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Contact (Chapter 2 of the book Between Gay and Straight: Understanding Friendship Across Sexual Orientation")

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Between Gay and Straight: Understanding Friendship Across Sexual Orientation

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2: Contact

Is He or Isn’t He?

A few weeks into his pharmacy externship, Doug arrives home and says, “I think my supervisor is gay.”

“Why,” I ask playfully, “did he flirt with you?”

Loosening his tie, Doug scowls a bit, saying, “Of course not.”

“Is the guy effeminate?” I probe.

He reflects a moment, then answers, “Not really.”

“So what makes you think he’s gay?”

“Some of his body language, maybe. Or the way he says certain words. I don’t know. I can’t give you an example. Anyway, David’s cool. You should meet him.”

My curiosity piqued, I offer to bring them lunch.

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1 Cite the published book as:
The next afternoon, I wander down the Hallmark card and feminine products aisles before locating the pharmacy. Spotting Doug behind the patient-counseling window, I straighten my sleeveless black dress, toss my chiffon scarf over my shoulder, and remove my sunglasses. This ensemble, I now realize, is a little much for Walgreens. Did David’s potential gayness heighten my fashion consciousness?

Doug grins when he sees me. “David,” he calls over his shoulder, “Lisa’s here.”

A 30-ish man with spiky, auburn-brown hair steps forward. “I tell you whuut,” he says, extending his hand across the counter, “this boy will not stop talkin’ ’bout you.” Is that an edge of femininity I hear or just a slippery southern drawl?

“Oh, he’s been talking about you, too,” I reply. David smiles warmly.

“Just before you walked in,” he reports, “I suggested we do the town some night.”

“Anytime,” I say. Before we can talk further, the phone rings and three customers converge. Waving goodbye, I leave a bag of sandwiches and steal another glance at David’s appearance and demeanor. His preppie hair cut, crisp white oxford, and conservative red tie offer no clues. His other nonverbals—erect posture, confident stride, and firm handshake—say little more than, “I’m the pharmacist.” Still, there is something unique about his presence, something magnetic, but is it gayness? I’m not sure.

When Doug returns home that night, he asks excitedly if the meeting confirmed his suspicions. “I only had time to notice that David didn’t swish, wear nail polish, or have a
hoop dangling from his right ear,” I tell him. “But I suppose that doesn’t rule out anything, except him fitting the pop culture stereotypes.”

Cocking his head, Doug queries, “What does your gut tell you?”

I ponder this a moment. “My gut tells me I like him.”

Though I’ve evaded his real question, Doug grins and says, “I knew you would.”

With that, the subject of David’s sexual orientation closes … until a few weeks later.

One Thursday afternoon in July, Doug phones me from work. “David wants us to go out with him and his roommate Chris.”

“Christopher or Christine?” I inquire.

“Christopher, I think.”

“His roommate, huh?”

“That’s what he said. They want to grab a few cocktails at Tracks.”

I smile. “What do you know about Tracks?”

“I assume it’s a bar,” Doug answers, “or a club.”

“It’s a gay club,” I clarify.

“Aaah, mystery solved.”

“Still up for it?”

“We’ll find out,” Doug says. “I already agreed to go. Um, you’re coming, right?”

“Absolutely. Watching you at Tracks has to be worth the price of admission.”

Setting down the phone, I wonder what the evening will bring.

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2 See Vito Russo’s (1987) The Celluloid Closet or the HBO film by the same title for an excellent and exhaustive analysis of homosexuality in the movies from the turn of the 20th century through the 1980s.
Doug and I arrive first. Getting in line, he asks, “Ever been to one of these?”

“A dance club?” I quip. When Doug shoots me a look of you-know-what-I-mean, I answer, “No, I’ve never been to ‘one of these.’”

“Me neither,” he says, stating the obvious. From his shifty posture, I surmise that Doug’s anxious. I am too, frankly, but even more, I’m curious and excited.

“Feel like a kid at the entrance to Disney World?” I ask.

“No,” Doug responds.

A couple minutes later, a familiar figure turns the corner. “You made it!” David shouts to us, as if a bit surprised. As he approaches, his form-fitting T-shirt, faded Levi’s, and industrial boots come into focus.

“Oh my,” I remark. “That’s quite a change from your pharmacy smock.” I turn to David’s companion. “I’m Lisa.”

“Chris,” he says, offering his hand.

Striking, I think, noting Chris’ steel blue eyes, coffee hair and mustache, and broad shoulders, then David’s sun-kissed complexion and muscular build. A striking couple, I then think, applying an old category to an unfamiliar kind of case.

“Ready to go?” asks Chris.

With a glance toward each other, Doug and I say, “Ready.”

Moving through the door, I first encounter a large posted warning. The sign says, “Tracks is run by gay people, for gay people. Enter only the open minded.” I hope we qualify, I muse silently, my pulse quickening.
A young woman with ebony attire, hair, lips, and nails takes my five dollars and stamps my hand. I want to ask if she’s been sitting shiva, but the pained expression of teen angst on her face keeps me quiet. As we venture inside, David says to Doug, “Take a good look at Lisa. She may be the only one here you’ll know for sure is a woman.”

“You don’t say,” Doug replies, wiping his palms on his jeans.

“C’mon, Doug” beckons Chris, “let’s get a round of drinks.” They walk away, and Doug peers over his shoulder. I give a nod of encouragement as he disappears into the crowd.

When they’ve gone, David says in my ear, “I was nervous ’bout bringin’ y’all here.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I never told Doug I’m gay.” Just then, a Black linebacker drag queen passes by, wearing a royal blue cocktail gown and matching sequined headdress. (S)he must be 6’2” in those pumps.

Trying to refocus, I say, “I don’t think there’s much need for disclosure now.”

He smiles, then asks, “Know when I decided that Doug was okay?” I shake my head.

“When I first saw you: chewin’ on th’ arm of your sunglasses, wearin’ that little dress and that flowin’ scarf. I said to myself, ‘This girl just might be too cool for words.’”

I’m stunned by his impression. At last, I respond, “I’ll try not to disappoint you.”

Doug and Chris return from the bar, and I can’t tell if Doug’s smirk suggests, “I’m having a good time,” or, “I’m trying not to freak out.”

Next, David gives us a walking tour of the establishment. “Here we have the disco room,” he points out as we file past small groups and pairs of males, some showing off their
dance moves, some putting the moves on one another. My eyes hone on two nipple nibblers.

Having never witnessed such an overtly sexual display between two men, I wait for a jolt of embarrassment or discomfort. But no such jolt, not even a twinge, comes. To my surprise, I don’t recoil or look away; instead, I take in this image with a child’s curiosity. I feel like I’m 14 again, watching a steamy scene from a movie I’m too young to watch; only here, the characters are both men. My body tingles with excitement, intrigue, and ... what else? There must be something else. Something should feel unsettling, strange at least. But nothing does. How is that possible?

I look down and notice that David is holding my hand. Is he the reason I’m not afraid or uneasy? Somehow, I think I could follow him anywhere. Why is that? I hardly know him.

We come through a doorway, and our guide informs, “This is the stripper room.”

“The what?” I query, looking up to find a longhaired surfer dude in a silver Speedo using the bar as a runway. His tanned, ripped, shaved, and oiled body catches my eye, but my mind flashes back to a recent conversation with Doug.

As soon as he walks in the door, I greet him with, “I chased a cockroach into the utility closet today, and I found something very interesting there.”

“The utility closet?” Doug asks, not sure where I mean. I cross the room to open the sliding door that conceals the water heater. “Oh,” he utters guiltily, “that utility closet.”

Retrieving a Playboy magazine from its once-secret hiding spot, I snap, “I thought you were going to cancel your subscription.”
“I told you I wouldn’t *renew* my subscription.”

“I can’t believe you consume this trash,” I scold, flinging the evidence at him. “It objectifies, degrades, and dehumanizes women!”

“You explained that,” Doug says. “Look, it was no substitute for your beauty—”

“Oh, spare me!”

“But that magazine helped me through lonely nights when I was living in Des Moines.”

“Well you’re not living in Des Moines now!”

“Don’t overreact. It’s my last issue anyway.”

I stare down into my vodka tonic. Focus on the lime, I tell myself, focus on the lime.

“Girl,” David assures, “it’s okay to look.”

“Oh, I’m looking,” I say, letting him see me take a peek. *Away, Speedo Man, away!* “Let’s head over,” Chris suggests. “The show’s about to start.”

“The show?” Doug queries.

“You’ll see,” David says.

On the opposite side of the club, we enter a room with a stage in the middle. “I’ll get another round,” Chris offers. “You three stay put; we’ll have the best view from here.”

“Best view of what?” I ask.

“You’ll see,” David says again.

Within minutes, the room packs with people. As Chris returns, the lights lower, and Donna Summer’s “Hot Stuff” begins thundering from the speakers. The spotlight comes on; curtains part. From backstage emerges a troupe of drag queens with big wigs, caked-on
make-up, and slinky eveningwear. Stepping, grooving, even back flipping, they work the crowd, allowing patrons to peck their lips, nuzzle their cleavage, and feel between their legs.

“Now *Doug,*” says Chris when a strutting Barbie takes front and center, “if you didn’t know that was a guy, you’d be attracted, right?”

Before he can answer, (s)he leans over, permitting a view into her enormous bosom. “Those are gen-u-ine silicone,” David informs. “She got ’em for Christmas last year.” After draining my third cocktail, I concentrate on keeping my mouth closed.

Following the show, we stay for more drinking and dancing. By the time Tracks closes, I feel woozy and unstable. “I guess I haven’t been out much lately,” I reflect.

“How many did you have tonight?” asks Chris.

“I tried to limit myself to one per hour; I think I had five.”

“You drank five vodka tonics?” queries David. When I nod, Chris and David smile. “I forgot to warn you ’bout how they pour liquor in gay bars,” David says. With one hand he simulates a glass, with the other a bottle. “Vodka,” he demonstrates, tipping the “bottle” for several imaginary glugs.

“Tonic,” Chris adds, mimicking a light misting.

“I haven’t been this drunk since moving to Florida,” I tell them.

“Me neither,” says Doug.

“Don’t worry, kids,” David assures, “you’ll get used to it. In the meantime, you’d better ride home with us.”

On the way to their car, David puts his arm around me and whispers, “Chris and I decided that you’re not nearly as naïve as Doug is.”
Considering my first encounters with same-sex dancing, male strippers, and transsexuals, I reply, “I’m not?”

“Oh, you’re fiine,” he tells me. “Doug, however, needs a little more exposure.”

I pat him on the back and say, “I have a feeling you'll provide it.”

Grinning, he responds, “I have a feelin’ you’re right.”

A Little More Exposure

As it turns out, both of us get “a little more exposure” in the summer and fall of 1994.

Another weekend, David and Chris expand our repertoire by taking us to a gay country bar to play some pool. It is there that I first watch men watch Doug. While he lines up a shot, a group lining the bar scans his body, nodding and pointing. When Chris notices me noticing them noticing my boyfriend, he explains, “They’re talking about his butt.” The thought takes a little getting used to, maybe because women so seldom give men this kind of overt attention, and maybe because I’m used to men looking at me.

I smile, pleased that Doug can experience this side of the male gaze. A subject becomes object; perhaps he’ll understand how women often feel in public: exposed, scrutinized, vulnerable.

The smile falls. With all eyes on him and other men, I feel myself shrinking, fading into the background. Am I envious of Doug? How strange!

But something else is going on. While I miss the validation of the male gaze, its absence feels liberating. I can move and roam. Hell, I can gaze—unashamed, unabated.
Liberation is not something I experience in all gay spaces. Our next stop that night is a biker bar, and from the moment I step inside, I sense male suspicion. From every corner of the dark room, narrowed pairs of eyes seem to ask, “What’s she doing here?”

Maybe I’m just paranoid, I think. After all, I’ve never been inside a biker bar—gay or straight. It’s a (sub)culture I know little about, save the “movie-of-the-week” perceptions linking it with hyper-masculinity and violence. Don’t make assumptions, I tell myself.

But then David and Chris envelop me protectively. As we head toward the jukebox, David softly explains, “They don’t like women here.”

What does that mean? I wonder. They don’t like women occupying this space? They don’t like women at all? Well, screw them!

Then I catch myself. Why am I so defensive? I shouldn’t care about the social preferences of these leathered men.

But I do.

Given gay men’s marginalization, I expected their communities to be nonsexist and non-exclusionary. I suppose that was unrealistic. Still, are they no better than straight men? Turning toward him, I want to ask David, “If they don’t like women here, why bring me?”

But I don’t.

David has shown me the warmth and guidance of an older brother. Maybe he’s testing his “kid sister” to see if she’s “mature” enough to handle all corners of his community, not just the softer, “straighter” ones. I know he thinks of me—maybe even needs me to be—“straight but not narrow.” However cliché, the attribution is one I value
and am determined to live up to, even if the process requires my confusion and discomfort, which it now does.

We stay for just one beer and one chorus of “It’s Raining Men” (Hallelujah). Though relieved, I exit the bar wondering how “not narrow” I’ll become.

Returned—Unopened

That autumn, Doug and I see more of Tampa’s gay culture than just the bars. In September, David takes us to Jeffrey, a play about a gay man who chooses celibacy because he so fears AIDS. In the Loft Theater production, Chris makes his acting debut as Steve, the handsome love interest who moves Jeffrey toward breaking his vow but then reveals he’s HIV positive. For two hours, Doug, David, and I share many laughs, a few tears, and much pride that we know one of the stars. Afterward, David introduces us to Nathan, the director.

“Nice to meet you,” says the bone-thin man with hallowed cheeks. When I take his frail hand in mine, it feels like it could break.

As Nathan shuffles away, I wonder what impact HIV has had on David and Chris. How many of their friends are sick? How many are gone? I turn to David and ask tentatively, “Are you conscious of AIDS every day?”

“Some times are harder than others,” he responds. “I almost dread sendin’ Christmas letters, for example. Each year, I have to cross several people off my list, and we always get a few cards returned—unopened.”

He looks away, and I feel the weight of his words. What must it feel like to flip through a stack of holiday greetings only to find a few of your own marked “return to sender”? What must it require to hold a black pen above your address book and draw a
line through name after name? When will I hold that pen? Could David or Chris—no, it’s a question I refuse to pose, even to myself.

In contrast to this encounter, most of the moments we share with David and Chris fall on the lighter side. When we inquire about gay life, the two patiently educate us about heterosexism, politics, and AIDS, but most of the time, they seem to prefer amusing us with humorous, animated tales and taking us on new adventures, such as a gay Halloween ball, for which Chris designs and sews our Medusa and cave man costumes.

Over time, Doug and I each grow closer to David. We remain fond of Chris as well, but we connect to him mainly through his partner. Together, Doug and I continue relating to them as a younger couple to an older, more seasoned one. Though they seem to enjoy our company, Doug and I talk sometimes about why they bother with a sheltered straight couple. Don’t our wide eyes and silly questions grate their nerves? Will they decide one day that we’re not worth the effort? Surely that would end these travels. After all, our contact with this community happens only via David and Chris.

Come November, however, that begins to change.

Coming Out
On a cool night at the apartment, I stop typing when I hear the bolt click. “Hey,” Doug greets as he crosses the threshold. “Hungry? I could grill that chicken.”

Saving the file for a class project, I say, “Great. I’ll find some pasta or something.”
We move into the kitchen, and he begins slathering on barbecue sauce while I inspect our supply of side dishes. “Talk to David much today?” I ask, holding up a box of instant au gratins and a package of Uncle Ben’s for him to choose.

Nodding toward the potatoes, Doug answers, “I did, actually.”

“What’s he up to this evening? Maybe we could catch a movie.”

“He has softball practice, I think.”

“Hmm,” I say, getting out a saucepan and mixing the dehydrated spuds and powdered cheese with milk and margarine. “Didn’t know he was an athlete.”

“Guess so. I told him if his team needed players, I’d be interested.”

“What did David say?”

“He said, ‘Before you sign on, I should tell you it’s a gay team in a gay league.’”

“A whole league? How’d you respond?”

“I said I didn’t care.”

“You did?” I question, not quite believing it. “Do other straight guys play?”

“Not many, but David said that each team can have two straight players.”

“Huh, that’s interesting. When would you start?”

“Early next year,” he says, pulling a spatula from the utensil drawer. A smile must form on my lips. “What’s that look for?” he asks. “You amazed I’m doing this?”

“A little,” I admit. “I just can’t imagine what your old fraternity buddies would say about playboy Doug Healy joining a gay softball league.”

Heading for the grill, Doug laughs a bit and remarks, “I can’t either.”
I all but forget about softball until 9:30 one Tuesday evening in January. As Doug enters the apartment, I’m surprised to see him dressed in sweatpants, T-shirt, and baseball cap. “Thought you were working,” I say.

“I tried out tonight.”

“Oh my! How’d you do?”

Joining me on the sofa, Doug reports, “Played pretty well. When I came up to bat, David was catching, and the first two pitches I hit over the fence. Don’t be too impressed—it was a little league field. But David said to me, ‘I’m glaad you’re my frieeen’.” We laugh at his mimicking of our associate’s drawl.

“Was it a good time?” I ask.

“Yeah, they seem like a fun group.”

“Were there any other straight guys there?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Did you feel out of place?”

“No. I’ve always been at home on the field, so I was fine. Felt good to be out playing sports again. Besides, I knew they weren’t going to come up and start grabbing me.” He pauses. “Still, it seemed like people were checking me out, not only as a ballplayer but also as a person. When David introduced me, he said, ‘This here’s Doug. He’s my intern, my straight intern.’ But from the looks on some of their faces, I could tell that a few of them thought, ‘Yeah, right. Closet case.’”

“Did that bother you?” I ask.

“Nah.”
Does that bother me? I wonder, then quickly dismiss the thought. “So, you’re staying with it?”

“Oh yeah. Maybe you can come to a game. They start in February.”

“I’ll try, but you’ll probably go alone most of the time.”

“That’s okay,” he says.

A few weeks later, Doug debuts in Tampa’s Gasparilla Softball Classic. My courses and teaching in full swing, I’m unable to attend. In fact, I don’t make it to the field until March, but when I do, I meet several people who become key players in my life and my work.

“Thanks for coming,” Doug says as we pull into the lot behind the Hyde Park field.

Reading the logo on his jersey, I ask, “What is ‘The Cove’ anyway?”

“A bar,” he tells me. “We’ll go there sometime.” Doug grabs his glove and cleats from the back seat, and we walk toward the crowd of spectators. When he spots a group of his teammates gathered by the home stands, his pace quickens.

Meanwhile, a few notice us and begin approaching. “Hey Duuug,” greets a blue-eyed blond built like a fullback.

“Al Steel,” Doug says, “this is my fiancée Lisa.” I grasp his large, strong hand.

“Oh my gosh,” banters a fit, muscular man with short dark hair, “we thought she didn’t exist!” He gives Doug a half embrace while saying to me, “I’m Tim Mahn.”

“Our coach,” Doug adds.

“And I’m just a front,” I play along, then wonder if I should have.
“Please,” a broad-chested guy with a northeastern accent warns, “don’t give Tim any ideas. My name’s Gordon Bernstein.”

Pointing to the well-defined six-footer next to him, Gordon says, “This is Jack.”

*Tim’s partner*, Doug mouths. I give Jack a nod.

A pale, gaunt man moves toward me. “I’m Colin,” he lets me know before being overcome by a fierce coughing spell.

Then I’m greeted by another man too thin for his height and frame. “Normally I’d remove my cap,” he tells me, pulling it back a little. “But chemo hair is not so attractive.”

"Michael has KS, an HIV-related cancer, on his lungs,” Doug later explains.

I offer my right hand, but he takes my left. “Fabulous,” Michael says of my new engagement ring. “I wish you a happy marriage.” I smile, wondering what his future holds.

“We better get started,” Tim says.

As The Cove begins its warm-up routine, I walk to the visitors’ stands and sit on the second bleacher. Several men and a couple women make eye contact and say hello. Feeling a little self-conscious amid so many strangers, I don’t strike up any conversations. Instead, I concentrate on the game in progress, democratically clapping for both teams.

After the inning’s last out, I look over and see Doug, David, Tim, Gordon, Al, and several other men in grey Cove shirts congregated beneath a tree. They’re all talking boisterously and laughing between comments. I can’t make out what they’re saying, but I notice something about Doug’s demeanor. Grinning widely, he looks … *comfortable*, like he did with his college drinking buddies. And happy. In this moment, I think, Doug looks
happier than I’ve seen him since he moved to Florida last summer. Suddenly, I understand his desire—his need even—to play for The Cove. Perhaps it’s not exactly the way he experienced it in his childhood baseball league or in fraternity flag football, but it is male companionship, something he’s obviously been missing.

Though I enjoy myself that Sunday, my studies consume the spring’s remaining weekends. In May, the league votes to continue playing in the summer, but I make it to the field just one more time.

During the interim between summer play and fall pre-season practice, we see David a few times but hear nothing from Doug’s other teammates … until one August afternoon.

The phone startles me out of a nap. “Hello?” I say groggily.

“Is this Lisa?” asks a male voice I don’t recognize.

“Yeah, who’s this?”

“Brandon Nolan. I just joined The Cove, and I’ve been seeing Tim Mahn, if that helps you place me.”

What happened to Jack? I wonder but don’t ask.

“I’m planning a birthday party for Tim,” he says. “I hope you and Doug can make it.”

Pleasantly surprised by the invitation, I ask, “When is it?”

“This Friday, 7:00, at The Red Pepper.”

Glancing at my daily planner, I note that Friday night is blank. “See you there, Brandon.”
“Great! I look forward to getting acquainted; Tim talks of you both all the time. Bye!”

Unsure I heard right, I hold the phone to my ear for several more seconds. Did Brandon say that Tim talks of us both *all the time*? That's interesting … and unexpected. He knows Doug from softball, but Tim’s hardly familiar with me. I wonder what he says.

That Friday, Doug and I are excited, both to learn more about Tim's impressions of us and to expand our connections with other Cove players. But when we enter The Red Pepper, I survey the crowd and recognize only Tim. "Where are your teammates?" I whisper.

“I thought they'd be here," Doug replies.

A mid-20s man who could model for *GQ* crosses the room. “Hi Doug,” he greets, “thanks for coming. And Lisa, I saw you once at the field, but we've never been introduced. I'm Brandon. Let me show you to your table.” When he doesn't seat us with Tim, I begin to worry about fitting in. But as soon as our host says, “This is Doug and Lisa,” we get nodding and a round of, “Aah!” from five men and a woman. We seem to have acquired a reputation.

“Glad you're in the league,” says a balding man to Doug.

Looking at me, his companion adds, “Glad you *let* him be in the league.” He then pours me a glass of champagne.

After toasting Tim's 25th, Brandon comes over and sits next to me. “Tim said you're in graduate school. Tell me about your program.”
Brandon listens attentively as I talk about my classes and research. Trying not to bore my host, I keep it short and sweet, but then he asks, “What’s it like, dealing with college students?” I see others listening as well, so I tentatively offer a teaching tale.

“ Mostly wonderful,” I tell them, “with a few notable exceptions. Last semester I had a Murphy’s Law student. The night before his first speech, his grandmother died; on the way to the next one, he wrecked his Camaro; the morning of the final presentation, a dog mauled him. Of course, he could provide no documentation that any of these events actually occurred.” They laugh.

“In four years of college,” recalls the man across from me, “I lost 11 grandparents.”

It continues around the table, each trying to outdo the last person’s most egregious school excuse. “What about you, Miss Thang?” someone asks when it’s my turn.

I begin the story of how the wife of my high school Dean of Students caught me sunbathing—topless—during school hours. Their laughter sends an energy rushing through my body. As I talk on, I become more animated, more performative, more me, than I’ve been in some time. “What could I do?” I pose. “I knew I was—”

Right there, mid-sentence, something clicks.

Looking to my right, I discover that Doug’s no longer there. Where did he go? And when? My fiancé left, and I didn’t even notice. I scan the room, finding him over by Tim. Doug and I make eye contact, and he raises his glass to me.

“Well, don’t leave us hanging,” Brandon goads. “You knew you were what?”

“I knew I was busted,” I say, “pun intended.” For this, I get a round of applause.

What just happened? Until this moment, our “gay connections” have seemed more Doug’s than mine. Doug and David, after all, share professional knowledge and experience.
When together, they tend to talk shop, which leaves me feeling peripheral. Moreover, Doug and his teammates meet twice a week for softball—a sport I've played just a few times. Though I've tried to learn the pharmacy and softball lingoes, I've still felt somewhat out of the loop. Tonight, however, I find myself not needing Doug to bring me inside. Could this group, I wonder, become my friends—our friends—as much as my partner's?

Something else occurs to me. Here we are, carousing and laughing with a roomful of people—mostly gay, mostly strangers—without David or Chris to mediate. In other words, they brought us into a conversation; perhaps it's now becoming ours as well.

During the months that follow, I participate in the conversation in new and unexpected ways. That autumn, I have a course on qualitative methods. When my intended project falls through, I'm left without a fieldwork site. In that vacuum, it occurs to me that this group could be not only socially engaging but also ethnographically interesting.

Work Cited