

Kort's Korner

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A Man Among Men

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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.

As Robert Bly pointed out in his best-selling book *Iron John* few heterosexual men have appropriate initiations into becoming a man. Most initiations into manhood as a young boy, adolescent, and young adult are through sports, religion, and dating girls, getting "at-a-boy's" from other boys and men. However if none of that is part of your life, then male culture pushes you aside and abandons you. This is true for gays and straights alike. We gay men, however, have fewer rituals, if any, to initiate us into manhood.

As a young Jewish man, my bar mitzvah served as a gateway into becoming a man. At least it was something. For many boys, sports serves as an initiation—which, unfortunately, a gay boy often doesn't like or isn't good at. Even if he is, he often feels there's something "different" about himself from the other teammates and not really "one of the guys". He may not feel true acceptance or a sense of belonging because he knows he is hiding something that would alienate him.

A lot of heterosexual men didn't get blessings from their fathers or other men in their lives. They are deeply wounded and starving for that male mentoring. They are straight men in need of healthy male role models. The same wound and need is true for gay men, only more so. In addition to the lack of blessings from our fathers, not being attracted to

women and the negative messages about homosexuality leaves us feeling even more wounded as men. It wounds us for being gay, leaving us feeling less than masculine.

As Gay men we're taught that we're effeminate, as if there were anything wrong with that—pure sexism! We're called sissies, pansies, mama's boys, weak, less than men because of emotionally distant fathers and smothering mothers, cowardly, and unable to control ourselves.

"Older gay men are afraid to come forward and be role models, lest they be accused of trying to satisfy their personal sexual desires."

Our gay male culture has long been under attack for our sexuality. We are verbally abused through homophobia and heterosexism, marginalized and seen only for our sexual acts. You see this all the time, particularly in fraternal organizations. The Boy Scouts don't want gay boys or scoutmasters in their troops, but you never hear the same concern in Girl Scouts. The

military doesn't want to hear or know about gay soldiers, yet you rarely hear an enlisted female worry about showering with a lesbian for fear of being watched. The church is always concerned about gay priests acting out sexually, but there's little to no concern about nuns.

Even puppets and toys are attacked for being homosexual and bad role models for children. Tinky Winky, the purple Teletubby, was criticized for carrying a "purse." Sesame Street's

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Continued on reverse

Bert and Ernie were outed as a gay male couple and, for the most part, have been separated ever since. The same accusations are not made toward Peppermint Patty of Charlie Brown who Lesbians have told me is clearly “butch” and resembles many “chapstick” lesbians. And what about Velma of Scooby Doo? While this may make one chuckle, it is clearly sexism that a male who acts effeminate or bonds closely to another male is “less than a man and therefore gay” and that there is something wrong with that.

From birth, every child is imprinted—bombarded—by messages that everyone else is heterosexual. And if you are not, then something is wrong with you. Homophobic slurs (“You fairy!”) and heterosexual praise (“Way to go, stud!”) are constantly heard in the playgrounds at recess. This is hard to shake, and most gay men spend the rest of their lives trying to remove it from themselves.

As a young gay boy, teen and now man, I felt inferior and alienated from my straight male counterparts. Gay men judge harshly their heterosexual counterparts for being unemotional, insensitive and poorly groomed. Straight men judge Gay men to be overly sensitive, overly emotional and groomed to “pretty”. However both sides in general agree on one thing; it is better to be perceived as straight acting than gay acting regardless of your orientation.

I never minimize the lack of ritual and initiation we gay men have had to endure. Our society lacks images of men, particularly gay men, touching and expressing affection.

Within our gay culture, we have few if any role models available to teach us these things. There’s no initiation or blessing into gay manhood. Older gay men are afraid to come forward and be role models, lest they be accused of trying to satisfy their personal sexual desires. So gay youngsters suffer.

Typically, a gay man’s initiation into manhood is purely sexual. Society doesn’t approve of our gay elders nonsexual contact

with a younger boy or teen, because it is assumed that sexual contact is all the elder wants. So when a young man reaches his 20s, his initiation is through sexuality—often by a “mentor” he’ll never see again.

Just coming out, not sure of himself, he hasn’t the nerve to start conversation with gay elder. He hasn’t learned it’s OK to approach a gay man nonsexually. So he does so sexually. Within these sexual encounters, his gay elder won’t have much to tell him, except for, “What turns you on?” To me, this is so sad. If older and younger gay men could gather in groups and sit down for tea and coffee, how different things would be!

In *Gay Spirit Warrior: An Empowerment Workbook for Men Who Love Men*, John R. Stowe writes: “Imagine a society different from our own, in which older gay men are treated with honor. Imagine a Council of Gay Elders who sit together in order to share wisdom and advice with the entire Tribe. Imagine going to this Council—being sent by your parents, even—the moment you first recognized your attraction to other men. Imagine sharing your concerns with a silver-haired mentor, a man like yourself who loves other men and who listens to you with respect. Imagine how you’d feel about yourself if you could call on this man’s guidance, insight, humor and perspective whenever you need it.”

This is what my work and life mission is all about as an openly gay therapist and openly gay man.

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