



Gottman's Model
Couple Assessment & Therapy

Therapists see as toughest to treat:

- communication problems
- individual problems
- power struggles
- lack of love
- alcoholism
- affairs
- abuse



What are we evaluating in Individual Psychological Assessments? (for Tx)

- DSM Dx
- Suicidal/Homicidal risk
- Support Network
- Coping Skills/Strengths
- Defense Mechanisms
- Capacity to participate/benefit from psychotherapy
- Need for referrals/liaison
- Other?

What are we evaluating in Couples Assessments? (for Tx)

- Strengths/weaknesses as a couple
- Motivation for Tx (by each as they often differ)
- Steps already taken toward separation/divorce
- Relationship Style
- Sexual Functioning
- Abuse
- Affairs
- Need for referrals (psychiatry/rehab/shelter)
- Other?

A Five Axis Conceptualization

Axis I:

Gottman factors (Four Horseman, Flooding, Failed Repair attempts, Lack of Love Maps, Negative Sentiment Override, Demand-Withdraw Pattern, etc.) (The “*how*” of the relationship/arguments)

Axis II:

Marital Styles (this is the “*what kind*” of the relationship) – such as Complimentary, Conflict-Minimizing, Best Friend, Emotionally Expressive

Axis III:

Sickness in the system – Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, Gambling Addiction, On-Line Pornography Addiction, Some Paraphilias, an Ongoing Affair, Certain Physical Abuse Patterns

Axis IV:

Marital Relation Stressors – In-Laws, Parenting, Money, Sexuality, Careers, etc. (this is the external “*about what*” of the fight)

Axis V:

How might you develop a GAD Equivalent?

Axis II – Couple Style

Berry McCarthy

1) Complementary Couples

- Maintain a balance between autonomy and coupleness.
- Desire is promoted by validating relationship.
- They run the risk of falling into trap of routine and mechanical sex. (Over time the couple looks back on romance, but now sex is just one more thing to get done.
- Often managing sex becomes one partner's role. If it is the males and he experiences erectile dysfunction as he ages- the sex life may decline significantly.

2) Conflict Minimizing

- Are the most stable marriages. Rules are easily understood and implemented.
 - They tend to be organized around traditional male-female roles. -emphasis is stability, family, religion
- The Husband initiates sex and sets style.
- Tend to value security over intimacy and family over singleness

2) Conflict Minimizing – Cont.

- Sexuality tends to be undervalued, and mechanical. Dysfunction and inhibited desire appear more frequently due to double standards on sexuality.
- If the man has problems, he tends to be too frustrated or embarrassed to seek help. He will decide that sex isn't worth the effort.
- Making the transition to intimate interactive sex is a difficult transition.

3) Best Friend Couples

- The most intimate marital style and the cultural ideal.
- There is a high degree of acceptance, intimacy, satisfaction and security.
- Sex is positive, integral, vital. Sexuality energizes the marital bond
- The marital bond is based on trust, respect and intimacy.
- Value touching, pleasure and eroticism. Sexual styles tend to be flexible and responsive to feelings and preferences of both partners.

3) Best Friend Couples – Cont.

- The potential pitfalls: couples lack conflict resolution skills and are bitter over unmet expectations. Too much intimacy stifles sexual feelings. Couple needs to have a mutually comfortable level of intimacy which promotes connection and desire.
- They may fail to be assertive in dealing with sexual dysfunction or dissatisfaction. Spouses tend to alternate between blaming self and partner. Couples need to be taught to work as a team.

4) Emotionally Expressive Couples

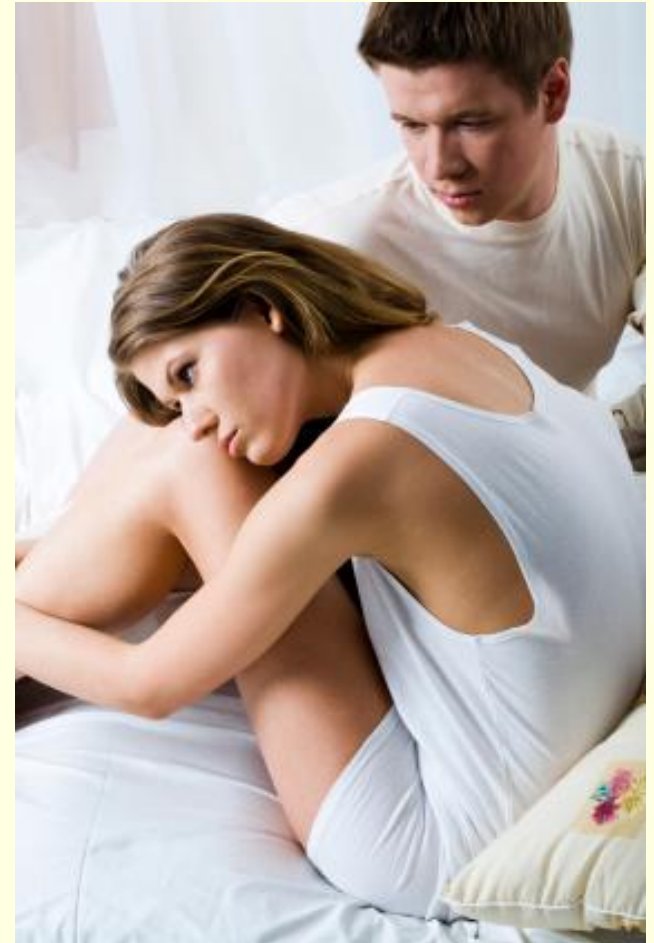
- These couples have the highest intensity of feelings- both loving and angry.
- When it works- it's vibrant and exciting, when it doesn't it can be violent.
- These are the most unstable marital form, most likely to result in divorce.
- In some cases, sex is used to make up for violent incidents.

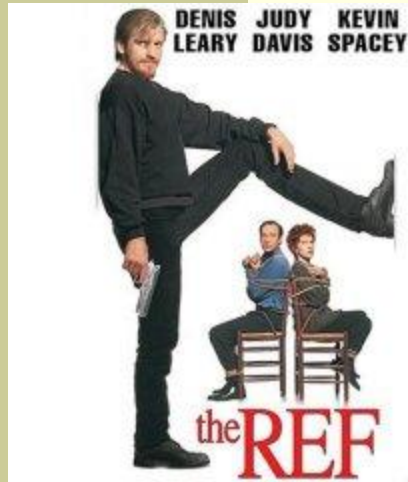
4) Emotionally Expressive Couples – Cont.

- Couples that succeed tend to maintain awareness of personal boundaries. Are able to express conflict, anger and disappointment without crossing into personal putdowns, contempt and loss of respect.
- If healthy, sex is likely to be spontaneous, adventuresome, and energizing.
- If sexual dysfunction occurs, it is hard to adopt a stepwise cognitive behavioral sexual exercise approach. If the dysfunction is not quickly resolved, they easily become demoralized, bitter, and can't tolerate the hiatus.

Do you have exclusionary criteria for Couple Therapy?

- On going physical abuse (Gottman)
- On going extra marital affair (Gottman)
- Significant psychopathology in one member
- Spouse's secrete (unwilling to share in therapy)
- Other?





Movie Clip

Dr. Wong

The risk of the unstructured evaluation

What are we evaluating in Couples Assessments? (for Tx)

■ Strengths/weaknesses

- Motivation for Tx (by each)
- Steps already taken toward separation/divorce
- Abuse
- Affairs
- Need for referrals (psychiatry/rehab/shelter)
- Other?

How do we determine what is right and wrong (“*Strengths*” and “*Weaknesses*”)?

Theory verses Research

Myths about Marriage

- Arguing/fighting ruins marriage, most conflicts are solvable (it's the **how** they are arguing – not the **if** or **what about**)
- Childhood wounds are responsible for marital conflict (rather, you **do not** need to be looking for neurosis or PDs in the individuals)

Myths about Marriage – cont.

- Common interests keep people together (what they like in common is **not** really important)
- Affairs *cause* divorce (see as a **Sx** of distress)

More Myths about Marriage

- Having a baby brings a couple closure together. . . Statistics?
- 2/3 of couples report a significant drop in marital satisfaction after their first baby



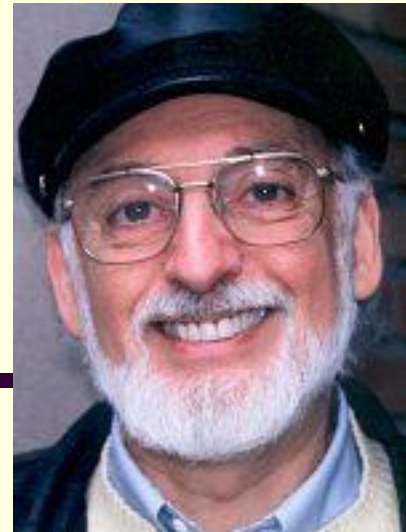
Predicting Divorce with 91% accuracy

By studying couples John Gottman reports across three studies that he can predict divorce with 91% accuracy:

- Conversational/interactional patterns
- Physiological reactivity

How do we determine what is right and wrong (“Strengths” and “Weaknesses”)?

Research

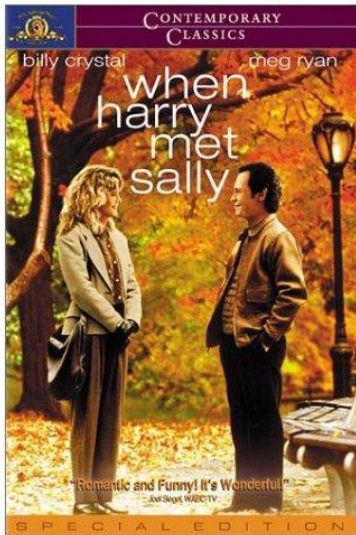


What did the research show

What is important is:

- Strong Marital Friendship
- Shared Meaning
- The necessity of having a mechanism for relational repair*

*Gottman found that the presence of the Four Horseman could allow his team to predict divorce with over 80% accuracy. When they included whether repair attempts were successful, that went up to 97.5%.



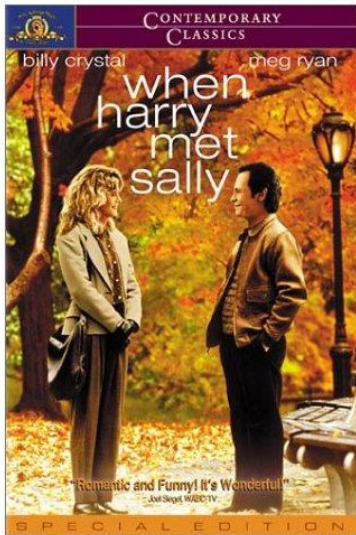
Movie Clip: Harry

Demonstrating
Repair Attempts & Failed Repair Attempts

3 Components of Marital Intimacy

- Know your partner's inner world ("love maps")
- Nurture Fondness and Admiration (express appreciation)
- Turning Toward Verses Turning Away (bids for connection)

Transparency* (shedding your mask and letting your partner into your inner world, being vulnerable)



Movie Clip: Harry

Love Maps
Expressing Appreciation &
Turning Towards

Turning Towards

“Tiny, everyday moments when people connect with each other are the building blocks of all relationships.

People use connection with each other all the time to get emotional support, share conversation and humor, exchange interests, and receive affection.

There is a law of Turning Toward: Turning toward leads to more turning toward.”

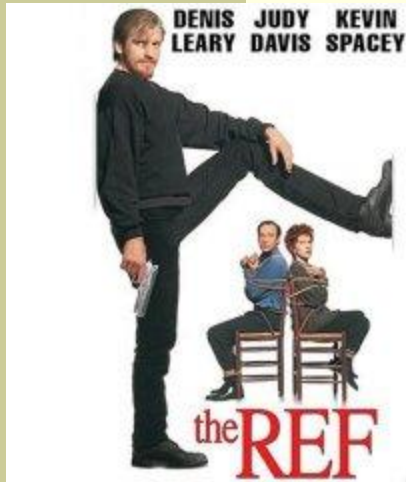


When these three are
present we see. . .

. . . Positive Sentiment Override

When these three are
absent we see. . .

. . . Negative Sentiment Override



Movie Clip: Lloyd

Demonstrating
Negative Sentiment Override

What did the data show

Particularly damaging:

- Harsh start-up (can predict discussion outcome 96% of the time)
- The 4 Horseman (predicts divorce with 82% accuracy)
- Failed Repair Attempts (added to the 4 horseman and the prediction rate rises to well over 90%)
- Flooding (fight or flight response, leads to stonewalling)

Harsh Start Up

- Bringing up a problem in a manner that tends to pull for defensiveness or anger,
- It suggests that there is something wrong with your partner's character (criticism),
- Or it has an element of contempt, such as sarcasm
- Predicts discussion outcome 96% of the time

The Four Horseman . . .

. . . of the apocalypse

Criticism verses a complaint



Complaints verses Criticism

- The latter includes a suggestion that there is something wrong with your partner's character
- It tends to suggest a Global failure
- “Why are you so selfish/forgetful/clumsy/etc?”
- “. . . What's wrong with you?”
- “Don't you care about me/your family/etc?”

Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling



Contempt

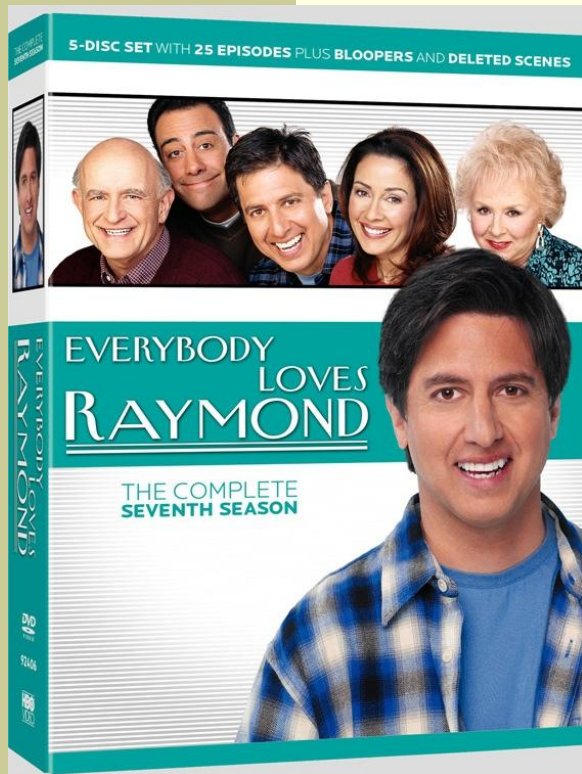
- Rolling eyes
- Sighing, huffing, blowing
- Shaking head
- Sarcasm, mockery, ridicule, disdain,
- Name calling (coin drop story)
- Laughing at tears or upset emotions
- Pointing out failures (lack of friends, job loss)

Defensiveness

- “You do that, too.” (you don’t have a leg to stand on)
- “Somebody has to . . . around here.” (how dare you complain about this), both might be thought of as *righteous indignation*
- Explain why you did the behavior at issue and your justification for doing so (your complaint is not valid)
- You’re too sensitive (these are issues from your relationship with your dad/mom/old boyfriend/etc) (i.e., it’s not me, it’s you)

Stonewalling

- Shutting down
- Physically leaving the room
- Emotionally disengaging
- Giving up trying in an argument
- Generally done as a protection against flooding (may be done UCS as a mechanism to control violent impulses – ego psych)



TV Clip: The Fight

Demonstrating
The Four Horseman

What are we seeing here?

- Harsh Start-up
- Defensiveness
- Contempt
- Criticism
- Rejecting Influence
- Demand – Withdraw
- Flooding
- Stonewalling
- Repair Attempt

After the fight . . .





Repair Attempts



And Failed Repair Attempts

Repair attempts could include

- Gifts
- Humor
- Changing the subject
- Concessions
- Apologies
- Touch
- Reinstitution of communication
- Requests for a time out
- Etc. . .

Apologies... not accepted!



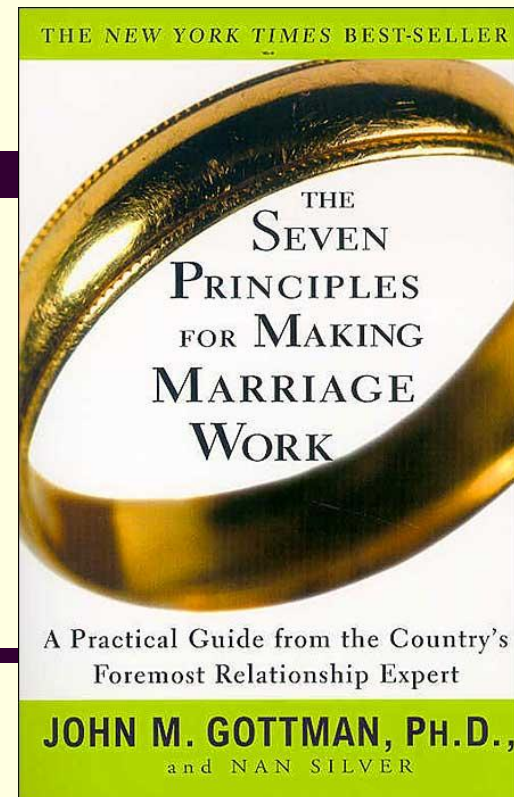
The take home here . . .

Repair attempts can be *actively* rejected or un*recognized* by the partner. Your job is to see what is being rejected or getting missed and point it out.

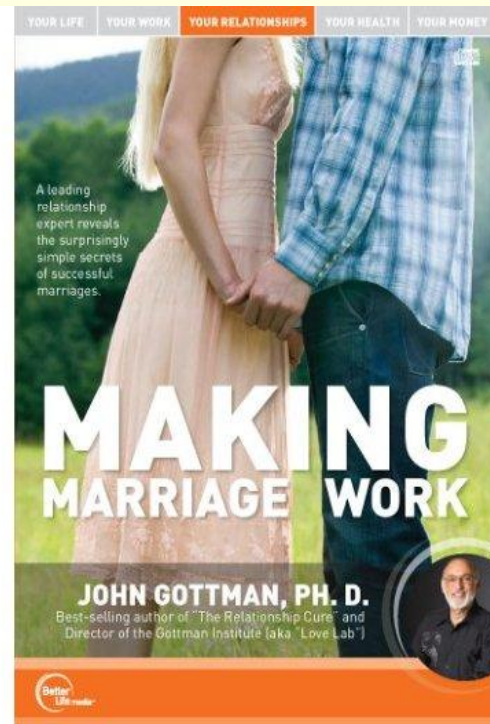
The Universality of Relationship “Mistakes”

- Empathic failures - people need to understand that the goal is NOT to stop these from happening or eliminate them from the relationship.
- Rather, the goal is to develop or strengthen the mechanism for REPAIR after these occur.

Client Book Recommendation



Client DVD Recommendation



Roll Plays

Find a Mate

The five minute marriage



The End