

a e BOOKS

Commitment and Healing

REVIEW BY
ROBERT WILLIAM WOLFF

This is as much an introduction of Richard A. Isay, MD, to those unfamiliar with him, as it is a review of his latest book. Author of *Being Homosexual, Becoming Gay*, and now, *Commitment and Healing*, Isay has made significant contributions to gay men's understanding of themselves and their experience of those around them over the past several decades. The books, taken together, not only show the progression of a practicing therapist's own self-education, they are something of a progressive revelation for gay males. They are worth our attention.

Isay is way past the homophobic swamp of questions that the therapists who support transformative therapies are caught up in. Isay has not only written about the failures of therapies aimed at turning homosexuals into heterosexuals, he had a major impact on the shift of important psychological societies in their policies on homosexuality. The New York psychotherapist seeks routes to aiding gay men as they strive to live productive, emotionally satisfying lives. As such, reading Isay can start a transformation for any gay man.

In his earlier books, Richard Isay brings experience gleaned from years of practicing therapy with gay men, to bear on issues surrounding parents and gay men. Isay broke ground earlier with reflections about whether fathers of gay men are distant from their gay sons because they are inherently distant, or because they reject the ways their gay sons behave that are different from their heterosexual brothers.

Now Isay has romantic love on his mind. He has been helping gay men in his practice learn to accept and love themselves enough so they can stop actions that end their potentially loving relationships. He has learned that because his patients have

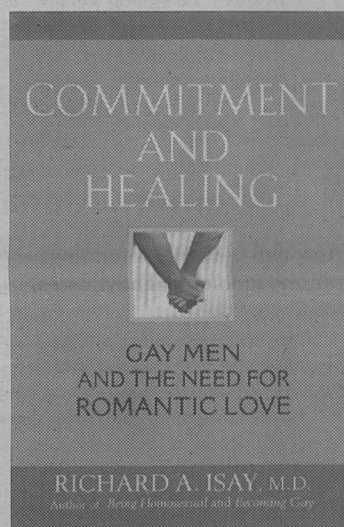
had parents unable to provide a loving environment for their son's development, the gay men unconsciously strive to duplicate these unloving relationships with men to whom they are attracted. The pattern has the men falling in love, being affectionate and sexual for a time, then taking steps to destroy the relationship that gave them temporary satisfaction. Because the gay man believes himself to be unlovable, he kills off the romance before he himself can be rejected.

"We need self-discipline to give up our reliance on accustomed pleasures that may have eliminated our need for love," Isay writes. "We must make a loving relationship the priority in our life and devote the effort and energy necessary to sustain it. Paradoxically, only after committing to another man and becoming convinced that the relationship with him is essential to one's happiness is it possible to love one's partner for his bad as well as his good qualities (...) It is his love that, over time, will revise the way we experience love and will ultimately change the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world around us."

Isay's therapeutic technique includes acting as a loving, supportive therapist and counselor, even while the patient is rejecting this love. He has found that after rejecting the therapist's support over time, the gay man will come to accept the steadfast loving support, realize that he is lovable and finally accept the love of a gay man whom he meets and starts a relationship with. Isay cites numerous gay men with whom he has performed this therapy.

Perhaps most important, in *Commitment and Healing*, Isay lays the groundwork for potential education and training of thinking, progressive parents as they seek to make easier the lives of their lesbian and gay children. The way parents behave toward their gay sons and lesbian daughters can cause

their children to believe that they are unlovable. The therapist hints at actions parents can take as they help their gay sons and lesbian daughters develop self-esteem and their own ability to love those who attract them intellectually and sexually.



Commitment and Healing:
Gay Men and the Need for Romantic Love
by Richard A. Isay, M.D.
2006, John Wiley & Sons
134 Pages

"Parents' indifference to the feelings of their homosexual children or their outright rejection of these children is caused by the bias that still exists in our society," Isay writes. "Despite the gains made over the last ten or twenty years, we still have much to do to achieve equality and acceptance; this includes legalizing same-sex marriages and integrating openly gay men and women into the military. Even when the time does come when society is less ambivalent, it will likely take several generations for parental attitudes to change so that the unique feelings of gay children are valued and not denied." ▼

➔ Robert William Wolff is a scenery and lighting designer and potter who lives in Randolph. He is an R.U.1.2? board member and a volunteer for OITM.

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