

The Neuroscience of Intimate Dialogue, “keeping your partner close”.

A Gottman Informed Presentation and Group Discussion.

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The Gottman Method

- A research-based *scientific* approach to couple therapy
- The Love Lab!
- Over 40 years of statistically valid and reliable findings
- Drs John & Julie Gottman joined together to create evidence-based strategies and interventions that can be applied to couple work



Statistical Findings by Dr John Gottman

- The average couple waits 6 years before seeking counselling
- 69% of all marital problems are perpetual, 31% are solvable
- Using the Gottman Couple Therapy Method, one can predict divorce with over 90% accuracy

Neuroscience

- *Neural Structures* – using physiological interventions of system 1 (the survival reptilian brain) to calm system 2 (the impulsive limbic brain), which, once downregulated, enables access to system 3 (the smart frontal cortex thriving brain) - mindful of an over active amygdala (fight, flight & freeze reactions)
- *Neural Chemicals* – too much production of cortisol, the production of oxytocin, a hormone & neurotransmitter associated with empathy, trust, sexual activity & relationship building, increased dopamine levels enhancing motivation and engagement
- *Neural Networks* – slowing dialogues down to become aware of neurological habituated grooves that are entrenched ways of engaging and intentionally creating new neural networks and habits (old Motorways & new dirt tracks!!)

Master Marriages & Disaster Marriages

- Physiological arousal
- Self-soothing capacity
- Affection & fondness
- Humour
- Curiosity
- Type of interaction
- Reparative acts – bidding & buying



Neuroscience – couples who have the capacity to downregulate their emotional states find that their relationships improve and deepen over time.

Relationships

*“A relationship is not a static thing.
It is a living organism, always moving, made up of
many inter-moments.”*

Catherine Devine

Master & Disaster Marriage Statistics

- Master marriages had 5 positives to every 1 negative interaction during conflict
- Disaster marriages had 0.8 positives to every 1 negative interaction during conflict
- Master marriages had 20 positives to every 1 negative interaction during normal everyday conversations
- Disaster marriages had 0.8 positives to every 1 negative interaction during normal everyday conversations

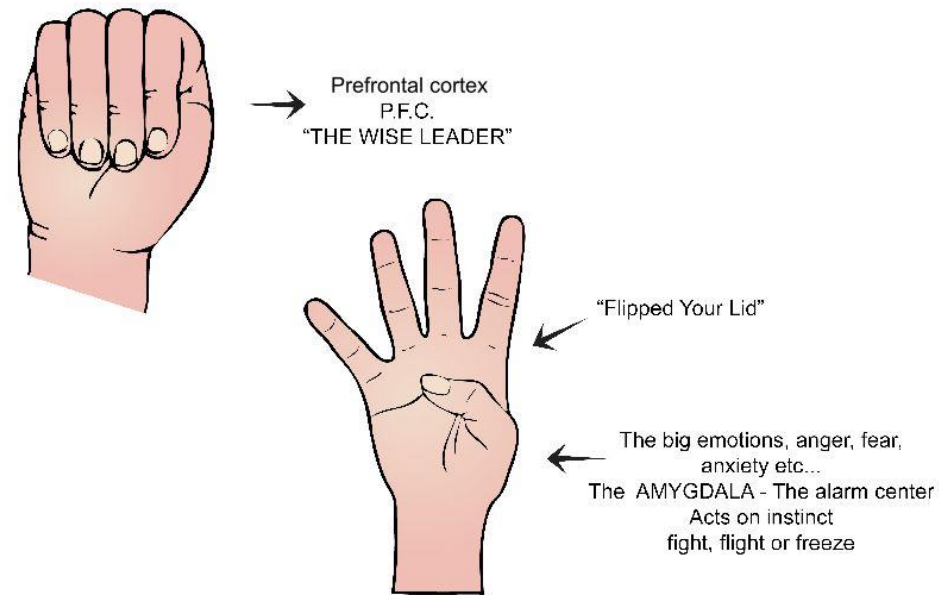
The Master Marriage culture is positively thriving and emotionally engaging and emotionally enriched.

The 4 Horseman of the Apocalypse

- Research has shown how a couple interact and predicts not only how their dialogue will progress, but also how the dialogue shapes the tone or tenure of the couple's culture
- Dr John Gottman identified 4 types of negative responses which are poison to a lasting relationship:
 - Criticism
 - Defensiveness
 - Stonewalling
 - Contempt

Neuroscience: Dr Dan Siegel's hand brain model

"Flipping One's Lid"



Credit: Daniel Siegel, V.D. is the creator of this metaphor and expression "Flipped Lid". Copyright © 2014 www.sharonelby.com

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Criticism

- Pointing your finger at your partner and highlighting a defect in your partner's personality
- Impact on our neuroscience
- **Antidote: use Gentle Start Up**



Defensiveness

- Self-protection in the form of righteous indignation or a counterattack or innocent victim-hood
- Impact on our neuroscience
- **Antidote: accept responsibility for even a part of the issue**



Stonewalling

- Emotional withdrawal from the interaction
- Impact on neuroscience
- **Antidote: physiological self-soothing**



Contempt

- Statements that come from a superior place. Can come in the form of insults, mockery and name-calling.
- Impact on neuroscience
- **Antidote: build a culture of appreciation and respect, to describe our own feelings and needs. Don't describe your partner.**



Couple Case Study

- Lydia: Adopted, parents divorced, abandoned by mother, lived with father who was possessive and overbearing, anxious attachment style
- Malcolm: Grandparents holocaust survivors, grandmother killed in car accident, mother suffers GAD & PTSD, grandfather died quickly from illness, issues within the family with older brother's sexuality, avoidant attachment style

Couple Case Study

Some of the Interventions:

- Slow down dialogue, clear on speaker listener roles
- Physiological measures, pulsometers – a feedback loop
- Self and other calibration
- Self-soothing downregulation, a bottom up approach
- Breathing and mindfulness exercises
- Co-regulation
- From uncontrolled incongruence to controlled incongruence
- Naming & expressing emotions, therapist modelling acceptance and space for vulnerability

Couple Case Study cont.

- Exercising impulse control
- Increase capacity to hold more than one reality, increasing tolerance
- Facilitating patterns of engagement, connection and approach
- Practicing active listening, understanding and empathy
- Coaching / re-wiring the interaction /circuit breaking habits
- Changing the chemical culture of the relationship, ie Gratitude
- Creating a culture of safety, staying allies and on the same bank
- The couple feels they are learning to navigate their landscape, being mindful that hiccups happen and that their job is to take care of themselves so they can feel resourceful and resilient to re engage

The Gottman Institute

*“All relationships have one law.
Never make the one you love feel alone,
especially when you are there.”*

The Gottman Institute

Acknowledgement

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based on the work of*

*Dr John M Gottman and Dr Julie Schwartz
Gottman.*

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Questions?

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