



author's statement

10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives *by Joe Kort*

I WANTED TO WRITE THIS BOOK IN THE first place because there's so much good information out there about various dynamics in one's life, but little of it addresses gays and lesbians. An article or two just isn't enough. So I took ten issues I thought were most important and addressed them—primarily to a gay male audience.

I address topics that are mostly absent in other books for gay men such as coping with sexual addiction, as well as the typical problems that crop up in romantic relationships. I wanted to bring what I've learned in providing Gay Affirmative Psychotherapy, both professionally and clinically, apply it to gay men, and write about what works and what doesn't.

Because Imago is a gender-neutral model, it is very applicable to gay and lesbian relationships. The Imago literature for couples and singles is very well done, but is written mostly for a heterosexual reader, using heterosexual case examples. I wanted to take my personal history—plus my clinical experience as a psychotherapist—and write about how Imago applies to gay male couples, and explore the dynamics that occur specifically in male-to-male couples—from a gay man's point of view.

For example, the power struggle takes on an additional dimension. As men, we tend to maintain emotional distance and are socialized to keep our emotions to a minimum. In heterosexual relationships, it's usually the woman who's more relational and promoting closeness and

affection. With gay couples, though, these elements can get lost. Either one or both can get lost in overwork, too much volunteering, over-scheduling, or anything that helps them avoid their relationship. As relationship therapists, we need to do our best to educate the couple about how men's problems with socialization is doubled in a gay relationship—and how they can bring more affection and intimacy into their lives. People who read this book can understand how to treat gay men, both as individuals in relationship or single. I knew that many therapists would have a basic understanding of sexual addiction and Imago Relationship Therapy, but not necessarily as it applies to gay men. There's lots of political awareness about the issue of coming out, but not much information about coping with—and moving through—its various psychological states.

This is true even for therapists who work with gay men and their families. I hoped my book could clarify and educate people on the unique psychological and social factors that play such a strong part in developing a gay male's identity and his nonsexual relationships—with his family, with heterosexuals, lesbians, and other gay men.

I am also hoping that therapists read my book whether they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. I think providing quality therapy to gay men goes much deeper than a therapist's being gay or simply gay-friendly. It's about knowing the issues at hand. I worry about gay therapists who think they can help gay

men simply because they're gay themselves. Or straight therapists who believe they can treat gay men just because they're not homophobic.

This just isn't true. In reality, all of us were all imprinted with homophobia and heterosexism. Thus, any gay man should find a therapist who's confronted and dealt with his own homophobia. The therapist should be aware of what gay sexuality really is, without applying heterosexual or feminist standards to it. Some gay men come into therapy with those same standards, while others don't. Either way, it's imperative that therapists be aware of their local gay communities and how they operate, both on the outside and on the inside. No gay man should have to spend most of his sessions educating the therapist about what it means to be gay. A little bit is fine, of course. Also he should make sure his therapist is willing to be interactive and share, particularly about his or her own orientation. Most gays and lesbians have led lonely isolated lives because, given their closeted orientation, deeper emotional contact with other has been prohibited.

The therapist needs to offer a relational environment where the client can feel he's connecting. The therapist needn't be an open book but should be willing to share some things about himself, so that his client can feel a human connection. ■

Joe Kort is an Imago therapist practicing in Royal Oak, Michigan. His book, *10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives*, is available in bookstores August 1, 2003. Contact him at joekort@joekort.com.