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-Daniel Wile, author of *After the Honeymoon, Revised Edition*

Everyone must read this fascinating book! A wealth of science linked to practice in a way that is both engaging and the engrossing history of the Love-lab come together to make a valuable contribution to the couples literature from the Gottman team."

Johnson, PhD, Director of the International Center for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy, bestselling author of *Hold Me Tight* and *Love Sense*

...our de force in our field, combining powerful theoretical and mathematical models with **practically practical clinical strategies**. All delivered in lively and often personal ways that John and Julie Gottman could have pulled this off."

Sherry, PhD, professor and director of the Minnesota Couples on the Marital Instability Project at the University of Minnesota, author of *Take Back Your Marriage*

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Gottman

The Science of
Couples and Family Therapy

John M. Gottman
Julie Schwartz Gottman



The Science of
Couples and
Family Therapy

BEHIND THE SCENES
AT THE LOVE LAB

Our Mighty Theory

The Sound Relationship House

Okay, so far we have identified what goes wrong and what goes right in couple relationships. We have even identified the interaction dynamics of what goes wrong and what goes right, and why. We know that we and others can predict the future of a relationship with remarkable accuracy. Great.

We have started talking about the dynamics of change, and the parameters that therapists can use to create change. Here's our story about our own journey in helping couples change their relationships. Twenty-one years ago the two of us decided to collaborate. We were out on a canoe on Puget Sound and John had just turned down a great job offer to be the research director for the Family Institute of Chicago, a place that conducted research and treatment. For years Julie had suggested that we bring our basic research findings into the therapeutic community. On our canoe trip, John was sad because he thought that could have happened in Chicago. (We were caring for John's mom at the time in Seattle, and Julie said she goes crazy if there are no mountains around her.) Julie suggested that we work together and make this all happen in Seattle. That's when our work together really started.

We started by trying to communicate our research findings to the general public and to therapists, and we quickly realized that we would need to build a theory and an assessment method that could be useful for

practicing therapists. Julie led the way in this process because she had far more clinical experience than John, and also more experience working with difficult cases. This chapter describes what we came up with.

HOW TO DO A VALID SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT OF A COUPLE

Our assessment and treatment method is fully described in our book *Ten Principles for Doing Effective Couples Therapy* (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). We will assume that the couple has taken the validated and reliable Gottman Relationship Checkup questionnaires. In our clinical office, we begin with getting their narrative of why they are here at this time, and what they'd like to accomplish. We ask them to tell us the story of what brings them here at this time and what they would like to accomplish. The therapist then summarizes and validates.

The therapist then asks them to go back to the story of their relationship, how they met and what their first impressions were of one another. The therapist does an abbreviated form of our Oral History Interview of their relationship, and then observes them engaging in a brief 10-minute conflict discussion, using pulse oximeters as they interact.

Then the therapist schedules individual interviews, explaining that there are no secrets in couples therapy. In the individual interviews the therapist also gets a primary family history and asks about common comorbidities (such as addictions, violence, depression, anxiety, trauma, and affairs). After the individual interviews with both people, the therapist puts all the information together and gives the couple feedback. Then they all discuss the goals of treatment.

In this feedback we review the areas of our Sound Relationship House theory and talk about which areas are strengths in the relationship, and which areas need improvement. We assess their expectations and commitment to the therapy process, explain the therapeutic process, and give the couple some hope. For the questionnaires in the Gottman Relation-

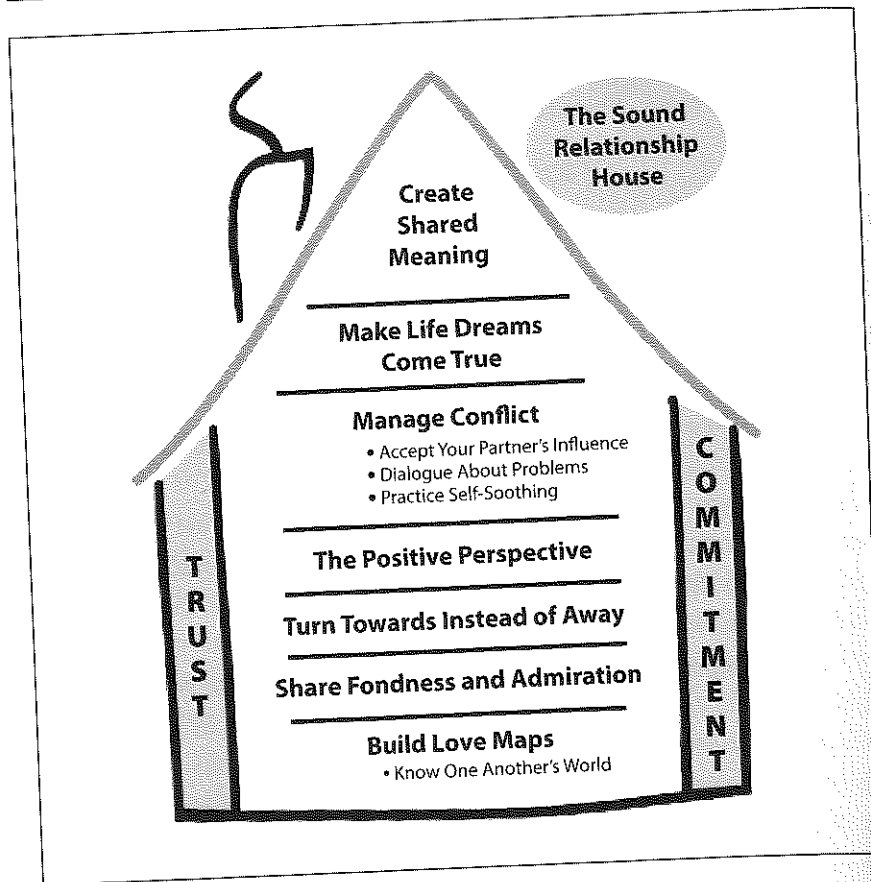


Figure 10.1. The Sound Relationship House

ship Checkup (<https://checkup.gottman.com/>) we also use the Sound Relationship House (SRH) theory. Figure 10.1 summarizes our theory.

OUR SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE THEORY

The first three levels of the SRH theory (from the bottom up) describe friendship in relationships. Now here's part of the great thing about being a scientist. You can't just say, "Friendship is important in relationships" or

"Yes, congregation, let's now have a moment of silence for we all know how sacred is a golden friendship." That's okay for the clergy, or for Oprah or Dr. Phil. But as scientists we have to actually measure things reliably and validly, so we have to be able to DEFINE what we mean, and that automatically gives us a recipe for success. One advantage of the SRH theory is that we can reliably and validly measure every construct in the theory, which means that we know how couples either build or erode every level of the SRH. That means we know HOW TO BUILD EVERY PART OF OUR THEORY. So here's what we mean by "friendship" in the SRH. One needs to be able to do three things within the Friendship domain, as follows.

1. Build Love Maps

A love map is a road map one creates of one's partner's inner psychological world. It is the most basic level of friendship. It's about feeling known in the relationship. It's about feeling like your partner is interested in continuing to know you—and your partner feeling that you are interested in knowing her or him. What are your partner's worries and stresses at the moment? Do you know? What are some of your partner's hopes and aspirations; what are some of your partner's dreams, values, goals in life? What is your partner's mission statement in life? The fundamental process in making a love map involves asking questions, remembering the answers, and keeping them in working memory—open-ended questions that you want to know the answer to. Not closed-ended questions like, "Did the plumber come?" People rarely ask questions. When people ask open-ended questions, it's a kind of invitation as opposed to making a statement, which is like, "Take that." So three parts to love maps: (1) ask questions you're interested in, (2) remember the answers, and, (3) keep asking new open-ended questions.

2. Nurture Fondness and Admiration System

This is about building affection and respect in the relationship. People do this verbally and nonverbally. There are two parts to nurturing fondness

and admiration. First, we need a habit of mind that scans our world for things to admire and be proud of in our partner and events to appreciate. That is the opposite of a critical habit of mind that scans for our partner's mistakes. Then the appreciation or admiration needs to come out of the mouth, or be expressed nonverbally; it can't stay hidden. The idea is to catch your partner doing something right and to say, "Thanks for doing that," "I noticed you did this and I really appreciated that," "I enjoyed the conversation at dinner," or "You look really hot this morning. I am having all these lewd thoughts about you." This is actively building a culture of appreciation and respect.

3. Turn Toward Versus Away

When people are just kind of hanging out, they actually are often letting their needs be known to one another either nonverbally or verbally. They are doing this a lot of the time. They're making what we call *bids* for emotional connection. We discovered this in our apartment lab, thanks to John's former student Janice Driver. This is a fundamental unit of connection, of emotional connection. They are asking for attention, interest, conversation, humor, affection, warmth, empathy, help and assistance, support, and so on. These tiny moments of emotional connection really form an emotional bank account that really gets built over time. Here are some examples: "There's a pretty boat." No response—that's turning away. Or a crabby response: "Will you be quiet? I am trying to read!" That's turning against. On the other hand, "Huh!" That's turning toward. Sometimes that's as good as it gets. Or, "Wow, that IS a beautiful boat. Hey baby, let's quit our jobs and get a boat like that and sail away together, what do you say?" That's enthusiastic turning toward. All this builds an emotional bank account. In our newlywed study, six years after their weddings, 17 couples had divorced. Their rate of turning toward in our apartment lab had been 33% six years earlier. The couples who were still married? Their rate of turning toward in our apartment lab had been 86% six years earlier: 33% versus 86%—that's a huge difference!

The *fundamental process of turning toward* is increasing awareness and

mindfulness about how your partner makes bids. Also, turning toward involves seeing the longing behind a bid that may be a bit negative or unclear. One doesn't need to have high standards, because turning toward naturally leads to more turning toward. There's a positive feedback loop. So one can start small, and it will build over time.

Incidentally, the test of a good theory is that it ought to be disconfirmable and it ought to be supported by experiment. Also, every concept in the theory ought to be reliably measurable—with convergent measurement methods—and validated. That is the case for turning toward in our theory, the 33% versus the 86%. What is also important is that a good theory ought to make unexpected new predictions that turn out to be true.

What were our unexpected results? We discovered, much to our surprise, that love maps, fondness and admiration, and turning toward were the basis for—get this—humor and affection during conflict. That might not seem very important to you. But we had discovered that in good relationships people make their partner laugh and that reduces physiological arousal. Humor is incredibly important in relationships. A cool result, but how do you use that in therapy? Can you just ask people to smile and laugh more the next time they have conflict? No. It's been tried and it doesn't work. The answer that Janice Driver found was that humor and affection during conflict are highly correlated with turning-toward bids in nonconflict interactions (Driver and Gottman, 2004).

Second, these first three processes of friendship were also the basis for romance, passion, and good sex. To convince yourself of this result, begin by asking yourself how you would make your relationship more romantic in the next two weeks. What would you do? What we discovered was surprising. We really didn't expect this—these first three levels of the Sound Relationship House are the key. There's a book called *1001 Ways to Be Romantic* by Gregory Godek (2012). Number 24 is addressed to guys. It goes, "What could be more romantic than getting your wife a golden locket with your picture in it?" Now imagine: (1) John hasn't asked Julie a question in 10 years, so he fails love maps, strike 1. (2) Last night they were out to a dinner party and as she was telling a story John said, "Don't

tell that story. You don't know how to tell a story. Let me tell it." So John fails Fondness and Admiration, strike 2. (3) John doesn't notice her bids, so he fails turning toward, strike 3, he's out. And then he gets her a golden locket with his picture in it. So now we ask you, is that going to be a romantic event? We don't think so. She'll probably drive the SUV over it a few times, really flatten out that locket. Or use it on her dart board.

So these three components of friendship affect the way people are when they disagree. If they are friends, they actually have a lot more access to their humor, to their affection—all the positive things that really make it possible to have disagreements or to live with them in a much more constructive and creative way. This is about earning and building up points that are like assets in the emotional bank account.

4. Sentiment Overrides

What happens when friendship isn't working? People go into "negative sentiment override." What the heck is that? Robert Weiss in 1980 suggested that couples are in one of two states: Negative or positive sentiment override.

In negative sentiment override, the *negative* sentiments we have about the relationship and our partner *override* anything positive our partner might do. We are hypervigilant for put-downs. We tend not to notice positive events. Robinson and Price (1980) discovered that unhappy couples don't see 50% of the positive things that objective observers see. We tend to distort and see neutral, sometimes even positive things as negative. We are overly sensitive.

In positive sentiment override, the *positive* sentiments we have about the relationship and our partner *override* negative things our partner might do. We give our partner the benefit of the doubt, assuming positive intentions. We don't take negativity personally but merely as evidence that our partner is stressed. We tend to notice negative events but not take them very seriously. We tend to distort toward the positive, and see even negative as neutral. We are not overly sensitive.

We initially thought that ONLY friendship would determine if people

were in the negative or positive perspective. But here we were wrong. Our research showed that if conflict was a negative absorbing Markov state, they would also be in negative sentiment override, or the negative perspective. It's fine to be wrong; that's why we wanted our theory to be disconfirmable.

People are in negative sentiment override for good reason—the friendship *or the conflict* isn't working. Then we tend to see our partner as our adversary, not as our temporarily annoying friend. So our theory suggests not to try to apply cognitive modification to get people from negative to positive sentiment override. The theory suggests that it won't work unless fundamental friendship processes are working. If friendship is working, you automatically get positive sentiment override. If friendship isn't working, you automatically get negative sentiment override, because you are running on empty in the friendship. That's our prediction.

5. Manage Conflict

We use the term "manage" conflict rather than "resolve" conflict because relationship conflict is natural and it has functional, positive aspects. We need conflict. For example, it helps us learn how to better love and understand our partners, deal with change, and renew courtship over time. We try to manage but not eliminate conflict. Also, as Robert and John studied couples over many, many years, most couple conflicts (69%) were perpetual; they never got resolved.

Robert and John's first finding: the MASTERS of relationships are gentle toward one another. They reassure, soften start-up (including preemptive repair); they accept influence, self-soothe, repair and de-escalate, compromise. This is the opposite of George Bach and Peter Wyden's (1983) *The Intimate Enemy*. Bach had couples take turns airing resentments. They even hit each other with foam rubber bats called "batakas." That resulted in greater resentment. As Carol Tavris's (2010) excellent book, *Anger, the Misunderstood Emotion*, explains, there is no catharsis in anger. That doesn't mean we need to expurgate anger from our emotional repertoire, as some writers have claimed, but it means we need to make it constructive, from the outset with gentle startup.

Second finding: not all conflict in relationships is the same. Our research revealed that 69% of the time when couples were asked to talk about an area of continuing disagreement, what they discussed was a “perpetual” issue. This is a problem that has to do with fundamental differences between a couple, differences in personality or needs that are fundamental to their core definitions of self. They are issues without resolution that the couple has often been dealing with for many years. Couples continue to talk about the same issues, occasionally making some progress, or at least the situation might get somewhat better for a short time, but then, after a while, the problem reemerges. In each case, the discussion is an attempt to establish a dialogue with the problem, which, admittedly, will never go away nor be fully resolved. What is needed is exactly what Andy Christensen talked about when he developed acceptance-based couples therapy (Christensen & Jacobson, 1988; Christensen, Doss, & Jacobson, 2014).

Most relational conflict is not resolvable. Our research also agrees with Dan Wile, who presciently wrote in a book called *After the Honeymoon* that “choosing a partner is choosing a set of problems” (2008, p. 12). He noted that problems would be a part of any relationship, and that a particular person would have some set of problems no matter who that person married. Wile wrote:

Paul married Alice and Alice gets loud at parties and Paul, who is shy, hates that. But if Paul had married Susan, he and Susan would have gotten into a fight before they even got to the party. That’s because Paul is always late and Susan hates to be kept waiting. She would feel taken for granted, which she is very sensitive about. Paul would see her complaining about this as her attempt to dominate him, which he is very sensitive about. If Paul had married Gail, they wouldn’t have even gone to the party because they would still be upset about an argument they had the day before about Paul’s not helping with the housework. To Gail, when Paul does not help she feels abandoned, which she is sensitive about, and to Paul, Gail’s complaining is an attempt at domi-

nation, which he is sensitive about. The same is true about Alice. If she had married Steve, she would have the opposite problem, because Steve gets drunk at parties and she would get so angry at his drinking that they would get into a fight about it. If she had married Lou, she and Lou would have enjoyed the party but then when they got home the trouble would begin when Lou wanted sex because he always wants sex when he wants to feel closer, but sex is something Alice only wants when she already feels close.

Wile also wrote, “there is value, when choosing a long-term partner, in realizing that you will inevitably be choosing a particular set of unsolvable problems that you’ll be grappling with for the next ten, twenty, or fifty years” (2008, p. 13).

Along with Wile, we also claim that:

Relationships work to the extent that one has wound up with a set of perpetual problems one can learn to live with.

When a problem is a perpetual problem, instead of **solving it**, a couple needs to learn how to dialogue well about their different subjective realities, rather than becoming gridlocked on this perpetual issue. The masters of relationship seem to be able to come to some acceptance of their problem. They are able to simultaneously communicate acceptance of the partner and the desire to improve this problem, often with amusement, respect, and affection. However, if they cannot establish such a dialogue, the conflict may become **gridlocked**, and gridlocked conflict eventually leads to emotional disengagement.

Doing a Dan Wile—A Powerful Method

A therapeutic technique we owe to Dan Wile’s ingenuity is to speak for a partner when that person is unable to get his leading-edge feelings across because he is stuck in the attack-defend mode. Wile’s technique is designed to “solve the moment,” rather than trying to solve the entire

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conflict issue. In moving to self-disclosure mode Wile adds positive affects and mixed feelings, as well as negative affects. The method is very powerful. It models moving out of attack-defend and into self-disclosure, which can help end gridlock and build trust. We can see in the process of interaction how people move against one another, or toward, or withdraw from one another by the very comments they make and the emotions behind their comments. Julie added one modification of doing a Dan Wile, which Dan has adopted. After we get the message right in speaking for a client, we then ask them to say that to their partner in their own words. We do that to make our therapy more dyadic, less therapist centered. That, we hope, can minimize relapse after therapy.

The masters of relationships know how to move from gridlock to dialogue on their perpetual problems. The masters of relationships are able to express a fundamental acceptance of their partner's personality even though they are asking for change. As we mentioned, this is consistent with Christensen's model for acceptance-based couples therapy. They also soften the importance of the change request. Here are the differences between gridlock and dialogue about a perpetual issue.

Gridlocked conflict.

The topic of the conflict is of no help in knowing if the conflict is in gridlock or dialogue. The perpetual conflict can be about anything. To an outsider it may seem like a very small issue. But within the relationship it really seems like a big issue. One visual image for gridlock is two fists in opposition. In gridlock conflicts, people feel basically rejected by their partner. They are probably feeling like their partner doesn't even like them when talking about that gridlocked issue. They will have the same conversation over and over and over again. It seems like they are spinning their wheels and not making any headway on it. There is no possibility of compromise. Over time people become more and more entrenched in their positions and even more polarized, more extreme. Conversations on this issue lead to frustration and hurt. Here's the major index of gridlock: There's very little shared humor or amusement or affection or giving appreciation when they talk about this problem.

There's no positive affect going on in a gridlocked conflict. That's the key to measuring gridlock.

Over time, with gridlock people start vilifying one another. They start thinking negative thoughts about their partner, especially when they talk about this gridlocked issue. Most common in vilification that researchers have found is people start thinking of their partner as selfish. That finding is essential in our analysis of gridlock as a loss of trust.

Dialogue with a perpetual issue.

Dialogue with a perpetual issue is different from gridlock in one major way. In dialogue there is a lot of positive affect (amusement, laughter, affection, empathy), whereas in gridlock there is almost no positive affect. Couples who dialogue about a perpetual issue seem to be trying to arrive at a better understanding of the issue or to reach some temporary compromise. They have an amused "oh, here we go again" attitude that involves a lot of acceptance, taking responsibility, and amusement, as well as a serious attempt to make things better and accommodate to their personality and need differences.

Why are people in gridlock? Previous clinical writing has suggested that these gridlocked couples have some kind of psychopathology that keeps them from taking the partner's perspective, such as an inability to empathize, or a deficit in theory of mind. Perhaps, various clinical writers have suggested, these gridlocked folks are narcissistic or have a personality or character disorder.

However, our basic research revealed that there is a very good reason most people cannot yield on their gridlocked problems. John analyzed 960 gridlocked conflicts and called the reason for the gridlock the "hidden agendas." But now we understand that the hidden agendas have an existential meaning. We now realize that behind each person's gridlocked position lies something deep and meaningful—something core to that person's belief system, needs, history, or personality. It might be a strongly held value or perhaps a dream not yet lived. They can no more yield and compromise on this issue than they can give up the bones of who they are and what they value about themselves. Compromise seems like sell-

ing themselves out just for the sake of peace with this person, which is unthinkable to most people.

When a relationship becomes safe enough and one partner clearly communicates that he or she wants to know what's the underlying meaning of the partner's position, the partner can finally open up and talk about his or her feelings, dreams, and needs. Persuasion and problem solving are postponed in favor of the goal of understanding one another's dreams about each person's position on the issue.

We have an intervention called the Dreams Within Conflict intervention. It is based on the realization that not all relationship conflicts are the same or require the same skill set. Existential conflicts like these are fundamentally different. In this intervention we simply add some questions for the listener to our Gottman-Rapoport Conflict Blueprint. Here are these questions:

- What ethics, beliefs, or values do you have that relate to your position on this issue?
- Is there some story behind this that relates to your history or childhood in some way?
- What are all your feelings on this issue?
- Tell me why this is so important to you.
- What would be your ideal dream here?
- Is there a deeper purpose or goal in this for you?
- What are your core needs on this issue?
- Is there a disaster scenario connected with not having this dream realized?

6. Make Life Dreams Come True

A crucial aspect of any relationship is to create an atmosphere that encourages each person to talk honestly about his or her dreams, values, convictions, and aspirations, and to feel that the relationship supports those life dreams. We are back to love maps, but in a much deeper way here. One of our favorite films is *Don Juan DeMarco*. In that film Johnny

Depp plays a mental patient who thinks he is Don Juan and Marlon Brando plays his doctor. Depp transforms Marlon Brando's life. Brando is about to retire. One day, after Depp talks to him about women, Brando goes home and converses with his wife, Faye Dunaway, in their garden. He asks her what her life dreams are. After a silence she says, "I thought you'd never ask." Making life dreams come true first takes asking the question and remembering the answer.

This is especially true for anyone today who wants to be close to a woman. We are living through a very important historical period when women are becoming empowered (at least in enlightened countries)—empowered psychologically, politically, economically, and socially. It's been a hard-fought battle; for example, women only got the right to vote in Switzerland in 1970.

7. Create Shared Meaning

Finally we come to the attic of the SRH, where we build a sense of shared purpose and meaning. A relationship is also about building a life together that has a sense of shared purpose and meaning. Victor Frankl (2006) said that the pursuit of happiness is empty. He suggested that we find happiness along the way as we pursue deeper meanings in life. Everyone is a philosopher trying to make some sense out of this brief journey we have through life.

This level of the SRH is about creating shared meaning in the relationship. People do that in many ways, as Bill Doherty (1997) wrote in his fine book, *The Intentional Family*, including creating formal and informal rituals of connection, creating shared goals and life missions, supporting one another's basic roles in life, and agreeing on the meaning of central values and symbols (like what a home REALLY is). This search for meaning is important as well in dealing with prior trauma and its effects on relationships, as pointed out by the research of Richard Tedeschi in his work on posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 2008).

Here we return once again to building love maps, but at a deeper level. Understanding what matters the most to partners is essential to

creating a meaningful life together. And that takes partners asking each other lots of questions. So the seventh level of the SRH loops back to the first level, love maps. (The SRH should probably be called the "Sound Relationship Bagel" since it's now circular.)

Trust and commitment.

As we reviewed earlier, trust and commitment were added to the SRH theory only recently, once we learned how important these two dimensions are and how to measure them using game theory, and incorporated Caryl Rusbult's research into our research.

THE FULL ASSESSMENT OF A RELATIONSHIP

Now that we've described our theory, how do we use it to assess a couple and determine the goals of their therapy? As we described earlier, the therapist can use our standard interviews, questionnaires, and a sampling of conflict to ask and answer the following questions before proceeding with defining the treatment goals of the therapy. Here are some of the general questions the assessment covers.

The Weight-Bearing Walls of the Sound Relationship House

Trust. Is trust an issue? Do the partners attune, accept, or dismiss negative emotions? Is there a history of betrayals, and, if so, what type of betrayals? Is there a history of affairs? Is there a meta-emotion mismatch? Do they attune on an everyday basis?

Commitment. Is there an issue with commitment to this relationship? Is there an issue with commitment to the therapy? Does the therapist think that they are doing negative comparisons?

Some Elements Inside the Sound Relationship House

Friendship and intimacy. What is the current status of love maps, fondness and admiration, turning toward versus away, passion/romance, sexual frequency, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, loneliness, thoughts about divorce/separation?

The positive or negative perspective. Are they in negative sentiment override?

Conflict management. What is the current status of spillover, start-up, Four Horsemen, flooding, accepting influence, compromise, and repair attempts? What are their specific conflict issues?

Past unprocessed regrettable incidents. What is their list of potential past attachment injuries or regrettable incidents that they have not processed yet? (Sometimes these emerge in later sessions of the therapy.)

Shared meaning. Have they created rituals of connection, shared roles in life, goals?

Individual issues and comorbidities. The therapist asks about each partner's primary family history and potential issues from childhood, attachment insecurities, alcohol and drug addiction, behavioral addictions (like gambling), suicide potential, domestic violence that is characterological, domestic violence that is situational, emotional abuse (isolation, degradation, sexual coercion, threats/property damage), and mental illness comorbidities: depression, anxiety disorder, trauma and PTSD, borderline personality disorder, psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder.

THE GOTTMANS' RELATIONSHIP CHECKUP

Beginning in 1980, our lab developed and validated a set of questionnaires that can (miraculously, now that Julie has painstakingly written all the text) provide a clinician with a profile of a client couple's relationship strengths and challenges. The real challenge in our lab developing these questionnaires was to avoid what Gerry Patterson (1982) called "the glop problem," which happens when all the data covary so strongly that we

can't get any description other than the trivial one, "your relationship is unhappy." That feedback wouldn't make a therapist sound very smart or insightful. The other trick was to *validate* the questionnaires against the more expensive measures in our lab, the observational coding of the Oral History Interview, the SPAFF coding of emotional behavior, and so on. We have now accomplished these goals.

It takes a person about 1.5 to 2 hours to fill out these extensive questionnaires. For the couple, this is NOT an aversive experience. On the contrary, they find it interesting and illuminating. We, and our therapists, almost never have any problem with people refusing to take these questionnaires.

These questionnaires are now available online, automatically scored, with suggestions to the couple's clinician for a treatment plan. With scores calculated and well-established cutoffs, we use a red circle to mean that this is *an area that needs improvement* and a green circle to indicate that this is *a strength in the relationship*. We also note asymmetries between partners.

At the time of this writing, 30,000 couples have taken these questionnaires. The website to access them is Gottman Relationship Checkup (<https://checkup.gottman.com>). Clinicians can apply to sign up to be able to use this website. The website is NOT for couples to use without the guidance of a therapist.

Areas Assessed and Scored

Friendship and intimacy.

1. Relationship satisfaction and happiness
2. Divorce potential
3. Love maps
4. Fondness and admiration (affection and respect)
5. Turning toward or away
6. Satisfaction with romance and passion
7. Satisfaction with the quality of sex
8. Satisfaction with the frequency of sex
9. Emotional disengagement and loneliness

Conflict.

1. Harsh start-up
2. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
3. Flooding
4. Accepting influence
5. Compromise
6. Negative sentiment override
7. Repair attempts
8. My family history
9. Specific conflict areas (with client-supplied comments)
 - a. Emotional connection
 - b. Stress management
 - c. Relatives and extended family
 - d. Jealousy
 - e. Emotional or sexual affairs
 - f. Basic values and goals
 - g. Housework and child care
 - h. Financial issues
 - i. Having fun together
 - j. Spirituality, religion, ethics
 - k. Children
 - l. Distressing events
 - m. Gridlock on perpetual issues

Shared meaning.

- a. Rituals of connection
- b. Roles in life
- c. Goals
- d. Important life symbols

Individual areas of concern.

- a. Drug and alcohol abuse
- b. Drug and alcohol frequency screening
- c. Suicide potential

- d. Domestic violence situational
- e. Domestic violence characterological
- f. Emotional abuse
 - i. Social isolation
 - ii. Degradation and humiliation
 - iii. Sexual coercion
 - iv. Property damage, threats
- g. SCL-90 scales (assesses potential psychopathology)

The detour scales (additional areas that need work).

- a. Chaos and control
- b. Trust
- c. Commitment
- d. Meta-emotions (a mismatch about their feelings about the emotions)

Contracting.

Once the therapist has conducted the assessment, the therapist can suggest the goals of treatment and check these out with the couple. To do this, the therapist works jointly *with* the couple, summarizing the assessment with the SRH diagram (Figure 10.1), noting which SRH levels are strengths and which need work, and checking to make sure that the therapist and couple agree about the goals of treatment.

Implications for Therapy

HERE'S A MINIMAL FLOWCHART OF HOW TO PROCEED IN COUPLES THERAPY

Our goal in this section is to present a brief flowchart of how couples therapy can proceed. We're going to keep it minimal here. We are not trying to be thorough, but instead, we're trying to give the reader a rough idea of the essential components of what we do. We hope the reader will see that we can use our theory to actually make a difference, a 4SD difference. In subsequent chapters we'll fill this all out a bit more.

1. Start with dysfunctional conflict, if it exists.
 - a. If the couple has a problem just with conflict, and no spillover into their events-of-the-day conversation, begin with the Gottman-Rapoport Conflict Blueprint.
 - b. If the conflict is pervasive (there is spillover), or there is gridlock with either a power or a love hidden agenda, add the Dreams Within Conflict questions to the Gottman-Rapoport Conflict Blueprint.
2. Process past regrettable incidents. Most couples have unprocessed past regrettable incidents. Process these with the Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident exercise, combined with using Dan Wile interventions to speak for the person who is worst at getting his or her leading-edge feelings across. A booklet for couples is available at Gottman Institute (www.gottman.com) called "The Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident." Consider whether there is a meta-emotion mismatch and, if so, help them develop a common emotion culture with each other. Your clients may need the help of the Eugene Gendlin (2007) book, *Focusing*, if one of them (the emotion-dismissing person) has trouble identifying his or her feelings or has trouble putting feelings into words that are consistent with what's going on in his or her body.
3. **Ritualize the weekly state-of-the-union meeting.** A one-hour meeting where they talk about the current status of their relationship this week: (a) say what went right this week; (b) give one another five appreciations; (c) if there was a regrettable incident, use the "Aftermath" booklet to process it; (d) if there is a current issue, use the Gottman-Rapoport Blueprint to process it; and (e) end the meeting by asking one another, "What can I do this week to make you feel loved?"
4. **Work on friendship/intimacy.** Begin by talking about everyday emotional connection. Show them the diagram in Figure 10.2. Use the Gottman "Guide to Great Listening."
5. Continue by introducing the Expressing Needs Card Deck (available free as a phone app). Continue building Friendship/Intimacy, by using the Love Map Card Deck, and the Open-Ended Questions Card Deck (all 11 decks are available free for iPhones and smart phones; type "Gottman" into a search).