

Psychobiological  
Approach to  
Couple Therapy®

# Deception

## Are your couples being truthful?

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I N S T I T U T E

## Cousins of Our Field (short list)

- ▶ Artists
- ▶ Dancers
- ▶ Musicians
- ▶ Actors
- ▶ Physicians
- ▶ Trial attorneys
- ▶ Hypnotists
- ▶ Spies
- ▶ Criminal investigators
- ▶ Magicians
- ▶ Confidence (Con) Men/Women

# What is it?

PACT therapists:

- ▶ Take **time**
- ▶ Apply **rigorous investigative techniques**
- ▶ Always **get corroborating evidence** from each partner
- ▶ **Test and retest** their hunches
- ▶ Always **seek to prove their work**
- ▶ Attempt to **disprove their hypotheses**

# Our challenge as couple therapists

We need to find out what is actually going on!

- Who are these people?
- What do they really want?
- And what are they up to?



# A Strategic Approach

- ▶ We want to catch people in the act of being themselves
- ▶ Pay close attention to
  - ▶ Micro-movements and micro-expressions
  - ▶ Shifts and changes in arousal and affect
- ▶ Regulate the couple by
  - ▶ Tensing and relaxing
  - ▶ Shifting topics
  - ▶ Forensic-like interviewing process
- ▶ Create or stage experiences before interpreting
- ▶ Collect evidence and offer proof before confronting

# A Strategic Approach

PACT is intended for licensed private practice where there are no third party constraints

PACT is *not* intended for non-private practice settings where session length, treatment length, or frequency is limited or capped

PACT is contraindicated in court mandated situations

# Deception

**Deception** involves acting in such a way which leads another person to believe something, that you, yourself, do not believe to be true (Ekman, Miller & Stiff).

# What Is Deception?

- Deception can be defined broadly as the manipulation of appearances such that they convey a false reality.
- Deception includes both dissimulation (hiding or withholding information) and simulation (putting out wrong or misleading information).
- Both deception and lying can be accomplished by omission as well as by commission.
- Interestingly, folk theories of deception are more likely to attach moral significance to deceptions accomplished by commission than to those accomplished by omission.



# Deception

1

Lying  
(acute)

2

Lying  
(chronic)

3

Withholding  
information

4

Deflecting

5

Shifting  
blame

6

Gaslighting

# Who are you?

## What do you really want?

## What are you up to?

- ▶ Don't trust what people say
  - ▶ People lie
    - ▶ Avg 10x/day
    - ▶ Strangers lie up to 3x within the first 10 mins of a meeting
    - ▶ Extroverts lie more than introverts
    - ▶ Men lie more about themselves; women more to protect others
    - ▶ Married partners lie 1x/10 interactions
    - ▶ Unmarried partners 1x/3 interactions
  - ▶ People withhold information
  - ▶ People don't know what they're talking about
  - ▶ People will hide or will not know what they really want
  - ▶ People will hide or not know what they are up to in therapy

# Deception

Analyze	Analyze versus speculate
Manage	Manage your bias
Recognize	Recognize evasiveness
Beware	Beware of aggressiveness
Convey	Convey versus convince
Understand	Understand non-verbal cues

# Analyze versus Speculate

- ▶ Disregard global behaviors
- ▶ Pay attention to when NOT just what a person does
  - ▶ Behaviors associated with response
- ▶ Timing (within 3-5 seconds)
- ▶ Clusters (two or more of same behaviors)



# Manage Your Bias

- ▶ Ignore truthful behavior
- ▶ Liking or disliking your patient can mislead you
- ▶ Avoid proving your hypothesis
  - ▶ Try disproving it

# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Doesn't answer question asked (aka deflection)
- ▶ Doesn't deny
- ▶ Exclusionary qualifiers (begs follow-up question)
  - ▶ Question: "Does her behavior annoy you?" Answer: "Not really."
- ▶ Non-contracted denial
  - ▶ "I did not have sex with that woman"
  - ▶ Denials are spoken slowly to oversell their honesty
- ▶ Repeating the question in its entirety

# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Lack of self-reference
  - ▶ Truthful people make frequent use of the pronoun "I" to describe their actions:
    - ▶ *"I got home at 6:30. I saw you were upset and I asked you if you thought I said an earlier time. You said no, so I was confused."* This brief statement contains the pronoun "I" four times in three sentences.
  - ▶ Deceptive people often use language that minimizes references to themselves. One way to reduce self-references is to describe events in the passive voice.
    - ▶ *"You know, you come home and you want some piece of mind and then there's your wife and she's upset with you for no good reason."*



# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Verb tense
  - ▶ Truthful people usually describe historical events in the past tense. Deceptive people sometimes refer to past events as if the events were occurring in the present.
  - ▶ Describing past events using the present tense suggests that people are rehearsing the events in their mind.
  - ▶ "After I hung up from you, I started to get ready for bed. It was raining hard outside and I was missing you. And then *I get this knock* on the door and *it's the lady* that talked to me in the hotel café. *I see her there* and she's dressed, you know, not for talk but for action. What was I to do?"



# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Answering questions with questions
  - ▶ Outright lies carry the risk of detection. Before answering a question with a lie, a deceptive person will usually try to avoid answering the question at all. One common method of dodging questions is to respond with a question of one's own.
    - ▶ "Why would I lie to you?"
    - ▶ "Do I seem like the kind of person who would do something like that?"
    - ▶ "Don't you think somebody would have to be pretty stupid to hide such a thing from one's partner?"

# Recognize Evasiveness

## ► Equivocation

- The partner avoids questions by filling his or her statements with expressions of uncertainty, weak modifiers and vague expressions.
- Watch for words such as: think, guess, sort of, maybe, might, perhaps, approximately, about, could.
- Vague statements and expressions of uncertainty allow a deceptive person leeway to modify his or her assertions at a later date without directly contradicting the original statement.
- Noncommittal verbs are: think, believe, guess, suppose, figure, assume.
- Equivocating adjectives and adverbs are: sort of, almost, mainly, perhaps, maybe, about.
- Vague qualifiers are: you might say, more or less.

# Recognize Evasiveness

## ■ Oaths

- Although deceptive persons attempt to give partners (and therapists) as little useful information as possible, they try very hard to convince everyone that what they say is true.
- Deceptive people often use mild oaths to try to make their statements sound more convincing.
- Deceptive people are more likely than truthful people to sprinkle their statements with expressions such as: "I swear," "on my honor," "as God is my witness," "cross my heart."
- Truthful partners are more confident that the facts will prove the veracity of their statements and feel less need to back their statements with oaths.



# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Euphemisms
  - ▶ Many languages offer alternative terms for almost any action or situation. Statements made by guilty partners often include mild or vague words rather than their harsher, more explicit synonyms.
  - ▶ Euphemisms portray the partner's behavior in a more favorable light and minimize any harm the subject's actions might have caused.
  - ▶ Therapists should listen for euphemisms:
    - ▶ "I was trying to help him, that's why I texted back."
    - ▶ "I was being welcoming, that's why I hugged her."
    - ▶ "It was a little peck on the cheek, that's all."



# Recognize Evasiveness

- ▶ Alluding to actions
  - ▶ People sometimes allude to actions without saying they actually performed them.
  - ▶ "I try to be as transparent as possible. I tell you as soon as I can, anything about what I'm spending. Last Tuesday, I needed to make a decision about the purchase and decided to make an executive decision and then tell you as soon as possible. I needed to pick the kids up and get them to soccer practice."
  - ▶ Did this person actually buy something? What did they buy? How much did they spend? When did they tell their partner about this? Was this in line with an agreement they had made about purchases?

# Recognize Evasiveness

## ▶ Lack of Detail

- ▶ Truthful statements usually contain specific details, some of which may not even be relevant to the question asked.
- ▶ This happens because truthful subjects are retrieving events from long-term memory, and our memories store dozens of facts about each experience — the new shoes we were wearing, the song that was playing in the background, the woman at the next table who reminded us of our third-grade teacher, the conversation that was interrupted when the fire alarm rang.
- ▶ At least some of these details will show up in a truthful subject's statement.
- ▶ Those who fabricate a story, however, tend to keep their statements simple and brief.
- ▶ Few liars have sufficient imagination to make up detailed descriptions of fictitious events.
- ▶ Plus, a deceptive person wants to minimize the risk that a partner will discover evidence contradicting any aspect of his or her statement; the fewer facts that might be proved false, the better.



# Recognize Evasiveness

- Narrative balance
  - A narrative consists of three parts: prologue, critical event and aftermath.
  - The prologue contains background information and describes events that took place before the critical event.
  - The critical event is the most important occurrence in the narrative.
  - The aftermath describes what happened after the critical event.
  - In a complete and truthful narrative, the balance will be approximately 20 percent to 25 percent prologue, 40 percent to 60 percent critical event and 25 percent to 35 percent aftermath.
  - If one part of the narrative is significantly shorter than expected, important information may have been omitted.
  - If one part of the narrative is significantly longer than expected, it may be padded with false information.

# Recognize Evasiveness

- Mean Length of Utterance
  - The average number of words per sentence is called the "mean length of utterance" (MLU). The MLU equals the total number of words in a statement divided by the number of sentences:
    - $\text{Total number of words} / \text{Total number of sentences} = \text{MLU}$
  - Most people tend to speak in sentences of between 10 and 15 words
  - When people feel anxious about an issue, they tend to speak in sentences that are either significantly longer or significantly shorter than the norm. Therapists should pay particular attention to sentences whose length differs significantly from the subject's MLU.



# Beware of aggressiveness

- ▶ Angry response to a question
- ▶ Attacking a third party
- ▶ Inappropriate level of concern
  - ▶ Too serious or not serious enough

# Convey versus Convince

- ▶ Convincing statements
  - ▶ “I wouldn’t do that”
- ▶ Referral statements
  - ▶ “As I said before...”
- ▶ Invoking religion
  - ▶ “I swear to God”
- ▶ Perception qualifiers
  - ▶ “To be honest...” or “To tell you the truth...” or “Frankly...”
  - ▶ Listen for clusters

# Understand Non-Verbal Cues

- Behavioral pauses
- Verbal/non-verbal disconnect
- Dis-synchrony between words and movement
- Sudden stopping, slowing down, or jerkiness in movement while talking
- Anchor point movements
  - Right after a question is posed
- Grooming gestures
- Freezing the face and/or upper body
- Too much eye contact
- Duping behavior (inappropriate smile)
- Hand to face movements (arousal going up)
  - Itching

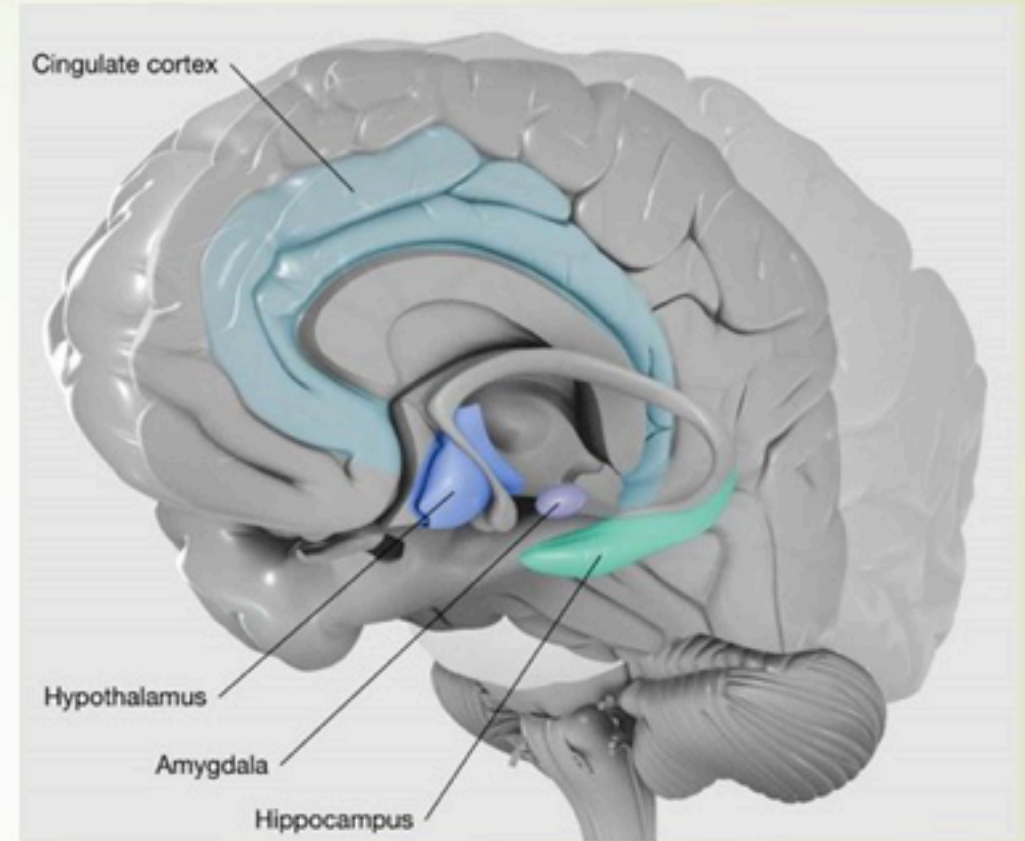
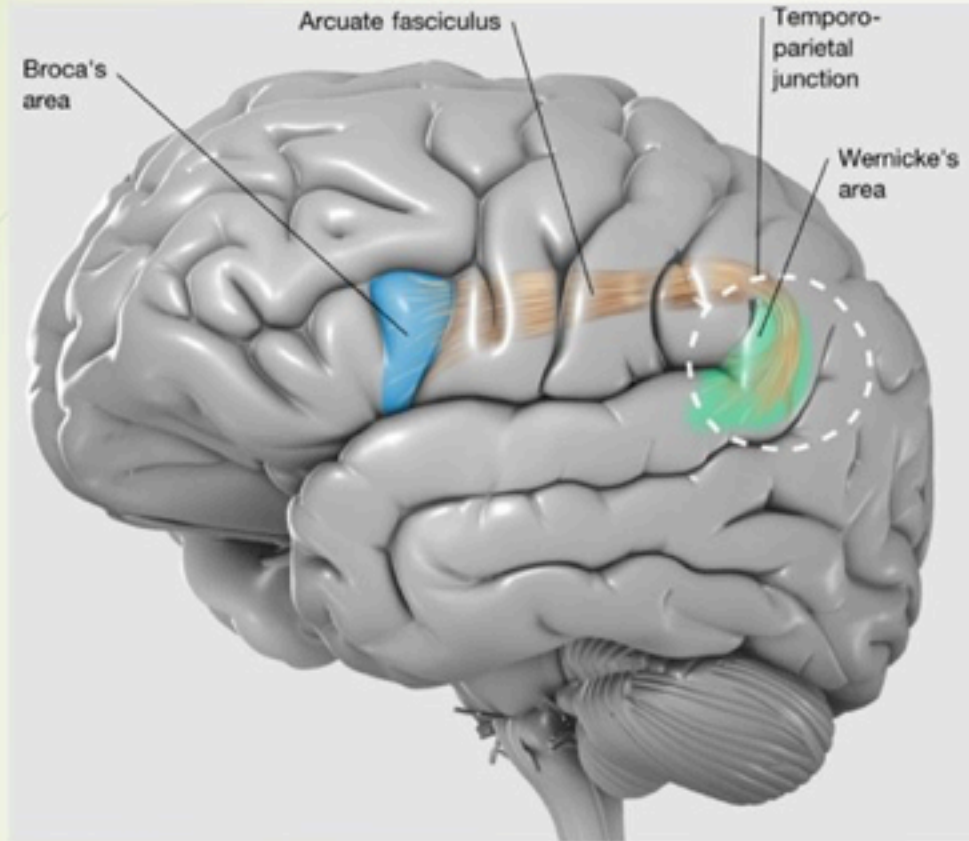
# Q & A



Focus on the face, eyes, voice,  
and body “tells”

# Baselines, Baselines, Baselines

- ▶ Face is THE primary signal system for emotion.
- ▶ Friendliness, rapport, meaningless chatter
- ▶ What does the face, body, and voice do when relaxed?
- ▶ Facial Withholders – Unwitting Expressers – Substitute Expressers
- ▶ Face reveals emotion, body reveals how emotion is being handled
- ▶ Reading faces requires visual attention
  - ▶ Even focusing on the face, words will grab attention



# High Resource Demand

# Tracking the Body

## Start flagging:

- Facial expressions (over-expression, under-expression, **controls**, resting face, upper-mid-lower face, etc)
- Eyes (pupils)
- Heart rate (neck, wrist, ankle, nose)
- Skin color
- Breathing (chest, belly)
- Muscle tautness (striated areas)
- Posture
- Gestures
- Voice (pressure, speed, volume, prosody)
- Movements (or lack thereof)



# Tracking the Body

- ▶ *Arousal* regulation is different from *affect* regulation
- ▶ Track arousal over affect
- ▶ Resource demanding versus resource conserving structures
  - ▶ High right and left structures
  - ▶ Frontal structures (including the anterior cingulate)
    - ▶ affect muscle movement
- ▶ Hyper/hypo-arousal affects speech and prosody
- ▶ Your own brain can fool you

# Tracking Deception

People deceive with their words, faces, voices, and bodies

- Self-soothing movements
- Unnecessary movements
- Body pointing
- Eye blocking
- Motor disruptions
- Motor jerkiness
- Narrative errors
  - Saying too much
  - Saying too little
  - Speaking tangentially
  - Misleading
  - Deflecting
  - Contradicting



Therapist uses surprise statements, surprise questions, movements, and other bottom-up techniques to create a splash, like dropping a pebble into water. Pay close attention to both partners prior to, during, and especially just following the pebble drop! There's the SPLASH and then there are the WAVES that follow. We find more information in the WAVES and SPACES.



# What to do

We use forensic-type interviewing skills

- Switch out topics
- Use surprise
- Tense and relax
- Presumptive technique – “You’re done with her, right?”
- Use hyperbole

We set them up to prove or disprove our hunches

Strategically stage interventions that will smoke out deception



# Cautionary Notes

- ▶ You can learn to discover the smallest shifts and changes in a person's face and body
- ▶ You can learn to identify when resources are being used or when self-soothing behavior occurs before, during, and especially after resources are used
- ▶ You CANNOT know the SOURCE or TARGET of a somatic reaction
  - ▶ That must be tested, retested, and corroborated by both the patient and his/her partner
- ▶ Tells are tips, not facts
- ▶ All hunches must be verified, tested, proven or disproven

# Nervous System Regulation

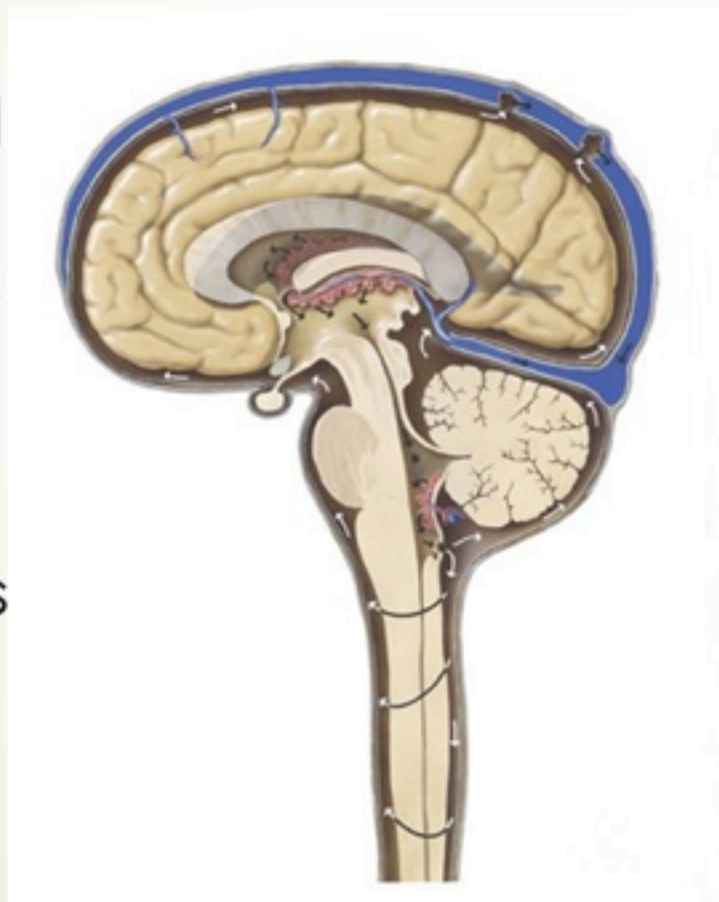
Preparatory/Anticipatory Systems

# Ambassadors

# Primitives

## High Cortical

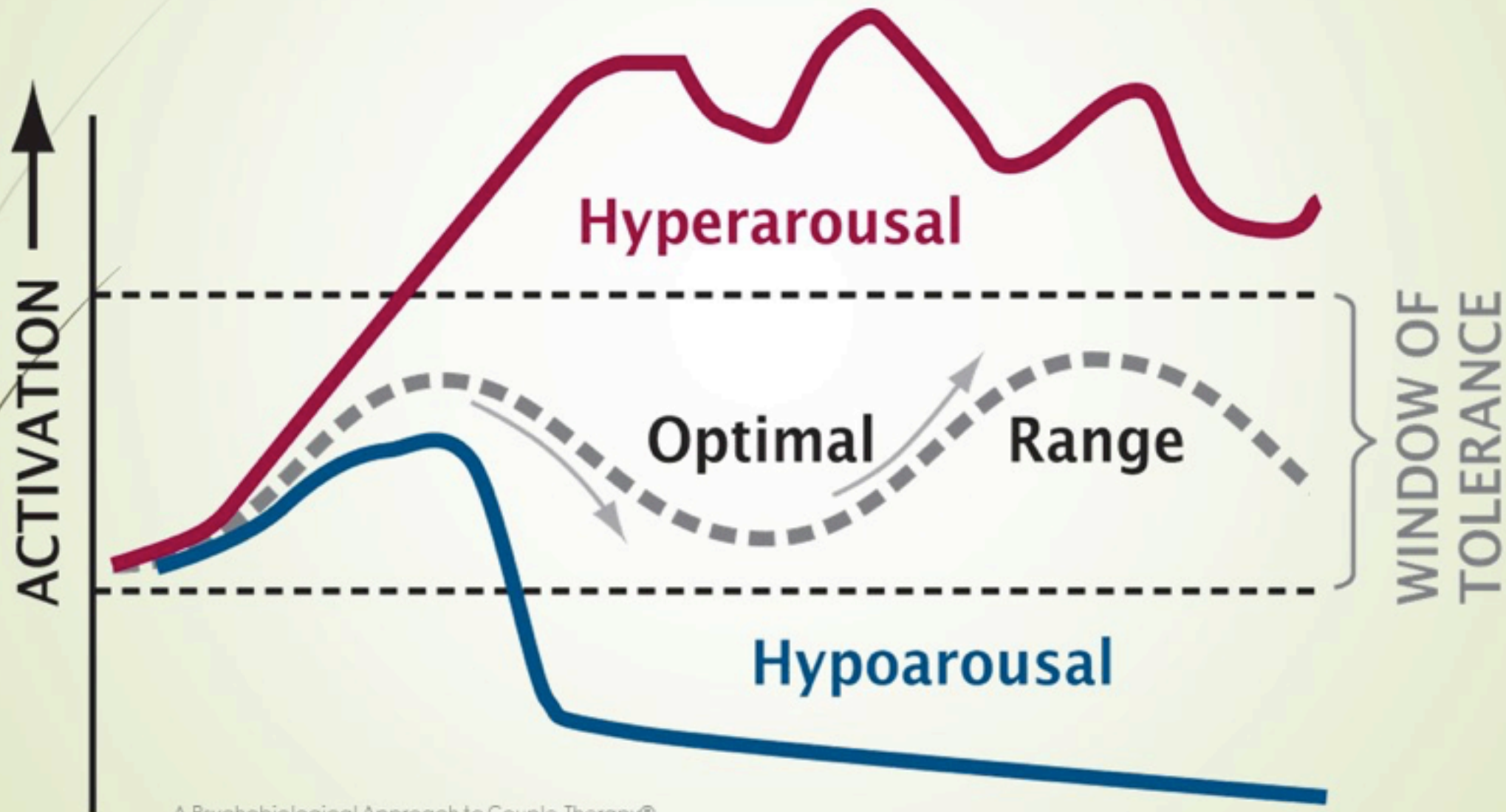
- ✓ Relational
- ✓ Expensive
- ✓ Slow
- ✓ Conscious



## Subcortical

- ✓ Survival
- ✓ Cheap
- ✓ Fast
- ✓ Automatic

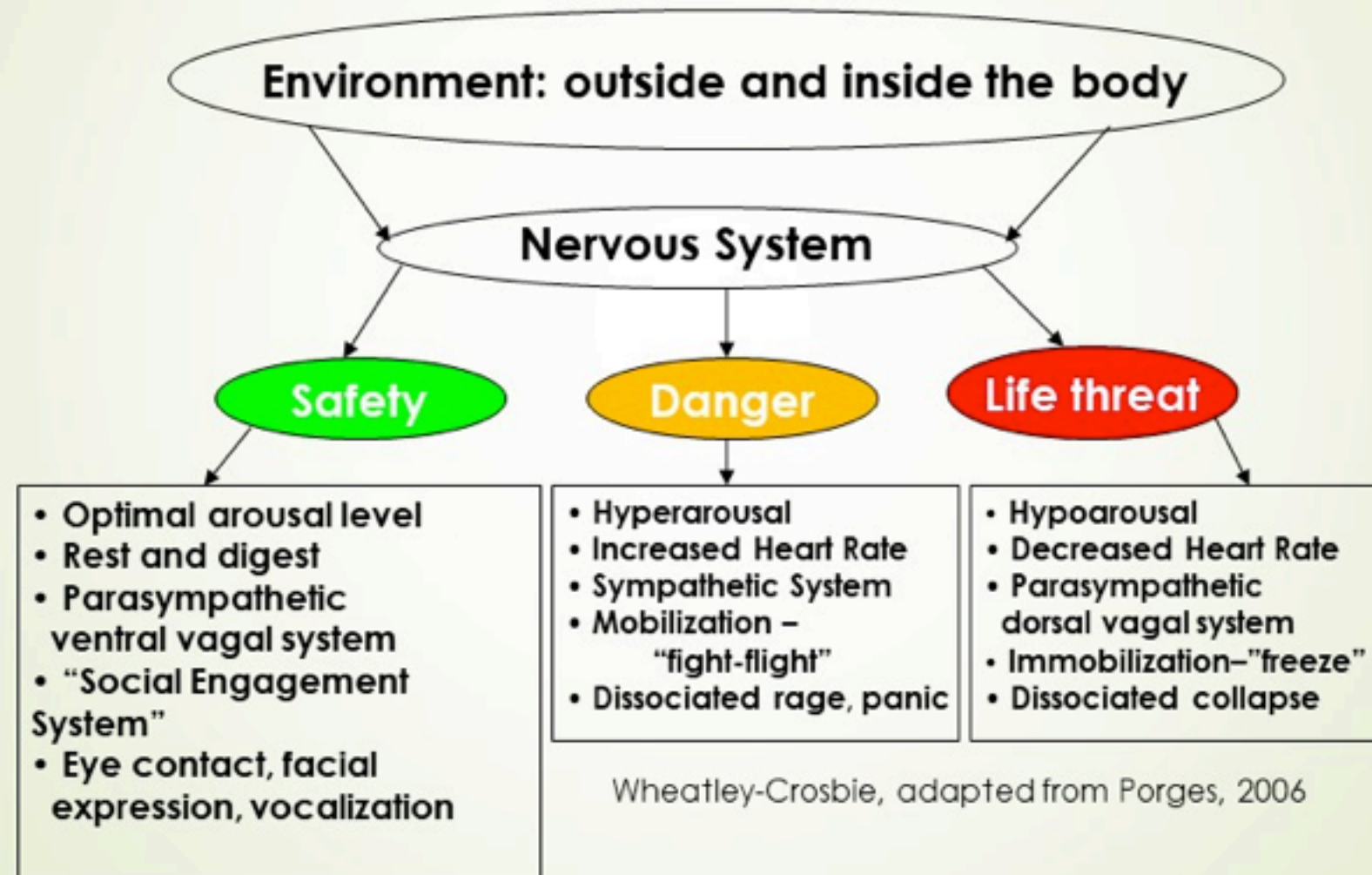
# Window of Tolerance





## Porges' View of the ANS

### The metaphor of safety



# Arousal “Tells”

- ▶ SKILL set (visual and auditory recognition of arousal)
  - ▶ Skin/muscle tone color cues
  - ▶ Facial expression cues
  - ▶ Movement cues
  - ▶ Breathing cues
  - ▶ Eye cues
  - ▶ Posture cues
  - ▶ Gesture cues
  - ▶ Vocal cues
  - ▶ Speech pattern cues

# Crossing Techniques

Where your eyes should go

43

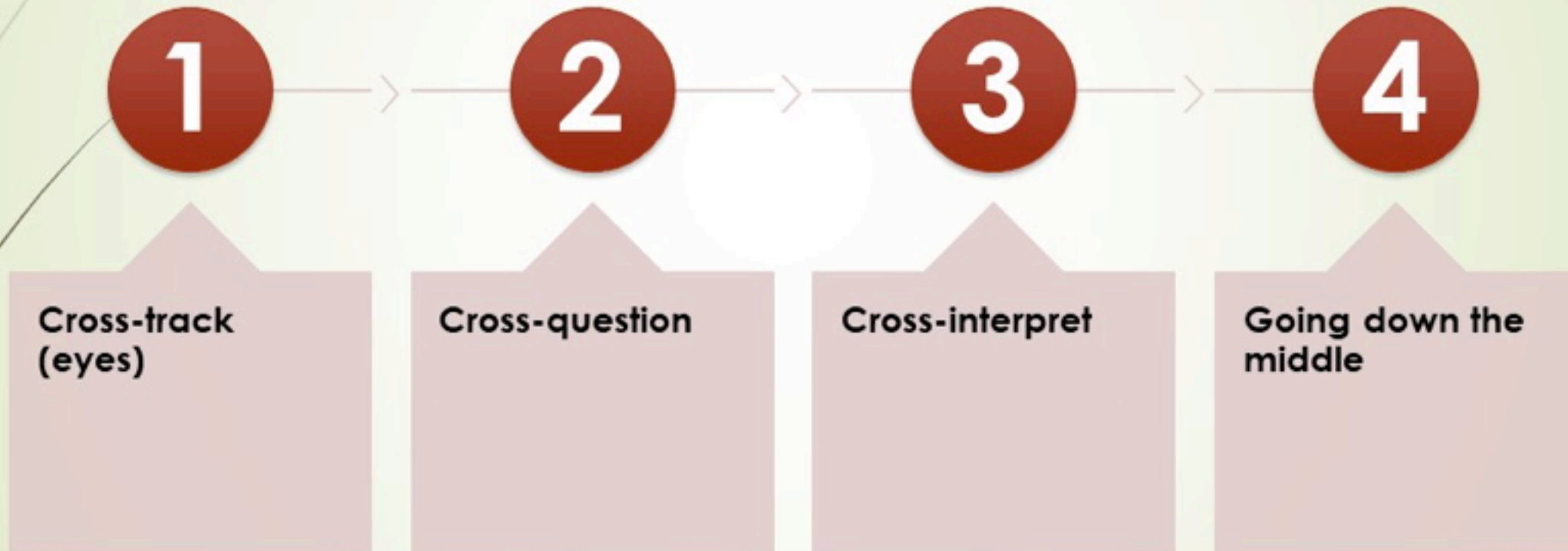


# Why Use Crossing Techniques

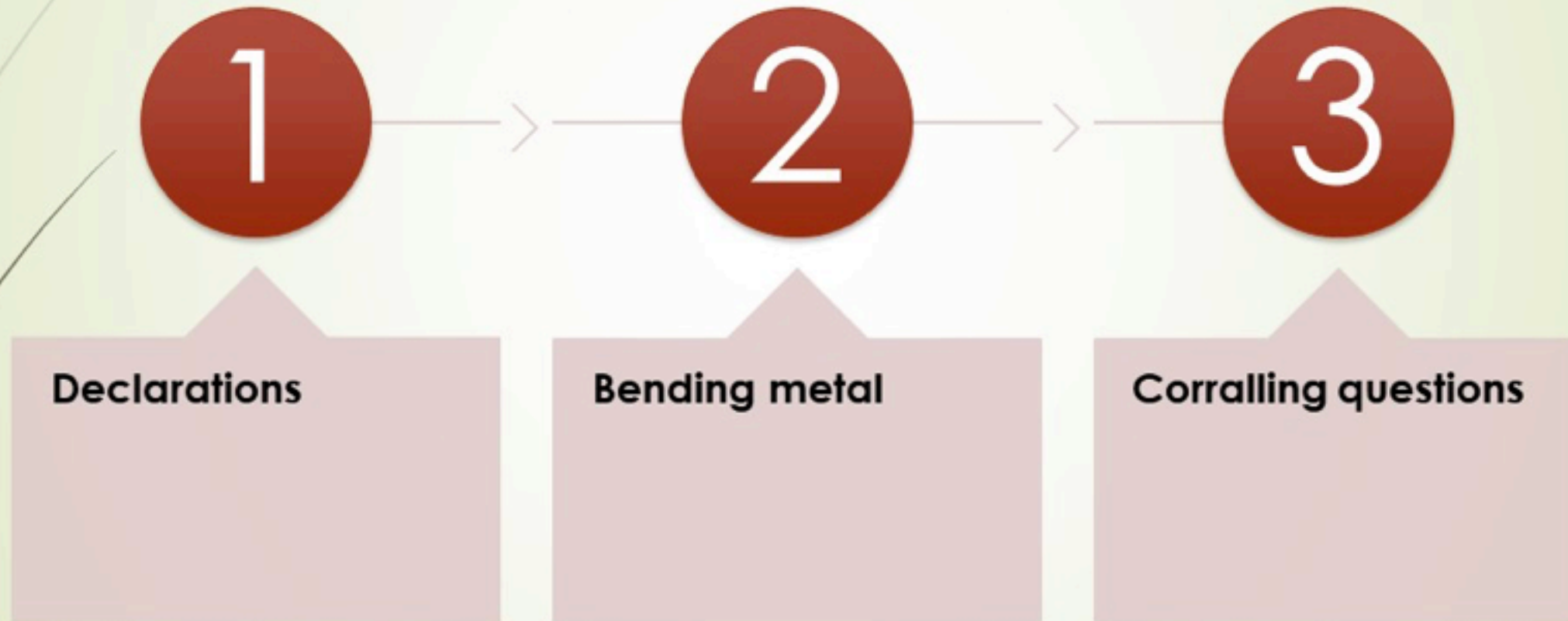
- Get more information quickly
- The target partner is relatively undisturbed by questions, comments, or interpretations aimed at him/her
- Crossing interventions bypass defense
- Assumes that partners are in each other's care
- Assumes that partners are experts on each other
- Tests the non-target partner's knowledge and understanding
- And, the target partner gets to be a fly on the wall



# Crossing Techniques



# Other Techniques



# Last Thoughts on Deception

- The matter of deception is at an all-time public concern
- The political climate, which reflects the culture, has directed our attention to lying, deflection, contradiction, blaming, covering up, and gaslighting
- What is occurring with our political leaders is affecting couples and families
- Individuals with trauma are particularly affected by both the behaviors exhibited by these leaders as well as those who remain silent, complicit, and tolerant of such behaviors
- The therapeutic community is also being affected
- We are standard-bearers for reality, truthfulness, and social justice



As a therapist, I view gaslighting as particularly sinister because it goes further than lying and covering up. Recovering from betrayal is not easy for couples. Recovery from the emotional trauma of gaslighting is much more difficult.

Why bring this up now? Because gaslighting is not limited to relationships between two people; it can occur at a national level. We as Americans are in a committed relationship with our leaders. We expect our government to be truthful with us. We rely on facts being true when the government passes along information. Our sanity as individuals as well as a nation depends on a climate of basic trust.

We are not living in a movie: if we are repeatedly lied to in the political arena, there are consequences to our national emotional health, whether we realize it or not. Individuals who have a personal history of being betrayed or lied to may be especially vulnerable, but every person is at risk. Everyone's brain is traumatized when it is forced to continually reconcile what it knows to be fact with falsehoods it is being told.

You may think it doesn't matter; that we're all able as adults to discern the facts. But that is to underestimate the very real effects of gaslighting. The perpetrator gaslights because he knows how effective and disorienting it is. He does it because it is a powerful way to manipulate others. He does it because it takes the focus off whatever he is doing that he doesn't want you to know about. And he may well get away with it because there is not always either a detective or a therapist—or in this case, a news outlet or a governing body—available to help pick up the pieces.



# Conclusion

- ▶ Before we can do anything, we must be clear about what it is that is in front of us
- ▶ People lie, deflect, defend, hide, mislead, and most of all, make things up in the absence of knowing why they do what they do
- ▶ Real time is too fast
- ▶ We are all automatic
- ▶ Memory drives state, and vice versa
- ▶ State changes alter perception
- ▶ Cross track, cross question, and cross interpret (comment) as a way to sew partners together
- ▶ Secure functioning will only occur if the couple therapist expects it
- ▶ Secure functioning is not just good for couples but for the world

Be secure functioning!

# Q & A