

What's up, Dr. Phil?

Oprah Winfrey's pal Dr. Phil McGraw insists he's more open-minded on gay issues than his daytime-TV predecessor, Dr. Laura

By Michael Giltz

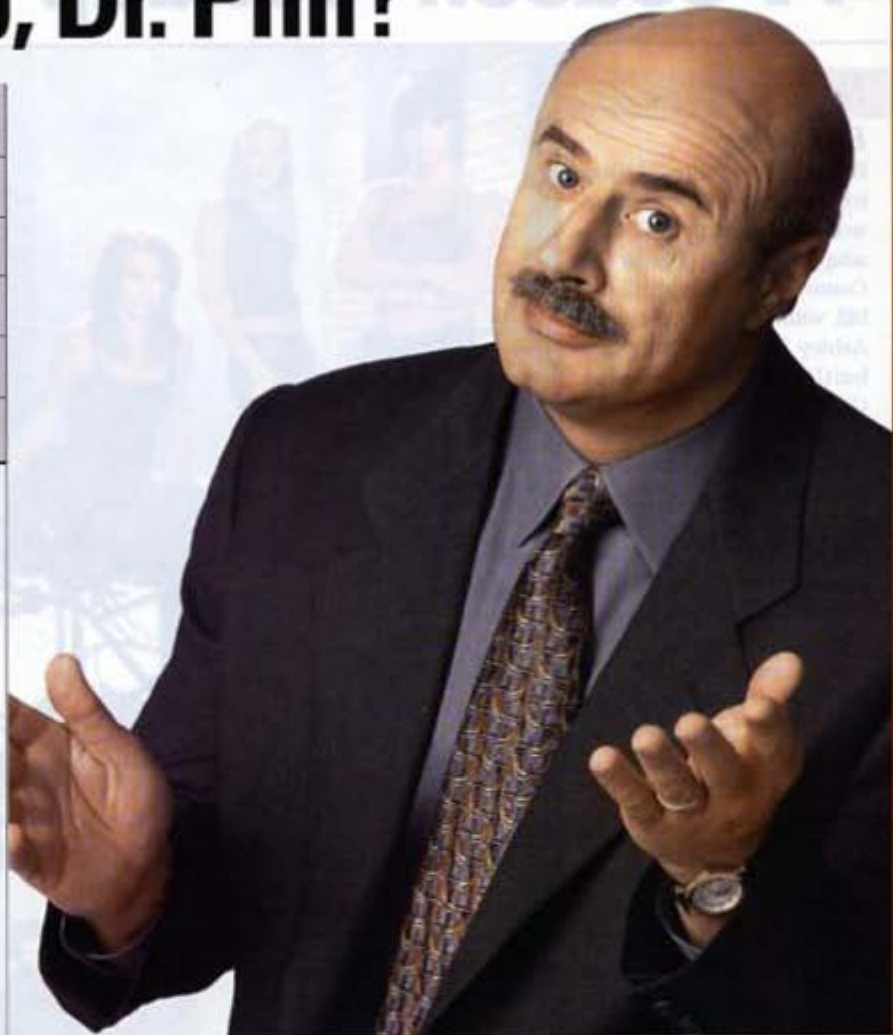
Oprah Winfrey's favorite relationship guru gets his own talk show this fall, courtesy of her production company and Paramount TV. But while Dr. Phillip McGraw shares a title with Dr. Laura Schlessinger—unlike Schlessinger, McGraw is actually qualified to dispense advice, thanks to a degree in psychology from North Texas State University—his heart is clearly in a different place when it comes to gay and lesbian relationships.

Dr. Phil—whose blunt confrontations and unsparing assessments on *Oprah* often move couples to tears—is in the midst of taping “practice” shows before his solo show debuts in September. He says the shows are going so well, they might even air as original episodes.

But how will those shows deal with gays and lesbians? Does Dr. Phil get it? Will gays and lesbians be invisible, as has usually been the case in his Tuesday segments on *Oprah*?

“It hasn’t come up too much on *Oprah*, but gays and lesbians face the same issues everyone else does,” says Dr. Phil. “And, hopefully, they’ll be a part of the show in general. I fully expect and intend for that to happen.”

So while every segment could conceivably involve a queer couple or individual, what about segments dealing specifically with GLBT concerns and problems? “We’ll focus on their issues in particular,” promises Dr. Phil, though no such segments are as yet scheduled. When asked if Paramount vetted him to make sure Dr. Phil falls within the mainstream on gay issues (surely they wouldn’t make the same mistakes they



made with Dr. Laura), he tacitly agrees they were no fools: They combed through his professional records, public statements, books, and so on to see where he stood on all sorts of topics.

One segment that is scheduled is about parents and teens dealing with sexuality. What would Dr. Phil say if a mother were worried her son was gay and didn’t know whether to confront him or try and force him to join the high school football team?

“Get him a testosterone boost?” he draws amusingly. “I think there is still a lot of education that needs to be done with this generation and previous generations about the gay orientation. A lot of people still believe it’s a choice.”

What about gay adoption? “The sexual orientation of the couple trying to adopt a child wouldn’t be in the top 10 of questions I would ask,” says Dr. Phil,

who is married with two sons. “It wouldn’t even be on the list. We’ve asked Rosie O’Donnell to come on and help us educate people about those issues and let us lend our support to what she’s trying to do to extend the rights of gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. I believe strongly in what she’s doing, and I want to lend my platform to helping her. If you see her, tell her to come.”

The bottom line? With comments like that, Dr. Phil’s biggest problem at the outset won’t be angry activists but rather the task of giving his show a warmth and balance that Oprah Winfrey provided with ease. Says Dr. Phil: “She’s irreplaceable.” ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.