

The "Ten Percent" Debate

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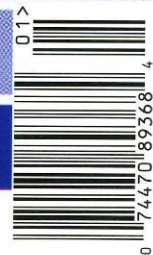
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schools and the abolition of slavery in the 1800's. We are in the *middle* of a *huge* societal movement, a tremendous change, one more step to a better society.

Such success stories could be multiplied if school administrators did their homework. Health and sex education in schools often does not include homosexuality and even ignores the existence of gay and lesbian families. Surprisingly, one study suggested that counselors' "attitudes and feelings about homosexuality were considerably more negative than those of their teaching peers." Children of lesbian and gay parents—even if they're straight—often suffer a great deal of discrimination.

While not oblivious to the real setbacks GLBT advocates have suffered in the past, Lipkin offers lots of practical advice for the reform-minded. One of my favorite sections lists concise "model responses" to objections about changing heterosexist education, such as that "gay/lesbian-positive education is anti-family." Official forms could use more inclusive language; school personnel could be sensitized to same-sex parents and their issues; and organizations such as the PTA could reach out to gay/lesbian parents. As students explore their identities and sexualities, they should be given clear information and positive messages about homosexuality. School personnel may feel that it is not "their business," but it is certainly their business to create an atmosphere in which students can feel safe.

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## Singlehood

DAVID SEIPLE

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### Finding the Boyfriend Within

by Brad Gooch

Simon and Schuster, 1999. 171 pages, \$21.

Brad Gooch, author of a biography of the poet Frank O'Hara and a well-regarded novelist and essayist, has lately embarked on what some would probably call a career plunge. His latest book is entitled *Finding the Boyfriend Within: A Practical Guide for Tapping into Your Own Source of Love, Happiness, and Respect*, and is exactly what it sounds like: a self-help book.

We open the book with a certain trepidation, then. And what we find is not exactly what we might expect. As a genre, the literature of self-help is a pretty dreary lot, written in the self-confident style of someone who has the chutzpah to believe that his or her personal experience with "self-improvement" is worth announcing to the world. What's so unexpectedly refreshing about Gooch's book is that here we don't have some self-appointed "expert" pontificating on how to fix our lives. Instead, the author is forthcoming about his own inner confusions and unassumingly frank in telling about them. In short, we learn that he harbors many of the same secrets that the rest of us do! He lies awake at night "in panic about being alone, or being yesterday's news." He used to visit dirty movie theaters, bask in other men's eye-contact from a bar stool, place phone-sex ads for the hot-to-

trot. Eventually he found such escapades rather boring and pointless. But at least he's been honest about them—and if Gooch can share these experiences with the whole community, the reader may ask, why shouldn't *I* be at least as honest with myself?

Okay, so the book may be a turnoff for anybody with a low tolerance for New Age jargon. We are assured that "everyone has a guiding voice within" that can bring him toward "that turning of the heart into a pond of golden nectar." To access this inner voice, we are invited to take a pad and two pens (of different colors, to distinguish the questions we ask from the answers we hear), and we're instructed to "listen with the inner ear"—rather as Neale Donald Walsch did in *Conversations With God*. We are then given sixteen "awareness exercises," almost all of which are suggestions for making lists—lists of our own neurotic patterns, of what we want in a boyfriend, of why we haven't found him, of times when we've "suddenly felt thrown back on our own resources." About halfway through, we reach the moment when we actually go on a "date" with our inner pal. (Oh boy.) We are meant really to *feel* all this, with an exhilarating, discerning intensity.

As for finding the boyfriend "without," life brings no certainties, as Werner Erhard used to say, only probabilities. What Brad Gooch promises is a higher probability that we'll be more content when we've gotten to know ourselves better, regardless of whether "he" ever shows up or not. For starters, Gooch recommends that we give up looking for love in all the wrong places.

By its very nature, a self-help writer risks insulting his audience by dicing everything into "a few simple steps"—if it's so simple, why didn't *I* figure it out?—a danger that Gooch largely avoids. For all the limitations of its genre, a transforming voice does actually speak from this book, that of a good conversationalist, someone who's familiar to many of us, and who's not so taken with his own success that he can't air some dirty laundry in public—and show us that it's not so dirty after all. If the notion of a "boyfriend within" strikes us as hokey, maybe that's because our jaded imaginations have lost touch with an emotional and spiritual side to ourselves, which is finally what Gooch wants us to explore.

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## Before the Before

GORDON BRENT INGRAM

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### Queer Sites: Urban Histories Since 1600

Edited by Davig Higgs

Routledge, 1999. 240 pages, \$22.99

Most gay men still know very little about the self-defined "inverts," "homosexuals," and "queers" who came of age decades or centuries before Stonewall, who often lived in our own neighborhoods and cities. Among several recent efforts to fill this historical blind spot is *Queer Sites*, by David Higgs, who teaches at the University of Toronto. This slim volume fur-

nishes short, well-written profiles of seven cities—Paris, Moscow, Amsterdam, London, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, and San Francisco—and is a delight to read.

*Queer Sites* begins with a history of gay male Paris, in which Michael Sibilis explores the rise of the comparatively recent tactic of gay visibility. He highlights the ambivalent relationship that gay men there have had with openly making social space and particularly with Paris's new strip of tourist-oriented gay establishments in the Marais. Sibilis highlights the persistent homophobia in the City of Lights, including the city government's attempts to ban rainbow flags, sprinkling his travelogue with historical tidbits, such as that "Only seven Parisian sodomites were burned at the stake in the entire eighteenth century." Unfortunately, Sibilis practically ignores the working-class and neighborhood-based scene that persists west of the Bastille.

University of Amsterdam sociologist Gert Hekma's chronicle of his city is similarly powerful and relates large-scale social and political economic forces to the efforts of a handful of men to build a community in the latter half of the 20th century. Hekma notes that well into the 18th century Dutch Protestantism was less concerned with punishing homosexuality than with anything perceived to weaken the State. In the expanding mercantile city, there were always a few places that remained outside the interest of police, where "wrong lovers" could cruise and perhaps even have sex. A culture of male *Vriendschap* (friendship) often triumphed over the surrounding homophobia. Moving into the modern period, there is something chilling about Hekma's understatement concerning the Nazi occupation, as he writes: "Notwithstanding the introduction of the harsher German legislation regarding 'unnatural lewdness' in the Netherlands there was less prosecution of homosexuals than before the war because the police had other priorities."

The slim offering on gay life in London is just plain insufficient given the scholarship that's already available. Editor Higgs's own two chapters on Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro are intriguing, especially in how he chronicles homosexuality in societies in the grip of the Inquisition and then the only slightly kinder, gentler, but still exceeding vicious homophobia of the Catholic Church that followed. Les Wright completes this journey with a particularly thoughtful history of San Francisco into the 1980's. The exploration of how gay men have transformed urban spaces pretty much stops there, at about ten years back. Still, if we can forgive the book's title and the pretentiousness in which these sketches occasionally indulge, this is a collection of fine local histories.

In the end, of course, these short chronicles can tell only part of the story. The social lives and communal histories of networks of homoerotic males are more complex and contradictory than the crisp social narratives of *Queer Sites* would suggest. What's more, research into this history is still sketchy for most cities; *Queer Sites* begins to explore some of the major themes in the emerging field of queer urban histories.

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## The Jokesmith

MARTHA E. STONE

### Way to go, Smith!

by Bob Smith

Rob Weisbach Books: William Morrow, 1999  
284 pages, \$24.

This is not a mildly amusing book; this is a raucously funny memoir in the best tradition of 1950's TV—or is it vaudeville? or Borscht Belt? Smith must have been born with the comedy gene, eliciting laughs from the first page to the last. Best known, perhaps, as the first openly gay comedian to appear on the *Tonight Show*, Smith was one of the members (along with Jaffe Cohen and Danny McWilliams) of the stand-up comedy trio, Funny Gay Males. His 1997 memoir, *Openly Bob*, which was dedicated to his then-boyfriend Tom, draws some of its comedy from their ten-year relationship. Two years later, Smith's new book opens with the words, "Tom moved out in December."

"Call me a romantic," writes Smith, "but I have always wanted a relationship like my parents had, where things are iffy for forty or fifty years." His widowed mother, living in upstate New York, becomes "every sensible gay man's worst nightmare. I had lost my boyfriend and gained a new girlfriend: my mother." This indeed continues a lifelong pattern: "I had been unable to find a subject that would make her lose interest [but she] was a friend I couldn't shake no matter how unbearable I became."

In order to give their friends a warning that the breakup was imminent, rather than just tell them that there's trouble in paradise, Smith and Tom resolve to go to dinner with as many of them as possible and let them get a sense that something was wrong. In the middle of a rather melancholy recollection, Smith throws in a sidesplitter about his friend Glen, who had three dogs all named after Judy Garland's children. "When Glen yelled 'Lorna! Liza! Joey! Get down!' [he] sounded like an attendant at a rehab center trying to prevent his patients from hurting themselves as they were going through various forms of drug withdrawal."

*Way to go, Smith!* traces Smith's life chronologically as one of four children in suburban Buffalo—territory largely untouched in his previous book. His upbringing may have been religious, and his parents "went through the motions of being good Catholics [but ...] on Sunday mornings they were tired, all they wanted was a little peace and quiet, and the baby Jesus was just another kid demanding attention." His gay fourth-grade teacher, Mr. McGaffin, loved poetry, and Edna St. Vincent Millay above all. He was "struck by beauty" almost every hour, and Smith "studied the geography" of Mr. McGaffin's face, "as if [I were] going to be tested" on it. Smith's reflections on visiting Mr. McGaffin's house—and meeting his boyfriend, as he now understands—will strike a chord with all readers who remember a time when one of the biggest shocks in life was discovering that their teachers had private lives.

In subsequent chapters, Smith comments on his life in high