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THE SEX ISSUE

Getting Off Online

24 hours on Gay.com finds Portland guys looking for sex, hoping for love

by Timothy Krause

"I find the conversation appealing—the rapidity of starting conversations with people one doesn't know."

—MudpuddleOR

"I never believe anyone on Gay.com. People are a lot meaner online, too—me included—because you're not face to face, because you can be. In a bar, if you're mean, you'll get hit in the face or kicked out or something."

—Numbers



I've always had a love-hate relationship with Gay.com. It's like television: an easy distraction if I'm bored, a destination if I'm randy; it's occasionally helpful (like when I practice Spanish with hot Argentinians) but largely inane and whorish; it's addictive, but delivering only enough to keep me wanting more.

Sex is unquestionably the common denominator, though you find heart-to-hearts as easily as cam-to-cams. And over the course of any given day, you can meet—or meet up with—a variety of guys, from snipey escorts to wealthy attorneys, closeted drag queens to straight boys who "party and play" (meaning fuck while high on meth).

Take, for instance, the dudes I run into online over one random 24-hour period in December, together representing a virtual cross section of Portland's plug-and-play set.

When I log in on a Friday afternoon and enter one of the three active Portland chat rooms, there are 6.3 million profiles worldwide and some 27,000 people online—211 from Oregon.

I randomly say hey to artist/designer Arsey, who is chatting from work. Arsey is 43, HIV-positive and looking for a "fellow explorer." He'd been in a relationship for two years before moving to Oregon. He's looking for locals, so I ask him how that's going.

"Met some good guys, some flakes, some freaks," he types back. "Nothing different in my opinion you would meet at the bar scenes. Also started using Gay.com to find a quick lay in the late nights/early hours when you need to get a nut off and you're tired of using yourself. Considering most gay contacts involve religion or alcohol, Gay.com is a nice alternative to meet other gay men."

Later, I greet WM00, a buddy I've known for years but met in person only once. This sharp 32-year-old doesn't hold back about the high number of Portland flakes standing him up and assholes

sharing holier-than-thou attitudes.

"They want sex, but they are too afraid of being judged harshly for just saying it—so they themselves will be judgmental if you say, 'Do you wanna fuck?'" he rips. "I love it when you see them on Gay.com and then they have a profile on Manhunt.net with a raunchy looking-for-sex profile. When you chat with them on Gay.com, they are just shocked and appalled that you talk to them in a sexual manner."

But it's not all bad, especially for those who are newly out or still questioning their sexuality. "For that," he says, "it's a wonderful thing and might make it easier for people to come out, to accept themselves."

Soon a window pops up from SaoPaulo, 50, who works in publishing. He's a self-described fag-next-door and AIDS widow.

"I'm not necessarily here for a hookup (although I certainly do not rule that out)," writes SaoPaulo. "I honestly seek a like-minded guy for friendship and possible LTR. But if we must resort to sex, well, twist my—er—arm."

LTR is short for "long-term relationship," something he already has with his live-in boyfriend, who incidentally he met online.

"It's not a completely satisfactory relationship, and I think we both know that," he explains. "I see other guys from time to time, and he knows about it. Basically, it's an 'affectionless' relationship, and I'm wanting slightly more."

What he gets online, though, is 90 percent conversation—a consequence, he believes, of his age.

"I'm something of the tribal elder," he says, "viewed as being somewhat harmless, something on the order of a royal eunuch."

And while he's made friends, there's a new phenomenon happening: reconnecting with fellas who, for one reason or another, he lost touch with. "I came thinking I'd find sex, but I found friends. I stayed for the community."