



**kort's korner**

# I Read You Loud and Queer!

OCTOBER 11 IS NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY, or when many turtles go on Oprah and say “Hi, Mom and Dad, I’m on national TV and I am gay!” Meanwhile many turtles do it quietly, if they do it at all. So what does it mean to be a Turle or a Hailstorm?

In Imago Relationship Therapy, we say that most partners and individuals are either minimizers or maximizers. Whether or not someone’s in a relationship, when conflict with another person arises, individuals usually minimize (Turtle) or maximize (Hailstorm)—because of nature granting us survival mechanisms through genetic neurological adaptations to our environment, or because of learned styles for survival. Children learn to adapt to their surroundings to make it through growing up. They don’t consciously look around and exclaim, “Wow, things are a mess here! I better find a way to get by!” But unconsciously, that’s exactly what all kids do—they adapt by unconsciously deciding whether to Turtle or Hailstorm in whatever environment they find themselves. Likewise it might just be a natural tendency for someone to either turtle or hailstorm.

When minimizers feel danger coming their way, they’re more like

the Turtle. In Dr. Harville Hendrix’s two books, *Keeping the Love You Find: A Guide for Singles and Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, he states that the minimizer is “passive, almost immobile, fleeing inward to avoid the danger of being emotionally or physically abandoned.”

When maximizers feel unsafe, they’re more like the Hailstorm—which, writes Dr. Hendrix, is “the active one, often expressive and explosive, discharging his high energy, fighting to get what he needs”.

Coming out is a relational experience, in that to come out to other people, you need to be involved. You must feel closely attached to those you tell. Safety is of utter importance, without which we’ll use our instinctive defenses to protect ourselves. The closer you are to someone the more you will either turtle or hailstorm.

Minimizing (or Turtling) can be ineffective and used against one’s self. Minimizers avoid conflict, but coming out requires that you be comfortable with conflict—or learn to be. Minimizers’ alibis for not coming out include “People don’t need to know what I do in the bedroom,” and “I don’t want to lose my friends, family, and/or my job.” Usually these reasons arise during the first three stages of coming out. Minimizers should examine their reasons closely to see if they’re legitimate, or only to support their natural self-protective instinct to stay inside their shell.

Informing people that you’re gay does not mean telling them what you did in the bedroom the night before. I absolutely agree that your sexual life should be private; that you should be selective in whom you choose to tell. The word “gay” is not synonymous with sex. If many people choose to hear it that way, that’s the issue of the person learning the information. Being gay is an affectional, relational, and spiritual experience, as well as sexual. So the argument that not telling keeps one’s sex life private doesn’t hold up. I often say that if I never had sex again for the rest of my life, I’d still be gay.

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## I Read You Loud and Queer!, continued

Minimizers are often reluctant to come out, out of the fear of losing friends, family harmony, and livelihood. This consideration is important, since the emotional and economic consequences can be serious. Often, however, it's just an excuse to avoid conflict. Minimizers often demote and diminish themselves by making themselves less important than other people.

And the psychological consequences can be extreme, leaving the minimizers secretly resentful, passive-aggressive, defensive and distant in their relationships. Friends and families often complain of missing the minimizer because they don't see much of him. For their part, minimizers miss out on strong relationships with friends and families, but fear the risk of rejection far more. So they keep their true selves hidden inside their socially acceptable shell.

Maximizing (or Hailstorming) is the complete opposite of minimizing, yet can be just as ineffective. Often in people's faces, they scream to the world that they're gay, confiding what they do sexually to shock others. Usually they're in the fourth or fifth stages of coming out, where their Inner Gay Teenager is asserting himself. They argue that "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" and want the entire world to know it.

Unfortunately when maximizers are out there Hailstorming, all others see is the hail, and their

message is lost. This is just what heterosexuals and homophobes love to see, since they can use it to reinforce their claims that gay life is all about S&M, drag queens and "in-your-face" behavior. While coming out, maximizers tend to be righteous, forceful, and cross boundaries; and it's very difficult to calm them down.

The consequences of someone's maximizing himself is that he never obtains the very thing he's trying to achieve—to be seen and heard. This leaves him feeling hurt, abandoned and ignored, which most likely he felt already, driving him to maximize in the first place.

Effectively, minimizers can work "behind the scenes" contributing to the gay community through volunteer work, donating their money and time, and being selective in who they tell. Maximizers can be the best activists when keeping their boundaries and learning how, where, and with whom to use their maximizing skills by being out and publicly visible in big ways. Whether you're a Turtle or a Hailstorm, learn to avoid the exaggerated state of feeling endangered and defensive and can come out in the way that works best for you!