

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.

Gay Shmay! Just Don't Be Alone - Throughout Our Culture We Need Strong Mentors

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Webster's New World Dictionary defines culture as the "ideas, skills, arts of a people communicated or passed along to succeeding generations.

"The Jewish culture was passed onto me mostly by my bubbie. Although not a formally educated woman, my bubbie knows quite a bit of Jewish religion and culture and has been obedient and loyal to it throughout her life.

As I write this, I am reminded that she wanted (no, insisted!) that I use her name in my articles.

"Yusella," she says, "I notice when you mention me in your articles you don't say my name... why?"

"Bubbie," I respond, "I did not know you had a name until I was a teenager... everyone calls you bubbie, even your friends!"

I had quite a bit of contact with Bubbie growing up because she helped my mother raise me. She taught me the reasons and meanings behind lighting candles for the Sabbath, keeping kosher (as a child I was always so upset that she would never know the taste of a cheeseburger or pizza with pepperoni in her life!) and observing the High Holidays. I witnessed a woman who was full of religious morality, spirituality and holiness. She is always filled with joy whenever she gets a chance to be a part of a Jewish experience. I can listen to her stories for hours about her experiences as a little girl coming to America from Russia with all the other Jews. In fact, I have videotaped her telling them so I will never forget not only her words but her way of telling these stories.

Unfortunately, not only did she teach me spirituality she taught me superstition as well. Admittedly, to avoid bad luck, when I accidentally spill the salt, I shake it over my left shoulder three times (or is it my right

shoulder?... I can never remember so I always to both just in case); if I sneeze while I am talking about someone who has passed away, I lift both my ears; and if it seems like someone is giving me the evil eye I say "tooh-tooh-tooh" through my index and middle finger over and over again.

But I did not have anyone to teach me the gay way of life. As a gay little boy and gay teen, and now a gay adult. There were no gay bobbies to teach about gay culture.

So, in the gay and lesbian culture, our identity is formed in adulthood and we mentor each other and ourselves. Some very wonderful things characterize our culture. One is that we are not bound by gender roles. This is a freeing experience so that when partnered, stereo-typical expectations do not exist.

Everything has to be negotiated. Imagine two men partnered in which both have been groomed to be breadwinners and providers as men usually are. Someone has to take care of the home. Or two women partnered, having been raised to be nurturers and home based. Someone has to go out and work. Se we get to decide what works best for us and not what we are expected to do.

We also have more freedom around sexuality that other cultures. This is largely due to heterosexuals having defined lesbians and gays mostly by our sexual desire so we explore and examine our sexual nature more openly.

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I think the best feature of our culture as gays and lesbians is our overall level of courage and honesty. It takes bravery and sincerity to come out of the closet in this anti-gay society in which we live. When closeted, we dishonestly present a false self to others because of fear of hate and rejection. To come out is an act of assertiveness and affirmation in a society that would rather we stay dishonest and passive.

The honesty it takes to come out is so profound that when others learn about our gayness, they become honest with us as well. It forces truthfulness to the forefront for all.

This was best illustrated in the movie *In and Out* in which Kevin Kline portrays a gay man who comes out. There is a scene in which his mother and her girlfriends are sitting around talking about this "outing" and they decide to take risks and be honest with each other and "come out" about their own deep dark secrets. It is done very appropriately and best shows what actually happens to us and those around us when we tell our truth.

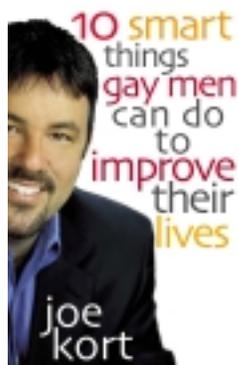
As I said, there are no Bubbie's in the lesbian and gay culture. There are still very few gay mentors who can or will come forward and be available to gay and lesbian youth. There are many people who will not allow it also.

I am always filled with grief when a man older than I am, in his 40's, 50's, 60's and even 70', comes to me because I am out and asks me what it is like to be gay and to teach him the gay culture. It should be the other way around.

I long for a bubbie-like presence in our culture to nurture me and teach me the kinds of things about what it means to be a gay man as I was taught about what it means to be a Jew.

I will end with the most healing words that were ever said to me in my whole life. When I told Bubbie I was gay at age 23, she looked at me and said, "Gay Shmay, Yusselah, just don't be alone!"

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