

Making Relationships Work

by John Gottman

The below notes are from a fantastic lecture by world renown marriage researcher, John Gottman. This lecture is available on You Tube and is divided up into four 10-minute segments, and it is very much worth watching. Here are the links to the lecture on You Tube:

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLXX8wzvT7c>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gFldZtVlqQ>

Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ7RHLBdqGM>

Part 4 (Q & A): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aSpl_ZjmcY

Summary Notes

Within the first 3 minutes of observing the way a couple communicates and relates to each other during a conflict discussion, we can predict to 96% accuracy the way that conversation is going to go. And, we can predict, with more than 90% accuracy, whether or not that marriage will divorce, how happy they'll be, and even the temperament and stability of the couple's children.

What discriminates the disasters from the masters, in relationships, is that the masters are very gentle with one another, especially in the midst of conflict, taking responsibility for their own actions and part in the conflict. The disasters were very critical, not taking any responsibility for their own faults during conflict but rather finger pointing at their spouse. Their attitude was critical, as if they were diagnosing their partner's personality defects.

Criticism (def): stating the problem in a relationship as a defect in the partner. Criticism leads to the second predictor of divorce, which is Defensiveness.

Defensiveness (def): any way of warding off a perceived attack.

Interestingly enough, the Masters invite additional input (i.e. "Tell me more) so they can more effectively work towards reconciliation. The Disasters become defensive (i.e., "It's not my fault. It's your fault.")

The best predictor of divorce is Contempt. It is also a very effective predictor of how many infectious illnesses the recipient of contempt will get in the next four years. Contempt affects a person's immune system.

Contempt (def): any statement you make to your partner from a superior place (i.e., more punctual, more intelligent, more knowledgeable, better parent, cleaner, tidier, etc.); speaking down with an air of superiority.

There are many ways that people may express contempt, including:

1. Direct insult and name calling (i.e., You're a jerk, idiot, etc.) is the most common expression of contempt.
2. Correcting someone's grammar when they're angry with you (Gottman's favorite)

Stonewalling (def): withdrawal by the listener from the conversation: with holding of common cues communication that enable and promote healthy and effective communication.

A significant difference between the Masters and the Disasters, is their "ability to repair" (i.e., "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?") and restore relationship during disagreements and arguments. The attitude of the receiver (the one being apologized to) and the quality of the couple's friendship, are the greatest factors of the ability to repair.