

# Kort's Korner

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## It's Official: Toy Maker Says Tinky Winky is Straight

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Jerry Falwell and others can rest now that the Itsy Bitsy Entertainment Co. has reassured them that the Teletubby doll they license, "Tinky Winky," is not gay. This reminds me of the hype surrounding Sesame Street characters Burt and Ernie who were accused of being a gay couple a few years ago. Since then Burt seems to have almost disappeared from the show.

Spokespeople for these characters assure the public that they are just dolls and puppets and that they do not have sexual orientations. I would like to imagine just for a moment that these puppets are gay or that they symbolize gay men and youth.

What is wrong with that? We don't have a problem imagining that the puppets are straight. How nice it would be for children to witness tolerance and acceptance toward what looks like a feminine and sensitive boy that could possibly be gay. As a gay man who once was a gay little boy like that, I bag the question, "What is wrong with that?"

What is wrong is that our society insists on equating "gay" with sex. Consequently, when a child is considered to be gay they immediately think of adult gay sex. People want to protect children from adult sexuality. That is appropriate. But "gay" does not equal, "sex" anymore than "straight" equals "sex."

We don't do this to children thought to be heterosexual. Gay and Lesbian adults were once children too. In my generation we had no role models. Television shows with characters like Dr. Smith from "Lost in Space," or Miss Hathaway from "The Beverly Hillbillies" were hardly role models. If images of gay and lesbian adults and children were shown being accepted and tolerated as just different, not

bad and wrong, our suffering would have been less as children. But people are afraid that this would "encourage homosexuality" and then "everyone might want to be one." Is heterosexuality that fragile? I think not.

I shudder when I hear people state that homosexuality is a learned behavior. Again, the assumption is that homosexuality is a behavior and nothing more. I usually ask where would we go to "learn"

this behavior. Gay and Lesbian charm schools? My question is as outrageous as the first. I often joke about when I "decided to be gay" and say that it was immediately following the first time I was harassed for it. If it could be learned, then it would not exist.

Certainly our society does everything it can to prevent homosexuality from even existing, let alone being taught. We are seeking this with

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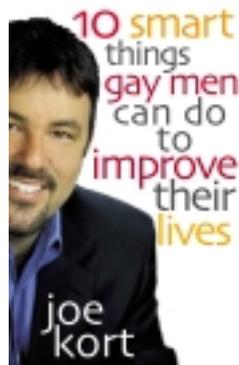
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*Continued on reverse*

the most recent push for the acronym HC (Homosexual Content), to be aired immediately before a television show begins that involves gay and lesbian characters.

If we continue with my imagining that puppets and dolls could be gay and lesbian, how healing that would be for gay and lesbian children and adults. Then Bert and Ernie could come out as, in fact, a gay couple and adopt Tinky Winky as their child. This would offer Tinky a home without judgment and role models that are healthy gay adults. Tinky is already perceived by his Teletubby friends in a positive way. Maybe he could avoid some of the traumas we all went through as gay and lesbian youth.

Instead of withdrawing and hiding from scorn and hate, he could evolve with healthy self-esteem and contribute to society as a well-adjusted gay male doll. Too bad this is just my imagination. And it is very sad that even puppets and dolls are not immune to the homophobia and heterosexism that is so prevalent in today's world.



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