



'let's talk'

HEALING TOGETHER:

Why every therapist should master the Art and Science of Relationship Therapy

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Relationship Institute Australasia

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Even if you aren't working with couples
You are working with people in
relationships

2

Becoming a couple therapist



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We've all
been there!



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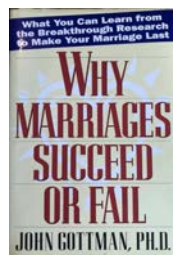
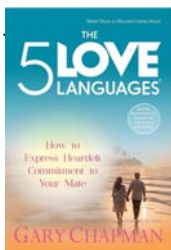
Help!!

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- Carstensen, L.L., Gottman, J.M., and Levenson, R.W., (1995). [Emotional behavior in long-term marriage](#). *Psychology & Aging*, Vol. 10(1), 140-149;
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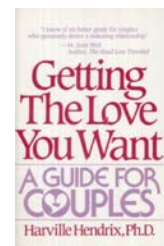
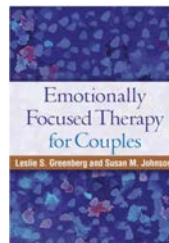
Helpful books in 1997/1998

Chapman, G. (1992). *The five love languages: How to express heartfelt commitment to your mate*. USA: Northfield Publishing t



Gottman, J., & Silver, N. (1994). *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: What You Can Learn from the Breakthrough Research to Make Your Marriage Last*. New York: Simon & Schuster

Greenberg, L.S., & Johnson, S.M. (1988). *Emotionally focused therapy for couples*. Guilford Press.



Hendrix, H., & LaKelly Hunt, H. (1988). *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*. St. Martin's Griffin.

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Learning EFTC



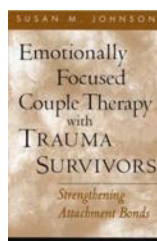
• [Veronica Kallos-Lilly, Ph.D.](#)



Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald

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Couple therapy and Trauma



Johnson, S. (2002). Emotionally focused couple therapy with trauma survivors: strengthening attachment bonds. New York: The Guildford Press

"If another stands beside you when you face overwhelming terror and helplessness-whether you name this terror and helplessness a "dragon" or call it by some other name, such as traumatic stress-then everything is different. Shadows are not so terrifying. The struggle can be shared, and sometimes the fight can even be a thing of joy as, together, you defy the dragon. We all know it is better not to be alone in the dark and that connection with others makes us stronger. Loc 70 (Kindle Edition)

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The emerging research

- Jacobson, N. S., Dobson, K., Fruzzetti, A. E., Schmalings, K. B., & Salusky, S. (1991). Marital therapy as a treatment for depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59, 547–557.
- Denton, W., Wittenborn, A., & Golden, R. (2012). Augmenting antidepressant medication treatment of depressed women in emotionally focused therapy for couples: a randomized pilot study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(1), 23-38.
- Dessaulles, A., Johnson, S., & Denton, W. (2003). Emotion Focused therapy for couples in the treatment of depression: a pilot study. *American Journal of family Therapy*, 31, 345-353.
- MacIntosh, H., & Johnson, S. (2008). Emotionally focused therapy for couples and childhood sexual survivors. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 34, 298-315.
- Naaman, S., Radwan, K., & Johnson, S. (2009). Coping with early breast cancer: couple adjustment processes and couple based intervention. *Psychiatry*, 74(4), 321-345.
- Oliver, M., Perry, S., & Ade, R. (2008). Couples therapy with borderline personality disordered individuals. *The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 1(1), 67-72.
- Robinson, E., Rodgers, B., & Butterworth, P. (2008). Family relationships and mental illness: Impacts and service responses. *Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse*, 4, 1-19.

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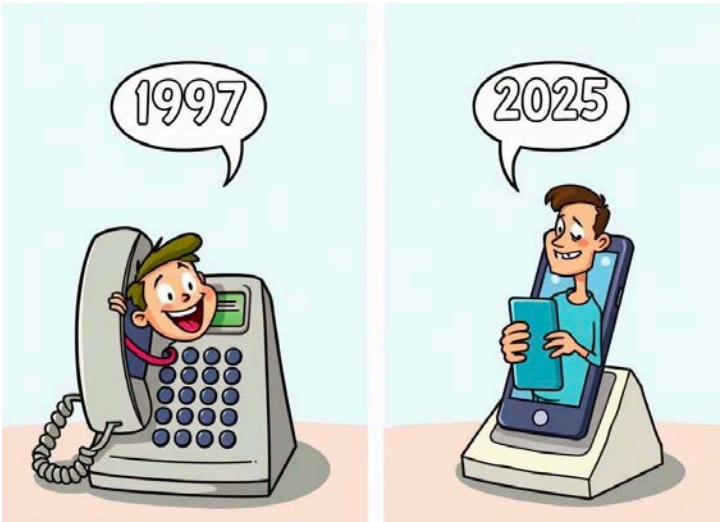
The move to Gottman Therapy



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The Lessons



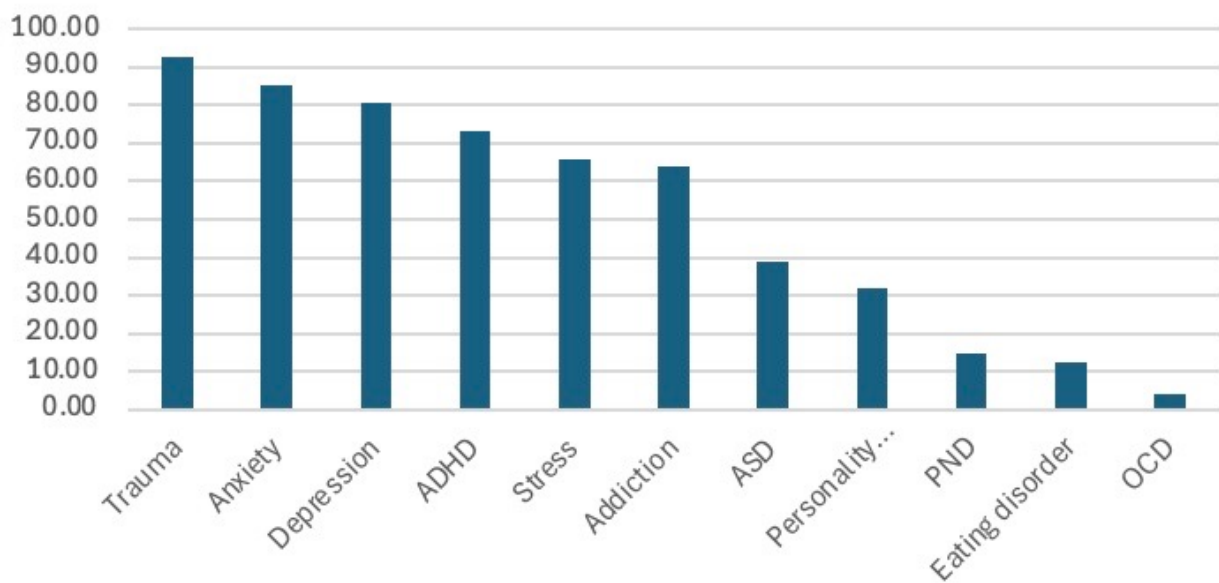
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Lebow &
Snyder
(2023)

- “Given the diversity in couples’ needs, therapy is most likely to be effective when the therapist engages in comprehensive assessment and selectively draws on intervention strategies across the theoretical spectrum in a manner consistent with an explicit case formulation”.(p. 45)

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Couple Mental Health Presentations



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1997 vs 2025

Couple therapy works

- Lebow, J., & Snyder, D. (2022). Couple therapy in the 2020's: Current status and emerging developments. Family Process, DOI: 10.1111/famp.12824
- "The average person receiving couple therapy is better off at termination than 70%–80% of individuals not receiving treatment—an improvement rate that rivals or exceeds the most effective psychosocial and pharmacological interventions for individual mental health disorders." p.1362.
- "

Disorder focused relationship relationship therapy for individual issues:

- Betrayal
- Addictions
- PTSD/Anxiety
- Depression/Bi-polar disorder
- Neurodiverse couples
- Eating disorders
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Sexual difficulties
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Physical health problems
 - Cancer
 - Chronic pain
 - Cardio disease
 - Type 2 diabetes

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Baucom,
et.al. (2014)

"In partner-assisted interventions, the partner is enlisted to help in the process of reinforcing and supporting the active treatment of the individual problem. In contrast, in disorder-specific treatment, the treatment itself is couple therapy tailored to the particular kinds of couple dynamics likely to occur in the context of the partner's individual problem." p.447

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Betrayal – disorder focused relationship treatments

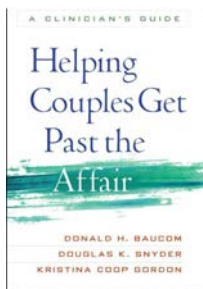


Gottman.com

Irvine, et.al. (2023) A Pilot Study Examining the Effectiveness of Gottman Method Couples Therapy Over Treatment-as-Usual Approaches for Treating Couples Dealing with Infidelity, The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families 1-14

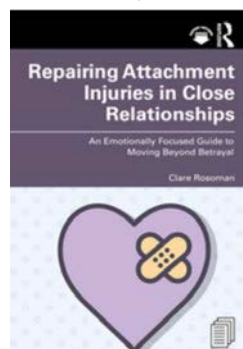
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Betrayal – disorder focused relationship treatments



CBT for Couples

EFT-Couples



[Let's Talk Betrayal - Relationshipinstitute.com.au](http://Relationshipinstitute.com.au)

A pluralistic approach

Draws on (amongst other things):

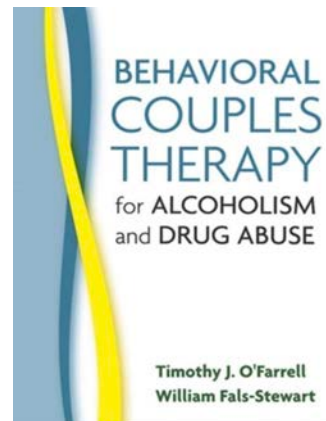
- Gottman's Trust Revival Model of treatment;
- Emotion processing interventions from EFT-C;
- Parts work from IFS and Schema Therapy;
- CBT approach to formulating how the betrayal occurred;
- Mentalization Based Couple Therapy to assist with the restoration of epistemic trust.

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Addiction – disorder focused relationship treatments

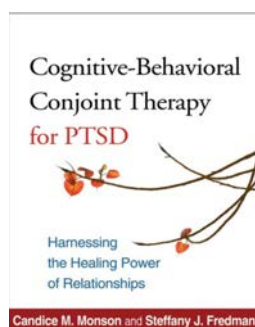
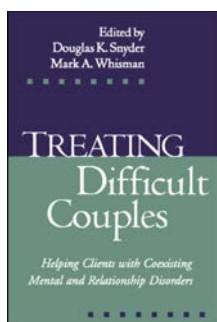


Navarra, R., Gottman, J., & Gottman, J. (2017). Couples and Addiction Recovery – A Gottman Approach for Therapists, Counselors and Addiction Professionals. The Gottman Institute.



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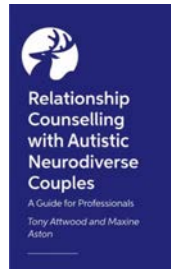
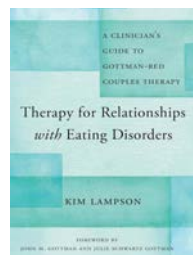
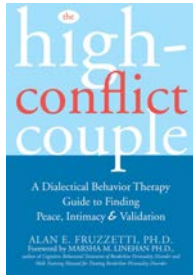
Mood and Trauma focused relationship treatments



Gottman, J., & Gottman, J. (2017). Treating Affairs and Trauma: A Gottman Approach for Therapists on the treatment of affairs and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The Gottman institute.

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Other disorder focused relationship treatments



<https://www.attwoodandgar.net/events.com/products/autism-in-couple-relationships-1>

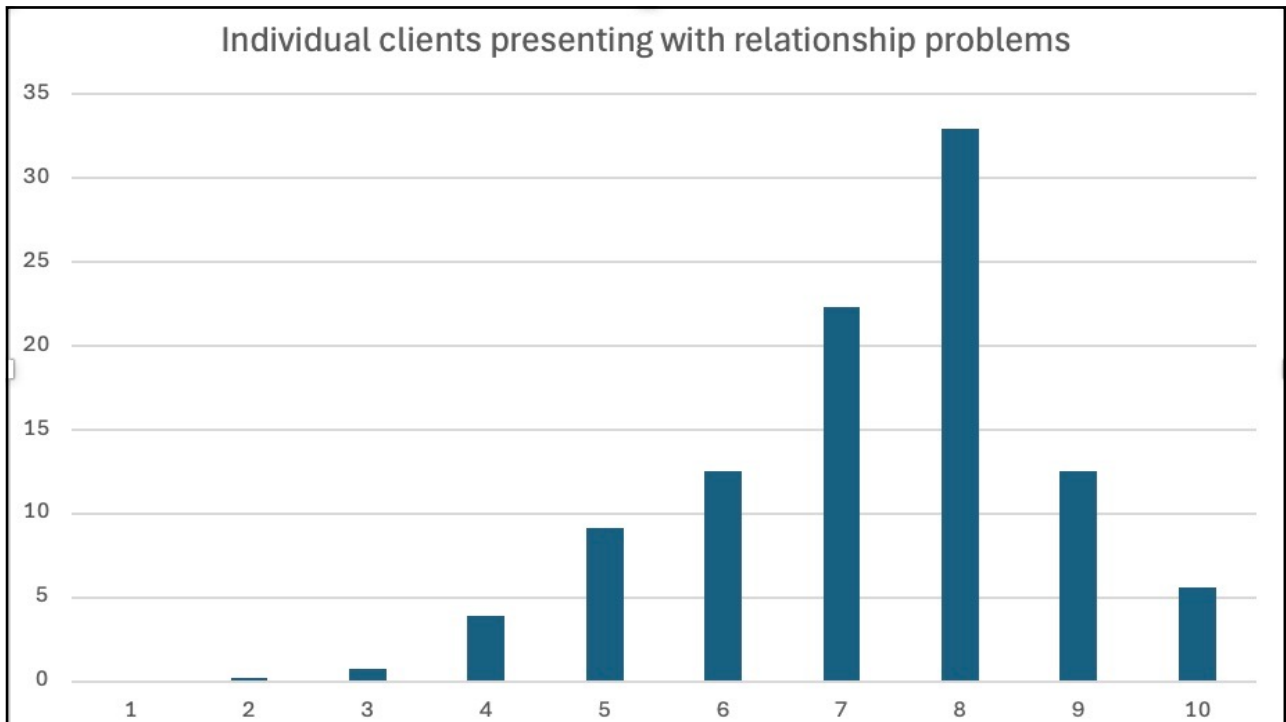


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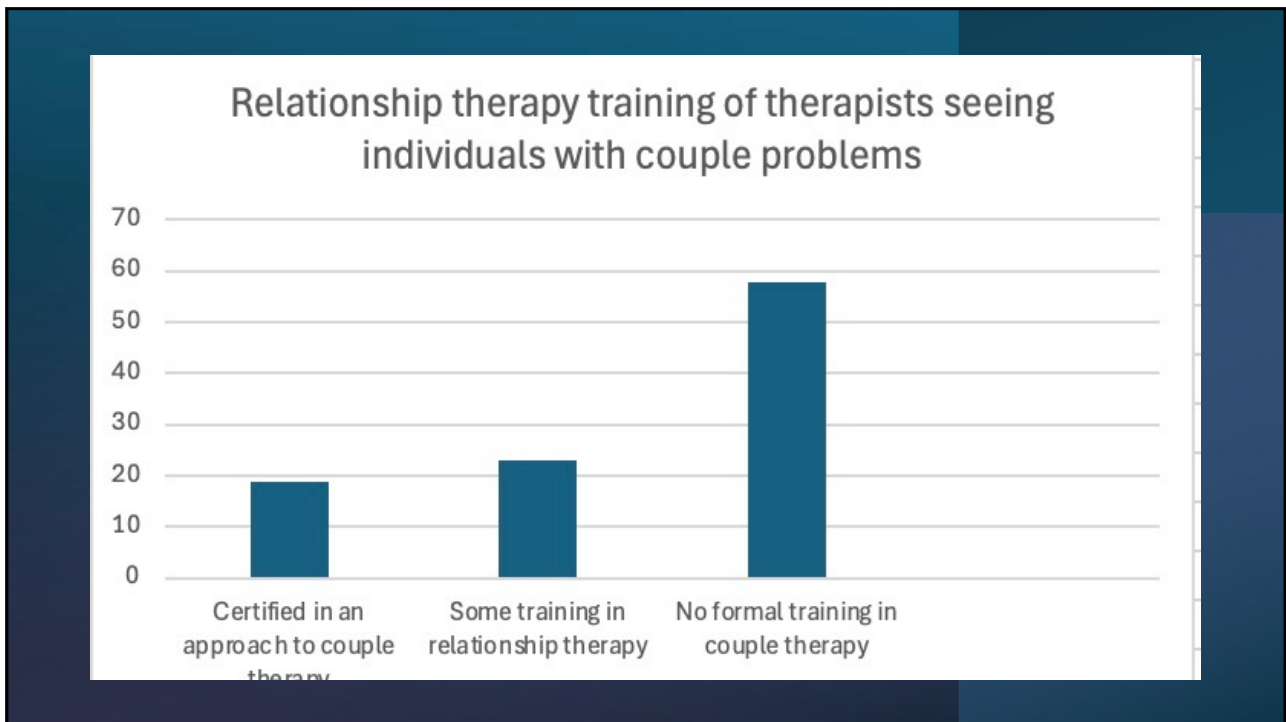
Maybe working
with only one
partner is easier



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IRISH PURNELL WEBB
Couple Therapist, Couple and Family

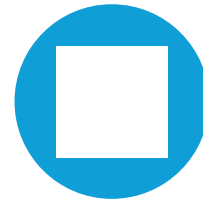
Outcome studies regarding Individual Therapy for Relationship Problems



BENNUN, I., (1985,
1997)



GURMAN, A., ET AL
(1986, 2014)



DOHERTY, W., (2002,
2015)

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So what's to be done?

Rule	First rule of relationship problems is ... refer for couple therapy
Rule	Second rule of relationship problems is ...refer for couple therapy
Rule	Third rule of relationship problems is ... ensure you are offering Couple Sensitive Individual Therapy.

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Signs the Therapy is Not Couple Sensitive (Doherty, 2015)

- Letting the client engage in psychological “assessment” of their partner;
- Regularly commenting on the spouse’s personality limitations;
- Offering a diagnosis for the spouse without having done an assessment;
- Consistently attributing negative motives to the spouse;
- Expressing pessimism that the spouse can change without knowing that person
- Rarely challenging the client’s perspective about their own contributions to the relationship problems;
- Rarely expressing empathy for what the spouse might be experiencing.

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What’s involved? Top 4 craft skills (Doherty)



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So where are we so far?

I think I've
established
that:

- Couples therapy works;
- Disorder specific relationship therapy works, with some studies finding it works better than drug therapy or individual therapy;
- Uninformed individual therapy for couple problems doesn't seem to work or at least not as well as couple therapy;

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Which therapy is the best?

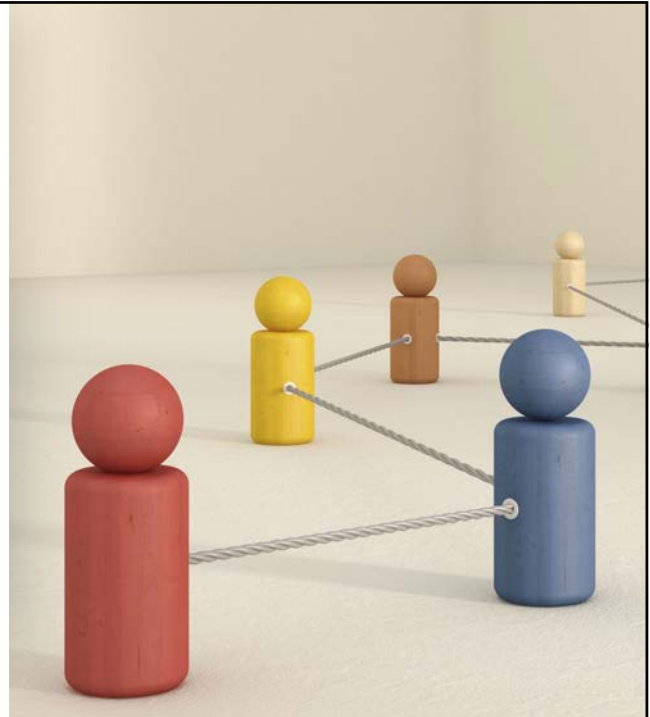


Snyder & Lebow (2023) – argue for a pluralistic approach.

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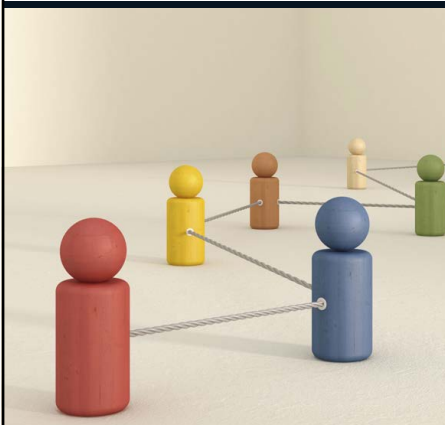
Pluralism is...

“An approach that recognizes (both) the validity and usefulness of multiple theoretical perspectives and draws on constructs and intervention strategies from across theoretical models by tailoring intervention strategies to a given case at any given moment based on their clinical relevance and potential utility. Pluralism differs from eclecticism in that interventions are always conceptualized from within a theoretical framework.” p.6.



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The case for a pluralistic approach



- **Recognition of Multiple Perspectives**
 - validity and usefulness of multiple theoretical models and intervention strategies.
 - tailor interventions to the specific needs of a couple at any given moment;
 - ensuring clinical relevance and utility.
- **Conceptual Framework:**
 - pluralism ensures that interventions are conceptualized within a coherent theoretical framework.
 - avoids unsystematic or contradictory use of techniques and
 - preserves the synergistic effects of combined interventions.
- **Flexibility in Intervention:**
 - enables therapists to address diverse aspects of couple dynamics, such as strengthening the dyad, promoting relationship skills, addressing cognitive components, and exploring developmental sources of distress.
 - allows therapists to adapt their methods to the unique challenges faced by each couple.
- **Therapeutic Palette:** Fraenkel (2019) introduced the concept of a "therapeutic palette," which provides an elegant framework for pluralistic practice. This approach emphasizes the therapist's ability to select and sequence interventions based on the couple's needs and goals.

A pluralistic approach offers a balanced and systematic way to integrate diverse therapeutic strategies, ensuring that interventions are both theoretically grounded and tailored to the unique needs of each couple.

THIS IS THE ART OF SUCCESSFUL COUPLE THERAPY

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So what does it look like in my practice?

Assessment

- Gottman all the way;

Treatment – Stage 1 - Healing the Past

- Gottman dyadic process and structured interventions;
- EFT exploration of negative dynamics;
- Existential psychotherapy emotional processing and meaning making;
- Psychodynamic exploration, Schema identification, surfacing the internal working models, etc
- CBT reframing; relaxation training; self-regulation skills
- Collaborative Couple therapy ‘doubling’;

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So what does it look like in my practice?

Treatment – Stage 2 - Attuning in the present

- Everything from stage 1
- Add in Gottman - Dreams within Conflict; Rituals of connection; Open ended questions, Repairing fights, learning to compromise;

Treatment – Stage 3 – Creating for the Future

- Gottman – deepening meaning and purpose; creating shared dreams and visions
- Sensate focused sex therapy – repairing physical intimacy

Relapse Prevention

- Gottman – State of the union rituals; fading out of therapy; post treatment assessment and fine-tuning

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My two cents
worth and why
I think every
therapist
should master
the art and
science of
relationship
therapy?

Every person you see therapeutically
will be in some kind of relationship;

Most people you will see will be
experiencing distress from their
relationships;

Therapy with couples is highly effective
in treating relationship distress AND in
treating individual mental and physical
health distresses;

Even though relationship therapy is hard
it's the most rewarding work you'll ever
do.

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Hopes for the future

1

Place greater focus on
training and preparing
clinicians to provide
evidenced based couple
therapy; in postgraduate
coursework;

2

Create Relationship
Psychology as an area of
endorsement – it requires
advanced knowledge,
extensive skills and ideally
supervised practice;

3

Develop relationship skills
programs for high school
students;

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The last word

The key to a better future for society is to foster stable, well functioning families. We as a profession are in a unique position to influence this direction.



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The End

If you would like more information about our trainings, find us at www.relationshipinstitute.com.au

References – please see the handout in your Conference Event App.

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