

# 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*

## Wanted: Meaningful Overnight Relationship

When I saw this saying embroidered on a pillow, I bought it to display in the office where I do my relationship workshops, because it reminded me of statements that clients and workshop participants have made to me over the years. They usually ask me why they cannot find Mr. or Ms. Right and why they keep having short, quick and unsatisfying relationships.

In reply, often I ask them questions like these:

- \*Are you doing what you say you should do to find a relationship?
- \*Does your lifestyle support and leave room for a long-term relationship?
- \*Is your behavior and lifestyle in line with whatever agreements you've made with your partner?
- \*Are you satisfied with your decision about how you are in your relationship?
- \*Are you in charge of your decisions about your sexual acts, or are they in charge of you?

My clients frequently tell me how very depressed they are at not being in a relationship. They complain that other gay men want nothing but quick sexual hook-ups. Lesbians state that all other women are either "heterosexual" or "already in a relationship." Even heterosexual men and women make similar comments, like, "All the good men are gay" or "All the good women are married." Unconsciously, however, they often use these as excuses to end relationships abruptly and to have quick one-night stands. They protest that they really do want a relationship, and that being single, seeing others enjoying relationships makes them feel lonely and left out. Also, some clients are in relationships but having "meaningful" outside encounters, claiming they do so because their current relationship feels unsatisfying and lacks the intimacy they crave. Very often, they've made their relationship a unilaterally open one, without their partner's knowledge or consent.

Other clients have all sorts of rationalizations for not entering into a committed relationship. If single, they hesitate to commit to the real work and self-examination that any solid relationship requires, and cannot be honest with themselves about that. For partnered individuals, the reasons are much the same, and often called "exits" from the relationship's intimacy. For others, a "meaningful overnight relationship" is all they want. They feel shamed by society's pressure to get married or at least in a committed dating relationship.

If they're interested only in short-term dating, then as a therapist I try to help them accept this about themselves and be accountable for it. There's nothing wrong with "meaningful overnight relationships" if, in fact, that's what you want and are clear about it—both to yourself and your sequential partners. It's less effective when you keep telling yourself that you want a full, committed relationship, but still keep going to the baths, meeting others at gay bars for one night stands, or conducting affairs with married men. This can signify a lot of things, many of which I'll address in a moment.

Often I see clients who compulsively act out quick, short, problematic relationships—either romantic, sexual or both. They are often troubled by this, for reasons

other than brevity, which is what brings them into therapy. Others have managed to convince themselves they do want to behave this way; that it's what they really want. On further investigation, however, we find that actually, they've adapted to their compulsive, impulsive needs rather than exploring them and gaining control over them. As with other forms of addiction, their needs are in control of them.

When I first heard about sex and love being an addiction—and a very common factor in "overnight" relationships—I just laughed. How absurd that sounded! How could these two things, both so sacred and core to

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*Continued on reverse*

who we are, constitute an addiction? But after seeing many of these clients, I quickly learned that in fact, it wasn't sex or love they were addicted to, but internal chemicals. The "rush" of attraction and arousal made them feel better and provided an intoxicating, addictive high. They compulsively sought relief from loneliness, isolation, and early childhood trauma like abuse, neglect and physical and sexual abuse. In fact, sex and love addiction isn't even about sex or love, but is far removed from either one.

Sexual Addiction is a disguised form of some sort of early childhood trauma. (For more on this topic click on <http://www.joekort.com/articles18.htm>) Ironically, sexual addiction's whole purpose is the unconscious attempt to keep intimacy at a distance. So overnight relationships are all that can be—or want to be—accomplished. Most of the acting out is actually just a higher form of masturbation. One client told me that for him, sex is like "theater." He invites strangers into his "play" and has them "act out" their parts through role play so he can have an orgasm. These are not intimate, reciprocal relationships at all, just a solo act with others playing roles with the sex addict as audience.

When we experience romantic love, the main internal chemical called phenylethylamine (or PEA for short) is mainly activated. Strong evidence suggests that PEA and thus, sexual arousal are highly induced by the presence of fear, risk and danger. Its molecular structure is similar to amphetamine. In our bodies, it is naturally strongest when first released and we are in the presence of our object(s) of desire—whatever or whoever that may be. In other words, it's PEA, adrenaline, and other internal chemicals like endorphins that people become addicted to, and not sex.

Love addiction is caused by much the same internal chemicals. But the high is different, though, in that the person is addicted to the feeling and experience of being "in love with love." This, the honeymoon period of relationships, lasts only from between six and 18 months. Its only long-term purpose is to bond two people together. Known as romantic love, this is the first of love's three stages. (For more on this topic, click on <http://www.joekort.com/articles03.htm>) If someone is addicted to romantic love and the feeling wears off (as it's supposed to do), he or she ends the relationship and goes on to a new one. They never do the "work" that any intimate long-term relationship requires.

I help my clients decide whether they want short-term or long-term relationships. If you're interested only in fun and having pleasant, affectionate experiences, then it's fine to decide to be in relationships for the short run and to move on when they're no longer exciting. However, it's important to be honest about what you're doing with yourself and your dating partner du jour. Does each of you understand that when the relationship is no longer fun

and has moved into a more serious mode, you want to end the relationship—pleasantly? Many decide to do this. There's honestly nothing wrong with it, as long as everyone involved behaves with integrity, knows it, and consents to it.

Many are torn between wanting only this transitory thrill but also the satisfactions of a deepening, long-term relationship. Usually, however, you cannot have both. Longevity involves conflict and recognizing differences, along with the fun. Only at the beginning are relationships totally enjoyable, with all the conflict and irritations minimal to none.

Especially after they've been together for a while, many couples decide to be non-monogamous and agree to open their relationship to include others. In fact, studies show that 75% of gay male couples are non-monogamous after passing their five-year mark. You can read more about this in David Nimmons's book, *The Soul Beneath the Skin*. Overall, the research into non-monogamy among gay couples is positive, because a sharp distinction exists between emotional and sexual fidelity. Some couples decide to have three-ways only; some decide to play separately from each other, while others mix it up.

All in all, with any of these "meaningful overnight relationships," problems arise for couples if secrecy is involved, in that the contract between the partners is one thing and one or both partners were doing another. If any couple wants to be non-monogamous, making it work within their relationship requires a lot of dialogue, communication, and trust. Trust is broken if an agreed-upon contract changes and neither partner tells the other. That is cheating.

For singles and individuals, the problem with meaningful overnight relationships is that if compulsivity is involved, it can lead to addiction. It's also problematic for an individual to say he wants a long-term relationship, while exhibiting behavior that contradicts that. Otherwise, it is up to you as an individual whether you want "meaningful overnight relationships" and how you want those relationships to run.

Intimacy with your partner—and yourself—requires honesty, communication, self-awareness and integrity. It demands that you say and be who you authentically are, to yourself and potential partners. It means being upfront, aware, conscious, open and communicative—all of which takes a lot of work. Most people are not up for it, because it is often painful, rife with conflict and overall, basically not a lot of fun. But the truth is, doing the painful work can be extremely satisfying, even fun. The two aren't mutually exclusive; both can come together. It's up to you to decide.

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