



Shavings from My Head

Eroding The MoZone

At fifty, as a recent development in my aging process, I've come to require more from my relationships. More, of course, can mean a million things. But for me, as of late—perhaps a sign of maturity—more has come to mean friendship before bed. Why?

Because hot sex, much like a tan line, eventually fades. Thus, I've come to crave dialogue before dick—applying a completely different fun-screen to my body of dating. Best, I've realized, to have more in common when you role over in the morning. And with said fun-screen liberally applied, that brought with it a surprising array of new, and at times, harsh exposure.

A few weeks back I experienced a spike in my social life—a party here, a gathering for drinks there. It was during this social swirl of soirees that I was introduced to several new men. With each, there was an invisible click and effortless banter—flaunting the possibility of a new friendship-first union. At the close of each gathering, as business cards were exchanged, the topic of dating never arose, only the agreement to reconnect. This left me hopeful. No typical (insert sexual) innuendo; only warm, friendly beams. Another week passed infused with e-mails to plan another get together. In my stream of e-mails, I applied my new fun-

screen filter. I wrote: It was great meeting you and am looking forward to hanging out. But, I'm not looking to date anyone right now; just kinda make friends first.

The response was two-fold: one developed into a new "manship", while the other ended in a horrific, fiery crash-and-burn response—leaving me to question the assumptions and attraction(s) of gay man-to-man connecting. After the initial comingling with each man, both were given same information: to become friends and hang out. And not I'll-never-date-or-sleep-with-you, just not right now; which left me with this question:

As gay men, is it always a given that when we gravitate to another man, that said attraction always be about sex? Can we put sex aside to find friendship first?

So I began to focus not only on my on social interaction—how invested I was physically versus mentally—as well as the actions of others.

While in questioning mode, I called my (straight) girlfriend Jackie—the one person that always remains radical-free. It sounds cliché to even write such a thing, a stunted relic-of-an-example: the Will and Grace case. But, like Will and Grace, the possibility of sex is removed; allowing for free-flowing friendship.

"Hey it's me. Where are you?" I probed.

"Blow me nails." (Our moniker for Blooming Nails nail salon in the heart of NYC's Chelsea)

"I'm trying to figure something out and I want your spin" I solicited.

"Shoot, but I don't know how much I can say in front of the manicurist," she giggled.

"Do you think it's possible for a straight man and a straight woman to be just friends?"

"I don't think it's genuinely possible" she began while the Asian girl filed at her toes as the massage chair hummed in the background.

"One person usually has more attraction than the other. There's always somebody that wants more. I think it's the same for you gay boys."

"Hummm..interesting. Well, do you have any single, straight male friends?" I probed.

"Well, yes. One." Then she paused. "But, if I'd give him more, he'd take it! And every now and then, it gets just a little too close and he tries to have a little bit more. So then we don't see each other for a while. I go off and date someone and he has to do the same....to keep things in check.

Why? What's up?"

"Well" I persisted. "I'm just trying to find the balance. You know. The variations of attraction; sometimes it's immediately sexual, and sometimes I want to explore the layers of someone I'm attracted to...before sex..to, to see if I like them for other things. I guess, I'm trying to have both and sex always seems to cloud things," I continued. "And these days, I don't really want to take off my clothes and be intimate, before I decide if I like them,..ya' know, as friends first." "Hum. Interesting" she countered. "I guess, for me, it's easier to define the difference between a girlfriend and a boyfriend. With a boyfriend it always starts off from a sexual attraction place. It's harder for you because your friends and your lovers come from same pool..which, I guess, makes it's harder to define the difference when you first meet someone."

Along with the conversations and the various responses, I began to think about how I was putting myself out there. I began to see it in terms of exposing myself. How was my fun-screen working against the Mo-zone? Was it protecting me or not?

And then I met Carl.

During a going away party I sat next to Carl—who spent the entire evening sexting with some man he was planning to meet up with after the party. Eventually he showed me a snap of his soon-to-be-bed-buddy.

"Cute. Right?" he asked.

"Well..yeah. But doesn't your husband mind?" I asked, while watching him spin the gold band on his ring finger.

"Oh,. No" he giggled, looking down at his hand. "I'm not married. I just wear it to protect myself." Seeing the confused look on my face, he continued.

"If I hook up with some guy and I don't want to see him again, I just blame it on the ring...on my 'husband'"—which he accentuated with air quotes.

"Well..don't you want to be friends with any of them?"

"Sometimes...then I tell them the truth."

As humans we develop protective layers as we mature. As gay men, early on we (generally) develop extra layers: due to the discovery that we are different than those around us on the playground.

And, I suppose, we all develop our own, personal variations of protection. For Carl it's his faux wedding band, for me it's my fun-screen, my friend-before fuck layer—to protect my affectionate feelings of intimacy.

Akin to the ozone, as a gay man my mozone is essential to my survival—protecting me from harmful exposure. But, while out there, um, exposing myself, I'm left to wonder: Have we gay men successfully devised an effective way to gage the differences in our attraction? And while the protective walls must remain thick at times, do we still need to discover when it's best to shed some new light on the situation? Does our sexual attraction (at times) get in the way of the rays of friendship? **O**