

Five Questions with Kort

Local psychotherapist releases new book – and inner comedian

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Joe Kort's released many books, including his latest "Gay Affirmative Therapy for the Straight Clinician," throughout his 23-year career as a psychotherapist. Now, he's ready to release, in public anyhow, another facet of his personality – the funny part. With eight

weeks training from a Royal Oak Comedy Castle class, he's fine-tuning his inner-comedian (he'll tell a few of his jokes on April 3 at Five15 in Royal Oak), which blossomed during childhood. "It most likely saved

my life as I experienced a lot of trauma and neglect growing up," says the self-proclaimed "therapedian," "and laughter helped me cope a lot with the horror that was going on around me."

Joe Kort

7:30 p.m. April 1
Joey's Comedy Club,
Livonia
7 p.m. April 3
Five15, Royal Oak
www.joekort.com

Most people probably assume that a therapist can't be funny. How will you prove them wrong?

If anyone has ever come to my talks or to my workshops they discover fast that I want to make them laugh as well as address the pain they are in. Personally, I do both, so I offer clients a chance to learn to do both as well.

Why did you feel the need to counsel, so to speak, other therapists on treating gay and lesbian folks?

I have been doing trainings on lesbian and gay issues to straight therapists for 20 years and have found time and time again they do not know the specific issues, which I felt were crucial in providing therapy. Many (straight therapists) still believe that homosexuality is influenced by one's formative years and that nurture as well as nature influence a gay or lesbian development. Science is increasingly pointing to nature and not nurture – and they are unaware of this. I cite the references in my book to illustrate this for them. Also, I was surprised at the amount of internalized homophobia amongst lesbian and gay therapists themselves. Their clients would say things to them like, 'I don't want to be a butch dyke,' or 'An effeminate gay man,' or 'A flag waving gay activist,' and the therapists would support that as if there is something wrong with that.

In some ways, how is it different helping gay and lesbian clients?

A big thesis of my book is that straight therapists forget that lesbians and gays were once gay children. Their work is usually helping with the adult issues and if reflecting back on childhood issues it is mostly – if not only – centered around family dynamics. Missing is the social neglect and trauma of what it was like to be a gay little girl or boy. I feel that is crucial to explore even if the client says they did not know their sexual orientation as a child. Straight – and even gay/lesbian therapists – do not know that there are stages to the coming out process, that gender issues play a crucial part in gay and lesbian relationships, (and) that 8

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percent of the gay male population suffer from sexual addiction and compulsivity.

The book is clearly geared toward clinicians, and might give gay and lesbian people little hope that straight therapists can help them. Should they feel that way?

No, they should not feel that way at all. I want gays and lesbians to know that straight therapists wanted me to write this book because they wanted to be informed. I hope this gives hope that straight therapists want to know the issues.

How do we know if a therapist is, as you say, not just 'gay-friendly' but 'gay-informed'?

Language is the biggest giveaway of being gay friendly and not gay informed. If they say, 'Yes, I see lesbian and gay couples. A couple is a couple,' that is a sign of being uninformed. If they use the word 'homosexual' and not 'gay' or 'lesbian' they are not gay informed. If they refer to the LGBT culture as an 'alternative lifestyle' that would show lack of being informed. If they speak only about their opinion and not refer to the GLBT literature that is another sign. While it is OK for a therapist to say, 'You know, I don't know much about that. Tell me about that,' it reflects a lack of internal motivation to be informed outside the therapy room. I receive many clients who don't want to spend their dollars for therapy training about gay and lesbian culture.

Chris Azzopardi is the entertainment editor of Between The Lines. To comment on this article, send an e-mail to chris@pridesource.com.