

I Was the Other Man: An Insider's Look at Why Gay Marriage Will Never Work

By Joseph Sciambra

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During the over 10 years I spent in the homosexual lifestyle, twice I became the "other man" in the midst of a so-called "gay marriage." At the time, since same-sex marriage was not recognized in the United States, both couples were "married" in private ceremonies by an obliging minister; one of the couples were in their late 40s and the other in their 50s.

For the most part, both had arrived in San Francisco from other parts of the country during the initial flurry of the gay rights movement in the 1970s. In those days, from what they all told me, each took a very active part in the hedonism and promiscuity that would later give birth to the AIDS epidemic; in fact, one of the men had become HIV-positive, lost his former lover, and then later married his current negative husband.

Personal histories were twisted and associations always rather complicated: Sometimes they would play together, sometimes separately; occasionally, jealousy would enter the scene — more often, a pervasive air of depression and anxiety encompassed everything and everyone. Strangely, in these relationships, often, with the participants living inside the beautifully restored Victorians surrounding the Castro, I internally hoped for a few moments of peaceful domesticity; surprisingly, I found them as dysfunctional as the rest of us who were younger and still partying in the discos, bathhouses and sex clubs. Gay marriage hadn't changed anyone — it merely gave a little solace to the over-sexed and the weary.

Generally, as is the case, more so after the sexual revolution, gay men enter the lifestyle while in their late teens or early twenties. At that age, there are plenty of opportunities to express oneself and to experiment. This newfound power can be heady at first; for instance, you were once the kid that no one wanted on their team, or the boy with the overly critical and unloving father, or the scared child that someone touched. Suddenly, you are with people who have largely gone through the same thing, though almost never admitting it; instead, everyone plays out the trauma of youth in a bizarre ceremony of re-enactment as healing. Now, you can dance into the throng, feel their warm bodies next to you, and imagine that you are finally part of the group. Older men, who want you to call them daddy, ask you out; and that moment of shame and embarrassment from your childhood doesn't seem strange or horrifying anymore, because you can live it over again and draw pleasure from it under what you think are your own terms.

In my 20s, this scenario played out over and over again. Yet things always got riskier, but I believed it was worth taking a chance in order to find love. Only, while I watched as more and more of my friends died — from AIDS, drugs and suicide — many of those around me, guys

entering their 40s and 50s, began to check out of the scene. Like me, the dangerous recklessness of being young and gay began to lose some of its allure, and, then, perhaps a new kind of happiness awaited in a mature form of homosexual monogamy.

On the periphery of homosexual understanding, in the pre-gay-marriage age of the 1990s, were small enclaves of middle-aged men who had lived through the perversity of their youth and survived to become a little more deliberate, but also increasingly alienated from the rampant sexuality at the core of gay being. Part of this self-imposed exile was a direct result of the gay obsession with youth and a muscular sort of vitality. Some pushed against this and remade themselves, through the use of hormone treatments and endless workouts, into hyper-masculine daddies, with a few former twinkles making porn comebacks as older tops ("twink" is gay slang for a young submissive and top refers to the dominant insertive partner). Many stayed away, choosing to couple up with men in their own age and social group. AIDS had claimed many friends and lovers, and this brought about a fear that channeled into a sort of forced stab at monogamy. But there was a constant pervasive unease that soured everything.

In 1989, then again, almost ten years later, I was the interloper or the other man in a gay relationship (marriage). For the most part, I was brought in acrimoniously, to "play" with one or both, because the initial fervor and fear that brought about the relationship was steadily sliding into conjugal apathy and sexual boredom. In the first instance, parameters and psychosexual borders were clearly defined from the beginning; although I was being accepted as an erotic participant in the relationship, neither would become emotionally involved with me. At that time, being as young as I was, that was enough for me: Just being around two seemingly well-adjusted gay men, who were apparently unscathed after outlasting the extreme hedonism of the now mythic 1970s, offered a respite from the constant one-night stands and meaningless but exciting encounters in the bathhouses. Perhaps, it also represented something that was then indefinable — that through all the endless sex, I was looking for just one person to love. Only this corrupted version of marital love was all I encountered; and, for a moment, it seemed real.

The second time was when I was much older, quickly getting burned out, and nearing the age when I could no longer physically or mentally keep up with the rapid-fire pace of modern homosexuality. I was shocked to find myself being labeled a "daddy" at 28; it seemed not that long ago when I had been the young and impressionable one seeking out the more worldly and experienced. It made me feel prematurely old, next to the new crop of teenagers, but it also brought about a numbing sense of failure: The happiness I did not find as a nubile boy, under the tutelage of the gay elders, I would now have to uncover as a purported mature instructor.

I didn't, so I turned to even older men. This new couple, then in their 50s, were a pair of former libertines. Like everyone else who had successfully missed the indiscriminately cutting sickle of

AIDS, they found some security in becoming serious roommates with benefits. When I met them, their sex life was safe, but routine. I was brought in to change all of that.

Although I observed a genuine affection between them, it was akin to the instant camaraderie which indelibly links all horror survivors. For, this was the characteristic that I witnessed in every same-sex couple: a bond of suffering enkindled by their shared memories of a childhood gone wrong: failed parents, tales of bullied boys and lonely nights spent crying out for love. It was a marriage forged through experience — of coming out, finding an introductory pride and hope in the gay lifestyle, then, seeing it dashed by the reality of collective gay self-centeredness and its propensity towards meaningless sex. They flee it, and by doing so, reveal its inherent dysfunction.

But that instability is only miniaturized and refined when it's focused inside a relationship. Things quickly become either sputtering or combustible. Because the complementarity between the opposite poles of male and female is nonexistent, the clash of testosterone agitates and antagonizes. The seemingly blissful harmony wanes, and the initial heat between the partners fizzles; they become codependent, but hungry for a sense of completeness that never materialized out of their bonding. Like the larger gay male world, it becomes sick; sex is the common denominator, as its fascist rule over those who accept and submit to its dominance are powerless against the prickly need to douse the unquenchable fire of a love unrealized, a perfect man yet unfound.

As the other man, I instinctively sensed this unease, a disquieting armistice that always seethed with sexual frustration. For it was a brotherhood born of anxiety and apprehension, a realization that the gay world continually spins out of control, incessantly chopping up every batch of newcomers. Therefore, the current obsession with gay marriage is not a step towards a version of heterosexual monogamy transplanted into the heads of gay men, but a withdrawal towards safety and an unconscious awareness that so far nothing (decriminalization, sexual liberation and acceptance) had worked.

I saw this in both the couples from my past, as there was also a palpable pride that gloried in their ability to seemingly overcome the gay sex-crazed stereotype — becoming more politically based as the 90s wore on. But it masked the truth of the situation: that these pacts were formed as a desperate response to the reality of gay depravity and the forcible expulsion of certain homosexual men deemed too old or no longer desirable; the tendency for these men to huddle into protective circles; the transitory nature of the strained monogamy in these relationships and the rapid re-encroachment of the gay sexual mindset; the opening up of gay couplings; the steadfast bluster about gay men who have "been together for years" despite their mutual history of continued sexual adventurism. In the end, it's all make-believe — a last-ditch effort to save a

way of life that is intrinsically self-destructive.

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