



kort's korner

Homo for the Holidays

WITH THE HOLIDAYS APPROACHING, my clients talk about how they dread the further trauma of going home to their families and not being able to—or feeling able to—be out and open with them about being gay. They call

it depression, but I say trauma because it better expresses something emotionally charged and distressing that happens, leaving you nowhere to release and express the emotions.

Over the past years with increased discussions about gays not being able to be legally married or be in the priesthood, I've listened to clients shout and weep, expressing their hurt, pain and fear at knowing they live in a country that passes laws against them. Among those they pass on the street, they wonder who might have voted to ban marriage for gays and/or are in favor of keeping gays out of the priesthood. They wonder, as I do—who betrays us?

They really want to express their dismay at work, in their families, to their neighbors, but many don't dare out of fear of rejection, alienation and abandonment. They do not want to experience the betrayal all over again.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD), first identified in sol-

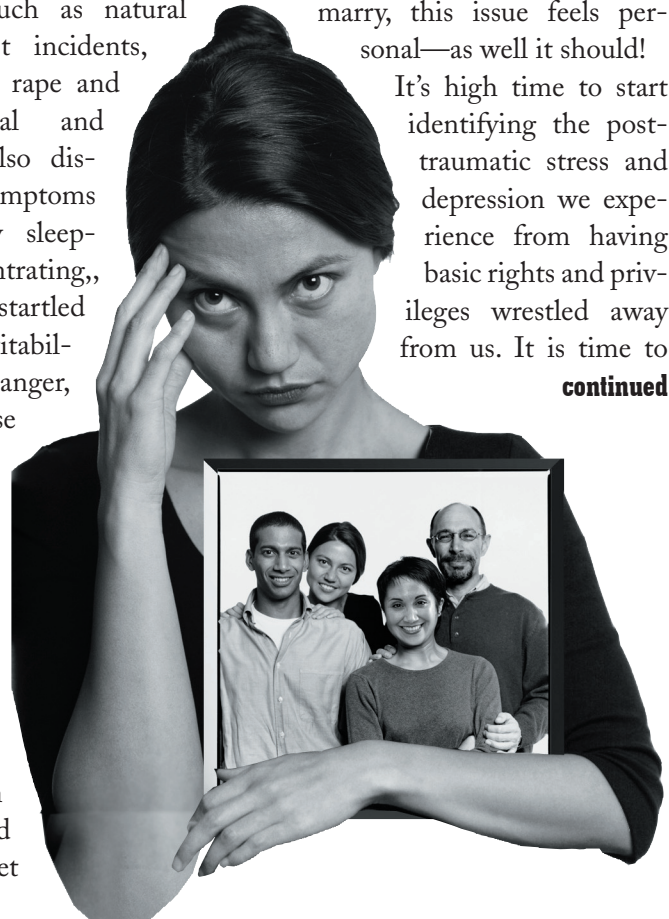
diers returning home from wars, is a psychological disorder that follows having endured life-threatening events. Later, psychologists noted that those who experienced other traumas such as natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, rape and childhood sexual and physical abuse also displayed PTSD. Symptoms include difficulty sleeping and concentrating,, becoming easily startled and agitated, irritability, outbursts of anger, depression, intense anxiety, substance abuse, nightmares and flashbacks, and feelings of helplessness. We lesbians and gays are vulnerable to PTSD, because we often lack social and family support, get

blamed for others' homophobic and heterosexist remarks, and must live with the threats and dangers, perceived and real, of being discriminated against. And I would say the recent election was a natural disaster, in my humble opinion!

In my office, I see more lesbian and gay couples and individuals struggling on a daily basis with the media's negative political views about us. Even if they aren't planning to join the priesthood or marry, this issue feels personal—as well it should!

It's high time to start identifying the post-traumatic stress and depression we experience from having basic rights and privileges wrestled away from us. It is time to

continued



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Homo for the Holidays, continued

claim back our rights, regardless of the passage of ignorant laws or what others do (and don't) want for us. No longer should we wait for others to give us permission to heal ourselves.

This holiday, download your emotions. Don't remain silent about being and living gay and lesbian. Even doing one thing differently with one institution, one group, one person can relieve your depressive PTSD symptoms and help you feel more empowered. Taking action is our one antidote to keep us from internalizing the hate and oppression coming our way, and treating ourselves and others badly as a result.

Avoidance, as in hiding, avoiding, fleeing, freezing, submitting—or conversely, fighting, shouting or being irrational—will only keep you traumatized. Herewith, some tips to keep yourself from being depressed during the holiday season, when many feel guilty for not feeling joyous.

How to be Homo For the Holidays

1. If you are not completely out, tell at least one family member, colleague, or friend that you are gay.
2. Take your partner home with you for the holidays, don't go separately to your own families.
3. Talk about GLBT issues with one group of people, be they friends, family, colleagues, or

fellow students. You don't have to get personal in terms of telling them you're gay yourself; you can just express your feelings on the issue. Whether or not you've come out, that's a step in the right direction.

4. Volunteer for a GLBT organization or donate to help them fight for our political and social rights.
5. Seek professional mental health help from a GLBT-affirmative therapist.
6. Write an editorial to your local newspaper.
7. Locate—and work for—GLBT friendly candidates
8. Write to the American Family Association, Women For America or another anti-gay organization and tell them you will not be oppressed by their hateful views.
9. Buy books on marriage and other rights for GLBT's and be informed!