

# Kort's Korner



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## Gay Today

Review By Bob Minor, Vol VII Issue 148 Monday September 1, 2003

Joe's practice specializes in sexual addiction, childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse, depression and anxiety.

He offers workshops for couples and singles. He runs a gay men's group therapy and a men's sexuality group therapy for straight, bi and gay men who are struggling with specific sexual issues.

His therapy services are for gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals.

"To disguise their authentic selves, gay men spend enormous amounts of time throwing others off track." That's not only true of gay men who haven't come out of the straight-acting closet, but of many otherwise "out" gay men in their relationships and even their committed partnerships.

Joe Kort knows. As a psychotherapist in practice in the Detroit area since 1985, he's seen the many ways people hide from themselves and the world around them. And he's seen the personal and social cost of the hiding.

The title of *10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives* makes this book sound like just another one of those self-help books that include titles which list the dumb and destructive things people do to remain stuck in old emotional, relational, and social patterns that prevent their happiness. Or the slick, popular self-help books that come and go with the seasons.

But it's not. Kort has pulled together wise and practical observations and recommendations for really improving lives -- with illustrations from the lives he's worked with that remind us of the gay men we know and are. That makes *10 Smart Things* an extremely helpful guide and a smart read.

"Affirm Yourself by Coming Out" isn't just another call to tell everyone we're gay, but a chapter that analyzes the excuses we give for internalized homophobia. The destructive expenditure of energy in not coming out in order to protect our parents, friends, and acquaintances from having to deal with their own homophobia, leads to "panic disorders, erectile difficulty, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual addiction and compulsivity, sexual anorexia, even suicide attempts."

How many LGBT people who are no longer dependent upon their parents for financial stability still can't sit their parents down and say: "Dad, mom, if you want to be in my life, this is how you'll have to act--and that means you've got to love the people I love."

In the process, Kort discusses the stages of gay identity formation and is unafraid to confront the

ambiguities involved in emotional and sexual identity that internalized and overt homophobia deny. A man can be, he points out, "hetero-emotional and homosexual." And a man's sexual behavior doesn't necessarily reflect his sexual orientation.

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Continued on reverse

“Graduate from Eternal Adolescence” calls gay men to give up beliefs such as: someone will rescue you when hard times come, or that the gay bar scene in general is any more developmentally and emotionally advanced than high school, or that people should know what you want in relationships without you asking. Kort even addresses why some gay men are so attracted to straight men.

“Maintain Rewarding Relationships,” “Understand the Stages of Love,” and “Commit to a Partner,” open up the search for a Mr. Right with practical, healthy commentary on what relationships really are and what the challenges of being in a committed partnership should be.

As a practitioner of “Imago Relationship Therapy,” Kort uses the insights of Harville Hendrix, author of the popular 1980's *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*. Hendrix emphasizes how we project the composite picture or image we received from childhood onto our prospective partners to see if they fit. The image directs our search for adult love, mostly unconsciously, so that partners hold the blueprint for the next stages of our personal growth. Not understanding what that image is sabotages our relationships.

Kort is not saying that the sole end of life is to find that Mr. Right who will save us from all our feelings of loneliness, incompleteness, unhappiness, and abandonment. Instead, he emphasizes that committed partnerships bring up our unexamined personal issues as opportunities for emotional and psychological growth. So, we have to do smart things about them.

There is little here about the place of deep friendships or how to maintain romance in a relationship. There's room for another book on that, and Kort would have much that is useful to say about those topics.

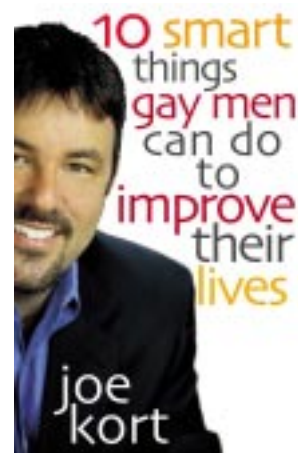
But these *10 Smart Things* could improve the lives of gay men - if we are willing to stop making the same mistakes, get beyond denial, pay attention, and put the effort into personal growth. Emotionally healthy gay men, and their lesbian sisters, have much to give the very sick society around us, more than they currently believe they do. For gay men, *10 Smart Things* is one of the best places to start.

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