



kort's korner

Sex-Starved Gay Male Couples

The Untold Secret

by Joe Kort, MSW

Gay male couples feel a lot of pressure to remain sexually fresh, new, and exciting. That's the popular stereotype.

"All gay men love sex and have it a lot" trumpets the popular press. "If I were gay," straight men joke, "I would be having sex all the time with my partner! Guys always want it!"

So gay couples think that other gay couples are enjoying all kinds of adventurous sex. After all, aren't men, gay men in particular, supposed to be sexually open and alive? But this is often not the case at all.

Gay male couples in long-term relationships (LTRs) in my office complain that they haven't been sexual for long periods of time—sometimes years. They tell me that they've agreed to get sex outside their relationship, or they are only sexual with each other when it involves a third man.

These partners question if they are really right for each other, if they're unable to keep sex alive between just the two of them. I'm quick to reassure them this problem is more common than they think. It isn't only gay couples' for whom sexual activity tapers off after their initial "honeymoon" period. For both gays and straights, sexual excitement wanes after the first two or three years.

Romantic Love...

This stage of love is only the doorway to the relationship with a new partner.

In this stage, people often report feeling drugged. If originally depressed, they feel less so. If suffering from some addiction, they may experience diminished craving or feel entirely "cured." But love's a stimulant, too: People find they can suddenly operate on a lot less sleep; and a sluggish libido will ratchet up to match a partner's higher sex drive.

New lovers feel an elation, exhilaration, and euphoria mostly due to their bloodstreams being flooded with chemical cousins of amphetamines such as phenylethylamine (or PEA), dopamine, norepinephrine—all natural stimulants and painkillers. So if they feel drugged, it's because they are!

When first released, PEA is at its most potent, which is why you never forget your first love. PEA eradicates pain, lowers anxiety, makes the world bright and renewed—but above all, it heightens sexual arousal and desire for the beloved.

...And the Power Struggle

In this, the second stage of relationships, conflict naturally arises and couples begin having difficulty communicating. Like romantic love, this universal stage is supposed to happen—and end, though it lasts longer than romantic love and doesn't feel anywhere near as good. Worst of all, sexual interest in each other partner wanes, for gay and straight alike.

Being upset and angry with your partner and perhaps hurt, the last thing

on your mind is showing physical affection.

Breaking up to make up

Many couples split up and make up—repeatedly, often in unconscious attempts to jump-start their romance. During a break-up, the fear, risk and danger all heightens PEA, which makes couples enjoy ecstatic sex. This "second honeymoon" is short-lived, naturally, and they soon return to less frequency and enjoyment.

Sexual Desire Discrepancy

Few partners are equals in libido. Typically, one wants sex more than the other. But at the start of their relationship, the "love drugs" make each want it as much as the other, with the partner with the lower sex drive experiencing an increase—again because of PEA. But when its effect wears off, he reverts to his naturally lower desire.

What happens after romantic love and sexual desire wane? Typically, each partner blames the other, not understanding why this physiological dynamic is occurring. They begin arguing, fighting and hurting each other—which really brings sex to a halt.

The problem with postponing sex for long periods is that you are creating a new behavioral template: The two of you become more like family, friends or brothers, but less like lovers. As a result, unfortunately, sexual anorexia can set in for any couple, gay or straight.

Sex-Starved Gay Male Couples, continued

Sexual Anorexia: Not a Common Term

Anorexic usually describes people with an eating disorder who can literally starve themselves to death. Logically, but incorrectly, many people assume that “sexual anorexia” means erotic starvation, or depriving oneself of sexual pleasure.

In his book, *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred*, Patrick Carnes writes about it as a disorder that parallels sexual addiction (a term that he coined) and compulsivity. Sexual anorexia he describes as “an obsessive state in which the physical, mental, and emotional task of avoiding sex dominates one’s life.” The sufferer is obsessed with avoiding sex and finds it repulsive—which is wholly different from having a low libido or being simply not interested in sex.

Sexual Anorexia is different from having low sexual desire. Those with low sexual drives do not avoid sex, but can’t activate their libido, try as they might. They simply lack interest, since their desire has been squelched or is non-existent. They may be avoiding a partner who wants sex more than they do, but they also seek to avoid confronting their own low desire.

Sexual anorexia takes on many forms:

1. A pattern of resistance to any sexual topic or overture
2. Continuing that pattern of avoidance, even though he may know it’s destructive to the relationship and might drive his partner away
3. Going to great lengths to avoid his partner’s sexual contact or affectionate attentions.
4. Rigid or judgmental attitudes toward sexuality and the physical body—his partner’s and his own

5. Obsessing over sex and how to avoid it, to a point where it interferes with normal living

The sexual anorexic’s main goal is to find ways to separate intimacy and sex. Men and women alike can suffer from this disorder. Most initially feel out-of-sorts and keep silent about their apathy, lest they be judged negatively in today’s sexually-affirmative society.

I often see this affliction in gay male couples. They often break up, thinking that there is nothing they can do to fix their impasse. “If desire isn’t there anymore,” they assume, “that must mean it’s over.” But that’s not true.

To bring passion and sex back into your relationship, you have to want to do it—and know that this time around, it takes work. It wasn’t work in the beginning, when nature was on your side, drugging you with excitement and ecstasy. To bring it back in healthy doses now, you’re on your own—and you can.

Smart Things Gay Male Couples Can Do to Rekindle Their Sex Life

1. Plan time for sex. Most couples—gay and straight—insist they shouldn’t have to plan for sex, which should come naturally and spontaneously the way it did in the beginning of their relationship. But after the first five years, you must make time for it. Planning can help you anticipate being together, making the coming experience more exciting.

2. Focus on some detail(s) you find attractive about your partner. Is your partner not quite as attractive as when you first got together? He’s put on some pounds, lost some hair, and doesn’t seem as hot to you now.

Then focus on what you do like about him—his genitals, hair, feet, hands? The way he kisses? Focus on any aspect of him that most arouses you.

3. Fantasize about some hot experience you had in the past. It can be an experience and/or fantasy with your current partner, or with someone else. The popular press media claims that not being fully present with a partner during sex is destructive and to fantasize about anyone else is like cheating. Not true! If that’s the only way you and your partner can enjoy sex, that might be an issue. But doing this every so often can spark sexual excitement in you both.

4. Watch porn together; get on the webcam with other guys on the Internet. This aphrodisiac can heighten your sexual desire—and thus, for each other. There’s nothing wrong with being stimulated outside your relationship, if you bring that sexual energy back into the relationship with your partner. Again, this is no problem unless it’s the only way you can have sex together or one of you is jealous. This would not be recommended if so.

5. Consider opening up your relationship. Many gay couples open their relationships after five to seven years together. In fact, studies show that 75% of gay male couples have non-monogamous relationships. However, these couples communicate and have agreements with each other so that both know that neither is cheating or doing anything in secret. This frank openness helps partners help them reactivate sexual desire in one another.

6. Role-play. Have you and your partner ever discussed your deepest, darkest sexual secrets? Maybe one or both of you like to be spanked? Maybe humiliating someone sexually turns you on? Perhaps you’ve never told

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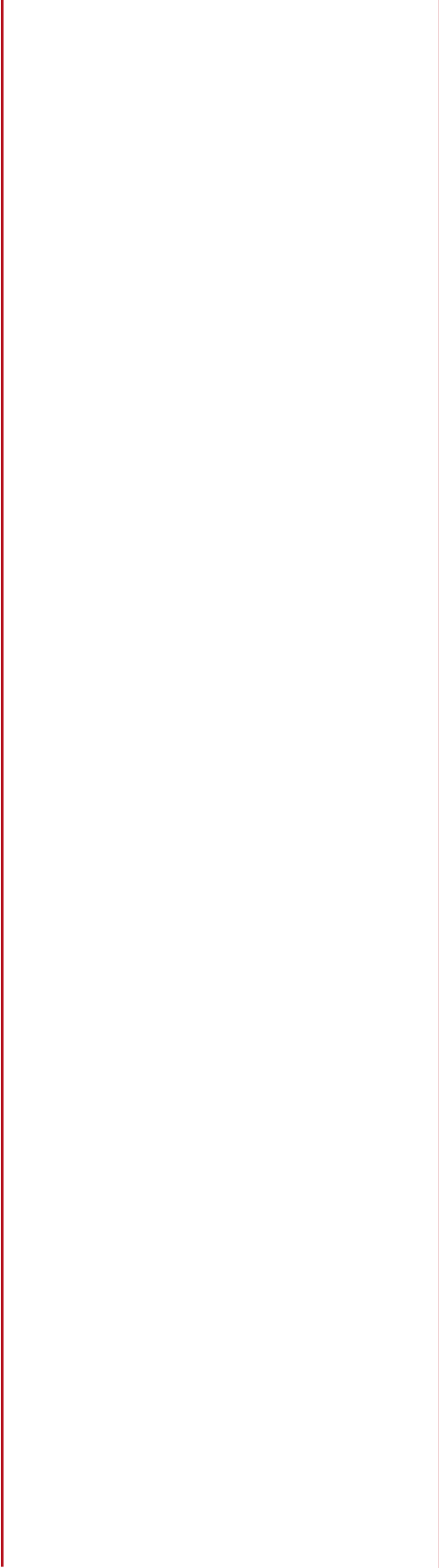
him of your fetish of licking his feet or armpit? Fantasy role play can help you escape daily living, forget about your busy lives, and perhaps even problems in your relationship. Remember, you should only do this when you feel good about each other. The goal is to connect, not disconnect.

7. Do anything except have sex.

After a long drought in a relationship, engaging in sex directly may be too tall an order. If so, give each other massages. Take a bath or shower together, lie naked beside each other, kiss, rub strawberries on each other's lips and feed each other. But whatever you do, don't have sex! If you both honestly decide to, fine-but your goal should not to create any pressure to perform.

Gay male couples not having sex for long periods of time can now come out of the closet of shame and lonely isolation, knowing that their worry is more common generally talked about. Following some of these guidelines or creating your own, you might not have to walk away from the relationship you've always wanted. ■

Gay Guise, continued



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