

## HOW TO BRIDGE THE COUPLE CHASM?

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### **Abstract:**

In this article it is supposed to introduce an affective method in couple therapy called the "Sound Relationship House Theory" (SRH). This theory is integrative approach and as a grounded theory combines existentially-based couple therapy, behavioral couple therapy, cognitive couple therapy, narrative therapy, systematic couple therapy, and psychodynamic couple therapy (J. M. Gottman & Gottman, 2011; J. M. Gottman & Levenson, 1999). The Sound Relationship Theory or Gottman's theory is supported to advancement of relationships and marriages. This theory explains perception, physiology, and behavior are interactive thermostats in marriage (J. M. Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998) and studies marital communication consequences, either negative or positive. Gottman Method Couples Therapy is a structured, goal-oriented, scientifically-based therapy. Intervention strategies are based upon empirical data from Dr. Gottman's three decades of many longitudinal researches with more than 3,000 couples. According to this method and its strategies every couple can bridge marital chasm and make relationship successful.

Keywords: Gottman Marital therapy, The Sound Relationship House theory, Couple Chasm, Bridging the Couple Chasm

### **Introduction**

In brief and after deep over whelming, the field of couple therapy has evolved throughout the last 75 years. Couple therapy is started by Jackson, Satir, Bowen, and Haley who provided theory and examined the dynamics of the system that surrounded the couple while Jacobson, Greenberg, and Johnson conducted many researches and integrated approaches for distribution knowledge in couple filed. Despite the long, today, this filed still need to grow and definitely it must be challenge with new and unique issues such as divorce and remarriage, families in transition, children of divorce and many new kinds of couples such as same-sex and cohabitating couples.

John Gottman, has established his theory based on a long collaboration with Robert W. Levenson (Gurman & Jacobson, 2002). Their research databases have been obtained over the last decades and continue today in which conducted with seven longitudinal studies with couples. Gottman has used perceptual, interactive-behavioral, and physiological measures in an attempt to find which techniques are effective with couples, and which are not (Hafen Jr & Crane, 2003). He follows participants for long time and assesses change and stability. He interests to evaluate distressed relationship as well as well-functioning hetero-sexual and also same-sexual couples. Based on a series of landmark researches of Gottman and his colleagues, they were able to predict both stability and relationship satisfaction and also developed a theory of how relationships function well or fail, and methods to facilitate change in these relationships through psycho-educational, preventive, and therapeutic interventions (Barth, 2008).

Gottman and partners (2005) are able to predict which couples will make health marriage, and which will not with more than 94% accuracy. In fact it is possible for Gottman's team to predict which newlywed couples will divorce from the way partners interact in just the first three minutes of a discussion. They examine among other things partners' heart rates, facial expressions, and how they talk about their relationship to each other and to other people.

### Important Components in the Sound Relationship House Theory

John Gottman and Levenson (1999) conduct a multi-method approach to evaluate of couple with use of three important domains: Interactive Behavior, Perception and Physiology as the core to a balanced relationship. Gottman describes Interactive Behavior as a healthy ratio of positive and negative interactions it means if couple wants to have a satisfied marriage, they must have at least five positive interactions per each negative interaction, although twenty positive interactions to each negative interaction will be so better (Hicks, McWey, Benson, & West, 2004). This gold ratio is lead into Positive Sentiment Override (PSO). PSO refers to interpreting events and is filtering out negative behaviors between the spouses (J. M. Gottman, 1999). Couple

with PSO interprets events through a positive rather than negative filter, and then will to have fewer arguments and conflict (J. Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002). Gottman argues that if these components are working well, the couple will have more Positive Sentiment Override, and will be better equipped to handle conflict discussions.

Another piece of interactive behavior is Negative Sentiment Override (NSO). It is the best and most consistent predictor of marital satisfaction. If its amount is increased, it will prevent the couple to be aware of the positive events that happen. Gottman labels these negative behaviors as 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,' are most corrosive and toxic to the successful marriage: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling" (J. M. Gottman & Driver, 2005). Gottman recommended using of the four antidotes for stopping of the Four Horsemen; Use Gentle Start Up, Take Responsibility for each partner's part in the problem, Build Culture of Positive Appreciation and Do Physiological Self-Soothing respectively (J. M. Gottman, Gottman, & Atkins, 2011).

Gottman suggested that the reason The Four Horsemen are so destructive to a marriage is not necessarily the initial negativity, but rather the cycle of negativity that continues thereafter. Negative messages interrupt with the hostile couple's communication and turns into a form of mutual psychological and emotional abuse. The dissatisfaction that results from this cascade is a direct result of the imbalance of the magic ratio (J. Gottman & Shapiro, 2010).

Gottman advances perception as a second key factor in sound marriages following interactive behaviors. (J. M. Gottman & Levenson, 2002) Perception refers to how spouses perceive and interpret positive and negative behavior of one another. It means, for having happy marriages spouses characterize positive interactions as a stable consistent action of the partner, and negative interactions as an occasional bump in the road.

Gottman points out that physiology is the third key factor in identifying sound marriages. By physiology, he explains sympathetic nervous system as body's "alarm system" assist to couple to know about changes in their body and affection of these physiological arousal in all aspects in communication. Increased heart rate, decreased blood flow to the gut and kidneys, increased blood pressure, and activation of the limbic system is happened after Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA). Gottman found DPA is especially predictive of marital success or failure. Gottman describes after marital conflict DPA is raised and then the psychological consequences are very negative. According to his description spouses have a reduced ability to process neutral positive information, and a more difficult time listening to and learning from what the partner is saying (Barth, 2008).

### **The Stories of Sound Relationship House Theory**

Gottman's Sound Relationship House is planned for treating distressed couples, and to be made up of three different "floors". In deed there are seven parts of the Sound Relationship House Theory (J. M. Gottman & Gottman, 2011). Each of these levels involves the need to build a fundamental process. The aims of this theory are included:

- To increase respect, affection, and closeness
- To break through and regulate conflict when they feel stuck
- To generate greater understanding between partners
- To keep conflict discussion calm

This theory has four basic stories:

- a. Enhancing Friendship; consists of three levels: Love Maps, Fondness & Admiration System, Turning Towards.
  - b. Positive and Negative Perspective.
  - c. Regulation of Conflict
  - d. Improve the Couple's Ability to Honor one another Dreams and Create Meaning Sense.
1. Build Love Map. The first three levels of the house describe the essential components of the friendship and increasing positive affect. This begins with identifying how well each partner

- is "in touch" with the other. To assess and improve the friendship, Gottman turns to "love maps". A love map is a cognitive map of one's partner's inner psychological world.
2. Share Fondness and Admiration. In this step the fundamental process is changing a habit of mind from scanning the environment for peoples mistakes and then correcting them to scanning the environment for what one's partner is doing right and building a culture of appreciation, fondness, affection, and respect.
  3. Turn Toward. Gottman describes a deep concept of Emotional Bank Account or Turning Towards instead of Turning Away. The fundamental process is building awareness of how one's partner asks for connection and express emotional needs, and deciding to turn toward these bids.
  4. The Positive Perspective. In this step every couple reinforce to have positive affect in problem solving discussions, and the success to repair attempt during conflict resolution.
  5. Manage conflict. In this story, therapist assist couple identifies the core issues and the anatomy of repeating negative cycle in the marital communication. Gottman teaches three skills on this "floor" of the house. First is working through solvable problems with some basic skills, second is physiological self-soothing, and third is dialoging about perpetual problems (J. M. Gottman & Driver, 2005).
  6. Make Life Dreams and Aspiration Come True. In this level couples explain their own culture as one entity, and talk about roles, religious and spiritual beliefs, and future goals. Couple realizes important life dreams and making the relationship.
  7. Create Shared Meaning. In this level couples learn their life is full meaning. In the way the couple moves through time together, in how they prioritize their time, and their resources.

In conclusion, this information can be used to develop targeted intervention with couples. One of the most significant current implication in this theory is how couple can resolve their conflict and moreover extends beyond the conflict issues into the everyday aspects of conflict through the building and improving fondness and admiration.(J. M. Gottman & Gottman, 2011). Gottman (1998) believes some couples experienced hurt, misunderstanding, anger, disappointment, unjust accusations, frustration and personal attacks which resulted in them thinking of leaving, getting even or protecting themselves developed a negative couple lens which often led to a downhill slide for the relationship. This pattern is called as cascade sequences (J. M. Gottman, 1999).They handle conflicts by negative ways and are prone to interact with each other negatively, they are dissatisfy and increased risk of relationship dissolution, until they learn and utilize more effective ways to repair from the negativity.

Recent developments in Gottman couple therapy have heightened the need for perceptual, interactive-behavioral, and physiological measures in an attempt to find which techniques are effective with couples, and which are not (Barth, 2008).This approach provides the most significant current discussions in marital quality leads to marital dissolution or marital maintenance successfully.

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