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People-based Therapy: Imago for Gay and Lesbian Relationships

IN A SOCIETY THAT SEES MOST relationships as disposable, lesbian and gay relationships are seen and treated as even more disposable. Thus, when conflict arises and the relationship becomes more difficult, it seems easier for lesbian and gay couples to give up on the relationship rather than face the struggle together.

Many lesbian and gay couples do not have children, the legal or religious sanction of marriage, family and friend support, or public recognition to reinforce a reason to stay together. Imago relationship therapy offers these couples a reason to stay in the relationship.

Custom Made Love

The premise is that conflict between two partners is normal and is supposed to happen. We pick partners who resemble familiar love and carry the positive and negative traits of our primary caretakers who raised us. Then the conflicts which appear in relationship are the unresolved issues from childhood in disguise. Each partner's healing and individual growth depends on the two staying together and resolving these differences. In other words,

we return to the scene of the crime in childhood, only this time we solve the crime in adulthood.

Gender Neutral

Imago relationship therapy is so important for our community because it offers, for the first time, a theory and practice that is not gender based, but rather more people-based. We do not have the approval of society allowing us to learn about dating and romantic love with members of the same gender during adolescence or early adulthood. In fact, most gays and lesbians spend most of their early lives running from each other and ourselves for fear of discovery and being scorned by society. A great deal of time is spent in early childhood and young adulthood conforming to heterosexuality. It is very traumatic to question one's

true identity and, when discovered, to then feel it necessary to keep it secret from one's inner self, the outside world and one's own family. So, imagine the difficulties lesbian and gay couples face in attempting to come become more intimate with each other. Imago offers hope.

Acceptance vs. growth for all couples

Relationships challenge us to learn more about ourselves; to stretch into aspects of ourselves that are undeveloped, and to deal with things differently than we learned in childhood. In Imago therapy, one partner may make a behavior change request of the other partner. Behavior Change Requests (BCR) are things you ask your partner to consider changing which cause you frustration within the relationship. Imago offers a technique to ask for this and have your partner be willing to provide a behavior change that is done safely and effectively. However, when a partner is asked for a behavior change request, the request itself can trigger old memories and feelings from childhood about being "forced" to conform to someone else's idea of how to be and thus losing one's identity. This

continued

People-based Therapy, continued

is a stumbling block for some gay and lesbian couples and some get trapped here.

Your Partner Holds The Blue Print For Your Individual Growth

Imago relationship therapy teaches couples that sometimes giving your partner what they want is so very hard to do, because the very thing that they are requesting is what you need to do for yourself. The promise of Imago is that by giving your partner what they want, you are in fact healing yourself. Therefore, gifting your partner with what they ask for is an opportunity healing things from your childhood. For lesbians and gays, however, childhood was a time where we were asked to change who we were at the core. So to change meant to lose one's self. Granting a BCR to your partner is an opportunity to discover that you will not lose yourself by complying. By gifting your partner, you learn that nothing psychically dangerous will occur and that your relationship will deepen.

Differences between partners on various issues can be very threatening to all couples, gay and straight alike, but particularly to the gay or lesbian couple. Our society treats gays and lesbians badly for being "different" than the norm. This attitude imprints upon us that differences are not okay which makes for more sensitivity and suspiciousness at having to conform for anyone again. So, when these differences and conflicts arise for the Gay and

Lesbian couple, it can feel like confirmation that society's attitude is correct and that our relationships are doomed to failure. Unfortunately, many people leave their relationships prematurely based on this misinformation.

Here again, Imago normalizes the tension and difficulty that all couples go through and terms it the "power struggle"—a quite necessary stage for growth of the individual and the relationship. This creates yet another anchor for lesbians and gays to stay in the relationship.

The only time the concept of the "good of the power struggle" does not apply is when domestic violence or active addictions going untreated are involved. That is not an effective source of conflict that can be resolved with couple's therapy. That demands more serious therapeutic intervention for the individuals in the coupleship first.

All in all, Imago relationship therapy provides the hope and reinforcement gay and lesbian couples need and deserve, just like our heterosexual counterparts.