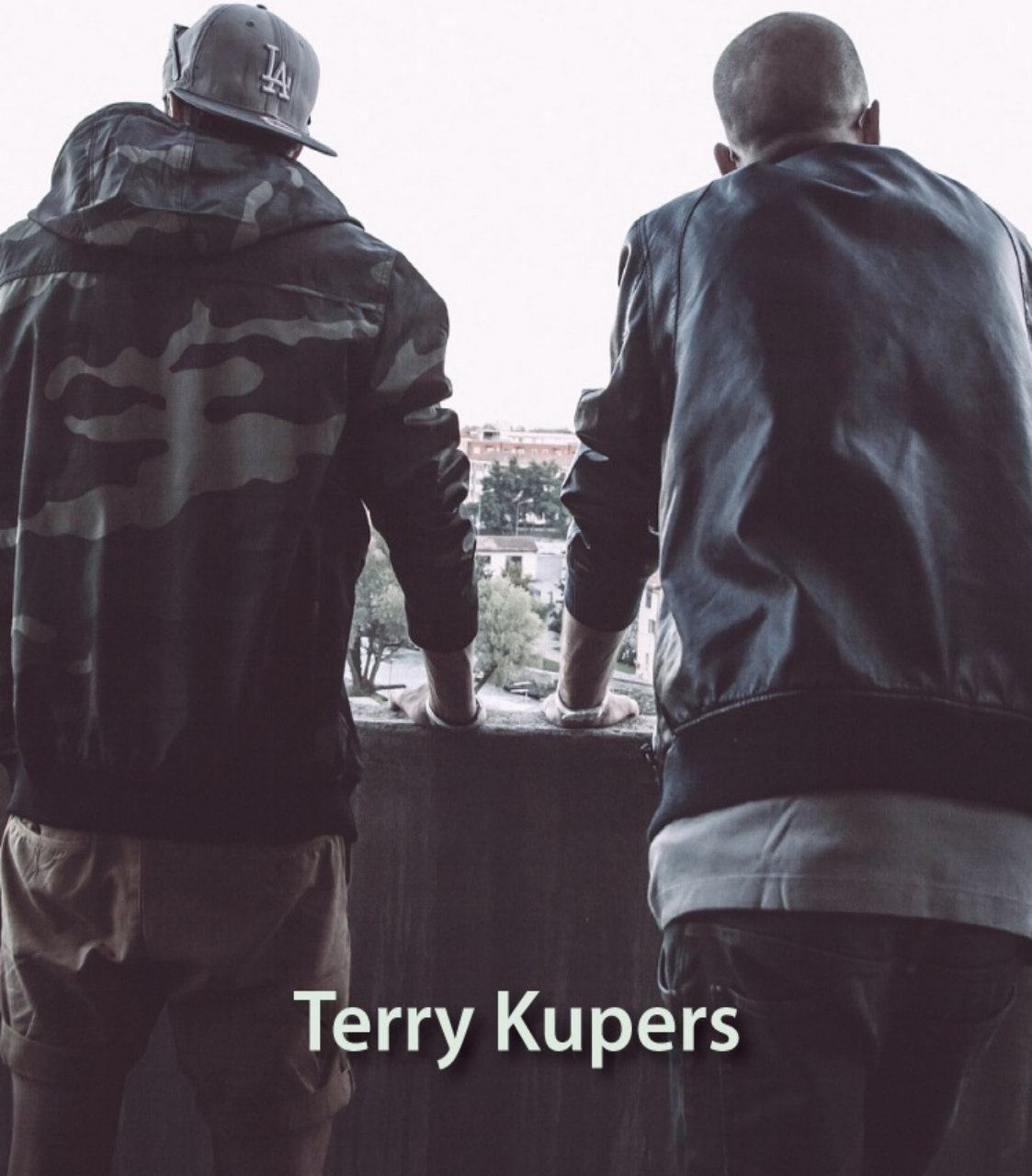
Friends



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Friends

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Friends

About a year ago I had a huge fight with a good friend, and an opportunity presented itself to reverse some of my old patterns. We had been friends for many years. His female partner told him some angry things about me. I was hurt by her disdain. I asked my friend whether he felt the things she said about me were true. He seemed uncomfortable with the question and took several minutes to answer. Then he said he had thought about it, and no, he did not think her castigation of me matched the reality very well. Then, I demanded to know why he did not defend me in discussions with his partner. Why did he not tell her he disagreed with her negative assessment of me? It was a calm, reasonable discussion. He thought about what I was saying and we parted on good terms.

We did not talk for a few weeks, leaving each other messages about arrangements to get together for lunch. I had to cancel one date because of a son's illness. When we finally did make phone contact, he informed me he was angry at me for always cancelling dates. I responded sharply that I was angry that he had so little concern about my sick child, and so little understanding of how difficult it was for me to arrange to meet him for lunch, considering my responsibilities at work and at home. We argued, we yelled at each other, and I slammed the phone down. My wife and son were surprised to hear me yelling on the phone, but when they realized who I was yelling at they began

to cheer me on—it seems they had always been critical of my "How-are-you-fine-and-you?" style of relating to men friends. My friend and I talked again a few days later, and patched things up. In fact, the spontaneous emotional outburst seemed to clear the air between us and permit a little more spontaneity in our relationship.

I have close friends, and we can be quite intimate, but I have to admit that my relationships with friends could be vastly improved. What brings this point home is a tendency to compare my intimacies with those of my wife, who, quite frankly, prioritizes friendship higher than I do. For instance, when we arrive home from a family vacation, as soon as the car is unpacked and our sons are off to their rooms or their friends' houses, Arlene goes to the phone to share some of her vacation stories with two or three friends while I, feeling slightly relieved the phone is tied up so I will not be disturbed, head for my computer to get on disk some of the ideas that were germinating while we were travelling.

Besides the four or five couples that my wife and I see often, I have approximately a half dozen male friends with whom I have lunch regularly, perhaps once or twice a month. Since I try to be home with my family for dinner, weekends are usually busy, and I am tired in the evening after a long day at work, lunches are the best time to see friends. The lunch meetings are generally quite enjoyable, and there is talk of intimate things. But, at the same

time, there is a certain lack of spontaneity. After all, the most compelling events in my life occur sporadically, and not always just prior to a scheduled lunch meeting with a particular friend. Thus, on the average, when asked by one of these friends how I am, I must scan memories of the past week's events in order to select a fitting subject for discussion. Sometimes I end up giving a very coherent summary of events and relationships, a summary that lacks the immediacy that would accompany the telling if I happened to be talking to this particular friend at a moment of confusion, anxiety, or sadness.

And why don't I pick up the phone and call a friend at such times? Partly it is because my wife is readily available, and like most of my male friends I reach out first to the woman who occupies a central role in my life. Partly, I tell myself, it is because I hate talking on the phone. I used to think my distaste was idiosyncratic, an aftereffect of having been on call too much as a young physician and dreading the phone's ring. Then I read Lillian Rubin's (1985) report that most of the men she interviewed shun speaking on the phone. Most of my male friends and clients avoid telephone conversations. Is it the phone that men dislike, or the immediacy of another man's presence at times of need and desire? Isn't the phone merely an instrument that might permit us to have immediate access to a male friend if we really wished it? I do not believe most women like the phone (the instrument) as much as they like the immediacy of the contact—the availability of a friend at a moment when the feelings are at their peak. I prefer to wait until the emotions abate. I

tend to retreat from my friends when I am most acutely troubled, and tell them of my troubles only in retrospect, after I have restored my grip on things. Perhaps this is why my lunch meetings with friends seem somewhat flat. Of course, part of the difficulty I have being friends with men is an idiosyncratic expression of my personal foibles and part is related to gender.

Isaac Bashevis Singer (1962) tells the story of a group of friends he had as a youth in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. He was the leader. One day he decided the others resented him and were excluding him from their conversations. He wondered if he "had sinned against them, or deceived them. But if so, why hadn't they told me what was wrong?" He decided to wait it out. Contact between him and his friends was broken off and he pursued his studies, alone. Time passed. Singer tells of the attempt of one friend to approach him and try to persuade him to make the first move toward reconciliation. He refused: "I was infuriated. 'It wasn't I who started this,' I said. 'Why should I be the one to make up?' " Eventually his friends sent him a note saying they missed him. They confessed they had been wrong and begged his forgiveness. He became the leader again, and delighted them by reading the stories he had written while estranged from them.

As a therapist, I see many men who lack friends, or wish they had more close ones. For instance, a client tells me he thinks he is boring me, and that is why I yawn during the session. He wonders whether the reason he has no

close friends is that men find him boring. This leads to a discussion about the line between his personal issues—for instance, the way his lack of connection with a depressed and distant father ill-prepared him to trust his ability to inject vitality into his relationships with other men—and men's difficulty, as a gender, "filling emotional space" in their same-sex relationships. As I mentioned in Chapter Seven, the process of therapy eventually leads to an exploration of one's circle of intimates, and each client reports his own reasons to be wary of close male relationships. In most cases, men do not visit therapists seeking help with their friendships. But while the therapist and client search for the meanings that lie behind the symptoms, the subject of friendship comes up, or if it does not come up by the time of termination, I bring it up.

A Clinical Vignette: Sean

Sean, a business executive in his mid-forties, suffers from panic attacks —intense palpitations and sweating that break out suddenly and without warning, often causing him embarassment at the office and at dinner parties. He has a wife and child and lives in a relatively affluent neighborhood. His company is big, a point he stresses in our first therapy session. He tells me he has been depressed lately, and not sleeping. He is experiencing daily bouts of panic. He is not quite sure what is bothering him, but he knows he cannot remain this depressed and panicky much longer and continue functioning at

work.

During the first few sessions we review the areas of his life where there might be a problem. He tells me he is unhappy at work; they have passed him over for a promotion and he feels his future in the corporation is very uncertain. He is having an affair, and explains that his wife gives him little sense of himself as a virile, desirable man. And his teenage daughter hates him:

"She thinks I'm more interested in work than in her and, you know, there's some truth in that."

I ask Sean whom does he talk to about his problems, and he tells me there is no one he can trust; that is why he has come to see me. He cannot talk to colleagues. They are either superiors who might hold him back if he reveals to them his personal problems, peers who might use what he tells them to get ahead of him in the office, or subordinates with whom he feels he must maintain the image of somene who "has it all together." And he cannot seem to find the time to get together with friends outside the work setting. In other words, he has no friends. In fact, he realizes as we begin to discuss the subject, part of the reason he began the affair was that he felt he could no longer talk to his wife about his feelings and sought out the comfort of sharing his thoughts with another woman.

We discuss Sean's concerns in turn, and begin to make some headway. During one session Sean mentions a fleeting thought that I might be recording our conversations, and quickly shifts to another topic. I ask him what he meant about my taping our sessions.

He responds: "Oh, don't therapists usually record their sessions to play back later, or to share with other therapists?"

I ask him to say more and he tells me he imagines I play tapes of our sessions in front of a group of peers—men, he imagines—and they give me feedback about the work I do with him. I ask if he thinks I would tape our sessions without his consent.

Sean is silent for a minute or two, seems deep in thought, and grimaces. I ask what has come to mind and he tells me of an incident during high school when his girlfriend called him at home while several guys were visiting. He went into another room to pick up an extension and asked them to hang up. Instead, they listened to the conversation. For several days after that the guys who had been at his house mimicked Sean's "mushy" endearments whenever they passed him in the hall at school. He decided never to trust guys again. Telling me this story leads to a breakthrough in our relationship.

Sean is afraid of close contact with me, afraid that if he lets me really matter to him I will betray him, just like his friends did in high school. Of

course, I would not have taped our conversations without getting Sean's consent. We examine Sean's reasons for assuming I might, and talk about ways he might, in the future, do a better job determining who he can trust and confide in.

Sean would like to leave his job and work part-time so he can spend more time with his daughter, but he is afraid other men might ridicule him for it. In other words, he is keeping up a tough front—the guy who is always battling to get ahead at work—just so that other guys will not laugh at him, presumably for being a loser. Of course, his tough front includes a certain amount of scorn he publicly exhibits for men who are not entirely manly.

Sean's fear of closeness with men leads to resistances in our therapeutic relationship, and therefore developments in our therapeutic relationship provide clues to Sean's inability to maintain close friendships. He complains about lacking "real" friends and wishes it were different:

"I think I'd like to have at least one really good friend, one whom I could trust entirely and have the kind of intense emotional interaction that I once had with my wife."

In other words, Sean secretly desires to have an intimacy with a man that reaches the level of trust and emotional intercourse that he has had only with his sexual partner. Once a therapist knows this, it is easy to decide what

work lies ahead. Sean and I need to look at the kinds of things that hold him back in his search for friendships with men. Obviously the first hurdle for him is his fear that contemporary friends will reenact the high school scenario that was so unbearably painful.

I mentioned in Chapter Seven that the two patterns that regularly emerge in psychotherapies involving men—a battle for dominance and difficulty filling emotional space—also emerge in men's same-sex intimacies. I can help Sean transcend his distrust of a male therapist and learn about what intimacy and connection feel like. Perhaps he will seek out the same level of connection with other men. It is not so easy for men friends to have a discussion about the roots of their distrust and distancing. Of course, with no therapist present to make interpretations, one or both men would have to initiate a discussion of the way the relationship seems stuck. But friends do not give each other the same kind of sanction they give therapists to explore underlying motivations. Besides, men feel safer being vulnerable and taking risks with a therapist than they do with each other. Still, I believe that some of the same kinds of self-revelations that occur in the consulting room can occur in conversations between friends, but with friends neither member of the dyad speaks from a "neutral stance," and the exploration is mutual, not unidirectional.

To the friend I yelled at on the phone, I admitted that I never yelled at

my brothers as a child, and consequently our sibling relationships lacked vitality. I told him I was glad this friendship, in contrast, was coming alive. He was then able to admit that my challenge made him feel he had been disloyal as a friend, and there were childhood precedents that made it very painful for him to hear that kind of criticism. We did not belabor the point. We had gotten past a barrier to deeper intimacy, and did not want to overly psychologize our relationship. But the mutual personal sharing helped us understand each other and reach the kind of understanding that we needed in order to get past the angry outburst.

Men's Foibles, Women's Example

There are as many stories as there are men. One man tells me he had good buddies in high school and college and does not know why he just has not been in touch with them or made new friends in so many years; another tells me he never was able to sustain friendships. One man says he was never able to relate to his father and that is why he cannot relate to other men; another tells me he was very close to his father but still has no close friends. Other men—the lucky few—have very close friends. David Michaelis (1983) interviewed men who had "exceptional friendships," and found that even these men's frienships were limited; for instance, they tended to avoid talk of competition and sex. In general, men admit that friendship is problematic.

Drury Sherrod (1987) reviews the literature and reports on his interviews with several hundred male and female college students about their friendships, concluding that:

> For most men, most of the time, the dimension of intimacy in friendships with other men may be irrelevant to their lives. According to the research, men seek not intimacy but companionship, not disclosure but commitment. Men's friendships involve unquestioned acceptance rather than unrestricted affirmation. When men are close, they achieve closeness through shared activities, and on the basis of shared activities, men infer intimacy simply because they are friends. Yet, there are times when a man becomes aware that something is lacking, (pp. 221-223)

McGill (1985) found that most of the 700 men she interviewed lack close friends. Daniel Levinson (1978) found close friendship to be rare among the men he interviewed for his classic study on the stages of adult life. Sherrod believes men once enjoyed very close friendships— in classical Greece or post-Renaissance Europe, for instance—and then, because of historical changes in worklife, marriage, and urban culture, men grew distant from each other in terms of personal relations. Hammond and Jablow (1987) suggest that close male friendships have always been more of a myth than a reality.

There is this familiar scenario: a heterosexual man retreats into his couple relationship, gets his emotional needs met there, and feels satisfied. The woman, meanwhile, seeks out close friends outside the marriage. This scenario develops, in most cases, because the woman has a greater need to

maintain close same-sex friendships even when she is in a primary relationship whereas the man finds it harder—for all the reasons I have mentioned—to make and keep friends, and is more willing to focus his emotional energy on a single partner. Lillian Rubin (1983, 1985) interviewed married couples about their friendships and discovered that the women had many more and deeper same-sex friendships; over two-thirds of the men could not name a best friend other than their wives whereas a large majority of the women could easily name a best friend of the same sex. There are many exceptions, of course. For instance there are women who cut off their friends when they get involved with a man and there are men who maintain very close lifetime friendships and see their men friends even after they get married. But in the more typical situation where the man cuts off his friends while the woman retains close same-sex friendships, the discrepancy eventually leads to problems in the primary relationship. Perhaps the man feels threatened by the woman's independent relationships and activities. Or, when they fight she has her friends to go to for support while he feels he has no one to talk to.

This is the point at which men resort to psychotherapy—but, as I mentioned at the end of Chapter Seven, instead of helping the man patch things up with his partner and returning him to the same situation, it might be useful for the therapist to examine how and why he has become so isolated and dependent exclusively on his female partner, and help him develop a

richer network of intimates. Straight men's tendency to talk about their emotional life exclusively with women means there is little vitality when they are with each other, and explains why the male culture of work and public life is relatively cold and lonely. But men are just plain difficult to be intimate with—if one is a man, that is.

Robert Bly and Michael Meade (Bly, 1989) claim that "the male mode of feeling" is very different than the female mode; for instance, men are not as interested in face-to-face discussions of personal matters, preferring instead to stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing a common task or adversary. The point is valid, men do have different ways. When women writers mock male shoulder-to-shoulder relating and imply that face-to-face relationships are the only kind that are truly intimate, they alienate men who might otherwise listen to what women are trying to tell them about the value of sharing personal stories. At the same time, shoulder-to-shoulder intimacies can be rather limiting, and men would do well to learn more about the face-to-face variety. The story-telling that occurs at men's gatherings is a move in the right direction. Men also have much to learn from women about friendship—as long as they keep in mind that men's friendships are different, of course.

Carol Gilligan (1982) contrasts the man's quest for status in a hierarchy with the woman's for connection with others. She believes women seek to be the center of a web of relationships:

> Thus the images of hierarchy and web inform different modes of assertion and response: the wish to be alone at the top and the consequent fear that others will get too close; the wish to be at the center of connection and the consequent fear of being too far out on the edge. (p. 63)

Men who seek closer intimacies are quite regularly forced to reevaluate their priorities. Close friendships require a certain amount of time spent together, and sometimes there is not enough time in the day to work long hours, be with one's family, and keep in touch with friends.

Lillian Rubin (1985) explores the differences between men's and women's friendships and writes:

> Generally, women's friendships with each other rest on shared intimacies, self-revelation, nurturance and emotional support. In contrast, men's relationships are marked by shared activities, (p. 61)

She proceeds to describe a man who is exceptional in that he has a very close male friend. But when his wife has an affair, he does not tell his friend. "Why not?," Lillian asks. The man responds:

> It's just not something I could talk about, that's all. Hell, I don't know. I was hurt and ashamed and angry, and I felt like crying and like killing her and the son-of-a-bitch who got her involved, who was a guy I knew. How could I tell anybody all that?, (pp. 67-68)

In explaining the differences between men's and women's friendships, Rubin mentions the obvious—that girls are rewarded for expressing their feelings and enjoying nurturing relationships while boys are taught to hide

any sign of weakness and neediness. She emphasizes the singularly formative role of the child's early relationship with the mother and, in the boy's case, the consequences of having to "dis-identify" with her so abruptly during the Oedipal stage of development (see Chapter Three). A problem with Rubin's formulation is her assumption that gendered identity formation occurs very early, and mainly in the context of the mother-infant dyad. The role of the father and of later events is minimized. Compare this with Peter Bios' (1984, see Chapter Six) formulation about fathers and sons wherein he emphasizes the "negative Oedipal triangle," the very young son's love for the nurturing father, and his wish to be just like him. Bios insists that the events of adolescence can be as formative of one's gender identity as can one's early childhood, and I heartily concur.

Stuart Miller (1983) reports that many men are secretly envious of women's ability to truly enjoy their friends. He writes:

> A wife, touched by the women's movement perhaps, begins to form serious engagements with other women. You hear her talking on the phone as you watch television at night. Politely, she gets up and closes the door so you won't be disturbed. But you are, somehow, even more disturbed. Occasionally you hear the sound of a peculiarly hearty laughter that you don't have in your own life, laughter of a kind that your wife doesn't even share with you. A shadow falls across your consciousness but you don't know exactly what to do about it. You respect her new friendships but you are envious, (p. 32)

I have learned quite a lot about friendship from women. For instance, I

have learned how two friends can be very angry at each other, call each other names, and then when calm returns go on being close friends. More typical of male friendships is one-fight-and-it's-over. I felt terrible after that first fight I described with my friend, I was certain there was something wrong with me, a certain meanness. I felt this even though, when my wife has the same kind of argument with a woman friend, I support her and tell her I admire the way she can be so forthright, fierce, and forgiving, and deepen her intimacies in the process. But somehow, for me, the rules are different. A man is not supposed to be so emotional and demanding.

The Unwritten Rules of Male Friendship

There are unwritten rules that guide men's approach to same-sex friendships. High on the list is the one about reciprocity (Pasick, 1990). For instance, one man invites another to lunch, they have a good time and the first man awaits a reciprocal invitation from the second. It does not come. The first man is stuck. Should he wait for the other's invitation to meet again, or break protocol and call him a second time? Men too often adhere to a tit-for-tat rule and cut off the relationship. I have recently changed my mind about how to proceed when I get into this situation. Instead of letting my feeling of rejection take over and swearing never to make any further effort to befriend a man who has failed to reciprocate my first invitation to lunch, I am now willing to call men I would like to get to know two or three times without

receiving a return call. Then, in subtle or not so subtle terms, I let the other man know that it hurts my feelings that he does not call to initiate contact and that I will not keep doing all the initiating forever. Either he needs to take some initiative in this friendship or I will give up the struggle. Men who hear me, who are willing to engage with me about such things, are the most likely to make good friends.

If men cannot break free of the tit-for-tat sensibility, we will repeatedly get stuck at the beginning of intimacies and never get really close. We will never get to the conversation where one man confronts the other:

"I'm a little hurt—last time we got together I told you my mother was about to undergo major surgery and you never called to see how she is doing. And, by the way, how come I had to call you to make this lunch date—I called to initiate our last lunch, why don't you reciprocate?"

If such things are said in the right tone, at a time when the other man is able to hear the caring side of the message, perhaps he can accept the criticism and admit that he, like most men, is not very adept at keeping in touch with other men. In general, whenever we are able to find an unstated rule that inhibits men's intimacies, it helps to identify it and consciously circumvent or renegotiate that rule—consciously pushing past the reciprocity rule is one example.

A second unwritten rule involves trust. It is as if men were saying to each other, "if you cross me once it's all over." This rule originates in the Wyatt Earp, back-to-the-door mentality that is so much a part of male culture. As I mentioned in Chapter Seven, men feel they need to size each other up if they are to avoid "being shafted." This is one of the ways our competitive, dog-eat-dog social relations constrict our possibilities for deep intimacy. And as soon as there is a sign of danger, the man is out of the relationship. Men do not make up. It is easier to drop a friend—or decide never to trust him again—than it is to stand toe-to-toe with a man and holler about the way he has hurt one's feelings or betrayed one. And then there is always the threat of violence. Above all else, men do not back down—another unwritten rule—so why should either man expect to get anywhere in a confrontation? It is easier to look for another friend.

The third rule: one does not cross the line of male propriety. Robert Pasick (1990) includes in his list of issues that prevent men from maintaining close same-sex relationships homophobia and men's adherence to a narrow definition of "masculinity." Men are stiff with each other. Of course there are pats on the butt after a football victory—if those huge professional linemen can slap each others' buttocks exuberantly, why cannot any male sports enthusiast smack any other enthusiast's backside? So we set up a more complicated, but still unstated rule: "real men" do not exhibit excessive affection toward each other in public, with the exception that an exuberant

hug or slap on the buttocks is okay at victory time.

A fourth rule: A man does not expose his raw emotional experience if there is a chance there will be no response. As a male client tells me: "You don't want to get caught with your ass dangling out there." Stuart Miller (1983) describes his experience attempting to get a friend, Ronald, to talk about his feelings:

> He is a happy, self-contained character, a man who knows himself and is at peace. But what am I? A strange kind of needy creature, with hankerings after some sort of closeness that others don't seem to require? Wanting to be known, to share something, a brother, trust—I'm not even sure I know what it is that I want, much less how to get it. And what will the other man think? He will, he does, slight me after I put myself forward. My pride is put into question by this needing and reaching. I know these feelings and I must fight them all the while that I do this crazy thing. It is heroic, in a small way, what I am doing. I know that, too. (p. 45)

Most men lack Miller's perseverance and give up on developing close male friendships.

Again, the lessons from therapy can be applied to men's same-sex intimacies. While discussing men's difficulties filling emotional space (Chapter Seven) I shared my therapeutic strategy: I look for moments of real aliveness in the therapeutic encounter and then ask why there are not more moments like that. In sharp contrast, men tend to steer clear of tensions and animosities in their friendships, and deaden their interactions in the process.

For instance a client, Keith, tells me about a friend who continually talks about himself every time they meet and asks Keith no questions about himself. I ask why Keith continues to get together with this friend and he tells me that it is a lot of fun to be with him, and they have been friends for a long time. We try to figure out how Keith might confront his friend about what he perceives as self-centeredness. Keith asks his friend to lunch and confronts him about the fact that he never asks Keith any questions. The friend listens, and then asks why it should be his responsibility to do so, why cannot Keith volunteer something about himself? Keith thinks for a minute and then agrees, he does too much waiting to be asked and could volunteer more. Then the friend also agrees that he is too self-centered. He says he is glad Keith had the courage to confront him. In the ensuing months, the two get together on several occasions and Keith reports to me that their interactions are more lively and mutually rewarding than ever.

Even men who have joined men's groups, attend men's gatherings, and consider themselves part of the men's movement continue to have conflicts about friendship. How many men are in men's groups, meeting every other week or monthly with a bunch of guys, but never seeing other members outside of group meetings? The same question could be asked about men's gatherings. The logical conclusion is that men do not go to each other in times of need, only on scheduled occasions, and this means there can be very limited spontaneity and dependency in the encounter.

Gay men, on the average, experience more vitality in their same-sex relationships than do straight men. Is this because there is the possibility of sex? Is it because they have gotten used to the stigma that goes along with public displays of affection between men and consequently can permit themselves to be more spontaneous and demonstrative than straight men who live in dread of that kind of stigma? There are many possible explanations. Whatever the reason, gay men tell me they do not experience the deadness in their same-sex friendships that straight men experience in theirs. I am mentioning a trend, not a hard-and-fast rule. There are many exceptions, of course. Gay men are teaching straight men a lot about being intimate with men. There is the danger gay men will resent being always the instructor—straight men have to develop more expertise in the art of male friendship, too—but for now, the leadership of gay men in this pursuit serves as another good reason for an alliance between gays and straights in the struggle to change gender relations.

Rewriting the Rules for Male Friendship

A male friend is having problems in his marriage. We talk. I am a very active listener, asking many questions. A day later I call to see how he is. A few days later I call again. He is not very forthcoming about his situation when we talk on the phone, and never initiates any phone conversations or further meetings. I wonder if I am being too intrusive. I decide to wait for him

to contact me. Many months pass. Then he calls me and we meet for lunch. He tells me he has been going through big changes, and things are much better. His marriage is the best it has ever been. He has decided to enter psychotherapy to explore some of the underlying issues. I say good, and by the way, I was angry about the way he broke off contact. (I know, why didn't I say that then?—but it was a situation where I called him three or four times, he never returned my calls, I figured I was being too intrusive, and backed off.) He explains that he was working things out on his own, something I know about all too well, and had been planning to reestablish contact.

Then he tells me that something I said in our initial conversation put him off. Hesitantly, he proceeds to tell me, fearing my feelings will be hurt, that when we spoke and he was on the verge of a break-up I told him about a mutual friend who had had an affair. He feared that, if he told me what was going on with him, I would betray his confidence and tell someone else about his personal crisis. Here was a very complicated issue. As a therapist, I am well versed in keeping confidences. As a matter of fact, I had thought about the issue and decided this mutual friend would not have minded—perhaps I was wrong. But there is another issue. I challenged him with the logic of his criticism: if, when a primary relationship is in trouble, we do not want anyone to know, and for that reason cut off all our friends (as Rubin's interviewee had done when his wife was having an affair), and then we go to see a couple therapist with the partner, does not that close off an important dimension of

friendship and limit the depth of intimacy? Men have a tendency to make personal crises an all too private matter. Then we go to see therapists trusting that they will maintain confidentiality.

Parenthetically, this negotiation between friends illustrates the "dual potential of psychotherapy" (Kupers, 1986), the utility as well as the limitations of therapy. We visit therapists, on the average, because we find our community and our network of intimates lacking in important ways. And therapy helps us refashion our coping skills and improve our intimacies as well as our sense of self. But the more we place our trust in professionals and their pledge of confidentiality, the less pressure there is for us to struggle with our friends and other intimates to establish a deeper basis for trust. Thus, psychotherapy can help us develop the capacity for close friendship (Gordon & Pasick, 1990), or it can serve to subvert our need for friends. For many men, the therapist becomes the trusted one and there is consequently less need to challenge friends when they are untrustworthy. This issue warrants further discussion, in intimate dyads as well as in men's groups and gatherings.

Perhaps we can collectively rewrite the rules so that we will be able to talk to each other about personal matters, balancing the need to protect confidentiality with the need to avoid isolation. Each time my wife and I have a serious dispute, I know a number of her friends will know the bloody

details, and sometimes I feel self-conscious in their presence because of it. But, at the same time, I am glad she has the support of good friends. Men are more likely to suffer alone, afraid to tell others the unpleasant details of their relational upheavals for fear that the secrets that are disclosed at a time of crisis might be used against them.

In this case, my issue with my friend was that 1 was afraid he had avoided me in his moment of need because I was too intrusive, so I planned to wait until he contacted me again. But then resentment grew when he did not seek me out. For his part, he did not feel strong enough to voice his concern about confidentiality and my trustworthiness, and to confront me about it so he could decide whether I was someone he might safely confide in. It turns out he also wondered if I would keep secrets from my wife about him. At the end of our conversation about all this he agreed men are all too private, gave me permission to tell my wife about our conversation, and it was left to me to say I would not tell my wife all he had told me, but would exercise the kind of discretion I felt he would want.

Having had this confrontation in one relationship, I felt obligated to return to the man whose affair I had mentioned to see if he objected to my breaching whatever unspoken vow of confidentiality had been implicit in our earlier discussions. I discovered that we did not share the same notion of confidentiality. Perhaps because I am a therapist, I assumed that when a man

tells another about something as personal as an affair, there is an implicit vow of confidentiality. Does that vow preclude my sharing the fact of the affair with my wife, who this man knows very well? This, too, is uncharted terrain and requires some negotiation. When I told this friend that I had told another man, a mutual friend, about the affair, he was neither surprised nor upset. I had shared his confidence because the other friend was in the midst of a terrible marital storm and, though he was not having an affair, it looked bad for the marriage. I wanted to let him know that another man—the friend who had the affair—had come back from even worse marital discord and reestablished a very deep romantic connection with his partner. In other words, I wanted to inject some hope into this friend's thinking about his marriage. The friend who had the affair understood my motive and told me he was glad I was able to use his affair as an example of how far out of phase relationships can go and still return to a deep connectedness. Here we are, three male friends, working out the ground rules for our intimacies.

Each man has to overcome a different hurdle vis a vis friendship. What unifies us is the fact that there always are those hurdles. We share a certain amount of collective incapability in the realm of man-to-man relating. Each of us has our own foibles that contribute to the collective incapability. And I am optimistic about the future, largely because so many men are embarking on a course of "men's work" to help them be more open and trusting. But if we are to transcend our collective incapability, then we must discuss the whole issue

and, essentially, rewrite the unstated social rules for being friends.

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