

Week 12: Handout A **GOTTMAN'S 4 HORSEMEN**

FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

By Marlene and Bob Neufeld

The four attitudes that most predict the dissolution of a relationship, especially in combination, are criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling. Dr. John Gottman studied more than 2,000 married couples over two decades. He discovered patterns about how partners relate to each other, which can be used to predict – with 94% accuracy – which marriages will succeed and which will fail.

1. Criticism:

Attacking your partner's personality or character, usually with the intent of making someone right and someone wrong

- Generalizations: "you always..." "you never..." "you're the type of person who ..." "why are you so ..."

2. Contempt:

Attacking your partner's sense of self with the intention to insult or psychologically abuse him/her

- Insults and name calling: "bitch, bastard, wimp, fat, stupid, ugly, slob, lazy..."
- Hostile humor, sarcasm or mockery
- Body language & tone of voice: sneering, rolling your eyes, curling your upper lip

3. Defensiveness:

Seeing self as the victim, warding off a perceived attack

- Making excuses (e.g., external circumstances beyond your control forced you to act in a certain way) "It's not my fault...", "I didn't..."
- Cross-complaining: meeting your partner's complaint, or criticism with a complaint of your own, ignoring what your partner said
- Disagreeing and then cross-complaining "That's not true, you're the one who ..."
- Yes-butting: start off agreeing but end up disagreeing
- Repeating yourself without paying attention to what the other person is saying
- Whining "It's not fair."

4. Stonewalling:

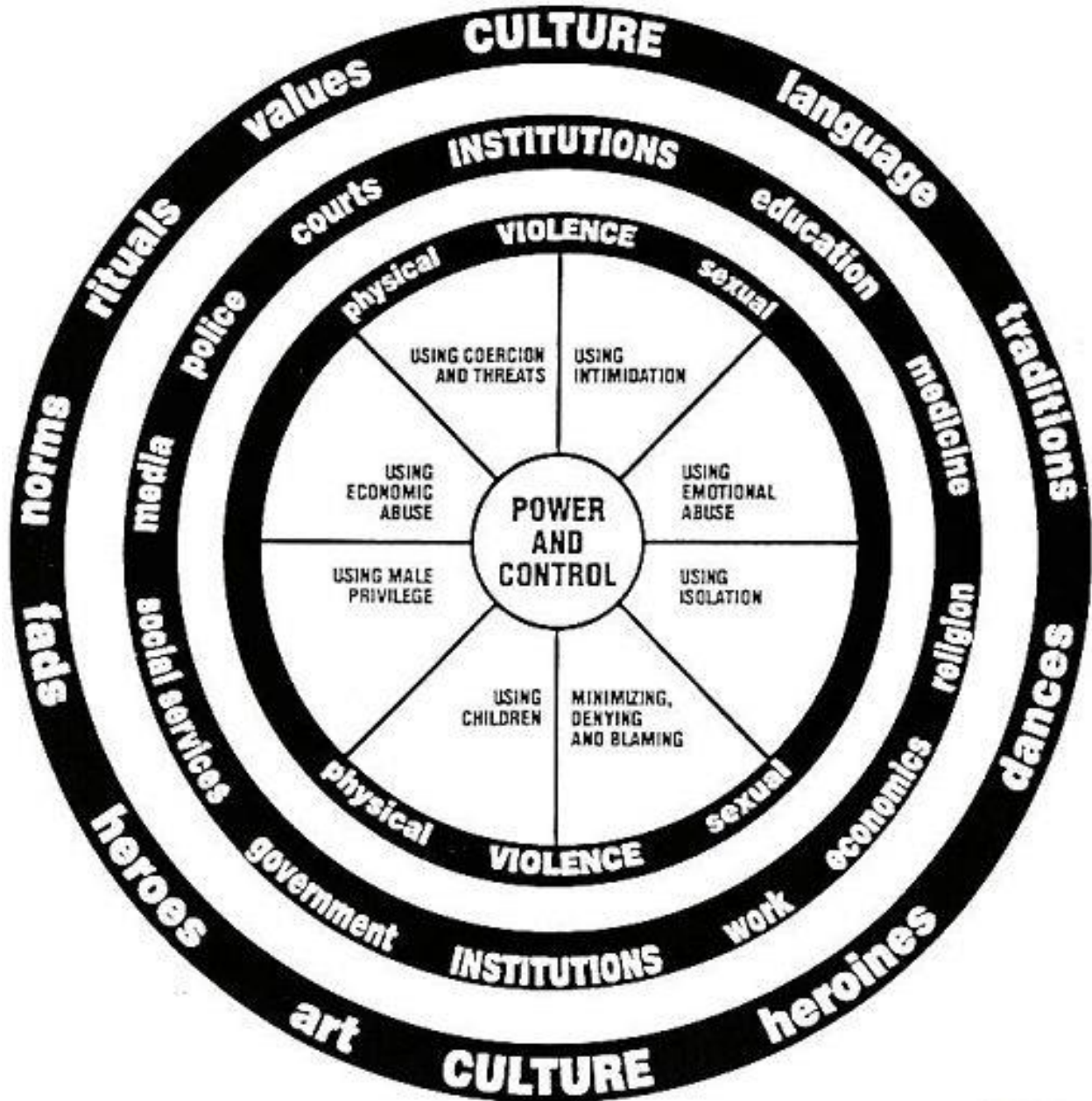
Withdrawing from the relationship as a way to avoid conflict. Partners may think they are trying to be "neutral" but stonewalling conveys disapproval, icy distance, separation, disconnection, and/or smugness

- Stony silence
- Monosyllabic mutterings
- Changing the subject
- Removing yourself physically

Week 12: Handout B
RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE & CULTURE

Relationship Violence and Culture

Societal and cultural factors contribute to perpetuating violent relationships. Below is a diagram that depicts some of the ways in which this is done.



A violent relationship, shown at the center of the wheel, exists within the larger environment of society and culture.

When institutions that interact with victims and perpetrator help victims find safety and hold abusers accountable for their violence, those agencies can be vital factors in ending the violence. However, when those institutions ignore victims' pleas for help or blame them for the violence, they actually keep the violence going and may even contribute to making it worse. In addition, institutions sometimes use tactics of control in dealing with victims, thus "re-victimizing" them when they seek help.

The actions of individuals and institutions are influenced by the norms, values, language, and other cultural factors that are like the dust in the air that surrounds everyone. These cultural factors are ingrained in us from the day we are born, and can play a role in either ending or perpetuating violence. For example, domestic violence was not considered a crime in West Virginia until 1992. Prior to that, violence against a stranger was considered a serious and prosecutable matter, but violence against an intimate partner was often seen as acceptable.

Cultural norms still exist that perpetuate the problem. For example, the tradition of not interfering in matters between family members that occur in private has led to reluctance for government, the criminal justice system, and other systems to respond to domestic violence, even after it became a crime. Music and the media continue to portray domestic violence as "lover's quarrels" and domestic violence homicides-suicide as "crimes of passion" by jilted partners who think, "If I can't have her/him, no one else will." This "romanticizing" of domestic violence allows it to be excused or explained away – something that is not done with any other type of assault and battery.

It is important to acknowledge the cultural norms that victims bring with them. These norms dictate how they may experience domestic violence and how they may react to it. People who live in rural communities may adhere to strong values of independence that prevent them from seeking help from "outsiders" or urban programs. People of color may adhere to a code developed through historical experience that has taught them not to trust the "white" culture and the formal systems it offers for assistance (e.g., the criminal justice system, the social service system and domestic violence programs). Elderly people may have been conditioned not to discuss "personal" issues with strangers and are therefore reluctant to use "self-help" programs that require people to disclose abusive experiences. When people in same-sex relationships disclose domestic violence, they risk exposure to societal norms that condemn them as "evil" and expose them to hate crimes.

Adult Intimate Partner Violence in Films and Literature

The lack of widespread awareness and open discourse on relationship violence means the issue is often understood in the context that media sources present it in. This can be extremely problematic, as films and literature tend to romanticize violence in a relationship. The abusive partner may be the hero or the victim may be portrayed as loving or forgiving when reconciling with the abusive partner. Looking critically at popular films and literature reveals many examples of adult intimate partner violence portrayed romantically. *Gone with the Wind* exhibits marital rape, yet is esteemed as a classic romance. *A Streetcar Named Desire* has two heroines, sisters, both of whom cater to the will of the abusive Stanley. The all too familiar image of Stanley falling to his knees and calling heart-wrenchingly to his wife, Stella, is in fact following an incident where he has hurt her while she is pregnant, and she has fled to a neighbor for safety. Stella returns to him.

Similarly, literature has a tendency to romanticize behaviors such as obsessive love and suicide. *Wuthering Heights* and *Romeo and Juliet*, even *Anna Karenina* and *The Awakening*, all exhibit female characters that sacrifice everything for love and either commit suicide or experience an untimely death as a direct result. From classic literature to modern day action films, we see a pattern in which violence in a relationship is seen as a piece of a romantic tryst or relationship. While this interweaving of tragedy and romance is not a new facet of literature or media, it is one that should be viewed critically.

The romanticization of violence means that a piece of literature, film or another text in popular culture is portraying a violent relationship in a romantic light. It is not simply the presence of violence in a romantic relationship. Rather it refers to examples where the violence itself is seen as a part of the romance. Unhealthy behavior is defined for the purpose of this paper as stalking behavior, obsessive behavior, controlling behavior, condescending behavior and talk of death and suicide.

Certain archetypes can be identified in portrayals of romance. There is the "Seeker", which is searching for true love or "enjoying the sexual infatuation of early relationships". "Fairy tale" love occurs when couples overcome obstacles to find each other or be together. "Mature" love occurs in long-term companions, when partners are comfortable in their relationship. In the *Twilight* series, we see all of these archetypes played out in the relationship between Bella and Edward. *Griffin* (2006) also points to two cultural ideals for long-term love, one being "Romantic" and based on emotional and physical responses, and the second "Companionate", built on closeness and friendship. Again, the relationship between Bella and Edward could be considered either, depending on where in the series you choose to examine it. Because this relationship falls into so many categories of love, it is possible that, within its readership, it appeals to all of its audiences' concepts of love. This conclusion may help explain the dedication to the series found in *Twilight* fans.