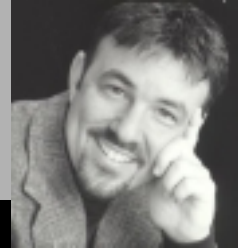


Kort's Korner

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Turns Out The Happy Couple Is Gay

By Kathleen Kelleher, Special to the LA Times (reprinted)

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.

Clinical psychologist John Gottman, a research scientist at the University of Washington who has studied heterosexual couples for 28 years, has tailored workshops explicitly for the needs of Gay and Lesbian (G&L) couples based upon research that examined the interactions of same-gendered couples. The 12-year study, which Gottman co-authored with UC Berkeley professor of psychology Robert Levenson, found similarities and differences in how Gay, Lesbian and Heterosexual couples interact.

We realized there were a lot of differences when we were observing men and women while studying marriages, said Gottman, who just submitted the study for publication. We couldn't tell if differences were biological or role-related. We decided to study same-gender couples, and we got interested in them for their own sake.

Gottman and his colleagues found that same-gender couples were much more optimistic in the face of conflicts than straight couples. If you compared how a person presented a problem in same-gender relationships, they showed less belligerence, less domineering, less sadness, less whining and more affection, humor and joy, said Gottman. Partners were also less distressed and more positive after a disagreement. While the research on same-gender unions is sparse, what the few studies focusing on G&L relationships have found is

that same-gender unions are comparable to heterosexual ones in satisfaction and quality. Researchers also found that there are fewer obstacles to leaving in same-gender unions and that they tend to dissolve more often than their heterosexual counterparts. There is more autonomy in G&L couples. But for G&L and straight couples alike, the bottom line is the same: When the bad outweighs the good, couples split.

"Positivity has much more influence in same-gender couples than in straight couples, where negativity triumphs over positivity."

Previous research has relied on same-gender couples self-report about their relationships. Gottman's study involved objective observations of same-gendered couples interacting. He compared 21 Gay couples, 21 Lesbian couples and 42 heterosexual couples all of whom had been together a minimum of two years. All the couples were videotaped discussing various topics and their physiological

measurements (heartbeat, finger pulse, etc) were taken to determine how agitated partners became when in conflict.

RESULTS:

- Same gender couples use fewer controlling, hostile emotional tactics. Generally, power sharing and fairness are more prevalent among same-gender couples than among heterosexual couples, said Gottman

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Continued on reverse

- In a fight, same-gender couples take it less personally. A G&L person can say something negative in a fight, and a partner is much less likely to be defensive, said Gottman. Positivity has much more influence in same-gender couples than in straight couples, where negativity triumphs over positivity.
- Unhappy G&L couples are better able to calm down while in a fight. For some reason, heterosexual couples become more physically agitated during a fight than same-gender couples. Same-gender couples are thus better able to soothe each other during conflicts or in the aftermath of a fight.
- In a fight, Lesbians show more anger, humor, excitement and interest than conflicting Gay men do. Gottman speculates that this may be a result of two women in a relationship who have been raised in a society where emoting is more acceptable for women than men.
- Gay men need to be especially careful to avoid negativity in conflict. If the initiator of conflict in a Gay relationship becomes too negative, his partner is not able to de-escalate the conflict as well as Lesbian or straight couples. Gay men may need extra help to offset the impact of negative emotions that inevitably come along when couples fight, said Gottman.

Part of Gottman's goal in doing the study was to give same-gender couples the same interscopic intervention to repair failing relationships that he has given heterosexual couples.

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