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## Homosexual Rites of Passage: A Road to Visibility and Validation

**Marie Mohler**

Harrington Park Press (December 1999)
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In the vein of the “Chicken Soup” series, Mohler has put together a book that examines the gay soul in the context of positive homosexual identity formation. The author was motivated to write the book because of a lack of knowledge on the topic, and as part of her own search for healing. The information presented is beneficial to a general audience in regards to the explanation of events and issues affecting the homosexual psyche.

Divided into two sections, the book begins with an exploration of issues that impede homosexual identity formation. Written in a somewhat academic style, this half includes a number of references to other works that provide a valuable resource of support. Mohler thoroughly defines and discusses the concepts that play a critical role in the homosexual’s search for positive identity.

She describes internalized homophobia as the largest obstacle in this search for a healthy identity. “Homophobia constitutes a persistent, intense, irrational fear of same-sex relationships which individuals often experience as overwhelming. Internalized homophobia occurs when homosexuals ingest this fear of shared intimacy between individuals of the same sex, and incorporate this irrational fear and shame into their identity.” The discussion continues with strategies for the homosexual to overcome fear and shame. A model of Homosexual Identity Formation is examined to help facilitate these changes.

In the second half of the book, which is much lighter reading, Mohler conveys the importance of establishing various rites of passage to affirm homosexual identities. “More often than not, homosexuals’ own families and the ones they love most are unable to understand their homosexuality. This, combined with the notion that validation and affirmation are paramount in the homosexual’s healthy identity development, has led to the creation of what is called Homosexual Rites of Passage (HRO).” Several rites of passage are described within each of six main areas: “firsts,” coming out, relationships and love, commitment rituals, family planning and aging rites. Mohler provides the reader with writing exercises to process past life experiences for the purpose of reshaping them into significant personal rites of passage.

The author’s original ideas are experiential and optimistic, and difficult constructs are presented in an understandable fashion. At times, Mohler’s journey is too individualized. Experiences and opinions from other men and women would have provided an even greater comprehension of the importance of the various rites. True to its intent, the book encourages gay men and lesbian women to adopt these significant growth markers as a means to validate the homosexual’s right to community and societal recognition and support.

PAUL J. WILLIS (November / December 1999)

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