

BOYS WHO LIKE BOYS



**How we date, love, and find
fulfillment in the age of the internet**

MAX THOMAS

“A witty and insightful read, Boys Who Like Boys is a rallying cry for all queer men to date, love and care for one another better.”

— **Vaneet Mehta, Author of *Bisexual Men Exist***

“This is a much-needed, highly relevant and thought-provoking book, ideal for queer men looking to develop deeper connections and relationships. Without a doubt I would recommend this book to any queer man.”

— **Thomas Smithson, LGBTQ+ Therapist
(@newhcounselling)**

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in the age of the internet*

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earth sign books

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*To all the boys who like boys who made my heart a little
bigger. I'm grateful for you.*

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I Hate to Say It... But Men Kind of *Are* Trash

“Like, wow, Claire. I’m astounded. ASTOUNDED!”

I’d been coming to see Claire for over a year at this point.¹

“A thirty-seven-year-old GROWN-ASS MAN. With a good job. And his own home!”

I’d sat on the couch opposite her and spilled all kinds of personal, shameful, heart-wrenchingly painful things before.

“And — APPARENTLY — the emotional maturity of a fourteen-year-old!”

But this one felt different.

“This feels like a big thing to say...”

Claire nodded invitingly, as therapists do.

“But I think it’s true. Men are trash, aren’t they? Men. Are. Trash.”

We sat in silence for a moment. It felt appropriate to let that thought reverberate around the room, perhaps the universe.

“Like, I’m at the point in dating where, for my own self-protection, I think I have to start each new connection assuming that he *is* trash, then wait to be proven wrong instead of the other way around.”

I took a deep breath.

“That feels devastating. That’s not usually how I navigate the world AT ALL. But I don’t think I have any choice.”

Let’s rewind six weeks earlier.

¹ I’ve changed most of the names in this book, obviously.

It was the typical twenty-first-century queer love story. We'd matched on one of the more relationship-friendly apps, and a few messages in, it felt — to me, at least — like we were clicking. I was out of town with work for a month just after that, but we stayed in touch over message while I was away.

The conversations felt pretty substantial. We'd shared photos of our families. We'd both thirsted over Mena Massoud in the new *Aladdin* movie. We talked about his passion for horse riding and, at his request, swapped cute voice notes. It didn't feel too much too soon. It didn't feel clingy. It was just a few conversations each week, all leading to — I thought — meeting in person later, once I'd made it back to London.

When later rolled around, we were still checking in a couple of times a week, which felt vaguely, faintly promising. And whether we were going to be a hit or a flop in person, I was excited to find out.

"Heyy so I just booked my ticket. I'll be back on Thursday. So clear your calendar :)"

"Oh that's nice," he shot back. "Are you excited to be back?"

That felt weird. We'd had that conversation literally a couple of days before.

"Haha yeah, it'll be nice to be home." Maybe he'd just forgotten. "So are we hanging out sometime? What's your schedule like?"

Then... there it was. Or more accurately, wasn't.

Message delivered, not read.

Twenty-four hours later, the same. This was not how it had played out the past six weeks. He'd replied within a few hours, without fail.

On the train back to London, I figured I'd try one more time. Messages get lost. People get distracted.

"Hey Mike, hope you're doing OK. Just wanted to check in. If you're down to catch up sometime, I'm still game. Or if you're not feeling it, it's 100% cool, just let me know."

The train pulled into Euston. Nothing. I got off the tube and through my front door. Still nothing. I woke up the next morning. Still nothing.

Nothing. Nada. Not one thing.

It wasn't a chain of events I especially enjoyed. But back in Claire's office, I was grateful to have someone who was literally paid to hear me sound off about it.

"I know, Claire! Call *The New York Fucking Times*!! 'Gay man in big city fails to communicate openly with other gay man!' It's the scoop of the decade!

"Because honestly," I went on, "now I feel like an idiot for daring to get excited about this. I'm mad at myself for assuming this was going somewhere it wasn't, and assuming if he wasn't interested, he'd just say that. Like, I literally set him up for the easiest rejection ever. I literally threw that ball in the air, ready for him to knock it out of the park with the TINIEST bit of effort, but then... nothing."

"Right," Claire said.

"I get that we've normalized this shit. I get this isn't even CLOSE to the worst thing some gay man will have done to some other gay man this week. And I can deal with rejection. I can cope with being told no — even if I really like someone. So why does this sting so much?"

To me, that was a rhetorical question. But Claire had an answer.

"Well, if I can chime in..." she said.

Now I nodded. For extra flair I raised my eyebrows as if to say, "Please, chime away!!"

"It sounds like, whether it was reciprocated or not, you felt like you'd formed a connection with this person. And when that happens, once you assume you've reached a point of mutual trust and respect with someone, but they violate that, it does hurt. It's bound to hurt."

"Right," I said. "So it's not really about the rejection. It's about trust and expectations."

"Yes," Claire said, "exactly."

"And in your case," she went on, "you care a lot about making meaningful connections. Your expectation is that you should be able to trust and form connections with other queer men. But from what you've told me, it sounds like it's been a struggle to do that recently."

I resisted the homosexual urge to say, “Gurl, you think!?” and just thought quietly about that a moment.

“You know what, that’s it,” I said. “It’s not just that I got excited because this connection lasted more than three messages on a dating app. It’s that I dared to feel optimistic about something that turned out to be another massive fucking letdown.”

I slunk into the couch a little (dejectedly).

“So here I am, at the point where every time I connect with someone new, I’m actively wondering what kind of new emotionally devastating experience is going to end it this time.

“Yep, that’s it. I’m not even mad at myself for being optimistic. I’m wondering whether queer men even *get* to be optimistic. I’m wondering whether I’m even allowed to think I’ll couple up with someone I actually like someday. I’m wondering whether ‘men are trash’ — maybe myself included — is the mantra I need to keep my expectations in check. Because that’s what it feels like right now.”

* * *

In theory, we’ve never had it better.

Queer people across the globe are more accepted than ever. Queer people are more visible than ever. Yes, there are equality battles still to win, but in lots of places we can legally marry, adopt, share bank accounts and share lives. We can meet, flirt and stroke each other’s butts in public. We’re not watching each other die of a devastating viral illness. Queer life is much more than hanky codes and underground bars now. The internet has given us easy access to more friends, dates and sex than ever. It’s easier to connect with other queer people now than at literally any other time in human history.

In theory, we’ve never had it better. But it doesn’t always feel like it.

Not just to me. A lot of us are bouncing through life facing more than our fair share of disconnection, disappointment and — as if that wasn’t enough — loneliness and isolation.

Because the truth is, a lot of us do struggle with dating and relationships. A lot of us aren't finding much success in building meaningful, supportive connections with each other.

Because, in a phrase, men often *are* trash when it comes to dating and relationships. Collectively, we really can be trash to each other.

I'm not proud to say it. And as I'll explain, it's not entirely our fault we ended up here. But somehow we did, and I for one think we should talk about it.

I could talk about how men learn that being sensitive and emotionally open is a sign of weakness.² I could talk about how men learn to dominate, compete and control.³ I could talk about how men encourage each other with weirdly violent phrases like “smash it,” “knock 'em dead” and “kill it, bro.” I could talk about the devastating truth that our fear of showing any signs of struggle or weakness is actually killing *us* — that up to *four* times as many men die by suicide as women.⁴

I could talk about all of that. But I might not need to.

If you're anything like the myriad of gay, bi and other queer men I spoke to while I was writing this book, there's a good chance you've already had your own “are men... trash?” moment.

Without even thinking about it, you might be able to rattle off a list of your own bad dating or relationship experiences that left you feeling not just hurt and let down, but wounded. And if you've been

² Seriously though fellas, is it gay to have feelings?

³ See Selin Kesebir, “Research: How Women and Men View Competition Differently,” *Harvard Business Review* ♦ (November 6, 2019). Dr. Kesebir really uses her full doctorate to say men are competitive trash: “On the negative side, competition potentially (1) encourages unethical behaviors, (2) damages people's self-confidence, and (3) hurts relationships.”

(By the way, the lil' diamond symbol above means the source is available freely online. If you want to look any of them up, I've put the applicable URLs in the “Internet Reference Links” section at the end of the book.)

⁴ See Helene Schumacher, “Why more men than women die by suicide,” *BBC News* ♦ (March 18, 2019). If you or someone you know is at risk, visit befrienders.org for help and support worldwide.

trying to date men for more than a few months, there's also a good chance you've taken at least one "Urgh, men are trash!" time-out — or just given up altogether — because it felt too stressful, disappointing or just like a massive waste of time.

And sure, maybe as queer men we are a bit ahead of straight men. Maybe you're more likely to say "you go, gurl!" than "smash it, dude!" Maybe you once tried to exorcise every trace of toxic masculinity from your soul at a self-actualization retreat in Peru.

But for all we've done as queer men to evolve our own culture, a lot of us still wrestle with the baggage we pick up from being raised culturally as men.

A lot of us are surprisingly competitive. We feel pressure to have the biggest pecs, the hottest partner or the fanciest job. A lot of us feel like we have to constantly assert our manliness. We put on deeper voices, look down on more "feminine" queer men — whatever we decide that means⁵ — and can be super guarded with our emotions. And then, lots of us struggle to be kind and empathetic. We're not always very nice to each other.

And OK, it's not all men, all of the time. But it's enough of us, enough of the time, that a lot of us do struggle to connect with each other — or at least connect through anything more emotionally meaningful than no-strings sex, shirtless mirror selfies and/or sweaty dancing.

As queer men, we often define ourselves mostly by the queer part. (Maybe because that's the part that gets us called "faggot" for holding another guy's hand in public.) But part of why we're the way we are is also because we're men. We grew up in the "man box" about as much as straight men do, and many of us haven't grown out of it.

Being a man is not a stigmatized identity (though personally, I would sometimes like to make it one), so most of us assume it's an easy identity to live with. And in some ways, it is. But when it comes

⁵ Fellas, is it gay to be gay?

to emotions and connection, let me go out on a limb and say that being raised as men *does* put us at a disadvantage.

Put it this way: research shows that overall, gay men suffer from significantly more mental health issues than lesbian women do.⁶ So while being attracted to people of the same gender in a world that's still deciding whether it's cool with that or not isn't great for anyone's mental health, the fact that we're men seems to make things worse.

And that, of course, brings us to the rainbow-colored elephant in the room. (Let's call her Justine.) Being queer *is* hard.

Despite all the reasons our lives are much better than they were or would have been forty years ago, it doesn't always feel like it. We still have to think twice about public displays of affection with other men. We can't take for granted that a bakery or hotel or wedding venue won't tell us "Umm, no fags." If we raise kids, we still have to go through a whole process of not just explaining to them that it's completely normal to have two dads, but also preparing them for the fact that other kids and their parents might not see it that way.

Even worse, as queer men who were raised to fit our society's very limited definition of what a man should be, liking other men makes us failures there, too. We have sucked dick and brought shame to our society *and* our gender.

And unfortunately — as we'll come to again and again in this book — that shame creates all kinds of psychological obstacles for us. It makes it harder for us to connect more deeply with each other, treat each other kindly, and communicate openly with each other. It cuts at our self-esteem and our ability to give and receive love.

So if the question is "Why does queer dating suck so much?" part of the answer is "because queer men can be kind of shitty to each other" and part of the answer is "because society is still shitty to queer

⁶ See Wendy B. Bostick, Carol J. Boyd, Tonda L. Hughes and Sean Esteban McCabe, "Dimensions of sexual orientation and the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders in the United States," *American Journal of Public Health* 100/3 ♦ (March 2010), 468–75.

people.” But don’t get comfortable just yet, because that’s actually not the whole picture either.

There’s a digital elephant in the room too. (Her name is Antoinette.) See, the internet was supposed to make things — dating included — better. But, you might not be surprised to hear, in a lot of ways it hasn’t. In fact, there are plenty of ways it’s made dating worse.

Forty years ago — or even just fifteen — you might have found yourself meeting guys in a bar. And if one of them wasn’t interested, he’d probably say so, but you might make a friend or get a nice conversation out of it.

Today, you’re probably meeting people online, which means you’re more likely to get rejected by being ghosted, blocked or — if you’re lucky — told you’re too fat or ugly or old or feminine to think you ever stood a chance.⁷ The internet has connected us in all kinds of ways, sure, but it often leaves us feeling less connected, and less *human*, than we should.

So to recap, if the question is “Why does queer dating suck so much?” there are actually three broad categories of answers. One: men are trash. Two: society treats queer people like trash. And three: the internet encourages us to be trash.

And that’s the hot, flaming trash heap that we, as queer men in the age of the internet, get to sit on. That is the universe we get to live in and where we have to try to find connection, love and fulfillment.

And then, we get basically zero help in learning to navigate said fiery trash heap. Sex and relationships education for straight people is usually pretty bad, but for queer people, it’s often nonexistent. Maybe your high school taught you how to put condoms on a carrot, and that’s definitely a start. But it probably didn’t teach you how to have conversations about consent with a carrot, how to cope with being rejected by a carrot, how to figure out whether you should be in an open relationship with your carrot, or how the stress of being not-

⁷ Fellas, is it gay to be nice to gay people?

straight in a straight-centric world takes a serious emotional toll that can harm your otherwise promising relationship with your carrot.

At the same time, your straight parents probably were — and still are — clueless about most of that too. There’s no Faggot University. (Though there should be, if only because we’d call it “FU” for short.) Dating apps don’t come with instructions. And nobody so far has written the handbook *Men: Embracing Your Inner Trashiness*.

And so, that’s partly why we’re here.

Sure, I wrote this book in part because I got my feelings hurt, and telling y’all about it in print feels intensely validating.⁸ And sure, I wrote this book in part to understand more about why same-sex dating is so hard. I wanted to understand why so many of us find it hard to connect more deeply with each other, why so many of us are way more single than we’d like to be, and why a lot of queer men feel lonely and isolated from each other in general. (We’ll talk more about that later, but spoiler alert: stigma, spoiler alert: trauma.)

But mostly, I wrote this book because I’m crazy enough to think we deserve better. And I think we *can* do better. It’s not completely — or even really — our fault that we ended up here, but we did, and I’m crazy enough to think it would be great if we treated each other a little better. I’m crazy enough to think we should be able to connect more deeply with each other if we want to. And I’m crazy enough to think that if we worked just a bit harder at processing the emotional and cultural baggage that put us here, we’d all feel a bit more optimistic about finding the fulfilling relationships that so many of us crave.

Because truthfully, there *are* reasons to be optimistic. Within the forty-foot trash heap, there *is* a glowing orb of hope. (If you dig around a little.) Plenty of queer men do form happy and fulfilling relationships, and there’s absolutely no reason any of us can’t.

First, nothing about this is inevitable. Being a man is not some kind of curse. (Even if I’m making it sound like one.) Men learn to be

⁸ I mean, Taylor Swift basically built a career out of sharing her bad dating experiences, so maybe you can extend a smaller version of that courtesy to me.

like we are mostly because of culture, not biology. As strong as the pull of “Man up, bro!” (*according to my very specific definition of masculinity)” might be, it’s not fixed.

Second, the emotional maturity and self-assurance it takes to become much, much better at dating and relationships are absolutely things you can pick up. Learning to love and connect with other queer men more authentically and finding partners who are ready to do the same can be challenging, yes, but with time and patience it’s something any of us can do. But we genuinely do have to learn how. It’s not something we can just rely on our instincts for.⁹

The biggest problem is, again, that nobody really tells us this stuff. As queer men, we’re regularly exposed to all kinds of things — stigma, gonorrhea, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* — but we’re only rarely exposed to positive and well-grounded attitudes toward dating and relationships. And that seems like a shame.

And so, here we are, a few pages into a book not just for boys who like boys, but for boys who like boys who like meaningful connections, who value emotional maturity, and who care about getting fulfilled and not just filled.

We’ll start by looking at some key concepts about dating and connection — old favorites like authenticity, vulnerability, romantic compatibility, and what love even is, anyway. Then we’ll talk a bit about sex. (I know, kind of weird not to start with that, huh?) Then we’ll dive more deeply into how we can build the fulfilling queer relationships that are right for us, and the specific baggage that often holds us back. And in the last few chapters we’ll look at some practical ways we can all date better, and try to figure out where in the holy titties of Jesus F. Christ we might go from there.

We’re going to get serious and heartfelt sometimes. We’re going to get mopey and introspective sometimes. We’re going to be chaotic and

⁹ Yes, your three-time divorcée aunt Linda may disagree. But yes, she is wrong. See Maria Popova, “A ‘Dynamic Interaction’: How We Learn (and Unlearn) the Language of Love,” *The Marginalian* ♦ (June 30, 2014).

a bit unhinged sometimes. We're going to make points backed by serious psychological research sometimes. Basically, if it's part of the authentic experience of being a gay, bi and/or queer man, you bet we're going to be it somewhere.

At the same time, I'm going to encourage you to live your best life, in your way, on your terms. I'm going to encourage you to date, fuck and thirst after the various orifices of whoever you want. But yes, I'm also going to argue that, as a community, we can treat each other better. I'm going to suggest that, as a community, we can absolutely go after the things we want and build the relationships we want while minimizing the collateral damage we cause other people along the way. (Yes, we really can have it all.)

And yes, while we're talking about our wider community, I want you to know I am semi-embarrassed to be yet another cis, white gay man who's clearly privileged enough to afford regular therapy who wound up writing a book about queer culture. But I also want you to know I've tried do it in a way that resonates as widely with as many different types of men who are attracted to men as I know how. And I hope that will be enough.

Still, a lot of what we'll cover is nuanced and won't apply to every single person in every conceivable situation. Nobody else's lived experiences invalidate yours. So please take whatever you find helpful and feel free to ignore the rest.

Also while we're here, we should talk a bit about terminology.

You've probably spotted that I'm mostly using the word "queer" as an umbrella term for "not straight and/or cisgender," and "queer men" to mean "men who are attracted to men."

Yes, "queer" is a word that some gay and bi men don't love, for all kinds of reasons I'm not going to get into now. But since this is a book about all boys who like boys, whether they identify as gay or bisexual or queer or questioning or pansexual or polysexual or anything else, I wanted to use a word that's as inclusive as possible to refer to us all.

"Queer" is the word that does that, however we might all identify individually. ("LGBTQ+ men" felt weird because most of us don't

identify with the “L,” and, at least for now, “GBTQ+ men” isn’t a widely used phrase.) So even if it’s not a perfectly neutral term, “queer men” is how I’ll usually refer to us as a group.¹⁰

Equally, I’m mostly going to refer to queer men with the pronouns “he,” “him” and “his,” though you or the people you like might use other pronouns, or even not identify as men. I’m also mostly going to use the word “partner,” though what I have to say might apply more to someone you think of as your “boyfriend,” “husband,” “spouse,” “fuckbuddy” or, sure, your “emotional support bottom.” Using the word “partner” in the singular is also not me trying to ignore polyamory or invalidate the orgy you went to last weekend, I promise. I’m just trying to be as inclusive as possible without having to account for every possibility and permutation on every page.

In short, whether I use the exact language you use or not, if what I’m saying resonates with you and how you see yourself, please rest assured that you are invited to the table. Always.

So, yes, thanks for joining me on this strange journey to try to turn something as chaotic and bewildering as “being a man who is attracted to men” into some kind of meaningful discussion.

Because as queer people find more acceptance and become more visible, we probably shouldn’t be surprised that more of us want more substantial connections, or at least something other than a string of casual relationships that just fizzle out or go nowhere. And a lot of us do expect more depth and respect from the people we date. We want to build relationships in our own ways, yes, but for more and more of us that includes longer-term, more meaningful connections. And if we want to build those longer-term connections, we absolutely can.

¹⁰ And to trans readers: first and foremost, yes, I hope you’ll also feel very welcome here. As a cis man, I don’t feel qualified to write about the specific challenges of dating as a trans man, so I’ll let other people’s books cover that. Still, most of what I say about queer dating and connection should apply to all of us, and if this book mostly speaks to you, I hope you won’t feel put off anytime I say something that doesn’t fully represent you or just applies differently. (Including the occasional jokes about the bodies of cis men.)

It's not always the easiest path. It's easier to ignore or laugh about our emotional baggage and our learned trashiness than to fight it. It's easier to say, "Oh, that's just queer culture," and settle for less than many of us want. But we don't have to.

We can overcome our trashiness. We can understand ourselves and our motivations better. We can learn to identify behaviors that might feel good and natural in the moment but might be harming our odds of finding happiness and fulfillment longer-term.

We can learn to connect more deeply with each other.

And if we want to, we will.

* * *

"Yes, Max, I hear you," Claire said. "And I'm sorry you had to go through all of that. So where do you go from here?"

"Huh?" I replied.

I'd assumed I could just wallow in self-pity and blame everyone but myself until things got magically better.

"What are you going to do about it?" she said. "For what it's worth, I don't completely disagree with you that men can be trash. But what, you're giving up on dating now?"

"Well, no. I don't want that. I guess I need to be... better?" I said abstractly, still hoping things would improve without me changing myself or really doing anything at all.

"Because yes," Claire continued, "we aren't responsible for anyone else's behavior. But it's often in low moments like this that we can reflect on our choices and behaviors, readjust them based on what we've learned, and come back much better."

"A breakdown is just the prelude to a breakthrough, right!?" I said.

"Yes, Max, that's one way to put it."

It felt a bit like Claire said that just to be supportive. But whatever.

"Well, actually," I said, "I did have this idea a while back to write something about queer dating and relationships. A self-help book, I guess. Because Jesus Christ a lot of us need help, 'self' or otherwise."

“That’s interesting,” Claire said. “I know you’re an experienced writer, but what happens if you start writing about this even just for you, to help get your head straight?”

It was a poor choice of phrase, but not a bad idea.

“What happens,” she went on, “if you try to figure out some ways you — and your community, your dating pool, whatever you want to call it — might show up in relationships differently? What could you do to be better to yourselves *and* each other?”

“Right, like how would I fix queer dating forever!?” I said, a bit too eagerly.

“Maybe,” Claire said. “Or just what could be different in the short term? If queer people rarely get the emotional help and support they need while they’re growing up, what do you wish they knew?”

Oh, that was a topic I had plenty of thoughts about.

“Think about it,” Claire said. “Speak to some other queer men. Read up on it, if you like. It could be really interesting to see what you discover.”

PART I:
FUNDAMENTALS

Authenticity

OK, I know. What kind of basic-ass dating book starts with the advice “just be yourself”?

Because sure, “be yourself” might be just about the most clichéd dating advice there is. And yet, points were definitely made. Learning to present ourselves more authentically to the world is not only fundamental to dating well, it’s also an essential part of how we fight back against the homophobia and stigma that keep us from finding more fulfilling relationships.

And what’s more, “be yourself” isn’t just damn good advice, it’s an idea that underpins nearly everything else in this book. That’s why it’s the perfect place to start.

What authenticity is — and why it’s so hot

If you ask a queer man to imagine his ideal partner, there’s a nonzero chance he’ll start to describe what that guy looks like. But let’s go a bit deeper than just looks, and think about who that guy is.

Outside of physical characteristics, let’s say our hypothetical queer man decides he’d like someone who is confident, kind, interesting and independent. Because let’s face it, someone like that sounds pretty great. Who wouldn’t want to have a partner who radiates confidence, who’s completely assured in their right to be here and build great relationships, who lives their life in a way that makes them happy and fulfilled?

And sure, there are different ways to become a great partner who is a lot of those things. But they all have one essential ingredient in common: personal authenticity.

In a few words, ***authenticity is the art of being yourself.***

In a few more, authenticity is the art of connecting with what you want, think and feel, then being comfortable presenting that to the world. And when someone does that well, it's usually really attractive. It tends to give off a vibe that says, "I'm a great person to be around!"

But the reason achieving that level of authenticity, confidence and self-assurance is a challenge is that most of us — queer and otherwise — learn to care too much about other people's opinions. We worry about getting other people's approval so much we're willing to adapt the things we do, say and even think to fit in. We present ourselves as what we think the world wants to see, not what we are, because we think that's what will make us feel seen and, if we're lucky, even loved.

And on the surface, it sounds like a fucking great strategy. Only, in practice, it isn't.

Whether we're conscious of it or not, most of us are pretty great authenticity sleuths. (Yes, "sleuths" meaning "detectives," not a fancy French spelling of "sluts." Though "hoes for authenticity" is also a phrase I could have used.) Most of us are pretty good at sensing when someone is behaving in a certain way just to get our approval. And most of us are not hoers for that. Even if someone's inauthentic behavior technically gets us what we want, the inauthenticity often puts us off.

That's because inauthenticity tends to come across as neediness. Inauthentic behavior doesn't exactly say, "I value myself highly, boys, girls and people of all other genders!" More likely, it says something like "I base my opinion of myself on other people's!" or just "Someone — *anyone* — love me please??" And needless to say, that's generally not that attractive.

To be clear, it's not that highly authentic people don't care about other people's opinions at all. (You might be thinking of psychopaths.) We'll talk about this properly toward the end of the book, but unless

you want to spend your entire life alone, we do need some approval and validation from others. And we do live a fuller life when we're open to other people's influence and ideas.

But the key is that highly authentic people are comfortable putting their opinions, their desires and their way of seeing things first. Even when they get input from other people, their own values and perspectives ultimately determine the decisions they make.

They spend time with the people they want to. They fill their lives with the things that are meaningful to them. They write a book that's like 80% well-intended dating advice and 20% random asides and dick jokes. And they do it knowing their exact brand of authenticity won't and can't be for everyone. But they do it anyway knowing it'll help them find the people their exact brand of authenticity *is* for — the people who will love and accept them *as they are*.

And that's hot, right? (In general, I mean. You can make up your own mind about the book thing.)

And sure, I know it's early in the book to be wheeling out the Insta-worthy comparison tables, but whatever. On the next page I've listed some specific ways people tend to reveal their authenticity — or how much they struggle with it — to the world.

In short, authentic people are comfortable being themselves and expressing themselves, even when that might make other people feel uncomfortable or let down, or even make other people reject them. And that's really important because while acting authentically can feel terrifying and even reckless in the moment, being inauthentic tends to have even bigger negative consequences in the long run.

Again, that's because inauthenticity tends to put people off. When someone really struggles to share their authentic opinion, it's harder to trust them. It's harder to believe them when they say "hell yes" if you suspect that they're afraid of saying "hell no" in case anyone gets mad or disappointed. It's draining when someone constantly needs reassurance to make even very small decisions — or when someone tries to change your mind about a deeply-held opinion instead of accepting that maybe you just see things differently to them.

<i>Common in people who have a high level of authenticity</i>	<i>Common in people who struggle with authenticity</i>
Pursues the things they like and value without worrying about what is popular	Usually follows the crowd and sticks with what is safely popular right now
Is comfortable saying no when necessary	Defaults to people pleasing — saying yes when they want to say no
Their words and behavior consistently align	What they say and how they act often don't align
Asks for input from people they trust, but ultimately makes their own decisions	Needs constant reassurance or validation from others before making decisions
Accepts other people authentically, without trying to change their mind or influence them excessively	Often encourages others to sacrifice their authenticity by trying to make them change their deeply held opinions
Expresses themselves confidently and clearly, even when their message might not be welcomed or understood	Often tells half-truths, lies by omission, or even outright lies
Acknowledges and accepts their imperfections and limitations, knowing they're part of being human	Struggles to accept their imperfections and limitations, afraid others will see them as weaknesses

In fact, another reason inauthenticity is unattractive is because it's a subtle kind of manipulation. It's a way of someone subtly altering who they really are to get other people's approval. And that's exactly why inauthenticity damages relationships. We don't like the feeling that we're being manipulated, that someone is *lying* about who they are in order to influence what we think or feel about them.

To be able to like and respect someone we have to know who they really are. (Not just in dating.) It's hard to build a trusting and genuine connection with someone who, on a personal level, is a moving target.

Yes, highly authentic people will be comfortable disappointing us sometimes, and yes, it sucks to feel disappointed. But we tend to admire people like that more in the long run, and trust them more deeply, precisely because we know they're not constantly hiding who they are. Ultimately, it's much more reassuring to be in a relationship with someone whose attitude is "Love me or hate me, THIS IS WHO I AM, bitch!" than "I change my thoughts and opinions more often than some twinks change their hair color!!!"

That's why high authenticity isn't just attractive but essential when it comes to forming secure and fulfilling relationships. It lets people see us as we authentically are so they can decide whether they're authentically into us, or not — which is always the best way to build more genuine relationships.

Because that's the thing: being more authentically yourself won't make you more attractive to everyone. In fact, it will usually put some people off. (Their loss, I'm sure.)

But importantly, being authentically yourself will always make you more attractive to the *right* people. It'll draw in the people who are ready to love and accept you as you are. It'll help you connect with, and keep, the people who are best suited to being in a fulfilling and genuine relationship with you specifically.

And, by the way, that's why relationships that begin with a lot of inauthenticity tend to become rocky or difficult over time. Sure, you can lie about your age or interests to get someone to talk to you. You can play games, like intentionally waiting to text someone back, to

keep someone keen. You can even craft a whole fake profile online with fake photos, and it might even get you a whole lot of attention you wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

But those tactics tend to fail eventually because they're all about hiding who you authentically are or how you genuinely feel. They turn dating into a game, not an opportunity to build an authentic connection with someone. They help you attract people who aren't right for you, or just other people who think you have to play games to keep someone's interest. (Good luck with that.) Games also damage relationships because they usually involve actively deceiving or manipulating someone. And in my experience, at least, most people don't think it's hot to be openly lied to.

But the main reason that "just be yourself" is great advice is because it sends a strong message, to other people and yourself, that who you are is worth presenting to the world, as you are. It sends a message that you like yourself, and that always helps if you want other people to like you, too.

Why queer people struggle especially with authenticity

As simple as living more authentically might sound, in practice it's often hard work. It takes courage. And being your best most authentic self always comes with consequences.¹

Before we talk about how to live more authentically, we should talk about what living authentically means when you're queer. Because as much as authenticity is something all kinds of people wrestle with, as queer people we face our own cornucopia of challenges when it comes to living more authentically.

The reason for that is depressingly simple: living in a homophobic, homo-uncomfortable, or even homo-just-about-tolerating society

¹ Perhaps you know the plot of the musical *Wicked*. (Yes, this might be a niche joke but no, I will not retract it.)

constantly forces us to compromise on being authentically ourselves in order to be basically accepted and even safe.

Yes, being queer is completely natural and queer people have existed throughout recorded history.² But obviously, plenty of people still don't see it that way. Instead of realizing that getting mad at queer people for naturally existing is exactly the same as getting mad at trees or clouds for naturally existing, some people still do that. And at best, those people make us feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. At worst, they physically harm us.

And as long as living authentically as queer people opens us up to stigma and rejection, not to mention actual harm, living authentically will be harder for us than it needs to be. All of that homophobia gives us a major incentive to hide who we are. And for our own safety and survival, most of us learn to adjust our behavior to avoid being too authentic when it might make our day-to-day lives harder.

And so, that means pretty much all of the behaviors that I told you are common in people who struggle with authenticity are things most of us have wrestled with at some point — and to some extent, probably still do — as we've come to terms with being queer.

Following the crowd? Sounds a lot like pretending to be like the straight majority to me.

Uncomfortable saying no? Sounds a lot like struggling to say “No bitch, I don't fit your exact image of how a man is supposed to look and love!!” to me.

Accustomed to half-truths, lying by omission and even outright lies? That sounds a lot like being closeted, or on the DL, to me.

Struggles to accept their imperfections and afraid others will see them as weaknesses? When you create a society that acts like being

² Same-sex attraction absolutely isn't just a thing in humans, either. See Juanita Bawagan, “Overturning ‘Darwin’s paradox’: Imperial researchers are using a new approach to understand why same-sex behaviour is so common across the animal kingdom,” *imperial.ac.uk* ♦ (2019).

anything but straight and cisgender is an imperfection or weakness, well, go figure.

And so, as queer people, we get very good at hiding behind inauthentic behaviors and defenses because that's what we learn to do to protect ourselves from prejudice and homophobia. We learn to become a version of ourselves that sacrifices authenticity in order to save ourselves from harm and humiliation. We get used to being loved and accepted as something false, something we're not. And as a result, we spend a lot of our adult lives trying to figure out which parts of us are truly us, and which parts of us we created to protect ourselves.

This fight to uncover our authentic selves is not trivial, by the way. That's because, without fighting that fight, without achieving a decent level of personal authenticity, we're unlikely to be able to build authentic and meaningful relationships with others. We might not even feel like we're worthy of the love and belonging all people — queer people included — are worthy of by birth.

Or, as Black queer writer James Baldwin once wrote: "It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here."³

Without a strong sense of personal authenticity — a sense of what is true for us and within us — we don't have a yardstick to measure ourselves against. It's hard to feel proud of yourself and to see yourself as valid and lovable if you're not even sure who "yourself" really is.

As a result, a lot of queer men turn to external validation to fill the void where, ideally, a strong sense of internal validation should be. In the words of psychologist and author Alan Downs in his landmark book *The Velvet Rage*, a lot of queer men become "validation junkies" who organize their lives around seeking external reasons to prove to themselves they're valid and lovable.⁴

³ James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (Library of America, 1998), 636.

⁴ See Alan Downs, *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World* (Hachette, 2012), especially chapters 1–3.

That can mean having lots of sex to feel wanted. It can mean bragging about the sex we're having to prove to other queer men that we're wanted. It can mean building perfectly sculpted bodies because we think it'll make us attractive to more and more people. Or it can mean chasing money, status and extravagant material things to prove to others that we're worthy of love and attention.

But of course, there's a catch. Because the validation is external — because it comes from outside, not within — it's never enough. Only true internal validation — genuine acceptance of ourselves, as we are — can build genuine and lasting self-esteem.

In short, because the society we live in teaches us to be ashamed of who we are, we tend to compensate for that shame by seeking out the quick highs of instant validation. But without attending to the source of that shame, without replacing that shame with authentic pride for who we are, that instant validation won't ever be enough. Because it's temporary, it passes and we're stuck looking for the next hit: the next hookup, the next shirtless selfie posted for attention, the next high-profile party or event we want to be seen at, and in many cases, the drugs or alcohol that can help numb the emptiness we feel.

And this, frankly, is a major part of why we behave so trashily to each other *and* are more likely to perceive each other's behavior as trashy and hurtful. To avoid shame, we have a habit of chasing the next hit of instant validation we need without caring or even thinking about who we affect in the process. And since a lot of us depend on this instant validation, when someone won't give it to us, say, through rejection or just indifference, we often feel not just disappointed but actively invalidated. We often end up feeling especially wounded by being turned down and — as if that wasn't fun enough — can even perceive rejection and invalidation where it doesn't exist. (We'll talk much more about that in a later chapter.)

And sure, by now you might be thinking “But surely homophobia isn't that bad anymore? Even my ninety-year-old grandpa adored my ex-boyfriend!”

And yes, you have a point. (And an exemplary grandpa.)

Queer people, at least in most of the Western world, are lucky to enjoy more freedom and more acceptance than we ever have before. But that doesn't mean all of us are surrounded by tons of acceptance. And the reality is, even small sacrifices of authenticity — like avoiding a public display of affection with your boyfriend, or ignoring a homophobic joke to keep the peace — still take a psychological toll.

Yes, what a privilege it is that lots of us get to worry more about hand-holding and homophobic jokes than about being beaten by the police, sent to conversion therapy, or stoned to death for being queer. But even these small compromises can have an outsized effect on us when we have to make them *constantly*.

The simple truth is, unless you were lucky enough to be raised by a pair of lesbian mountain goats in Nepal, you grew up in a society where homophobia existed. You'll have sensed, even unconsciously, that being queer is bad, or at least something you should, um, probably not be. And what's really fun is that you don't need to have been actively called a "fag" or a "queer" for that to be true — just understanding that "homo = bad" is enough.

When most of us grow up, we're confronted with more and more evidence of our queerness. Maybe we don't dress like other boys, or maybe we're more into art than sport, or we just start to notice we find other guys cute. So then, we start to confront this sinking feeling that there's something fundamentally unacceptable — and, importantly, unchangeable — about us. And before we've developed anything like the insight and maturity we'd need to understand what's going on, never mind deal with it, we respond in the only way we know how: we start adapting our behavior to try to become more acceptable.

We realize we can't get rid of homophobia, but we learn we can sacrifice our authenticity to save us from the worst of it. So we do. And when you spend years doing that over and over again, it's traumatic. It creates lasting and even lifelong trauma.⁵

⁵ "The trauma for gay men is the prolonged nature of it," says William Elder, a sexual trauma researcher and psychologist. "If you experience one

As a result, most queer people end up with a complicated relationship with authenticity. Most of us are still, one way or another, traumatized from the closet, from years of not being able to present ourselves as authentically as we'd like.

So yes, in theory authenticity is attractive — perhaps the most attractive trait there is. But in practice, a lot of queer men can't or just don't see it that way.

Even as adults we often fall into the trap of hiding who we are or how we feel, including from ourselves. Since we know what it feels like to be validated inauthentically — for being someone we're not — we can be good at dismissing even genuine support and admiration from other people. And maybe worst of all, we can end up feeling intimidated or repulsed by other queer people's authenticity. It can force us to confront how much of our own authenticity, or just our own queerness, we fearfully keep hidden.

We find ourselves preaching about how important self-love and self-acceptance are in long Facebook posts, then including phrases like “please be masc” or “muscular guys only” on our dating profiles. We compensate for feeling excluded from society in general by excluding and being cliquey with each other. We end up feeling disgusted and even invalidated by queer people whose queerness does not look exactly like ours. And knowing how much it hurts to be invalidated for being our authentic selves, a lot of us become masters at intentionally saying and doing things we know will hurt and invalidate the queer people *we* feel hurt or threatened by, like we're some kind of bitchy fallen Jedi.

These are the day-to-day struggles we face — and the less-than-ideal ways we behave — because of the internal battles we fight with

traumatic event, you have the kind of PTSD that can be resolved in four to six months of therapy. But if you experience years and years of small stressors — little things where you think, was that because of my sexuality? — that can be even worse.” Michael Hobbes, “Together Alone: The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness,” *The Huffington Post* ♦ (March 2, 2017).

authenticity. And again, it's why cultivating more authenticity as a queer person isn't just a fun thing to do because self-improvement is, like, so in right now. It's required of us if we want to find a healthy level of self-love and self-esteem, and build the meaningful relationships so many of us yearn for.

For queer people especially, our struggles with authenticity affect the foundation of how we see ourselves, how we value ourselves, how we interact with each other, and how we give and receive love in our relationships.

That's because the only real antidote to the disproportionate and uncalled-for invalidation we experience as queer people is authentic self-validation. Inauthentic validation — being validated for being someone we're not — doesn't work. It feels hollow, because it is. And relying on external validation — constantly looking for other people's approval to feel basically valid — puts our self-esteem in other people's hands, so it isn't a reliable strategy.

We fight the shame most of us struggle with for being queer by learning to be more authentic. By accepting and not hiding all the different parts of who we are. By presenting more of our authentic selves to the world. By learning to detach ourselves from other people's opinions, and relying more on our opinions of ourselves.

In turn, that's what helps us show up in relationships more authentically. It's what helps us build more genuine and meaningful connections. It's what can truly protect us from the worst effects of shame, stigma and rejection.

Yes, as queer people we might have to fight harder to cultivate a high level of authenticity. But equally, as queer people, doing that could not be more essential.

How to live more authentically

Again, learning to unlock more authenticity is not easy. So in the better, fairer world I often fantasize about, we wouldn't have to do this

alone. We'd be able to call someone up called the Authenticity Fairy, who'd sit on our shoulders and help us make everyday decisions. She'd be just like Jiminy Cricket, if Jiminy Cricket cared less about gender norms and was banned in a handful of conservative states.

And just like that one friend who takes absolutely no shit and tells it like it is, the Authenticity Fairy would keep us on track anytime we're tempted to make a questionable decision or say something we don't mean. She'd know what's best for us — and that, deep down, we usually know it too.

And so, she'd always be on hand to whisper quiet encouragement like “Be yourself, king!” and “BISHHH, spit it out!” when we needed it. She'd also know when we don't say what we really mean or act in line with our true values. So she wouldn't hesitate to jump in with a “Bitch, you don't mean that!” or “GURL, that's not really what you want!!” She wouldn't even hold back with a “WHAT!?! Stop lying just to fit in, hoe!!” or “Bitch, whyyyy?!?” when we make choices that could really undermine our authenticity in the long run.

Her blunt honesty and peroxide-blond hair would help us navigate the enormous daily challenge of living more authentically. Her strong female presence would help us overcome the fact that a lot of queer men don't respond well to earnestness or strong words from male figures, including ourselves.

But unfortunately, like Faggot University, the Authenticity Fairy is just a fantasy. Unfortunately, we're left to navigate the relentless challenges of living more authentically by ourselves. Unfortunately, only we can take responsibility for finding ways to bring more authenticity into our lives.

But if that's the bad news, there's also good news.

For starters, one reassuring thing about maintaining a high level of authenticity is that it rarely comes down to any single big decision. Living more authentically is about a *series* of choices, where we either decide to act in line with our values and desires, or do something that would make the Authenticity Fairy say, “Bitch, what the fuckkk!?”

That means that no single bad decision is catastrophic, and no matter what you've chosen to do in the past, you can always make more authentic decisions in the future. It also means there's plenty of room to screw up, change course, or make corrections if you need to — or just decide to do better next time.

And though living authentically can be hard, we tend to get better at it with practice. The more we build a habit of living authentically, the easier it gets to default to authentic decisions over inauthentic ones. So living more authentically is not about turning your entire life around overnight — as if that's even possible. It just means increasing your overall level of authenticity by choosing to replace inauthentic actions and decisions with more authentic ones.

Here are some specific ways you can do that.

Avoid saying things you don't mean

Yes, white lies and small fibs are often part of maintaining relationships with people. But if you start to bring significant untruths into your relationships, that comes at a cost — to the relationship and to you.

So stop saying things you really don't mean to fit in. Stop saying “Hey, let's hang out” to people if you have literally zero intention of hanging out with them. Avoid stringing people along by telling them you're looking for a relationship if all you want is a good fuck. Don't tell potential dates you're single if you're actually in an open relationship with a guy in the next town. Don't tell potential dates you're single if you're in a closed relationship with a guy you live with.

Stop yourself. Go back and correct yourself if you need to. But bring yourself, as you are, to your relationships and watch them deepen. And that starts by saying what you mean, as you mean it.

Stop saying yes to things you hate

Being more authentic means learning that “no” — or at least “No, I don't want to” — is a complete response. You don't have to do things you don't enjoy. You are not obligated to give your time to people you

don't vibe with. If you know you'll resent saying yes to a project or commitment later, it's always better to face the discomfort of saying no now than letting someone down at the last minute or hating yourself for doing it.

Sure, carve out time for family get-togethers even if you decide to spend as little time as possible with your casually homophobic uncle. And sure, go to your best friend's comedy show because you really want to support them even if stand-up isn't your thing. But stop saying yes to things that drain you, depress you, or just offer no clear benefit to you. Being authentic means prioritizing the things, people, and relationships that bring you joy and fulfillment — and not just whatever's on offer.

Learn to tolerate being disliked

One of the biggest hurdles to living more authentically is that making more authentic choices for yourself often means someone else ends up feeling uncomfortable, disappointed or let down by your choices. That can be hard to accept — especially from people you're close to — but that's how it works.

Humans evolved to care about social acceptance because for most of our history we needed to be part of a large community to be safe and have enough food to eat. But that's not true anymore. We have supermarkets now. We can feel at home in smaller, less defined tribes. And actually, today it's often hard to thrive on a personal level *without* being misunderstood or disliked by some people.

Learning to live more authentically means accepting that you won't vibe with or be understood by everybody. It means accepting that it's usually more fulfilling to be accepted authentically by a small group of people than to sacrifice lots of personal authenticity to be accepted and understood by a lot of people.

Some queer men rely a lot on the approval and validation of others, and it's often a psychological defense mechanism we use to soften the feeling of being "othered" by a straight-centric —

“heteroppressive,” if you will — society. But that’s a major barrier to living and connecting more authentically.⁶

So surround yourself with people who accept you as you are, and learn to be comfortable with the fact that some people won’t. Accept that being disliked or misunderstood by a few people is a small price to pay for the greater joy of living authentically. And remember that trying to be liked by everyone is a dumb game — you don’t even like everyone, so it’s nuts to expect the same in return.

Connect with what’s important to you

Sometimes the challenge with authenticity isn’t just acting on what you want, think and feel, but *knowing* what you want, think and feel in the first place.

That might sound like a crazy concept, but if you can remember a whole era when you assumed you were 100% straight, you might know what I’m talking about.

Unlocking more authenticity doesn’t happen in one big lightbulb moment when you suddenly see the life you’ve always dreamed of. It’s usually uncovering layers of wants and needs and feelings, like cutting into an (especially emotional) onion.

Plus, in a world where we’re constantly bombarded with advertising trying to influence us, and social feeds drowning us in hundreds or thousands of other lives we could be living instead, it can be hard to drown out the noise and connect with exactly what is and isn’t authentically you.

So take some time to do that. Go spend some time in nature. Decide to spend a weekend alone. Read something. Try journaling. Unplug, disconnect and put all the little queer people inside your phone you chat with on silent for a while. Make some time to get to know yourself, without anyone else to influence or distract you.

⁶ Or as the Authenticity Fairy might paraphrase the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: “Care about what other people think and you will always be their prisoner, bitchhh!!”

Surround yourself with other authentic people

It takes courage to be authentic. That's part of why we admire it in others. But better yet, authenticity is often contagious: being around people who have the courage to live more authentically also tends to encourage us to be more authentic — and vice versa.

That's one reason queer men can struggle with authenticity as a group. If we watch our friends and the people we date do and say things we sense aren't authentic, there's a good chance we just think, "Fuck it, it doesn't matter," and watch our own authenticity slip away.

But we can break that cycle. As well as consciously choosing authenticity ourselves, we can prioritize spending time with people who also have a high level of authenticity, therefore turning a vicious circle into whatever the opposite of a vicious circle is. (A benevolent rhombus, I looked it up.)

In the real world, it's OK — and often necessary — to compromise on authenticity

It's true that consistently acting inauthentically tends to have negative long-term consequences. But when you're a queer person existing in an often-homophobic society, acting authentically can have negative consequences too. So strategic compromise is often a smart and necessary game plan.

This is often called "code-switching" — intentionally changing the way you talk or behave to be perceived differently around different groups of people. It's something most queer people still have to do sometimes, and yes, it can be exhausting.⁷

But if acting more authentically in a particular environment would actively put you in danger, then it's obviously not a good idea. If acting more authentically would explode a relationship that's important and otherwise fulfilling to you, such as a family relationship, you always have the option, within reason, to compromise.

⁷ See Madeleine Holden, "The Exhausting Work of LGBTQ Code-Switching," *Vice* ♦ (August 12, 2019).

So if you find yourself putting on a deeper, more “masculine” voice around other men at work, that’s OK. And no, you haven’t failed as a queer man if you decide not to wear your sluttiest swim bikini to a family pool party. Even the Authenticity Fairy would say, “Don’t make life any more difficult for yourself than you can handle, boo.”

Because yes, it can also be authentic to value having a strong and stable relationship with your family. (Provided they’re not stubbornly homophobic or abusive to you.) It can also be authentic to want to avoid dealing with awkwardness or weirdness from customers at work. It can also be authentic to accept that while you can be your queerest, most authentic self in some spaces, surviving in other spaces can require making small real-world compromises. And while that’s often not right, it can — as Whitney taught us — be OK.

If authenticity is the sum (or really, the average) of the decisions you make, that doesn’t mean it’s game over if you make one compromise or inauthentic decision. Yes, for us, doing that can feel especially frustrating and insulting because of all the unjust sacrifices and adjustments queer people have to make, day in day out, to live peacefully. But again, authenticity isn’t just about doing whatever you like and yelling “Fuck it!!” to the consequences. Unfortunately, being more authentic doesn’t mean you’ll get everything you want or even deserve all of the time.

When it comes to maintaining a high level of personal authenticity in difficult situations, what makes all the difference is that the adjustments are purposeful and strategic. When you’re *choosing* to compromise on authenticity, any decision you make is less likely to feel like a personal betrayal that might have a lasting effect on your self-esteem.

Navigating this can feel like walking a tightrope we didn’t ask for and don’t deserve, but we have to walk it as courageously and authentically as we can. We have to keep pushing the boundaries of how much of ourselves we can bring to the world, because it’s often more than we think. But it’s also OK to accept that in the real world, there are limits.

In particular, we have to work on finding the people and environments that encourage us to be more authentic. We have to work on bringing more of ourselves *as we are* to the important relationships, romantic and otherwise, in our lives. We have to work on seeing the value in saying, “This is who I am” and “This is what I offer” to the important people in our lives and expecting them to do the same. Because that is the foundation of building strong relationships — with other people, but also with ourselves.

Vulnerability

If authenticity is the essential art of being your best whole self, then vulnerability is the essential art of sharing your best whole self with the important people in your life.

And like with authenticity, learning to access the vulnerability we need to form deeper and more meaningful bonds with others isn't a challenge only for queer people. But also like with authenticity, as queer men we face our own specific hurdles when it comes to learning to be vulnerable with the people we want to feel close to.

What vulnerability is — and why it's important

In short, vulnerability is expressing emotional truth. Doing so involves a level of intimacy. Being vulnerable is a choice.

That's the end of this preview!

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