



# Unfettered Mind: the Importance of Black Male Mental Health

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He is an incredible cook and looks forward to the day when all artists are well paid and highly respected. He utilizes his love of great literature, film and brilliant comedy and social commentary to write and constantly develop work that inspires and entertains.

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# Relationships

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## In Praise of Good Men

In an effort to make sense of so much of the craziness that goes on, everybody would like a scapegoat. Someone to blame everything on.

I have read a great deal of feminist literature. I love me some bell hooks and actually met and talked with her once on a subway when I lived in NYC. I have read feminists, male and female, and I have realized that the problem was never with men.

The problem is with our culture and its social structure. In fact anyone, male or female, can be an agent of oppression. I have become obsessed with letting go of the idea of men as the big bad.

You'd think being gay would make me male-friendly and somewhat male-obsessed. This is what oppression does to you. It has you inviting and creating a great big bowl of crazy called your life and inviting all sorts of wrong and not very well thought-out beliefs and personal policies into your mind.

As a young queen fresh out of undergrad, I was determined to change the world. I read tons of material on oppression, misogyny, classism and racism. With all of this information, I was ready to take on all the powerful entities in the world that decided how far I could go and what I could dream about.

There was only one problem. I took in all of the "men are the problem" thinking.

Granted, growing up an inordinate amount of torture was

wielded in my direction by men, all straight. The type of torture that teaches you self-hate and self-negation way before you know that's what your doing.

The type that says you are wrong for not liking, being good at, or obsessing about sports. That if you were a real boy you'd wanna fight, destroy, and maim. The indoctrination begins early and often and never, under any circumstances, lets up.

If you're a young kid who is gay or perceived as such, it sets you up for a life of mockery and shame at the hands of friends and family. This is what happened to me.

Having grown up in a working class, black neighborhood in the 70's, there was little I could do to uphold a particular type of masculinity. So between that upbringing and all the reading I read from 23 onward, is it any wonder that I also thought: "If men would just get it together, what a wonderful place this world would be."

I hadn't realized two things: that society and the way people, not just men think, is the real problem, the true enemy; and there was no way to truly feel good about myself and my male allies if I believed we were all flawed beyond compare and hopeless.

I would like to offer praise and love for all things male. I want all men, myself included, to truly fall in love and commit to being loving towards the incredible gifts and joys we experience and share simply because of our gender. I want us all to seek out and work towards becoming incredible men.

Men who can be all things. Vulnerable and action-oriented. Playful, kind, and to the point. The type of fathers, uncles, brothers, and lovers who can be counted on to take care of children and be secure enough to say: "I don't know. I think we should ask someone who has more experience in this area."

We need men who can think and love and a world that doesn't fear or demonize them as a result of this choice.

# How Money Affects Gay Male Couples

**M**en loving men has its own challenges and no place is this more evident than the realm of financial responsibility.

Like many of our straight male counterparts, we often enter relationships with many severely limited and unproductive views regarding earning and managing money. More often than not, we equate a man's earnings and or earning potential with his character and ability to effectively contribute within a relationship. Without a proper understanding of money that comes from understanding its limits and power, we limit our ability to effectively wield its power and utilize it to improve our lives.

Money to some people is love and security and freedom. Money to others is frivolity. Its only purpose being purchasing things. What happens in our relationships is that we typically have different styles with money and this is not discovered until we are very much emotionally involved.

If we are in the process of developing our emotional commitments, the one who has the money (the one who makes more) many times feels as if they are in the position to make all the decisions. While this is not always the case, I have heard men both gay and straight joke about being in charge because they have all the money and in return get to "call the shots."

As any comic will tell you, there is a great deal of truth in comedy. In other words, while this may provide a hardy chuckle to all involved parties, it does very little to move a relationship forward or provide interesting and provocative results.

Recently, two very seemingly unrelated but pivotal things occurred within hours of each other. I had a very upsetting

conversation regarding money, creativity and my current relationship. In the same twenty four hour period, it was pointed out to me what the universe requires of us if we are to move our lives forward. The two things most needed to make our relationships with each other and money work are the twin pinnacles of awareness and experience.

Within the black community, financial matters are rarely discussed. I know of couples who hide money from each other, lie about what they owe and to whom and would rather be water-boarded than tell you how much the interest rate is on their credit card, their overpriced mortgage or the fifty dollars they have in their savings account until payday which is a staggering twelve days away.

Manliness and machismo is often determined by the size of our paychecks. This is great as long as you are earning a paycheck.

To break this deadly and relationship killing pattern we need to add a healthy dose of both awareness and experience. With awareness, we all can have a healthy, honest, nonjudgmental look at our patterns, what we do and why and then decide if this is still the best way to proceed.

Let me cite my own personal attempts to do this. When I was single, living in NYC in my late 20's and early 30's, I was solely responsible for me. I could eat what I wanted when I wanted and never had to consult or think about what anybody else wanted or needed financially.

As my perfect comedic timing dad used to say repeatedly: "When you eat your whole family eats." This worked swimmingly well for a number of years.

Surviving on pizza, bagels and hummus is great when it is just you. If you get hitched and decide to invite someone else into your life unless they enjoy living on the edge with you, there might be a need to readjust what you're doing.

If the dynamic has changed and if this is not recognized, and this is what awareness will do, then you are asking for a

heap of trouble and an inordinate amount of strain on your relationship. How is this prevented? Awareness.

If I am unaware of my own tendencies, which in my case was survival mode, then I can not make another decision. I will simply recreate the same drama just with a new cast member. Being aware allows for an incredible amount of humility as well. I can now retire the man-cape, admit my humanity and ask for help in creating and establishing new and more productive, inclusive ways of being.

In gay male culture, we are not encouraged to be self aware. Instead, we are supported to live in fantasy world where in every thing fabulous and lovely is our birthright and the thing to be most longed for.

There is little reward in stepping back, having a look at a given situation and deciding what is the best course of action given our current situation, past choices and future desires. Being aware forces everyone involved to consistently create fresh approaches to old situations.

We are allowed the opportunity to tackle and take on things that have previously menaced us.

## How Money Affects Gay Male Couples (part 2)

**M**oving beyond simply “dealing” and into more proactive ways of being have far reaching effects. By increasing our awareness, we allow necessary room for reflection and insight from our significant other.

Ideally, and let’s assume that this is the case, our life partner is willing to share his awareness of not only his ways of dealing with financial issues but the ways that we have created that both keep us stuck and move us forward.

Perhaps you have luckily stumbled upon a man who is not confused or easily distracted by the power of money. Maybe you have come across the rare individual who understands that he and not money is the one with the power (look for a man who worships and listens to Suze Orman). Congratulations! You have found a man who has a particular type of experience with money.

If our partner is great with money, it is wise to seek his counsel and share solutions that allow the best of all worlds. There is no need to argue, defend or manipulate regarding our money intelligence if where it has lead us is not the place we wish to be.

When we move from awareness, we can take an honest look and make an informed decision about what we need and what is and is not working in our current financial situation. When combined with experience, we now have exactly what we need to make incredible changes. Before moving into what works, I would like to point out things that trip us up, confuse us and just plain keep us stuck and pissed off.

For one thing, we are expected to know and understand work, money and how to make incredible life enhancing financial decisions. Since very few of us are taught money management skills, it is a setup for disaster to then expect every-

one to know and match our financial intelligence or lack thereof.

As gay men, we are taught to be isolated is to be safe. In terms of financial well being, this is the worst decision any couple can make. If you are struggling with financial matters, it would be wise to seek out couples who have created loving and compassionate financial solutions.

Statistically, it has been proven that couples fight and break up because of money matters in greater numbers than those affected by infidelity. To put this in perspective, people can forgive and offer acceptance regarding sexual infidelity but a refusal to go for that promotion or use the undiscussed bonus to buy new stereo equipment and all hell breaks loose.

So how do we prevent money from causing us grief and or using it as a weapon to dominate and belittle ? We have discussions to determine our partner's view of money and its power. We determine to not isolate about our money "issues". We seek out therapy before we need it and prior to combining finances. We discuss our saving and spending habits.

We ask direct questions. How much do you make? What did you do with the money you made last year? Most importantly, we don't assume because someone is spending money that they have an unlimited supply and we should just enjoy the ride or in some instances the gravy train.

If you have had little experience with dating men with money, it can be confusing and thrilling to meet someone who has no spending limits and indulges each and every consumer-oriented whim. When I went from dating men with less than two nickels to rub together and began to date men who gave gifts and constantly shopped, it was difficult to ask the aforementioned questions.

As an artist who was consistently sacrificing and doing without, it went unquestioned as to where the money was coming from if it would ever deplete or if it should be spent in this manner. This proved to be our undoing.

Too afraid to speak up and ask direct questions, I wrongly assumed all of these men were well off and had unlimited access and why shouldn't I enjoy it?

What I confront head on currently is the following series of questions: where is this money coming from? How often? What about credit card debt?

These are also the same statements and inquiries I share regarding my financial state past and present.

When the guess work and childlike wonder of financial matters is removed, the work of combining hearts and wallets can begin.

# How To Win Lovers and Influence Friends

If we treated our friends the way we treat our partners, many of us would be friendless. At a very informative and enlightening workshop, I once heard this statement. We all had a good laugh then quickly moved into embarrassed giggles once the truth of this statement was realized.

Over the years, I have often found myself sharing the same statement with couples young and old. The results are astounding.

For some reason, we seem to think loving someone, sharing expenses and our bodies gives us a license to do and say pretty much anything. It is almost as if this is the price we must pay when we decide to love. Maybe it's the reason that so many of us forgo love in favor of fucking around, hooking up or whatever the new term is these days.

With tricks, the negotiations are typically quick and to the point. Desires with anonymous or fairly anonymous persons rarely have to be renegotiated and if things don't work out (oh well) what have you really lost? Unfortunately, many of us bring this same limited and predictable way of interacting into our primary relationships then wonder why things are so screwed up.

In order for our relationships to work we need to start with one of the most important ingredients: wanting it to work and then handling decisions and things that get in the way. When we meet someone and decide to build a friendship, there are certain expectations.

If we agree that we like each other, we might not spill our guts day two but we will definitely set a few rules and decide the nature of our interaction. More than likely, if we have a bad day at the office, we will not torture our friend and point out each mistake they have ever made. Likewise, if we have a

friend that we have pledged undying support, we do not change our minds when something is presented that we don't understand, wouldn't do or causes us distress.

We typically do not allow for conditional acceptance, biased opinions or just plain vindictiveness from those we refer to as friends. Unless, of course, we no longer want them as friends.

I once dated a guy who stole money from me, lied and then said I drove him to this behavior. This was after having supported him financially and emotionally for four months.

I have never had a friend behave in this manner and I have offered my friends all types of support. In a similar fashion, when getting into heated debates and passion-filled exchanges, I have never threatened to beat a friend to death or thought of throwing him or her down a flight of stairs. This remains the province of intimate relationships.

What I've learned over the years is to not compartmentalize my feelings and the ways that I interact with friends or lovers. Recently, due to damn-near two years of unemployment, I chose to borrow money from a dear and trusted friend. The borrowed money allowed for transportation to job interviews and some grooming so I wouldn't scare the hell out of the people interviewing me.

When it came time to repay my friend, neither of us could remember how much had been borrowed. I quickly interjected that his friendship meant more to me than nickling and diming about what was owed. He stated a number. We agreed. He was paid and that was the end of it. I have always struggled with keeping a tab on how much either I borrow from or lend to a paramour or how much they have borrowed from or lent to me.

My thinking has always been it'll work out and we live and love together so at some point you will owe me or I will owe you. I admit this is not the best way to handle financial matters no matter who it is and it presents a set of problems

and drama that would never fly in the course of trying to build or maintain relationships with others. This is one way that I have consistently mistreated those that I say that I care for.

However, there is hope. When living with someone we can sit down for a face-to-face discussion regarding what each person needs in the relationship and then adamantly hold each other to the agreed upon arrangement. When we place equal value on all our relationships, we don't allow any of the ones we truly care about to circle the drain.

We look for ways that we are less than kind and considerate. We recall the compassion and tenderness that we offer a close friend who has shared the same dilemma for the tenth time and offer this same empathetic ear to our partner when a problem is presented the first time. We make sure that all the planning and preparation that goes into an outing with friends is also utilized when it is time for one-on-one interaction with our beloved.

## Soulmates and Other Lies

I have a wonderful friend who is constantly getting dumped because the women he goes out with don't feel that special spark. He is straight. I have another friend who dumps people after dating less than two weeks because he doesn't feel that "spark." He is gay.

It makes no difference. None of us understand what is required to make relationships last and work. I am often baffled by the concept of sparks and chemistry. Sparks are based on feelings. Feelings constantly change. If things are constantly changing how in the world can you base a decision on them?

Watch a young child in the course of a day. He will cry, fret, hate everybody, frustrate himself and you, tantrum and laugh uncontrollably. This can and does occur within the space of one or possibly two hours. Which emotion is real? All of them. Which one at any given moment do we decide is how this kid really feels about us and the world. None of them and all of them.

Like so many adults, if you give children what they want they love you to pieces and shower you with hugs, kisses and kind words. Like so many adults, if you refuse them, say no, these same little cherubs can quickly become hell spawn grumbling and plotting your death.

Which set of emotions do we listen to and how do we determine what is real or not? Hopefully, we are doing some serious thinking and can be available to the fact that the only thing that has changed is our response to their request. Yet, like the aforementioned friends, we want to base our most precious relationships on how we feel and how the other person "Makes" us feel. This is grown up love ?

When my friend recounted his tales of woe regarding women and the spark, I said maybe you should try dating adult females. My other friend would do well to let something get

to the one month mark before deciding to pull the plug. What is going on here ?

Real, close relationships take time and a lot of energy over an extended period of time. One date is not indicative of a future together or the rationale that this will never work. Whenever I hear a man mention anything about a click, spark or soul mate, I want to set myself on fire and run screaming out of the room. All of this nonsense is brought to us by movies and tv.

When I have met people that just set me on fire upon our initial meeting, it absolutely ended in disaster. Having one cup of coffee and a two hour conversation is not nearly enough info to make a decision. What is the rush?

I don't believe in these hard core dumb ass rules: don't call too soon, wait three days, let them call you. What is this a battle strategy or an opportunity to get to know another human being? Save all the strategic maneuvering and plotting for scrabble or a heated game of chess.

Do not make a decision thirty seconds in then reach for the panic button. In contrast, the relationship that lasted the longest (eight years) was one where the attraction grew slowly and steadily. It grew based on conversations and letters.

It was long distance with me never physically seeing him until Thanksgiving 1999. Even when he tried to persuade me to share photos, I refused. I stated that I felt like I was having a very rich experience and was not willing to let my eyes and mind deceive me.

## Should You Remain Friends With Your Ex?

Unless two virgins get together, the man you love and have partnered with probably has a history. While many people have several ways of handling this touchy subject, I find it interesting when people allow an ex to take up a significant amount of their life space.

How can you invite someone new into your life and have any chance of happiness if bachelor number two is still lurking about? I am particularly curious as to how you move from one station in a person's life immediately into another. If you have dated someone a while and things don't work out there are only a couple of options. You can break it off like an adult and seek your needs elsewhere. You can hunker down for a life of misery and simply "grin and bare it." If we were a couple and now we're not there are probably some very valid reasons.

However, I do understand that given some time and some space apart, there might be a chance for a very familiar, cordial relationship. I have yet to see queens give anything any time. We break up on Monday and Thursday we are going out for cocktails.

Personally, I broke up with a guy and still had sex with him periodically for the next three months. While I agree this was not the best use of my time and energy, it did allow confusion, angst, fear and resentment to remain. Basically, there would be no emotional healing or road to psychological well-being engaging in these shenanigans. Which leads me back to my original point, should I remain friends with exes? My initial reaction is a big fat "hell no".

I have also learned in growing older that you never wanna rule nothing out because that thing will come back and bite you in the ass every time. Do I allow exes to simply run

amok? How is a balance obtained between raving bitchhood and a simple I don't think this really works for me in any and or all situations?

Maybe the key here is distance. Luckily for me and whomever I choose to date, all of the individuals I seriously dated live far, far away. There is never any danger of bumping into them or ending up at the same social gathering when I live in California and they live in NYC and Tennessee respectively. My big discovery is that I get to decide the nature of when and how my relationships in this most precarious and particular of situations play themselves out.

I can't allow someone else to decide based on what they are comfortable with. I have recently opened the lines of communication with my past lovers and have learned to keep the conversation focused on what we do well and our individual gifts. Sex talk of any kind is strictly forbidden and the "why didn't we work out?" seems pointless and pain-inducing.

While these techniques work in my world and for me, what is to be done when the person you are currently seeing has his own way of handling past flames? Because just as winter turns to spring, the person you're dating probably has their own way of doing everything.

If you are dating someone who thinks yea I want to chat with my ex daily, go out for drinks and go on trips that require us to share a hotel room (all are things I have personally heard of) then how is this negotiable? Remember that we both teach people how to treat us and that you can't get someone to share your values if they don't see a reason to respect the values you have created.

Many times, I fought with a paramour who truly believed that what they were doing was not damaging to the relationship. There was an inability to understand the jeopardy they could potentially cause our union.

If a reasonable amount of time has passed and there are legitimate and nonnegotiable boundaries set, it might be time

to allow a restructuring of the past relationship. If there is confusion, hope for a reconciliation of any kind and or constant visits and interaction, there will definitely be a need to decide which relationship matters the most and proceed accordingly.

# Don't Read This Unless You Are Color Blind

Recently, I read an article and watched an accompanying video regarding black/white gay male relationships. I was surprised by the vocal and passionate responses of some of the readers.

When I began blogging over a year ago, it was in direct response to an article that was filled with stereotypical responses to black and white relations. This brings me back to the previously mentioned video and written responses. In the video there was some mention of the concept that folks who don't want to appear racist like to trot out. "I don't see color."

In my experience this is generally whipped out when someone is asked to justify their love and affection of the "other" What I find amazing about this is both the need folks have to spout this nonsense and the feelings of relief and superiority this seems to engender in well meaning but misguided black folks.

Not seeing color? How is this possible. I am dark ebony brown, 180 pounds and 5'9". If you are able to have me stand in front of you for any amount of time and still fail to notice my color, there is a serious problem. Perhaps what is really being stated here is that the viewer is fighting against seeing "only color." Could this be an attempt to humanize and make the viewed person a subject and not relegating them to objectification status?

There are white males who see black and immediately think massive cock, sexual prowess and stud for hire. Many of our black brothers bring the same limiting and dehumanizing gaze to potential friends and lovers. With all the massive attention given to swag, sexiness and just plain deliciousness of black skin, there is little to no attention given to the mind, heart and soul encased within all of this yumminess.

It is almost as if we are required, no matter our race or background, to give up on reinventing and challenging our limited views on what is possible and attractive. This is the real problem.

I have dated both types of white men. There have been experiences that left me feeling used and unheard and there have been others where the desire for black flesh led the white male I was dating down the path of self reflection, honesty and a thorough examination of long held beliefs. The larger problem is that there is little to no discussion about why we find certain things attractive.

Is it to be assumed that every white male who seeks a black companion is blind to the nature of his own desire and in fact needs to be avoided? Is it to be assumed that if I date whites I am a race traitor and filled with self loathing?

Having witnessed several types of relationships and exchanges, being with someone who looks like me may not be a panacea if I am not beyond self hating. Personally, I have witnessed and been the target of some very vicious attacks by "brothers" who looked like me.

While one of my own told me it was his job to "blacken" me up since I didn't like greens and wanted to travel the world, there was another who loved and then hated me for not falling into the addiction traps and victimization that being black and gay seemingly offers so many. While this may have been two isolated incidents, there where several experiences were neither me nor my friends were treated very well.

In the same manner, I have witnessed white males endure levels of pure tomfoolery (within intimate relations both platonic and sexually intimate) because their lust was so potent and unexamined. In the same fashion, I have had black men both ridicule and judge me for what they assume to be my love for all things "white and male." Stupidity and idiocy does not discriminate.

We have all done and said some stupid shit regarding men and the types of nonsense we are willing to put up with. If there is no choice (we can always choose) regarding the level of commitment and true intimacy we are willing to create, we run the risk of building our connection on lust and juvenile fantasy. The inability to think things through and make life enhancing choices for all involved parties is the real issue.

There is a great quote by one of my favorite writers, the brilliant and insightful Toni Morrison that I have fought to use when seeking out companions: He is a friend of my mind.

Is the person you are drawn to a friend of your mind? Does he encourage, support, challenge you to become a better human being? Are you moved and lifted just a little higher from being in his presence? To indulge in finding mind friends means we must not deny or eliminate color. Instead, we are challenged to recognize it and allow it to draw us in more deeply.

Perhaps the trick is to simply like what you like without qualifying. Know that somebody will not be happy or approve and love unabashedly and fully anyway. Attraction is not the problem. Not moving beyond it to know and love the whole person is.

## Can Gay Men Be Friends?

Growing up and coming out, I constantly heard very interesting messages regarding friendships between men and women. The message was loud and clear and annoying: they don't work.

I thought this was interesting and often wondered why people would make such assumptions. Then of course, I grew up and started dating men and to some degree began to believe and conduct myself based on this odd and accepted view of men and their "Nature."

Like our straight counterparts, gay men are seen as always horny, on the prowl and commitment adverse. While this may or may not be the truth when it is used as both a point of reference and a place to build a relationship from, it can have inane and very limiting results. Yes, gay men can be highly sexual creatures. This is simply my observations of myself, my friends and damn near thirty years of personal research.

While this may be the way things get played out, there are instances where this doesn't occur. What do you do when you have decided that you will have a full bodied, powerful relationship with another gay man and there will be no sex. Period. From personal experience during my younger days and the days of my gay male posse, several friendships either sprang up from having been sexual at one time or began because there was the promise or hint of some type of sexual interaction in the very near future.

Sexual tension is awesome. It is fun and enjoyable and can lead us into making some very stupid decisions. It can also cost us friendships and a great deal of hurt feelings via confusion and misunderstanding. While it can be a thrill knowing that the person you are having a serious conversation with would totally do you in the broom closet, sexual desire can of-

ten be our own undoing.

What is more exciting than the promise of sexually fulfilled desire? When we mutually agree upon goals, add respect and value of another person, we then create something infinitely more exciting than sexual conquest and fulfillment. This may sound boring to those of us who see the be-all-end-all as sexual conquest and the next great orgasm.

However, sex can mislead and confuse the best of us even we are trying to establish a foundation beyond the physical. The trick is trying to establish a relationship when everything around you says: "it won't work." Keep in mind that as gay men we have already figured out what works to some extent. If you had to navigate a less than friendly and accepting world as a result of coming up in any decade prior to the 1990's, you most definitely have some tools for thriving amidst hardship.

While the 1990's may not have been ideal, it sure beats the hell out of being out in the 80's or 70's. It is my understanding that back in the day (70's and early 80's) several friendships had their beginnings in sexual adventure being the only mutual goal. I have never been able to figure out how I can climb out of your bed in one moment and then say we're best buds the next.

This is a grave exaggeration. It has always baffled me how you could have both. Perhaps this is the reason so many of us fail to make meaningful relationships and have challenging times creating them if everything is seen through the lens of sexual conquest. I have several friends I adore and would do absolutely anything for, I don't think about fucking them.

I no longer utilize this criterion for friendship and the brief stint that I utilized this stupidity as a guide rule the shit always blew up in my face. My best and closest relationships have not been sexually. It can be very difficult being honest with someone if it may cost you an incredible roll in the hay.

It can be extremely upsetting to try and be emotionally

honest with someone if you know they are just there for a good time or will be out the door before you can state why you don't want a proper romp.

## Can Gay Men Be Friends (part 2)?

I have had bad experiences trying to make fuck buddies into legitimate friends. Having witnessed several friends attempt and fail repeatedly at this endeavor, I am assuming either it doesn't work or either my friends and I are a bunch of dopes.

Gay men learn early on how to sexualize absolutely everything. When we are young and beautiful and unsullied, everyone will be more than willing to sexually instruct the "newbie." Where is all eagerness when it comes time to mentor, teach, support, guide and encourage without the promise of a shared sexual experience.

I recently sat on a panel with some very striking and experienced young gay men. Both of these men were in their 20's with similar experiences of interacting with older men. Apparently, once sexual interaction was taken out of the equation for whatever the reason, the older men had little to no interest in pursuing any type of relationship. In other words, we're not gonna fuck so I am gonna move on.

I remember being put in that position and not knowing how to handle it. Based on what I heard at this panel and what I've witnessed first hand, we (older gays) don't know how to interact with one another either. Hence, not much has changed since the days when I was a contender.

We must learn to socialize. We must learn how to differentiate between a potential sex partner, date, trick and some one we can truly call a friend. We must learn not to angrily discard a relationship because dating and or sex are not on the menu. This type of learning and negotiating can only occur if we are emotionally honest with another human being.

Trust me nobody is fooled when you only call post midnight. Nobody is hoodwinked when you are showering them with gifts a few days into knowing them. While this is simple,

“it is not easy” (as my baby would say). If you tell people: I really like you and look forward to getting to know you better; you are often met with sheer terror and the assumption that you are one needy SOB. I say risk it and be ok with the outcome.

# Why Black Fear Matters

I write this essay as a direct response to all of the drama surrounding the belief, statistically factually proven or not, that the black folks in our great state of California overwhelmingly voted for Prop 8.

While there is much confusion on everyone's part regarding Prop 8, black folk took a whole lot of heat and once again were made to seem more homophobic than any other groups in question. Even though I have severely mixed feelings regarding marriage for anybody, I would like to offer my view on what I think went down and continues to keep us afraid, confused and somewhat apathetic regarding this issue.

Scapegoating is very popular these days. Sound bites and shots of passionate individuals from the pulpit is not nearly enough information to base an opinion. I am convinced that someone will suggest, and I will accept, being the poster boy for pointing out why this is a civil rights issue and why it is similar and different than the civil rights movement of the 60's.

My problems with all of this is that like most issues, I understand and see the potential for greatness and misunderstanding in all arenas. As an African American living in this society, I understand and have witnessed first hand the inequities and incredible opportunities that exist within our culture. It is clear that so much is available and yet who gets to decide who gets what and how much of it? Once again, it is an issue of power.

Black folks know on a cellular level what it means to be denied and have to survive and develop self-love in a culture that is dominant, dismissive, and oppressive. Having lived through the things that my parents endured, it is not a very exciting proposition to even suggest that their offspring endure any hardship.

In other words, we fought, died and marched to make

changes so that you wouldn't have to or at the very least not have to endure what we did. Why look for trouble? Take your place at the table, it's been paid for tenfold.

Yes, gays and lesbians are or should be extremely grateful and humbled by the work done by previous generations and it is not enough. While appreciation should be the norm, the next evolution involves taking things even further. It is with this spirit of love and refusal to back down that we now pick up the baton of activism and carry on.

If you, as an elder, are keenly aware of the results of demanding more (rocking the boat) and understand it can and has lead to death, you would definitely have reservations regarding any one you care about being visible and vocal to a very powerful group.

## Will Marriage Save Us?

Marriage, any type of commitment, and being truly, terrifyingly, unabashedly, emotionally intimate is for grown ups. This is the reason we now have this insane obsession with marriage. Although I have never really had the desire to marry, I am keenly aware of what it signifies and why it is significant. It is my belief that we have a hunger to grow up.

In this culture, the union between two people is one major way of stating that we are adults. Is this the only way of taking on full adulthood? In this quest to be seen as a well-adjusted (normal) members of society have we truly taken a look at what this may cost us?

I recently heard someone state that who we are and what we do be considered "normal." I was bothered by this for a couple of reasons. Placating people's fears and judgments only leads to more of the same. Rather than try to prove how much we are like the masses, why not say: "Screw it, this is who I am and I am so busy living my life I really don't have time to worry or concern myself with your insecurities or lack of acceptance."

Before anyone decides to label me the arbiter of gloom and doom, let me explain. When I was a great deal younger, I hungered for three things: a life of the mind, a promising career in the arts, and men. My immediate and always helpful family did not support the first two desires and are still waiting for me to outgrow the third.

We (as a community) have an insatiable need to be seen and accepted. This is a longing so prevalent and so virile that we will accept anything that remotely looks like inclusion. But is marriage the answer? Do we need full, basic, no question about it rights? Most definitely.

Given that more than 50% of heterosexual marriages end

in divorce, is this a system we should buy into unexamined and unquestionably? Considering the percentages of failures among the folks that dreamed up this institution, is this the best star on which to hitch our wagons?

We most definitely need full access to all the rights, privileges, and rewards that our straight allies accept as birthright. What is very fascinating to me is how we are assigned certain roles that keep us confused and infantile. As a group, we are the only ones defined by what we do in bed and with whom. Making this legal means not only does the world at large have to respect us it also provides the world at large with an unabashed look at relationships and unions. In other words, having full rights makes everybody fully responsible for reexamining their prejudices and thinking.

Do we want equality or marriage? Are they one and the same? Must we limit our thinking to an either or limited view of what people need? Where do gay folks go who long for heart in the throat, life changing, soul shaking love and commitment and don't want to enter into marriage? I have yet to hear any discussion about that.

What are the action plans once this glorious day arrives? So much energy is going into gaining this right that there seems to be very little planning regarding what will occur once this goal is achieved. This, my friends, is a recipe for disaster.

Many movements have been egregiously derailed because there was no plan of attack once the "big bad" was defeated and the goal achieved. I would strongly encourage the folks who have the most to gain by this and who are adamantly pushing for this social change to find and or cultivate some progressive, forward allies who have more experience in this arena.

Do you know a great loving couple who has some coupledom years under their belt? Start dialing now. The change will be here before we all realize it.

# Sex & Sexuality

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## Should Cruising Be Considered An Unacceptable Risk?

I was 36 the first time I had sex in public. I had no idea this was an option. I kept hearing Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong in my head: "How long has this been going on?" I truly thought people went to the park to read, the restrooms to pee and the malls to shop. Who knew?

Coming out of a long term relationship at 36, I was angry, hurt, suicidal and just plain done. It was one more disappointment that seemed too much to bare. Like a number of men, once the relationship that you have spent so much time putting together disintegrates, there is a faulty understanding of whether or not you are still attractive.

Cruising takes care of that. Nothing like a romp in the great outdoors to set your heart a thumping, your mind to shutting down and the belief that you have thumbed your nose at the man, polite society, and have truly gotten away with something dastardly. Oh yes, online or in person, the concept of free, noncommittal sex (hookups if you're 30 or under) serves a number of functions.

The connection can be explosive, entertaining, instantaneous and most importantly if the person is a pain in the ass you never have to see them again. You don't have to argue about the same thing for the millionth time.

It's free and always available. Nobody is at these spots not wanting to be sexual. A bit of negotiation and you're off and running. Is this enough? What happens when this carnival of

manly delights ceases to thrill? What do I when I'd rather sit home and the thought of getting up and getting dressed to go to the man buffet causes me to yawn?

The concept of cruising fascinates me on some severe levels. One of the things that I find so telling about it is the concept of the risks we are all willing to take when it comes down to this business of getting "done."

Often, we are led to believe that our actions have no consequences, that we can do whatever we like, whenever we like and if it ain't hurting nobody who gives a shit. This is a very wrong, upside down way of handling our decisions and consequently our lives.

Everything we do has consequences. Some are immediate others take time and work on us slowly and deliberately. What we really mean is this decision has a certain set of results that I am comfortable with. I can live with the fallout of such and such decision. This is truly the case for cruising.

Yes, I could go to jail. Yes I could contract an STD or possibly HIV. Yes, I might have to register as a sex offender. I could be bashed or have my throat cut but I am willing to take these chances. Fascinating, right?

Yet, when it comes down to the serious work of truly listening, knowing that the person you love more than life is not hearing you, can't and won't get it, we run for the hills. That seems to be too much work.

We will fuck strangers (he's really hot) in dark alleys and trust that the person is somewhat sane or at least hasn't murdered anyone this week. Yet won't tell the person we live with and lay beside nightly when we are afraid.

Gentlemen, we, I have all got to do so much better. Will cruising/public sex ever go away or stop, who knows? Can we make decisions that are truly risky and could possibly change the course of our lives and the context of our relationships? You bet.

# Does Hyper Sexuality Start at Five?

When baby animals don't get touched they die. If this is the case for lesser developed creatures, why do we think humans can survive without touch?

In my post "Should Cruising Be Considered an Unacceptable Risk?" I made reference to gay men willing to risk life and limb in an effort to be seen. Perhaps all of the hyper sexuality is not really about sex at all. In this installment, I would like to take to task the larger, straight community and any and all participants who feel that as men we do not require a loving touch.

I recently have been reading tons of books on the young male mind. It is often believed that young boys require a radically different rearing than girls. While young girls are taught to relate socially, young males are taught to compete. We are systematically taught to lock away feelings, vulnerability and want and channel every bit of energy into aggression sexualized or not. Anything but having the desire to touch and be touched.

In one study I read, it pointed out that young males (by the age of five ) are ripped away from the nurturing and emotional connection and dependency that is a result of being with caregivers. Since no one explains this to children all they know is the feeling of abandonment that is entrenched at a young age with no justification or explanation. Without this need being met, the urge is satisfied elsewhere.

A great deal of the tussling, horseplay and physical risk taking is an attempt to regain the alive feeling one gets when he is physically and emotionally fed and attended to. I remember being denied this sensation and for years not knowing why until I reached forty. When I hit forty, the longing was so great and overwhelming that it felt as if I was housing a beast that if unleashed would destroy any and everything.

Once, I recounted to a friend through sobs, that I was going in to have a facial because without this bit of touch, the only option was anonymous sex. I couldn't believe that at forty, the best I could do was either have a facial, sex with a stranger or no physical touch, thereby reigniting the longings that had run my life and overwhelmed me since boyhood. This just couldn't be it.

I have been obsessed with the concept of touch since this discovery. Why are we so afraid of men being kind and loving? What does it say about us that our collective fantasies and roles for men include wars, murder and fear mongering? Why is that more exciting than compassion and a heartfelt hug? How in the world did the bigger culture make the decision that men hurting other men should be romanticized, sexualized, and most frighteningly, normalized, and why did we buy into it?

# HIV, Youth & Aging

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## Why We Should Cancel Pride Celebrations

Pride festivals for all of 2011 and beyond should be canceled. More important than hunky guys, displays of camp, and the all consuming focus on gay marriage, our young people need all of our time and access to resources. It will not do any young person any good to go to a rally and have no place to sleep afterwards.

Pride festivals that focus on something other than mentoring and encouraging young people will only provide a quick and imminent death to our movement. We can not demand equal rights without consideration of what we are teaching and sharing with younger generations. Protests of all kinds are needed.

Where is the marching and demanding that young people have health care and ways to sustain themselves should their family of origin not greet them respectfully when they come out? I grew up in constant fear of being found out. I grew up with the fear that I would be at a severe loss financially if I was found out and then of course excommunicated from my family.

I understand young people's need for safety, self expression and the unrelenting fear of being "put out" and left to fend for themselves. Pride festivals with their gigantic budgets have yet to take seriously the needs of our young members.

An old school diva whipping out a bunch of hits from the

70's will not help a young boy who is bullied, isolated and lacking in basic survival skills. Theme parties and fanfare will not ensure that the young girl who is questioning and unsafe in her own home will sleep easy at night.

I have been there and I speak from experience. What I needed and suspect young folks still need is the reassurance that they are loved, more than enough, have a right to exist and are not alone. Having spent years in abusive relationships, I understand the abuser's primary tool of isolation. Isolation and our complicity in being confused, horny, and constantly shaking our asses makes it very difficult to reach out to another person.

We, as older and hopefully wiser persons, must let our younger counterparts know that we are not easily confused and can offer more than a good time and financial resources. We are not willing to just reparent them. It is our duty to pass on knowledge, teach life skills and assist in goal planning and general self esteem building.

Personally, I am gathering a group of older established gay men to create a one-on-one mentoring program that will culminate in the creation of something that publicly declares our youth "off limits" in terms of aloneness and abuse. Someone is watching. Not everyone has gone asleep at the wheel. There are people who care and who want to listen.

While this entry is directed towards feelings of safety for young people, I want to publicly challenge older established gays to change the way we interact with the younger generation. I want to challenge the elder set to care for, not date, not raise, but truly care for younger persons. I challenge us all to seek out the young folks in our immediate communities who would benefit from a kind word and a blueprint for self love and acceptance.

Yesterday, I saw a very moving film, "On these Shoulders We Stand." In this moving documentary, gay history and the subsequent movement were shown in great detail. At 42, I

witnessed things via this film that I didn't know. If I was unaware of these monumental changes and our incredible history, it is safe to assume that the young person being bullied or harassed is unfamiliar with this as well.

How will any of this (canceling pride, community involvement, teaching skills) help young people and keep them alive? It will make everyone more responsible for not recreating yet again feelings of giving up and isolation that inevitably lead to depression and in extreme cases, suicide.

My mission is to assist young people in gathering the skills that lead to thriving in this world. I will offer support for our passionate and powerful young people. The support looks like and is not limited to basic budgeting, housing information, cooking and house maintenance, spiritual practices, interviewing and interpersonal relationship building skills.

## 40+ and Refusing To Be Dismissed

Within the gay community, there seem to be two factions, old and young. I want to specifically address these issues even though I know someone will bitch and say we have more issues than this, or this is too simplistic, or we're far more complex.

Just hold on because for now, I want to address how these two entities connect and make for startling realizations, opportunities for growth and the success of our lineage and movement.

At 42, I have been recently informed that I am now considered older. I don't know when/how/if this has truly happened and I am so glad someone took the time to let me know. My friend Chris was trying to explain the skill set I bring to a project we're currently working on. In a delicate and diplomatic way, I was informed that I had a "different set of life experiences." Are you saying I'm old? Be careful. Remember, I created this project no sense in getting canned day one. He is 29. I am 42.

When did this happen? At some point, I became, as Whoopi Goldberg would say, "the oldest thing in the room." It is a very sobering and interesting place to be.

When 20-year-olds ask you questions that begin with the phrase: "What was (fill in the blank) like when you were my age?" you know the afternoon is not looking so hot. I can't get upset because when I was 24, four decades of living seemed as close to God as one could possibly get and still be on this planet. But, my young, arrogant friends, the tide always changes, power always shifts so here is my gift to my gay brethren both young and old.

First fact, you will do one of two things — die young or grow old and then die. These are pretty much your options. Along with these fun facts — hear it and learn it now — your

body will change. The six pack we are so violently obsessed with will give way to something you notice in the shower along with a big ass. It will feel as if someone snuck into the shower with you because this can't possibly be your body.

As far as a six pack and the incredibly discriminatory and fascist concern with body image, the day will arrive when that will not help you one wit. The day will arrive when you will be called upon to offer compassion for a dying friend, care for an ailing parent or uplift and support a discouraged lover. Trust me, no one will be checking on your BMI when they find themselves in one of the aforementioned situations.

Part of getting older, hopefully, is recognizing bullshit and what is truly important in a more expedient manner. Dancing all night at bars, like I used to, and then having to go to work and drag ass all the next day is simply not an option as we age. It seems to me that what older gentlemen like myself are seeking is this consumption of youth. In a culture as youth obsessed as this one, it is no wonder that we prize youth over experience and lean hard bodies with ones that have enjoyed a couple of brownies now and again?

How do we make experience, knowledge, social skills, and insight sexy and appealing? I haven't a clue. We could demand that a different demographic be made the focus of advertising campaigns. We could not allow our heads to be turned by a dazzling smile and taut abdomen. We could fall madly in love with wrinkles, failing eyesight, love handles and ten extra pounds.

We could commit to being healthy and fit as opposed to thin and hungry and gorgeous. We could eat carbs and widen our aesthetic to be more inclusive of differing body shapes. We could make the worship of experience and knowledge a focus. Sadly, I'm not sure how or if this is possible.

As much as I hate to admit it, I live for moisturizers, exfoliants and am a sucker for anything that lifts and tightens the pores. I am a part of this culture and in an industry that re-

quires that you remain 30 for life.

Recently, I have met and socialized with a heap of sexy over 50 guys. What a bunch of fun, knowledgeable souls. Having learned patience, compassion and just plain, good old-fashioned sense, they are quite a bunch to love and emulate.

# Fucking Dobey Gillis

Six pack abs, huge cocks, all night sex parties and drug induced orgies are now officially over. We are now officially required to man up and grow up and take our rightful place in society as responsible, trustworthy citizens.

I want to address what is society's part in the creation and sickness (pathology) of gay male culture. Society and gay society have teamed up to make sure that we never grow up. I heard a term recently that I have taken to heart and truly believe sums up what it is we are doing and where we remain trapped if we refuse to wise up. Prolonged Adolescence.

Somewhere along the lines we have been sold a pack of lies. It is the mind set that all gay men are young, fabulous, wealthy, problem free and drugged up party animals. While this may be one segment of the population, it is not our only representation. If this is our only and most important place of belonging, we as gay men have a serious problem.

The larger society and our self created subculture are by and large in agreement that we stay young, in a constant state of wanting and never make inroads into developing our individual and collective gifts.

What is so fascinating to me is both the level of charade this presents and the agreement by so many individuals that this behavior is ok and should be lauded. This would be downright laughable if it didn't cost us so much and so many of our players. In my previous post regarding cruising, I made the point that cruising is neither good nor bad and that it may or may not ever go away. The deluge of passionate comments I received let me know that many folk didn't get the point.

Prolonged Adolescence is an overall view of both cruising and so much that makes up our culture. The problem is that we are only presented with a few choices which seemingly di-

minish as we age. If we want to spend time in fantasy world there is a huge market that is all but too eager to make a huge profit off our delusions and need to belong. There is a great deal of money being made when we are kept hyper sexual, strung out, emotionally unhealthy, isolated and just plain feeling bad about ourselves.

It is easy to deceive and manipulate people if you can determine their self esteem and then of course their buying habits. What I am suggested and have been suggested is consistently having a closer look at our habits and ways of being and then making intelligent, discernible decisions that determine what makes the most sense given the time, context and all involved parties.

Many of us think critically looking at situations is a drag and takes the fun out of life. This is a fallacy of the highest degree.

When you work on having a mind that works and a healthy emotional life, you tend to enjoy your decisions and consistently look forward to the life you can create. When things are examined critically, life is engaging and unlimited. This is a very different way of existing in a world that is only to happy to offer you the crumbs at the table if you will allow yourself to be opportunistically pimped.

When I strive for emotional well being and truly growing up, thereby leaving Prolonged Adolescence behind me, I move from a position of choice and not manipulation and reaction. Prolonged Adolescence keeps me stuck.

Choosing to define self regardless of the manipulation by people who have the most to gain via my misery and self hatred makes me free.

## Smart Slut: the Beginning

For many years, I wrongly assumed that a loving, honest relationship would keep me HIV negative. I foolishly bought into the thinking that simply decreasing the number of sex partners and being in a committed monogamous relationship would be enough to keep the big bad away from the door. This line of thinking came about as a result of scared people who encouraged us all to be scared instead of engaging in open and honest with tricks and lovers.

During the onslaught of this epidemic (by the way with African Americans representing 49% of cases it is still an epidemic), we were given a whole lot of information that constantly changed and was all about keeping us trembling and unable to make informed, intelligent decisions.

One of the major things trotted out for us to cling to was the belief that if we limited sex partners and stuck with one mate things would work out. All of this would work provided that you wanted one mate, the person you partnered with was honest and only wanted one mate and of course because they loved you so much would consent to being tested together over a particular period of time. What a load of crap.

Coming of age during the beginning of this plague, I believed all of the afore mentioned ways of staying safe. However, being the smart slut that I am, it was clear to me early on that I better come up with some very different approaches to sexual freedom and social responsibility. If I didn't want monogamy or the person I was refused to be tested, for whatever the reason, what was I to do?

Here are a couple of action oriented and productive ways I got around much bs regarding sexual disclosures, playing safe and people who had less than my best interests in mind.

1/ I assumed everyone was HIV positive and either didn't know or was lying about it. 2/ I brought up HIV status and

asked when their last test date was and shared mine. 3/ I assumed everyone was HIV positive and either didn't know or was lying about it.

Being 19 and alone was no fun. Still in the closet and afraid to death to leave it forced me to make awful decisions that could have cost me my life. This was no place to be in the hey day of HIV/AIDS in the late 80's and early 90's.

As a young queen, I was fearful and willing to do anything to be loved. With this mind set, it was inevitable that I would either truly court death or come up with survival strategies that would help avoid it. Not knowing this kept me in this relationship far too long even beyond and amidst violence early on.

Having spent three and a half years with an emotional terrorist, it was clear that if I was going to make it in the gay community and live to see a ripe old age, I had better start taking care of business. After having a look around and realizing that the years spent with an emotional invalid could either make me bitter and withdrawn or savvy and self reliant, I chose the latter.

At 19, I foolishly thought that if I had the best interests of my significant other in mind, he also was operating under the same set of standards (rules). I learned that nothing could be more ridiculous and life threatening. Early on, he constantly manipulated, cajoled and reasoned that unprotected sex was the way to go and it made the most sense. When I protested, I received a psychological and emotional bitch slap.

After a series of those and the belief that he did love me (because I had such a warped sense of love at the time) and that there was no where to turn (systematic isolation), I relented and gave in to unprotected, highly risky sexual behavior for the duration of our relationship. This went along with the "he cares and would never do anything to harm me" line of reasoning.

Taking responsibility at this young age meant I had to face

some serious fears and take some action that I never thought possible. I had to look at my behavior and why I was willing to put my life in some one else's hands.

During the course of this relationship where in which domination and coercion reigned, I learned some very powerful lessons. Staying healthy, happy and HIV Negative was my responsibility. My status was and is under my control.

## Smart Slut: Love Will Not Keep You HIV Free

Most of the HIV positive people I know became infected in the course of a relationship. After talking with a good friend from overseas, I was informed of this incredible theory. My brilliant ally and I discussed at length the risks people are willing to take and for what reason.

The mutually agreed upon theory is as follows: people will take greater risks in the context of a relationship because the assumption is that since we now have added love to the mix, we have more than enough information to trust our paramour. This is in direct contrast to not knowing or trusting a “trick” which means we better be on guard for any bit of foolishness (ours and theirs) that might occur.

Personally, I have been willing to take unbelievable and highly stupid risks with people that I was in “love” with. I have had unprotected sex. I have been lied to and yet was willing to engage in sexual activity with the person lying to me. I could have easily been affected and was not. My initial HIV test was very traumatic.

After listening to several people tell me that I should be tested, I could find no one to go with me for the long dramatic walk to get tested and receive the results. I went alone.

One of the main things that I gleaned from this experience was the knowledge that love would not save me. At 23, I was sexually involved with a (positive) partner and was unaware of this frightening reality for a year.

When I found out, I couldn’t believe that this was happening. This frightening reality would prompt my initial HIV test and a complete immersion into the world of smart slutdom. I could have played the victim role and said poor me what will I do now? Blah, blah, blah.

Instead, I obsessively gathered information about how

people become infected and how to both prevent infection and not give up sex. In other words, through this horrible incident and life altering experience, the smart slut emerged.

Here's my advice: Look at and use absolutely everything for your growth and development. Know that you can be sexually free and socially responsible. Know that sex is good and is God's greatest creation since chocolate.

Understand that you are not a victim and can consistently and creatively make choices that enhance your life. Familiarize yourself with decisions that allow you to stay healthy, happy and productive.

## Smart Slut: the Decision to be Victorious

**M**y new favorite past time is falling in love with men's potential. Instead of taking an honest look at what a person presents as their true self, I like the big game of pretend.

Basically, I wasn't very bright and instead of examining my choices regarding my health and well being, I decided to jump into another ill-fated romance. Without any investigation regarding the new stud's HIV status, I assumed that no one will shamelessly put any one else at risk.

This type of thing happens every day more than we realize. It doesn't matter if he seems nice or looks healthy or comes from a good home. What matters is the person's status.

In my early 20's, I thought one way about how people conduct their affairs and the belief that no one would deliberately and knowingly place anyone at risk. As this very fearful and troubling decade of my life grew to a close, I had to make some hard core decisions.

What is your HIV status and when is the last time you were tested? A smart slut knows how to address the most delicate of subjects, get their swerve on and keep the party going. I was tested four months ago and here are my results where are yours and would you like to test again together?

Keep in mind the context of your relationship. You can always ask a trick this question and more than likely if you're in the bushes or an abandoned building or an empty apartment you probably won't have time to pop by the clinic for a quick test. Instead go by the smart sluts rule for engaging in a quick roll in the hay: assume he is and either doesn't know or he's lying and then take serious precautions.

Within the context of a relationship or if you are considering getting seriously involved — which could mean just

doing the dirty or a full out more committed type of deal — here is a bit of advice that always works and is sure to get the heart a pumping: ask some goddamn questions and if the response is anything other than “yea here are my results” or “yes let’s get tested together”, keep it pushing.

What makes us not ask the hard questions, the things that will upset us temporarily and yet will have such far reaching results? Why did I never bring it up? I wanted to assume and pretend. I didn’t want to upset or offend and most importantly, I wanted to be wanted and loved and did not want to be alone. The smart slut doesn’t go in for all of that pretend nonsense.

Smart sluts state wants and needs clearly and have the foresight to know that his life is far more valuable than ten or fifteen minutes and a lifetime of doctor’s appointments, pricey meds and a life altering disease that has to be constantly and relentlessly managed.

## Smart Slut: Smart Slut Handles Business

**F**irst fact about HIV: it will cost you money and time. When there are attempts made to decrease HIV infection rates, the financial costs are never discussed.

Remember, a smart slut is a safe slut (thanks GS, my favorite Brit). As I mentioned previously, I had to soldier on alone when it was discovered that perhaps I had been exposed to the virus. I got tested the first dozen or so times by myself with no physical or emotional support.

When I moved to California, all of this changed overnight. I began dating and meeting people who were honest about their status. I began going to clinics and facilities with friends and dates where I literally held hands while blood was being drawn and t-cell count was being shared. HIV is a lifelong partner that will need to be managed and will affect every life decision.

Secondly, it costs money a whole lot of money. Missed days of work. Time spent going back and forth to the doctor and having the pressure of daily pill taking is a great deal to manage even if you have a support network that is kind, loving and thoughtful. Nobody ever discusses that this is a most time consuming and financially draining way to live.

I love the ads that the pharmaceutical companies show with all of the gorgeous perfect men having gorgeous perfect lives all via a one pill a day regimen. This is great if you can afford the one daily pill. It sends the message that being infected is a glamorous, chic and very affordable style. When you are on a regimen that cuts into the funding of the trip to Europe, cable tv, pedicures, gym memberships, facials and of course the latest and greatest brought to us via Prada, things look a little different.

By not playing it safe you risk infection and a life time of

doctor visits, pills and possibly some serious health issues and of course the psychological upheaval that is a part of the chronic disease architecture. There have been studies done where in people would rather get their hair done then pay for condoms that could save their lives. If you want a great deal, contact the .99 store where you can get a box of 12 condoms for a dollar and if that ain't a deal what is?

I enjoy fine food, theater and the movies and live for a day of beauty (haircut/shave/pedicure and manicure). While this is not expensive by any means (some of my peeps spend hundreds per month drinking), it would be severely limited if I had to purchase meds and take time off from work (which means I lose money). No fun.

The smart slut knows that in this world we are not supposed to want or have everything and yet this smart slut did figure it out and so can you...

One of the things we have been assigned and gleefully taken on is the worship of all things fabulous and show stopping. What could possible be more show stopping than being sexually responsible and looking great at the same time.

I am not referring here to the latest duds and whatever Madison Avenue has decide to pedal to us. Instead, I am talking about decisions that make great financial sense. Staying uninfected makes great financial sense.

# How to Successfully Reach Our Young Black Males

Today I found out that one of my favorite students is in prison for murder. He is only nineteen. My friend and teaching colleague shared the news via Facebook. The way it was stated, I thought for certain that this must be a joke. It has to be.

This is the same kid whose parents picked him up and dropped him off at school. I want to call attention to the incredible responsibility we all shoulder regarding our young people. I don't have all of the answers. I wish I did.

I am not sure that I have any answers and yet there have got to be some solutions. Where were his parents? While I taught him, I often had conversations with his parents. His father, who obviously felt much love and frustration regarding this individual, would often state "we can't do anything with him."

This is the same student who told me that his mother lied about his age so she could get him out of the house. He was four and in no way ready for school.

This is the same student who told me a teacher called him a dumb ass. After this proclamation, the instructor told the class that if he could do the work anybody could do it. Where was the outpouring of community concern? There was no one willing to say: "send him to me; I'll handle him; I'll turn him around."

What has happened to a community wherein the youngest get avoided and ignored? When I was his age and younger, my parents and the adults who knew my parents were aware of my goings on. I am always shocked when I talk to young people whose guardians have allowed them to do whatever they like with little to no accountability.

Equally stunning is the phenom wherein parental involve-

ment has ceased and the young person most affected by this decision is nine. Our children need more involvement from us not less. They will not figure shit out on their own.

Between the media and their peer groups, who often know less than they do, there is little chance for our young people to grow up into responsible critical thinking individuals. Without our assistance and firm and gentle love and guidance, our young people are left to navigate a world that is strange, competitive, narcissistic and changing in such an expedient fashion that without us they become and remain lost. Without our assistance, how will they develop the sense of self to not apologize for making productive, life enhancing skills.

For example, another one of my students began taking my class late. Even though he entered my class one month after it began, he wanted to catch up and do well. He asked about missed assignments and from day one performed the best out of all of my students. His mind was sharp, able to immediately see all and any connections but at some point gave up and decided that doing well in school no longer mattered.

The first week he dedicated himself to doing well and beamed with pride when I anonymously used one of his writing assignments as an example of the type of stellar work I expected from all of my students. This quickly changed. At one point, he became antagonistic and hostile. It became more important to display the "I don't give a shit" attitude.

I have no idea what brought about this bizarre and disturbing turn of events. I had not changed. He no longer saw learning as cool and his instructor as an adult who cared. I refused to let him slide and produce anything less than what I knew he was capable of. When he confided in me that he was a teen dad, he was seventeen and his daughter was three, I redoubled my efforts and reminded him that he had someone dependent on him.

I struggled with both these students trying to make sense

of a world and a way of thinking that made no sense. What could I have done differently ? Was I just another black teacher with middle class values trying to instill them in young people who were neither concerned nor impressed with my “alternative” ways of viewing the world and how they would enter into it or refashion it to make it fit their desires?

Having worked with a number of young people from all walks of life, I have some insight into what makes certain students turn right and others turn left. It is a collaborative effort. Everyone involved in the young person’s life must make their education and subsequent successes a priority.

The parents and students and instructor must all agree that success is achievable and expected. Then all parties must gather and map out both a strategy for attaining success and the part everyone involved will play in making sure that this happens. It does no good to point fingers and blame. No solution was every created by pretending that there wasn’t a very serious problem.

# Unfettered Mind

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## Unfettered Mind... The Importance of Black Male Mental Health

Are you sure you wanna be well  
sweetheart? A lot of weight when  
you're well.

—The Salt Eaters

The first time I had peach yogurt, I was visiting a friend in a mental institution. Chris was young, black, charming and struggling with his sexuality. He was having trouble with life and ended up here. Within these walls, decisions were made for him and everything seemed quiet and orderly. Chris was vocal, passionate and funny.

In this environment, none of this was allowed nor encouraged. I want to call attention to the need for constant and serious examination of the mental health industry and the need for men to seriously win the battle for mental health.

In the incredible, life changing book, *The Salt Eaters*, there is much discussion around the need for healthy minds and the responsibility that goes along with it. Recently, I read a post on my Facebook page that talked about gay male mental health. There was some back and forth discussion as to whether this was a black problem, a male problem or a gay phenomenon.

It is a problem that doesn't discriminate. It is an issue that is silently eating away at the world community. I would like

to address the point at which I have been most affected by it. As an artist and creative individual who is also black, gay and in his 40's, it is expected that I should be a little off my rocker.

In the aforementioned worlds, we are allowed a bit more leeway in the crazy cakes department. It is expected that we will be nasty, bitchy, cut throat and addicted to something. If you are not strung out and instead address people and problems directly with compassion and a sincere interest in solving the problem and not cutting down the other person, you are viewed with much suspicion.

Often times, I have been mistaken for being too quiet or passive when I am looking at a situation and contemplating a particular response. However, when I am passionate about something, fierce in my devotion and take decisive action I am perceived as angry. I often find this funny and disturbing.

Having a clear, well developed mind should not be looked at as an anomaly. Spending time maintaining and growing a wonderful mind and the incredible gifts this brings should be celebrated. Instead, all the parts of me when combined with the commitment to stay healthy are often viewed as magical, unprecedented and just plain scary.

Like my mentor, bell hooks, I have spent an incredible amount of time reading and thinking. When I tell people that at one time in my life, I read 4-5 books a week, they are visibly shocked. If I said that I spent six hours a day in front of the tv, nobody would be taken aback.

While I have been somewhat lucky in that I found out ways to stay healthy early and often, it is not been an easy road to travel. We live in a world that supports and relies on us being victims. The media trots out reality show after reality show with folks who seriously need a good therapist or support group not face time on a national TV show. Along with the reality craze, there is constant and pointless coverage of celebrities.

Whenever, I see these people who are so rich and popular

and have been given the position of cultural icon, I am just a little sad. My mind always goes to: you have all of this money, celebrity, notoriety and yet you can't stop drinking, drugging, shopping or maintain a healthy relationship? This is the cost of a lack of attention to what adults require to be mentally healthy. The fantasy that if we focus on everything else we'll be happy and things will just naturally fall into place has to be looked at for the sham that it is.

As an artist, someone is always critiquing my work. In some extreme cases, I am the one personally who gets critiqued. Could you be younger? Taller? More hood? Less hood? At a certain point I needed to make a decision regarding how much of this crap, I was willing to let in.

Was I going to let the culture decide how I thought or felt about myself, only to have it changed in a week because that was no longer "hot"? Hell no. I knew if I was gonna make it in the world, entertainment, my family, that I better get myself some tools and make holding on to and developing and nurturing my mind the first priority.

To the gay men who have not made this connection and are still walking around looking for the perfect mate, the acquisition of the perfect six pack, mojito, apartment whatever, my heart goes out to you. We can start a movement.

It is clear that so many of us are completely crazed about our bodies and keeping them healthy, why not transfer that obsession to getting and staying mentally fit and adept? We've probably got to make mental acuity very sexy. Why not encourage all of the advertisers, the taste makers to feature ads with people reading or talking about dealing with their crap and growing up?

We advertise medications that can ensure you have sex all night long but no attention is placed on what we are doing other than each other.

Where are the ads for commitment to growth via discussions and mutual sharing? Where are all the webcams whose

focus is on two men saying I want to talk, I feel like I'm losing it and a cocktail and a new sex partner won't improve/help the situation.

If we all made this issue our issue and demanded that everyone we involve ourselves with do the same, there would be a serious decline in the number of new HIV cases, depression and isolation. We would have loads of energy to attack the next series of challenges with joy and understanding of our capacity to be self governing and the knowledge that an incredible mind and loving heart can change the world.



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