

Kort's Korner

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Joe's practice specializes in sexual addiction, childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse, depression and anxiety.

He offers workshops for couples and singles. He runs a gay men's group therapy and a men's sexuality group therapy for straight, bi and gay men who are struggling with specific sexual issues.

His therapy services are for gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals.

*Joe Kort MA, MSW, ACSW
25600 Woodward Ave,
Ste 218
Royal Oak, MI 48067
Tel: (248) 399-7317
Email joekort@joekort.com
Website: www.joekort.com*

Out of the Closet and Into the Streets!

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A while ago, a gay couple—I'll call them Tony and Don—came to see me, because they were about to break up. Tony, an outgoing guy, was active in the gay community, and on various groups and political committees. He had many friends, most of them gay and lesbian and mostly (if not only) his—because Don wouldn't attend gay events.

Don didn't like "labels." Adamant about not being an "in-your-face" gay man, he didn't want to build a life around what he "did in the bedroom the night before." He felt it was Tony, not him, who had a problem with their lack of mutual gay friends. To Don, being gay clearly meant sexual acts, nothing more. Declaring he was "more than that," he felt no need to socialize in the gay community or even be around other GLBT people. Don wasn't involved in the gay community at all, much less out at work, worrying that if "discovered and outed," he'd lose his job as a teacher. So while Tony went to various events, Don wouldn't join him. Predictably, Don resisted my suggestion that he try attending gay events, objecting that I was trying to convince him to "wave a Gay Pride flag."

I do encourage clients to involve themselves in GLBT organizations, for the psychosocial benefit and for political ends. Often I see couples where one, like Tony—is out and involved, while the other, like Don, is either closeted or out to only a few, and not involved

in the community. With this negative weight on their relationship, they go few places where others can see them as a couple. Consequently, their relationship is rarely validated. I see many partners nearly break up or grow apart, simply because either or both of them resist getting involved in the gay community in some way.

I liken being gay to being Jewish, African-American, or any other minority culture.

"Denying one's core identity leads to poor relationships and ultimately, depression."

Children of minorities usually grow up in neighborhoods with others of the same race or religion. Families can attend community centers and houses of worship to strengthen their ties and affirm their identity. From a very young age, individuals build a foundation to springboard they can use for later personal and social development. They share the secure feeling of being part of something larger than themselves, helping them feel proud of who they are. Ultimately, affirming one's core identity increases self-esteem and leads to healthy relationships. Oprah cites the Supremes being televised in 1965 as contributing to her later success. She ran through the house screaming, "Colored people on TV!" Her family came to watch with her, proud to see three beautiful black women singing.

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We gays and lesbians have to build similar foundations—starting in adulthood. GLBT children cannot watch “Will and Grace,” and shout, “Homosexuals on TV!” and receive their families’ support. Denying one’s core identity leads to poor relationships and ultimately, depression. In defending his “right” to keep himself isolated and suppressed, Don was on the verge of losing his partner. Tony, in turn, despaired increasingly about going to events alone—because Don worried about being discovered if he accompanied Tony to parties that weren’t even gay!

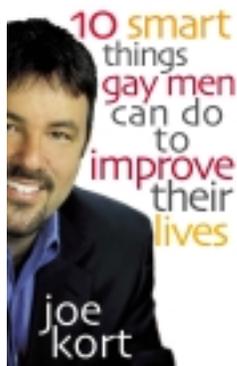
Ultimately, Don did decide to take the plunge and join Tony at a few gay events. Frightened and hypervigilant at first, he started to feel more comfortable in gay circles, feeling the power of groups and the reinforcement that gay is good. He found himself positively mirrored by other gay men. Partnered couples supported and honored his relationship with Tony, even giving him tips on what worked for them. His relationship with Tony improved and strengthened.

Discovering the power of being around others like him, Don obtained a sense of belonging. The goal of getting involved won’t necessarily make you into a political activist. Many people, including myself, do that, and for us, it works. For others, simply getting involved in the gay community is psychologically refreshing. Most other cultures and minorities nurture each other with that sense of belonging. Why not ours?

I plan to attend this year’s inauguration of the Human Rights Campaign building in Washington D.C. Every other minority has had its own a building there, except us. Now we have one too, declaring right on the front that it’s a “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Building.”

I’m not going for political reasons alone, but to contribute to the empowering pride I take in my GLBT brother and sisters, which in turn deepens my relationships and raises my self-esteem. June is Gay Pride Month, so get involved. Your identity and self-esteem depend on it!

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Royal Oak, MI 48067
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Website: www.joekort.com



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