

Year 7 Issue #17 | August 22 - September 4, 2008

# CROSS

*Back to School, bitches!*

VARLA JEAN MERMAN GOES

**JUNGLE  
RED**

+

ROMA DOES  
DECADENCE

&

SWANK  
PICS!

The **Labor  
Day**  
weekend  
issue

**HARRISON**

left coast entertainment | nightlife | interviews | features | community

# LOVE IT

ARE ALL ARGUMENTS CREATED EQUAL?



by Salvatore Garanzini, MFT

With all the political focus on gay marriage, many people have been asking about the differences and similarities between gay and straight relationships. One area of focused research involved whether same sex couples argue more intensely, and more often, than straight couples. The results are quite fascinating.

First, same sex partners are generally happier than their straight, married siblings. Research has repeatedly shown that when gay couples argue, their arguments are generally more kind and compassionate than straight couples. No one has figured out why, though. One guess is that gay couples take larger risks to live openly, thus they must work harder to stay together. By working harder to stay together, they end up creating happier relationships.

Overall, same sex couples are:

- more honest with each other about monogamy and sex
- more mature, considerate, and fair to each other
- more funny and affectionate when they argue
- less controlling
- take things less personally than similar straight couples.

This said, many couples in gay relationships struggle with stopping arguments. This is one of the most frequent complaints we hear at our San Francisco relationship clinic. The country's leading relationship researcher, John Gottman, PhD, has found in his 30 years of observational research that all relationships have disagreements, and even arguments at some point.

Arguments, by themselves, are not correlated with breakup, separation, or divorce. All couples will, at some point during an argument:

- get defensive
- criticize one another
- get overwhelmed and walk away.

However, there is one pattern of communication you should avoid: contempt. John Gottman defines contempt as basically talking down to your partner, like chastising a child who's done something wrong. Contempt has over a 90% correlation with separation/divorce.

So what does contempt look like? Criticism: "I can't believe you dented the car again." Contempt: <In a condescending tone> "You dented the car again? You mind telling me what the heck is wrong with you?" In the second example, there's an air of judgment - like talking down to someone. This pattern is TOXIC. If you're seeing this pattern, then some repair needs to happen in your relationship, whether it's gay or straight.

Our weekend communication workshops teach couples to initially bite their tongues if they think they're going to say something contemptuous. Contempt does so much damage, it's just best to avoid it. Instead you should give yourself about 20 minutes to calm down, and then try approaching the issue again with the voice of repair.

Repair attempts are simple efforts to make the disagreement less hostile, making it productive again. Good repair attempts are:

- "I'm sorry, can we try that again?"
- "I'm feeling defensive (or blamed, criticized, etc.) Can you rephrase that?"
- "Let's find our common ground here...."

Salvatore is the Executive Director of the Gay Couples Institute, located in downtown San Francisco, where gay couples therapy, workshops, and web seminars focus on relationships and dating. Visit: [GayCouplesInstitute.org](http://GayCouplesInstitute.org) or call 877-424-1221.

# You Don't Have To Break Up



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