

The following is a supplementary handout for Lisa Murphy's workshop, OH THOSE LITTLE ONES! It is a book report she wrote on the book, *A General Theory of Love*, by Thomas Lewis, M.D., Fari Amini, M.D., and Richard Lannon, M.D. It is quite applicable to the topic at hand!

*What is love? Why are some unable to find it? What is loneliness? Why does it hurt?
What are relationships? How and why do they work the way they do?*

The authors start by saying that answering these questions is the aim of this book. While the past decade has seen an explosion of scientific discoveries about the brain, up until this point, “science slumbered” and we relied on the arts to chronicle our hearts. Every book, say the authors, is an argument, and theirs – as it talks about the shaping power of parental devotion, the biological reality of romance and the healing force of communal connection - is one for love.

The way I tackle a book report for you depends entirely on the work itself. Sometimes it's a basic recap, highlights, sometimes soundbites, sometimes quotes, often bullets of main points, sometimes a reflection of how it impacted me. This one... hmmm this one.... It was a big book! Lots of data (albeit manageable) and lots of science (yet also internalizable – is that a word?) I had to put it down and pick it up again a couple times, yet while slightly cognitively challenging, I enjoyed the whole book immensely, yet the *middle section* is where I got most of my “take aways” so maybe we'll just start there and see where it goes.

I think for weeks after I read this book I was running around talking to everyone about *limbic resonance*...

Ever walk into a dinner party and just *know* that the host couple had been fighting? Ever been able to tell if the child needed you to intervene or just observe? Ever hear the cry of a baby and know in a split second if it was a hungry vs. hurt cry? **That is limbic resonance.** It's not telepathy, but it might feel like it. I applied this section of the book to our work as caregivers. And the biggest take away for me was the notion of limbic resonance: ***a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's inner states.***

The authors introduced me to *prosody* – which is the process of our brain infusing dry concepts with emotional significance. So powerful is this need, that we created emoticons! (text based emotional inflectors)

Eye contact can take place inches or yards away, but, “when we meet the gaze of another two nervous systems achieve a palpable and intimate apposition.” It is not coincidence that our

toad, snake and Medusa-esque “monsters” kill with their eyes and that the cold, lifeless eyes of a shark send chills down our collective “mammalian spine.”

Our bodies are not closed loops, they are open. Our limbic system evaluates the nature of another’s intentions – which for me links back to Medina’s *Brain Rules* – can I eat it? Does it want to eat me? Can I mate with it? Is this OTHER friend or foe? **And as such, we can influence and be influenced by the emotional states of others.** We are stabilized (or destabilized) by a system of coordination with nearby figures. The authors call it a “collaborative dance of love.” And the entire evaluative process is precise and occurs in a matter of seconds.

The limbic activity of those around us will draw us almost into immediate congruity. A mammal can detect the internal state of another mammal and adjust its own physiology to match the situation, a change that is perceived by the other, who likewise adjusts. Heard of group mentality? *Mob* mentality? Ever go to work in a good mood and then get “sucked in” to someone’s bad one? That is THIS in action! A second person can (and does) alter our hormone levels, sleep patterns, immune functions, cardiovascular functioning and more. Each has open loops that only someone else can complete and when together, they create a balanced, stable organism.

Please, stop for a minute and really reflect on what this means for us as teachers... parents... caregivers...

Day old babies can read and register the emotional states of others... google STILL FACE and VISUAL CLIFF experiments. In the former you will see what happens when the babies do *not* get facial cues from the mother and in the latter you will see how they look to the mother for facial cues.

In the 1200’s, **Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II unwittingly conducted the first experiment in the importance of touch, interaction, communication and responding...** wanting to see what language children would start speaking if not spoken to, he instructed the nurses and caretakers to tend to the infants’ basic needs, but to not “prattle or speak” to them. **All of the babies died.** An observer wrote, “They couldn’t live without the petting.” 800 years later in the 1940’s **Rene Spitz** reported on orphaned and abandoned infants caught in a similar situation. Institutionalized babies were fed, bathed, clothed and kept warm, but were not played with, handled or held. A good many of them died. In theory, knowing our history allows us to not repeat it, but apparently we are not that smart, in our own recent history we witness similar stories within Romanian and Chinese orphanages. We forget that lack of human interaction – cooing, touching, playing, is fatal.

In the 1950's, **John Bowlby** picked up where Spitz left off, and **Mary Ainsworth** his assistant, followed shortly thereafter. Out of their collaborative work came what we now call attachment theory (but that's another paper, so we'll acknowledge the lineage, but attempt to stay focused...)

At the end of the day what I took from this and applied to my work is that my emotional state impacts yours and vice versa. And if I am going to be working with children I need to have a healthy understanding of the connections between us all, and the love that binds us together. Which I realize is a lame way to end this, but it really is the takeaway. Mirror neurons, limbic resonance... we really need to know this and keep it in check! We all have waaaaaayyy more power and influence than we might realize.

We must use our power for good.

© Lisa Murphy, Ooey Gooey, Inc. Rochester, NY
www.ooeygooey.com (800) 477-7977