

The “Science” of Relationships

By: Rachael M. Collins, M.A.

Science and love sound like two concepts that couldn't possibly go together. However, for the past 30 years, Drs. John and Dr. Julie Gottman have devoted their time to researching what contributes to relationship failure and what helps relationships succeed. The Gottmans have researched couples at various points in their relationship, such as newly married couples, couples raising children, and retired couples. They established The Gottman Institute in Seattle, to provide resources and services for couples, along with training opportunities for counseling professionals, across the country.

Based on their work, the Gottmans believe they are able to predict with approximately 90% accuracy whether or not a couple's relationship is in trouble. The Gottmans divide couples into two groups: (1) the *masters* and (2) the *disasters*. According to their research, *disasters* express far more negative behaviors and feelings during arguments compared to *masters*. The magic number seems to be 5 positive for every 1 negative interaction to maintain a healthy relationship.

From their decades worth of research, the Gottmans have identified what they call “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” or negative behaviors that can result in the downfall of a relationship if they continue. Those behaviors and the ways to counteract them include the following:



Criticism

- **Definition:** Talking about a problem as if it were a flaw in a person's character.
- **Solution:** A way to combat criticism is to voice complaints by starting with your own feelings and then sharing your frustration. These are called “I” statements.

Defensiveness

- **Definition:** Protecting one's self through denial or counter-attacking.
- **Solution:** One way to deal with defensiveness is trying to take responsibility for even a small part of the argument or problem.

Contempt

- **Definition:** Statements designed to make one partner seem superior to the other. These statements often include sarcasm, insults, and name-calling. Subtle things like correcting someone's grammar when they are angry also shows contempt. Contempt is probably the biggest predictor of relationship breakdown.
- **Solution:** Couples not only have to remove contempt from the relationship, they also need to show mutual respect for one another by celebrating each other's successes and strengths.

Stonewalling

- **Definition:** Someone emotionally “checking-out” during an argument. Stonewalling can happen when a person gets overwhelmed by emotions so they shut down rather than explode.
- **Solution:** It's ok to ask for some space to calm down during an argument, but you have to be willing to collect yourself and then come back to your partner to address the issue.

Many people aren't aware of how important the 5:1 positive to negative ratio is. Knowing how we can change our behavior can help maintain a healthy romantic relationship. Take heart, even the *masters* sometimes engage in negative behaviors. However, the key is to reduce these behaviors and try to express positive feelings toward your partner - even during arguments. For more information about how to become *masters* visit the Gottman Institute website at www.gottman.com. If you're worried you're headed toward a *disaster*, call us to set up couples counseling.



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Inside This Issue

MONTHLY GUIDANCE	2
FEATURED YOUTH ISSUE	2
FEATURED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE	3
STRESS BUSTER WORD SEARCH	3
FEATURED COUNSELOR PROFILE	4
FEATURED WELLNESS ISSUE	5
ABOUT OUR CLINIC	6

Monthly Guidance

Dear MG,

I have become a terrible procrastinator. From cleaning the dishes to finishing my homework, I just can't seem to get anything done on time. I never used to procrastinate, and now I put everything off until the very last minute. This, of course, always really stresses me out. Sometimes I feel really overwhelmed as my "To Do List" becomes longer and longer. I need to change something soon before this gets completely out of control. Please help!

Sincerely,
Better Late than Never

Dear Better Late than Never,

I think it is safe to say most everyone has gone through a period like the one you are describing! It doesn't take much for those To Do Lists to get out of control, and it is easy to feel

overwhelmed as that list becomes longer. While avoiding that list can help lower our anxiety in the moment, it only makes things worse in the long run.

First, I would suggest taking a look at your list and tackling one or two things that are relatively easy and less time-consuming. This will help shorten the list quickly and make you feel better about accomplishing something. I would also suggest you set reasonable expectations and prioritize the things on your list. Sometimes we expect to finish everything in one day, and often that is just not possible. Take a close look at all you have to do and think about how long you expect each task will take. Tackle things in order of importance and with a realistic sense of how long they'll take. Finally, be sure to take breaks if you need them. But be sure to set a certain amount of time for your break, so you don't get stalled again. Breaks are important because they will prevent you from getting overtired, bored, or even burned out. As

always, if you feel your "To Do List" is creating a level of stress that is more than you can manage, or you're getting overwhelmed with anxiety, it may be helpful to talk to a counselor to assist you in working through this process.

Monthly Guidance [MG] is here to answer questions about relationships and personal issues. If you would like to ask MG a question, you may call the Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic and leave an anonymous message for MG. Or, you may send your question in writing to the address on the back page of this newsletter. If you choose to ask MG a question, the identity of the person submitting the question will remain completely anonymous. Please keep in mind when writing your questions that space is limited. Due to time constraints, MG cannot answer all questions, but will try to choose questions that are representative of a broad range of issues. If your question does not get answered and you would like to discuss it, please call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

Please be advised that MG is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

Featured Youth Issue:

Teen Dating: Choose Respect - Get it, Give it!

By: Wendy Gonzalez-Canal, M.A.

Dating, at any age, can be a confusing process. However, teenage hormones, high school challenges, and lack of life experience can contribute to unhealthy behavior in young relationships. While we don't like to think about it, one in four young people report experiencing dating abuse every year. That abuse can be physical (e.g., hitting or shoving), verbal (e.g., yelling, calling each other bad names), emotional (e.g., threats to harm partner, self, or others), or sexual (e.g., forcing or threatening). Unfortunately, dating abuse is often not recognized or acknowledged and is kept secret.

What's the problem?

Dating abuse happens at a startling rate. One in 11 young people report being a victim of physical dating abuse, and one in 5 report being emotionally abused by their dating partner. 70% of girls and 52% of boys report experiencing some type of physical injury when they are in an abusive dating relationship, half these boys and almost 3/4 of these girls require an ER visit.

The physical and mental health risks resulting from dating abuse are significant and include:

- Double the rate of drug, alcohol, tobacco use
- Increased risk for suicide attempts
- Increasing severity of violence
- Forced sexual activity, unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV infections
- Poor self-concept, self-esteem, and body image
- Unhealthy behavioral patterns in future relationships

What are the warning signs?

Being able to recognize the following signs of abuse in dating relationship is the first step.

Warning signs include:

- Crying and depression
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Dropping out of extracurricular & enjoyable activities
- Sudden drop in grades
- Seems ashamed or reluctant to talk about their relationship
- Seems controlled by significant other
- Changes appearance and clothing choices
- Self esteem and confidence decrease

What can we do about it?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed or lost when trying to help our loved ones in these situations. However, dating abuse can be prevented in a number of ways:

Help young adults develop healthy relationship skills by teaching

- Negotiation skills
- How to compromise
- Conflict resolution skills
- Healthy communication skills
- The importance of honesty
- Parents and other adults act as role models of healthy relationships
- Make and maintain supportive relationships with friends and family

It is important that friends, family, teachers, and other trusted adults to identify and step in to prevent abuse. If you suspect you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship ask for help! The BSU Practicum Clinic has worked with the Centers for Disease Control to develop a teen dating violence prevention program called Choose Respect. We also provide counseling services for abuse survivors.

Featured Mental Health Issue:

Depression: Is it Contagious?

By: Julie Matsen, M.A.

While most people know they can catch a cold or the flu from the people around them, fewer people realize depression can be contagious too. People with depression often see a glass half empty world, and they may be more likely to point out the negatives in everyday situations. Some research has shown that one person's negative thinking style can "rub off" on other people in their environment. You are most likely to "catch" this negative thinking style in close relationships where you spend a lot of time with the other person. For example, if your partner or roommate is depressed, they might not want to socialize with others. In turn, you may decide to stay home with your them, instead of spending time with others in your social support group who normally would act as a buffer against sadness and distress. You might even begin to feel their negative thinking style is typical or "normal" and start thinking this way yourself.

People are more likely to catch depressive symptoms from others when they are in a particularly stressful life stage or situation. When life feels overwhelming, it is easier to see the negative side of things, especially when those close to you are focusing on this side of life. Be aware, major life stressors can include positive and negative life events

such as a big move, starting a new job, having a child enter or leave the family, and getting married. It is important to be aware of how your changing life circumstances may be affecting your mood and those around you.

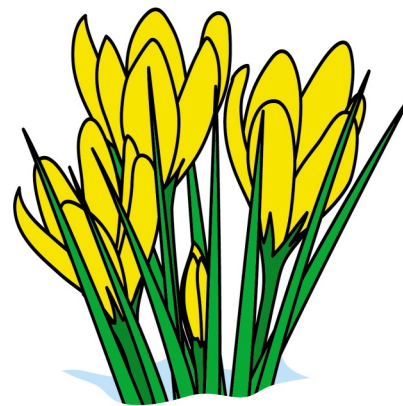


So how can you protect yourself from catching depression, while still supporting someone close to you who is having a difficult time?

- **Spend time with happy people.** While you may feel you need to spend all of your time with a depressed friend or family member trying to lift their spirits, it is important to remember that you need support too. Spending time with others can help lessen the burden, and good moods can be contagious too!

- **Take care of your basic needs.** The stress of caring for a person suffering from depression often leads to neglecting your own important physical needs. Make sure you are getting enough sleep and eating right. Maintaining a healthy life style can help prevent developing depression.
- **Exercise.** Exercising helps produce endorphins, which give a positive boost to your mood. Physical activity is also a great stress reliever as well. If you find exercise boring, try doing some activity that gets you moving and is fun, such as gardening or swimming.
- **Learn about depression.** Learning more about the signs and symptoms can help you better understand your friend or family member's experience. It can also help you be aware of how depression may change your own thoughts and allow you to recognize these thoughts sooner rather than later.
- **Get help for yourself.** Along with encouraging your loved one to talk to a counselor, it can be helpful to seek help for yourself as well! Talking to a therapist can help you manage the stress of supporting someone who is experiencing depression and learn healthy ways to cope.

Kids Corner: Spring Crossword Puzzle



Featured Profile

Hunter Sully, M.A.

By: Sean Jones, M.S./Ed.S

This column is a way for the community to learn about the diverse talents, both master's and doctoral students, employed at Ball State's New Combined Clinic.

Hunter Sully is a current Ph.D. student in the Department of Counseling Psychology. He was accepted as a BA to Ph.D student.

How did you decide to pursue your PhD in Counseling Psychology?

I knew I always wanted to help people, which was the first thing that made me want to get into counseling psychology. I previously worked with children with autism after undergrad doing applied behavioral analysis therapy. However, I realized I liked working with the parents more to help them cope. I ended up talking to my undergraduate professor, and she suggested I apply to a counseling psychology program. She actually graduated from the Ball State counseling psychology program herself! I jumped in head first, and I love it.

Are there any populations that you especially enjoy working with in counseling?

One population I really like working with is the college student population. I like the idea of working with students entering into adulthood and assisting them in that process. I also like working with the LGBT community, specifically helping individuals navigate through the coming out experience. Really, I want to help anyone of minority status who encounters adversity, including the African American population as well. I think it's important to help individuals of minority status in transitioning to a majority white institution. During

undergrad, I became both a peer mentor and co-coordinator of the Smooth Transition program, which was designed to help people transition into the college experience and develop a built-in support system. I loved helping others with this process and found a lot of joy in this experience.

What has been your most influential work experience at Ball State University so far?

I would have to say my internship experience at Lucina, the Ball State University counseling center, has been the most influential. Before I started at Lucina, I was working to try to understand what counseling was, and I didn't feel like I always knew what I was doing. However, I found my voice at Lucina. I learned how to build rapport with clients and how to make that human connection in a counseling relationship. It's been a really rewarding experience overall.

What is your overall approach to counseling?

I look at the relationship between the counselor and client as one of the most important parts of counseling. Once the counseling relationship between the client and counselor is developed and becomes stronger, the sky is the limit. I honestly feel there is no problem we can't work on together.

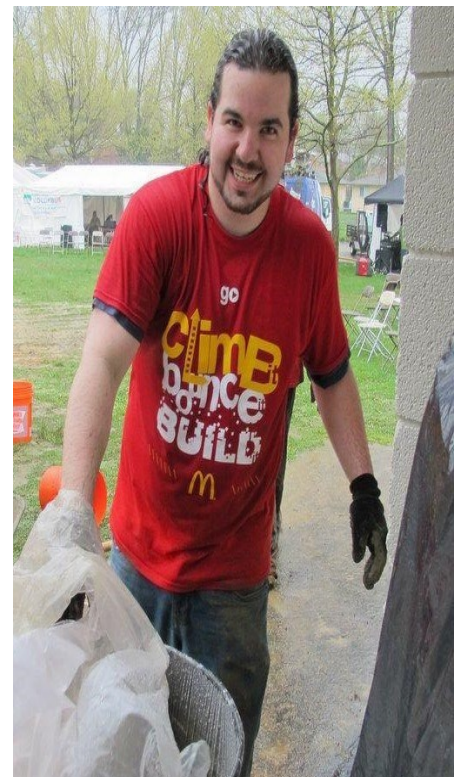
What do you hope to do after you graduate?

I think I want to work at a college university counseling center and possibly as an adjunct professor. I found I have a huge passion for the supervision process, and I would like to assist in training other master-level students and helping them grow as future counselors. I also love doing outreach events, which happens a lot at university counseling centers. Some

people just aren't ready for counseling, but I want to reach out in some way to expose them to some information that might help them with whatever is going on in their life.

What would you say to someone hesitant to go to counseling?

People have this idea that you need to be in a life crisis of some form to go to counseling. People think you need to be in a lot of distress to where you can't function if you don't have counseling, and that is just not the case. Counseling is for all people in any stage of life. I would recommend going to counseling, if for nothing else, just to experience something different and learn more about yourself, even if you don't have a reason. It will be such a rewarding experience if you take part in it.



Hunter Sully, current M.A. student in the Department of Counseling Psychology.

Featured Wellness Issue

Remembering our New Year's Resolutions

By: Josh Staples, M.A., M.S.

It has been a little while since you made your New Year's resolutions. How did you do? Are you still keeping them up? New Year's Day is often seen as an opportunity for a fresh start, and many of us look at the new year as an opportunity to make positive behavior changes, such as exercising more or eating healthier. However, the process of changing your behavior can be difficult and slow moving. Now that summer's upon us it's a good time to re-evaluate your New Year's goals and adjust them.



Back in January, you probably began to prepare and plan for change in the new year. Many of us wait for special events to plan for change and when we don't follow through we give up and wait for the next big event. Lasting change can come at any time though and when you start is not as important as what you do. Here are some strategies you can use to increase the chances of success with your goals for change—whenever you decide to start working toward them. Working with others can help increase the chance of success.

Specifically,

Think about making your commitment public by telling others about your goal.

Try to find someone with similar goals and work together to stay committed & accountable.

Social media and online message boards can increase your chance of success and can help you develop supportive relationships in the process.

There are some specific strategies you can use on your own as well.

Set small, reasonable goals: Often times people set large endpoint goals that feel overwhelming. It's OK to have a large final goal in mind, but you can increase your chances of success by making smaller, manageable goals. Maybe you want to lose 15 pounds, but if you set a goal of a pound per week it will feel more manageable. Think of these as "steps along the way"

Reward yourself: It can be helpful to set up a reward system as you work towards your goal. If you set a goal of exercising 3 times a week, then build in a way to reward yourself. Maybe have a small piece of dark chocolate at the end of the week.

Enjoy yourself: If you hate every minute you spend working towards your goal, it will be difficult to keep up. Choose exercise types you enjoy.

For instance, you may find that you enjoy exercise more if you do it while watching your favorite TV show.

Reminders: Setting reminders can help you continue to work towards your goal. Also, it is helpful to remove the things that remind you of those unwanted behaviors. For example, removing ashtrays from your home can lower your cravings to smoke. Similarly, laying out your workout clothes on your bed before you leave for work can increase your chances of exercising when you get home.

Substitute a healthier behavior for the one you're wanting to change. For instance, go for a short walk to help you wake up instead of reaching for that energy drink or cup of coffee



After about six months of working on your goal, you may find yourself more confident in your new behaviors and less tempted by old behaviors. The longer you maintain your goals, the more natural it will feel, and the less likely you will be to need those rewards and reminders. Remember, it is completely normal to take a few steps back. You may have to change up your approach, but know it is possible to successfully change your behavior and keep up those once long-forgotten New Year's resolutions!



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Mind Matters

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Services Offered

- Individual Counseling
- Couple Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Child/Adolescent Counseling

Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic: Serving the Community Since 1969

Mission

- The clinic is a training and research facility for the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services.
- The clinic provides high-quality, low-cost psychological services to the Delaware County community and beyond.

Service Providers

- Over 50 graduate student counselors under the supervision of faculty.
- Faculty supervisors are licensed psychologists and counselors.

We're on the Web!

- www.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/counselingpsych/practicum



- www.facebook.com/BallStateCounselingPracticumClinic/



Hours of Operation

- August-May (Spring & Fall)
9 AM to 9 PM M-Th
9 AM to 12 PM Fri
- May-August (Summer)
9 AM to 8 PM M-Th
Closed on Friday
- The clinic is closed during university vacations and holidays.

All clients have the right to receive timely, competent counseling services consistent with the ethical principles and guidelines established by professional organizations. All counseling services provided at the Counseling Practicum Clinic are guided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the American Rehab Counseling Association, the General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services, and the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Counseling Psychologists.