



Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking

Tim Dean

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Barebacking—when gay men deliberately abandon condoms and embrace unprotected sex—has incited a great deal of shock, outrage, anger, and even disgust, but very little contemplation. Purposely flying in the face of decades of safe-sex campaigning and HIV/AIDS awareness initiatives, barebacking is unquestionably radical behavior, behavior that most people would rather condemn than understand. Thus the time is ripe for *Unlimited Intimacy*, Tim Dean's riveting investigation into barebacking and the distinctive subculture that has grown around it.

Audacious and undeniably provocative, Dean's profoundly reflective account is neither a manifesto nor an apology; instead, it is a searching analysis that tests the very limits of the study of sex in the twenty-first century. Dean's extensive research into the subculture provides a tour of the scene's bars, sex clubs, and Web sites; offers an explicit but sophisticated analysis of its pornography; and documents his own personal experiences in the culture. But ultimately, it is HIV that animates the controversy around barebacking, and *Unlimited Intimacy* explores how barebackers think about transmitting the virus—especially the idea that deliberately sharing it establishes a new network of kinship among the infected. According to Dean, intimacy makes us vulnerable, exposes us to emotional risk, and forces us to drop our psychological barriers. As a committed experiment in intimacy without limits—one that makes those metaphors of intimacy quite literal—barebacking thus says a great deal about how intimacy works.

Written with a fierce intelligence and uncompromising nerve, *Unlimited Intimacy* will prove to be a milestone in our understanding of sexual behavior.

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