

## On Chat Rooms

The following article was written for NARTH  
by a same-sex struggler who wishes to remain anonymous.

I've spent more than my share of slow workdays talking with other men in gay chat rooms. It's a mindless habit, and one I don't equate with the severity of looking at pornography online. Still, I've found that the consequences can be just as damaging.

Most of the times when I go into chat rooms, I have no intention of actually arranging to meet the person face-to-face. I really do it more for the rush, to indulge the *possibility* of meeting someone. Just the thought of being near a guy who is as sexually aroused as I am sparks a whole fantasy of possibility: "You're in L.A.? Really? Me too. Whereabouts? Westwood! So am I! Wow, I'm just a few blocks from you at this very moment. I could be there in five minutes..."

The conversation is enticing not only because someone nearby me is aroused, but because that someone wants to do something with *me*. A major challenge I constantly face—along with other Reparative Guys—is a feeling of loneliness. And the same loneliness and isolation that fosters homosexuality is sometimes made worse by misguided efforts, like making contact with guys in a chat room, to overcome it. If gays lament the difficulty of living a minority lifestyle, I trump them—as a Reparative Guy, I'm a minority *within* the gay minority!

During these times I feel as if I'm the only one in the world suffering from these problems. So to have a guy pay me any attention at all, if only to find out where I live and what sexual acts I'd be willing to perform with him, is somehow gratifying. Sometimes I'll even keep a chat room open in an Internet browser while I do other work, just waiting for someone to strike up a conversation and pay me a little attention.

That's not to say I'm all talk. Sometimes the temptation is too great, the guy too conveniently close, and his description too good to be true. We agree to meet. When I'm sexually aroused there's a hungry desperation that'll make me settle for almost any guy. The longing is more than the natural craving felt by regular guys – there's a near unstoppable obsession that goes along with it.

A lot of the time, in fact, the guy turns out to be *bad* enough to be true: While chat rooms draw men of all ages and types, you could file a large portion of them under "freak," "creepy" or "just plain ugly." After all, young and attractive homosexual men can go to bars or clubs and meet other gay

men in person. But that's not an option for a Reparative Guy like me, who is young and decent-looking enough, but has very little desire to hang out in such places.

So when I meet a guy from a chat room, there's often a disappointment physically. But Mom and Pop didn't raise no quitter: Once I meet a guy, I'll most likely go ahead and fool around with him (safely), even if I'm not all that attracted to him.

I try to justify my actions as an admirable commitment to following things through; it's a lot more enjoyable than believing the more likely reality—which is that in doing such things, I give myself less respect than Rodney Dangerfield ever got.

After I've fooled around with such a guy, I have self-esteem issues that would make Charlie Brown seem confident. I feel like an entirely different person. My craving for sex does a complete turnaround, and with the obsession now (temporarily) gone, I'm repulsed by what I did—not only because it was with a male, but that it was anonymous and impersonal.

The feeling of regret isn't the "internalized homophobia" that gays would use to explain it. I know this because I spent a good amount of time in the gay lifestyle, relishing and accepting it as

best I could. No, the feeling is something deeper—a feeling that I've done something that has somehow robbed me of my masculinity and my claim to being a man. (At least feeling so awful brings me closer to my True Self, since I've forced myself to feel something.) But instead I block out the regret, because that's much easier than making the effort to really *feel* the nagging feeling of masculine inferiority and to understand it, and then to do what I need to do to grow beyond it.

But by the next day I've forgotten the guy's name, if I even bothered to get it in the first place. For a day or two afterward, the thought of entering a chat room is *absolutely* repugnant. But if I remain in my black hole of depression, the desire to "chat" returns as strong as ever. Because *this time*, I think, the guy will be better looking. He won't seem gay, but he'll be totally straight-acting (a paradox in itself). *This time* the guy will be cool, someone I'd want to be friends with. "*This time*" never comes, though.

You'd think it would just be a matter of "just say no," and of not doing it anymore, but chat rooms aren't easy to

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resist. Since chatting takes place right at home, it's not like having to go rent a pornographic video or to drive to a gay bar. Don't think of Internet porn as a fast-food chain that tempts a would-be dieter to go pick up a greasy burger. Think of it instead as a pizza delivery boy, *always* ready to make a house call, instantaneously and *free*, whenever the slightest hunger pain strikes. The Internet is the most instant form of *instant gratification*. I can commit the act and be done with it before I've even considered the ramifications.

What's more, the act is anonymous. Unlike bars or other gay meeting spots, I can find someone to meet without suffering the embarrassment of being seen and identified. I can even avoid the social necessities of small talk and having to be personable and friendly. The process is a slippery slope, and a casual conversation can all too easily become a real-life hookup in minutes.

What really frightens me is the more I do it, the more normal it becomes. If I make that first step to start chatting, I'm almost certainly drawn in to the whole process for a

good week or more. Once I've made one erroneous deviation, I figure two won't matter. Two then becomes three, until chatting becomes a part of daily life, like brushing my teeth. To *not* do it would be weird.

Unlike brushing my teeth, though, there's a compulsion to the behavior. I'll chat even when I'm not feeling aroused, but I'll use it as a stimulant to help kick me out of even the slightest state of boredom or depression. To jolt me back out of that rut, it usually takes a monumental positive mood of inspiration or else an even deeper state of depression.

At the risk of seeming preachy (I don't want this to sound like an "After-School Special"), I'm telling this to all of you — moms, dads, therapists, pastors and all others who want to support a Reparative Guy like me — to let you know what I'm dealing with. What *all of us* Reparative Guys are dealing with. The decisions we make in the privacy of our homes are ultimately up to us, of course, but a supportive, nonjudgmental chat from you could help us avoid a destructive chat online later. ■