







# Outline




## What is Ambivalence

- Factors leading to ambivalence and what's behind it
- Techniques to use (inc MI and IBCT)

## Traps to avoid

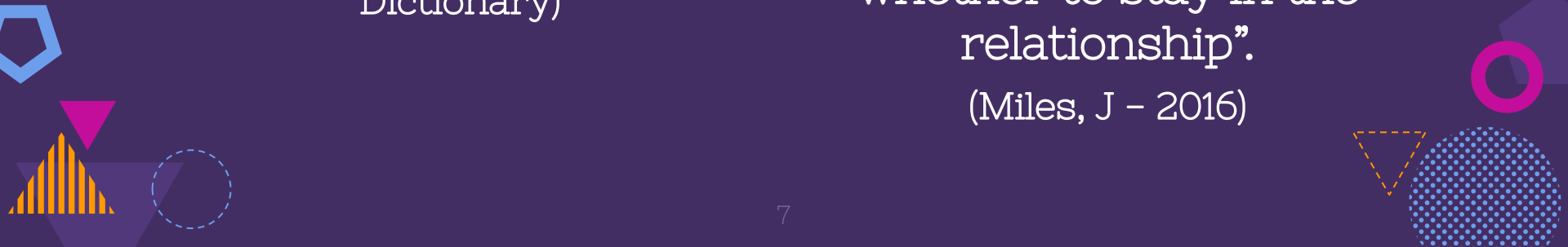


# What is Ambivalence ?



“The state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone”. (Oxford Dictionary)

“Having opposing desires or emotions about a person causing them to feel uncertain about whether to stay in the relationship”.  
(Miles, J – 2016)



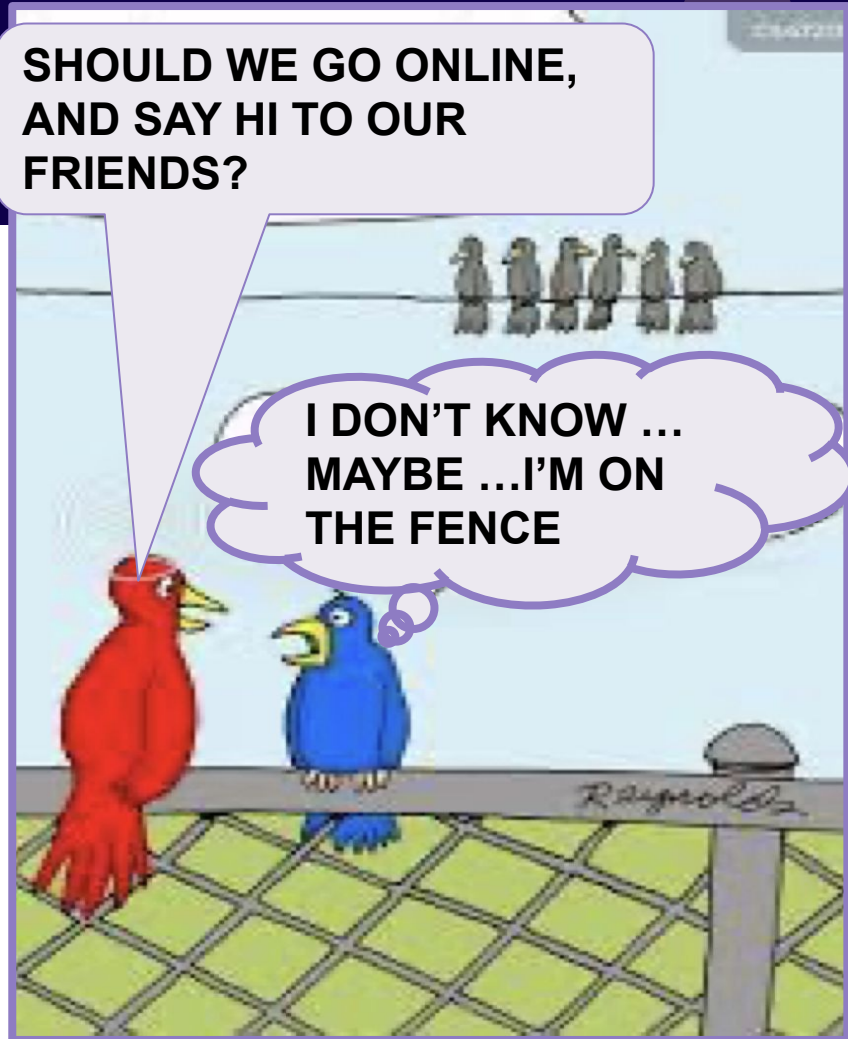
# Motivational Interviewing (Miller and Rollnick 2013)

Ambivalence is an expression of pro-change and counter change arguments at the same time.

- Thinking about change moving to contemplation rather than staying stuck – it is uncomfortable

SHOULD WE GO ONLINE, AND SAY HI TO OUR FRIENDS?

I DON'T KNOW ...  
MAYBE ...I'M ON  
THE FENCE





# What is Ambivalence in couples ?

- Different level of investment /goals
- “Mixed agenda”
- “Leaning in” / “Leaning out” partner (Doherty 2015)
- 36% were mixed agenda couples – 64% of couples shared the same goal – N= 249 (Owen, Duncan, Anker and Sparks, 2012)

# Couple Ambivalence “..”



“Main issue is our fighting – main issue is our parenting”

“I’ve moved out – should I return to the house?”

“This is the last chance for our marriage I can’t keep doing this”

# Factors leading to Ambivalence and what's behind it?



Therapy Factors

Relationship  
Factors

Individual  
Factors

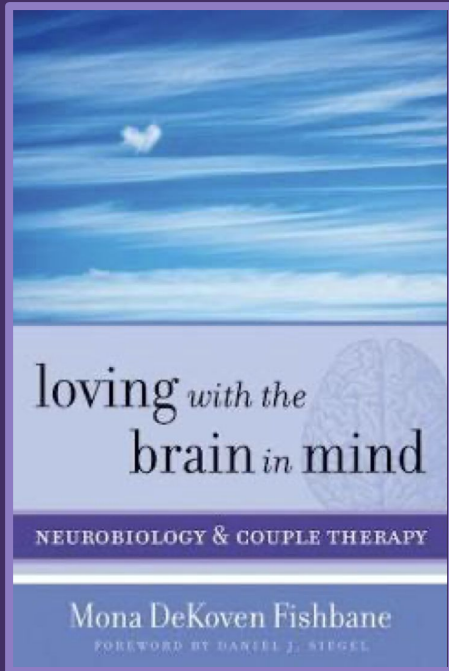
# Therapy Factors



- Fear of what will CT involve /being exposed
- Will the therapist side with one of us?
- What will happen on the way home ?
- Will the therapist try to convince me stay/leave ?



# Therapy Factors



*“I represent a place the male has avoided for years, therapy for him has meant the realm of feelings and women. I represent a place for the wife to vent her anger and frustration even though she’s doubtful it will help” (pg 54).*

# Individual Factors

- Ambivalence stops a person from having to resolve internal conflict
- “If I act on my behaviour (eg addiction)– I will need to be more open/present with my partner”
- Polarised thinking / perfectionistic
- Changes in beliefs/values

# Relationship Factors

People Change: “She used to be outgoing, had her own interests – now all she wants to do is stay at home”.

Event: “I discovered pornography use again – I can’t do this again”

Circumstance: “We met at the time of a death in the family.. guilt kept me there”

Negative Comparisons: “I can do better” – turning away

Perpetual Problems: Personality traits

# And these things too!

Fearing consequences

Poor self - esteem  
asking for what you need

Difficulty tolerating  
holding only negative  
thoughts about the  
partner/relationship

Switching between  
emotions / painful to  
settle on one (DV)



**“I FOLLOWED MY  
HEART ..... IT LED  
DIRECTLY TO THE  
TREAT CUPBOARD”**

**A LOT OF  
EMOTIONS ALL  
AT ONCE!**



# Janet and Marcus

- In their 60's married 35 years – Affair, husband working in hospital settings in fly in fly out role, covid lockdowns

## Concerns:

- Wife – feeling shut out, “he’s built a wall”, “blindsighted”
- Husband – guilt, shame, depression, suicidal thoughts, unsure about future of relationship

Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test	54.0	92.0	Low relationship satisfaction is an issue for [REDACTED] but not an issue for [REDACTED]	<a href="#">Details</a>
Global Relationship Satisfaction Inventory	16.0	21.0	[REDACTED] are both dissatisfied with their relationship. Relationship satisfaction needs improvement.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Weiss-Cerretto Relationship Status Inventory	0.0	4.0	Based on data provided, [REDACTED] does not currently want to end this relationship, but [REDACTED] is considering separation or divorce.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Love Maps	4.0	4.0	A positive for this relationship is that both [REDACTED] feel known by one another and satisfied with their Love Maps, (their knowledge of one another's world).	<a href="#">Details</a>
Fondness and Admiration System	2.0	2.0	Neither [REDACTED] feels well respected, admired or loved by the other. Fondness and Admiration are problem areas in this relationship.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Turning Towards or Away	1.0	3.0	[REDACTED] feels that [REDACTED] does not Turn Toward her enough, but [REDACTED] is satisfied with [REDACTED] Turning Toward.	<a href="#">Details</a>

Subsection			Summary	
Chaos and Control	1.0	1.0	report that their home life provides them with a sense of safety, security, order and peace which is a strength for their relationship.	Details
Trust in the Relationship	30.0	21.0	does not trust this relationship, however does.	Details
Commitment	28.0	17.0	feels committed to this relationship, but does not.	Details
Meta-Emotions	18.0	11.0	struggles with Meta-Emotion as he does not think that sharing emotions is helpful or productive. In contrast does think that expressing emotions is helpful.	Details



Satisfaction with Passion and Romance	2.0	2.0	██████████ are both unhappy with the amount of passion and romance in their relationship.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Satisfaction with the Quality of Your Sex Life	2.0	2.0	██████████ are both dissatisfied by the quality of sex in this relationship.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Satisfaction with the Frequency of Sex	1.0	0.0	██████████ are both dissatisfied with the frequency of sex in their relationship.	<a href="#">Details</a>
Emotional Disengagement and Loneliness	4.0	3.0	██████████ both feel lonely and neither believes they are a priority in the other's life.	<a href="#">Details</a>

# Factors leading to Ambivalence and what's behind it?



Therapy Factors

Relationship  
Factors

Individual  
Factors

# Janet and Marcus

- Therapy: Strong pull from the wife, husband hesitant /make things worse /shame
- Individual: Husband – depression, suicidal, black and white thinking analytical, cognitive dissonance, perfectionistic
- Wife: caring, self sacrificing
- Relationship: affair, life stage, adult children, loneliness distance, negative comparisons, turning away,



# Exercise in pairs



Think about a couple with ambivalence present.

How did it present in the couple

What were some therapy, individual and relationship factors behind it

What were some challenges you faced and how did you manage them?



# Techniques – A roadmap for therapists

Engage and Contain

1

Model Healthy Communication

3

Review goals move forward

5

Listen and evoke

2

Perpetual Problems

4

Avoid the traps

6

# 1: Engage and Contain

Balance, fair, safe , explore experience of therapy and/or reluctance – FEAR / ANGER / SADNESS +++

- Reassure and help couple gain control over emotions – roller coaster – hope/despair – empathy for each other
- Don't force interventions – but consider power and control
- Explore anxiety/resistance / individual session if needed
- Safety planning and individual support



## 2. Listen and Evoke



- When you feel unacceptable it's difficult to change
- Evoking / not directing – Avoid Righting Reflex (MI)
- Dan Wile – “If I can guess what you're going through”..
- How Confident / How Important
- MI – Collaborative conversation to elicit own reasons for change

### 3. Model Healthy Communication



- Highly anxious couples = poor communication
- Leaning in /out – Working hard to please vs feeling suffocated, guilty
- ATTUNE Acronym

# ATTUNE



- A wareness of partner's emotions
- T olerance of 2 valid perceptions
- T urning towards partners negative emotions
- U nderstanding partner's negative emotions
- N on-defensively listening
- E mpathy expressed



## 4. Perpetual Problems- Integrative Behavioural CT

Distressed couples = Coercion, vilification,  
polarisation

Therapy involves : Empathic joining – decrease  
blame and accusation – see vulnerability

“Different not Deficient”

Unified detachment Problem as an “it”

Tolerance of non destructive behaviour

### INTEGRATIVE BEHAVIORAL COUPLE THERAPY

A Therapist's Guide to Creating  
Acceptance and Change



ANDREW CHRISTENSEN  
BRIAN D. DOSS  
NEIL S. JACOBSON

## 5 : Review goals and move forward

- What direction are we heading in..maybe a time frame?
- Be clear on agenda of CT – friendship? Reduce negativity
- Is CT helpful or destructive? – Deal breakers
- Book : What Makes Love Last? Honesty, transparency, accountability, ethical, alliance

## 6: Traps to avoid

- Getting frustrated and forcing people to do things before you've understood the fears
- Feeling too responsible / Over functioning – “You're not responsible for the problem you're not responsible for the cure” (The marriage clinic casebook)
- Taking sides / over identifying with one person
- Losing control of the session



# Take home messages



- Ambivalence – a common part of couples work-mixed agenda, commitment and goals
- Address fears and avoid traps – to give best chance of success
- Strategies to get around it – Create safety, engage, contain, evoke, acceptance, support.

# Group Discussion



- How can you incorporate some ideas from the roadmap techniques for therapists
- What traps can you relate to
- What other techniques would you use

# References and Resources

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