

# 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.*

## Recognition Of Relationships Could Replace Criticism

Parts of this article originally appeared in the Detroit Jewish News in 1997

All of us human beings long for contact and connection with one another. We adults yearn to be in lasting, loving relationships. Straight or gay, there's no difference.

But gays and lesbians are told that our committed relationships are "forbidden" and "dirty," that our same-gender unions are "bad" and "wrong." We're the only minority that mainstream society shames and criticizes for desiring and longing to be in committed relationships within our own culture.

We want nothing more than what everyone else enjoys: to have our relationships acknowledged and recognized as valid.

All I've ever wanted are the exact same rights and privileges as my sister. She is legally married, wears her wedding band, talks openly about her husband, and brings him to all events and family gatherings—where he's always invited. No one would even think to say, "Honey, we don't want to hear about your sex life, so take off that wedding band. Don't tell us about your husband. Don't bring him around to anything that puts us in contact with him. That just feels like you're shoving your heterosexuality down our throats!"

Our culture struggles under the blanket assumption that everyone is heterosexual, like the one that everybody's is a Christian. Every year, people wish me a "Merry Christmas, Joe," and "Happy Easter". Most times, if I inform them I'm Jewish, they politely say, "Oh, I apologize! Happy Hanukkah or "Happy Passover". Never has anybody said, "Why do you need to tell me that? Now, all I can do is imagine you praying

a yarmulke on your head in a tallis (the prayer cloth over your shoulders), praying in synagogue and I'm disgusted!" But if I tell them that they've mistakenly assumed I'm straight, they'll say I'm "pushing this in people's faces" or "trying to make a statement." Yet no one would ever accuse my sister or any other heterosexual of doing that.

The term for this attitude is heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality is "natural" and therefore superior;

that everybody is innately heterosexual and can be somehow cured or "reprogrammed" from being gay. It's about rights and privileges granted to heterosexuals that are denied to lesbians and gays. It perpetuates the myth that gay and lesbian relationships are brief, being primarily sexual, rather than affectional in nature.

Gay men especially are regularly criticized for our sexuality.

Mainstream society tells us we are promiscuous, that anonymous sex is all we want. But when we push for our monogamous relationships to be valued and legalized, we're told we can't have it and are wrong for wanting our committed unions to be officially recognized. It seems that some straight people want it both ways, and that isn't fair.

For any gay or lesbian, it's easier to be single than partnered. Single, we can be less visibly part of a culture. Our identity can be kept more separate, even closeted. And society is marginally more comfortable with things that way: "Don't ask, don't tell."

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*"I do grow tired of being minimized down to a sexual being, for society's inability to look past my being gay. Because we are all much more than that."*

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When partnered, however, we become instantly visible and must suddenly struggle over how much to share with family, friends, co-workers. We're asked whether we'll be bringing a date to the upcoming bar mitzvah or wedding, or when we plan to get married, or who our "friend" is and why he shares our living quarters.

The decision to tell can often be painstaking. How to tackle it depends on one's comfort level, because reactions to our disclosures will vary. Human beings tend to project their own feelings onto other "different" cultures—including ours. If they feel uncomfortable themselves, they claim that we are trying to shock them for admitting who we are. If they're preoccupied with our sexual behavior, they accuse us of being sexually preoccupied; when all we're trying to do is be ourselves.

I'm always startled when anyone challenges me on my desire to be completely out and for telling people that I'm partnered with another man. Yes, I know that if I were silent or more hidden, they might be more comfortable. But I wouldn't be!

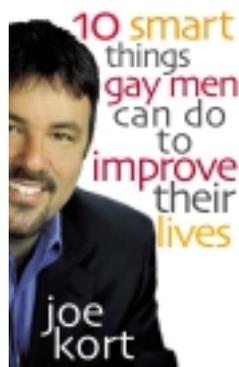
Before Mike and I were married under Reform Judaism in October, 2000, we had the same desires as most other soon-to-be-married couples. We wanted a shower thrown for us before our wedding, to see our picture in *The Jewish News* announcing our engagement, and a wedding to publicly celebrate our love for each

another. We wanted to be each other's insurance beneficiary; as well as the Social Security benefits just as the survivor of a married couple is legally entitled to. Should either of us fall ill or suffer an accident, we wanted hospital visitation privileges and to be involved in making decisions. But we're denied these rights, because men cannot be legally bound to each other anywhere in the United States of America.

None of this would be in question if we could legally marry. That doesn't feel unreasonable, yet people tell me it is.

I do grow tired of being minimized down to a sexual being, for society's inability to look past my being gay. Because we are all much more than that. Of course lesbians and gays have a human sex drive, as well as emotional needs like everybody else. Legally, we too should be granted the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It's everyone's birthright to be loved, to be sexually and emotionally fulfilled, and to be able to embrace that desire without shame.

I have a strong emotional investment in making my partnership with Mike work. He is my family, my confidant and friend, and also my sexual partner—and has been since 1993. I want the world to know how proud I am, for all of that.



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