

Showering with other men is a privilege

Recently I posted on my Facebook page my anger at the men who are opposed to showering with openly gay men in the military. This came after reading an article on Alternet.org entitled, ["Homophobic Group Argues Gay Soldiers Should Shower Apart From Straight Soldiers"](#). I labeled these straight men as nothing more than scared, ignorant, homophobic and threatened. I regret having such a strong and narrow mindset now however I don't know that I am completely wrong and I do recognize that I was having an overreaction

Here is a direct quote from me on my wall:

This is about patriarchy where straight men feel their sexual eroticism is central and dominant and G-d forbid women and gay men share sexual power. Straighten are frightened of losing their power.

My anger reaction comes from the mindset that people believe that gay equals sex and that all gay men want to do is hump the next guy with whom he comes in contact. I remember vividly my mother telling me in the summer before 6th grade that I would be showering with other boys for gym class. As a gay child and one moving rapidly toward puberty this was overwhelmingly exciting and titillating. Imagine if heterosexual boys were suddenly told they were going to have access to the female locker room. Quickly I realized that this was not going to work out well as erections were not so easy to control and I knew that I would have them in the locker room. All I remember thinking that summer is of being humiliated and exposed as a "fag" right there for all to see me standing at attention--literally!

So, like other gay boys who are placed in situations with other males in locker rooms, I learned to look straight ahead and think of anything other than the naked males who were around me. This was stressful and I remember being full of anxiety. However, I learned to get used to it and become desensitized to the images while I was in the shower. I admit that I would go home and masturbate the images that I had seen and fantasize that anything but just showering was going on in that locker room.

Gay boys like myself learn to be appropriate and respectful in the locker room. While it is true there are some gay males who are not respectful and gawk and sexualize other men openly in the locker room, they are the minority.

That said, I have to admit that as a gay man I do see showering and changing in the locker room as a privilege that I take seriously. I know it would make people more comfortable if I said, "No there is nothing sexual about it and it is neutral for me" but it is not.

The argument that if straight men were allowed to shower with women is not a good comparison for gay men showering with other men in the military or anywhere else because we gay men have been showering with other males our whole lives whereas straight men have not been doing so with women. Gay men develop ways to cope that straight men would not have as adults suddenly thrown in with naked women.

A former college roommate and friend of mine gave me permission to post his response to me on Facebook wall here on my blog:



Joe Kort, Ph.D. AND ASSOCIATES

All joking and intolerance of heterosexuals aside, what DO we do about people who genuinely feel uncomfortable about showering with overtly gay people who might be titilated by seeing them naked? You're attitude can't seriously be, as that article suggests, "oh, those backwards bigots! Get over it!"---can it? Just because someone is uncomfortable being naked around strangers of the opposite sex (whether literally the opposite sex, or just constructively---i.e., gays) doesn't make them bigots. Are women bigots who don't want to change in front of strange men? Seriously, we should be adults and be responsive to people's sensitivities and vulnerabilities. It's not unreasonable to be uncomfortable at the possibility, let alone likelihood, of people leering lasciviously while one showers or undresses in a communal setting. And you must admit, in the general population, there WILL be people who gawk or leer. C'mon---we're men---it's what we do, a thousand times a day. If it walks, wriggles or crawls, we're looking at it coming or going, sizing it up, giving it a score, storing it in our camel-hump memory for emergency use later if necessary. Sure, changing the DADT policy won't change the ratio of hetero to homo, but the key consideration is that DADT affords an "ignorance is bliss" benefit. I can understand why, for some people, it's uncomfortable to shower in front of people who are covertly gay and, by definition, turned-on by members of your "sexual category."

Either it's "Don't Ask Don't Tell", and "ignorance is bliss," and people just go on not knowing who might be susceptible to titilation, and keep showering together, and no one is the wiser but the gays get their red meat and the "homo-phobes" (i.e., those who are uncomfortable showering with gays), get their state of denial. Or else we have "Nobody Asked But Look At Me, I'm Telling Anyway", and gays don't get court-martialed out of the service, and get to live freely, but we have separate showers because we're sensitive about people's sexual issues and vulnerabilities. But you can't have both!---can't have your cake and eat it too. i.e., you don't get the communal showers as if no one knows and its no big deal, at the same time you get to trumpet that you're gay and harbor a sexual preference for the group you're showering with!

It just doesn't seem bigoted, prejudiced, unreasonable, or backwards to me. It's just considerate, to have separate showers in such situations. I would LOVE being able to shower with the women at the gym, and pretend like it's no big deal, I'm just there to work-out, and how dare women PRESUME I'm automatically turned-on by them just because I'm heterosexual and turned-on by women as a group. But seriously---there would, in any general population of women, be some I'm leering and gawking at! And they would be completely reasonable and within their rights to require separate showering facilities, just SUSPECTING that, given the law of averages, there would be men like me out there!

I can hear the howls of protest already, at my impudence in contesting this position, or in unknowingly using some politically-incorrect words or phrases; some of your fans, I've noticed, simply have no tolerance for disparate opinions and principles, and assume those who disagree are bigoted louts. Still, I welcome all of you "educating" me, if I'm wrong on some premise or conclusion. But I do wonder---is the "gay agenda" about being treated equally, under a fair application of The Rule of Law, and about the freedom to be yourself without repercussion and blow-back (no pun intended!)? Or is it about dispensing with the cumbersome art of persuasion, and instead FORCING an expedient change in attitudes?

Joe Kort, Ph.D.

AND ASSOCIATES

I cannot say I disagree with my former college roommate. I also feel that my side makes sense too. Some men are overreacting while others are not and have to struggle with this and work this through. What do you think?