

Hunters or husbands?

An Amsterdam adventure raises more questions than desires...

"In terms of monogamy, I think that's absurd. People who are ranting that way are going to lose all credibility with younger people. To say to some 20-year-old gay man 'You should become monogamous' is crazy, since what they really want is a lot of sex." —Edmund White to the Advocate, Sept. 16, 1997

It was last year at this time, in Amsterdam, worried about missing some key element of my post-Stonewall gay male identity, that I decided it was high time to go to a bathhouse for some of that radical sex I'd heard so much about.

As a veteran of the queer youth movement, a longtime gay student activist, and now a fledgling professional homo, I had never had

random, spontaneous, anonymous sex. I felt like something was wrong. What was missing from my (not-so) queer DNA? Were the powers that be going to demand that I turn in my homo ID card? My collections of musical theater CDs? Oh no, not the hair-care products!

"I'm as queer as they come," I shouted, fending off the spirits of sexual liberation who questioned my queerness. I've just never had sex without knowing my partner—I guess I've never really wanted to. Or have I?

Determined to challenge my most obvious heterosexist socialization, I promised myself that once I was in Amsterdam (the city of sex and drugs) I would take the plunge and give it a try.

Two days later I paced in front of the Thermos sauna, freezing my ass off, and finally opened the door and entered.

"I must do this," I kept saying to myself. "I'm going to liberate myself if it kills me." Obviously, this wasn't going to be easy. The butterflies in my stomach increased in size, flying faster,

frenzied.

The guy behind the counter smiled at me, a bit knowingly. He could tell I was a bathhouse virgin and thankfully made my "check in" as easy as possible. I handed over my wallet and other valuables to be locked up for the evening; he handed me a key and a towel, and I was on my way.

Three hours later I sat on a couch in the porno room, frustrated, cranky and confused. Nothing had happened. I had walked around almost all evening, seeing men in various poses, some naked, some wrapped in towels; short men, tall men, hung men, fat men, beautiful men, all types of men engaged in a silent dance, a ritual of courtship completely unfamiliar to me. Perplexed, I was at a loss as to how to approach, how to make my interests clear, how to communicate at all. No one had said a word, yet somehow these men communicated, speaking a language foreign to me (and I don't mean Dutch). Somehow they understood each other and were hooking up all around me.

As I sat watching three hairless gym bunnies fuck on video, I felt certain I was the only fag in Amsterdam on New Year's Eve who couldn't get laid—and in a bathhouse, no less.

As a 23-year-old gay male, I figured I ought to be in the middle of my sexual prime, fuck-

ing numerous partners and perfecting my sexual repertoire. That is, if you believe Edmund White's assertion about young gay men and monogamy.

Sure, I'm as horny as the next queer boy, and yes, since my disastrous attempt at bathhouse sex—my mission impossible—I've had a number of sexual partners (seven to be exact), but I refuse to be defined entirely by my sex life. And for good reason: It isn't the sex I'm really after. It's the connection, the sense of beauty, both physical and intellectual, that arouses me, the communication with another man that stimulates my mind as well as my dick. I want to know my partner, to talk with him, even if he is the shortest-lived of infatuations, the most transient of lovers.

Now, with all the controversy surrounding

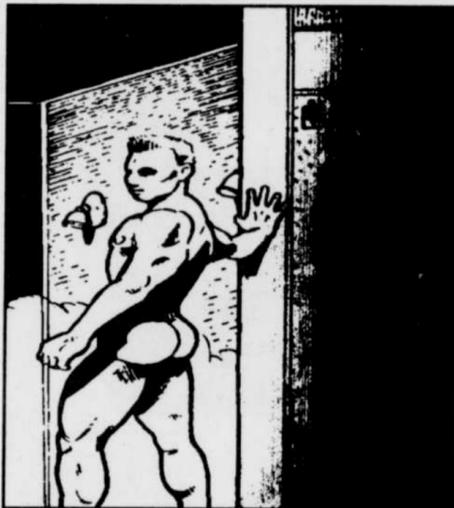


ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD PARKER

what gay men should be doing sexually in the late '90s, I don't want to prescribe a code of sexual behavior that all gay men must follow. Many men find anonymous sex exciting and liberating, while others find traditional monogamy an exquisite expression of love.

Self-appointed cultural "experts" have forcefully articulated both extremes in recent months. From Sex Panic's radical defense of our sexual freedoms to the kinder, gentler homos' desire for a place at the table and their demands that we all sit with them, these "experts" are forgetting the vital importance of the individual's need to experiment, to identify his own sexual needs and boundaries, and to feel good about whatever it is that turns him on.

The extremist tactics of these "community" spokespersons seem to do little to help the majority of gay men—out or closeted, liberal or conservative, monogamous or not—to understand and explore their own individual sexuality. Why is it so hard to understand that gay men comprise myriad sexualities? A multitude of approaches to fucking, sucking, licking, touching?

As educators, community leaders and peers, we should encourage every gay man to discover for himself what he should be doing sexually, not mandate sexual behavior. Our sexual differences don't strike me as that important. As my father said to me shortly after I came out, "An orgasm's an orgasm. You do what you gotta do. Sex is just a biological urge."

Maybe good ol' Dad knew something after all.

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