

Rectifying Relationships:

Masters of Marriage (Dr John Gottman);
Couples Therapy + Relationship Education

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Accepted Truths:

In relationship work, traditionally accepted truths are not supported by Gottman's research:

Active Listening is not the be-all/end-all to accomplish empathy;

Romance and hopes should not be cast aside as merely wishful thinking.

Views on Marriage & Relationships:

Corporate structure of 60hrs per week is not conducive to a good marriage.

With single mothers, the confidantes are sometimes not useful...also, the men coming in & out of the single mother's life is issue.

Masters of Marriage:

“...people who stay married
and
kind of like each other...”

Masters of Marriage:

Have access to a sense of humour even in conflict -

(Sense of humour is key to interest & shared affection)

5:1 Positive to Negative Moments -

High Prediction of Happiness/Divorce.

Happy couples do more happy things together.

Events-of-the-day conversations are important.

Styles of Marriage:

- ❑ Validating (support/negotiate)
- ❑ Volatile (passionate)
- ❑ Avoidant (minimise)

Styles of Marriage:

Lack of compatibility doesn't predict divorce, but how couples handle inevitable incompatibilities...& the way they resolve conflicts & their overall quality of emotional interactions that does....

What Makes a Happy Marriage?

1. Personality (enduring qualities) that people bring, accounts for $\cong 30\%$.
2. The “fit” between two people.
(Ackerman: Two neurotics can have a good marriage if they don't push each other's buttons)
3. Couples who don't trample on each other's enduring vulnerabilities.
(sensitivity)

Facts about Marriage:

Fighting is healthy – airs grievances.
Relationship grows as differences are reconciled.

Problems often develop during times of transition.

A happy marriage is good for your health.

4 Horseman of the Apocalypse: The Warning Signs!

- ✦ Criticism
- ✦ Contempt
- ✦ Defensiveness
- ✦ Stonewalling

Bimodal Distribution of *Time* People Divorce:

1. Early Divorce - first 7 years:
Attack & Defend/Stonewall.
- 2 Later Divorce:
Suppression & Avoidance
 - ♦ ♦ emotional disengagement.

Impact of Children on Couples:

Couples are more likely to stay together in the first 7 years if they have children, but there is little difference from couples without children after that time.

40%-70% of couples have a drop in satisfaction after children, within 1yr.
(sleep deprivation; ignored husband)

Relationship Education:

Education should occur for couples at pregnancy classes...to preempt problems.

Conflict:

Is conflict the conversation the couple never had, but should have?

Couples argue about money, for example, but the issue is really about power, freedom, love, connection, life dreams (existential issues).

Fundamental Attribution Error:

“I’m okay, you are defective!”

In Counselling it presents as:

“Fix him/her & our marriage will be fine.”

Marriage & Relationship:

Quality of Friendship is critical:

Knowledge of partner,
Respect & admiration,
Bids & Turning.

Fundamental Unit of Intimacy:

The "BID" & the "TURN."

- Turning:

Toward, *Away*, *Against*

(i.e., **Positive**, *Avoid*, *Attack*)

- ♥ Playful bids & enthusiastic turning are useful as they help **access** sense of humour, & **repair** following conflict.
- ♥ 96% of bids are responded to by positive couples.

Fundamental Unit of Intimacy:

- ♥ Bids & turning are the basis of good **sex, romance, & passion** in the marriage.
- ♥ “From the **mundane** moments, come the profound connection.”

Relationship Education:

Couples need to become mindful of
“bids” & “turns.”

Conflict Resolution:

69% of conflicts are never resolved, even years later....people argue about the same stuff!

You will always have a set of unresolved issues with whomever you marry!

The issue is the *affect* around the issues you don't resolve.

Sal Minuchin wisdom:

All marriages are mistakes...some couples are more successful than others in repairing them.

We only know 2 marriages well...our own, & our parents.

Conflict Resolution:

31% of problems can be repaired.

Emotional Bank Account impacts
“sentiment override” which controls
repair threshold, & effectiveness.

Ogden Nash

(poet - paraphrased)

To keep brimming the marital cup,
When wrong admit it,
When right shut up!

(this is about respect & honour, the idea
of giving in, & of saying sorry...
honors both people)

Relationship Education:

The Issues in Fighting:

Prevention of fights (when possible).

How to argue when you do fight.

How to recover when it gets away from you.

Relationship Education:

Rather than saying:

“Yes dear” or “Anything you say” or
“I’m not buying any of this”

The Masters of Marriage say:

“I can see some points in what you are saying & they make sense. And there’s some stuff you’re saying I just don’t agree with. Let’s talk about it.”

Keys to Improving Marriage:

Calm down - recognise feelings; deliberate effort to calm down...reversing distress.

Speak Nondefensively - nondefensive listening and attitude...then speak nondefensively.

Validation – see things from partner’s perspective. Let partner know you understand them...antidote to the 4 horsemen.

Overlearning – try & try again! Practice the skills of “fighting smart” often...

Relationship Education:

Compromise is sometimes a solution that becomes a new problem.

Giving up of ideals, romance, passion, their selves...

People may have a philosophical ideal that they have & it's essential to who they are as a person.

Relationship Education:

People who have idealistic standards, who really want to be treated well & want romance & passion, they get that...
people who have low standards, they get that...

It's better to ask for what you want in a relationship & try to be treated that way.

Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work:

(Gottman & Silver)

- Maintain a Love Map
- Foster Fondness & Admiration
- Turn Toward (instead of away)
- Accept your Partner's Influence
- Solve Solvable Conflicts
- Cope with Unresolved Conflicts
- Create Shared Meaning

Negotiating a Marital Style:

Togetherhness Vs Separateness

Romance & Companionship

Honesty

Persuasion

Expressing Emotion

Traditional Roles

Philosophy & Beliefs

Couple Counselling: Be Flexible & Speak the Couple's Language

Systems: Spouses impact each other.

Existential: Look underneath at life dream.

Psychodynamic: Dreams from childhood, symbolic meanings about past trauma in other situations.

Narrative: Examine the story of the dream.

Behavioural: To effect change, change behaviours & perceptions will follow.

Couple Counselling:

Individual Counselling can be counter-productive to Couple Counselling.

With co-morbid issues, medication or individual counselling is useful...but often couple counselling is simultaneously good for Depression.

Couple Counselling:

FOCUS:

Have the skills to solve the solvable problems.

Cope with the unsolvable problems.

Build successful bids.

Dialogue not gridlock.

Successful repairs.

Honouring one another's dreams.

Build a dream or meaning system (find the dream, appreciate views/values, build a shared dream).

Relationship Education:

To Honour a Dream:

You talk about it, You understand it,
You support it (You financially assist it).

Couple Counselling:

Rather than labelling couples,
acknowledge existential issues of
power, freedom, love, connection.

Encourage rituals of connection.

Open the attack/defend mode...use a
video to get to "admitting mode."

Get to "collaborative mode."

Couple Counselling:

Process a “fight-recovery conversation” (good marriages have these).

Examine the anatomy of attack/defend (internal working models).

Have the conversation the couple never had, but should have.

Couple Counselling:

EFFECTIVE TREATMENT:

Reduce negativity during conflict,

Increase positivity during conflict,

Increase positivity during non-conflict contexts.

Assessment in Counselling:

JOINT INTERVENTIONS:

Friendship Profile

Conflict Profile

Meanings Profile

30% - 50% have co-morbid issues
(e.g., alcohol, depression).

When is a Marriage Over & Recovery Impossible?

When fondness, respect, and admiration are gone,
and
contempt is present...

You need some embers to
fan into a fire!

Resources:

“Evolution of Psychotherapy”
conference,
Anaheim CA, May 2000.

www.gottman.com (The Gottman Institute)

www.psychotherapy.net (an interview)

http://web.psych.washington.edu/directory/people.php?person_id=73 (Univ home-page)

"Dear John:

**That's a GREAT slide show. Thanks for taking
the time to capture what I am saying
accurately." John Gottman**

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