

Couples Counseling: History, Effective Theories and Interventions, and Special Considerations

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History

- ▶ In 1965, George Bach published a book titled *The Intimate Enemy*
- ▶ Bach explained in this approach to couples therapy that the problem in relationships was that people needed to air their anger rather than suppress
- ▶ If not expressed, resentments and anger would build and have catastrophic effects
- ▶ If expressed, there would be a catharsis that would clear the air between them
- ▶ Bach would have partners take turns airing resentments
- ▶ Sometimes, he would encourage them to hit one another with soft foam-rubber bats
- ▶ Believed this process was like erasing a chalkboard
- ▶ What we know now...

History

- ▶ The Quid-Pro-Quo idea (also from the 1960s)
- ▶ A good relationship is based on reciprocating positive behaviors and a bad relationship is caused by a breakdown of this implicit contract
- ▶ Led in the 70s to the behavioral intervention known as "contingency contracting:" give to get
- ▶ The counselor assists each person to identify what behaviors he or she wanted to get from their partner
- ▶ Then-the couple constructs a contract for the exchange of these desired behaviors
- ▶ Research in 1977 demonstrated that a reciprocity concept in relationships AND friendships is a sign of an ailing relationship, not the hallmark of a happy one
- ▶ People become "affective accountants" when a relationship wasn't working well
- ▶ When unhappy? "I did this for him/her, and he/she never reciprocated."
- ▶ When happy? The contingency contract wasn't even an afterthought

History

- ▶ Used to think that a couple came in, and counselor identified problems and solved them (counselor was super problem solver)
- ▶ This assumes that all conflicts are alike (they aren't)
- ▶ What do we know now? *Resolution* of conflicts is mostly misguided
- ▶ 69% of problems in relationships are perpetual-THEY HAVE NO RESOLUTION
- ▶ This leads to frustration for some counselors, and a lot of frustration for couples ("If only we could solve these problems...")
- ▶ Counseling doesn't need to focus on resolving

History

- ▶ **Atheoretical phase (1930-1963!)**
- ▶ Labeled marriage counseling
- ▶ Practiced by OBGYNs, gynecologists, clergy (mostly)
- ▶ These are not individuals who we would consider having the necessary expertise to counsel couples
- ▶ Was centered around giving guidance and heavily laced with values about what marriage should look like
- ▶ Was usually not practiced with the couple together
- ▶ Conjoint therapy (paralleled/intersected with the Atheoretical phase) 1931-1966
- ▶ Risking expulsion from psychoanalytic societies, some would meet with more than just an individual to look at the "interlocking neuroses" of the couple
- ▶ At this time in history, marriage counseling was on the margin, so psychoanalysis was what it was attached to
- ▶ As we now know, psychoanalysis was soon to be vaporized by family therapy

History

- ▶ **Family Therapy Incorporation phase (1963-1985)** killed marriage counseling
- ▶ These original pioneers (Bowen, Minuchin, Whitaker) were psychiatrists with psychoanalytic training who were bucking the establishment-namely, individual focus, rejection of exploring new methods, and the pathologizing of people in relational contexts
- ▶ So when they split from psychoanalysis, marriage counseling was part of what was abandoned
- ▶ During this time, marriage counseling was "functionally invisible"
- ▶ **Refinement, Extension, Diversification, and Integration phase (1986-present)**
- ▶ Sustained theory and practice development
- ▶ Clinical research
- ▶ Refinement: growth in three orientations (1) behavioral/CBT, (2) humanistic/attachment, and (3) object relations

Gottman Method Couples Counseling

- ▶ Over 40 years of academic research begun in 1972
- ▶ Started in 1976 working with Dr. Bob Levenson
- ▶ Observed over 3,000 couples in research
- ▶ “The Love Lab” (apartment lab)
- ▶ The importance of physiology
- ▶ The “masters” and “disasters” of relationships

Research Methods

- 40 Years of Research, Representative Samples, Happy-Stable, Not Only Ailing Relationships
- Multi-Method: Physiology, Self-Report, Behavior
- Multi-Situational: Conflict, Events, Apartment Lab
- Longitudinal (Up to 20 Years) and Developmental (Babies, Children)
- Gay, Lesbian, as Well as Heterosexual
- Domestic Violence
- Transition to Parenthood
- Theoretical and Mathematical
- Intervention and Prevention Research
- Extension to Lower-income Populations

WHAT PREDICTS DIVORCE?

- ▶ Ratio of positive to negative emotions in conflict
- ▶ Couples in happy, stable relationships:
 - ▶ 5:1 ratio of positivity to negativity when discussing an area of disagreement
 - ▶ 20:1 ratio of positivity to negativity when simply conversing
- ▶ Even when talking about an area of continuing disagreement, “masters” demonstrate affection, humor and interest in each other.
- ▶ They minimize defensiveness in partner.

ARE ALL NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS EQUALLY CORROSIVE?

- ▶ Some ways of interacting are more corrosive to a relationship than others. We call these:
- ▶ **THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE**
 - ▶ Criticism
 - ▶ Defensiveness
 - ▶ Contempt
 - ▶ Stonewalling

Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes

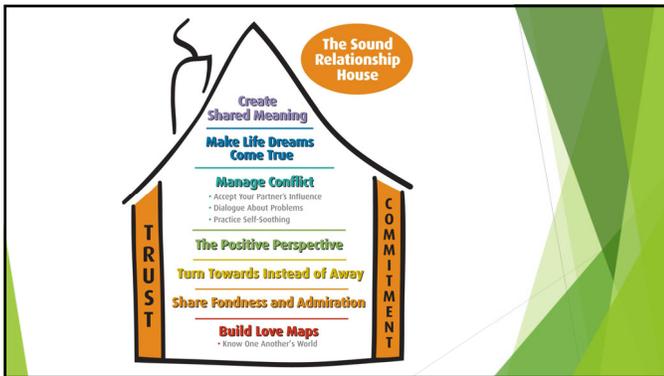
CRITICISM	➔	Use Gentle Start Up
DEFENSIVENESS	➔	Take Responsibility
CONTEMPT	➔	Build Culture of Appreciation
STONEWALLING	➔	Do Physiological Self-Soothing

WHAT DO HAPPILY MARRIED COUPLES LOOK LIKE? THEY...

- ▶ Have positive everyday interactions and behave like good friends, turning toward one another.
- ▶ Handle their conflicts in gentle, positive ways; have more positive affect during conflict to soothe partner and co-regulate physiology.
- ▶ Are able to repair negative interactions during an argument.
- ▶ Have greater sense of "we-ness" than "me-ness" and purpose in life.
- ▶ Are able to effectively share and discuss negative emotions with each other.
- ▶ This is all interesting and predicts divorce or stability with over 90% accuracy across studies.
- ▶ But it doesn't help us change couples. Need a theory.

THE SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE THEORY

- ▶ Derived from our basic longitudinal research
- ▶ The focus is on:
 - Emotion: The "engine" of change
 - Skills to enhance friendship
 - Skills to manage conflict
 - Skills to create shared meaning



NURTURE FRIENDSHIP AND INTIMACY

- ▶ The first three levels of the Sound Relationship House focus on a couple's *friendship*, which is the foundation of a strong relationship.

FRIENDSHIP: BUILD LOVE MAPS

- ▶ Maintain an awareness of each other's world
- ▶ Show interest in each other by asking open-ended questions, and remember the answers

**FRIENDSHIP: SHARE AND NURTURE
FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION**

- ▶ Create a positive habit of mind by looking for what your partner is doing right.
- ▶ Express fondness and admiration to each other verbally and physically.
- ▶ Build a culture of appreciation, fondness, affection and respect.

**FRIENDSHIP: TURN TOWARD EACH
OTHER**

- ▶ Express needs by stating what you do want, not what you don't want.
- ▶ Turn towards each other's bids for emotional connection, rather than away or against them.
- ▶ Build an emotion bank account

POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE: THE SENTIMENT OVERRIDES

- ▶ When the first three levels of The Sound Relationship House work well, a relationship contains the Positive Perspective, or in general, positive feelings for one another that OVER-RIDE momentary negativity. Partners are more likely to give each other the benefit of the doubt.

MANAGE CONFLICT CONSTRUCTIVELY

- ▶ Practice self-soothing to keep calm; take breaks.
- ▶ Process Regrettable Incidents and Past Emotional Injuries.
- ▶ Use softened startup.
- ▶ Repair and de-escalate.
- ▶ Accept influence - find common ground.
- ▶ Compromise.
- ▶ 69% of all issues are PERPETUAL: Discuss perpetual problems - move from gridlock to dialogue by focusing on the existential meaning of each person's position on the issue

MAKE LIFE DREAMS COME TRUE

- ▶ Make the relationship safe enough so that each partner can express his or her dreams.
- ▶ Using the skills of accepting influence and compromise, partners can nurture each other's dreams while maintaining their own.

CREATE SHARED MEANING

- ▶ Create meaningful rituals of connection: formal & informal
- ▶ Create shared meaning for relationship by expressing values, roles, goals, and narratives.
- ▶ Share ideas about legacy and meaning in order to create shared cultural rituals and purpose.

What is EFT?

EFT (Emotionally Focused Therapy) is a short-term (8-20 sessions depending on the level of distress), structured therapy. Research studies find that 70-75% of couples move from distress to recovery in 10-12 sessions and 90% show *significant improvement*. It is currently the best delineated and most empirically validated couples therapy of the past 25 years.

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EFT: Theoretical underpinnings and roots

- ▶ Experiential Psychotherapy (Perls)
- ▶ Client Centered Therapy (Rogers)
- ▶ System Theory (Minuchin)
- ▶ Attachment Theory (Bowlby)

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Bowlby - Good enough Mothering

- ▶ 30% Attunement and the rest is repair
- ▶ Same is true in couple relationships
- ▶ Attachment history influences how or whether repair takes place.
- ▶ Despite couples' attachment styles and history, the new research of neural plasticity tells us that we can repair old patterns with new relationships.

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Bonds not Bargains

- Adult romantic relationships are emotional bonds infused with meaning, hopes, goals, desires, and attachment significance.
- They can provide a safe haven and a secure base from which humans can find comfort and safety both emotionally and physically.
- Most couples get together for emotional reasons and split up for emotional reasons.

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Basic overview of EFT

- ▶ The primary goals of EFT are to:
 - ▶ Access, expand and re-organize key emotional responses between partners.
 - ▶ Create a shift from rigid interactional positions to a more fluid one.
 - ▶ Foster the creation of a secure bond between partners through the creation of new interactional experiences that redefine the relationship.

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Highlights of EFT Model

- ▶ The major distress evidenced in couples is due to ruptures connection/attachment. The content can change but the fights/distress look the same. The goal of EFT is to translate the content of distress into attachment yearnings and longings.
- ▶ Another goal of EFT is to help couples express their longings in ways that don't scare their partners.

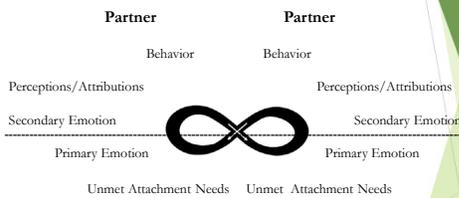
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More Highlights of EFT

- ▶ Negative cycles reflect the attachment dance that emerges when couples are fearful of being vulnerable with their partner.
- ▶ The negative cycle is reframed as the enemy, not the partners, and the cycle is the thing that, together, the couple battles.
- ▶ Neither partner is right/wrong, the conflict is normalized and de-pathologized. Both partners are seen as fighting for connection.

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The Cycle



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EFT - 3 Stages and 9 steps

Stage 1
Assessment and Cycle De-Escalation

Stage 2
Changing Interactional Positions and Creating New Bonds

Stage 3
Consolidation and Integration

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Withdrawer
"I never get it right or make her happy."
"I don't bother anymore what's the point."
(Feelings: Rejected, inadequate, fears failure, overwhelmed, judged, shame, empty, alone)

Pursuer
"He's never around and whenever he is he's always distracted."
"She doesn't see me. No matter what I do I don't count in her world."
(Feelings: Hurt, unwanted, invisible, abandoned, desperate, deprived, not important.)

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Attachment

- ▶ If we listen to the attachment related themes, we, as therapists, can be compassionate to both partners.
- ▶ EFT is empathy on crack.
- ▶ All interactions are slowed down and sliced thinly to milk the most attachment related experiences.

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A.R.E.

- ▶ Basic goal of EFT:
- ▶ To help couples become with each other:
- ▶ Accessible
- ▶ Responsive
- ▶ Emotionally Engaged
- ▶ The attachment questions are really:
- ▶ Do I matter to you? Will you come when I call?
- ▶ Can I count on you?

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Process

- ▶ Each interaction is slowed down and processed.
 - ▶ Enactments are utilized throughout treatment:
 - ▶ Diagnostically
 - ▶ To deepen the emotional connection and shift the interactional positions
 - ▶ To reinforce rarely occurring positive emotional and interactional experiences.
- Each partner's experience of the enactment is processed fully.

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Skills for Emotional Engagement

R-I-S-S-C

- R: The therapist intentionally REPEATS key words and phrases for emphasis.
- I: Therapist uses IMAGES or word pictures that evoke emotions more than abstract labels tend to do.
- S: Therapist frames responses to clients in SIMPLE and concise phrases.
- S: Therapist will SLOW the process of the session and the pace of speech to enable deepening of emotional experience
- S: Therapist will use SOFT and soothing tone of voice to encourage a client to deepen experience.
- C: Therapist uses CLIENT words and phrases in a supportive/validating way.

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▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaHms5z-yuM>

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Interventions in EFT

- ▶ Emotion Intervention
- ▶ 1. Empathic reflection.
- ▶ 2. Validation of client realities and emotional responses
- ▶ Evocative responding-questions and reflections of the leading edge.
- ▶ Empathic conjecture, interpretation and inferences, disquisitions.

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Interaction Interventions

- ▶ Create, choreograph new interaction patterns
- ▶ 1. Track and reflect process of interaction, make positions and cycles explicit.
- ▶ 2. Reframe experience/interaction in terms of attachment context and interactional cycles.
- ▶ 3. Restructuring and shaping interactions using enactments.

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Distinct Issues

- ▶ Couples counseling is clearly not just like individual counseling with one more person present
- ▶ Couples counseling is distinct in the processes required in session and the particular issues couples present with
- ▶ Two significant and common ones will be discussed: Betrayal and battering
- ▶ Note: understanding more about these will also help with individual counseling

Betrayal

- ▶ What are the reasons?
- ▶ What is the number one reason?
- ▶ Who is most likely to commit a betrayal?
- ▶ Who is least likely to commit a betrayal?
- ▶ What might prevent a betrayal?
- ▶ What constitutes a betrayal?
- ▶ What (may) make betrayal so painful?
- ▶ What types of betrayals are most devastating?
- ▶ How may disclosure of a betrayal affect the betrayed?
- ▶ Where are betrayals most commonly beginning and occurring?
- ▶ How common are betrayals?

The new infidelity

- ▶ Good people in good marriages are having affairs
- ▶ Not about thrill seeking-the old model
- ▶ The new infidelity: people who unwittingly form deep, passionate connections before realizing that they have crossed the line from platonic friendship into romantic love
- ▶ Some research indicates up to 82% of unfaithful partners had an affair with someone who at first was "just a friend"
- ▶ Another twist: not only are these betrayals being done by well-intentioned people not planning to stray, they are also betraying their own personal values, ethics, morals, and beliefs
- ▶ Result: a marital crisis AND a personal crisis

The new infidelity

- ▶ This is the essence of the new infidelity...friendships, work relationships, and Internet liaisons are the latest threats to relationships
- ▶ These opportunities for both men and women are so ubiquitous that it is becoming easier and easier for the line between friend and lover to become blurry and be crossed
- ▶ The biggest danger zone for romantic attraction and opportunity?
- ▶ The workplace
- ▶ More women are having affairs than ever before (the old model)
- ▶ What is different about women today and women in 1980?
- ▶ More sexually experienced...more likely to be working in traditionally male-dominated occupations
- ▶ Men are also having having affairs at the workplace more than ever before (the old model)

The new infidelity

- ▶ Significant fact: different than the old model, betrayals originate as peer relationships
- ▶ People who are genuinely just friends or colleagues slowly move onto the slippery slope of infidelity
- ▶ Secret emotional intimacy is the first warning sign, yet most people are unaware of the situation they have gotten themselves into until they have become physically intimate
- ▶ <https://youtu.be/i8kpYm-6nuE>

The new infidelity

- ▶ Circling back: What might prevent a betrayal
- ▶ *The Prevention Myth*
- ▶ Most people believe it is possible to prevent affairs by being loving and dedicated to one's partner
- ▶ Why is it a myth?
- ▶ Simply being a loving and dedicated partner will not safeguard your relationship from betrayals
- ▶ So what to do?
- ▶ Of most importance: Awareness of appropriate boundaries with the gender of attraction and boundaries with this gender in your workplace and friendships

The new infidelity

- ▶ Circling back: What constitutes a betrayal?
- ▶ Conventional wisdom has long portrayed betrayal as sexual contact
- ▶ Gender differences in the old model
- ▶ For women-hypotheses?
- ▶ For men-hypotheses?
- ▶ In the old model, women tended to regard any sexual intimacy as a betrayal
- ▶ In the old model, men tended to deny betrayal unless there was penetration
- ▶ What about the new infidelity?
- ▶ *Affairs do not have to be sexual*
- ▶ Some (Internet, texting, social media, work) are exclusively emotional
- ▶ Circling back: What kind of betrayals are most devastating?
- ▶ Engagement of the heart, mind, *and* body
- ▶ The new infidelity is this kind of affair (the old model)-more men are getting emotionally involved and more women are getting sexually involved

The new infidelity

- ▶ Circling back: At least one or both parties in 50% of all couples, married and living together, straight and gay, will commit a betrayal (sexual or emotional) during the lifetime of the relationship (we think)
- ▶ This figure is not the gospel (how studies operationalize betrayals for instance)
- ▶ But consider this: a meta analysis revealed that 25% of wives and 44% of husbands committed betrayal (intercourse)
- ▶ My intuition tells me that like other statistics-domestic violence/rape for example- there is underreporting
- ▶ Circling back (sort of): Who is most likely to commit a betrayal? The least?
- ▶ Betrayal can occur to any class, ethnicity, race, religion, occupation, or age
- ▶ NO RELATIONSHIP IS IMMUNE

Betrayal

- ▶ Do we need some good news?
- ▶ There are steps to take to keep a relationship or marriage safe
- ▶ There are steps to take to repair a relationship after a betrayal
- ▶ There are interventions to help individuals through the trauma of betrayal

Betrayal

- ▶ Conventional wisdom about betrayal and the couples counseling that deals with it is engulfed in myths
- ▶ *Assumption:* Betrayals happen in unhappy or unloving marriages
- ▶ *Fact:* Betrayals can happen in good marriages. Betrayals are less about love and more about sliding across boundaries
- ▶ *Assumption:* Betrayals occur mostly because of sexual attraction
- ▶ *Fact:* The lure of a betrayal is how the unfaithful partner is mirrored back through the adoring eyes of the new love. Another appeal is that individuals experience new roles and opportunities for growth in new relationships
- ▶ *Assumption:* A cheating partner almost always leaves clues, so a naïve spouse must be burying his or her head in the sand
- ▶ *Fact:* The majority of betrayals are never detected. Some individuals can successfully compartmentalize their lives or are such brilliant liars that their partner never finds out

Betrayal

- ▶ *Assumption:* A person committing a betrayal shows less interest in sex at home
- ▶ *Fact:* The excitement of a betrayal can increase passion at home and make sex even more interesting
- ▶ *Assumption:* The person committing the betrayal isn't "getting enough" at home
- ▶ *Fact:* The truth is that the unfaithful partner may not be giving enough. In fact, the partner who gives too little is at greater risk than the partner who gives too much because he or she is less interested.
- ▶ *Assumption:* A straying partner finds fault with everything their partner does
- ▶ *Fact:* He or she may become Mr. or Mrs. Wonderful in order to escape detection. Most likely, he or she will be alternately critical and devoted

Betrayal

- ▶ Some more facts:
- ▶ You can have an affair without having sex. Sometimes the greatest betrayals happen with no touching. **Infidelity is any emotional or sexual intimacy that violates trust**
- ▶ Child-centered families create conditions that increase the vulnerability for affairs...children may ultimately be harmed
- ▶ People are more likely to cheat if their friends and family members have cheated
- ▶ When a woman has an affair, it is more often the result of long-term marital dissatisfaction, and the marriage is harder to repair
- ▶ Most people, including unfaithful partners, think that talking about an affair with the betrayed partner will only create more upset, but that is actually the way to rebuild intimacy. **Trying to recover without discussing the betrayal is like waxing a dirty floor**
- ▶ The aftermath of an affair can offer partners who are still committed to their marriage an opportunity to strengthen their bond.
- ▶ Starting over with a new love does not typically lead to a life of eternal bliss. Seventy-five percent of all unfaithful individuals who marry the affair partner end up divorced
- ▶ More than 90% of married individuals believe that monogamy is important, but almost half of them admit to having had affairs

Betrayal

- ▶ Recovering from betrayal
- ▶ According to therapists who treat couples, infidelity is the second most difficult problem to treat (domestic violence)
- ▶ It can take years for people to come to terms with betrayal...like comets, affairs leave a long trail behind them
- ▶ When a betrayal is revealed, it catapults the three involved into a crisis
- ▶ The revelation of a betrayal is a traumatic event for the betrayed partner- important implications for healing
- ▶ People who have just discovered a partner's betrayal may react as if they have been viciously attacked-formerly felt safe, now feel threatened
- ▶ In one instant, the betrayed individual's assumptions about the world have been demolished

Betrayal

- ▶ Common experiences of betrayed partners:
 1. Obsess over details of the affair
 2. Trouble eating
 3. Trouble sleeping
 4. Feel powerless to control emotions (anger/grief which can be overwhelming)
 5. Irritability or aggression
 6. Difficulty concentrating
 7. Even depersonalization

Betrayal

- ▶ A little more about the dynamics of betrayal...
- ▶ **Walls/Windows**
- ▶ Windows between you and your partner
- ▶ Walls between you and others
- ▶ The relationships with the greatest levels of intimacy are characterized by honesty and openness about the significant things in your life
- ▶ When information is withheld and secrets kept, walls are created that act as barriers to the free flow of thoughts and feelings
- ▶ But-when you open up to each other, the window between you allows you to know each other in unfiltered, intimate ways

Betrayal

- ▶ In a love affair, the unfaithful partner has built a wall to shut out the marriage partner and has opened a window to let in the affair partner
- ▶ To reestablish a partnership that is intimate and trusting after a betrayal, the walls and windows must be reconstructed to keep the partnership sound
- ▶ Install a large picture window between you and your partner
- ▶ Construct a solid or opaque wall to block out contact with the affair partner
- ▶ These walls and windows nurture the partnership and protect it from outside elements and interference
- ▶ Bottom line: The boundaries in a platonic friendship should be solid
- ▶ Identifying the position of walls and windows can help people to know whether a dangerous alliance has replaced a relationship that began as "just friends"

Betrayal

- ▶ Trust Revival Method
- ▶ Atone, attune, attach
- ▶ Atone
 - ▶ Betrayed partner will experience anger, sadness, disappointment
 - ▶ Relentless criticism/reminders of betrayal (ace in the hole)
 - ▶ The betrayer must take full responsibility for the betrayal-patiently, non-defensively
 - ▶ Cannot get into the why or retaliate
 - ▶ In counseling—clinician guides couple through question phase
 - ▶ Has to be everything on the table
 - ▶ As long as it takes
 - ▶ Contain to in session, possibly set a designated time out of counseling
 - ▶ Depending on the couple, this phase can be extremely challenging

Betrayal

- ▶ Attune
 - ▶ Building a new relationship
 - ▶ 2.0
 - ▶ There were some needs not getting met and problems with the old relationship
 - ▶ Attunement is the desire and the ability to understand and respect your partner's inner world
 - ▶ Sharing vulnerabilities stops either partner from feeling lonely or invisible
 - ▶ Stress reducing conversation
 - ▶ Open ended questions
 - ▶ Rituals of connection
 - ▶ In session or outside

Betrayal

- ▶ Attach
 - ▶ Deals with sex
 - ▶ May be very difficult for couple to reengage
 - ▶ Steady flow of intimate conversations talking about sex
 - ▶ Discussions about sex to discover your partner's feelings, attitudes, and preferences
 - ▶ Aimed at slowly mending and deepening the emotional connection
 - ▶ Gottman Card Decks
 - ▶ Remember: Need first two phases

Domestic Violence

- ▶ There is situational violence and characterological violence
- ▶ 80% of DV is situational; 20% is characterological (women's shelters)
- ▶ Couples therapy is against the law in most states when there has been DV
- ▶ Situational: conflict escalated out of control; minor injuries; does not involve control or dominance
- ▶ Women start situational violence 71% of the time but men cause much more harm; no fear involved
- ▶ Both are remorseful, understand impact, want to change
- ▶ Violence is reciprocal-no clear victim/perpetrator
- ▶ Characterological: Asymmetrical...clear victim, clear perpetrator; controlling, domineering, belligerence; little remorse/blaming of victim; victim has no control; victim terrified of perpetrator
- ▶ Two types: Pit Bulls and Cobras (more on that later)

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Up until around 1980, little was written about domestic violence
- ▶ DV was not identified as a social problem, and most battered women did not know that there was anything out of the ordinary in their relationships
- ▶ Some things that changed the landscape:
 - ▶ Onset of women's movement, growth of feminism in the 1970s
 - ▶ Consequently, writers began to draw attention to violence against women...specifically violence perpetrated by husbands against wives
 - ▶ Lenore Walker (two very influential books)
 - ▶ Murray Straus & Richard Gelles-conducted two national surveys with shocking results: there was so much family violence that many began to wonder, is it the exception or the rule?

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Since that time, DV has captured the attention of some social and behavioral scientists, and a growing body of knowledge has accumulated
- ▶ Public consciousness about DV has also been raised by high profile news events
- ▶ What was the first?
- ▶ Any others?
- ▶ A benefit of these news stories and other contemporary movements is that there is now an open discussion about DV
- ▶ Where we are now—in an average month, 50 women are shot to death by an intimate partner

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Based on groundbreaking research conducted by Neil Jacobson and John Gottman
- ▶ Based on direct observation of the arguments of severely violent couples (rather than relying on the reports of others)
- ▶ Focused on the emotional experiences of batterers and those being battered (heart rate, movement, other physiological activity)
- ▶ Also focused on what contributes to the demise of abusive relationships and how/if it changes over time
- ▶ Followed severely violent couples over time
- ▶ Used a comparison group of couples who were *equally dissatisfied* with their relationships but no violence had ever occurred (therefore differences could not just be written off to relationship dissatisfaction)

Domestic Violence

- ▶ How was battering defined?
- ▶ If the woman reported within the past year 6 or more episodes of “low-level” violence (pushing/slapping), 2 or more episodes of “high-level” violence (kicking/hitting with a fist, or at least 1 episode of “potentially-lethal” violence (woman badly beaten, man threatened to use or did use gun or knife)
- ▶ Important to understand definition of battering as well as purpose
- ▶ To control, intimidate, and subjugate another human being
- ▶ *Always* accompanied by emotional abuse, often accompanied by physical injury, and virtually always associated with fear and even terror
- ▶ There are essentially two subtypes of batterers: Cobras and Pit Bulls

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Cobras look keyed up, act angrily, and sound loud and menacing during arguments
- ▶ In reality, the heart rate becomes lower and lower the closer they are to striking
- ▶ Hold their heads up, lead with chin
- ▶ Taunt their partners by pushing them away (Cobras don't want to be bothered)
- ▶ But...they demand their partners be there when the need something: sex, money, drugs
- ▶ Extremely frightening to their partners while at the same time captivating (charming, highly manipulative, seductive)
- ▶ That combination makes Cobras very difficult to escape from
- ▶ Regardless of the partner's method of discussing an issue, Cobras immediately become belligerent, contemptuous, or defensive
- ▶ Give appearance of being explosive and dangerous
- ▶ NO REMORSE

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Cobras are adept at finding women who are vulnerable to their macabre charisma, whose lives are guided by a particular dream, women down on their luck, new to an area
- ▶ Present themselves with just what the women wants to hear, presentation is totally contrived
- ▶ Cobra violence is more severe than Pit Bulls
- ▶ Cobras commit more emotional abuse (high rates of belligerence and contempt)
- ▶ Cobras have more chaotic/traumatic childhoods
- ▶ The partners of Cobras are more depressed and frightened
- ▶ Cobras and their partners do not easily separate or divorce
- ▶ Cobras are more violent outside the relationship
- ▶ Cobras have more mental illness (specifically antisocial personality disorder)

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Pit Bulls:
- ▶ Do not present themselves as Cobras do (contrived); rather, present as genuine—honestly attempting human connection
- ▶ Many Pit Bulls have a distorted view of themselves that they believe—therefore, they do not think that they are dangerous (Cobras *know* they are dangerous, and they don't care)
- ▶ Pit Bulls may exact violence on women and then profusely apologize...and then do it again
- ▶ Like Cobras, Pit Bulls strike out unpredictably. This has obvious effects on the abused
- ▶ Pit Bulls monitor all activities (if she says she went to the grocery store, demands receipt and inspects time, items purchased, etc.)
- ▶ Pit Bulls do not allow any freedom (unlike Cobras who unless they want something right then, don't care)...isolating
- ▶ Many times this leads the abused to sit at home even when the batterer is away. "It just isn't worth it."

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Pit Bulls:
- ▶ Pit Bulls demand as well as withdraw...unlike Cobras or nonbattering husbands, Pit Bulls are often in the *demanding* role
- ▶ They demand changes in their partner's behavior, even as they resist changes requested of them
- ▶ Therefore, vastly different than Cobras, Pit Bulls are emotionally dependent
- ▶ Need infinite amounts of love and reassurance—and the partner can never give enough
- ▶ JEALOUSY/FEAR OF ABANDONMENT
- ▶ Pit Bulls are internally aroused when behaving aggressively
- ▶ Head down, lean forward, start conversation condescendingly
- ▶ Heart rate increases the closer they are to striking, fly into unintended rages
- ▶ Pit Bulls are seldom violent outside of relationship (relative absence of criminal activity)

Domestic Violence

1. Both Men and Women Batter
 - ▶ Remember two things: impact of violence and its function
 - ▶ Hard to find women even capable of battering a man
2. All BATTERERS are Alike
 - ▶ Cobras/Pit Bulls
3. Battering is never caused by drugs and alcohol
 - ▶ Sometimes, some men only batter when intoxicated, because it transforms them. But this is NEVER an excuse/justification (diminished capacity defense)
4. Batterers cannot control their anger
 - ▶ Basically, except in extreme cases, battering is a voluntary choice
5. Battering Often Stops on its Own
 - ▶ Battering seldom stops on its own. Men may decrease their level of violence over time (emotional abuse pairing), but few stop completely. When they do stop, the emotional abuse has become enough

Domestic Violence

6. Psychotherapy is a More Effective "Treatment" Than Prison
 - ▶ Prisons overcrowded, judges looking for alternatives
 - ▶ Since (typically group) psychotherapy is commonly available for batterers, judges find it irresistible for a referral to court-mandated treatment (particularly since DV charges are mostly misdemeanors)
 - ▶ Very little evidence that treatment for batterers is effective
 - ▶ **THROW THEM IN JAIL.** Gives time for violence to stop and give powerful message to the batterer

Domestic Violence

- 7. Women Often Provoke Men Into Battering Them
 - ▶ This myth still lingers...among batterers, general public, and some professionals
 - ▶ Men initiate violence regardless of what women do or say
 - ▶ *Holding the man accountable for the violence, regardless of what the woman does or says, is a critical step in the violence stopping*
 - ▶ Despite what the women says or does, it is not a provocation. There is no remark or behavior that justifies violence unless in true self defense
- 8. Women who Stay in Abusive Relationships Must Be Crazy
 - ▶ This myth starts with a false premise: That most battered women do stay. They don't
 - ▶ What about those who haven't left yet? Guesses?
- 9. Battered Women Could Stop the Battering by Changing Their own Behavior
 - ▶ Nope, nope, nope
- 10. There is one Answer to the Question "Why do Men Batter Women?"
 - ▶ For the sake of brevity, nobody knows what causes battering, and there are likely a complex mix of factors
 - ▶ What we can say-battering related to social class

Domestic Violence

- ▶ The Stages of an Argument
- 1. Unpredictability
- 2. Holding Onto the Dream
- 3. Batterer's Unwillingness to Accept Influence
- 4. Women's Response: Anger Versus Fear
- 5. The Absence of a Withdrawal Ritual in Battering Couples
- 6. The Violence Commences
- 7. The Reestablishment of Control

Domestic Violence

- 1. *Unpredictability*: Extremely difficult to predict when the batterer will strike
 - ▶ This is what makes it so frightening-unpredictability/uncontrollability
- 2. *Holding Onto the Dream*
 - ▶ Thoughts about what this could mean?
- 3. *Unwillingness to Accept Influence*
 - ▶ Batterers are unwilling to accept any influence from a woman, no matter how gentle or reasonable the attempt
 - ▶ Phrases you will never hear: "That's a good point," "I never thought of that," "You are starting to convince me."
- 4. *Anger Versus Fear*
 - ▶ Battered women live in a constant state of competing emotions...they are too angry to be scared (when most would be scared), or they are too scared to be angry (when most might be angry)
 - ▶ Magnified during an abusive episode but present all the time

Domestic Violence

5. *Absence of Withdrawal Ritual*

- ▶ For most happy or unhappy but nonviolent couples, there is an invisible line that is never crossed
- ▶ At some point, the escalation stops or reverses itself
- ▶ Some couples take breaks, others compromise, or a combination of both
- ▶ Some couples simply stop or sweep the issue under the rug
- ▶ For batterers, once activated, they cross the line, and when the line is crossed...there is NOTHING a woman can do to affect its course

6. *The Violence Commences*

- ▶ One note-battered women are often just as angry or angrier than the batterer, and they often express the anger and fight back

7. *The Reestablishment of Control*

- ▶ Violence is stopped once the woman has been "taught a lesson," or once control/dominance has been put back it place

Domestic Violence

- ▶ There are many different scenarios, but to condense it down, it is when the dream dies
- ▶ "Last Straw Incident"
