



## **A FACE IN THE CROWD** *Expressions of Gay Life in America*

### **Book Discussion Group Topic Points**

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#### **A Face in the Crowd Discussion Group Overview**

**W**e are pleased to provide general guidelines for the organization of *A Face in the Crowd* discussion groups. The format and length of time of these groups will vary depending on the number of participants and taking into account individual goals and personal interests. These groups may take place over the course of an evening in the comfort of someone's home, or expanded over several weeks to accommodate the active contribution of all participants.

Our overall goal of creating *A Face in the Crowd* discussion groups is to support open and honest dialogue around issues pertaining to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) individuals, including families and friends. We seek to empower today's youth to actively take part in developing solutions to problems rooted in ignorance and hatred. Through this process, we hope to encourage and promote acceptance, understanding, and respect for all.

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#### **About the Book**

**S**ponsored by the MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION, *A Face in the Crowd: Expressions of Gay Life in America* edited by John Peterson and Martin Bedogne, celebrates the triumphs and challenges of those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and presents a diverse group of people living their lives filled with love, hope, and happiness. Incorporating stories and profiles of gay men and women, sharing tales of families and challenges, underscoring the soul searching of coming out, and looking ahead to the increasingly hopeful future, *A Face in the Crowd* illustrates that gay life in America does not fit a single stereotype.

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#### **Topic Points Overview**

**T**he following topics are based on sections of the book. They are provided simply as a starting point and may be modified to best reflect the group's priorities and goals. We encourage participants to expand on these topics to address the issues that most impact your lives, the lives of your loved ones, or currently is having an influence within your communities.

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**TOPIC: FAMILY**

The Family Section of *A Face in the Crowd* includes topics that generate great debate and are often found in today's headlines. This includes gay marriage, domestic partnerships, gay parenting and adoption.

Possible Discussion Points:

- ◆ What defines a family? Discuss why some people might feel that same-sex couples do not fit into the definition of family. What are some of the ways that this can be changed?
- ◆ What are common reactions that a parent might have when their child first reveals that he/she is gay? Are these reactions similar as to when a parent reveals he/she is gay to a child?
- ◆ Discuss the perceptions associated with gay marriage and domestic partnerships. Are domestic partnership benefits generally accepted within your community? What factors influence opposition to the idea of gay marriages and how can they be addressed?
- ◆ How will gay marriage acceptance in other counties influence laws in the United States? Discuss whether gay marriage should be legal in the United States.
- ◆ What are some reactions to gay parenting and gay adoption? Why do people sometimes feel a child cannot lead a happy and fulfilled life when raised by same-sex couples? What are the challenges of gay parenting and how can they be addressed?
- ◆ Open the dialogue to encourage participants to share other thoughts or comments that has had an influence on their own families.

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**TOPIC: COMMUNITY**

The Community Section of *A Face in the Crowd* touches upon the gay rights movement and the concept that communities are what we create based on individual involvement and personal contributions.

Possible Discussion Points:

- ◆ Discuss a brief history of the gay rights movement. How far has the movement come in the last 30 years? Are things heading in the right direction? What more can be done?
- ◆ How was AIDS viewed when initially presented in the media? What has changed? Does fear and misinformation still play a role today?
- ◆ How do churches deal with GLBT individuals? Are GLBT people generally accepted within your religion? How does religion and spirituality impact a young person who identifies as GLBT?
- ◆ Are GLBT issues adequately addressed within our schools? Are teachers and counselors appropriately trained to address specific needs of our GLBT youth? What can be done to

improve resources within our educational system?

- ◆ Open the dialogue to discuss the various ways that each participant can positively influence others to take steps forward within their own communities.

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**TOPIC: CHALLENGES**

The Challenges Section of *A Face in the Crowd* touches upon the problems that GLBT people may face. This includes issues relating to gays in the military, bi-national couples, intolerance and prejudice.

Possible Discussion Points:

- ◆ Discuss the reasons or drive behind anti-gay movements and hate groups. What is their fear? Why are GLBT people so threatening?
- ◆ What are/were some of your own fears and prejudices? How has this changed over time and what has influenced these changes?
- ◆ Is it possible for a gay person to change and become straight? What are the arguments for and against this theory?
- ◆ What are some of the current laws or policies that continue to create challenges for GLBT people such as the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy or immigration issues for gay couples?
- ◆ Open the dialogue for participants to share personal challenges. Discuss current steps being taken to find solutions to overcome these obstacles within your own families or communities.

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**TOPIC: FUTURE**

The Future Section of *A Face in the Crowd* reflects the greater awareness that young people have today and influences that encourage or support coming out earlier and embracing their identities as GLBT individuals.

Possible Discussion Points:

- ◆ Discuss how parents, students or teachers can encourage and support a young person who identifies as GLBT at an early age. Do GLBT adolescents generally receive support from their peers?
- ◆ Are Gay/Straight Alliances in schools effective? Does your school system currently have one established? Would there be opposition within the community if a Gay/Straight Alliance were formed in your school?
- ◆ How does the media influence our youth? Do television shows that depict gay characters

have a positive influence? Do they reflect an accurate picture of the rich diversity of GLBT individuals?

- ◆ What other resources are currently available to support GLBT youth? What resources could be established to address specific needs within your community?
- ◆ Open the dialogue to address other thoughts about GLBT issues that may have an impact on our youth both positively and negatively.

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**TOPIC: COMING OUT STORIES**

Coming out stories are found throughout *A Face in the Crowd* that represent each section of the book. They range from varying positive responses from parents and family to personal struggles and intolerance.

Possible Discussion Points:

- ◆ Participants may wish to select and read coming out stories found in the book and share their reactions. How do you relate to these stories? What advice might you have for the person whose story has just been read?
- ◆ Open the dialogue and invite participants to share their own experiences of coming out or reactions when first learning a loved one is GLBT. Discuss your initial reactions and how things have possibly changed.