

Kort's Korner

Volume 1, Issue 12 - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



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

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

Couples Must Learn About the Stages of Love

Originally printed in *Between the Lines*, February 1997

Lesbians and Gays are a sexually abused culture. We are under sexual assault regularly from society. We are only seen for our sex acts and are told that we are dirty and bad for having sexual feelings and for wanting intimate relationships with members of our own gender.

With a lifetime of receiving these messages we run from each other so as not to be exposed or identified as one of those "forbidden and dirty people." We have no one to tell. Oprah Winfrey talks about the first time she saw African American people on television. She was watching Ed Sullivan introduce the Supremes and ran through her home yelling to her family in excitement and pride that African Americans were on TV.

Can you imagine any of us as gays and lesbians doing this as children - or even adults - yelling through our home that homosexuals were on television? Of course not.

We enter adult love relationships with internalized messages that we are inherently damaged and flawed as people. Problems begin to arise as a result. What we do not realize, however, is that these problems are supposed to happen and they can offer us the greatest amount of personal healing. Problems can also help a relationship grow and strengthen.

We enter relationships through the doorway of romantic love. This is a time when people report feelings of elation, exhilaration and euphoria. Partners will say things like, "Oh, I can't live without you," and/or "It seems like I've always known you. I feel whole when I'm in your presence."

This feeling is strongest in the presence of one's partner. It is during this period of time we can go without much sleep. If we have been depressed, we are less so. Addictions seem to subside and so on. This stage is what our society calls real love.

"Real love can only emerge once partners move through romantic love and the power struggle."

Movies, books, television, songs, etc. focus on this period because it feels so great. But it is not real love. It is only nature's way of bringing two

people together. It is supposed to happen and supposed to come to an end. Most people do not know this. For us, as lesbians and gays, it is a time that has even more importance to us.

It is like we have found something that we were told we would never have. We feel so loved and authentic. We have waited a lifetime for a connection to someone like this and we don't want it to end. And when it does end, it moves us to sometimes even more despair about relationships than we had before. It is like confirmation that we are doomed and cannot have long-term healthy relationships.

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After romantic love ends, the next stage of a relationship is called the power struggle. It, too, is supposed to happen and supposed to end. However, this phase does not feel as good and disillusionment arises. It is here that we are most aware of the differences between ourselves and our partner. Conflict arises as a result of the belief that these differences are not good for a relationship when in fact they are.

This conflict is growth (both personal and relational) trying to happen. It promotes a way to differentiate from one's partner and for each to keep a sense of self and also be a couple. For lesbians and gays, it is even more important to us in relationships to keep our sense of self because we have spent a lifetime being forced to conform and disown ourselves.

Thus, it seems easier to terminate the relationship, have affairs, and engage in addictions rather than face the conflict and fear of losing ourselves.

Many also feel that it is confirmation that we cannot have relationships. The good news, however, is that the power struggle we face with our partners is a positive indicator that we are with the right person. It is that person who will challenge us to make necessary changes for ourselves. It is an opportunity to maintain closeness while still maintaining one's own individuality.

Isn't that what we want for ourselves from society as a whole and from our families anyway? To be who we are, they who they are and to allow the differences to exist. Incompatibility is grounds for a relationship and is the norm for partnerships. If you don't know this information and what to do about working it through you can walk away from your dream partner.

Real love, mature love can only emerge once partners move through romantic love and the power struggle. Gays and lesbians deserve to know this information and to have the relationship of their dreams. It is our birthright.

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