

The Science of Romantic Relationships

David VanNuys Ph.D. interviews Sue Johnson, Ph.D.

David: Sue Johnson, Ph.D., is an author, clinical psychologist, researcher, professor, popular presenter and speaker and one of the leading innovators in the field of couples' therapy. Individuals, couples and practicing therapists all turn to Sue for her insight and guidance. She's the primary developer of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, which has demonstrated its effectiveness in over 25 years of peer reviewed clinical research.

As author of the bestselling book, "Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love," Sue Johnson has created for the general public a self-help version of her groundbreaking research about relationships, how to enhance them, how to repair them, and how to keep them.

Her most recent book, "Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships," outlines the new logical understanding of why and how we love, based on new scientific evidence and cutting edge research. Explaining that romantic love is based on an attachment bond, Dr. Johnson shows how to develop our "love sense," our ability to develop long lasting relationships.

Sue Johnson is Founding Director of the International Center for Excellence and Emotionally Focused Therapy, and Distinguished Research Professor at Alliance University in San Diego, California, as well as Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Sue Johnson, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Sue: Hey, nice to be here, David.

David: It's really nice to have you here. A couple of my former guests alerted me to your work and to its importance, most recently it was Dr. John Amodeo and before that Dr. Keith Sutton, so I'm glad to finally have the opportunity to connect with you.

Sue: Hey, it's nice to talk to you.

David: Yes. Now you've pioneered an approach called, "Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy," which is abbreviated EFCT and sometimes just EFT. What are the basic underlying principles of that approach?

Sue: The basic underlying principle is that EFT focuses on the emotional experience of relating to another person and the emotional signals that are the music of the dance that couples get into and the patterns in that dance. It really prioritizes emotion. At the time it was created, emotion was really sort of seen almost as the enemy in couples therapy and people were talking about you had to have insight, you had to teach people negotiation skills, you had to teach people very set communication skills and the idea was that emotion almost kind of got in the way. You had to teach people to be rational and to negotiate, and really, you know, EFT came from sitting down and watching distressed couples and then watching them as we try to help them repair their relationship, and what we saw was that the most powerful thing in the room was the emotion that people experienced and that that primed their thoughts and it primed the way they responded to their partner, and a lot of the things that people wanted from each other, you really couldn't get to them any other way but through emotion. You can't tell people to feel love, you can't coach people to feel sexual desire and affection, you know, that just doesn't work, and people, our couples, didn't just want to negotiate about chores, they wanted some sort of secure, emotional connection.

We focused on the emotion and really from a long tradition which started with Rogers, I think experiential therapists are used to working with emotion and to helping partners or anyone helping individuals, if you like in therapy, reprocess that emotion, reshape that emotion, and experiential therapists also see emotion as a positive force.

EFT came out of that tradition of focusing on emotion, but if you want a shorthand, what I do in EFT is I help people move into their emotional experience, order it, distill it, and reshape it in a way that helps them send new messages to their partner, and the new messages invite that partner close, rather than pushing that partner away. We really focus on primacy of emotional communication.

David: All of that makes a lot of sense to me. I come out of the very much an experiential tradition myself, humanistic psychology, Gestalt therapy, a number of other approaches so that what you're saying really resonates with me.

Three years ago I interviewed Dr. Leslie Greenberg about his 30 years of research on Emotional Focused Therapy.

Sue: Yes.

David: I also see that you co-wrote a book with him. What's the relationship between your work and his?

Sue: You know really Les and I worked together to formulate the first version, the first manual of EFT for couples. Basically I think Les has done most of his work in looking at intra-psychic change, and I think his work is very significant in looking at intra-psychic change, whereas I just became completely obsessed with couples and dyadic change and helping couples and working with these.

It's almost like we sort of worked together and then I kind of just became obsessed with couples, and the other thing that happened, which I think is very significant for EFT for couples, is that I became obsessed with the beginnings of adult attachment theory and research, which really, when we first wrote the first manual for EFT for couples, there wasn't anything in the literature about adult attachment, nothing, and it was only when I started looking at what was happening in EFT and realizing how powerful it was, realizing it was much more powerful ... I sort of didn't quite know what was going on but I knew something very powerful was going on and I couldn't quite explain it.

Then when I started reading some of the very early people like Phil Shaver writing about adult attachment, suddenly it all made sense. As EFT for couples has developed, it's become more and more attachment-orientated and attachment, adult attachment, has grown as a field so the two fields have kind of grown together to the point where, to be honest, I'm a researcher and I'm a presenter and I'm a couples therapist, but if you really asked me, I'd say I'm an attachment researcher and theorist.

EFT is the only approach to working with relationships that is based on a broad, deeply articulated, massively researched, developmental theory of personality and relationship. It is the only approach to couples therapy that has that kind of base. We have a map to what love is all about, and so I think that gives us an amazing edge, you know like I have a map to people's inner experience of longing and pain and I have a map to the interactions that are going to get people completely stuck in that pain or the interactions that can take people into more secure bonding, and that map is attachment theory.

David: Fascinating. Fascinating. We'll get into attachment theory some more as we go along. I'm struck by the confidence of the statements that you just made. It sounds like you have a lot of confidence when you say, "I have a map," and ...

Sue: You know it's ... I do have a lot of confidence and we have 16 outcome studies now and about 9 process of change studies, and they're all on our website: www.iceeft.com, and also there's a new website out: Drsuejohnson.com that has some clips on our most recent studies, particularly on a brain scan study we just did.

I do have a lot of confidence because I think every time I walk in, never mind the studies, every time I walk in with a new couple, I feel that I'm not starting from scratch, I'm not ... I know the kinds of things this couple are going to say, I know how to interpret the look on the man's face, I almost know where this couple needs to go.

That being said, each couple is also unique. The couple teach you about their reality and their longings, but nevertheless, what attachment says is that we have certain responses that are wired into our brains by millions of years of evolution. We are all terrified of rejection and abandonment, and we all depend on our most intimate partners in a way that is intimately linked to our very sense of emotional survival. That really does give me or any EFT therapist a really ... what John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory would say, "a secure base to stand on," when a couple or a family, or even an individual talking about relationship problems, when these people come and start to talk to you, you know, it's like, you really do have a secure base of understanding about what these relationships are all about and what people's needs are, and you're right, David, that does give me a lot of confidence.

When I say to a couple, "Yes, I understand how stuck you feel right now, and we know how to help you out of this, we know how to take you here," it feels very, very good to be able to say that, and certainly we worked very hard for that. I didn't start there. Perhaps one of the reasons I got so hooked ... I started not knowing what to do at all, right?

David: Sure, sure, well you know, having been in that situation and not having developed the same set of skills that you have or not having had this map to work from, there you are with two or more people and emotions are flying all over the place, and I can understand that it really helps to have a map and a solid place to stand on.

Now as you move through this therapy, in your map I would imagine that there are sort of stages of therapy that unfold, and maybe you can take us through what the major stages of your approach are.

Sue: Yes. Basically we try to create a safe reliance, and we're also guided by attachment theory there in that we stay emotionally present with the people in the room. We validate them, we try to really help them feel safe so that they know that they're going to be supported and not blamed. We assess the couple, and that is written up very well in the EFT literature in the basic 2004 book, "The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy," and the workbook that goes along with it and the casebook that goes along with that. That assessment procedure is well written up.

Then we go, really, that's part of stage one which we call, "De-escalation," and what we're trying to do is de-escalate the negative cycles of interaction that people have created and are now stuck in. Cycles like one person's criticizing and blaming basically in order from an attachment point of view, to get a response from the other person, and the other person feels criticized and blamed, and this hurts. We know from recent research that that's not a metaphor, that rejection in the mammalian brain, is really processed as a danger cue and it's processed in the same place and in the same way as physical pain because isolation from others is dangerous for mammals and our brain is wired to understand that right from the beginnings.

We take the couple into the relationship. We show them the patterns they get stuck in. One person criticizes, one person withdraws because they don't want to be rejected and to hear they're disappointing, and the more one person withdraws, the more the other person ups the ante and criticizes.

We help them see these kinds of patterns and we help them understand that the problem in the relationship is the dance they're courting, not the fact that they don't have any skills or that there's something wrong with them from their family history or that they're somehow inherently deficient as partners. We help them understand the dance, and we help them understand the emotional music that's going on, the desperateness underneath criticism, and the feeling of hopelessness and failure that mostly underlies withdrawal in intimate relationships.

We get to the point where we can have the couple have a meta-perspective on the relationship, understand things from the point of view of attachment, understand the impact they have on each other, and start to help ... stand together and look at the enemy, look at the dance, and begin to make sense of what's going on, feel more confident that they can impact this, and create a secure base in their own relationship. That's Stage One.

People say things like, "Our relationship's improved incredibly. I used to think he just didn't care. Now I understand that he doesn't know what to do and he gets scared. I never really meant to hurt him, and somehow we're more affectionate and we feel better about our relationship and nothing's really changed." They're right. They're right, because what we've done is we've contained the negative. We've contained the dance they get into that constantly puts them into what we call, "attachment panic," puts them into rejection and abandonment. We've contained it, they've contained it. Now if you stop there, and I think lots of couples therapies, from our point of view, do stop there, if you stop there there's been some improvement in the relationship, but our assumption is that they will relapse because the heart of EFT is the second stage, which is restructuring attachment. In the second stage, we help the couple create a positive cycle of

interaction where each person can tune into their own emotions, keep their emotional balance, make sense of those emotions, and learn to turn and reach for the other person in a way that pulls that person close, and we call that, "withdrawal re-engagement" that's what it's called in the therapy literature. When we talk to the public, we call that, "hold me tight conversation."

What we know is when couples learn to do this, learn to reach for each other and talk about their needs and their fears from an attachment point of view, that this predicts that at the end of therapy they will be out of distress, they will have repaired their relationship, and in our most recent study which isn't published yet, we've also shown that we can help them create a more secure attachment bond.

That is very promising because all the research says that secure attachment bonds are associated with every positive indices of healthy psychological functioning you can imagine, from assertiveness to the ability to deal with stress, to the ability to deal with ambiguous information, to empathy for others, on and on and on and on and on. We feel that these conversations not only heal relationships, they create relationships that heal and grow people. I think Rogers would have liked that.

The third stage is consolidation, where we basically help the couple see what they've done, celebrate what they've done and create a new model for their relationship so that they can take these future. At this point we have, my institute has created over the years quite a large number of training tapes where we show these kinds of stages and we show the EFT interventions because we spent a lot of energy making this model available to therapists, you know, so that ... I mean there's no point in having a model that you think is on target and really helpful if it stays on a shelf in a library or only 20 therapists know how to do it.

David: Right, right. Have you ever sold vacuum cleaners or washing machines or something, because you're quite a good salesman?

Sue: Oh, really?

David: I'm really sold here. Oh yes. Now it makes me wonder, though, are there any critics of EFT and if so, what's ...

Sue: Oh sure.

David: Their criticism?

Sue: EFT is the only approach apart from behavioral approaches that has real strong empirical validation, so my behavioral colleagues ... I'm not quite sure what

they'd say. I think traditionally they have taught that you teach communication skills and negotiation skills, and then the latest model put out by Andy Christiansen teaches that you end up teaching the couple to accept the negative behaviors that they can't change and I think they would say ... I'm not sure they use it to criticize us, they would say that if you do this, the couple will be fine and perhaps that as satisfaction goes up, the attachment bond will just naturally get better. The trouble with that one is all the research is in the other direction. What the research on attachment says is that it's secure attachment that creates satisfaction. That's the direction there, it's not the other way around. You can have some satisfaction in a relationship but if that doesn't translate into being able to reach for somebody and get the support you need, that satisfaction isn't going to last very long, it's going to disintegrate.

They don't agree, I don't think, about the power of attachment and perhaps those folks would say that learning cognitive skills is as powerful as working with emotion. For me, that is a non, that is just a non-argument. Every human being on this planet knows that emotion, especially in intimate relationships, is the most powerful thing there is. It's the music of the dance.

David: Yeah, and we've learned through recent brain science that emotion is faster than cognition, right?

Sue: Oh yeah, and it's compelling.

David: Yeah, and that's why arguments and so on can flare up so quickly and offense can be taken so quickly and so deeply.

Sue: That's right, and so I think they would say that there are also some folks who have different models of therapy who don't have any research. Some people object to attachment... Some of the more traditional, Bowenian folks would say that they focus on individuation and differentiation, for example. I believe that David Schnarch suggests that we are turning people into needy children, which I find very strange because our couples don't look like needy children at the end of the day, they look like very well-functioning adults.

The key issue there is attachment says that you differentiate and individuate with people, not from people, and that we are strongest when we can reach for others and use others as a resource. The research behind that is enormous, so my response to those folks is to say, "Show me the research."

David: All right. That's such a breakthrough, too, I mean it's been a lot of years of hard work, but I think going back to the '60s when I was in training and graduating and so on, and had a strong emotional faith and reliance on experiential work, but the research wasn't there and that was always the criticism that was being

brought to people who came from that point of view. Now people like you and like Leslie and others have really done the hard work to establish these principles that rest on research.

You go through a lot of this in your latest book, which is title, the main title of the book is, "Love Sense," and I wonder about "Love Sense," if that's a play on words. What are you getting at with that title?

Sue: What I'm getting at is that all through recorded human history, poets and philosophers and psychologists as well have talked about romantic love as a mystery, and of course we don't quite trust mysteries, you know. You don't want to base your life on a mystery, so they've talked about romantic love as a mystery. What I'm really getting at with this title is that at this point in time, because of the last 20 years, love simply isn't a mystery anymore. We understand it and we understand what it's about. We understand how it goes wrong. We understand how to repair it, we understand how important it is and why. This is an enormous breakthrough and the promise in that is that if love makes sense, then you can understand it and shape it and learn how to do it.

I think in this world that's huge because we count on our partners in a way that nobody in human civilization has ever done before. We don't live in small villages, we don't live in massively supportive communities that give us a web of familiarity and support from the time we are born to the time we die. We really ask our partner to provide the kind of emotional connection and support that my grandmother got from a village. I think that puts romantic love on a whole new footing in terms of survival and importance in people's lives.

I read a survey that said that marriage has changed and women used to basically ask what kind of provider you were going to be, and a recent survey said that it was more important for women that a man talk about his emotions than how much money he made and whether he was going to provide for them. I think marriage has moved from being an economic enterprise to an emotional enterprise. It's the main way we get these needs for emotional connection and security met as adults in our society.

David: Let me ask you a question. Is that putting too great a burden on the relationship to have to supply what a village and what a community used to support?

Sue: It is if you don't know how to do it. I feel like what we do is we ... The reason that EFT is powerful is not because all the EFT therapists are so clever and magical or because we're super master therapists, we're all gurus ... That's not the reason why EFT is powerful. The reason EFT is powerful, I believe, is because we tune in to the most powerful, unconditioned motivation in human beings, which is much more powerful than sex and aggression by the way, which is the need for safe

emotional connection and caring from another human being. The point about that one is if we understand that, and we know how to deal with that, and we know how to operationalize that in a relationship. A relationship is amazingly satisfying for people. When we watch our couples, when one person is really able to turn and reach for the other person, what we see is this naturally evokes amazing empathy and caring in the other person to the point where they want to give, they like to give. We like holding babies. I mean babies are like a little magnet. We look at them, we stare at them, we hold them. Nature is brilliant. It's made that kind of connection rewarding for the giver as well as for the person who is receiving.

It's like everything else. If you don't understand what's going on, understand your own needs, we've actually taught people to be rather ashamed of their needs for caring and closeness as adults, that they're not supposed to depend on other people, then yes, you're right. This can be an awful struggle and it is too much for people, but if we give people a map and we help them understand how to do it, then that's different.

It's happened in parenting, you know, David. This revolution that I'm talking about in the book, in, "Love Sense," I mean attachment theory has revolutionized parenting in the western world in the last 50 years. We no longer just drop our kids off at the hospital and leave them there. We know how traumatizing that would be for them, and attachment as a developmental theory has totally changed the way we deal with our children and what I'm really trying to do in, "Love Sense" is to really bring that kind of revolution into our adult love relationships. I believe that attachment and the enormous amount of research on adult love that's happened in the last 15 years really can create a whole new model of romantic relationships and will revolutionize those in much the same way as parenting's been revolutionized in the last 50 years.

David: What audience did you have in mind when you decided to write this book?

Sue: Everyone. Therapists, because therapists work with people and help people who actively are seeking to improve their relationships, but really, "Love Sense" is a bit different from "Hold Me Tight", which I wrote about 5 years ago, which was taking all that we've learned in EFT for couples and trying to give it to ordinary folks for them to work on their relationship. "Love Sense" is a bit different, it's kind of like a big idea book. It's like saying to people, "there's all this research and all this science and we really can understand love," and it's trying to reach people who maybe just want to understand how love works, they don't necessarily want to change their relationship right now. It's trying to reach a broader audience, I guess, to have people have a new model of romantic love, not just trying to reach the people who are actively trying to work on a specific relationship.

David: One of the things that I really like about your book and your approach is that it builds so heavily on attachment theory, which you have been emphasizing. Somehow I don't think it had really occurred to me before to look at adult relationships through the lens of attachment theory, which in the past has focused so much on the early years.

You say that attachment is really the heart of the matter.

Sue: Yes ... Yes, I think we've had this kind of blind spot. We've been very enamored with the idea that somewhere around 12 you become something called, "independent," and I think in our individualistic society, we've really gone with this idea that adults are self-sufficient and should be autonomous and self-sufficient and this is a sign of health, whereas in fact, a well-functioning adult is someone who knows how to do what is the most brilliant adaptive strategy of the human species, which is to turn to someone else and use them for emotional support and as my friend Jim Cohen would say, I'll tell you about our brain scan study in a minute, he worked on the study with me, he's a neuroscientist, he would say, "Turn and borrow other people's brains."

David: By the way, let me have you back away from the mic a little bit, I think it's overdriving it a little bit.

Sue: Really what I'm talking about in the book is that there's been this enormous paradigm shift and that research scientists have started to see that as adults, of course we are different from children, as adults we can think of our partners and think of our attachment figures and find comfort just in representation, and often we do that when we're uncertain or life becomes too much or we become anxious or we become confused about what to do. When we feel like we don't have enough resources, if you think about it, often we have conversations in our head with people that we depend on, people we love. Those people are always alive in our heads even when they're not physically present.

A child needs the attachment figure to be present, an adult doesn't. The other issue is that there's a sexual component to an adult attachment relationship, but that being said, if you look at romantic love, the similarities with the parent-child relationship are striking. In both forms of relationship people seek and desire emotional and physical proximity and become very upset when the person is unavailable, unresponsive, distant and to the point to where they become very angry or they become very, very anxious. This, we call it, "separation protest," it's the same in those relationships. Emotional responsiveness and accessibility build a secure sense of bonding and connection, that's the same in both those relationships. Both of those relationships offer people a safe haven from anxiety, a feeling of being cared for and not being alone in the world. Both those

relationships actually support people to feel confident and to be able to go out into the world.

This is a paradox, you know, it's like how do you get an independent child? You allow the child to depend on you and learn that other people are safe and that their emotions are manageable and that they're not alone in the world. It's the same with adults. How do you get an autonomous adult? You give that adult support. John Bowlby would call this, "Effective dependency."

There's a beautiful study, young career women who felt supported by their partner and felt they could reach for their partner were more confident when they went out to face challenges. They were more sure of themselves because someone else had their back. They were more resilient to stress and they reached their career goals faster.

We've been obsessed with independence, but what Bowlby would say is we're wired for dependency. We're wired to reach out for others, and that's a strength for us, but we can do it in a way that makes us stronger as individuals, or we can not know how to do it and get caught in all kinds of struggles which isn't good for anybody.

David: The emphasis that has existed on children, in terms of early attachment experiences with parental figures, the notion has been that that would strongly color subsequent relationships in adulthood. So it raises the question to what extent can we override or re-program these?

Sue: I think that's a very good question, and the old view of attachment sort of from way back before the adult attachment literature really got going, was that you were programmed as a child in your main relationships and then you just kind of followed that program all through your life and really, all therapy could do is give you insight into that.

This is pretty old hat now. The new research says, but of course we can change our models of relationship, in fact Bowlby said that adaptive working models of relationship and of self are adaptive precisely because they can be revised, and if you like what I say in the book, is that one of the amazing things about romantic love is that it's perhaps our main chance to revise those feelings about ourselves and other people, our beliefs about relationships, it's our main chance to revise them and the research says we can revise them, we do revise them, and in fact we've just done a study that says that we can revise them in Emotion Focused Couples Therapy.

David: In fact you say, "Love shapes the brain," and you even refer to "neurons of love." What are you getting that there?

Sue: I think what I was referring to there is that people like Cosalino and Alan Shroof, and some of these guys who really look at the developmental underpinnings of adult attachment, what they're basically trying to talk about is that we are born small and helpless and vulnerable. We are born as beings that if we call and no one comes, we literally die, and so emotional isolation is coded in our brain as a danger cue and emotional connection is coded as a safety cue, and just on that very basic level, that is not just a psychological reality, that's a physiological reality. Yak Pangsep, who's an emotion theorist and researcher, he talks about the fact that there's actually a special kind of fear in the mammalian brain, and this pathway is reserved to respond when attachment figures, especially our main attachment figure, is perceived as somehow unavailable and unresponsive, and it's a danger cue.

Our need for caring has shaped neuropathways in our brain, and then of course it works the other way, too. The neuropathways in our brain shape who we are and our relationships, so if you work with a trauma survivor in couple therapy and we've worked with depression and with anxiety, you can find all the studies on the isept website ... If you work with a trauma survivor whose brain has been wired to desperately want closeness because the world is a pretty dangerous place and they need that reassurance, but also when they're offered that closeness, suddenly there's another neural pathway that takes over and they feel at risk. They want closeness but then when it's offered they say, "Oh my God, this is too dangerous."

The EFT therapist expects that and has to be able to deal with that ambiguity and help the client deal with the ambiguity and help the client's partner understand that ambiguity. Emotion is physiological and this stuff is physiologically wired in. The wonderful thing about this is whether we're talking about neurons or emotional responses or therapy, what I'm trying to say in, "Love Sense" is all this is making sense. All these studies and clinical insights and studies with kids in the lab and studies with adults at airports, they're all singing the same song.

David: There's a kind of convergence going on there, isn't there?

Sue: Yes, that's the word, that's the word, David.

This empowers me as a therapist, and EFT continues to grow as a model. We're very proud of this new brain scan study we've done. I don't know if you want to talk about that, but I think it's pretty amazing.

David: Yeah, let's talk about that. Tell us what you found.

Sue: It was part of the attachment study to show that we could not only change satisfaction in relationships but we could take unhappy, unsatisfied, insecurely

attached people who really didn't feel comfortable emotionally connecting with their partner and didn't trust their partner, and we could change them into more secure attachment in 20 sessions of EFT.

We wanted to show this on lots of levels. We gave them questionnaires and we gave them tasks to do and we coded it and that data isn't out yet, but it was very positive. We found that we could indeed help both anxiously attached and avoidantly attached partners feel more securely connected with their lover.

The other thing we did was we put the women ... We only put the women in because we didn't have enough money to put the men in as well, so we put the women in a brain scan machine before therapy, and we told them, and this is on the website if people want to look at it, there's a little YouTube about it, we told them when you see an "X" in front of your face, there's a 20 to 30% chance you'll be shocked on your ankles. We left them alone in the machine and when they see the X their brain goes crazy and if they get the shock they say it hurts. We had a stranger hold their hand when they saw the "X" and again their brain went crazy and the shock hurt. We had their husband hold their hand, and again their brain went berserk and the shock hurt. The husband is not the safety cue.

Then we give them 20 sessions of EFT and they go through these Hold Me Tight conversations where they can reach each other and comfort each other and support each other, and what happens is when the women are alone in the machine after therapy, their brain goes berserk when they see the "X", the shock hurts. When the stranger holds their hand it's a little bit better than it was before therapy, their brain goes a little bit less berserk, the shock hurts a little bit less, but when their husband holds their hand and they see the X, nothing happens in their brain and they report that the shock is uncomfortable.

David: Fascinating.

Sue: Yes, it is.

David: Some people out there are going to be thinking, "These psychologists are always shocking people."

Sue: I know, it's true. What is interesting about this is the pre-frontal cortex in those women didn't turn on. The implication is it wasn't that their husband's hand holding after all this intimacy building, their husband's hand holding, it wasn't that it helped them control the fear more or cope with the fear better, because if that was true, the pre-frontal cortex would be all lit up and working like mad. The point is the touch of the husband changed how the threat was encoded at source, and that is very powerful and it fits beautifully with what John Bowlby

talked about which is the intimate connection with other people creates a safe haven for us. It literally turns the world into a less dangerous place.

David: Beautiful.

Sue: It changes how we perceive threat because we're not alone.

David: Beautiful. I want to go back to something you said earlier when you were saying, "We're not gurus," and one test of that, one test of your map is how trainable this approach is. Talk to that a bit and have you done any research that would show the efficacy of being able to train other therapists in these skills?

Sue: I knew you should ask that, David, because I'm very honored, I just got the professional training award from the American Association of Marital Family Therapists.

David: What a setup, and you didn't even ...

Sue: I can't resist telling you that, sorry. Actually I think we're one of the few models that yes, recently in the *Journal of Marriage & Family Therapy*, some of my Californian colleagues ... I can't remember now whether it was 2 studies or 3, please forgive me, but they did do some research on how people experienced a basic 4-day externship, which is the basic training in EFT. It was very interesting. People reported that they felt much more confident with their clients, but they also reported that it had impacted their own relationships and their own way of dealing with those relationships ...

David: That's not surprising, that's a good outcome, it's not surprising, though.

Sue: In answer to your question, I feel very proud of the fact that EFT really is unique, in the amount of focus attention that we have given in the last decade to creating resources to teach this model, training tapes, and we get amazing feedback from our seminars and we have ... You can become registered, you can become certified as an EFT couples therapist, it's all on the website. That pathway to certification is very well trodden and well thought out and we know how to teach people these skills.

It's not a simple model, it's not like ... This model doesn't say there's 5 questions you ask and you always ask them and you'll create a miracle, we don't believe in that. People are complex and the dances they dance with their partner are complex, but we feel very good about the training that we can give and I think it's evidence that this work is translatable in that it's not just me who's done these studies and gets these outcomes. Other people have done the studies in different parts of the country.

Wayne Denton, he moves around, I can't remember quite where he is now but he's in the southern states somewhere. Europe, this stuff translates, it's incredibly popular in China. Of course you have to adapt it to the culture that you find yourself in, but yes, I think all the evidence is that we can train people and we also have built a community, because after all, if you believe in safe haven secure-base, you believe that people need connection, we have an EFT listserve. If you do our externships you are welcome to join our community. We put out a newsletter. The listserve is amazingly supportive to people. We really believe in constant learning and in supporting people to create EFT communities. We have, I think, about 30 ... No, more than that ... There are about 35 centers all over the world now which were initiated by the people in those communities, and what we do at iseft is we just support them. We do webinars for them and share our resources and so we try to create this safe haven, secure-based community for therapists to learn.

I think actually we've done more in that model, from that point of view of training, than any other model I know, and that's because we really take attachment seriously. We've created a team. We really do believe that people are better together, so I have 35 trainers who are the most amazing group of people and who are all over the world and who travel all over the world from Korea to Australia to Finland.

David: We're back to the village and the security of the village.

Sue: We are, aren't we? Because I was born in an English pub, you know.

David: Right, I was struck by that. Now what about on the client side? You've done such a good sales job here, what if somebody's listening to this and they're in a troubled couple relationship. How would they go about finding somebody that you've trained in ... Or trained by one of your trainers, in their own area?

Sue: They would go to the Iseft website and they would look at the therapist by area list, and they would find somebody in that community. Or if they could not find someone they would call us in Ottawa or the nearest center, you know if they live near New York they'd call the New York EFT Center or the San Francisco EFT Center or the San Diego EFT Center and ask someone there, "Listen, I live in this area, could you please tell me if there's therapists who not be on the website yet but who have been trained in this model," and we will help you.

There are some areas that have less EFT therapists than others. There don't seem to be many EFT therapists in Alaska. I don't know why.

David: People have the cold there to bond them together. They need to cuddle and stay warm.

Sue: It's 40 below here today, David.

David: Oh my goodness. You're in Ottawa right now?

Sue: Yeah.

David: Forty below?

Sue: Yeah, it's too cold, okay?

David: Oh my goodness. My goodness.

Sue: Anyway, I'm sort of looking at your questions here and wondering ... I'm looking at some of the questions.

David: There's time to hit another one or two, so if you see some, just to let people know. I don't always share the questions that I've made up with the guest, but sometimes my intuition says it would be a good idea, so I did share that with you.

Sue: One of the things maybe that comes up a little bit is I want to say that we also have a few years ago we did research on forgiveness of the wounds in the relationship, but people focus a lot on affairs, but affairs are not the only wounds in a relationship, and I think from an attachment point of view, it really helps you understand the wounds that happen. Wounds happen when someone we care about and need to be with us at a particular moment in time, abandons us or is not there for us. Good example came up in our research was women go through miscarriages and for the man it's a medical emergency, and he goes into high coping mode, and into quite sort of rational detachment often, and the woman, her baby died, and she needs emotional connection at that point.

If the couple cannot talk about this afterwards and heal this rift, it really can start to unravel the bond between them, and so we did a whole research project on what we call, "attachment injuries," and helping couples heal these injuries. I think that's one of the examples of how if you have an understanding of human bonding, adult bonding, it really does give you a way of understanding why people get so hurt, what the hurt's about, and what is necessary, what needs to happen to heal those injuries.

You can talk about injuries like that until you're purple, and people do, it doesn't change anything. You have to have a new experience of bonding. You have to have a new experience of expressing your pain to that person and having them this time hear you and respond, and from our point of view that's the only thing that heals those bonds, you can't heal them any other way.

David: Are you saying that that's a component of forgiveness? That forgiveness is possible?

Sue: Yes. I'm saying forgiveness is possible but you have to do it on an emotional processing level. You have to address the original pain, and you have to have the other person this time respond to that pain in a very particular way and in an emotionally engaged way. If you look at most of the forgiveness literature it's amazingly cognitive and it's amazingly moral, and for the most part it misses the point. Forgiveness is an emotional process between two people, so that was very rewarding research. I feel like we learned a lot from that research.

I'm basically a clinician, and the reason I do research is because I learn so much about how relationships work and from every research study, we learn and so that was one I think we found very, very rewarding.

David: I'm glad that you shared that with us and maybe this is a good place for us to wrap it up. You've been extremely generous with your time.

Sue: You're most welcome.

David: I've really appreciated the opportunity to speak with you. So Dr. Sue Johnson, thanks for being my guest on Shrink Rap Radio.

Sue: You're most welcome. Happy new year to you, David.

David: Oh thank you, you too.