2012

An Initial Qualitative Exploration of Gottman's Couples Research: A Workshop from the Participants' Perspective

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AN INITIAL QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF GOTTMAN’S COUPLES RESEARCH:
A WORKSHOP FROM THE PARTICIPANTS’ PERSPECTIVE

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Family and Child Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2012
Columbus Edward Brand defended this dissertation on February 29th, 2012.

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A special thanks and remembrance is given to my father, Arnold; my brother, Larry; my uncle Jimmy Segrest; and my sister, Joan. I dedicate this to them as well as my wife, Shea Hughes-Brand; and mother, Ruth Brand.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin my acknowledgements with the people that were most influential in my life, but could not be here to help me celebrate this accomplishment. The first is my father, Arnold Edward Brand. He was a very colorful character with only a fourth grade education, which motivated him to impress upon his children the importance of having an education. Second is my brother, Larry Arnold Brand, who passed away at age 36 in 1984. He lived life as if he knew it would be brief. He taught me the joys of listening to and playing music. Third is my uncle, Jimmy Wayne Segrest, who was raised as my oldest brother and passed last year. He taught me that serving my country is a privilege and choice, which earns a membership to a special brotherhood. Finally is my sister, Beverly Joan Brand, who recently passed. She made me laugh and feel that I could truly do anything. She set the bar high among my siblings for artistic competence.

Thank you for the love and patience from my wife, Shea Hughes-Brand, who, along with my mother, Ruth Brand, have given me support when it felt as if I could not continue. Thank you to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Robert Lee, who truly went above and beyond for me through this process. I wish to thank Dr. Mary Hicks, for introducing me to Dr. John Gottman and other major figures that I often cite. I would like to give thanks to Dr. Christine Readdick, for her empathetic ear during times of stress, and finally, Dr. David Gussak, for understanding right brain thinkers.

I also would like to extend my gratitude to the participants of this study. The short time spent with them during the workshop was very memorable thanks to the energy in which they displayed.
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ABSTRACT
Distressed relationships may be emotionally and economically costly to the couple, their families, and the community in which they reside. Given the current political endorsements, convenience, efficiency, capacity for prevention, and overall lower cost of psychoeducational workshops, they should be explored for efficacy. Are they providing the promoters and participants with a viable option? Is there a possibility to improve any part of these options for optimizing their effectiveness? Using a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition, this study explored the input of 14 participants who attended an eight-hour, one day, psychoeducational workshop. The workshop was based on a faithful presentation of Dr. John Gottman’s couple’s research. Attendees became “active participants” by agreeing to provide personal information about their relationships and offering their perspectives at scheduled intervals during the workshop. The participants were interviewed one month after the workshop to ascertain what, if anything, they had found to be useful about the workshop. Sampling was an opportunity sample open to couples ages 18 and over who were married or unmarried, having children or without children, and although only heterosexual couples responded, it was open to all sexual orientations. The findings obtained were triangulated consisting of written surveys from the participants, the researcher’s field notes, and the participants’ audio-taped post-intervention interviews. The following twelve themes emerged: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; 10) Finances, Unmanaged; 11) Planning, Acceptable; and 12) Planning, Unacceptable. Initially, the participants indicated that they were focused on improving their communication and conflict resolution skills, but their participation level and expressed interests in specific blocks of information appeared to change throughout the workshop day. The Gottman concepts which indicated higher participant interest were again indicated in the post-intervention interview responses. Post-intervention interview questions one through four were coded using the existing themes. The following ten themes emerged: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; and 10) Planning, Acceptable. The theme Connectedness was coded considerably more times than the others. Conflict Resolution and Communication, Acceptable
were discussed by the participants very heavily along with Planning, Acceptable. Lastly, for post intervention interview question number five, the participants were asked to rank-order their answers to question three and four relative to their perceived usefulness. Their number one choices were coded using the existing themes and the findings in descending order of use were: 1) Connectedness; 2) Communication, Acceptable; and 3) Conflict, Resolved. This corroborated the findings of the final coding seen in the post-intervention interviews questions one through four. However, the final distribution of the participants’ rank ordered answers to post-intervention interview question number five indicated a slight deviation in that the specific Gottman concept of Conflict Resolution was cited fourth overall as being useful. This shift in focus may have indicated that, although the participants had continuing concerns for coping with their relational communication skills and ability to resolve their conflicts, they were finding it important to look deeper for causal and resolution factors as well as prioritizing what may actually be important within their relationships. The interviews, written surveys, and field notes agreed: The participants found that the workshop was helpful because of the above factors and because they were developing and putting into action some of the workshop information. The high degree of participation after some blocks of workshop information was reflected in the participants’ choices for useful Gottman concepts indicating a need for more research into the usefulness of participation in a workshop format.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Having a successful marriage or union is highly valued in America with 93% of those rating having a happy marriage as their most important objective. A little more than 70% say that marriage should be considered a life-long commitment (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Despite this, 50% of first time marriages still end in divorce, generally within ten years of the marriage (Clark, 1995). In addition to marital distress leading to divorce, one trend noted in 1993 was that many distressed couples stay in non-satisfying unions (Notarius & Markman, 1993). This has recently gained national media attention due to the connection with the current economic downturn. It seems that a rising number of distressed couples are remaining in their relationships, despite their turmoil or overall unhappiness, because two person unions thrive better financially in this economic climate (Newell, 2009). Consequences from dissolution or failed marriages can be severe for everyone involved, as well as staying in a toxic marriage (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009).

A recent review by Sparks and Duncan (2010) offered that overall, it can be justifiably concluded that couple therapy, when compared with no treatment, is efficacious in alleviating a range of symptomatic complaints and is a viable option. On average, any systematically applied treatment is four times more effective than no treatment (Lambert & Ogles, 2004). Couples that receive therapy have been found to experience approximately 80% improvement (Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006). Even brief or subtle psychological interventions have been found to have considerably lasting beneficial effects in conjunction with the use of 15 minute self-affirmation writings from ethnic minority students (Cohen, Garcia Purdue-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2010). In short, distressed couples should be able to benefit from the knowledge necessary to build more desirable, less distressful relationships. The task, it seems, is for some of these distressed couples to find an affordable resource which could help to affect a positive change in their relationship dynamics. One such resource of cumulative knowledge comes from couples’ researcher Dr. John Gottman. He has spent the past 40 years looking at the behaviors of couples, which not only were observed to contribute to the continuance of healthy marriages, but also the specific behaviors which appear to be corrosive, eventually leading to separation and divorce. Specific findings gained from his research have allowed Gottman to claim that he can predict divorce using affective variables from each conversation with 82.6% accuracy from the
conversations displaying conflict and with 92.7% accuracy from the rebound or repair attempt conversations (Gottman & Levenson, 1999).

Although Gottman’s work is highly referenced, accuracy of his divorce predictions has come under fire due to the lack of cross-validation (Heyman & Smith Slep, 2001). In addition, other assertions made from his findings have not come without some opposition (e.g. Stanley, Bradbury, & Markman, 2000). They argue;

• Gottman’s statement calling for the abandonment of interventions such as promoting active listening diminishes anger as overrated and a danger to marriage.
• The implication that therapists should ignore negative affect reciprocity may be also a premature assertion.
• In addition, the idea that couples who do well characterized by husbands who accept influence from wives and wives who raise concerns gently were also considered to be premature assertions. Therefore, assigning interventions that aligned with these ideas may also be premature.

Gottman has translated his research findings into a more consumer friendly product by using an analogy of a house with seven floors which he now refers to as the Sound Relationship House Theory. Each floor represents a point in his research studies in which he witnessed couples either excel or fail. The observations made at each level have helped him to explain his findings and were the main ideas presented in this workshop (see Appendix G). Gottman has further transposed the house with seven floors analogy into therapeutic interventions, which he admittedly borrows from clinicians and others such as Susan Johnson and Leslie Greenberg, Dan Wile, Victor Frankl, and Anotole Rapoport (Gottman, 2009) to complement and drive his research findings in clinical settings. The genesis for his interventions came about when he and his clinician wife, Dr. Julie Gottman, were in a kayak on the ocean and the discussion turned to putting the years of research to good clinical use. He admittedly watched, as a researcher, the deterioration of couples’ relationships over time in longitudinal studies. He said that his wife noticed one of his male subjects in pain to which Dr. John Gottman did nothing to intervene. It was decided that they start applying the interventions they felt were aligned with his theory and necessary to help these clients (Jencius & Duba, 2003).

It appears that after many years of researching couples in a semi-natural setting which he refers to as the Love Lab, Gottman has predominately chosen to bring his findings to the clinical
arena by using techniques from other’s models and concepts. In contrast, the process in which his research evolved, which will be discussed later in the literature review, has the qualitative appearance of an anthropologist living with his subjects and documenting their observations. It is interesting that Gottman would look to others instead of following this same formula to design techniques which are specific to his model from the setting in which they were born. Clients’ active involvement and collaboration have been consistently associated with successful outcome across a wide range of therapeutic modalities (e.g. Garfield, 1994; Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994; Tryon & Winograd, 2002).

Considering Gottman’s work as a viable option, cost should be considered. Even in this economic climate, today’s average reported cost of therapy per session is $95.00 (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009). Oftentimes specific therapies such as those offered by Gottman Method Certified Therapists may be higher, due to the high costs of their own training. It is reasonable to say that the cost may place an added burden upon a failing relationship or become a deterrent altogether.

Gottman has published some extraordinary research findings, which were hoped to prove useful in an eight-hour psychoeducational workshop format. The present study utilized these findings from his research only without the interventions he now uses in therapy. It is noted that Gottman has asserted that psychoeducation alone does not stand up as well against conjoint psychoeducation and therapy sessions (Jencius & Duba, 2003). The purpose of this study was not to disprove this assertion, nor to challenge his choice of therapeutic interventions, but to provide and qualitatively explore a participatory option to couples who may not otherwise attend therapy due to financial or time constraints.

Whether discussing couple’s therapy or psychoeducational workshops, it appears prudent to review trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and legislation implemented to improve marriages. Information regarding the current trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage; effects of marital conflict and divorce; myths concerning divorce; federal and state healthy marriage initiatives; advantages of marriage; and the genesis of Gottman’s research with couples will be addressed within this chapter. This chapter concludes with a discussion delineating the purpose for using Grounded theory, the research purpose, research questions, the assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study, along with a chapter summary.
There have been several important trends in marriage and cohabitation in the United States. These trends include the decline in the percentage of married couples, an increase in number of those delaying marriage until they are older, an increase in the number of the individuals never married, and an increase in the number of couples who choose to cohabitate before-or instead of- marrying (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011; Olson, DeFrain, & Skogrand, 2008). The percentage of individuals over the age of 18 who are married has steadily declined. In 1970, 68% of adults were married. In 1980, 66% of adults were married and in 2000, only 62% of adults were married. In 2006, homes headed by married couples declined to 49.7% making married couples a minority in the United States. Further, there is an increase in the numbers of same-sex couples who are not typically counted as being married. Early in 2008 only one state, Massachusetts, in the United States recognized gay male and lesbian female marriages; Rhode Island recognized gay “unions” (Olson et al., 2008). Since this time there have been several states that have begun to change their state statutes regarding allowing gay males and lesbian females the right to marry and more are viewing this as an acceptable direction.

Currently more individuals are delaying marriage until their late 20’s; the age for one’s first marriage has been on the increase for the last four decades. The median age for first marriages for males is 27 years old and for females, 26 years old. In 1960, the median age for a first marriage was 22.8 years for males and 20.3 years for females. The current trend is the oldest average in the United States history (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005).

Recent studies show that more than half of all couples cohabitate before marriage. The number of cohabitating couples has increased 800% since the 1960’s, when fewer than 500,000 were cohabitating. There were 2.5 million couples cohabitating in 1988, 3.5 million cohabitating in 1993, 4.7 million couples cohabitating in 2000, and 5.5 million couples cohabitating in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003, 2004).

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2004), almost 20 million Americans, around 9.9% of the U.S. population have divorced. The divorce rate climbed during the 1960’s and 1970’s, but it has stabilized today at about 50%. About 75% of those who divorce will remarry later; however, 60% of those who remarry will divorce again. After divorce, males tend to remarry more quickly and more often than females. Glick (1999) found that 72% of recently divorced females remarry, but the rate of remarriage decreased as the number of children
increased. Around 81% of divorced females with no children remarry, 73% of females with one or two children remarry, and only 57% of females with three or more children remarry.

Recently it has been noted that the divorce/annulment filings in Washington, D.C. has sharply fallen 49% from 2006 until 2008. In 2009, there have been 159 filings thus far predicting about 1,900 by the end of the year. This is 200 less than 2008. Although no verifying statistics are available at this time, the national trend appears to be somewhat the same. The biggest contributor to these numbers is the drop in home values. So far in 2009, home value rates are down 19.4% from 2008 (Newell, 2009). It is becoming increasingly apparent that couples are staying together for financial reasons with little to no regard for the quality of their relationships.

Overview of the Effects of Divorce and Toxic Unions

According to Waite and Gallagher (2000), 93% of Americans rate having a happy marriage as one of their most important objectives with about 70% viewing marriage as a lifelong commitment to be ended only under extreme circumstances. The current estimates of first marriages in the United States ending in divorce range between 50 to 67 percent. Studies show that the divorce rate for second marriages are either the same or about 10% higher than for first marriages. Serious consequences can result from marital dissolution for both spouses. These negative effects of separation and divorce for adults include: decreased work productivity, poverty, impaired parent-child relationships, increased risk/incidence of psychopathology, increased rates of automobile accidents with higher mortality rates, suicide, violence, homicide, decreased longevity, significant immunosuppression, increased incidence of physical illness, and increased mortality from diseases (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009).

Notarius and Markman (1993) noted that many distressed couples never divorced; they remained in unsatisfying relationships, conflictual relationships, or both. Not only is this distressing to the couples but unfortunately, marital distress, daily disruption, and conflict also have a negative impact on infants, children and adolescents. For infants, Gottman and Levenson (2000) found that marital conflict transfered to the infant and made it more difficult for the infant to self-soothe and to re-establish physiological calm after being distressed or over-stimulated. For children and adolescents, negative psychological and physical effects were present including symptoms of depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic performance, a variety of conduct-related difficulties/juvenile delinquency, and marked
decreased longevity (Gottman, 1999; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Hicks, McWey, Bendon, & West, 2004).

Staying in a toxic marriage or relationship, it appears, has as many negative consequences for all involved as with marital dissolution. The observation that Notarius and Markman (1993) noted has been cited recently due to the obvious connection with the current economic crisis. It seems that now many couples, who would otherwise be seeking dissolution, may be staying together due to their financial state (Newell, 2009). These couples often grow increasingly distressed with limited financial means to seek the tools to improve the relationship. Financial stress can include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that affect the relationship. Therefore, economic hardship causes individual and personal suffering that may bleed over into the relationship. It is conceivable that marital satisfaction decreases in conjunction with economic hardship, e.g., job loss, unemployment or underemployment, unexpected hospital bills, or slow economy. In fact, half of all Americans families no longer feel a sense of self-sufficiency in regard to their finances (Dakin & Wampler, 2008). Adding to this, counseling for couples currently range from $45.00 to $200.00 per session with an average reported to be $95.00 per session, putting further strain on an already ailing budget (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009). Given these costs, it is highly probable that these distressed couples, who are experiencing personal economic strains, may focus their pooled financial resources on the basic necessities and forgo the expenses of attending therapy. It would be reasonable to assume that distressed couples would attend or participate in an event marketed toward providing skills and/or knowledge that offer some measure of relief, if the cost could be budgeted with limited time spent and geared toward home use. Cost of a workshop has shown to be a factor by playing an important role in who attends and who will not (Morris, Cooper, & Gross, 1999).

Gottman has made it clear that he is against psychoeducation alone, but views it very helpful and even necessary in conjunction with therapy. He notes that psychoeducation alone could be unethical and possibly dangerous given that 33% of couples who attend these workshops have premorbid psychopathologies above the clinical level cuttoff of the SCL 90 (Symptom Checklist- 90). There must be a clinic or referral network in place to make referrals during the psychoeducational workshop because some individuals may become suicidal, depressed, or violent (Jencius & Duba, 2003). A referral network was in place for the pilot and intervention workshops and referrals were made.
Current Trends in Addressing the Problem: Federal and State Healthy Marriage Initiatives

In 2006, the federal government passed the Healthy Marriage Initiative, a grant providing $100 million dollars a year for five years, to support programs to promote healthy marriages around the country. According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), healthy marriages are considered the foundation of a successful society and promote the interest of our children. Children were reported to do better when they were raised in a two-parent home. Funding was granted to 126 organizations to provide programs for couples, especially low-income and minority populations with single-parent homes and couples who may be at risk for divorce. The objective of these programs was to teach relationship skills and knowledge to couples with the goal of forming and sustaining healthy marriages (Olson et al., 2008).

Due to over half of the marriages in the United States ending up in divorce, many legislators are requesting more requirements on couples planning to marry. Florida was the first state to pass the Marriage Preparation and Reservation Act as of January 1999. This bill was a comprehensive package of legislation designed to strengthen marriages and reduce divorce. The bill had four key components: 1) high school students were required to take a marriage and relationship skill-based education course; 2) couples were encouraged to take at least a four hour premarital preparation course resulting in a reduction of their marriage license fees; 3) each couple would be given a handbook prepared by the Florida Bar Association informing them of their legal rights and responsibilities to each other and children if present both during the marriage and in the event of a divorce; and 4) couples with children who file for divorce must take a parent education and family stabilization course. Other states are following this approach to support premarital education and parenting programs including Arizona, Louisiana, Minnesota, Maryland, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah (Olson et al., 2008).

Benefits of Healthy Marriages/Unions

Waite and Gallagher (2000) reviewed over 200 studies that examined the major positive benefits of marriage on individuals in their book The Case for Marriage. These studies found five major benefits of marriage with White middle-class couples as compared to single, divorced, or widowed persons. These benefits included improving and/or increasing one’s lifestyle, longevity, sexual experiences, wealth and economic assets, and children’s health. Married couples were found to have led a healthier lifestyle. Individuals who were married tended to
avoid more harmful behaviors such as lower levels of problem drinking, smoking, and drug abuse, thus, decreasing their risks of accidents, interpersonal conflicts, and levels of depression in females. Married couples reported to also maintain a healthier lifestyle in terms of eating, sleeping, and exercise habits. Married couples also tended to live longer. At every age level, married couples live longer possibly due to emotional support and more economic resources. Married couples reportedly tended to monitor each other’s health more closely than co-habitating couples. Non-married females had a 50% higher mortality rate than married females and non-married males had a 250% higher mortality rate than married males. The authors concluded that, “Not being married can be hazardous to your health” (p.47).

Married couples were also found to be happier than single, widowed, or cohabitating couples. Around 40% of married couples reported being very happy with their lives compared to 15% of separated people, 18% of divorced people, and 22% of cohabitating and widowed people reported feeling very happy with their life. Married couples also reported having sex more frequently and reported that their sexual relationships were more emotionally and physically satisfying than singles. Married couples reported having sex six to seven times per month, as compared to an average of seven times for cohabitating couples, and three to four times for singles. In terms of sexual satisfaction, 54% of married males and 43% of married females reported a sexually satisfying relationship. For cohabitating couples, 44% of the males and 35% of the females reported feeling sexually satisfied (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Four factors were identified as contributing to the improvements in married couples’ sex lives. These were the proximity, a long term contract, exclusivity, and emotional bonding. In regards to the proximity, the married partner was available and felt comfortable more often. Married couples were willing to invest time, money, and energy in the relationship. Because more married couples were sexually exclusive, couples were willing to develop mutually agreeable relationships and reported feeling more connected to each other than cohabitating couples (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Married couples, especially females, were less likely to experience domestic abuse than cohabitating and separated females. The abuse rate for females was about three times higher than that for divorced females and 25 times higher than that for married females. Arguments between couples that led to physical abuse were 4% for married couples and 13% for cohabitating couples. Children also were reported to fare better in homes where the parents were married. In
homes where the parents were happily married, children were more academically successful, emotionally stable, and assumed more leadership roles due to the stability and guidance of having two committed parents present. Children from two-parent homes were half as likely to drop out of school, had higher grades in school, and were less likely to become pregnant at an early age. Children also received more parental attention from two-parent homes lending to more parental supervision, help with school work, and quality time spent with both parents. Children from a single-parent home were reported to have a higher probability of growing up in poverty and experiencing a lower quality of life. In addition to this, single mothers were five times more likely to be living at the poverty level than two-parent families (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Hethrington & Kelly, 2002; Ooms, 2002).

Married couples also reported more financial wealth. Financial wealth was calculated by totaling the assets (home, car, investments, and savings) and deducting the debts (mortgages, household expenses, loans, and credit card debt). Married couples were able to combine their income and were more responsible in their spending because of having two persons involved in the decisions-making process. Married men also reported being more successful in their career in terms of financial earnings. The median household wealth for a married couple was $132,000 compared to $35,000 for singles, $42,275 for widowed individuals, $33,670 for divorced individuals, and $7,600 for separated individuals (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Although these figures have changed in light of the recent economic downturn, the idea of combined wealth still holds true, which is probably why there appears to be a fall in divorce/annulment fillings. Since the reasoning for staying together seems to be linked to the recent economic crisis (Newell, 2009), it could be assumed that some couples are experiencing distressing interactions yet weather them for financial reasons. Given the price range of couple’s therapy currently (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009), it would seem that the additional costs may be a financial burden, further adding to a decline in the quality of the relationship. Couples may be more likely to attend a cost effective workshop that provides the tools appropriate to their needs. It is the intentions of this research project to offer a comfortable, well lit atmosphere to explore the participants’ perspectives on their experiences upon attending a workshop which offers quality information obtained over many years of research without adding to the ailing budgetary concerns of the couples who attend.
The Use of Grounded Theory to Explore Workshop Participants’ Perspectives

Undertaking this exploration of the workshop participants’ perspectives was accomplished through the use of a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It was speculated that the participants’ perspectives could be gathered and through the process of constant comparison of the data, a new theory would emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that a better understanding of phenomena about which little is known could be gained through grounded theory. This qualitative methodology is also appropriate for investigations of an unfamiliar area or to gain a fresh perspective on a familiar one (Stern, 1995). The decision to utilize grounded theory was made after formulating the research purpose. Specifically, what new theory or theories might emerge upon exploring the participants’ perspectives concerning their workshop experiences? One possibility stemmed from offering Gottman’s research findings in a psychoeducational workshop format. Gottman has formulated his findings into a model used in long term psychotherapy. He has stated that psychoeducation alone is insufficient as a treatment modality, although he has cited the Gottman-based Bringing Baby Home (Shapiro & Gottman, 2005) as a viable tool for the transition to parenthood. One possible new theory sought, therefore, was to explore Gottman’s research findings in a psychoeducational workshop format to uncover what specific concepts the participants might find useful from a brief exposure to the information. Since the questions being posed to the participants were open-ended, it was thought that they would cite Gottman concepts, but also indicate through narratives what they were putting to use or not.

A second possibility stemmed from the existing, albeit scarce, literature concerning involving client collaboration and participation in the change process. The literature has cited clients’ active involvement and collaboration as being consistently associated with successful outcome across a wide range of therapeutic modalities (e.g. Garfield, 1994; Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994; Tryon & Winograd, 2002). However, there appears to be no specific references offered to the utility of client participation or their perspectives regarding their experiences in conjunction with psychoeducation given in a workshop format. Therefore, a new theory was sought by employing grounded theory to explore this idea.

I. Research Purpose

Psychoeducational workshop groups are generally highly structured. There is a preplanned lecture format with therapist guidance and direct instruction. Often this may be
followed by some form of audience participation (Brabender & Fallon, 2007). The purpose of the present study was to provide a faithful presentation of an eight-hour, couples’ psychoeducational workshop based on Gottman’s research in order to ascertain what the participants found useful for their relatedness. This purpose was extended. The researcher explored the results of encouraging active participation from workshop participants’ throughout the workshop. They were asked to consider the concepts presented and to develop personal strategies for applying them in their own relationships. These personal discussion periods were between each block of information (seven in total). The attendees were encouraged to participate by discussing the material and then implementing their strategies in writing.

II. Research Questions
This study addressed the following two research questions:
1. Unprompted, and a month back in their daily lives, what would the participants’ responses reflect as being valuable about that experience and what would the rank order of those traits be?
2. What new theory would emerge as a result of analysis using a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967)?

III. Theoretical Assumptions
This study was guided by two theoretical assumptions:
1. Any couple intervention, by its nature, can be expected to influence couple behavior after the occurrence of that event.
2. Interventions patterned after Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory can be expected to influence couple behavior after the occurrence of that event.

IV. Research Assumptions
This study was guided by six research assumptions:
1. Individuals who were interviewed and who completed written measures after an event will carefully and honestly describe their experiences as they remember them.
2. Interviewing four weeks after an event will uncover meaningful recollections of that which was found helpful in that event.
3. Participants involved with the research study will be willing to participate in the study and discuss their relationships openly and honestly.
4. The participants involved in the research project will complete the questionnaires honestly and to the best of their ability.

5. All of the participants in the research study will be present for an eight hour workshop in its entirety, and actively participate in group activities with discussions.

6. Participants will return in four weeks to answer the post-intervention questions.

V. Limitations

The study had three limitations:

1. The opportunity sample consisted of adults over the age of 18 who were either married or unmarried with or without children in a relationship. Coan and Gottman (2007) cited that there were known, reliable differences between married and cohabitating couples. Conversely, Holman and Jarvis (2003) stated that their findings were remarkably similar for both married and unmarried couples.

2. Because an opportunity sample was used, there was the possibility of having participants familiar with either the material being presented or the researcher.

3. Although all attempts were made to not influence the participants’ interpretations of the information being presented, by reason of participating the researcher affects the process (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

Summary

In summary, the benefits of a healthy marriage/relationship outweigh the negative effects of remaining single, divorcing, or remaining in a toxic relationship. It is time to further explore other options given the current divorce rates, effects of divorce, and marital conflict in an economic environment which, for many, is not conducive to long, expensive therapy. Gottman’s research findings without the extraneous therapeutic interventions may prove very valuable by offering a psychoeducational workshop designed to allow participants a chance to decide for themselves what is useful and what is not, thereby empowering the participants and providing a unique perspective from each (see review Lee & Everett, 2004). This perspective becomes more salient given that some studies such as Garb (1989) which argued that being professionally trained does not necessarily signify superiority of clinical judgment in couple’s therapy. Peterson (1995) reiterated this assertion stating that there is a significant empirical basis indicating professional training in psychology is unrelated to validity of clinical judgment.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW
Introduction to Gottman and the Genesis of His Model

John Gottman, a mathematician, psychologist, and researcher, has studied relationships in the context of marriage and the family for the past 40 years. Gottman utilized his training in clinical psychology and observational methods for evaluating the design and implementation of programs with unique optimism. Practitioners and researchers in psychology and marriage, from the beginning, were asking the question: “What makes some marriages happy, but others miserable?” (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002, p.13). Finding the answer to this has taken many turns over the past few decades. For example, in the initial stages of his research Gottman (1982) wrote for a need of a new language which moves away from that which addressed individuals in relationships and toward a language for relationships as a “temporal form”, or as organisms themselves, which require attention (Gottman, 1982, p.373). Gottman viewed relationships analogous to jazz musicians improvising together. In looking at current positions concerning relationships, Gottman found that couples were no longer being seen individually, but together in session. Couples’ interactional patterns were being studied in therapy, which prompted a need for a language to describe what variables were at play in the relationship. The difficulties start with what to measure and how to further measure this idea (Gottman, 1982).

Another important point was that Gottman posited that couples needed to be studied in a natural context and setting. Couples tended to act differently in the confines of a clinical setting than in natural settings. He aspired to work on developing a laboratory which could simulate these requirements. He then set out to develop a language that described interactional patterns and variables being displayed by couples in this environment. Tools were developed for sequential analysis of observational data such as talk-silence. How positivity and negativity should be defined and measured, for example was resolved by looking at affect. The rewards and costs inherent to the interactions were found to be perceptual. Relationships were considered to be the forms that people construct when they were together. These forms determined their satisfaction with their relationship (Gottman, 1982).

The importance of allowing research participants the opportunity to interpret and provide their own perceptions of their interactions was seen early in Gottman’s work as well as others.
Sullaway and Christensen (1983) were unique in that this was the first study that explored how couples responded to descriptions of interactional patterns. There was some indication that the couples agreed on particular patterns and roles assigned. The roles of one being social and the other being a loner was observed more in less satisfied couples. One spouse bidding for attention, while the other spouse was more distracted by work/school, was seen in less satisfied couples as well. One partner was described as being more rational, while the other more emotional partner was seen more in less satisfied couples. Less satisfied couples exhibited a demand-withdrawal pattern consisting of one spouse bidding for contact while the other spouse voiced feeling crowded. A significant relationship was found between couples’ satisfaction in their relationship and specific asymmetrical pattern occurrences.

Now having new ideas of direct observation, couples’ input, and the benefits of providing a natural setting, Gottman joined the University of Washington’s Department of Psychology in 1986. Along with Robert Levenson, and with assistance from the National Institute of Mental Health, Gottman started the Family Relationship Lab also known as the Love Lab. This was an apartment laboratory at the University of Washington where couples could live for 24-hour periods as part of a longitudinal study that lasted up to 15 years for some. Observations were focused on looking for similarities and characteristics that might help better predict marital success or failure. The research team tested for a variety of behaviors and emotions such as; communication, problem resolution, physiological responses, levels of empathy, level of violence, positive and negative affect, levels of anger which appeared detrimental to the couple, and balance of power in the relationship. Gottman and Levenson coded the couples’ actions and feelings as they spent time with each other in various situations while in the laboratory. Questionnaires, video recall procedures, attributional methods, and interviews were utilized. Gottman later broadened his focus to all types of relationships including gay male and lesbian female couples, couples transitioning to parenthood, domestic violence, parenting and child development (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002). Through his research, Gottman has provided behavioral observations as to characteristics of what makes marriages succeed and what makes them fail. His research has focused on human experience by studying one’s behavior, perception, and physiology within the context of the relationship. Most importantly to clinicians and couples alike, he identified the antidotes for behaviors, perceptions, and physiology that were identified as harmful to the marriage. Gottman’s Sound Marital House
Theory was formulated from data collected while at the University of Washington Family Research Laboratory. He grew to believe that the principles in which he developed were applicable to all relationships, so therefore, the approach was renamed the Sound Relationship House Theory (Gottman et al, 2002). Both theories will be discussed within this literature review as original works dictate and will be treated as one theory.

Gottman has made it clear that he believes marital therapy needs to take a more objective standpoint. Marital therapies exhibit weakness in the lack of solid empirical research when searching for reasons for marital distress. Starting 40 years ago, Gottman began working with couples using principles of the day. As his methods of study evolved, he found some techniques to be significantly more efficacious in staving off divorce than others. In fact, some traditional techniques were indicating little or no efficacy in these more natural settings and specific observational methodologies that he was developing. This paper will present the natural progression of how his laboratory observation set-up and methods of measuring evolved. His tenets were extracted from each research study where they indicated significance and some techniques were abandoned where little or no efficacy was indicated. His findings claim that the current methods being taught to couples are basically ineffective and ill conceived (Gottman, 1999). Each major tenet such as the Core Triad of Balance was adopted as part of his theory. These ideas culminated to form his seminal 1999 text, *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy*, which will be included in this section as well. Gottman believes the fundamental goal of couples therapy is to identify the dysfunction in a couple’s relationship and aid them in finding a remedy.

**Use of Participants’ Perspectives**

The researcher went beyond the traditional psychoeducational approach. He wanted the participants to think carefully about each construct and to make it “theirs” by translating it into the facts of their own lives. They were to take ownership of that which was taught by developing personal strategies for implementing the constructs into their relationship events. The importance of client expectations and preferences can be traced to 1961 when Jerome Frank published his views on the role of client expectations for change (Frank, 1961). Later, James Morrison (1979) argued that despite apparent successes seen in psychological testing, therapists cannot ignore the importance of client feedback, recommending engaging in ongoing evaluation and soliciting periodic feedback from the client (Morrison, 1979).
The measurement and management of change, from the clients’ perspective, has again recently become a focus for research and practice of couples’ therapy. Although literature has seen an expanding body of research on feedback, very little in this area has been produced to date (see review, Sparks & Duncan, 2010). There appears to be no literature to date regarding the effectiveness or utility of gathering participants’ feedback in a workshop format. The present study utilized a qualitative design to explore participants’ experiences regarding their attendance to such a workshop, thereby viewing them as the expert (see review, Lee & Everett, 2004).

Active participation of clients has been found to reinforce clients’ perceptions of therapeutic alliance in a randomized controlled study of brief metacommunication (Fluckiger, De Re, & Wampold, 2012). The adjunctive instruction of encouraging client feedback may have changed the clients’ expectations by valuing their perspectives, thereby altering the therapeutic focus. Such an intervention was viewed as being not as time-consuming or expensive in comparison to other types of therapies and requiring relatively little training for therapists (Fluckiger, De Re, & Wampold, 2012).

Connecting feedback with task and goal agreement has been explored as well based on meta-analytical review in organizational psychology called feedback intervention theory or FIT (DeNisi & Klugar, 2000; Klugar & DeNisi, 1996). FIT posits that employer input is not as important for the success of feedback as triggering employee’s central goals, expectations, and proactive actions. Some feedback, focused on the therapeutic processes, has been investigated by facilitating clients’ perspectives at the end of each session within a formalized framework (Lambert & Shimokawa, 2011). However, these systems do not explicitly convey to the clients that their feedback or perspectives are valued (Fluckiger, et. al., 2012).

In summary, client’s active involvement and collaboration have been consistently associated with successful outcome across a wide range of therapeutic modalities (e.g. Garfield, 1994; Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994; Tryon & Winograd, 2002). It was postulated in the present study that by encouraging their perspective, the participants would become more involved in the process, which was expected to be reflected in their post-intervention responses.

This literature review will focus on marital and couples therapy. The literature review excluded studies focusing on children, adolescents, families, abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. The initial key words of the search included: Gottman’s Sound Marital House Theory, the Sound Relationship House Theory, Gottman’s model, and Gottman’s theory with couples
counseling/ workshops. Specific dates for the literature topics were broad, focusing on the years from 1989 to present. The literature review will be presented in chronological order. Secondary resources were also extracted using the aforementioned keywords as well as couples’ perspective, and couples’ feedback, spanning the past ten years. The search engines utilized included: Cambridge Abstracts, ERIC, First Search, Gale Net, Infotrac, Lexus-Nexus, PsychLit, Science Direct, and Wilson Web. These databases accounted for research and literature addressing counseling, education, marriage and family therapy, nursing, psychology, sociology, and social work. The following section will focus primarily on Gottman’s research from 1989 to present along with secondary sources as they apply to the present study.

**Gottman’s Research with Couples from 1989 to Present**

Gottman and Katz (1989) discussed the role of the body’s response to stressful events through the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system, the immune system, and the interconnections of these three systems. These researchers proposed that specific emotional states were connected to two adrenal endocrine systems, the sympathetic-adrenomedullary system and the pituitary-adrenocortical system. The **sympathetic adrenomedullary system** is activated during active coping and the affective responses of anger and hostility. This biological system is responsible for the acceleration of the metabolic rate and the expenditure of energy in the body through the secretion of catecholamines, including norepinephrine, epinephrine, and dopamine. The **pituitary-adrenocortical system** was proposed to be activated during chronic stressors that engage a passive coping response, such as depression, helplessness, or withdrawal. This biological system is responsible for regulation of the glucose metabolism and the maintenance of metabolic processes through the secretion of the glucocorticoid cortisol. Chronic activation of the systems may lead to tissue damage such as the plaque formation in the arteries related to atherosclerosis. Chronic marital tension may also lead to the activation of one or both of the endocrine stress systems, as well as to feelings of chronic sadness, helplessness, or anger in both of the parents and the children. If males tend to have more difficulty regulating their physiological arousal, they are also at greater risk of continued medical and mental health problems. Focusing on ways to assist males in dealing with physiological arousal in a healthy manner may improve the males’ emotional and physical health, as well as improve their relationships with family, friends, and later offspring.
Gottman (1991) explored physiological data further while at the University of Washington Family Research Laboratory. He collected data on couples’ interactions through the use of videotapes and physiological data. During these studies, Gottman requested that a couple discuss a major area of disagreement in their marriage and then try to come to a resolution. While the couples discussed the conflict, physiological data were collected including the couples’ heart rates, blood velocity and amplitude, skin conductance, and gross motor movement.

The results of the first study indicated that the physiological arousal, especially that of the husband, predicted the longitudinal deterioration of marital satisfaction. For couples who had a faster heart rate and blood flow, increase in perspiration, and increase in body movement during marital interactions or anticipated marital conflict, the marriages deteriorated in satisfaction over the next three years. This correlation was .92 indicating a 95% accuracy level of marital satisfaction based on physiological data. For couples who were physiologically calmer, marriages tended to improve over time (Gottman, 1991).

He then explored the separate expressions and behaviors associated with separation and divorce utilizing a coding system to measure the rate of particular facial expressions of emotions, including happiness, surprise, anger, and sad-miserable smiles. Miserable smiles were defined as a partner raising the lip corners without the eye involvement (trying to display a happy face). Gottman found that couples who were more likely to separate exhibited more of the following facial expressions: wife’s disgust, husband’s fear, husband’s miserable smile, and wife’s miserable smile. To counter balance the detrimental effects of the negative affects, the ratio of positive to negative affects needed to exceed 10:1 so that the relationship could remain healthy (Gottman, 1991).

In exploring the couples’ relationship Gottman found that husbands and wives tended to be more defensive (made excuses and denied responsibility), wives complained and criticized more, husbands disagreed more, and both husbands and wives “yes-butted” more. Gottman also found that husbands’ tendency to stonewall and the wives’ tendency to display more verbal expressions of contempt predicted divorce. Gottman further focused on gender differences in the marriage which may have accounted for emotional and physical health. He found that husbands’ tendency to stonewall predicted feelings of loneliness. Stonewalling was also associated with the male’s deterioration of physical health over a four-year time period. Additionally, men who did housework were less overwhelmed by their wife’s emotions, were less avoidant of marital
conflict, and had lower heart rates during marital conflict than men who did not share in
household chores. Gottman proposed a gender difference in the physiological response to
conflict in that men take longer than women to recover from physiological arousal. Without the
ability to predict, it is difficult at best to understand the constructs that help or harm a marriage.
Performing longitudinal studies that look at the course of marriage should offer data essential in
designing a science, which would provide couples with the specific tools necessary to make their
relationships work. Gottman and Levenson have been working on the problem of building an
empirically-based theory of how marriages change since 1984. The constructs of specific
interactional patterns have been a focus of theirs since this time as a means to uncovering what
makes a marriage work or fall apart (Gottman, 1991).

With the observation that marital therapy was not based on a process model derived from
longitudinal studies which identified interactional patterns of couples, Gottman et al., (1998)
conducted a study with 130 newlywed couples to explore the processes that were predictive of
divorce and marital stability. They felt that building such a model in such a manner would be
superior to any theoretical model using psychotherapy interventions currently in place. Between
1989 and 1992, Gottman et al. (1998) used a two stage sampling procedure to draw a sample of
newlywed couples from the Puget Sound area of Washington. Recruited by newspaper and
contacted by phone, they were administered a telephone version of the Marital Adjustment Test
or MAT (Krokoff, 1987; Locke & Wallace, 1959). From a sample of 179 responders, which were
mailed questionnaires concerning their demographics and indices about their marriages such as
health and well-being, 130 couples were found to be representative and evenly distributed for the
study. Average age of the wives were about 25.4 \( (sd=3.5) \) and husbands’ ages at 26.6 \( (sd=4.2) \).
The wives’ marital satisfaction =120.4 \( (sd=19.7) \) and the husbands’ =115.9 \( (sd=18.4) \). The 130
couples’ marital satisfaction was assessed once each year. After six years, 17 of the couples had
divorced, with six from the first cohort group, six in the second, and five from the third cohort
group. Average time spent being married was about three years.

Gottman et al., (1998) examined physiological responses using a polygraph and computer
the first year of data collection. They also asked the couples to view their taped interactions and
make comments about their emotions. The couples chose a conversation in which they rated
themselves, then their spouses’ affects. The researchers were after a couple of predictions: one
prediction being marital stability from both a happy and unhappy group and the other prediction
was marital happiness. Neither the husbands’ nor the wives’ anger was shown to predict divorce or discriminate between a happy or unhappy stable marriage. The model of the Four Horsemen indicated the wives’ and the husbands’ high intensity negative affect did predict divorce. However, this did not discriminate between happy and unhappy stable marriages. The wives’ low intensity negative affect such as whining, anger, sadness, domineering, disgust, fear, and stonewalling did predict divorce, but not happy or unhappy stable marriages. As expected, the evidence showed that divorce was predicted by the husbands only in refusing their spouses’ influence. The wives’ negative start-ups were predictive of divorce. The husbands’ de-escalation of low intensity negative affect was found to be predictive of marital stability. In conclusion, anger was not found to be a predictor of divorce or marital stability. Contempt, belligerence, and defensiveness were seen as the destructive patterns during conflict resolution. Surprisingly to the researchers, the active listening model appeared to occur infrequently in the resolution of marital conflict and not predictive of marital outcome. Self-soothing by husband or de-escalation of husband by the wife was predictive of a positive outcome. The amount of positive affect during conflict, overall, was predictive of marital stability and marital happiness. So with methodology as a focus and a primary concern for global coding systems that target interactional patterns, it was now possible to code facial expressions and affect such as anger, sadness, and fear. This has led to reliable coding of conflictual and non-conflictual interactions with greater precision of studying positive affect. An expansion of this work by undertaking global coding was represented by Gottman and Levenson Laboratories in which they detailed microanalytic coding with multiple coding systems (Gottman, 1999).

Given their findings from the elaborate coding systems, Gottman, as well as other colleagues, who incorporated the speaker-listener technique in their earlier work now were denouncing its’ efficacy. In fact, they asserted that this technique may actually be contributing to lower efficacy in programs that utilize it in general (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman, 1999). Speaker-listener types of communication were now being considered to be promoting a form of emotional gymnastics that cripples couples emotionally by forcing their response (empathy) to be incongruent with their true physiological and emotional states during the conversation (Gottman et al., 1998). Interestingly enough, Gottman et al. (1998) noted that when couples were complaining about a third party, their marital satisfaction may actually improve to a degree. Similar results to this study were found by Cornelius and Alessi (2007).
In 1999, Gottman organized his work to date in a text called *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy*. He recorded what he had gleaned over the years in his research from his observations of the couples in his marriage clinic. He noted what he found that worked, as well as those interactions that were toxic. His purpose was to establish a reference guide which could be utilized by clinicians who worked with couples. The key components of his research findings included: The Sound Relationship House Theory; myths about what predicts divorce and toxic interactions within relationships; predictors of divorce/couples’ dissolution; dispensing the myths and mistakes in marital therapy; and the core triad of balance.

In his many years of research, Gottman continually developed his means of observing his couples. Research findings and the technologies to advance Gottman’s observational methods have advanced the field of marital research and, subsequently, couple’s therapy over the past two decades. Gottman and Notarius (2000) presented an article which stressed the importance of observational research in marital research both for the purpose of description and building theories of the mechanisms underlying central phenomena occurring within families. The breakthroughs of the 1990’s came with the advent of inexpensive computer assisted coding and live real-time coding. This now means that an observer can code complex interactions between husband and wife in real-time and later compute offsets, onsets, and duration of speaker/listener events, compute inter-observer reliability, and also perform sequential and time-series analysis that require knowledge of precisely when an event occurred. It has become possible to time-synchronize real-time acquisition of physiological and observational data from an interacting couple, as well as noting couples’ perception of these events with playback. This means, with time-synchronized data, it is now possible to study dynamic interplay between behavior, cognition, and physiology. Because of this, couples’ natural experiences and observer understanding may see a decreasing gap.

During this same time, Gottman and Levenson (2000) investigated the predictability of divorce, both earlier and later in marriage, in a long-term, prospective longitudinal study. The study explored whether the predictors of marriages that dissolve during the first critical period of seven years could be the same as the predictors of the second critical period of midlife. The researchers followed a cohort group for 14 years beginning in 1983. It was found that 27% of the couples had divorced by 1996 and since 1997, the average length of marriage was 16.4 years.

Participants were recruited in Bloomington, Indiana, by means of utilizing newspaper
advertisements and a $5.00 incentive. About 200 couples replied to take a demographic questionnaire and two measures of marital satisfaction. A smaller group of eighty-five couples was pulled from this sample to participate in laboratory assessments along with a number of additional assessments. Complete sets of usable physiological data were obtained from 79 couples. Husbands, at time 1, averaged 30.8 years old (sd= 9.5 years) and wives were 28.9 years old (sd= 6.8 years). During this time, the average marriage was for five years (sd= 6.3 years). Marital satisfaction using the Locke-Wallace and the Locke-Williamson scale showed the husbands’ satisfaction to be 96.80 (sd= 22.16) and wives’ satisfaction to be 98.56 (sd= 20.70) (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

Procedures of the study were in a consistent order beginning with the couple having an 8 hour separation followed by short events of the day discussing then three 15 minute conversations regarding: 1) events of the day, 2) a conflict resolution discussion, where the couples were asked to talk about an area of continuing disagreement with an attempt to resolve it, and 3) a mutually agreed upon pleasurable topic. The third topic was a means to assist couples in recovery from negative affect before a debriefing period. The couples were contacted after a four year period from the initial assessments to which 73 of the original 79 couples (92.4%) agreed to participate. They completed questionnaires to assess marital satisfaction from the initial assessments. The last contact was after 14 years from the first contact. It was found that of the original 79 couples, 22 (27.8%) had divorced after 14 years. Nine couples divorced after 7.4 years (sd= 1.7 years), which formed the studies early-divorcing group and 13 couples divorced an average of 13.9 years (sd= 5.1 years) to form the later divorcing group (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

Coding and Analysis of the data consisted of coding video tapes of a marital conflict discussion with the RCISS (Gottman, 1996), which employed a checklist of thirteen behaviors that were scored for the speaker and nine that were scored from the listener upon each turn speaking. This particular study used only the codes of the speaker which consisted of five positive codes and eight negative codes including: complaining, criticism, and defensiveness. Summary codes of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling were calculated. The same videotapes of the interactions were coded using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; Gottman, 1996). The events of the day and conflict discussion were coded (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).
After operationalizing the wife-demand-husband-withdrawal pattern, wives were found to show more criticism, \( t(78) = -3.49, p < .001 \) where the husband’s \( M = .19 \) and the wife’s \( M = .29 \). The husband stonewalled more, \( t(78) = 5.10, p < .001 \); the husband’s \( M = 1.07 \) and the wife’s \( M = .84 \). This generated a need for the variable demand-withdrawal to be created. The results were analyzed in two steps including: 1) constructing a model of divorce prediction and 2) analyzing the particular predictive capability of positive versus negative interaction in the two conversations. Early divorcing couples showed a canonical correlation of .31, with \( x^2 \) squared (6) = 6.84, \( ns \). Just the univariate \( F \) ratio for the wife’s satisfaction at time 1 was significant, \( F(1,70) = 4.51, p < .05 \). This meant that stable and divorcing couples did not differ in positive affect, but did differ in marital satisfaction from time 1 (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

The negative-affect model included marital satisfaction of the couple, as well as total wife and husband RCISS scores on criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling for the conflict conversation. Canonical correlation was .52, with \( x^2 \) squared (12) = 22.36, \( p < .05 \), with correlation classification 83.5%. This meant that the negative affect variables and marital satisfaction at time 1 predicted divorce and who would stay married with a high degree of accuracy. Early divorce is accurately predicted by the time 1 negative affect model, but not by the time 1 positive affect model. For later divorcing couples the model that included marital satisfaction at time 1 and positive affect was able to predict with high accuracy who would divorce and who would stay married. In summary, the amount of positive affect during conflict, as well as marital satisfaction at both time points, along with thoughts of dissolution contribute to the high predictability of later divorcing (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

In step two, while constructing a prediction model from interaction codes found in the early divorcing couples, the predictive codes were found to be the husband’s contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. The wife’s criticism, contempt, and defensiveness contributed to high accuracy of divorce prediction. Frequency of positive affect was also predictive for later divorcing couples. Female negative start-up patterns had an etiology that was predicted by husband negative affect during non-conflict interactions. The wife-demand-husband-withdraw variable predicted both earlier divorcing (\( r = .32, p < .01 \)) and later divorcing (\( r = .27, p < .05 \)) (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

In this study it was discovered that the absence of positive affect and not the presence of negative affect was more predictive of divorce for later divorcing couples. The presence of
negative affective conversations containing contempt, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling predicted divorce for earlier divorcing couples. This means that intense marital conflict makes it difficult to stay very long in a marriage while the absence of such makes it more tolerable for a longer period of time. Unfortunately, the absence of positive affect takes a toll in the long run as well. Specifically, wife-demand-husband-withdrawal patterns, along with the amount of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, may be the culprits to divorce for all couples (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

Hawkins, Carrere, and Gottman (2002) investigated the effects of couples’ sentiments, such as marital bonds, on perceptions of their partners’ specific affects. They postulated that sentiment, whether positive or negative, would have a global effect on how the partner viewed messages regardless of the quality of the message. In other words, having a positive sentiment override would tend to color the message being given as a positive message. Negative sentiment override would tend to filter the message as a negative message regardless of the intention.

This study explored sentiment override in three ways. First, because some negative affects are now seen as more corrosive than others, the objective ratings needed to be more specific. The difference being that Gottman’s four horsemen (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling) have more of a negative impact upon marriages than sadness or anger. When viewed as various negative emotions and behaviors appear to have different levels of toxicity, it naturally would be prudent to study sentiment in terms of power upon couples’ perceptual filters within specific marital dialogues (Hawkins et al., 2002).

Secondly, a continuous rating system with video recall was employed. The rating dial was considered to have an unconstrained, natural flow that perfectly coincided with the couples’ interactions. Lastly, the Oral History Interview (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992) was utilized to measure global sentiment or marital bond. Marital bond appeared to measure perceptual biases that each spouse had about each other and his/her relationship (Hawkins et al., 2002).

In this article Hawkins et al. (2002) hypothesized that higher marital bond scores would predict a more positive rating of couples’ expressed affect for positive affects and low-intensity negative affects. It was also expected that the perception of higher-intensity negative affect would not be influenced by marital bond. Specifically, sentiment override would influence positive and low-intensity negative affects, but not high-intensity negative affects. To investigate this, a two-stage sampling procedure was used to draw a sample of newly-wed couples from the
Puget Sound area of Washington between 1989 and 1992. Recruited from newspaper advertisements, the wives only were then administered a screening phone interview that included the telephone version of the MAT (Krokoff, 1989; Locke & Wallace, 1959). The wives were studied because of financial and logistical reasons. The sample was chosen so that there was an even distribution of marital satisfaction along each point. Couples were chosen because they were married for the first time within the last six months, were childless, and had no serious illnesses. The sample matched the racial and ethnic demographics of the Metropolitan Seattle area. A total of 96 couples completed the marital interaction session and the Oral History Interview. The average wife’s age was 26 years (sd =3.6 years); the average husband’s age was 27.2 years (sd =3.9 years). Marital satisfaction for wives was 122.2 (sd =18.4); marital satisfaction for husbands was 116.3 (sd =19). The mean educational level for both wives and husbands was a four year degree and 64% had lived together before marriage (Hawkins et al., 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the Oral History Interview was used, which is a semi-structured interview conducted with both husband and wife present to explore the history of the marriage and philosophy of their marriage, as well as comparisons to their parents. It measures marital bonds that reflect the couple’s global perception about their marriage and about each other. To rate the couples’ affect, the Specific Affect (SPAFF) coding system (Gottman, 1996) was used during couples’ marital interactions. Immediately following the marital interactions, couples’ perception of their partners’ expressed affect during the marital interactions was measured using a rating dial. The marital interaction consisted of a discussion of ongoing disagreements in their marriage. After ascertaining this information, the interviewer asked each couple to sit quietly for two minutes to achieve a baseline. They were instructed to discuss the given disagreements for 15 minutes on tape. The couple then reviewed and scored the tapes afterwards (Hawkins et al., 2002).

The results suggest that sentiment override serves as a perceptual filter in how wives view their husband’s behaviors. This is the first empirical evidence of how positive sentiment override colors a wife’s perception in respect to their interactions with their mates. Those who scored low on the marital bond rated their husband’s expression of low-intensity negative affect (anger and domineering) as negative emotion, whereas wives who scored higher on the marital bond tended to score their husband’s anger as a neutral emotion. As positive affect was expressed by
husbands, the wife’s marital bond scores coincided with their predictions. Because the wives’ perceptions of husband’s high-intensity negative affects were not being influenced by their global sentiments, it is surmised that sentiment override appears to be effective only up to a certain level of toxicity with the wives. In contrast, husbands were not influenced by their global sentiments when examining the wives’ expression of positive affect, low-intensity negative affect, or high-intensity negative affect. It appears that wives were more susceptible to sentiment override than their male counterparts. The authors of this article admit that caution should be taken when interpreting the results of the study due to low sample size affecting the power of the tests used (Hawkins et al., 2002).

A randomized clinical trial for couples experiencing the transition to parenthood conducted by Shapiro and Gottman (2005) studied another Gottman-based, psychoeducational workshop approach called Bringing Baby Home. Participants were required to be married and over the age of 18 and either expecting a baby or had a baby born within three months of the first interview. There were 38 couples randomly assigned to the experimental and control group (wait-list to be enrolled after the completion of the study three years later). The experimental group consisted of 18 couples, and the control group consisted of 20 couples. Impact of the intervention was measured following a three-year period. Following a short demographic inventory administered at the beginning of the study, the outcome measures utilized included the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment, the SCL-90 to evaluate post-partum depression, and observational data such as the interactive marital behaviors. The Specific Affect Coding System was used to code the couple’s conflict interactions (Shapiro & Gottman, 2005).

The SCL-90 indicated that post-partum depression for both partners decreased in the workshop group, but increased in the control group. Hostility toward the partner was lower at one year for both spouses in the experimental group than for those in the control group. Overall marital quality stayed stable in the workshop group, but declined steadily in the control group as measured by the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. In summary, the data suggested that using a psycho-communicative-educational format was found to be effective over a three-year time period as compared to the control group (Shapiro & Gottman, 2005).

Secondary Sources

Gottman (1999) discussed the concept of couple-conflict types, where he found that couples in functional, high-quality, high stable marriages have very different ways of handling
conflict than do couples in dysfunctional, unstable marriages. The functional couples he studied were termed regulated and the dysfunctional couples were termed nonregulated. He observed nonregulated couples to make frequent, persistent use of dysfunctional interactions, whereas regulated did not. He postulated three types of regulated couples: validating, volatile, and conflict-avoiding.

Holman and Jarvis (2003) explored Gottman’s couple-conflict types with the use of survey data. Their first research question was to empirically identify four (hostile, volatile, avoiding, and validating) couple-conflict types using survey data. They also wanted to extend their understanding of couple-conflict types. Their second research question was to explore if the individual members of the couple-conflict types have significantly different levels of satisfaction in the relationship, stability, communication with conflict strategies, and affect regulation. Similar to the current study, the researchers utilized Gottman’s observational findings with survey data but differing by attempting to identify the four groupings of couple-conflict types using statistical procedures of four couple-conflict process scenarios. The self-selected, nonprobability sample was divided into a sample made up of married only and another sample consisting of unmarried couples only. An interesting choice of the researchers was that the married couple was comprised primarily of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (aka. Mormons). The data was gathered longitudinally over several years for both the married and unmarried couples.

In both of the samples of the hostile conflict type, the men and women classified as hostile displayed the poorest relationships in terms of their outcome measures (lowest satisfactions and stability). The unmarried types also had the lowest soothing and highest criticism, contempt/defensiveness, and flooding. The married males and females classified as hostile had the lowest positive communication and highest negative communication, compared to the others. Conversely, in validating couple-conflict types, men and women who saw their conflict style as overwhelmingly validating, had the highest stability and satisfaction, whether married or unmarried. The unmarried, validating types almost always had the highest soothing and lowest criticism, contempt/defensiveness, and flooding means. The married validating types had, in all cases, the highest positive communication means and the lowest negative communication means. In the volatile couple-conflict type, both married and unmarried couples who were classified as volatile had significantly higher relationship satisfaction and perceived
stability than those of the hostile type, but significantly lower than those classified as validating. The avoiding couple-conflict type cluster was indicated with the unmarried males and both of the married sexes, but not with the unmarried females. Although between the regulated types, this group was statistically closer to the validating group than the volatile group. In the regulated-undifferentiated couple-conflict type, one instance indicated a cluster of individuals, unmarried females, who were moderately lower in levels of regulated (volatile, validating, or avoiding) conflict behaviors and very low in nonregulated behaviors. The authors state that their findings were remarkably similar for both married and unmarried couples. In conclusion, they cited that their overall observations indicated a continuum with differences found within the three regulated groups, ranging from hostile to volatile to avoiding to validating in terms of moving from a low quality relationship to high quality.

A study by Hicks et al., (2004) sought to use self-reported strengths collected from pre-marital individuals as a means to explore ways in which to enhance pre-marital education programs. The assumption was very similar to the present study in that who better than the individuals themselves were more qualified to offer insight into at least their part of the relational interactions (Floyd & Markman, 1983) given some dynamic personal salience making this an untapped resource (Ebling & Levenson, 2003). To tap into this resource, Hicks et al. (2004) used a convenience sample pulled from applications for marriage license in the state of Florida who were given premarital surveys by county court officers. There were 962 individuals who responded to the question posed by the researchers; “What are the best things that you do in your relationship?” (Hicks et al, 2004, p. 100). The sample consisted of 50% male, 50% female, with the average age of the males being 36.4 years old and the females being 34.6 years old. The average time the couples had known each other was 2.5 years. Further breakdown of the sample was 53.6% had never been married before, 28.1% had one prior marriage, 9.4% had two prior marriages, 4.8% had three prior marriages, 2.3% had four prior marriages, and 1.9% had five or more prior marriages. Average education was some college and average income was $30,000 to $39,999 for males and $20,000 to $29,999 for the females. There is additional racial breakdown of the sample available in a table provided by the researchers (Hicks et al., 2004).

Hicks et al. (2004) utilized Grounded Theory for coding the responses given by the research participants. After responses were sorted into themes, a constant comparison method was employed until categorizing saturated the overarching themes. Data gathered using
Grounded Theory traditionally is employed to generate a new ideology or theory. Veering from traditional Grounded Theory at this point, the researchers applied the data to themes representing the seven floors of Gottman’s Sound Marital House. The responses then became numerical values corresponding to the themes of each floor. Specific themes found in the open and axial coding process included the importance of spending time together, sex, love, friendship, future planning, aspects of communication, respect, physical affection, intimacy, openness, understanding, church, and humor.

Coupling research from Gottman to factors identified by the research participants as strengths of their relationships, a marriage preparation and preservation (MPREP) team devised the goal of constructing a four hour curriculum of relationship skills. The content emphasized the affinity of couples to be able to identify specific aspects of their relationships that were conducive to success. Reinforcing these aspects and enhancing the couple’s abilities to identify and override negative interactions became paramount to the curriculum goals (Hicks et al., 2004).

Another recent qualitative study by Barnacle and Abbott (2009) also very similar to the present one with the exception of length of study and exact material being presented set out to develop, implement and evaluate a marriage preparation program based on Gottman’s work. Sessions were designed to address the seven levels of the Sound Marital House. The authors recruited dating or engaged couples. It also sought to evaluate the program using qualitative interviews. The study was unclear whether they utilized some or all of Gottman’s interventions while navigating the participants through each floor of the Sound Marital House. The first session covered levels one through four (developing friendship), the second and third sessions focused on level five (conflict regulation), and the fourth session covered levels six through seven (life dreams and shared meaning). The final session was used to summarize the couple’s strengths and weaknesses. It also included an exit interview. Couples received homework between sessions that emphasized the processes and principles of each level. Six predominately Caucasian couples were recruited on a college campus including one Hispanic couple. Only one 32 year old male, which was previously married, had children. The rest had no children and were never married before. Ages ranged from 20 to 37 with a mean of 23.5 years old. All couples were dating between seven months to three years with no data collected concerning their finances.
The psychoeducational sessions took place in a Midwest University Marriage and Family Therapy lab. Couples were compensated $5.00 for each session with a bonus of $25.00 if they completed the entire program. All six couples attended the entire program of five sessions at two hours per session for a total of ten hours. The six couples did not attend the program simultaneously; rather, they were assigned to two groups by convenience of scheduling. This was to keep the groups small. Three couples were assigned per group so that more one-on-one attention could be given. Training of the facilitators were not given; however, the assistants who provided one-on-one training were reported to have received Gottman training in their graduate programs (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009).

The couples each provided a critique at the end of the intervention based on questions given by the research team. The results suggested that this program could be realistically used for premarital education. Each participant was able to point out new skills that they had gained, as well as expanded their knowledge of one another. The exit interview indicated that the couples had begun to integrate Gottman concepts and skills into their interactions including soften start-ups, accepting influence and reducing both defensiveness and criticism. The researchers noted that the couples reported that this was too much information in such a short period of time (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009).

Monitoring client-based outcome, when combined with clinician feedback, has been cited to significantly increase the effectiveness of services, catapulting the measurement and management of change, from the client's perspective, to the forefront of research and practice (e.g. Sparks and Duncan, 1999; Duncan, Miller, Sparks, 2004). Unfortunately, very little couples and family research have been produced in this area to date. One recent couples study by Anker, Duncan, and Sparks (2009) conducted the largest randomized clinical trial ever conducted with couples only in a randomized clinical trial to date that compared feedback with a non-feedback condition with couples. They recruited 205 couples in a naturalistic setting to examine what effect, if any, progress feedback to clients would have in routine practice. Anker et.al (2009) utilized their own standardized instruments to gather outcome feedback from the clients, as well as alliance feedback. Some study characteristics were: use of consecutive cases seen in routine care regardless of diagnosis; random assignment of client to feedback and non-feedback conditions; provision of different models and techniques; variations in clinician experience and discipline;
use of the same therapists in feedback and non-feedback; and the length of care was determined by therapists and clients rather than by the research design.

The researcher cited feedback substantially increased positive outcomes (ES = 0.50), accounting for approximately 10% of the variability in change while simultaneously reducing the number of at-risk clients. Clients in the treatment as usual group responded to treatment 41.7% (both in couple, 22.6%) and in the feedback group 64.6% (both in couple, 50.5%) responded to treatment. Given the relative simplicity of the intervention and the fact that the comparison group was in an active treatment, the magnitude of the effect of feedback seems particularly noteworthy. The feedback couples reached non-distressed levels nearly four times more than non-feedback couples. In a six-month follow-up, the feedback condition maintained a stronger effect than treatment as usual and achieved nearly a 50% less separation or divorce rate (Anker et al., 2009).

Concerning the issue of therapist variability, the effect of feedback varied significantly across therapists. The researchers reported that the correlation between the variability in the effectiveness of a therapist with no feedback and variability in the effect of feedback was unusually high (r = -0.99). The number of therapists (10) significantly limits any conclusions that can be drawn according to the authors. It may be surmised that the less effective therapists or those who had the worst outcomes without feedback, benefited more from feedback than the most effective therapists. Interestingly, they found that a therapist among the lower effectiveness group without feedback became the therapist with the best results with feedback. Overall, they cited nine of ten therapists benefited from the effects of feedback. On the face of this research, feedback appears to improve outcomes across client populations and professional discipline, regardless of the model practiced. A notable aspect of this study is the fact that the researchers attempted to control for allegiance effects in addition to therapists serving as their own controls; therapists had no espoused allegiance to formal feedback and held attitudes about feedback that ranged from neutral to positive. It appears that a couple of insights may be gained from this study. First, the most efficacious couples’ therapy indicated is one that possesses continuous feedback to the clients about their progress. This lends some credence to Gottman’s assertion that psychoeducation alone does not stand up as well against conjoint psychoeducation and therapy sessions (Jencius & Duba, 2003), as well as Lambert and Ogles (2004) statement that any systematically applied treatment is four times more effective than no treatment. The second
insight, relating to the present study, is that having the clients provide the information may have a positive impact upon their relationship outcome as well. Reese, Toland, Slone, and Norsworthy (2010) found very similar results with the main difference being Anker et. al. (2009) used licensed professionals to conduct their couple’s therapy, whereas their study used graduate trainees with much less training. This illuminates the importance of including this technique in graduate training in couples’ therapy as well (Reese, et. al., 2010).

A six month follow-up to the Anker et. al. (2009) study hoped to expand the emerging picture of couples’ therapy through an analysis of couples’ reflections post-treatment (Anker, Sparks, Duncan, Owen, & Stapnes, 2011). This follow-up study examined 519 of 918 clients (56.54%) who responded to a questionnaire consisting of three open-ended questions about client experiences in couple therapy at two community counseling agencies in Norway. The study utilized the following four questions:

1. What aspects of couple therapy do couples identify as most salient?
2. How do aspects identified by couples as meaningful expand understanding of the alliance, the role of the therapist, and gender in couple treatment?
3. What different experiences, if any, emerge for couples whose therapists used systematic feedback compared with those who did not?
4. How did couples experience their use of feedback protocols during therapy?

The sample consisted of White, heterosexual, Euro-Scandinavian couples that were self-referred to two agencies for typical relationship problems, including communication difficulties, loss of feeling for partner, jealousy/infidelity, conflict, and coping with partner’s physical or psychological problem. Similar to the present study, before the first session, study participants were asked to identify their goals on a standard intake form. Three hundred seventy-nine (73.03%) participants marked the goal of achieving a better relationship, whereas 118 (22.74%) were seeking clarification as to whether their relationship should continue. Fourteen individuals (2.7%) wanted to terminate their relationship with ease and another eight (1.54%) marked “other” without elaboration. Three hundred sixteen (60.89%) individuals were in relationships where both marked the goal of achieving a better relationship, while 203 (39.11%) were in a relationship where both left this goal blank. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, 382 (73.6%) answered the two open-ended questions about their experiences in therapy. These 225 women and 157 men constituted the qualitative subsample.
Each individual from the couples received their own questionnaire. They responded in writing in their own home without a researcher present. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding outcome and satisfaction, which inquired about the current status of the couple (e.g., together, separated, or divorced), the problem presented in the prior therapy (e.g., better, worse), and the quality of the couples’ communication since the end of therapy (Anker et al., 2009). Clients who had utilized feedback instruments throughout treatment were asked to check the box that best matched how they had experienced the feedback process (e.g., helpful, not important). The survey concluded with three questions of the questionnaire that invited clients to express their views further in writing: 1) How did you experience the contact with the family counseling office and the therapist?; 2) Was there something missing?; and 3) Was there something you were satisfied with?

In the qualitative subsample, 742 statements from 382 individuals were analyzed concerning experiences with the family counseling office and the therapist were offered by the 225 woman and 157 men for the open-ended questions. Analysis of the feedback and non-feedback study conditions indicated no significant differences in satisfied and problematic responses with the exception of clients in the non-feedback group were significantly more likely to complain about the therapy service delivery than feedback clients. The findings raised the questions: 1) Were therapists who regularly received feedback more responsive to clients’ wishes regarding session scheduling?; 2) Did client feedback condition prompt therapists to take greater responsibility for this aspect of the work?

The study’s findings suggested that couples’ therapists may benefit by becoming more comfortable with and adept in providing structure, making definitive suggestions, challenging, as well as other such instrumental types of behaviors. In addition, therapist should feel confident being more directive while remaining personable, forging their therapeutic connections with friendliness and warmth (Anker, Sparks, Duncan, Owen, & Stapnes, 2011).

A meta-analysis conducted by Lambert and Shimokawa (2011) investigated the recent trend involving regular, periodic monitoring and tracking of client treatment response then providing clinicians with the information gathered with standardized scales from two feedback systems. They found that the number of psychotherapy clients who deteriorate could be cut in half by the use of these systems. Their suggestions for clinical practice as a result of the meta-analysis were:
Clinicians should use real-time client feedback to monitor responses to treatment and therapeutic relationship to improve outcomes and decrease the dropout rate.

The use of feedback compensates for inaccuracies to detect when clients deteriorate.

Therapists should be cognizant of clients who over or underestimate their condition on the self-reported scales.

Therapist should supplement feedback with clinically-supported tools such as problem-solving and decision-making.

Therapist should be aware of inconclusive results about additive effects of direct client feedback.

The use of electronic versions of the feedback systems should be considered for consistent, practical application and availability of instantaneous results.

They conclude with the assertion that clinicians should seriously consider routinely using formal methods of periodically collecting client feedback throughout treatment. Given the inconclusive results of utilizing some feedback systems and how these systems do not explicitly convey to the clients that their feedback or perspectives are valued (Fluckiger, et. al., 2012), the present study chose to gather information from the clients at various points using their perspectives in open-ended questioning.

Summary

Gottman’s research illustrates his findings of what makes marital relationships work and what makes the relationships fail. Gottman touts that from his research findings over the past 40 years of couples’ interactional patterns, he can accurately predict divorce, as well as provide guidance to those who wish to improve the quality of their relationships. His findings dispute techniques that are hailed as effective and shed more light on techniques in which he has found to be more efficacious.

Gottman’s research has expanded the field of therapy not only by his research findings, but through the manner in which he has gathered his data. His work has exhibited a diligence in providing data that has reflected his subject’s behaviors in real-time, processed with self-description by the couples involved.

Other researchers and clinicians (Lebow, 1997; Parrott & Parrott, 2003) agree with Gottman that psychoeducation alone does not stand up to a combination of psychoeducation and therapy. Recent studies (Anker, et. al., 2009; Anker et.al, 2011) indicate that the most efficacious
couple’s therapy applies continuous client progress feedback to the clients, which requires on-going therapeutic sessions. However, state and federal support has focused primarily on marriage education (generally provided in a workshop format) with many of the community-based education initiatives touting ten year strategic plans for education without supporting evidence to back them up (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). This is probably due to the financial differences between therapy and psychoeducational settings. A new focus for couples’ research indicates the need to explore the impact that participants input has upon the change process (see review, Sparks & Duncan, 2010). Some feedback, focused on the therapeutic processes, has been investigated by facilitating clients’ perspectives at the end of each session within a formalized framework (Lambert & Shimokawa, 2011). However, these systems do not explicitly convey to the clients that their feedback or perspectives are valued (Fluckiger, et. al., 2012). Utilizing Gottman’s research and active audience participation together may be a significantly helpful starting point in maximizing the effectiveness of a psychoeducational workshop.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical and research assumptions, research study site, design, population, sampling mechanism, and sample demographics. The chapter further provides a description of the qualitative measures, data collection, and qualitative date analysis based on the process of Grounded Theory Tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An overview of the intervention is provided with an outline of the couples workshop format and content, qualifications of the research team, and the expected outcome for the study. Half of the recruited couples were randomly assigned to a pilot intervention, which was used as a means to illuminate and address potential logistical difficulties, as well as other barriers to success. Although the results are not factored into this study, some examples of the responses are included in the tables of this section along with the experience that led the researcher to a major modification in the intervention (see Pilot Workshop Summary).

Purpose of Study

Psychoeducational workshop groups are generally highly structured. There is a preplanned lecture format with therapist guidance and direct instruction. Often this may be followed by some form of audience participation (Brabender & Fallon, 2007). The purpose of the present study was to provide a faithful presentation of an eight-hour, couples’ psychoeducational workshop based on Gottman’s research in order to ascertain what the participants found useful for their relatedness. This purpose was extended. The researcher explored the results of encouraging active participation from workshop participants throughout the workshop. They were asked to consider the concepts presented and to develop personal strategies for applying them in their own relationships. These personal discussion periods were between each block of information (seven in total). The attendees were encouraged to participate by discussing the material and then putting their strategies in writing. To accomplish this, the participants completed a short, open-ended item paper and pencil questionnaire before the intervention regarding their expectations of the workshop and their individual relationship goals. Next, the participants discussed the information given and completed a paper and pencil, open-ended survey after each block of instruction, to prompt input concerning the information given. Field notes were written reflecting observations of the participants during the discussion periods.
following each block of instruction. Lastly, after the workshop and one month in their home environment, the participants returned to be interviewed. They answered five open-ended questions with prompts to provide relational experiences, both good and bad events which had occurred since attending the workshop. In addition, they were asked what, if any, workshop concepts they had found to be useful, including rank ordering those specific concepts. It was expected that participants would cite Gottman topics and their feedback would render other possibilities, especially in the manner in which they apply the ideas at home.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the following two research questions:

1. Unprompted, and a month back in their daily lives, what would the participants’ responses reflect as being valuable about that experience and what would the rank order of those traits be?

2. What new theory would emerge as a result of analysis using a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967)?

**Theoretical Assumptions**

This study was guided by two theoretical assumptions:

1. Any couple intervention, by its nature, can be expected to influence couple behavior after the occurrence of that event. Interventions patterned after Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory can be expected to influence couple behavior after the occurrence of that event.

**Research Assumptions**

This study was guided by six research assumptions:

1. Individuals who were interviewed after attending the workshop and a month back in their daily lives would carefully and honestly describe their experiences as they remember them.

2. Interviewing four weeks after an event would uncover meaningful recollections from participants regarding what each had found helpful from that event.

3. Participants involved with the research study would be willing to participate and discuss their relationships openly and honestly.

4. The participants involved in the research project would complete the pre-intervention and intervention questionnaires honestly and to the best of their ability.

5. All of the participants in the research study would be present for an eight hour workshop in its entirety.
6. Participants would return after four weeks to answer the post-intervention interview questions.

**Research Study Site**

The research site was a private practice office in Orlando, Florida. A large private room for group counseling sessions was utilized to accommodate the couples and the research staff. The workshop was free. The office offered free and well-lit parking with refreshments served throughout the eight hour workshop.

**Research Design**

The researcher utilized a qualitative design in the Grounded Theory Tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of participants’ experiences. Triangulation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) was employed, not only to increase faithfulness, but also to ensure that both the participants’ and the researcher’s aims were met. Observational field notes of attendees’ participation during discussion periods of the workshop were written along with taped interviews of the participants after they had been home a month from the attending the workshop. In addition, each participant completed a:

- Short, open-ended item questionnaire before the intervention to describe what information they were looking for and what they considered to be areas of concern in their relationships.
- Questionnaire after each of the seven blocks of instruction and its attendant discussion period.
- Personal, open-ended interview, semi-structured where necessary, completed at the offices where the workshop occurred four weeks after the workshop.

**Unit of Analysis**

The researcher was faced with a difficult choice to either interview each workshop participant together as a couple or separately. Gottman, whose research was at the core of this study, began his research in league with others who viewed the dynamics between couples and families as a system regarding them as “organisms themselves requiring attention” (1982; p.373). In addition, one of the main contributions of general systems theory is its observation that the parts of systems are interdependent and that all actions are recursive; if one changes, the other parts are affected (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2007). However, from early on marital experts (e.g., Bernard, 1970) have described “his” marriage and “her” marriage. They observed that each
partner subjectively interprets a given situation, often in personally unique ways. This is in line with contemporary postmodernist and multicultural thinking, to wit, the existence of multiple subjective truths (see discussion in Norris, 1990). In fact, recent recommendations regarding couples assessment recommend approaching individuals first and their larger social systems second. Participants should be observed and assessed from their individual perspective initially in order to avoid overlooking psychological perspectives which they may have adopted and may influence the relationship (Snyder, Heyman, & Haynes, 2005). Ultimately the researcher chose the responses obtained from each workshop participant through a pre-intervention questionnaire, intervention questionnaire, post-intervention interview transcripts, and observational field notes as the assessment unit, but not without considerable deliberation.

Participants

Sprenkle and Moon (1996) pose that Grounded theory qualitative research begins with criteria-based selective sampling with selection becoming increasingly specific to research objectives. This study employed criterion-based, opportunity sampling starting with the criteria given via recruitment flyers. The recruitment flyers stipulated that only couples of legal age (at least 18 years old) should attend. Sexual orientation and the presence of children was not criterion. Incidentally, only heterosexual couples volunteered and participated in the study. They responded to flyers placed around East Orlando including the area just off of the University of Central Florida campus. Each flyer stated the type of material being presented, presenter, place, date, and times of the free couples’ workshop. The responding participants were given the opportunity to exit the workshop if the need were to arise or if they found no applicable use of the materials being presented.

Sampling differences between qualitative and quantitative studies may be viewed as “trade-offs between breadth and depth” (Patton, 2002 p. 227). Sample sizes of qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those of quantitative studies with Ph.D. students found to commonly use 20 or 30 participants, followed by 40 then 10 (Mason, 2010). For purposive sampling, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that 12 interviews created 92% of the total number of codes developed for all 30 of Ghanaian transcripts and 88% of the total number of codes created across two countries and 60 interviews. Group therapy literature indicated that the benefit for participants in interactional groups may be reached at 16 members as discussed in Yalom & Leszcz (2005). The number suggested to achieve the most beneficial group results was
set as the sampling goal for this study as well as for each workshop. A total of 15 couples were recruited, put into a list in no special order with every other couple assigned to the pilot group (14 participants) and the remaining eight couples (16 participants) were assigned to the intervention group. However, there was a mortality factor with one of the eight couples in the treatment group choosing to leave the workshop around the midpoint. Their data sets were incomplete and therefore not included in the study.

**Research Team**

The research team consisted of the chief investigator, who presented both the pilot and intervention workshops with consultative assistance given by a Ph.D. Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. The principle investigator has a doctoral level of education and training as a Marital and Family Therapist, and holds a Master of Arts degree in Counseling. He is licensed by the State of Florida as a Marriage and Family Therapist and Mental Health Counselor. He also is a State-approved supervisor Licensed Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists. The principle investigator has attended one graduate semester course in Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory at Florida State University under the supervision of a Gottman-Certified Therapist and Trainer, Dr. Mary Hicks; has attended a two-day training under Dr. John Gottman known as the Level I Gottman Method Training; has attended the four-day Level II Gottman Method Training; and has attended the four day training in Seattle, Washington, known as the Level III Method Gottman Training. The principle investigator has also provided state and local workshops on Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory incorporating art and play therapy with couples and families for the last six years.

The consultant has completed the requirements for Level III Gottman Method Training and was not a part of the interviewing or investigative procedures of the research process. Two colleagues from the private practice in Orlando volunteered as research assistants. They both had a master’s degree and were registered as counseling interns, as well as had completed Level I Gottman Method Training. They were blind to the training material, other than the workshop agenda, the research questions, assumptions, and research design. They were in possession of the five post-interview questions and given instructions to offer the participants prompts to elaborate upon each of these questions. The assistants were instructed to interview the participants separately so that the partners would not influence each other. While one interviewer was interviewing one partner, another interviewer was in with the other. The five post-workshop
questions were given to each participant individually as a four week follow-up in an interview format at the research study site. Each participant was given interview schedules according to their availability one month after attending the workshop. The post-intervention questions were conducted through individual interviews by the research assistants and tape recorded on audio tape. Prior to coding, the recorded responses were transcribed by a medical transcriptionist with three years experience. After receiving the transcribed answers, the researcher then e-mailed each participant’s corresponding responses back to the appropriate participant to authenticate as being their responses to the post-intervention questions. They, in turn, authenticated their responses through e-mail replies to the researcher.

**Psychoeducational Curriculum**

The couples’ workshop was based on Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory, which consisted of didactic information derived from his research findings and activities based on the seven blocks of instruction that coincided with the seven levels of the theory (Gottman, 1999). The formal workshop agenda is given in Appendix B. A detailed overview of the Gottman concepts, abbreviations and definitions discussed in the workshop can be found in Appendix G.

Specifically, there were seven blocks of instruction: 1) love maps; 2) fondness and admiration; 3) turning toward versus turning away; 4) sentiment override; 5) regulation of conflict; 6) honoring dreams and aspirations; and 7) creating shared meaning. Gottman (1999) describes love maps as the amount of cognitive room people will consciously make for one another where each person becomes increasingly aware of the other’s psychological world and periodically updates this information. In short, love maps consist of how much one partner knows about the other and the importance of updating this information periodically as a means of staying emotionally and mentally connected. The fondness and admiration system reflects the amount and accessibility of respect and affection felt and expressed for one another. Turning toward versus turning away reflects the emotional connection versus distance in the relationship including everyday activities, which adds to what Gottman (1999) terms the emotional bank account. Sentiment override is described as either being negative or positive. This refers to negative sentiment override as when a person, within the relationship, attacks another person, within the relationship, and often blames or criticizes that person for his/her mistakes. Positive sentiment override means that anything negativity expressed is interpreted as informative, rather than as a personal attack. Regulation of conflict includes the ability to address solvable problems
or perpetual, chronic, and unsolvable problems. Skills needed for solving problems include easing into the discussion, repair and de-escalation, accepting influence, compromise, and physiological soothing. Honoring one’s dreams and aspirations includes acknowledging individual, family, and relational hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Creating shared meaning includes building rituals for emotional connection such as using mealtime and other potential relational gathering events to learn more about each member involved. Oftentimes rituals or traditions from the family of origin are incorporated and take on a new meaning with the new family constellation (Gottman, 1999).

**Data Collection and Qualitative Analysis Using the Grounded Theory Tradition**

The pre-intervention data was gathered by the participants completing the questionnaires in writing. The individuals were asked to complete the questionnaires separately from their partners in hopes of eliciting some additional accounts of their experiences. The participants wrote responses to four qualitative open-ended questions regarding their overall hopes of attending the workshop:

1. What are you hoping to get out of this workshop?
2. What topics would you like to discuss during the workshop?
3. What would you say are your top concerns in your relationship right now?
4. What are your top goals for your relationship?

The intervention questionnaire after each block of instruction was also acquired via paper and pencil. There was a discussion period between blocks of instructions where participants were encouraged to write any clarification gained from their discussions. The participants wrote answers to four qualitative open-ended questions at the end of each of the seven blocks of instruction for the workshop:

1. How helpful or applicable was this block of instruction to your relationship?
2. Given the last block of information, how would you design an intervention for your relationship?
3. What do you need to apply this to your relationship?
4. What would happen if you were to apply this?

One purpose of these questions was to enhance and expand the Gottman-specific education through discussion and personal application. Another was to privilege the consumer as expert in the consumer’s own life (see review in Lee & Everett, 2004). At the core of the study and
considering the consumer as expert, the questions were hoped to elicit an evaluative mindset of what was useful and how they might utilize the information given their own resources after returning to their home environment.

Four questions at the post-intervention point moved from the participants’ spontaneous, self-generated perceptions and evaluations regarding their experience from attending the workshop to an increased specificity as seen in question number five. The final results touch on what the participants brought away from this experience and possibly incorporated into their own lives. The fifth question was meant to highlight the evaluative component.

1. Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were going very well in your relationship. (Prompts) What were you doing? What was your partner doing?
2. Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were not going so well in your relationship. (Prompts) What were you doing? What was your partner doing?
3. What about the workshop do you remember as being helpful in your relationship? (Prompts)
4. According to the daily agenda of the workshop, these were the topics that we covered (agenda will be looked at by research assistants and partner). What, if anything, do you remember and have found helpful?
5. Rank order aspects named under questions three (3) and four (4).

Qualitative processes in the Grounded Theory Tradition were used to answer the research questions. The data was examined primarily by using Sprenkle and Moon’s (1996) overview regarding family research. Noticeable phenomenon was highlighted by categorizing the data into similarities, differences, and emerging categories, themes, or patterns. Other guiding research sources with emergent methodology or where theory emerges from the data were used as well, in particular Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser (1998). By using these Grounded theory methods, the theory was developed from the data, beginning as it was collected (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996) to understand what was occurring during the study.

Systematic procedures were begun, inductively derived, concerning what was emerging from the data. This process involved data collection, data analysis, and formulating a theory. The researcher sought to identify key elements within the data that could be isolated, grouped, and categorized to divine the story which would offer insight into the participants’ experiences. The researcher’s ability to perceive these key elements and their relationships is called theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1998). To further clarify there are four primary requirements: 1) That which
fits the phenomena based on being derived from the diverse collection of data, and relates to a common reality; 2) Provision of understanding and being understandable; 3) The theory should provide generality in that it includes extensive variation, as well as being abstract enough so that it may be applied to a wide variety of contexts; and finally 4) There should be control, in as much as conditions under which the theory is applicable and ascribes a basis for action (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Constant comparison of the key elements and their relationships was essential (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As the data was coded, the researcher adhered to a set of coding rules with elements based on Glaser (1998) which asked questions such as: 1) What are the research questions; 2) What does the categories or category properties, from the emerging theory indicate; 3) What are the participants’ primary concerns; 4) What are the participants saying and doing; 5) What accounts for the answers to these questions; and lastly 6) What events are issue here and what do they mean?

The initial data analysis from the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire exhibited a potential to develop the foundation for guiding further analysis. The initial data being collected was understandably in the participants’ language. Unlike Hicks et.al. (2004), the decision to avoid fitting the data into Gottman’s language was therefore made. By allowing the participants’ language to guide the categorization, it was surmised that a wider range of theory options would emerge. One of the most interesting phenomena to emerge was the subtle changes noted in the perspectives of what was being categorized. The changes appeared to result with the application of instrumentation, observation, and ultimately interviewing procedures at the various scheduled time intervals. Viewing the thematic patterns through the variable of time appeared to be telling a story which was directly applicable to the research questions. The basic process of data analysis was as follows (for detailed coding see Coding of Data: Open, Axial, and Selective):

1. The transcripts were read in their entirety several times using an ocular scan method (Bernard, 2000) or eyeballing in order to get a solid sense of the collection of data. The data were categorized with regard to similarities, differences, and emerging categories, themes, or patterns. The purpose of this was to highlight noticeable phenomena (Patton, 2002).
2. The first to be read were responses to the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire. Examined second were the written responses to the Intervention Questionnaire. The data included any clarification notes made by the participants from the discussions after each block of
instruction on their questionnaire forms. Finally the transcripts obtained from the post-intervention interview responses were examined separately.

3. The last step required that each transcript, and its classes and themes, to be triangulated. “Triangulation” is to bring more than one source of data to a single point (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.202). This is exemplified within the present study by written observational field notes of attendees’ participation during discussion periods of the workshop along with taped interviews of the participants after they had been home a month from the attending the workshop. In addition, the participants completed an open-ended questionnaire before the workshop and a questionnaire with open-ended questions specific to each block of information given to be completed after that block of information. This was understood to provide “thicker” data, on the one hand and, if consistency across the data was to be demonstrated, should increase the readers’ sense of its trustworthiness. The researcher designed a qualitative data coding form based on the work of Sprinkle and Moon (1996) to examine the participant’s responses based on these three categories (similarities, differences, and emerging categories, themes, and patterns).

Instead of specialized qualitative analysis software, the researcher chose to use Microsoft Word to create, manage, and store text-based documents and to produce tables. Many researchers recommend specialized software (see discussion by Creswell, 2007). These packages provide organized storage file system availability; ease of data retrieval; a computer’s greater attention to the data; a visual model of codes and themes; and ease of retrieval associated with codes, themes, or documents. However, there are disadvantages as well such as researchers have to be trained to use the package, and they also may feel that a machine has come between them and the data. Many users feel that the analysis packages do not capture the ambience of the data, their nuances, and transactional complexities. In the present research, the use of qualitative analysis software was ruled out. It was discovered that the data contained rich nuances, which raised doubts that the available programs could adequately capture and categorize. Comfort was taken in Creswell’s reassurance that “The process used for qualitative data analysis is the same for hand coding or using a computer” (2007, p. 165), therefore, all of the data were coded by hand. Specifically, the responses were color coded using unique colors for each like word in their context or theme so that they could be joined with other like or synonymous themes that shared that unique color designation.
Some qualitative practitioners have advocated for the use of multiple coders as a means to increase reliability and validity of their investigations (e.g. Ryan, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990) posited that the researcher be the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and through the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity they are allowed to develop theory found in the data using Grounded Theory. In addition, data analysis begins as soon as one collects the data with dimensions and categorical properties being compared with other emerging categories as the researcher goes through the data (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). The research assumption that Gottman terminology would be espoused by the participants became evident with the data collection. A considerable amount of layman language was also given by the participants, which opened the idea that the coding could take the research in a different direction. Utilizing external coders, therefore, posed the possibility that training could be lengthy, cumbersome, and difficult as a whole. To keep the research theoretical sensitivity intact, the chief investigator served to code the present study. This decision also adhered to the initial application procedural agenda filed with the Florida State University Institutional Review Board.

Coding of Data: Open, Axial, and Selective

As the data was examined for emerging patterns, categories, and themes, it was grouped according to the participant’s similar responses and different or unique responses until the categories were saturated. The overall major groupings tell a story about these participants and their experience of being given this faithful presentation of Gottman’s research findings. Similar to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the data collected was divided into three coding phases referred to as open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding refers to a conceptual phase of data examination where items within are compared and differentiated. This phase is designed to expand the analyst’s thinking about the data, whereas axial coding integrates data through reduction and synthesizing in order to establish connections between categories and subcategories. From the foundations established in axial coding, selective coding is the process of selecting a core category, systematically relating it to the other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in those categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Analysis of open coding began by viewing the data as discrete parts, examining and comparing for theoretical or conceptual similarities and differences, which in turn, stimulated
questions about how to categorize the data. For example, constant comparison began with the pre-intervention data, which was what the participants’ said they would like the workshop to provide. Through the process of constant comparison, patterns or prevalent use of synonymous words or phrases with similar definitions in the responses began to emerge. “Tic marks” were made in the margin with a descriptive word (e.g., “communication”) indicating an initial impression of the remark. Within that topic (traditionally called a “class”), descriptive variations but conceptually similar statements became clear (called “themes”). Moreover, by taking note of these similarities other patterns emerged that were different from these original patterns allowing for specific distinctions to be made (e.g., Class: “Finances” versus Class: “Communication”).

These observed differences prompted the need for grouping the similarities together to further distinguish them from the other patterns. Investigators use various methods to accomplish this task (see discussion p.463, Patton, 2002). Some people use different colored highlighting pens or colored pencils to distinguish the emerging differences between the themes. Although the technique of cutting and separating eventually proved to be less confusing, highlighting was the initial technique chosen for this project. Each of the similar statements were initially coded using an assigned color, such as yellow, so that they could be distinguished from other statements and designated a name (such as “Communication” for this particular classification) until saturation was reached. This is when the addition of another indicator fails to render an intrinsic connection, generating new insight into the concept or when new sources lead to redundancy, becoming overextended beyond the boundaries of the analysis (Patton, 2002).

Eight concepts initially emerged which were color coded: 1) Communication (yellow), 2) Planning (purple), 3) Conflict (pink), 4) Connectedness (orange), 5) Family (green), 6) Finances (brown), 7) Understanding (aqua), and 8) Religion or Closeness to God was originally underlined in pencil. Illustration for some of the similarities and differences emerging in the data can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Thematic Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>“We have a lot of disagreements”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We have disagreements”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We argue over everything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>“Want more romance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Need to learn/be aware/ to be empathetic to wants/needs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Want more tenderness/romance”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Illustrative Open Coding Frame, taken from Pre-intervention Questionnaire- continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Thematic Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Communication       | “I would like to improve our communication with one another”  
|                     | “I want to be able to express ourselves honestly when we talk”  
|                     | “I wished we would talk more”                           |
| Family              | “I want to be on the same page with our teenage son”  
|                     | Our teenager/ son/children  
|                     | Our/His family                                          |
| Finances            | “The economy has hit us hard/financial hardships”   
|                     | “We are financially overwhelmed”                        |
| Planning            | “I’d like to see us make a future together”           
|                     | “I want us to spend more time together”                |
| Religion            | “I hope we can devote more focus upon Allah”           
|                     | “I would like for us to agree on attending church”     |
| Understanding       | “I don’t know my partner anymore”                     
|                     | “I would like to understand ‘him’ or ‘her’ better”     |

Table 2. Illustrative Open Coding Frame, Taken from Intervention Questionnaire Answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Thematic Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Communication       | “I will rephrase my criticism as positive statements”  
|                     | “We need to talk and update each other occasionally”  |
| Conflict            | “I will practice staying calm and avoid getting flooded”  
|                     | “Work on respecting my partner to avoid conflict”     |
| Connectedness       | “We will become more unified by accepting each other’s influence”  
|                     | “I will work on my emotional connection through bids” |
| Family              | “We have a child coming and I won’t let that add stress”  
|                     | “We will be more consistent with our son”            |
| Finances            | “Adhere to the budget we have established”            
|                     | “Limit our spending”                                  |
| Planning            | “Plan to discuss our dreams and aspirations every 6 months or so”  |
| Religion            | “Devote more time to worship”                         
|                     | “We will be freer to give praise”                      |
| Understanding       | “Know more about what he likes and dislikes”           
|                     | “Understand my wife’s emotional needs”                |

Besides developing concepts or classes, and distinctions within these classes or categories, the process of constant comparison during open coding also tends to formulate and highlight subcategories important to the next phase of coding called axial coding. Axial coding occurs as the categories are related to their subcategories or themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to integrate data, each category was analyzed for variables shared related to the couples’ descriptions of their relationship dynamics. These categories, at first glance, appear to be similar but are more useful when separated. An example that would be in the contrasting statements of
“we argue about everything” to “we would be more respectful when talking if we try the antidotes to the four horsemen” might produce a need to open the class Communication, to subcategories or themes of Communication, Poor, which it was originally called and the emerging theme originally called Communication, Good to distinguish the differences in the nuances of meaning or intent. This was followed for the classes Conflict, which after discovering the emerging differences in thematic concepts rendered Conflict, Unresolved and Conflict, Resolved and the classification Connectedness, which rendered the theme Disconnectedness (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example A</th>
<th>Example B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication, Good; “We would be more respectful when talking if we try the antidotes to the four horsemen”</td>
<td>Communication, Poor; “We argue about everything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict, Unresolved; “We never agree on anything”</td>
<td>Conflict, Resolved; “I will practice breathing exercises”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness; “I enjoyed hearing how much my partner knew about me”</td>
<td>Disconnectedness; “We have grown apart these past few years”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice for the source word Communication to remain in the front of the two thematic designations separated by a comma was to maintain an alphabetical order that could keep them together for the reader to get a clearer sense of the differences (e.g., Communication, Good and Communication, Poor). Recognizing language that was synonymous, but used to convey different intentions, the concepts were regrouped and categorized according to their contextual meaning. This was accomplished by cutting out the themes and placing them into corresponding piles with the new classifications and color designations for each pile. Each pile was then assigned an overarching Class name to which each category would be placed. Eleven categories emerged from this regrouping, which were eventually assigned to eight overarching categories. The original class names for Conflict was changed to Problem Solving Abilities and the original class name Connectedness was changed to Togetherness Perspective as a means to lessen the confusion and fully distinguish them from their subcategories.

The initial eight classes and categories with respective color coding included: 1) Class Communication- Subcategory Communication, Poor (renamed Communication Unacceptable) coded as gray; and Subcategory Communication, Good (renamed Communication, Acceptable)
color coded as yellow; 2) Class Planning color coded as purple; 3) Class Problem Solving Abilities- Subcategory Conflict, Unresolved color coded as blue; and Subcategory Conflict, Resolved coded as pink; 4) Class Togetherness Perspective- Subcategory Connectedness color coded as orange; and Subcategory Disconnected color coded as red; 5) Class Family color coded as green; 6) Class Finances color coded as brown; 7) Class Religion or Closeness to God was mentioned twice in the pre-intervention questionnaire, six times in the intervention questionnaire and twice in the post-intervention transcripts. Each time it was mentioned by the participants as a constant to their future so it was absorbed into the theme Planning themes pile; and the final class, 8) Understanding originally color coded aqua was collapsed into the subcategories Disconnectedness and Connectedness piles, depending on the intent evident within the themes. Collapsing Understanding and Religion or Closeness to God, resulted in six classes with nine subcategories remaining. After a discussion of the coding process in a peer debriefing (see Peer Debriefing), it was pointed out that the use of “Poor” and “Bad” to describe the participants’ communication skills may be perceived as “judgmental” to readers of the study, as well as indicating a researcher agenda toward the outcome. It was posed that these categories be renamed Communication, Acceptable and Communication, Unacceptable with the understanding that this would be from the participants’ perspectives, remaining consistent with the study’s collaborative theme. Discrepancies observed with thematic nomenclature were also discussed.

The nature of the study is guided by what the participants felt to be desirable and undesirable about their relationship dynamics, which has been captured by Communication, Acceptable versus Communication, Unacceptable, Connectedness versus Disconnected, and Conflict, Unresolved versus Conflict, Resolved but appeared not to be represented fully by the classifications Planning, Family and Finances. A discussion of what would make these classifications accurately consistent with the study led to a revisiting of the data for coding, opening new perspectives and renaming. Again from the participants’ perspectives, Planning would be divided into Planning, Acceptable versus Planning, Unacceptable. Family also would be divided into Family, Acceptable versus Family Unacceptable as well as Finances changed to Finances, Managed versus Finances, Unmanaged. As before, the source words are in front alphabetically for ease of comparison. These classifications were re-coded by expanding the thematic piles to include the new categorization with color designations at this point for consistency. The theme Family, Acceptable was color coded as rose and Family, Unacceptable
became color coded green. The theme Finances, Managed became coded as olive and Finances, Unmanaged became color coded as brown. The class Planning was color coded purple for the themes Planning, Acceptable, and the color tan was assigned for the class Planning, Unacceptable. This resulted in six overarching classes and twelve final categories going into the selective coding phase. See Table 4 for the classes, categories and associated color codes utilized when analyzing the qualitative data.

Table 4. Final Coding Key of Class, Codes, and Themes with Corresponding Color

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Class:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Coding Colors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication Status Reported Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 1. Communication, Acceptable</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Status During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 2. Communication, Unacceptable</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Status Reported After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Class:</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Theme Coding Colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Conflict Reported Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 3. Conflict Unresolved</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code- Conflict During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 4. Conflict Resolved</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict Reported After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4. Final Coding Key of Class, Codes, and Themes with Corresponding Color - continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3) Class:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Coding Colors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Togetherness Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Togetherness Perspective Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 5. Connectedness</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Togetherness Perspective During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 6. Disconnectedness</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Togetherness Perspective After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4) Class:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Coding Colors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Family Dynamics Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 7. Family, Acceptable</td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Dynamics During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 8. Family, Unacceptable</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Dynamics After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5) Class:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Coding Colors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finances</strong></td>
<td>Financial Perspective Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 9. Finances, Managed</td>
<td>Olive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perspective During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 10. Finances, Unmanaged</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perspective After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Final Coding Key of Class, Codes, and Themes with Corresponding Color—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class:</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Coding Colors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Planning Abilities Before Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 11. Planning, Acceptable</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Planning Abilities During Workshop</td>
<td>Theme 12. Planning, Unacceptable</td>
<td>Tan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Planning Abilities After Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some qualitative researchers believe that it is important to know the prior research and the terminology that has been used (Clarke, 2005). An example would be considering the house analogy as a guideline (Hicks et al., 2004). Others understand that we are inevitably going to be influenced by these previous works, but we must proceed as if from a fresh perspective (Becker, 1986). The use of Gottman’s house analogy was useful to the researcher; but there was always the possibility that participants may not find that concept to be important or particularly useful as an analogy for their own relationship in full or in part. It should be noted that occasionally during qualitative analysis, the research may take a different direction due to the information gathered (Mathews, 2005). The decision to stray from the house analogy became a more prudent option as the data gathered from the participants best fit into categories not corresponding to Gottman’s analogy of a house. This is to say that the current data may or may not have fit pre-determined conceptual maps, but the possibilities of allowing for more richly diverse category markers opened the door to unexpected outcomes and perspectives which perhaps have their own story to tell. In this study the names of the codes, classes, and themes were not to be determined by the language of Gottman’s theories, they were to be derived from what word or words best described the collection.

This leads to the final coding process of selective coding. After all of the data is in, there should be one core variable among the others that, in addition to other qualities, is theoretically saturated and centrally relevant (LaRossa, 2004). This one category should have the analytical power to pull the others together to form an explanatory whole. This final coding process was important to the research question: After completing this faithful workshop presentation of
Gottman’s research findings and a month back in their daily lives, what would the participants consider to have been valuable about that experience and in what priority of usefulness ranking? The grouped data was analyzed according to what the participant’s expectations were going into the workshop as compared to what they found useful during the workshop to finally what they considered to have been useful after a month at home. Since the themes were categorized as to what the participants considered desired or undesired relational dynamics, Desired and Undesired became the directions in which the categories were collapsed in the selective process phase. The resulting story of what the participants found useful became a manner of following the progressive input from the Pre-intervention questionnaire to the Post-intervention interview responses.

**Trustworthiness**

The seminal work by Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the discussion of trustworthiness should begin with the example of Derek Freeman (1983) questioning the validity of the famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead’s, work with indigenous Samoan peoples. Although not an overwhelmingly popular opinion at the time, this debate prompted the already growing concern for qualitative rigor to become a necessary focal point of qualitative researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 289-331) discussed, as a comparative model, a conventional paradigm that assists the researcher in establishing trustworthiness that included: 1) Internal validity- extent to which variations in an outcome or dependent variable can be attributed to a controlled variation in an independent variable; 2) External Validity- the approximate validity with which we may infer that a presumed causal relationship can be generalized; 3) Reliability- the ability of others with similar instruments to consistently and accurately come up with the same results; and finally 4) Objectivity- the intersubjective agreement which is threatened by an intervening method which manipulates the response, engages in ideological purpose, or relies exclusively on single observer data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further suggested a criteria for the Naturalistic Paradigm: 1) Credibility or truth value, which is the extent to which findings of an inquiry display an isomorphism or one-to-one relationship with a single, tangible reality; 2) Applicability or transferability is the responsibility of the original investigator to accumulate empirical evidence and provide sufficient data to make similar judgments possible; 3) Consistency or dependability by taking into account factors of instability in the individuals, the context and the design; and
finally 4) Neutrality or confirmability or the extent to which investigative objectivity is maintained. The present paper offers an attempt to meet the criteria of the Naturalistic Paradigm with the understanding that a majority of grounded theorists tend to be objectivists by orientation (Charmaz, 2000):

1) Credibility

- Avoiding perceptual distortions, selective perception, retrospective distortions, and situated motives were attempted by prolonged engagement, which was accomplished, in part, by the investigator being present throughout the day, not only as psychoeducational instructor, but throughout discussions and processing as well. The investigator had no prior knowledge of the participants’ relationship dynamics and relied on the written input of the participants from the Pre-interview Questionnaire, the Interview Questionnaire, which included their processing remarks they may have added to the forms, and their interviews a month after the workshop.

- Discussions were guided by persistent observation and offering each person in attendance a chance to participate by discussing their perceptions of the material as it was presented and encouraging them to include this in their written responses.

- Triangulation brings together three sources of data for a variety of purposes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). One purpose is to demonstrate the integrity of the exploration by showing how the various assessments dovetail or over-lap, and thereby strengthening the argument about what is being uncovered. In the present case, there is a triangulation exampled by written observational field notes of attendees’ participation during discussion periods of the workshop. Also, each participant completed a pre-intervention questionnaire asking for written statements about what they wanted and expected of the workshop and an intervention questionnaire to be completed after each block of information demonstrating that they had received and understood the lesson plans. Additionally, after attending the workshop and being in their home environment for one month, each participant returned to the workshop site to provide an audio-recorded retrospective verbal description and evaluation of the received material.

- Peer debriefing was accomplished by giving an overview of the workshop, data, and coding procedure to an acquaintance who had recently graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Sociology with very little knowledge of qualitative research and no significant
knowledge of Gottman’s work. She offered her opinions and perspectives, which helped to reorient some problematic coding changes (see Peer Debriefing discussion).

- Negative case analysis or eliminating exceptions by continually revising the hypothesis was attempted by immersing deeply into the data for several revisions as the coding developed themes.
- Member checks were attempted although trust was given without question to the interviewers due to their professional standing as therapists. Potential interviewer biases were noted due to their training in Gottman’s work, which was initially the attraction to utilize them. By allowing this unquestioned trust of the interviewers and the interviewing process, there appears to be a missed opportunity for therapists’ observations and field notes during the interview process. The responsibility obviously rests upon the chief investigator to provide explicit instructions without making assumptions that a detailed qualitative analysis approach will be performed. The participant responses may also reflect the interviewers’ ability to elicit information as well, the depth of which may influence the replication potential of the study. This may be a function of interviewer skill level and/or therapeutic orientation toward interviewing. However, decreased credibility through experimenter bias was curtailed, in part, through the process of each interviewer conducting their interviews independently of each other, as well as separating the couples and recording these sessions on audiotape. A professional transcriptionist who had no knowledge of the purpose of the study or the underlying marital theory or research methodology in general, then transcribed the tapes. Moreover, prior to the coding process, the transcriptions were returned to their respective participants via e-mail. These individuals were asked to indicate accuracy via e-mail by replying, in writing, what elements of the transcripts did not appear to correspond to what was given during the interview. Every participant, with the exception of the couple that left during the workshop, replied with no corrections to their transcripts.

2) Transferability

- Concerning transferability, Glasser (2004) charged that the Lincoln and Guba Naturalistic Paradigm should not be applied to Grounded theory due to their assertion that it is not the naturalist’s task of providing an index of transferability, but should
allow the database to provide those judgments. The fundamental difference is the tendencies for naturalists’ to be descriptive as opposed to conceptual generalizations. This promotes a remodeling effect upon Grounded theory by subjecting all of the criteria for achieving accuracy of description to it. In short, transferability was argued to be either conceptually oriented where theory springs from the data and may always be modified by constant comparison or heavily controlled criterion based data from which the reader makes the generalizations (Glasser, 2004). Caution was taken in generalization for the present study.

3) Dependability

- Dependability was negatively affected by some potential biases which included:
  a. Researcher is a White heterosexual male, in long-term committed relationship, which is under constant duress by health and troubled economic climate affecting his occupational and educational demands.
  b. Probability that the researcher was heavily influenced by Gottman’s work through education and training, years of practice, and modeling marriage dynamics through the principles.
  c. In addition, having these principles espoused as empirically-based, unlike those in the field who find fault with Gottman’s research findings (e.g. Heyman & Slep, 2001, Russo, 1997).
  d. Colleagues who were not associated to the project conducted the interviews. It should also be noted that the interviewers, themselves, had as much as Level II Gottman Method Training and possessed graduate degrees in counseling and certificate work in marriage and family training, which probably exposed them to Gottman’s work. There was, however, no power differential between the researcher and the interviewers who were aware of the researcher’s interests in Gottman’s work and his questioning nature of all manual-guided therapies and research studies that espouse claims to being empirically-based.
  e. The chief investigator’s experience with qualitative research methods may be considered minimal having been exposed a few times in undergraduate and master’s level courses, as well as completing a course while working on his doctorate degree.
4) Confirmability

- The dissertation was defended with all materials, procedures and instrumentation guided by a dissertation committee. The inquiry process has been delineated in detail with greater transparency of results offered. This is a means to establish rigor in the present study (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Peer Debriefing Discussion

The debriefing with an individual not connected to the study proved to be beneficial and helped to guide the manner in which the data was being viewed. Although she had no training in qualitative research, her first comment pointed to the use of “Poor” and “Bad” to describe the participants’ communication skills. She offered that, to an outsider reading the study, this may be perceived as “judgmental” therefore having a researcher agenda toward an outcome.

A change to Communication, Effective and Communication, Ineffective was discussed to be semantically the same and somewhat clinical so they were discarded. Communication, Acceptable and Communication, Unacceptable was chosen as a viable alternative with the understanding that an explanation was provided as being from the participants’ perspectives, which is consistent with the study’s collaborative theme and the concept of emic analysis versus etic analysis, or from the participants’ perspectives as discussed in Patton, (2002, pp.267-268). Her second comments were toward what she felt appeared to be further discrepancies with thematic nomenclature. She observed the nature of the study to be guided by what the participants felt to be desirable or undesirable about their relationship dynamics. This has been captured by the coded themes: Communication, Acceptable versus Communication, Unacceptable; Connectedness versus Disconnected; and Conflict, Unresolved versus Conflict, Resolved. However, this appeared not to be represented accurately by the themes Planning, Family and Finances. A discussion of what would make these themes accurately consistent with the study led to a revisiting of the data for coding and renaming. Again with the participants’ perspectives, Planning would be divided into Planning, Acceptable versus Planning, Unacceptable. Family also would be divided into Family, Acceptable versus Family Unacceptable as well as Finances changed to Finances, Managed versus Finances, Unmanaged.

Pilot Workshop Summary

A pilot workshop was conducted as a means to illuminate and address potential logistical difficulties, as well as other barriers to success. Half of the recruited couples were randomly
assigned to the pilot workshop, which with the experience led the researcher to a major modification in the intervention; namely, the intervention was reduced from a 16-hour, two-day workshop to a one-day, eight-hour experience. The rationale is described below:

1. The intervention originally was structured so that three levels of the Sound Relationship House Theory would be covered the first day and the additional four levels of the Sound Relationship House theory would be covered the second day, followed by a group debriefing. In addition, by offering a workshop for only one day, this allowed more couples to participate due to work and child care constraints, thus fostering an increase in recruitment (Lee, 2009). Although the recruitment number increased, with the reduction of workshop time, the participants most likely experienced less substantial on-site processing.

2. Some blocks of instruction were more lengthy than others; thereby, limiting the participant’s feedback and question time. By timing each block of instruction during the pilot group, the researcher determined that offering one hour for each block of instruction was both optimal for the use of the researcher and participants’ time. This improved the format and timing so that the material was covered adequately and the participants had sufficient time to ask questions and provide feedback.

The purpose of the pilot group was to work out the expected difficulties and hurdles as well as sharpen the presentation. Even with the expected challenges of the first workshop, the outcomes of the observations from the questionnaires were very similar to the second workshop. The Post-Intervention Interview question responses were also very similar.

**Summary**

The purpose was to provide a faithful presentation of an eight-hour, couples’ psychoeducational workshop based on Gottman’s research to explore the participants’ responses to questions about their experiences from the workshop. The purpose extended to exploring the results of encouraging active participation from workshop participants’ through gathering and valuing their perspectives at various intervals. To accomplish this, the participants completed a short, open-ended item paper and pencil questionnaire before the intervention regarding their expectations of the workshop and their individual relationship goals. Next, the participants discussed the information given and answered four open-ended questions after each block of instruction concerning the information given. Field notes were written reflecting observations of the participants during the discussion periods following each block of instruction. Lastly, after
the workshop and one month in their home environment, the participants returned to be interviewed. They answered five open-ended questions with prompts to provide relational experiences, to include both good and bad events which had occurred since attending the workshop. In addition, they were asked what, if any, workshop concepts they had found to be useful, including rank ordering those specific concepts. The workshop took place in a private practice office located in East Orlando, Florida. There criterion-based, opportunity samples consisted of two groups of participants recruited via flyers displayed in this area. The intervention sample initially consisted of eight couples either married or unmarried, no sexual preference restrictions, and with or without children. One of the second group couples left about half-way during the workshop leaving seven couples. There was a pilot workshop to organize and work through unforeseen difficulties. The unit of analysis was each individual. The qualitative data gathered from the participant responses was analyzed using a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition. Color coding the data was utilized at the beginning to flesh out the themes, but was abandoned as themes were collapsed for a method of cutting out the data. Through a constant comparative method of viewing the data through what the participants stated they wanted from their relationship, twelve themes finally emerged: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; 10) Finances, Unmanaged; 11) Planning, Acceptable; and 12) Planning, Unacceptable.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH FINDINGS

To recapitulate, the purpose of the present study was to provide a faithful presentation of an eight-hour, couples’ psychoeducational workshop based on Gottman’s research in order to ascertain what the participants found useful for their relatedness. This purpose was extended. The researcher explored the results of encouraging active participation from workshop participants’ throughout the workshop. They were asked to consider the concepts presented and to develop personal strategies for applying them in their own relationships. These personal discussion periods were between each block of information (seven in total). The attendees were encouraged to participate by discussing the material and then they were asked to record their strategies in writing. The findings section compiles the emerging themes, patterns, and trends. Field notes were interjected where appropriate.

Sample Characteristics

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire to provide their individual characteristics. They were an opportunistic sample and therefore did not reflect national demographics. They were well-educated (nine had bachelor’s degree; one had a technical degree; three had a master’s degrees; and one had a law degree), three were cohabiting, and none were divorced. The sample is described in Table 5.

Table 5. Grouped Sample Demographic Characteristics (n=7 couples, n=14 individuals)

| Sex: Males | N=7 participants |
| Sex: Females | N=7 participants |
| Age Range: 18-28 | N=3 males; N=4 females |
| Age Range: 29-38 | N=2 males; N=1 female |
| Age Range: 49-58 | N=2 males; N=2 females |
| Relationship Status: Cohabitating | N=3 couples |
| Relationship Status: Married | N=4 couples |
| Relationship Status: Divorce | N=0 couples |
| Relationship Status: Widowed | N=0 couples |
| Length of Relationship: 1-3 years | N=0 married couples; 1 cohabitating couple |
| Length of Relationship: 3-5 years | N=0 married couples; 1 cohabitating couple |
Findings from Qualitative Analysis of the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

The participants appeared active from the beginning, talking with each partner and to other couples to a smaller degree. They were asked to complete the questionnaire without the help of the partner, which was grossly ignored. They completed the initial forms fairly quickly and returned them. The overall group appeared eager to learn about the items on the daily agenda.

Fourteen participants in the treatment group participated writing what they were hoping to get out of the workshop. The following examples are provided without names but will be identified as (1-7) and A (male) or B (female). The responses were sorted by themes and coded based on twelve categories: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Unresolved; 4) Conflict, Resolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; 10) Finances, Unmanaged;
11) Planning, Acceptable; and 12) Planning, Unacceptable. The following are examples of the findings:

**Pre-Intervention Question #1**

The first question was: What are you hoping to get out of this workshop? Because of the nature of asking what they hoped for, the answers indicated a deficiency needing to be worked on thereby being currently unacceptable. Therefore, the themes Communication, Acceptable; Conflict, Resolved; Connectedness; Finances, Managed; and Planning, Acceptable answers were understandably not represented in the participants’ written responses. The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

- Partner 2B wrote that she wanted to “Learn new ways to communicate with partner”.
- Partner 3A wrote that he wanted to “improve communication to build awareness of any issues we need to address as a couple”.
- Partner 4A wanted to “enhance our communication”. Partner 4B wrote that she wanted “improved communication”.
- Partner 7B answered that she wanted to “have better communication”.

*Theme Conflict Unresolved*

- Partner 1A wanted to “manage differences”.
- Partner 5A wanted “ways to cope with our problems”.
- Partner 7A wanted to “learn ways to compromise”. Partner 7B wanted to “improve coping skills (deal with problems)”.

*Theme Disconnectedness*

- Partner 1B wanted to learn ways to “work together”.
- Partner 2A wrote that he wanted to “get closer to spouse”. Partner 2B wrote that she wanted to “be a better partner by learning to understand him better”.
- Partner 3B wanted to “learn more about partner”.

*Theme Finances Unmanaged*

- Partner 1A and 1B wrote that they wanted to learn how to” deal with their financial situation”.

*Theme Planning, Unacceptable*

- Partner 1B wanted to “feel more optimistic about the future, adapt to change”
Pre-Intervention Question #2

The questionnaire asked: What topics would you like to discuss during the workshop? There were no responses for Communication, Acceptable; Conflict, Resolved; Connectedness; Family, Acceptable; Finances, Managed; or Planning, Acceptable. The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

- Partner 2A wanted to discuss “ways to improve couples communication”.
- Partner 3B wanted to discuss “improving communication”.

*Theme Conflict Unresolved*

- Partner 1A wanted to talk about ways in which to “deal with personal differences”.
- Partner 4B wrote that she wanted to discuss “conflict resolution”.

*Theme Disconnectedness*

- Partner 1A wanted to discuss “love and togetherness”.
- Partner 2B wanted to discuss “empathy toward each other”.

*Theme Family, Unacceptable*

- Both Partner 5A and Partner 5B wanted to discuss having children.

*Theme Finances, Unmanaged*

- Partner 1A wanted to discuss “finances” as a desire to manage.
- Partner 5A wanted to discuss “money” as a desire to manage.

*Theme Planning, Unacceptable*

- Partner 4B wanted to discuss “goal setting”.
- Both Partner 5A and Partner 5B wanted to discuss planning their marriage. They had been avoiding the subject.

Pre-Intervention Question #3

This question asked: What would you say are your top concerns in your relationship right now? Again, there were no responses for Communication, Acceptable; Conflict, Resolved; Connectedness; Family, Acceptable; Finances, Managed; or Planning, Acceptable. The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

- Partner 1A wrote that he was most concerned with couple’s communication skills.
- Partner 2A was most concerned about “communication”.

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Theme Conflict Unresolved

- Partner 1A was most concerned about how they “handled difficult situations”.
- Both Partner 7A and Partner 7B were concerned about their “arguing”. Partner 7B listed the topics they argued about.

Theme Disconnectedness

- Partner 1B was concerned about how they were not working “as a team”, and had “lack of romance”.
- Partner 2B was concerned about how the couple was “working together”.

Theme Family, Unacceptable

- Partner 2A was most concerned about his “spouse’s relationship with teenage son”.
- Partner 2B was concerned about “disciplining our son”.

Theme Finances, Unmanaged

- Partner 1A was most concerned with the way in which they were managing their “finances”.
- Partner 5B was concerned about “finances”. Partner 7B listed her concern about “money”.

Theme Planning, Unacceptable

- Partner 4B was most concerned about “future together”.

Pre-Intervention Question #4

This question asked: What are your top goals for your relationship? Again, due to the orientation of the question, deficiencies were indicated in Communication, Acceptable; Conflict, Resolved; Connectedness; Family, Acceptable; Finances, Managed; or Planning, Acceptable. There were no written responses for these themes. There were also no coding for theme Conflict, Unresolved. The following are examples of thematic coding:

Theme Communication, Unacceptable

- Partner 3B listed the goal of “improving communication”.
- Partners 6A listed the goal of “better communication” and 6B had the goal of “speaking openly and honestly to partner”.

Theme Disconnectedness

- Partner 1B listed the goal of “understanding each other and cooperating together”.

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• Both Partner 2A and Partner 2B listed the goal of “togetherness to maintain the marriage”.

*Theme Family, Unacceptable*

• Partner 1B had the goal of “setting a better example for the kids”.

*Theme Finances, Unmanaged*

• Partner 1B listed the goal of “better financial condition”.

*Theme Planning, Unacceptable*

• Partner 1B had the goal of “establishing a routing”.
• Partner 4B listed her plan to “grow closer to God”.

**Findings from Qualitative Analysis of the Intervention Questionnaire**

The Intervention Questionnaire was designed by duplicating the same four questions after the completion of each block of instruction (see appendix A). Due to there being seven blocks of instruction with four questions asked after each and fourteen individuals answering, the intervention results will be discussed in a similar format as the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire responses. In depth responses may be obtained from the author. The following are examples of the findings:

**Love Maps**

After the block of instruction, conversations between the participating couples about how it felt to revisit earlier days were noted, as well as being surprised at how much the other partner could remember about them. Overall, after the Love Maps block of instruction, the heaviest use of the themes were Connectedness and Planning, Acceptable. The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

• Both Partner 7A and 7B wrote that they needed to work on their communication.

*Theme Conflict Unresolved*

• Partner 7A wrote that they have problems with conflict.

*Theme Connectedness*

• Partner 1B wrote feeling more connected.
• Partner 2A input was predominately on feeling more connected with spouse. Partner 2B wrote feeling more connected from the block of instruction.
**Theme Family, Unacceptable**
- Partner 1B wrote that it felt good not focus as much on “kids”.
- Partner 2B cited the need to talk with their son.

**Theme Finances, Unmanaged**
- Partner 1B wrote feeling better to “focus on each other instead of finances”.
- Partner 2B cited a need for less focus on “bills”.

**Theme Planning, Acceptable**
- Partner 3A and 3B wrote planning to continue learning about partner.
- Both Partner 4A and 4B cited what they were going to do to continue knowing more about each other.

**Theme Planning, Unacceptable**
- Partner 2A cited the need for more planning and “time”.
- Partner 4B cited a need for commitment.

**Observation Field Notes**
- Partner 2B was vocal stating that this information “made sense and remembering what brought them together was helpful as well as checking in with each other periodically instead of always talking about their bills”.
- Partners 1A and B agreed that they focused too much on materialistic things.
- Partners 5A and B joined in that “always talking about money stood in the way of making important decisions”.
- Most of the conversation was between couples after this block of information. The women in the group appeared to be more active about this information than the males. It was posed to the group to discuss their first date together after the information was presented. Most of the group members were noted to smile during this discussion period at least briefly while they talked to one another about their first dates.

**Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration**

This block of instruction was psychoeducation for the participants concerning the importance of maintaining a predominately loving relationship for times when the relationship is tested. Overall, the participants were again observed to respond using more of the Connectedness and Planning, Acceptable. The following are examples of thematic coding:
Theme Communication, Acceptable

- Partner 3A wrote that he felt the information was helpful for him to work on communication.

Theme Unacceptable

- Partner 5B wrote that she was critical of her husband.

Theme Conflict Resolved

- Partner 1A wrote that he felt better with Gottman’s position that not all conflict was solvable.
- Partner 5A wrote that he working on this would lessen conflict. Theme Conflict, Unresolved.
- Partner 3B stated that she focused on the “little things” that her partner does.

Theme Connectedness

- Partner 1B stated that their emotional connection was more important than all the things they focus upon.
- Partner 3A stated that he felt more connected.

Theme Family, Acceptable

- Partner 2B wrote that the information helped her to get a better perspective for her relationship with her spouse and son.

Theme Finances, Managed

- Partner 1B wrote that the relationship was more important than their “financial situation”.

Theme Planning, Acceptable

- Partner 1A planning to establish an emotional bank account with partner. Partner 1B is planning to take time for their relationship.
- Partner 2B wanted to devise a “flow chart” to measure their progress.

Theme Planning, Unacceptable

- Partner 5B wrote that she needed to take time to be more accepting of her husband.
**Observation Field Notes**

- Partner voiced how he felt that he and his wife should “cherish each other even in the hard times”. They had exhibited some distancing and anger/irritation toward one another up to this point.
- Partner 2B had been the least active of the group up to this point but offered that he had been neglectful at home.
- Partner 7A had also been somewhat inactive even with his spouse but was notably more active this discussion period.
- The participants continued to not be as vocal as a group as they were toward one another but were more vocal than after the first block of information. The discussion period from this block of information went over time. All members discussed either aloud or to one another about making plans to start doing things for their partners.

**Turning Toward versus Turning Away**

This block of instruction was presented to assist the participants with recognizing the little attempts for connection in the relationship that are often missed but add up over time. Overall, the theme Communication, Acceptable and Connectedness were the highest observations represented in this question. The following are examples of thematic coding:

- **Theme Communication, Acceptable**
  - Partner 1A wrote that the instruction was difficult to understand but he felt it was to guide him toward cues of how to “talk to” his wife. Partner 1B wrote that she felt recognizing and changing “four horsemen” communication would help relationship.
  - Partner 2B wrote that she would attend to partner more and respond differently, maybe devise a means to measure her progress.

- **Theme Communication, Unacceptable**
  - Partner 3B wrote that she needed to be more cognizant of her own behavior.

- **Theme Conflict, Resolved**
  - Partner 3B wrote that if their “emotional bank account increased, I think I would receive less stonewalling when conflict arises”.
  - Partner 5B wrote that she felt she would become less defensive.

- **Theme Conflict, Unresolved**
  - Partner 4B wrote that she needed to stop being stubborn.
Theme Connectedness

- Partner 1A wrote that this helped him to wife’s cues of being touched. Partner 1B wrote that she felt this would increase the couple’s love if carried out.
- Partner 6B wrote that she would be more connected by noticing her partner more.

Theme Disconnectedness

- Partner 5A wrote that he needed to be more aware of partner’s “bidding” for attention. Partner 5B wrote that she needed to be “less emotionally shut off”.

Theme Planning, Acceptable

- Partner 6A wrote that he would do more planning and felt more hope toward their future if this was carried out.

Theme Planning, Unacceptable

- Partner 4A wrote that he needed to plan and be more disciplined.

Observation Field Notes

- Partners 3A and B commented on how they saw the four horsemen in their communication and how it created a distance at times.
- The group overall noted that changing the way in which they talked with each other was critical and how they were not aware that paying attention to their partners’ actions such as sitting close or touching was important to maintaining their relationships. Several members admitted to poor communication skills. An interesting observation was that all group members were noted to hold hands, kiss quickly, or at least touch one another at some point during this discussion.

Positive Sentiment Override

This information was to help the participants decrease their negative communications and learn to start with positive communication. Gottman (1999) found that how you start a conversation will determine if it will continue on a negative path or positive. The themes Communication, Unacceptable, Communication, Acceptable, Conflict Resolved, and then Conflict Unresolved were observed to be heavily represented in the answers to these questions. The following are examples of thematic coding:

Theme Communication, Acceptable

- Partner 1A wrote about listing things said and making an effort to place in positive to make a habit.
• 3A wrote that he would make an effort to say at least one positive thing toward his partner each day. Partner 3B wrote that she of sitting down with her partner to practice positive statements and roles, functions, and expectations.

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

• Partner 1A wrote stated that the couple needed a “block of time to listen to each other’s complaints (with respect)”.

• Partner 2B wrote that she was “lacking in this area” needing to communicate with more positive sentiment override.

*Theme Conflict, Resolved*

• Partner 1A wrote that the couple should “run drills” to stop fighting and getting out of control.

• Partner 5A wrote that he thought that this would help lessen their arguments and negativity. Partner 5B stated also agreed this would help lessen their arguments.

*Theme Conflict, Unresolved*

• Partner 6A wrote that he needed to be mindful and give way to her to lessen their arguing.

• Partner 7A wrote that they needed to avoid arguing.

*Theme Connectedness*

• Partner 6B wrote that she would be less assuming, become less judgmental and understanding of her partner.

*Theme Disconnectedness*

• Partner 1B wrote that she discovered that she was Low in her “emotional bank account” and indicated this disconnection was a root problem.

• Partner 4B wrote that she needed “positive reinforcement from partner”.

*Observation Field Notes*

• Partner 1A was increasingly active this discussion period. He stated that he and his wife need to listen to one another instead of criticizing.

• Partners 5A and B as well appeared to be more comfortable with talking to the group about how their conversations seemed to usually deteriorate into arguing.
Regulation of Conflict

This block of information offered two perspectives for disagreements within relationships. One was the vastly predominate perspective of unsolvable issues and the others that have a possibility of being solved. The information dealt primarily with toxic communication errors. This block of instruction appeared to be the most anticipated from the conversations at the beginning of the day and stimulated considerable written and verbal responses. Overall for the block of instruction there was an expected heavy use of the classes Problem Solving Abilities and Communication. The following are examples of thematic coding:

Theme Communication, Acceptable

• Partner 3B wrote that she would start her conversations “soft”.
• Partner 4B wrote that she felt that this would help them to communicate with an open heart.

Theme Communication, Unacceptable

• Partner 1A wrote that he needed better communication with spouse.
• Partner 4A wrote that he needed better listening. Partner 4B stated that she needed the ability to stop and listen to partner.

Theme Conflict, Resolved

• Partner 3A wrote that he could see the times when he gets flooded and felt the information could help with their coping skills.
• Partner 5A wrote that he would practice staying calm during their discussions. Partner 5B stated that she would practice deep breathing and take the steps to cool off.

Theme Conflict, Unresolved

• Partner 1B wrote that she needed better coping skills during arguments.
• Partner 2B wrote that she had a problem with pursuing her husband when he tried to take a break from arguing, making it worse.
• Partner 7A admitted that escalating during an argument was their biggest issue. Partner 7B admitted that they both did things to contribute to an argument such as driving, not taking breaks, and calling other people to complain.

Theme Disconnectedness

• Partner 1B wrote that she needed better understanding and patience.
Theme Family, Unacceptable

- Partner 2B wrote that she needed to “back off” and see her interactions with their 14-year-old son.

Theme Planning, Acceptable

- Partner 3A wrote that he would develop a plan to de-escalate to deal with their conflict.
- Partner 4A wrote that he would develop a plan to study the process and measure it.

Theme Planning, Unacceptable

- Partner 1A wrote that he needed a plan and to implement it.

Observation Field Notes

- Partners 1A and B were both active during this discussion period. They both voiced to the group that they had gotten used to arguing instead of talking.
- Partner 4B voiced that this was the information that she had wanted to talk about. She had several questions about calming down and taking time apart to de-escalate.
- Partner 6A had been noted to talk with his partner each discussion break but was more animated this discussion period with the group.
- Partner 7B was becoming the most active at this point of the day. She stated that their main problem was not being able to work through their issues together.

Honoring Dreams and Aspirations

The information for this block of instruction dealt with recognizing the underlying meaning to gridlock or perceived impasses to conflict experienced within the relationship. Generally these events are thought to present underlying dreams or aspirations of the unyielding partners and should be communicated as having a purpose which requires support from each partner. This sixth block of instruction appeared to be very enjoyable to both the pilot and treatment groups and stimulated an unexpectedly heavy discussion both written and verbal. Overall, the themes Connectedness; Planning, Acceptable; Communication, Acceptable; Planning, Unacceptable; and Conflict, Resolved were observed to be the highest represented. It was noted that the classes Planning and Communication appeared to be tied to the class Togetherness Perspective in the responses. The following are examples of thematic coding:

Theme Communication, Acceptable

- Partner 3A wrote that he found it very helpful to have a dialogue about these items. He added that it would be helpful to talk about these items to a greater extent and prioritize
each one. Partner 3B wrote that she would use the information to make a “template” for in depth discussions.

- Partner 5A wrote that he and partner would “sit down and talk about it”. Partner 5B stated that they would write their dreams and aspirations and discuss them.

Theme Communication, Unacceptable
- Partner 2B wrote that they had done this (discussed hopes, dreams, and aspirations) very little over time.
- Partner 3B wrote that she found this helpful adding that they had not had an in depth conversation before.

Theme Conflict, Resolved
- Partner 5B wrote that she felt improving this between her and her partner would lessen their conflicts.

Theme Connectedness
- Partner 1B wrote that this helped her to know more about her partner.
- Partner 2A wrote that he found this helpful to see if the couple was on the “same page”.

Theme Disconnectedness
- Partner 7A wrote that they “didn’t pay enough attention to these things”. Partner 7B wrote that they needed to be accepting and willing.

Theme Family, Unacceptable
- Partner 7A wrote that they needed to discuss future as a family, having children or adopting.

Theme Planning, Acceptable
- Partner 1A wrote that the couple would make a list delineating their discussed desires and dreams and revise it every month or so. Partner 1B was similar stating that she would discuss hopes, dreams and aspirations and make them happen.
- Partner 2A simply wrote that he planned to make a point to discuss these things. Partner 2B wrote that she planned to revisit these items “a few times a year”.

Theme Planning, Unacceptable
- Partner 7A wrote that they needed to do this for their future.

Observation Field Notes
- Partner 1A was the first to talk this discussion break. He appeared excited with this
information calling it “a road map to life”. Partner 1B stated admitted that she had been worried about the couple’s future together. She added that they had not been able to discuss this together without talking about their finances and work.

• Partner 4B had been tentative about offering group input but voiced her concerns about building a future together as a couple and family.
• Partner 4A voiced that he and his wife were able to plan together, for the most part due to their faith but illness, school and finances had made this a little more difficult.
• Partner 7B offered that her and her husband need to revisit this information after the workshop.
• As a group, the participants appeared to be engaging in a dialogue together and increasingly with others after this block of information about how they felt that the preceding information touched on mutual respect for one another and how most of their arguments were not really as important as it seemed at the time.

Creating Shared Meaning

The intent for the block of information was for the participants to develop a sense of “we- ness” or shared futures. Participants were encouraged to discuss developing new rituals, outside what they may have done with their families of origin, or combining their rituals and traditions. Because of the nature of the information given, the theme Planning, Acceptable was expected to be represented heavily in the participants’ responses but the theme Communication, Acceptable was coded to be the most discussed with Connectedness equally represented along with significant use of the themes Family, Acceptable and Conflict, Resolved. The following are examples of thematic coding:

Theme Communication, Acceptable

• Partner 1B wrote that she felt it was important to talk about intimacy along with rituals and adopt them.
• Partner 2B wrote that they had begun some discussion about rituals.

Theme Communication, Unacceptable

• Partner 2B wrote that they needed to start talking with more meaning.
• Partner 3A wrote that he felt that they needed more “open communication”.

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**Theme Conflict, Resolved**
- Partner 1A wrote that planning and preparing for contingencies would lessen the couple’s stress.

**Theme Connectedness**
- Partner 3A found it helpful to “assess their rituals that they already have”. Partner 3B wrote that this would improve their relationship.
- Partner 5B wrote that this would “bring them closer together” and they would “go to bed at the same time and cuddle”.

**Theme Disconnectedness**
- Partner 2B wrote that they had “neglected this area for seventeen years”.
- Partner 7A admitted that they had been “spending time together without interacting”.

**Theme Family, Acceptable**
- Partner 1A wrote that he wanted to start planning events for the family.
- Partner 2A wrote the importance of developing family rituals and maintaining them.

**Theme Planning, Acceptable**
- Partner 1A wrote the importance of using the calendar to plan events. Partner 1B wrote that they would start planning meal time and establish other routines.
- Partner 5A wrote that they would plan “quiet dinners together”. Partner 5B agreed adding that the dinners were “without the TV”.

**Observation Field Notes**
- Partner 2B voiced that she and her husband had generally continued the rituals from their families of origin.
- Partner 5B had similar comments about not having rituals that reflected their relationship together.
- Everyone offered ideas to start developing rituals together as a couple and family this discussion period. An interesting note was that the group had become more animated by this discussion period but also stated that they were tired and wanted to go home.

**Findings from Qualitative Analysis of the Post-Intervention Interview Responses**

The post-intervention interview consisted of five questions including: 1) Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were going very well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing?; 2) Visualize an event in the past four weeks where
things were not going so well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing? 3) What about the workshop do you remember as being helpful in your relationship? 4) According to the daily agenda of the workshop, these were the topics that we covered (agenda will be looked at by research assistants and partner). What, if anything, do you remember and have found helpful?; and 5) Rank order aspects named under questions three (3) and four (4). Sixteen participants had started the workshop but one couple left about mid-point and did not participate in the follow-up individual interview. Fourteen participants in the treatment group returned to the office to be interviewed for the post-intervention questions. The following are examples of the findings, followed by the participants’ number one rank ordered responses to question number five, complete rank ordered responses, and finally, the distribution of these rankings in Table 6:

**Post-Intervention Question #1**

The following is a qualitative analysis of the post-intervention question number one: Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were going very well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing? The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Acceptable*

- Partner 1A reported that they were able to turn towards each other, face one another, hold and, and starting talking to each other after a conflict. Both partners were listening to one another and the female requested that the male talk to her the remainder of the night. Partner 1A reported that their argument went away and they both reported feeling happy afterwards. Partner 1B also reported spending more time talking about each area that they discussed. Partner 1B reported having fun and being able to give honest answers to every area/element that they discussed. Partner 1B reported that her husband really tried to tell her what was going on in his mind and she did the same. Both partners reported feeling stable and secure.

- Partner 2B reported that her partner was driving the car and started talking to her, appeared engaged in the conversation, and started smiling.
Theme Conflict, Resolved

- Partner 3B reported that her partner was taking more initiative to complete tasks around the house that in the past would have led to conflict such as putting dirty dishes in the dishwasher and taking the trash out.
- Partner 4A reported that they relocated recently and believed the relocating was going to be very stressful. The couple reported that they worked well together and was able to compromise. The couple and their family were also able to organize a birthday party for his wife without any conflicts. Partner 4B discussed relocating to a much smaller home. She reported that they handled the stress very well and was even nice to each other. She also reported feeling happy because her husband organized a surprise birthday party for her during the move.

Theme Connectedness

- Partner 2B reported that they were taking a drive in the car. Partner 2B reported that she felt like they were together on the same page and reported that this was a vast improvement in their relationship. She reported feeling more relaxed in the relationship, more so than in the last five years and reported no feelings of strain or worry. Partner 2B reported that her partner was able to recognize this was an opportunity to spend some time together. The couple reported having lunch together and spent the day together.
- Partner 3B reported that she was more attuned to her partner's needs. She reported that she became aware that her partner was in a lot of physical pain from putting in a hard day's work so she initiated rubbing his back. She stated that in the past, she may have waited until her partner asked for a back rub rather than initiating a backrub before her partner asked.

Theme Family, Acceptable

- Partners 4A and 4B discussed having a surprise birthday party and involving the family.
- Partner 6B reported that they spent more time with family. Both partners reported more stress about the family visiting, but Partner 6B reported that she tried to have fun and overall enjoyed the family visiting and experienced several fun activities.

Theme Planning, Acceptable

- Partner 1B reported that they went to dinner and discussed the state of their relationship and planning their lives for the next couple of years. The couple discussed how they were
feeling honestly; they reported feeling stable and secure afterwards.

- Partner 2A reported that they ran errands together and scheduled more “mini-dates” with no set schedule.

In summary, couples described going on “dates” with each other, how they arrived at the decision to do so and what they would do. Some talked about mundane activities such as going to the store yet they noticed that they were collaborating on what was necessary to buy. A commonality was that many noticed a difference in what each were doing and not doing from previous times when things were not as well. A couple of examples included: 1) For once I was not focused on the family, our relationship difficulties, or our son; and 2) Typically, it is very stressful to have family in town, however, there were no real problems. An immediate observation could be interpreted as there appears to be a positive change noted in these examples from pre-intervention to post-intervention regarding family interaction.

**Post-Intervention Question #2**

The following is a qualitative analysis of the post-intervention question number two: Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were not going so well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing? The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Acceptable*

- Partner 1B noted that after the fight over finances, they talked and the evening became intimate.
- Partner 4A reported that after discussing expectations of each other after he became critical, his partner was listening instead of being defensive. Partner 4B reported that after experiencing a conflict, the couple took several hours away from each other and were later able to effectively communicate with each other wanted or needed from one another.

*Theme Communication, Unacceptable*

- Partner 1A reported that they started out not talking to each other with no direct communications or physical touching. Partner 1A reported that they started screaming at each other and complaining about one another continuously. He stated that neither of them was listening to each other and they both wanted to get away from each other. Partner 1B reported a conflict regarding finances and stated that they both were not
listening to one another and started blaming one another rather than creating a dialogue about the problem. Partner 1B reported that she thought they were out to hurt each other.

- Partner 3B reported that she was trying to communicate with her partner and quickly started feeling defeated when she did not feel that her partner was really listening to what she was saying. She also reported that partner was not feeling heard and quickly became "heated." Partner 3B reported that when her partner becomes angry and raises his voice, she tends to shut down and essentially stops talking. This resulted in neither of the partners getting their message across to one another.

**Theme Conflict, Resolved**

- Partner 1B noted that after the fight over finances, they talked and the evening became intimate.

- Partner 3A reported that he had an expectation that was not met and he became critical. He reported that his partner asked him to elaborate and they had a discussion about what expectations they had for each other in certain situations. Partner 3A reported that after discussing the expectations, his partner was listening instead of being defensive and the conflict was resolved.

**Theme Conflict, Unresolved**

- Partner 1A reported as we started out not talking with no direct communications or physical touching… we ended up in a conflict with screaming and complaining about one another continuously neither of us were listening to each other and we both wanted to get away from each other.

- Partners 6A and 6B reported experiencing a conflict when one partner asked for assistance in applying flea and tick medication for their cat. Partner 6A became angry, upset, and shouted at his partner. Partner 6B ignored her partner because he yelled at her.

**Theme Connectedness**

- Partner 1B noted that after the fight over finances, they talked and the evening became intimate.

- Both Partner 6A and 6B gave similar accounts of after they reached a compromise, they were able to make a decision together that where they both enjoyed the evening.
**Theme Disconnectedness**

- Partner 1A said that when neither of them was listening to each other, they both wanted to get away from each other.
- Partner 2A reported that when his wife and son argued he retreated to his room as he usually does to avoid their arguing. Partner 2B gave an account of when her husband’s family visited she felt isolated, left out and not receiving help from anyone while cooking for everyone.

**Theme Family, Unacceptable**

- Partner 2A reported that most of his stress revolved around his wife’s interaction with their son. He reported that he retreated to his room to avoid the escalating confrontation. Partner 2B also reported a family conflict and differences in family-of-origin issues for years. She reported that her husband’s family came to visit them. Partner 2B felt isolated from the family’s conversation even though she was standing in the same room and cooking dinner for the family. No members of the family were reported to assist in cooking, setting up, or cleaning after dinner. Partner 2B reported that she watched the family interact and laugh together while she cleaned the kitchen. She further thought about her child and how she had not taught the child to not help out in the kitchen. Partner 2B reported that she felt left out and was given a “mother” and hostess role.
- Partners 7A and 7B both reported a family conflict due to the couple currently residing with a family member. Partner 7A reported that he felt upset and defensive after discussing their feelings about staying with a family member. Partner 7B reported that she is feeling very stressed over this situation.

**Theme Finances, Managed**

- Partner 1B reported that the couple was eating out and when they got into their car to return home, they started fighting over the wife’s inability to find a job and what they should be doing to overcome the problem. Partner 1A then discussed his inability to bill clients and conduct a profitable business. Partner 1B reported after arguing about finances, they were able to overcome the money issues and maintain an intimate evening after discussing how to plan or focus on maintain a healthy relationship.
- Partner 5A and 5B both discussed an incident regarding finances. The couple was to go out with friends for dinner and drinks. The couple had a disagreement about whether
they could spend the money or not. Partner 5A felt upset and flooded because he felt like they could spend the money and he wanted have fun with their friends. Partner 5B felt upset because she felt they did not have any extra money to spend. Both partners reportedly became defensive and separated in order to calm down. They were able to calm down and decide upon a compromise (have dinner at home, but go out with friends for drinks).

**Theme Planning, Acceptable**

- Partner 1B reported that the conversation shifted from arguing about finances to discussing ways to focus and plan on keeping a healthy relationship.

In summary, responses to question number two appeared to reflect how unacceptable communication skills were tied to conflict and a sense of disconnection for partners one and three. It appeared that conflict, financial management, acceptable communication skills and a sense of connectedness were also tied through dynamic processes for partners one and five. It also appeared that conflict resolution was tied to a sense of connectedness for couple number six.

**Post-Intervention Question #3**

The following is a qualitative analysis of the post-intervention question number three: What about the workshop do you remember as being helpful in your relationship? Although the participants occasionally offered references to Gottman’s Sound Relational House Theory, their elaborations helped in coding them using the existing twelve themes for consistency. The following are examples of thematic coding:

**Theme Communication, Acceptable**

- Partner 1B stated; “No matter how much we actually have committed to rote memorization the concepts are with us on a programmatic level and we are attempting to adapt and adopt the ideas from the class into our relationship and our individual lives. This class has also helped me to a great degree in communication of my expectations and relations with my children and to a lesser degree with clients and social acquaintances. Admittedly, I am not too sure how long the tools gained will remain in my tool chest, but am kind of certain that the more they are used the longer they will aid me in maintenance of my marriage and all interpersonal relations”.

- Partner 2A stated that the most helpful take-away was the 5 to 1 ratio. “It really
increased my sensitivity to how (my wife) and I were treating each other and how that could be improved”. Partner 2B stated that what she found most interesting was how well her husband responded to some of the suggestions during the workshop. She added; “He actually has improved in his communication with me and I have stopped ragging on him and my son. I do try to count 5 things well-said about their behavior before offering my ‘re-direction.’ It has seemed to work”.

Theme Conflict, Resolved

- Partner 3A replied with “I think it gave a greater awareness of the negative emotions and cycles we can get ourselves stuck in, and some skills to deal with those emotions in the heat of the moment”.
- Partner 5A stated that he used the information about how you start a fight is how it will end and taking 20 to 30 minutes when you become flooded to calm down because you can’t think straight. Partner 5B had a similar answer; “I liked learning how you start a fight is how it will end and we have started to use taking a break to de-escalate before discussing things again”.

Theme Connectedness

- Partner 1A stated that he remembered and liked the example of taking a temperature reading and “the thing about touching each other”. Partner 1B responded by stating that she “gained a realization that marriage is the best thing for a couple. The inherent worth in staying together and working past all difficulties and the benefits of a healthy marriage. The idea that we are not broken but all can gain from a fair amount of social, emotional, mental and physical maintenance”.
- Partner 3B stated; “One of the biggest things from the workshop for me stems from the metaphor of the foundation of a house. Similar to the structure of a home, a solid foundation in my relationship is essential in maintaining and building a structurally sound relationship. Without a solid foundation in our relationship, I believe that my partner and I would eventually go our separate ways. I find that I am more cognizant of the impact that I have on the structure of my relationship because I recognize the importance of the foundation in our relationship”.

Theme Planning, Acceptable

- Partner 5A replied; “Coming up with a shared goal for our future so that we are on the
same page. With each person’s dreams and aspirations involved”. Partner 5B stated that the couple was now considering how their decisions affect their future.

**Post-Intervention Question #4**

The analyses of the post-intervention interview question number four began with asking the participants to answer the following question: According to the daily agenda of the workshop, these were the topics that we covered (agenda will be looked at by research assistants and partner). What, if anything, do you remember and have found helpful? Although the participants expectantly offered references to Gottman’s Sound Relational House Theory, their elaborations helped in coding them using the existing twelve themes for consistency. The following are examples of thematic coding:

*Theme Communication, Acceptable*

- Partner 1A gave “Positive Sentiment Override” as an example of how he had tried to change his interactions and communication with partner.
- Partner 2A admitted that he learned that when he avoids the arguments between his wife and son that he feels more negative so learning about “Positive Sentiment Override” helped to “reorient” himself.
- Both Partner 3A and Partner 3B cited that they had been working on decreasing their use of “Four Horsemen” in their discussions. Partner 3B remembered the antidotes to these toxic communication styles.
- Partner 5A remembered that you need more positives (in communication) than negatives because 5 negatives equal 1 positive.

*Theme Conflict, Resolved*

- Partner 1A replied with “Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems”. Partner 1B stated “It seems that in relationships there is plenty of negativity (conflict), but it is far less remembered than the positive things. I believe we are closer (from these) and in their positive aspects have lessened the frequency of our negative patterns of behavior and conflict”.
- Partner 2A listed “Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems” as influencing his recent behaviors in his relationship. Partner 2B listed “Dreams Within Conflict” as a concept she remembered to deal with their impasses along with “Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems”.
- Partner 3A recalled the information about diffuse physiological response saying that he flooded easily. Partner 3B remembered “Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems” as helpful.
• Partner 5A cited “Regulation of Conflict” as “how you start a conversation is how it will end, this has been very helpful”. Partner 5B remembered the rules of when one of them gets flooded as being the most helpful. “We remember to take time apart if we need to calm down and then get back to the conversation. That was very beneficial to our relationship. We also remember the ways to identify if a person is flooding with the heart rate and physiological responses. We remember that when a person gets flooded they can’t cognitively operate at their best”.

• Partner 7A remembered the “Regulation of Conflict” section saying; “it has been helpful to know we won’t ever solve every conflict so pressure has been lifted to compromise on everything”.

**Theme Connectedness**

• Partner 1B recalled the section “Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration” and cited this as helping her to being closer to her partner.

• Partner 2A cited remembering and benefiting from learning about the concept of “Turning Toward vs. Turning Away”. Partner 2B cited “Fondness and Admiration” as beneficial for helping them become closer.

• Partner 3A gave “Culture of Fondness and Admiration” and Turning Toward vs. Turning Away” as helpful sections. Partner 3B recalled the block of instruction called “Love Maps” saying that “it was fun learning more about him”.

• Partner 4A stated that the section “Fondness and Admiration is important to every relationship”. Partner 4B remembered “Love maps” as being “an enjoyable exercise” and also cited “Fondness and Admiration” as important for “couples to be more accepting of each other”.

• Partner 5A remembered Love Maps as being “getting to know your partner better” as semi helpful because they were already doing this. He added; “The simple things are helpful to learn about even though they seem not that important at first”. He stated that “Culture of Fondness and Admiration was very helpful and important; we remember the importance of saying loving things to each other and spending quality time together. Making time to spend together and not just get caught up in the business of life”. Partner 5A cited “Turning Towards” as being “the importance of sharing a united path and goal in life buy turning towards each other in stressful times”. He admitted that he didn’t
remember as much in this section. Partner 5B cited “Culture of Fondness and
Admiration” as important adding; “Try to focus on the nice things”.

- Partner 6A cited “love maps” as important because “people tend to grow apart over
time”. He added that “Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations as well as Creating
Shared Meaning helped couples keep on the same page”. Partner 6B stated that she
found “Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration as important to help when
things aren’t going as well. This has helped bring me and my partner closer”.

- Partner 7A and Partner 7B both remembered “Love Maps” and found that segment
helpful in getting them to know each other better. Partner 7A also remembered “Turning
Toward vs. Turning Away” stating; “It was helpful for us to know how we respond to
each other’s bids. I most liked the emotional bank account because we realized when it
keeps getting lower and lower it gets to a certain point where there is no fixing it. I liked
bids of connection because we realized we turn away from each other’s bids a lot”.  
Partner 7B remembered and liked the segment on “Positive Sentiment Override” and
liked the demonstration with money explaining how negative comments and actions cost
a lot in our relationship and how important it is to build up with nice actions. Both
Partner 7A and Partner 7B also really liked the rituals because this has helped us create
new ones with each other.

**Theme Family, Acceptable**

- Partner 5A cited “Focusing on our goals and aspirations and cleaving to each other
instead of our individual families”. Partner 5B cited “Creating Shared Meaning” as
“very helpful especially when planning out the future together as a couple regarding
children…”.

**Theme Finances, Managed**

- Partner 5B cited “Creating Shared Meaning” as “very helpful especially when planning
out the future together as a couple regarding …career and finances”.

**Theme Planning, Acceptable**

- Partner 1B stated that she was also “struck” by “Honoring Hopes, Dreams and
Aspirations”; and “Creating Shared Meaning”. Partner 2B talked about discussing their
dreams and hopes “instead of allowing tempers to rise”.

- Partner 4A remembered “Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations, Creating Shared Meaning” as
being “similar but helpful as couples grow older together”.

- Partner 5A remembered “Honoring Hopes and Dreams” as “very helpful to newly married couples. It is important to learn about each other’s goals and aspirations in life so that we can learn more about each other. Focusing on our goals and aspirations and cleaving to each other instead of our individual families”. Partner 5B shared that “Creating Shared Meaning was important for learning about each other’s goals and aspirations and creating a shared goal in life for our relationship, making sure to include and merge both people’s goals. Sometimes you may need to sacrifice your goals to some degree in order to create a shared goal that works for both people.

- Partner 7B liked the segment on honoring each other’s hopes dreams and aspirations because it helped us share dreams with each other so we can help support those things.

**Post-Intervention Question #5**

The analyses of the post-intervention interview questions number five began with asking the participants to answer the following question: Rank order aspects named under questions three (3) and four (4). Once again, the participants expectantly offered references to Gottman’s Sound Relational House Theory. Unfortunately, they were not asked to elaborate on these answers so the elaborations given for questions three and four helped in coding. The highest ranked only is shown here using the existing twelve themes. The complete raw rankings are given after the coding for the number one ranked responses followed by their distribution:

**Theme Communication, Acceptable**

- Partner 1A (ranked #1) Positive Sentiment Override
- Partner 3A (ranked #1) Four Horsemen
- Partner 3B (ranked #1) Four Horsemen
- Partner 5B (ranked #1) Rules of flooding and physiological response
- Partner 7B (ranked #1) Positive Sentiment Override

**Theme Conflict, Resolved**

- Partner 1B (ranked #1 as Conflict, Resolved tied into Connectedness) Staying together and working through problems that we can solve.
- Partner 5A (ranked #1) Regulation of Conflict
**Theme Connectedness**

- Partner 1B (ranked #1 as Conflict Resolved tied into Connectedness) Staying together and working through problems that we can solve.
- Partner 2A (ranked #1) Turning Toward versus Turning Away.
- Partner 2B (ranked #1) Fondness and Admiration
- Partner 4A (ranked #1) Fondness and Admiration
- Partner 4B (ranked #1) Fondness and Admiration
- Partner 6A (ranked #1) Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration
- Partner 6B (ranked #1) Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration
- Partner 7A (ranked #1) Emotional Bank Account because we realized when it keeps getting lower and lower it gets to a certain point where there is no fixing it.

**Post-Intervention Interview Rankings**

**Partner 1A**
- #1) Positive Sentiment Override
- #2) Solvable versus Perpetual Problems

**Partner 1B**
- #1) Solvable versus Perpetual Problems (Conflict Resolved tied into Connectedness, “staying together and working through problems that we can solve”)
- #2) Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration
- #3) Creating Shared Meaning
- #4) Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations

**Partner 2A**
- #1) Turning Toward versus Turning Away
- #2) Positive Sentiment Override
- #3) Solvable versus Perpetual Problems

**Partner 2B**
- #1) Fondness and Admiration
- #2) Solvable versus Perpetual Problems
- #3) Dreams Within Conflict

**Partner 3A**
- #1) Four Horsemen
• #2) Diffuse Physiological Response
• #3) Culture of Fondness and Admiration
• #4) Turning Toward versus Turning Away

**Partner 3B**
• #1) Four Horsemen
• #2) Solvable versus Perpetual Problems
• #3) Love Maps

**Partner 4A**
• #1) Fondness and Admiration
• #2) Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations
• #3) Creating Shared Meaning

**Partner 4B**
• #1) Fondness and Admiration
• #2) Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations
• #3) Creating Shared Meaning
• #4) Love Maps

**Partner 5A**
• #1) Regulation of Conflict
• #2) Turning Towards versus Turning Away
• #3) Honoring Hopes Dreams and Admirusions (tied to planning, and family)
• #4) Creating Shared Meaning (tied to family and finances)
• #5) Culture of Fondness and Admiration

**Partner 5B**
• #1) Rules of Flooding and Physiological Response
• #2) Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations
• #3) Creating Shared Meaning
• #4) Culture of Fondness and Admiration

**Partner 6A**
• #1) Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration
• #2) Creating Shared Meaning
• #3) Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations
Partner 6B

- #1) Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration
- #2) Creating Shared Meaning
- #3) Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations
- #4) Love Maps

Partner 7A

- #1) Emotional Bank Account because we realized when it keeps getting lower and lower it gets to a certain point where there is no fixing it.
- #2) Bids for Connection because we realized we turn away from each other’s bids a lot.
- #3) Rituals
- #4) Love Maps
- #5) Regulation of Conflict

Partner 7B

- #1) Positive Sentiment Override
- #2) Hopes Dreams Aspirations
- #3) Rituals
- #4) Love Maps

Table 6. Final Distribution of Gottman Concept Rankings (Total in Descending Order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gottman Concepts:</th>
<th>Number of Participants who ranked as:</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration” - “Emotional Bank Account”</td>
<td>5  1  1  1  1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Honoring Hopes, Dreams, and Aspirations”</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Creating Shared Meaning”</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Regulation of Conflict” - “Solvable Problems and Perpetual Problems”</td>
<td>2  3  1  0  1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Love Maps”</td>
<td>0  0  1  4  0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Turning Toward versus Turning Away” - “Bids for Connection”</td>
<td>1  2  0  1  0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Positive Sentiment Override”</td>
<td>2  1  0  0  0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”</td>
<td>2  0  0  0  0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Diffuse Physiological Response” (Flooding)</td>
<td>1  1  0  0  0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Rituals”</td>
<td>0  0  2  0  0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dreams Within Conflict”</td>
<td>0  0  1  0  0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Pre-Intervention Questionnaire appeared to stimulate a perspective of what was not acceptable in the couples’ relationship at the time prior to the workshop beginning. Question one and two dealt with what the participants were hoping to gain from the workshop, whereas three and four appeared to gather their concerns and goals. The post-intervention responses indicated both a positive perspective (questions one, three, four, and five) and a negative perspective (question number two). The data prompted “initial hunches about how concepts relate hypotheses because they link two or more concepts, explaining the what, why, where, and how of phenomena”, (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.135). As such examples of the written responses on the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire question one and two are compared here to post-intervention responses in table number seven as a means to identify if the workshop may have addressed the participants’ indicated needs. The written responses on the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire question three and four are compared to Post-Intervention Responses in table number eight as a means to identify the degree to which participants’ adopted or indicated any benefit from the workshop. The asterisks (*) indicate exceptions to data found for themes.

Table 7. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Questions 1 and 2 to Intervention Question Responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication Status Reported Before Workshop</td>
<td>Communication, Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3A “improve communication to build awareness of any issues we need to address as a couple”. 3B wanted to discussing “improving communication”.

Partners 3A and B commented on how they saw the four horsemen in their communication and how it created a distance at times.

The group overall noted that changing the way in which they talked with each other was critical and how they were not aware that paying attention to their partners’ actions such as sitting close or touching was important to maintaining their relationships. Several members admitted to poor communication skills.
Table 7. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Questions 1 and 2 to Intervention Question responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Communication Status During Workshop</th>
<th>Communication, Acceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>3A wrote information was helpful for him to work on communication, and would start “immediately” turning toward partner when she talked and listen instead of on the “superficial level” he had been doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Abilities</td>
<td>Conflict Reported Before Workshop</td>
<td>Conflict, Unresolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>1A wanted to “manage differences”, talk about ways in which to “deal with personal differences”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partners 1A and B were both active during this discussion period (Regulation of Conflict). They both voiced to the group that they had gotten used to arguing instead of talking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Abilities</td>
<td>Conflict Reported During Workshop</td>
<td>Conflict, Resolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>1A wrote that he felt better with Gottman’s position that not all conflict was solvable, and would “run drills” and “discuss complaints with respect”.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a group, the participants appeared to be engaging in a dialogue together and increasingly with others after this block (Honoring Dreams and Aspirations) of information about how they felt that the preceding information touched on mutual respect for one another and how most of their arguments were not really as important as it seemed at the time.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Questions 1 and 2 to Intervention Question Responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness Perspective</td>
<td><strong>Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disconnectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Field Notes During Workshop</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2A wanted to “get closer to spouse”. 2B discuss “empathy toward each other”, wanted to “be a better partner by learning to understand him better”.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Partner 2B had been the least active of the group up to this point but offered that he had been neglectful at home.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group overall noted that changing the way in which they talked with each other was critical and how they were not aware that paying attention to their partners’ actions such as sitting close or touching was important to maintaining their relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness Perspective</td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Field Notes During Workshop</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2A input after “Love Maps” was predominately on feeling more connected with spouse, Found “Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations” section helpful to “be on the same page”. 2B stated feeling more connected from the block of instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the group members were noted to smile during this discussion period (Love Maps) at least briefly while they talked to one another about their first dates.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An interesting observation was that all group members were noted to hold hands, kiss quickly, or at least touch one another at some point during this discussion (Turning Toward vs. Turning Away).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td><strong>Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family, Unacceptable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Family Dynamics Before Workshop</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both Partner 5A and 5B wanted to discuss having children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family, Acceptable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Family Dynamics During Workshop</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*5A did not address this directly. 5B stated would “use their own rituals instead of their families”. She added that they should continue this even after they have children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Questions 1 and 2 to Intervention Question Responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finances</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial Perspective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Finances, Unmanaged</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td>1A and 1B wrote that they wanted to learn how to” deal with their financial situation”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5A discuss “money” management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Field Notes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partners 1A and B agreed that they focused too much on materialistic things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partners 5A and B joined in that “always talking about money stood in the way of making important decisions”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finances</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial Perspective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Finances, Managed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
<td>1B stated that the relationship was more important than their “financial situation”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*5A did not note this area on the intervention form, he did talk about it with the group and noted that they would “make decisions together” and plan “quiet dinners together”, both of which were demonstrated in Post-Intervention Response by not going to dinner with friends but having drinks only with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning Abilities Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning, Unacceptable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Field Notes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner 4B had been tentative about offering group input but voiced her concerns about building a future together as a couple and family. Partner 4A voiced that he and his wife were able to plan together, for the most part due to their faith but illness, school and finances had made this a little more difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning Abilities During Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning, Acceptable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Field Notes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>During Workshop</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All members discussed making plans to start doing things for their partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Goals and Top Concerns to Post-Intervention Responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication Status Reported Before Workshop</td>
<td>Communication, Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2A- top concern “better communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3A- top concern “improve communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3B- goal “improve communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication Status Reported After Workshop</td>
<td>Communication, Acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2A admitted that he learned that when he avoids the arguments between his wife and son that he feels more negative so learning about “Positive Sentiment Override” helped to “reorient” himself. Both 3A and 3B cited that they had been working on decreasing their use of “Four Horsemen” in their discussions. 3B remembered the antidotes to these toxic communication styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>Communication, Acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner 2B was vocal stating that this information (Love Maps) “made sense and remembering what brought them together was helpful as well as checking in with each other periodically instead of always talking about their bills”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication, Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partners 3A and B commented on how they saw the four horsemen in their communication and how it created a distance at times. The group overall noted that changing the way in which they talked with each other was critical and how they were not aware that paying attention to their partners’ actions such as sitting close or touching was important to maintaining their relationships. Several members admitted to poor communication skills. Partner 1A was increasingly active this discussion period (Positive Sentiment Override). He stated that he and his wife need to listen to one another instead of criticizing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Goals and Top Concerns to Post-Intervention Responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving Abilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict Reported Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict, Unresolved</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1A was most concerned about how they “handled difficult situations”. Both 7A 7 B were concerned about their “arguing”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving Abilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict Reported After Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict, Resolved</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Field Notes During Workshop |                               | *Although 1B gave an example of resolving conflict, 1A did not but he gave “Positive Sentiment Override” as an example of how he had tried to change his interactions and communication with partner.
Neither 7A or 7B gave examples of resolving conflict but both agreed that living with a family member is a root for conflict between them. 7A remembered the “Regulation of Conflict” section saying; “it has been helpful to know we won’t ever solve every conflict so pressure has been lifted to compromise on everything”. |
| **Conflict, Resolved**     |                               | Partner 7B was becoming the most active at this point of the day. She stated that their main problem was not being able to work through their issues together. As a group, the participants appeared to be engaging in a dialogue together and increasingly with others after this block (Honoring Dreams and Aspirations) of information about how they felt that the preceding information touched on mutual respect for one another and how most of their arguments were not really as important as it seemed at the time. |
| **Conflict, Unresolved**   |                               | Partners 1A and B were both active during this discussion period (Regulation of Conflict). They both voiced to the group that they had gotten used to arguing instead of talking. |
Table 8. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Goals and Top Concerns to Post-Intervention Responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Togetherness Perspective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Togetherness Perspective Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disconnectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1B was concerned about how they were not working “as a team”, and had “lack of romance”. 1B listed goal of “understanding each other and cooperating together”. 7B had the goal of “doing more nice things for each other”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Togetherness Perspective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Togetherness Perspective After Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1B noted that after the fight over finances, they talked and the evening became intimate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Notes During Workshop</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the group members were noted to smile during this discussion period (Love Maps) at least briefly while they talked to one another about their first dates. Partner 1A voiced how he felt that he and his wife should “cherish each other even in the hard times”. They had exhibited some distancing and anger/irritation toward one another up to this point. An interesting observation was that all group members were noted to hold hands, kiss quickly, or at least touch one another at some point during this discussion (Turning Toward versus Turning Away).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Disconnectedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner 7A voiced that he and his partner were allowing their living situation to come between them. 7B voiced that they just avoided each other at home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Goals and Top Concerns to Post-Intervention Responses—continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family Dynamics Before Workshop</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family, Unacceptable</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|             | 2A was most concerned about his “spouse’s relationship with teenage son”.  
|             | 2B top concern was “disciplining our son”.  
|             | 7B was concerned about having children and the strain felt from “in-laws”. |
| **Family**  | **Family Dynamics After Workshop** | **Family, Acceptable**      |
|             | *2A and 2B both cite an example where 2A withdrew to room after 2B and son were arguing, however, 2A admitted that he learned that when he avoids the arguments between his wife and son that he feels more negative so learning about “Positive Sentiment Override” helped to “reorient” himself.  
|             | *7B reported that she was experiencing “stress” living with in-laws but reported having a date night at home. She reported that they drove together to the store with the dogs in the car and that her partner let her pick out a movie. The couple went home and watched the movie together in their bedroom. |
| **Finances**| **Financial Perspective Before Workshop** | **Finances, Unmanaged**     |
|             | 5B was concerned about “finances”.  
|             | 7B listed her concern about “money”. |
| **Finances**| **Financial Perspective After Workshop** | **Finances, Managed**       |
|             | 5B stated that friends wanted them to go out for food and drinks but, which prompted an argument but they were able to calm down and decide upon a compromise (have dinner at home, but go out with friends for drinks).  
|             | *7B No direct examples reported for concerns about “money”. 7B reported that she is stressed living with family but both cite that they are developing “rituals together. |
Table 8. Examples of Comparing Pre-Intervention Goals and Top Concerns to Post-Intervention Responses- continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Planning Abilities Before Workshop</td>
<td>Planning, Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1B had the goal of “establishing a routing”.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7A listed the goal of having the relationship be “long lasting and happy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning Abilities After Workshop</td>
<td>Planning, Acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1B reported that they went to dinner and discussed the state of their relationship and planning their lives for the next couple of years. The couple discussed how they were feeling honestly; they reported feeling stable and secure afterward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes During Workshop</td>
<td>Planning, Acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7B “liked the segment on honoring each other’s hopes dreams and aspirations because it helped us share dreams with each other so we can help support those things”. This, along with their report of developing rituals together, coincides with 7A’s stated goal of having a long lasting relationship. The couple has yet to marry at the time of the interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning, Acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner 1A was the first to talk this discussion break (Honoring Dreams and Aspirations). He appeared excited with this information calling it “a road map to life”. Partner 1B stated admitted that she had been worried about the couple’s future together. She added that they had not been able to discuss this together without talking about their finances and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning, Unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner 7B offered that her and her husband need to revisit this information after the workshop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Eight couples initially presented to this faithful presentation of John Gottman’s research findings. The presentation was offered on a Saturday in an eight-hour psychoeducational workshop format. One couple chose to leave at the midpoint so their data was excluded from the study. A qualitative measure in the Grounded Theory Tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized to examine the participants’ perspectives of their relational experiences. The findings were obtained by triangulating written surveys from the participants on a Pre-Intervention Questionnaire, an Intervention Questionnaire, as well as the researcher’s field notes during the intervention, and the participants’ audio-taped post-intervention interviews a month after they had attended the workshop.

Summary of Findings

The following twelve themes emerged from the data through constant comparison: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6)Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; 10) Finances, Unmanaged; 11) Planning, Acceptable; and 12) Planning, Unacceptable. Analysis began with the responses from the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire, which offered an immediate glance into past and present experiences of the participants. Some offered what they hoped to gain as a result of attending the workshop. The pre-intervention responses appeared to be framing some relationship difficulties in a manner that indicated hope or possibility for repair, for example, “I would like to understand ‘him’ or ‘her’ better”. This is in contrast to the statement, “I don’t know my partner anymore”, which clearly indicated a lacking of connection but without a verbalized longing for connection. The participants wrote that they looked forward to rekindling a lost connection overall in their relationship and many sought to improve their communication skills. The latter was often linked to conflict, often involving finances and diverse family issues.

Although initially the participants were focused on improving their communication and conflict resolution skills, their participation levels along with expressed interest in specific blocks of information appeared to change throughout the workshop day. The group participation was primarily between couples at the beginning of the workshop. However, as the day progressed, the participants became more vocal and animated consistent with the developing stages seen in group literature (e.g., Hill & Gruner, 1973). Participation was higher after some blocks of
information than others, for example after Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration and Honoring Hopes, Dreams, and Aspiration. The group discussed both of these blocks of information past the allotted time, particularly Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration. Similar to Hill’s (1969) discussion where group participation was noted to stimulate group learning, the higher activity level of these discussion periods coincided with the participants’ number one preferences of Gottman concepts presented in their post-intervention interview responses. A particular observation noted after the information on Turning Toward versus Turning Away, was most of the participants began to hold hands, some briefly kissed, and others touched at least for a short period of time. This Gottman concept was also a high preference of the participants in their post-intervention interview responses.

The participants’ data indicated some interesting developments when coding the post-intervention interview responses. Post-intervention interview questions one through four were coded using the coding key. The following ten themes emerged: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family, Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; and 10) Planning, Acceptable. Although Communication and Conflict Resolution themes were expected to be coded more than the others as indicated by the participants’ pre-intervention goals, the theme Connectedness was coded considerably more times than the others. Conflict Resolution and Communication, Acceptable were also discussed by the participants very heavily along with Planning, Acceptable but to a lesser degree.

Lastly, for post intervention interview question number five, the participants were asked to rank-order their answers to question three and four relative to their perceived usefulness. The participants’ number one choices were coded using the coding key and the findings in descending order of use were: 1) Connectedness; 2) Communication, Acceptable; and 3) Conflict Resolved. This corroborated the findings, as discussed above, of the final coding seen in the post-intervention interviews questions one through four. However, the final distribution of the participants’ rank ordered answers to post-intervention interview question number five indicated a deviation in that the specific Gottman concept of Conflict Resolution was cited fourth overall as being useful. This shift in focus may have indicated that, although the participants had continuing concerns for coping with their relational communication skills and ability to resolve their conflicts, they were finding it important to look deeper for causal and resolution factors.
They may have also prioritized what they actually were perceiving to be important within their relationships by way of nurturing and honoring each other’s hopes and dreams.

**Trustworthiness**

Although every attempt was made to preserve trustworthiness, the researcher performed the analysis thereby compromising it. Dependability was also an issue in that the investigator had completed the Level III Gottman Method Training and the assistants which conducted the post-intervention interviews had also completed the Gottman Level II Method Training. Other factors increased the trustworthiness of the study:

1) The investigator had no prior knowledge of the participants or their relationship dynamics;
2) Data was primarily from the participants’ written perspectives with the exception of researcher field notes; 3) The post-intervention responses were audio-taped, transcribed by an outside agent, then e-mailed to the participants for confirmation of authenticity; 4) A Peer Debriefing; 5) Negative case analysis by immersing into the data, and continually revising the hypothesis and thematic coding and; 6) The participants’ post-intervention interviews were conducted independently of one another.

The data was triangulated using three sources of data for a variety of purposes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006): 1) Written questionnaires from the workshop participants before the workshop and at several points during the workshop; 2) Researcher field notes during the workshop and; and 3) Audio taped interviews from the participants after they had been home for a month. The inquiry process has been delineated in detail with transparency of results offered. This helps to establish rigor in the present study (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

**Extension/Elaboration of Theory Using a Qualitative Method in the Grounded Theory Tradition**

The first research question sought to uncover what the participants would cite as being useful after attending this eight-hour workshop and being home a month. The participants cited that they were having difficulties in the relationship. Their initial goals were to improve their communication and conflict resolution skills to repair these difficulties. An interesting development was indicated by a shift in how the participants were addressing their relationship difficulties. This appeared to be tied into the second research question asking what new theory emerged as a result of using Grounded theory. This shift was as a result of allowing the participants to actively participate as well as valuing their input. Active participation may possibly change clients’ expectations by valuing their perspectives (Fluckiger, et. al., 2012). This
relatively new phenomena has very little literature to date and has only been examined using long termed therapy. The present study indicates that encouraging participation and valuing the participants’ perspectives may also be important to improving the effectiveness of psychoeducation given in a workshop format. Field notes corroborated that encouraging participation and valuing their input was an important process in the manner in which the participation seen in the discussion periods was reflected in the post-intervention interview responses. Feedback has been explored as triggering central goals, expectations, and proactive actions (DeNisi & Klugar, 2000; Klugar & DeNisi, 1996).

Limitations

Clients’ participation may be dependent upon conditions seen in the literature concerning group stages (e.g., Hill & Gruner, 1973). The present study indicated that participation increased throughout the workshop day, which may suggest their need to be more comfortable with each other to share personal information. Workshops are brief in nature and developing a therapeutic rapport may be difficult but essential. Therapeutic alliance has been shown to explain as much as 22% of outcome variance (Johnson & Talitman, 1997; Knobloch-Feddeis, Pinsof, & Mann, 2007). Developing a therapeutic alliance with the workshop participants as a group proved to be difficult with limited success. One positive result from time constraints limiting the ability to establish a therapeutic rapport may be that any expectancy placed on the participants by the researcher was curtailed by the lack of familiarity. This probably decreased the possibility of a Rosenthal or “Pygmalia” effect, which is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy where observed behaviors improve with the greater expectancy placed (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). However, there may have been an unintentional Hawthorne effect, named after the work site in which the experiment was undertaken. This is where research participants are noted to improve or modify their behaviors being measured as a response to being observed or experimental manipulation. For example, every attempt was made to call the participants to task during the discussion periods but a couple of periods went over time, which may have affected the post-intervention data. Jones (1992) reviewed the original data which first cited the existence of the phenomena termed the Hawthorn effect and argued against the existence of the effect in the original experiment due to having no comparison group to compare the results. This may be argued for the present study as well.
The sample size of the study was relatively small and although the criterion was open to couples of any sexual orientation, all of the participants were heterosexual. The cultural representation was diverse but with no African American representation. The data from the present study may not be transferable to a wide population due to it being obtained from a single sample pool from the general area of East Orlando, Florida. In addition, because the workshop site was located in an affluent neighborhood close to a large state university, most of the participants had higher educational degrees further limiting the transferability. Follow-up for the post-intervention questions was after one month, which negatively affects any assertions made from the outcome. Research to extend the time period for follow-up is clearly indicated. Finally, the workshop was in English which probably contributed to one couple whose primary language was Spanish exiting at the mid-point of the day (see discussion below).

**Implications for Future Research**

State and federal support has focused primarily on marriage education, which is generally provided in the form of workshops (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Because of the current cost of couple’s therapy, there appears to be a demand for research to be focused on how to improve their efficacy. Sprenkle and Blow (2004a) suggested that the research should continue by expanding to include broader variables than just model-specific factors. Sparks and Duncan (2009) suggested that one broad variable that should be explored further is feedback. They asserted that the feedback process is a vehicle to modify any delivered treatment for client benefit adding that because of this, it should be considered as a common factor. Gathering feedback from the perspective of the participants as experts (see review, Lee et.al, 2004) was at the heart of data collection in the present study. Through the use of Grounded theory, results from the data suggested that encouraging participation and valuing the participants’ perspectives may be important to improving the effectiveness of psychoeducation given in a workshop format. Further research is indicated to explore the implications of this study at longer follow-up intervals and possibly using formal methods of collecting client feedback as suggested by Lambert and Shimokawa (2011).

In conclusion, the participants clearly indicated that they learned and valued what they were expecting to learn from the workshop. There were a few notable exceptions that not all expectations were met in the workshop such as Partner 5A and 5B wanted to discuss having children, yet he did not address this directly during the workshop or after the workshop. He did
note that they need to be “on the same page” regarding planning their future. Partner 5A also did not directly address his pre-intervention goal of managing finances during the workshop but noted that they would “make decisions together” and plan “quiet dinners together”, both of which were demonstrated in his post-intervention response by not going to dinner with friends but having drinks only with them. Partner 1A wanted to address managing finances in the workshop but only mentioned it in a discussion period and did not write this on the intervention questionnaire. In post-intervention interviews, both Partner 1A and 1B reported having an argument about finances but 1B did say that after arguing about finances, they were able to overcome the money issues and maintain an intimate evening. They were then able to discuss how to plan or focus on maintaining a healthy relationship.

Partner 7A also had hoped to address money management but did not indicate this in the intervention or post-intervention data. Partners 7A and 7B stated they were living with his relatives which was a source of conflict. There were also a few exceptions indicated from Pre-Intervention Questionnaire responses to post-intervention responses. Similarly, although there may not have been indicated to directly address their hopes for their relationships, other themes were tied together to indicate a change process for example; Partner 1B provided an example of resolving conflict, her partner did not but he gave “Positive Sentiment Override” as an example of how he had tried to change his interactions and communication with his partner. Neither Partner 7A or 7B gave examples of resolving conflict but both agreed that living with a family member was a root of conflict between them. Partner 7A remembered the “Regulation of Conflict” section saying; “it has been helpful to know we won’t ever solve every conflict so pressure has been lifted to compromise on everything”. Partner 2A and 2B both had the goal of better parenting of their son but this was only negatively addressed by both during and after the workshop. Partner 2B also indicated an episode were her husband’s relatives visited that was not acceptable.

One problem that arose from the Intervention Questionnaire was from question number one. The question asked simply how helpful was this block of information, which was meant to ascertain, from the participants, the usefulness of the preceding block of instruction. It appears that the design of the fifth question from the post-intervention interview, which asked to rank order the responses, would have served to be more beneficial for the Intervention Questionnaire if saved until all blocks of instruction were completely presented and asked at the end of the workshop.
There may have rendered a more visible link between the intervention and the post-intervention responses. Another difficulty that arose was asking the participants to design an intervention. There was some confusion by a few participants as to what this meant and others wrote procedures they would do such as; “make a list and check in”. No responses reflecting these procedures were noted in their post-intervention responses although the importance of designating the participants as experts is apparent (see review, Lee & Everett, 2004).

There was an attrition of one couple departing around midday for the treatment group. Interesting of note, they were the eldest of all the couples from both workshops. They were also Hispanic and appeared to struggle with English. As stated earlier, unfortunately, the workshop was in English with the researcher lacking in the skills to speak fluent Spanish. There were others who spoke Spanish in attendance that helped to clarify some of the material presented. This couple was also noted to take their breaks outside away from others and engage in notably loud discussions. They offered very little input on their questionnaires as well. The following Monday, the wife was e-mailed three local referrals for couples therapy including the free couples and family therapy clinic at the University of Central Florida. A follow-up was attempted at one month in which they declined to participate but reported that they were still together.

Another couple from the pilot group reported filing for divorce at one month follow-up but claimed that the workshop helped them to admit to each other that they were not happy in their marriage. Several couples have made multiple contacts since this time to report that they learned quite a lot that has helped their marriage and have tried to continue practicing some of the principles. No one has reported that the workshop was detrimental, offensive, or detracted from their relationships in any way. Many commented that the workshop day was exceptionally long and difficult to keep focus on the material. Some replied that it should be spread out because there was too much information for one day.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose was to provide a faithful presentation of an eight-hour, couples’ psychoeducational workshop based on Gottman’s research to explore the participants’ responses to questions about their experiences from the workshop. The purpose extended to exploring the results of encouraging active participation from workshop participants’ through gathering and valuing their perspectives at various intervals. To accomplish this, the participants completed a short, open-ended item paper and pencil questionnaire before the intervention regarding their expectations of the workshop and their individual relationship goals. Next, the participants discussed the information given and completed a paper and pencil, open-ended survey after each block of instruction, to prompt input concerning the information given. Field notes were written reflecting observations of the participants during the discussion periods following each block of instruction. Lastly, after the workshop and one month in their home environment, the participants returned to be interviewed. They answered five open-ended questions with prompts to provide relational experiences, both good and bad events which had occurred since attending the workshop. In addition, they were asked what, if any, workshop concepts they had found to be useful, including rank ordering those specific concepts. The workshop site was the private practice offices of the researcher in East Orlando, Florida. The criterion-based, opportunity sample of participants was gathered via flyers and randomly assigned. Seven couples were assigned to a pilot group and eight couples were assigned to a treatment group. Only data for the treatment group has been discussed for this study. One of the couples in the treatment group left about half-way during the intervention, therefore none of their data was utilized for the study. The unit of analysis was the responses obtained from each workshop participant through a Pre-Intervention Questionnaire, Intervention Questionnaire, post-intervention interview transcripts, and observational field notes. The data was analyzed using a qualitative method in the Grounded Theory Tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Through a constant comparative method of viewing the data from a perspective of what the participants stated they wanted from their relationship, twelve themes immerged: 1) Communication, Acceptable; 2) Communication, Unacceptable; 3) Conflict, Resolved; 4) Conflict, Unresolved; 5) Connectedness; 6) Disconnectedness; 7) Family, Acceptable; 8) Family,
Unacceptable; 9) Finances, Managed; 10) Finances, Unmanaged; 11) Planning, Acceptable; and 12) Planning, Unacceptable. The data is presented in the study utilizing these themes.

The data suggested that the intervention, for this sample, did make a difference for the participants a month after attending this workshop and returning to their home environments. An initiation effect (e.g., Howard, Kopta, Krause, & Orlinsky, 1986) associated with making an initial psychotherapy appointment, could account for the initial change seen in the participants data during the workshop. Although the data suggests that an initial change did take place, after attending the workshop and being at home for a month, something transformative, and sustained, at least for this short period of time, was indicated to have happened. In addition, an interesting shift in personal focus for positive relationship maintenance appeared to have taken shape. For example, the most cited Gottman concept for the post-intervention responses was “Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration /Emotional Bank Account” along with “Hopes, Dreams, and admiration” and “Creating Shared Meaning.” Sentiment Override, which is a vital part of the Emotional Bank Account serves as a perceptual filter in how wives view their husbands’ behaviors as noted in the results of Hawkins et.al., (2002). Interesting to note was that resolving conflict, as a general idea, was represented fourth in participant responses.

These results are not surprising given similarities to works by others such as Pasch and Bradbury (1998) who indicated that affective tone, especially for wives, appeared to be more important than dialogue or whether couples can problem solve particular issues. Similarly, the core of the emotionally focused approach, Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), comes from an attachment model of adult intimacy with focus upon essential elements of behaviors that create more secure bonds between partners (Johnson, 1996). Restructuring or “softening” couples’ interactions has been found to enhance emotional engagement (Johnson & Greenberg, 1988). Gottman et.al., (1998) acknowledges similarities to EFT, and both Gottman and Johnson cite a confluence within their teams’ research processes (Young, 2005).

In conjunction with this, some empirically validated treatments such as Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (ICBT) have begun to focus more on emotion and have adopted supportive interactions such as acceptance to accent their behavioral techniques (Jacobson, Christensen, Prince, Cordova, & Eldridge, 2000). Although Gottman has denounced the use of behavioral techniques such as “Quid Pro Quo”, he touts the use of five positive behaviors or acknowledgments to every one negative one as a means to nurture the relationship (Gottman,
Fincham and Beacham (1988) cited both correlational and experimental findings that are aligned with the Gottman’s view that spousal cognitions, particularly attributions, influence marital behavior. This is consistent with Gottman’s concept of a fundamental attribution error, where a spouse’s attribution toward their partner is influenced by their existing cognitive and emotional state (Gottman, 1999). Although Gottman’s work does not directly identify the distressing meanings that particular micro- and macro-behavior patterns have, or why some couples develop such patterns but others do not, this concept, otherwise, is shared by empirically validated treatments such as Cognitive-Behavioral Marital Therapy (CBMT, Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

The first research question asked: Unprompted, and a month back in their daily lives, what would the participants’ responses reflect as being valuable about that experience and what would the rank order of those traits be? Initially, many of the participants stated that they wished for improved communication and conflict resolution. Many participants extended this to a desire for validating conversations about a future together, family and marital planning, as well as financial management. This data suggested that the participants were hoping for similar positive adjustments within their relationships to those seen in Holman and Jarvis (2003). They found that men and women who view their conflict style as validating had the highest stability and satisfaction, whether married or unmarried. These positive relationship adjustments may appear as a continuum ranging from hostile to volatile, to avoiding, to validating in terms of moving from a low quality relationship to high quality. The results were remarkably similar for both married and unmarried couples (Holman & Jarvis, 2003).

Snyder, Michael, and Cheavens, (1999) discussed the importance of cultivating clients’ hope to assist in their movement from a low quality relationship to a high quality relationship. One means, developing a working alliance, explained as much as 22% of outcome variance in a study of EFT (Johnson & Talitman, 1997). This may not predict progress at an individual level but has been found to account for 5% to 22% of the variance of improvement in marital distress (Knobloch-Feddeis, Pinsof, & Mann, 2007). Developing a working alliance proved to be a daunting task with limited success due to time constrictions apparent in the workshop format. In addition, because a language barrier existed, where the couple’s primary language was Spanish and the presenter spoke English only, this may have been, in part, at the root of one couple leaving the workshop early.
The second part of the first research question was to further specify the participants’ valued ideas from the workshop by rank ordering those discrete ideas and actions. This appeared to be closely tied to the second research question: By utilizing Grounded Theory Tradition, what new theory would emerge? Hill (1969) cited group learning as being tied to group participation. In the present study, the highest group participation periods were reflected in the post-intervention responses as the most valued of the Gottman concepts. The degree of active participation appeared to coincide with the shift seen in the participants’ responses. Valuing clients’ perspectives appears to change their expectations (Fluckiger, et. al., 2012). This was exampled by the participants’ pre-intervention responses of focusing upon changing their communication skills and conflict resolution to the post-intervention responses of primarily nurturing the relationship. Therefore, it may be viewed that an apparent new theory which emerged from the process of gathering the participants’ perspectives in a workshop was that it triggered central goals, expectations, and proactive actions (DeNisi & Klugar, 2000; Klugar & DeNisi, 1996). Additionally, the process of formally gathering the clients’ perspectives incrementally has been shown to reduce the clients’ symptomology by half (Lambert & Shimokawa, 2011). Although such impressive results are not expected in a workshop format, improvements within the participants’ relationships of this study were noted in their post-intervention responses after being home for a month.

Research Implications

Challenges to the marriage and family therapy field to close the gap between research and practice have been leveled (Pinsoff & Wynne, 2000). They noted that efficacy research does not show how or why models help to bring about positive change to couples adding that it is hard to control client and contextual variables. Sprenkle and Blow (2004a) reiterated the point that much of the current research tells us little about how change occurs, only that it does. Many studies have found similar results such as the study by Davis and Piercy (2007) who observed their participants to describe model-specific interventions, from the three different couples’ models being studied, to be of help in similar ways. Wampold (2001) noted that meta-analytic reviews of the comparative efficacy literature indicated no significant differences were seen among the different treatments. Others (Duncan & Miller, 2000) asserted that these findings were evidence that comparative efficacy research should stop. At any rate, the debate over these common factors to change within couples’ therapy is complex and the evidence, at this point, is far from
conclusive (Sexton, Ridley, & Kleiner, 2004). Sprenkle and Blow (2004a) suggested the research to continue by expanding to include broader variables than just model-specific factors. The heavily cited study by Lambert (1992) stated that these broad factors can be attributed to clients or extratherapeutic factors (40%), therapeutic relationship factors (30%), placebo, hope, and expectancy factors (15%) and the therapeutic model or interventions being used (15%).

Sparks and Duncan (2009) asserted a need to explore feedback stating that the feedback process was a vehicle to modify any delivered treatment for client benefit. They reported that it is collaborative, offers increased hope for improvement, applies directly to client preferences, possibly increases therapist-client rapport, raises the effectiveness of lower or average therapists to that of their more successful colleagues, and because it becomes a core feature of therapeutic change, can be as a consideration to be a common factor of change (Sparks & Duncan, 2009). Some researchers reiterated that feedback from the clients in couples’ therapy improves the efficacy (see review Sparks, et. al., 2010). Gathering feedback from the perspective of the participants as experts (see review, Lee, et.al, 2004) was at the heart of data collection in this study. This is exampled by questions one and two which explored the idea of what the participants liked from the workshop and questions three and four which asked for their relationship goals.

Researchers and clinicians (e.g., Lebow, 1997; Parrott & Parrott, 2003) agreed with Gottman’s assertion that psychoeducation alone is insufficient (Jencius & Duba, 2003). In contrast, state and federal support has focused primarily on marriage education, which is generally provided in the form of workshops (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). This is probably due to the fact that half of all Americans families no longer feel a sense of self-sufficiency in regard to their finances (Dakin & Wampler, 2008) and the high cost of therapy (National Directory of Marriage and Family Counseling, 2009). Because couples’ psychoeducational workshops have been given a green light to continue by state and federal authorities, along with the current cost of couples’ therapy, there appears to be a demand for research to be focused on how to improve their efficacy. A new focus for couples’ research indicates the need to explore the impact that participant input has upon the change process (see review, Sparks & Duncan, 2010). The present study indicates that in a workshop setting, offering psychoeducation, and allowing participants to actively participate, may help couples to effect positive changes within their relationships. The data from the present study indicates a positive change in couples’ relationship at one month.
Research utilizing the same intervention, extending the follow-up period to six months and/or one year is indicated.

**Limitations**

The sample size of the study was relatively small and although the criterion was open to couples of any sexual orientation, all of the participants were heterosexual. The cultural representation was diverse with the absence of African American couples noted. Because of the workshop site being in an affluent neighborhood close to a large state university, most of the participants had higher educational degrees. Although the data suggests that a positive change did occur in the participants’ relationships, follow-up for the post-intervention questions was after one month, which negatively affects any assertions made from the outcome. Research to extend the time period for follow-up is clearly indicated.

Clients participation may be dependent upon conditions seen in the literature on group stages (e.g., Hill & Gruner, 1973). Workshops are brief in nature and developing a therapeutic rapport may be difficult but essential. Therapeutic alliance has been shown to explain as much as 22% of outcome variance (Johnson & Talitman, 1997; Knobloch-Feddeis, Pinsof, & Mann, 2007). Findings indicate that alliances in couple therapy form early, are relatively stable, and account for treatment participation (Knobloch-Feddeis, Pinsof, & Mann, 2007).

Several participants have reported that the workshop had too much information in this short period of time, similar to the reports from Barnacle and Abbott (2009). A few of these individuals stated that they believed refresher classes could be given as reinforcement in a few shorter increments. A notable difficulty which arose in this study was asking the participants to design an intervention. There was some confusion by participants as to what this meant and prompted what appeared to be their interpretations of clinical procedures such as; “make a list and check in”. No responses reflecting these procedures were noted in their post-intervention responses although the importance of designating the participants as experts is apparent (see review, Lee & Everett, 2004).

**Summary**

Similarly to Holman and Jarvis (2003) responses for this study were remarkably close for both married and unmarried couples as exampled by three married individuals and three cohabitating individuals rank ordered Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration as their number one Gottman concept choice. Other number one choices were varied but closely related
to other higher rank ordered choices for the married and cohabitating couples (see post-intervention interview rankings). One study found that couples’ responses differed from male to female, with a few exceptions (Helmeke & Sprenkle, 2000). Interestingly, the present study found two of the cohabitating couples’ responses and one of the married couple’s responses were very similar. Although initial data indicated a desire for improved communication and conflict resolution, specific post-intervention data indicated participants benefitted the most from small gestures of appreciating each other and pulling together as a team for their decision-making and future planning. In the narrative responses of post-intervention questions one and two, communication and conflict resolution were evident. Improvement through the use of Gottman concepts was evidenced by partner 1A reporting that he was able to reorient himself in an argument by focusing on maintaining a healthy relationship or “nurturing the relationship”. Partners 5A and 5B reported how they averted an argument by separating for a period of time and then discussing a compromise to a dilemma of going out with friends.

There were some study design characteristics limiting the quality of observations made such as asking the participants the helpfulness of the previous block of information. It may have proved more beneficial to ask the participants how the previous information was helpful, or explain how it was not. In addition, instead of asking the participants to design their own interventions it would have been more advantageous to ask them to rank order what they felt to be the most beneficial at the end of the workshop. Although this question may have not produced the quality of responses as other questions, by asking them to design their own intervention, this may have heightened their sense of being the “expert”. An overall observation was that participants were very active during the workshop and appeared to welcome the chance to participate. Given the generally positive post-intervention responses from these workshop participants who were asked to actively participate and provide incremental feedback, more research focusing on this area is indicated.
APPENDIX A

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

COUPLES WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE: PRE-INTERVENTION
1. What are you hoping to get out of this workshop?
2. What topics would you like to discuss during the workshop?
3. What would you say are your top concerns in your relationship right now?
4. What are your top goals for your relationship?

COUPLES WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE: INTERVENTION
1. How helpful or applicable was this block of instruction to your relationship?
2. Given the last block of information, how would you design an intervention for your relationship?
3. What do you need to apply this to your relationship?
4. What would happen if you were to apply this?

COUPLES WORKSHOP QUESTIONS: POST INTERVENTION
1. Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were going very well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing?
2. Visualize an event in the past four weeks where things were not going so well in your relationship. What were you doing? What was your partner doing?
3. What about the workshop do you remember as being helpful in your relationship?
4. According to the daily agenda of the workshop, these were the topics that we covered (agenda will be looked at by research assistants and partner). What, if anything, do you remember and have found helpful?
5. Rank order aspects named under questions three (3) and four (4).
APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please Circle All That Apply:

1. Sex:
   Male          Female

2. Age:  
   18-28          29-38          39-48 
   49-58          59 and over

3. Relationship Status:  
   Single          Cohabitating          Married 
   Divorced # of times_____          Widowed

4. Length of Relationship: 
   Under 6 months          6 mos-1 year 
   1-3 years          3-5 years 
   5-7 years          7-9 years 
   More than 9 years

5. Age and Number of Your Children: 
   No Children          0-4 years #          5-9 years #          10-14 years #
   15-18 years #          Over 18 years #

6. Cultural/Ethnic Background:  
   African/American/Black          Asian American 
   Caucasian/White          Hispanic/Latino 
   Native American/Eskimo          Other: ________________________

7. Family Income: 0-$25,000          $25,001-$50,000          $50,001-$75,000          $75,001 +

8. Level of Education:  
   High School Diploma          Technical Training 
   Associate’s Degree          Bachelor’s Degree          Master’s Degree or Above

9. Type of Prior Counseling if Any:  
   Pastoral Counseling          Relationship Workshop 
   Couples/Family Counseling          Individual Counseling          Divorce Mediation
APPENDIX C
GOTTMAN’S SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE THEORY

THE SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE

CREATING
SHARED MEANING:
Rituas of Emotional Connection

HONORING DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS

REGULATION OF CONFLICT
1: Skills for Solvable Problems
1) Softened Startup  2) Repair & De-escalation  3) Accepting Influence
4) Compromise  5) Physiological Soothing

2: For Perpetual Problems
Create a Dialogue to Overcome Gridlock

POSITIVE SENTIMENT OVERRIDE “POSITIVE VIBES”

EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

TURNING TOWARDS VS. TURNING AWAY
The “BIDDING” Process
Making Emotional Connections

NURTURING A CULTURE OF
FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION

LOVE MAPS

Areas of Strength
APPENDIX D
GOTTMAN-BASED COUPLES WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Couples Workshop Interventions/ Activities
SATURDAY 9 a.m.–6 p.m.
Complete pre-workshop questionnaire and demographics. Introduction to group facilitators
and group participants (9 a.m.- 9:30 a.m. - 30 minutes)
Discuss Research on Love Maps: (9:30-10:30 a.m. -1 hour), Process and Complete Suggested
Intervention Form (SIF)
Discuss Research on Nurturing a Culture of Fondness and Admiration: (10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. -
1 hour), Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF)
Discuss Research on Turning Towards versus Turning Away: (11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.-1
hour), Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF)
LUNCH (12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m. - 1 hour)
Discuss Research on Positive Sentiment Override/ Review Perception Domains: (1:30 p.m.-
2:30 p.m.- 1 hour), Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF)
Discuss Research on Regulation of Conflict and Solvable and Perpetual Problems: (2:30 p.m.-
3:30 p.m. – 1 hour), Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF)
Discuss Research on Honoring Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations: (3:30-4:30 p.m. -1 hour),
Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF)
Discuss Research on Creating Shared Meaning: Review rituals of emotional connection: (4:30 -
5:30 p.m.-1 hour), Process and Complete Suggested Intervention Form (SIF) Question and Answers (5:30 p.m.-6 p.m. – 30 minutes)
APPENDIX E
ADULT INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Dr. Robert Lee in the Department of Family and Child Sciences at Florida State University. I am conducting a Qualitative research study where the research from thirty-six years of Dr. John Gottman, a nationally noted couple’s researcher and clinician, will be presented. Attendees will be expected to participate and actively provide perceptions of the utility, if any, of this research for their own relationships.

Title of Research Study: An Initial Qualitative Exploration of Gottman’s Couples Research: A Workshop from the Participant’s Perspective

Procedures for this Research: Your participation will involve completing a short survey and demographic information at the beginning of the first day. The participants may actively engage in designing therapeutic interventions at the end of each block of information to include providing their perceptions of the research information being presented. Participants will complete four questions during the workshop per each block of instruction. Participants will be requested to schedule an appointment to return to the office to complete an additional four item questionnaire after four weeks to ascertain how the participants apply the workshop information to their own relationship, if at all. Your participation may include sharing information about your relationship with the researcher or the other group members; however, you may choose not to share any couple or relational information.

Withdrawal From this Research Study: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty to yourself or to your family.

Confidentiality: Because many couples may enroll in the workshop, confidentiality will be considered a priority, but cannot be guaranteed through the other group members. Your identifying information such as your name, mailing address, and email address will be collected for the sole purpose of mailing out the surveys if needed. No information will be disclosed to others except the researcher and all identifying information will be maintained with your surveys in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Demographic information will be gathered for yourself and your family regarding sex, age, cultural/ethnic background, family income, level of education, relationship status, length of relationship, age and number of your children, and type of prior counseling if any. All information gathered will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. All surveys will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and locked office. This information will be kept for three years and will be destroyed after that time.

Potential Financial Risks: All couples will be responsible for all travel costs to attend the workshops. All couples will be responsible for daycare if needed.

Potential Financial Benefits to You or to Others: All couples will be able to attend the couple’s workshops at no charge.
Compensation for Research Related Injury: In the unlikely event of you sustaining a psychological injury resulting from relational conflicts, which is proximately caused by this study, a referral to a local agency for professional consultative care will be provided by the researcher to obtain counseling at no charge.

Potential Health Risk or Discomforts: There may be foreseeable risks or discomforts based on your level of sharing if you agree to participate in the study. The possible risks are that you may choose to discuss difficult topics or conflictual information. Possible discomforts include discussing topics that you or your family may find difficult which may lead to a disagreement or may be stressful. If you request to meet with a counselor individually or with your family present, a referral will be provided to you to offer individual, family, or couples counseling services at no charge.

Potential Health Benefits to You or to Others: Although there may be no direct benefit of attending the couple’s workshop, the possible benefit of your participation may include an improved relationship with your partner and/or family such as an improvement in your communication, coping, and problem-solving skills.

Conflict of Interest: The researcher is volunteering his time with no monetary compensation to explore a couple’s workshop based on Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory. No foreseeable conflict of interest exists for the researcher. If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call (407) 770-1200 Monday through Friday between the hours of 8a.m. to 5 p.m. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

Sincerely,
Edward Brand

Signatures:

________________________________________
Participant’s Name

The Principal Investigator or representative has explained the nature and purpose of the above-described procedure and the benefits and risks that are involved in this research protocol.

________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator Date

You have been informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and you have received a copy of this description. You have given permission for your participation in this study.

________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Representative Date

________________________________________
Signature of Witness Date
APPENDIX F

FSU IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM Date: 6/11/2010
To: Columbus Edward Brand

Dept.: FAMILY & CHILD SCIENCES
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair
Re: Re-approval of Use of Human Subjects in Research

An Initial Qualitative Exploration of Gottman’s Couples Research: A Workshop from The Participants’ Perspective

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 6/8/2011, you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc: Robert Lee, Advisor

HSC No. 2010.4516
I. Gottman's Sound Relationship House Theory: The Seven Principles

Gottman (1999) envisioned his seven principles to fostering a successful marriage as being analogous to a house that requires a strong foundation. The first three floors/levels of the house focused on the couple’s friendship and included: love maps; nurturing a culture of fondness and admiration; and turning towards versus turning away. These levels summed up the emotional bank account of the marriage. The foundation or first floor of the theory was known as the love map, measuring the amount of cognitive room couples have for one another. The measure included what each partner knew of the other’s psychological world and would call for a periodic update of this information. The second floor was composed of the fondness and admiration system which reflected the amount and accessibility of respect, as well as affection each partner felt and expressed for one another. Gottman also considered this to be an antidote for contempt. The third floor was turning toward versus turning away that reflected the emotional connection versus distance in the marriage. It included everyday activities which could add to the emotional bank account.

The fourth floor was the sentiment override, which could be viewed as either negative or positive. Negative sentiment override meant that the partner attacked the other partner and often blamed or criticized the partner for their mistakes. Positive sentiment override meant that any negativity expressed by the partner was interpreted as informative rather than as a personal attack (Gottman, 1999).

The fifth floor addressed the couple’s ability to regulate conflict. The regulation of conflict was described as either skills needed for solvable problems or perpetual problems. Skills needed for solvable problems included: 1) softened start-up, 2) repair and de-escalation, 3) accepting influence, 4) compromise, and 5) physiological soothing. Skills for perpetual problems include creating a dialogue to overcome gridlock. It is essential to better assist one another in understanding each other’s feelings, thoughts, and behaviors rather than trying to solve the problem or conflict. The goal was to move from gridlock by creating dialogues exploring the symbolisms behind each other’s positions or dreams within the conflict. (Gottman, 1999).

The sixth floor was based on meanings in the marriage and included helping the couple honor one another’s dreams and aspirations. The last and seventh floor of the house, considered
to be the attic, included assisting the couple to create shared meanings in the marriage, such as dreams, narratives, rituals of connection, myths, and metaphors (Gottman, 1999). See Appendix A for an image of the Sound Relationship House Theory.

II. Dispelling Myths about What Predicts Divorce (Toxic Interactions)

Gottman (1999) reviewed the marital research and literature on divorce to determine the myths about what predicts divorce and found three major assumptions including: 1) affairs cause most divorces; 2) monogamy is for women; and 3) gender differences cause divorce. The most common myth is that extramarital affairs cause divorce; in actuality, 25% of all marital therapy cases reported an extramarital affair as the major presenting problem. The major reasons for divorce given by 80% of all men and women were gradually growing apart, losing a sense of closeness, and not feeling loved and appreciated. Research has also shown that severe and intense fighting and sexual intimacy problems play a large role in marital distress (Gottman, 1999).

The second major myth is that monogamy is only for women; men need to philander and women do not so that a monogamous marriage is supported by women. Research has actually shown that men benefit more from marriage than women. By being married, longevity was predicted to be substantial for men by 250%, but only 50% for females (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Further, since women have entered the workforce in large numbers, women have surpassed men in extramarital affairs and affairs are now occurring sooner in the marriage than in the past. Two-thirds of the women and half of the men were having an affair within the first five years of their marriage (Gottman, 1999).

The third major myth about what predicts divorce is that gender differences cause divorce. Gender differences cannot explain divorce; there is a male and female in both couples divorcing, as well as happily married couples. Gender differences do exist with respect to the attributional processes, physiological reactivity, and physiological recovery. This will later be discussed in chapter two under the section describing the core triad of balance (Gottman, 1999).

III. Dispelling Myths and Mistakes in Marital Therapy

While pursuing a model for couples therapy, Gottman reviewed a plethora of research regarding what works and what does not work in couples therapy. He found many myths present in couples therapy that were not found to have scientific validity. Five myths and mistakes defined by Gottman will be discussed.
The first area in marital counseling described by Gottman (1999) as a mistake in marital counseling and possibly the most influential was the *active listening model*. This model asserted that stable couples were characterized by “active, empathetic listening during conflict resolution” and that couples needed to be non-defensive and empathetic listeners (p.8). Couples were requested to use “I” messages, summarize their communications without judgments, and validate their partner’s feelings. The techniques related to this model were flawed because they were asking couples to react to negativity in a manner that was unnatural to them. Couples were not naturally using the active listening model, were not paraphrasing or summarizing their partner’s feelings or content, and were not validating their partner’s feelings. Further, the active listening model did show a decrease in negative interactions, but did not show an increase in positive interactions. Treatment that combined behavioral exchange with problem solving training has been shown to be affective. This combination of treatment resulted in a decrease in negative interactions and an increase in positive interactions.

The second myth and mistake in marital counseling as described by Gottman (1999) asserted that the *model of anger was a dangerous emotion* and destructive to relationships. The expression of anger was associated with lower concurrent marital satisfaction; however, it was also associated with an increase in marital satisfaction over time. The suppression of anger was found to be related to physical violence in American couples. Anger in a marriage was not found to predict divorce; contempt and defensiveness were shown to consistently predict divorce.

The third myth and mistake in marital counseling was the *quid pro quo error*. This theory posits that in healthy marriages, there is a reciprocal exchange of positive behaviors and in unhealthy relationships, there is also a breakdown of these healthy exchanges. Quid pro quo was actually found to be characteristic of unhappy marriages. Unhappy couples were keeping tabs of positive exchanges rather than happy couples offering unconditional daily positive interactions (Gottman, 1999).

The fourth myth and mistake in marital counseling was the concept of *non-contingent positivity*. This concept attempted to create an overall greater degree of daily positivity, kindness, and love in couples. Couples were being encouraged to be nicer to their spouse, regardless of what they received in return. Research found that only couples that were currently happy showed a positive improvement after the intervention and unhappy couples underestimated the amount of positivity by 50%. The behavior exchange approach eventually involved trying to change the
couples’ perception, as well as their behaviors (Gottman, 1999).

The fifth myth and mistake in marital counseling was regarding the *harmony model*. This model proposed that conflict-avoiding and bickering couples were dysfunctional. The harmonious couple was hypothesized to be the only healthy and functional type of couple. Gottman found that conflict avoiding and volatile, bickering, and passionate couples could have happy, secure relationships. The bickering, passionate couples were the only type of couple to report a romantic relationship after 35 years (Gottman, 1999).

**IV. Predictors of Divorce (Couple’s Dissolution)**

Gottman conducted his longitudinal research based on over 3,000 couples to determine what works in marriages and what does not work. The findings of his research led to the development of his approach originally called the Sound Marital House Theory (SMHT). Gottman placed much of his focus on toxic communication patterns that he called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The four negative or toxic behaviors as described by Gottman include criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. These behaviors usually follow this sequence and were found to *not* be equally corrosive; some behaviors were a better predictor for divorce than others. Women were found to criticize more than men; men were found to consistently stonewall or emotionally withdraw more than women. Contempt was found to be the best single predictor of divorce and the most toxic (Gottman, 1999).

Gottman and Silver (1999) further found that these communication patterns predicted divorce, along with five other patterns: harsh startups, flooding, body language, failed repair attempts, and bad memories. *Harsh startups* are the understanding that beginning a communication negatively only renders a negative exchange that will end negatively. *Flooding* occurs when couples’ emotional exchanges became overwhelming to the point of affecting their physiology, such as heart rate and cortisol (stress hormone) levels. *Body language* is the awareness that although a partner may not be verbally expressing anything that is negative, the body communicates a negative message anyway. *Failed repair attempts* are those that occur when a partner asserts a positive sentiment override, and either it goes unheard because of flooding or the message becomes negative, leading to negative sentiment override instead. An example of *bad memories* occurs when the couple becomes so entrenched in negativity that they re-write their pasts as negative.
A. Core Triad of Balance: Interactive Behavior, Perception, and Physiology

Gottman described the ideas or concepts of balance and repair in marriages in the context of three domains of human experience: interactive behavior, perceptions, and physiology. These three domains were not considered to be independent of one another, but were intricately linked in the relationship. The homeostasis within a marriage is defined as the steady balance of a relationship and can be either healthy or dysfunctional. Every marriage establishes a homeostatic steady stage, one positive and one negative. Each marital system is capable of repair when needed. This repair makes homeostasis an active pattern (Gottman, 1999).

There are also two types of stable steady states in relationships: uninfluenced stable steady states and influenced stable steady states. The uninfluenced steady state is what “each person brings to the interaction before being influenced by the partner”. This is determined by the person’s history of the relationship and temperament. The influenced steady state is “how an individual is affected by the partner in the process of interacting” (Gottman, 1999, p. 34). For a relationship to be healthy, these stable steady states must reflect a larger balance of positivity versus negativity in perception and behavior. The positive/negative ratio in interactive behavior during conflict resolution is at least 5 to 1 in stable, happy marriages. In unhappy marriages, the positive/negative ratio is only .8 to 1 so that there are as many negative interactions as positive interactions (Gottman, 1999).

Based on the research of Gottman and Levenson, three domains of human experience that included the interactive behaviors, perceptions, and physiology of couples at the Love Lab were explored. The interactive behaviors were measured by coding the partners’ actions and feelings as they spent time with one another during diverse activities. The perceptions of the partners were measured and evaluated by having the couples complete questionnaires and interviews and by utilizing video recall procedures and attributional methods. The couple’s physiology during behavioral interactions was measured by monitoring the couple’s autonomic, endocrine, and immune system responses (Gottman, 1999). The following sections thoroughly discuss the core triad of balance, which led to underpinnings of the Sound Relationship House Theory.

a. Core Triad of Balance: Ten Areas of the Interactive Behavior Domain

The interactive behavior domain can further be examined in ten areas and were analyzed by observing the partner’s actions and feelings while interacting with one another while at the Love Lab. These areas include: 1) negative affect reciprocity, 2) “Dow Jones” ratios, 3) start-up,
4) four horseman of the apocalypse, 5) repair attempts, 6) influence factor in marital outcomes, 7) regulation of conflict, 8) positive affect models, 9) etiology of dysfunction, and 10) violence within the marriage.

1. **Negative Affect Reciprocity**

   Gottman (1999) found the most consistent correlate of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction is a construct in the interactive behavior domain called the *negative affect reciprocity*. The negative affect reciprocity “refers to the increased probability that a person’s emotions will be negative (anger, belligerence, sadness, contempt, and so on) right after his or her partner has exhibited negativity” (p.37). This is the most consistent discriminator between happily and unhappily married couples, more so than the amount of negative affect in the relationship. Negative affect reciprocity can occur in three possible combinations: 1) reciprocating low-intensity negative affect in kind (e.g., anger is met with anger); 2) reciprocating high-intensity negative affect in kind (e.g., contempt is met with contempt); and 3) escalating from low to high intensity affect (e.g., anger is met with contempt).

2. **Dow Jones Ratio**

   The second concept is referred to as the “*Dow Jones* Ratios. This ratio is “a sum of all the positive things during one person’s turn at speech minus all the negative things” (p.38). Negative points are earned by unhealthy behaviors such as defensiveness and criticism. Positive points are earned by healthy behaviors such as agreement and compromise. A conversation is termed as “low risk” when partners generally have more positivity than negativity and “high risk” when there is more negativity from one spouse (Gottman, 1999, p.38). Negative affect was determined not to be dangerous in relationships, but instead it was the positive/negative variable ratios that predicted marital outcomes.

3. **Start-Up**

   The third concept in the interactive behavior domain was determining the way a conflict starts termed the *start-up*. Start-up was defined as “the way a topic of disagreement is broached” (p.41). The first minute up to 15 minutes of analyzing couple’s interactions could predict divorce or stability. Harsh start-up by the wife was associated with instability and divorce. Women were found to be more likely to criticize than men (Gottman, 1999).
4. *Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*

The fourth area of the interactive behavior domain is a concept referred to as the *four horseman of the apocalypse*. The four negative or toxic behaviors as described by Gottman include criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. These behaviors usually follow this sequence and were found to *not* be equally corrosive with some behaviors being a greater predictor for divorce than others (Gottman, 1999).

The first horseman of the apocalypse as defined by Gottman (1999) is *criticism*. Criticism is any statement that “implies that there is something globally wrong with one’s partner, something that is probably a lasting aspect of the partner’s character. Any statement that begins with “you always” or “you never” will be a criticism rather than a complaint” (pp. 41-42). Complaints do not predict anything negative in marital outcomes. Women were found to consistently criticize more than men. The antidote to criticism is complaining without suggesting that one’s partner is somehow defensive.

The second horseman is *defensiveness*. Defensiveness is “any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack. Defensiveness is a general stance of warding off a perceived attack. In marital interaction, it takes the common form of the innocent victim posture, with accompanying whining” (Gottman, 1999, p. 45). It includes denying responsibility for the problem. The antidote to becoming defensive is to accept responsibility for a part of the problem.

The third horseman and the most toxic behavior is *contempt*. Contempt is “any statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself on a higher plane than one’s partner” (p. 45). Examples might include mocking one’s partner, correcting one’s partner, and contemptuous facial expressions. Contempt was found to be the best single predictor of divorce and the most toxic. The antidote to contempt is creating a culture of praise and pride (Gottman, 1999).

The fourth horseman of the apocalypse is *stonewalling*. Stonewalling occurs when “the listener withdraws from the interaction (p.46).” Examples of stonewalling might include brief monitoring glances, looking away and down, maintaining a stiff neck, and hardly vocalizing. Men were found to consistently stonewall or emotionally withdraw more than women. The antidote to stonewalling is to self-soothe, give the listener communication options, and stay emotionally connected (Gottman, 1999)

Gottman (1999) found that in happy, stable marriages, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling do occur less often; however, contempt never occurred. Gottman suggested labeling
contempt as unacceptable, extremely toxic, and as psychological abuse. Gottman also found that in some couples, there was no horseman present which was a sign of emotional disengagement. Within the marital interactions, there was an absence of positive affect with no emotional connections, humor, affection, or even interest in one another. Further, many of the couples had advanced to the stage of the Distance and Isolation Cascade which will be discussed later in the domain of perception.

Happy marriages were found to still have criticism, defensiveness and stonewalling; the partners just repair the relationship soon after they occur. Happy marriages usually have no identifiable contempt. When none of the four horsemen are present, there may be emotional disengagement occurring. The four horseman help predict divorce with 85% accuracy (Gottman, 1999).

5. Repair Attempts

The fifth area of the interactive behavior domain is a concept called repair attempts. Repair attempts is defined as the couple’s ability to comment on the communication of conflict itself, support and soothe one another, or express appreciations to soften the complaints. In healthy couples, repair attempts were made at the rate of about one every three minutes. The more distressed the couple, the higher the rate of repair attempts and the higher the rate of their failure. Gottman (1999) found that successful repair attempts were based on three factors including the parameters of the timing, content, and delivery. Successful repair attempts could not be ascertained by the method of delivery or its antecedents. Attempts to repair relationships are an important part of maintaining a happy marriage. Repair attempts that fail can ultimately lead to divorce (Gottman, 1999).

6. Influence Factor

The sixth area of the interactive behavior domain is a concept called the influence factor on marital outcomes. The term accepting influence refers to “the extent to which both people perceive that they accept influence from their partner” (Gottman, 1999, p.119). Escalation of negativity by husbands predicted divorce which was correlated with the husband’s refusal to accept influence from the wife. Gottman hypothesized that “marriages will work to the extent that men accept influence from, share power with, women” (p.52). Men who did not accept influence from their wives divorced with an 80% prediction rate of accuracy.
7. *Regulation of Conflict*

The seventh area of the interactive behavior domain is a concept called the *regulation of conflict*. Gottman (1999) differentiates between two types of problems or conflicts couples will try to regulate, *solvable and perpetual problems*. Perpetual problems are defined as problems within a relationship that are not solvable such as differences in one’s beliefs about values/morals, religion, politics, and/or parenting. Perpetual problems accounted for 69% of the conflicts experienced by couples that were addressed over many years that could be resolved. Solvable problems are defined as problems that are not perpetual and are situational, meaning they can be solved in the here and now of the conflict. Only 31% of these problems involved specific problem solving skills. Gottman suggests five steps to solve situational problems: 1) softened start-up, 2) repair and de-escalation, 3) accepting influence, 4) compromise, and 5) physiological soothing. These concepts will be later discussed in the physiology domain.

8. *Positive Affect Models*

The eighth area of the interactive behavior domain is a concept called the *positive affect model* that is one aspect in predicting the outcome of marriages. *Positive affect* is measured by “the sum of expressions of humor, affection, interest, and joy” (Gottman, 1999, p.60). Other positive interactions included agreement, approval, assent, engaged listening, laughter, positive physical contact, and smiling. *Negative affect* is defined as “the sum of expressions of anger, contempt/disgust, whining, sadness, and fear/tension” (p.60).

Distressed couples were found to exhibit an average of 1.49 positives per minute while nondistressed couples exhibited 1.93 positives per minute. Gottman (1999) and his colleagues conducted a newlywed study using an observational coding system to report the number of positive affect during timed interactions in the first few months of their marriage. The results turned out to be a great predictor of whether a couple six years later would be in a divorced, together and miserable, or together and happy group. The results also showed that for marriages that wound up stable and happy, the positive affect was used to de-escalade the conflict and was related to self-soothing. This result was important for designing Gottman’s clinical interventions.

9. *Dysfunction*

The ninth area of the interactive behavior domain is the *etiology of dysfunction*. Etiology is defined in the context of “how do people get into dysfunctional patterns in the first place” (p.59). It was found that in distressed marriages, there is a *female-demand/male-withdraw*
pattern. Females tend to be more critical and start the conflictual discussion whereas males tend to stonewall more and withdraw from the relationship. This pattern tends to characterize all marriages; however, in ailing marriages, this pattern exacerbates and becomes more harmful and consistent resulting in the increase in the negative affect interactions and negative affect reciprocity (Gottman, 1999).

Gottman reviewed his work which explored the etiology question. In the first part of the study, they asked the couples to talk to each other about how their day went. The second part of the study requested them to discuss an area of disagreement in their marriage. For the third part of the study, they compared the two conversations and amounts of positive and negative emotions separately. The researchers found that the husband’s affect when talking about events of the day predicted the wife’s affect during the same conversation. More importantly, it predicted the extent to which the couple showed a demand-withdraw pattern. This showed that the husband’s role was critical in predicting whether marriages function or dysfunction in the long term. Stable couples were found to have a ratio of about five times as much positive to negative affect, while distressed couples had a ratio of 0.8. For a meaningful and lasting change, marital therapy cannot focus only on the context of conflict resolution, but on other factors such as the sum of the positive affect (Gottman, 1999).

10. Violence

The tenth area of the interactive behavior domain is exploring violence within the marriage. Violent marriages were studied to show the processes of influence/power and resistance to change. Couples displayed extreme one-way patterns of exerting power. Anger management were not found to be the issue in violent marriages; it was the exerting of power. Further, studying violence in marriages is useful because in clinical practice, a clinician must always asses for violence (Gottman, 1999).

Gottman (1999) found that there were two categories of violent men: Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 violent males showed decreased heart rates and were more likely to use a knife or gun when threatening their wives. These males were also violent with friends, coworkers, and family. Perpetrators tended to start a discussion by being belligerent, defensive, and intimidating, but presented with a calmer physiology. These males encouraged their wives to be independent; perpetrators responded to a fear of being controlled.
Type 2 violent males showed increased heart rates, used their fists when threatening their wives, and showed a “slow burn” or buildup of emotions. The men tended to isolate their wives socially, act very jealous, and controlled their wives by using domineering patterns. The divorce/separation rate for this group was 38%. These men responded to a fear of abandonment (Gottman, 1999).

b. The Core Triad of Balance: Four Areas of the Perception Domain

Gottman (1999) describes the ideas or concepts of balance and repair in marriages in the context of three domains of human experience: interactive behavior, perceptions, and physiology. The perception domain refers to “how spouses in both happy and unhappy marriages perceive and interpret positive and negative actions of one another” (p.68). In a happy marriage, if one spouse does something negative, the other spouse tends to “evaluate the negativity as fleeting and situational. On the other hand, in an unhappy marriage, the same behavior is likely to be interpreted as stable (enduring, unchanging) and internal to the partner” (p.68). Within the perception domain, there are four areas to explore that includes: 1) subtext, 2) type of attributions, 3) Distance and Isolation Cascade, and the 4) marital “poop detector”.

1. The Subtext and Type of Attributions

Within the perception domain, there are four areas to explore including the subtext, type of attributions, distance and isolation cascade, and the marital poop detector. The first area that is dysfunctional in ailing marriages in the domain of perception is the negative perception in the subtext. The subtext is defined as “what people are actually thinking and feeling at the time” (Gottman, 1999, p.69).

2. Fundamental Attribution Error

The second component of the attribution system is the term called the fundamental attribution error in which “each spouse sees the marital problems as residing in a defective character trait of the partner” (Gottman, 1999, p.71). This becomes the central focus of marriage counseling so that one partner wants to fix the other person in order to be happy. The attribution system can be described as either being relationship-enhancing or distress-monitoring. Non-distressed couples engage in relationship-enhancing attributions whereby they “minimize the impact of negative behaviors of the partner and maximize the impact of positive ones” (p.71). Distressed couples engage in distress-maintaining attributions whereby they “maximize the impact of their partner’s negativity and minimize the impact of his or her positivity” (p.71). With
this they fail to see the positivity that is there. The couple may also recast the historical narratives of the marriage so that positive experiences may now be viewed in negative terms (Gottman, 1999).

3. Distance and Isolation Cascade

The third dimension of the perception domain according to Gottman (1999) is the development of the Distance and Isolation Cascade. The Distance and Isolation Cascade describes how the immediate perceptions of negativity are transformed to create negative and lasting narratives of a relationship’s decay. The Distance and Isolation Cascade can be characterized by five stages including: 1) flooding, 2) seeing problems as severe, 3) thinking it best to work out problems alone, 4) adapting to parallel lives, and 5) loneliness. Flooding can be defined as “one emotion or a set of emotions becomes so aversive and so prominent that it takes over the emotional world of a person” (p.73). The partners become very reactive and believe that they will get nowhere by working with their spouse because their problems are seen as too severe. The partner then believes that it is best to work out their problems alone. The partners then turn away from the marriage by arranging household schedules so that parallel lives are created. The partners then feel lonely and vulnerable to relationships outside of the marriage, thereby, increasing the chance for a marital affair.

4. Marital “Poop Detector”

The fourth dimension of perception is referred to as the marital “poop detector”. Regarding the influence functions, for newlyweds it was determined that the threshold for negativity was set lower for happy, stable couples. Newlywed wives notice lower levels of negativity and have a negative response to negativity than their husbands. This was referred to as the marital “poop detector”. In less stable, happy marriages, wives tried to adapt and accept setting the threshold for negative response systematically much higher. Couples wait much longer to enter counseling, usually around seven years, and by adapting and accepting this negativity, believe that counseling is not necessary. In happy, stable marriages, wives do not adapt to the negativity and address conflicts within days of the negativity. In addressing levels of negativity, the negativity threshold has to also be reset so that this negativity is not continually accepted or adapted to by the wives (Gottman, 1999).
c. The Core Triad of Balance: Six Areas of the Physiology Domain

Within the physiology domain, there are six areas to explore: 1) diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) and marital prediction; 2) vagal tone and emotional regulation; 3) DPA and emotional blends; 4) chronic DPA and immunosuppression; 5) views of strong emotions in marital therapy; and 6) critical gender differences in physiology. The physiology domain was investigated through measuring the autonomic, endocrine, and immune system responses of marital partners. These physiological responses were found to be very important in predicting the status or health of the marriage (Gottman, 1999).

1. Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA)

The first and most important predictive concept in the physiology domain is the diffuse physiological arousal (DPA); this is the body’s general alarm mechanism. Many systems are simultaneously activated to mobilize the body, so we can cope effectively with emergencies and situations seen as dangerous. The general alarm mechanism is mediated by the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is known for the flight or fight responses. The parasympathetic nervous system is known for rest and digest and is responsible for restoring calm to the body. When the body is under stress and the heart rate exceeds 100 beats per minute (bpm), the body starts secreting epinephrine. The attentional system becomes hypervigilant and is limited in its ability to process information. During DPA, couples have difficulty processing information, listening to their partner and learning new information. Couples also have difficulty breaking reinforced habitual behaviors and cognitions. Couples under stress were also found to have greater levels of epinephrine and other stress-related hormones (Gottman, 1999).

2. Vagal Tone and Emotional Regulation

The second area in the physiology domain is the vagal tone and the emotional regulation system. The major nerve, the vagus, is located on the brain stem and is part of the mechanism that works within the parasympathetic nervous system that is responsible for restoring calm in the body and refocusing attention. Research has been conducted on the parasympathetic nervous system revealing an association between a high vagal tone and improved attentional abilities, as well as emotional regulation abilities. High vagal tone was found to be responsible for focusing attention and the suppression of vagal tone was responsible for engagement with more complex social or cognitive tasks such as focused or sustained attention, mental effort, and organized
responses to stress. *Attentional processes* were also found to be an important factor in emotional regulation. This refers to the ability to sustain and to shift attention. Attention is impaired under stress and is associated with levels of aggression, anxiety, and depression (Gottman, 1999).

3. **Diffuse Physiological Arousal and Emotional Blends**

   The third area in the physiology domain as discussed by Gottman (1999) is the *DPA and emotion blends*. It was believed that certain emotions would increase one’s heart rate; therefore, result in the diffuse physiological arousal (DPA). However, it is the blending of strong emotions that results in DPA, not one specific emotion such as anger or fear. The Henry-Stephens Model proposes that the two avenues of physiological activation (the sympathetic nervous and the brain) each “mediate different psychological states: active coping, anger, and hostility give rise to sympathetic- adrenal activation and catecholamine secretion; helplessness, passive coping, depression, and pessimism give rise to cortical processes (the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical axis)”, leading to the secretion of cortisol (Gottman, 1999, p.79). It was believed that the activation of both stress-mediating systems resulted in physical illness and on-going stressful effects such as continued diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) and immunosuppression.

4. **Diffuse Physiological Arousal and Immunosuppression**

   The fourth area of the physiology domain as described by Gottman (1999) is the role of *chronic diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) and immunosuppression*. Chronic physiological arousal and lower marital quality was associated with a suppression of the immune functioning and poorer cellular immunity.

5. **Strong Emotions**

   The fifth area of the physiology domain as described by Gottman (1999) is the belief regarding *strong emotions in marital therapy*. Strong emotions in counseling such as a couple presenting as angry, sad, fearful, hurt, disappointed, or contemptuous are said to be *state-dependent* in nature meaning that the best time to address these feelings is when the couple are in those emotional states. When blends of strong emotions are activated, “both spouses need to learn how to self-soothe and to soothe one another to reduce states of diffuse physiological arousal (DPA)” (Gottman, 1999, p. 81). Gottman also recommends taking breaks and creating a *withdrawal ritual* so that spouses have time away from a conflictual discussion essential for soothing. This withdrawal ritual must last at least 20 minutes or longer. By restoring clam and self-soothing, the couple can reverse the *escape conditioning* that occurs from continued marital
conflict. Escape conditioning is the second most powerful form of conditioning (the first being taste aversion). This escape conditioning will eventually lead to the Distance and Isolation Cascade whereas the couple will eventually separate because they become overwhelmed and flood often, believe that their problems are too severe and must be worked out alone resulting in the couple leading parallel lives with a later sense of loneliness. If the couple reaches the state of DPA during the counseling session and is not able to self-soothe, they will lose access to high order thinking and will not be able to access the information discussed in the therapy session. To prevent DPA, Gottman suggests an optimal level of heart rate for marital interaction below 100 bpm (95 bpm for a normal healthy adults ages 20-55).

6. Gender Differences

The sixth area of the physiology domain is the critical gender differences in physiology. Men were found to have more distress-maintaining thoughts than women. These thoughts were categorized into two categories of negative reactions including righteous indignation and innocent victimhood. Righteous indignation was a type of perception associated with contempt. The innocent victimhood was a type of perception related to whining and defensiveness. The men stayed aroused and vigilant. The women were more likely to rehearse relationship-enhancing thoughts to calm themselves. When men and women became angry, the women were better at self-soothing resulting in a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure. The men had more difficulty calming down; some males could not self-soothe. In an atmosphere of negative affect, men were found to emotionally withdraw while females were known categorized in the “female-demand/male-withdraw pattern. Females were also found to experience more immuno-suppression because of staying in ailing marriages, rather than withdrawing as their male counterparts. Males were also found to become emotionally flooded by lower levels of negative affective behavior than for females. Therefore, Gottman recommended females use the softened start-up of a conflictual discussion to prevent the males from flooding (Gottman, 1999).

V. Abbreviations

1. DPA: Diffuse Physiological Arousal
2. MAT: Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test
3. MSI: Weiss-Cerreto Marital Status Inventory
4. NSO: Negative Sentiment Override
5. PSO: Positive Sentiment Override
VI. Definitions

1. Affect Models (Negative) - The sum of expressions of anger, contempt/disgust, whining, sadness, and fear/tension.
2. Affect Models (Positive) - The sum of expressions of humor, affection, interest, and joy.
3. Attentional Processes - The ability to both sustain and to shift attention. Attention is the first ability to become impaired when a child or adult is under chronic stressful factors such as marital conflict. Attentional fluctuations are associated with symptoms of aggression, anxiety, and depression.
4. Attributions (Relationship-Enhancing) - Minimize the impact of negative behaviors of the partner and maximize the impact of positive ones.
5. Attributions (Distress-Maintaining) - Maximize the impact of negative behaviors of the partner and minimize the impact of positive ones.
6. Compromise - A couple is able to accept influence by yielding some to find a common ground so that a position of compromise can be reached. By accepting influence, the couple can find those parts of their partner’s position that they can understand and with which they can agree.
7. Contempt - Any statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself on a higher plane than one’s partner. Contempt was found to be the best single predictor of divorce and the most toxic.
8. Core Triad of Balance - Gottman describes the ideas or concepts of balance and repair in marriages in the context of three domains of human experience including: interactive behavior, perceptions, and physiology.
9. Creating Shared Meaning - Marriage must be seen as a journey that each person must make sacrifices and compromises on; shared meaning comes when a couple can strengthen their friendship bonds and embark on the journey together as one rather than on separate paths. Areas to examine include: rituals, roles, goals, and symbols.
10. Criticism - Any statement that implies that there is something globally wrong with one’s partner, something that is probably a lasting aspect of the partner’s character. Any statement that
begins with “you always” or “you never” will be a criticism rather than a complaint. Women were found to consistently criticize more than men.

11. Defensiveness - Any attempt to defend oneself from a perceived attack. Defensiveness is a general stance of warding off a perceived attack.

12. Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA) - DPA is the body’s general alarm mechanism.

13. Many systems are simultaneously activated to mobilize the body resulting in coping effectively with emergencies and situations seen as dangerous. The alarm mechanism is mediated by the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. When the body is under stress and the heart rate exceeds 100 beats per minute, fight or flight reactions occur that include: secretion of epinephrine and other stress-related hormones, a hypervigilant attentional system, limited ability to listen and process information, decreased ability for learning, and increased habitual behaviors and cognitions.

14. Distance and Isolation Cascade - Describes how the immediate perceptions of negativity are transformed to create negative and lasting narratives of a relationship’s decay. This process includes one becoming flooded, seeing the problems as severe, deciding it is best to work his/her problems out alone, leading parallel lives, and finally becoming lonely; thereby, increasing one’s vulnerability to relationships outside of the marriage.

15. “Dow Jones” Ratios - The ratio is a sum of all the positive things during one person’s turn at speech minus all the negative things.

16. Emotional Bank Account - The frequency of “turning toward” versus “turning away” from one another in non-conflict interactions. This demonstrates the level of positive or negative sentiment override.

17. Emotional Bids for Connection (Failed) - The fundamental dysfunctional unit of interaction at the heart of the marital friendship. Partners ignore bids for connection such as gaining one’s attention, interest, humor, affection, emotional support, solidarity, and sexual intimacy. Partners will continue making bids for connection even when they are in a distressed marriage.

18. Emotional Bids for Connection (Successful) - The fundamental functional unit of interaction at the heart of the marital friendship. Partners accept and engage bids for connection such as gaining one’s attention, interest, humor, affection, emotional support, solidarity, and sexual intimacy.
19. Emotional Regulation - Refers to low vagal tone, which initiates higher order thinking and sustained, focused attention (parasympathetic nervous system responses) as opposed to high vagal tone, which focuses attention for critical decision making (sympathetic nervous system responses).

20. Escape Conditioning - Occurs from continued marital conflict whereas one partner or both wants to escape the relationship. Escape conditioning is the second most powerful form of conditioning (the first being taste aversion). This escape conditioning later leads to the Distance and Isolation Cascade.

21. Female-Demand or Female-Pursuer/Male-Withdraw or Male-Distancer Pattern - Males were found to emotionally withdraw in a relationship climate of negative affect whereas females were found to demand. This pattern does become exacerbated when the marriage is ailing. By staying in an ailing relationship, females were found to have a greater immunosuppression. This pattern was found to be characteristic of all marriages and was not deemed to be dysfunctional unless in an ailing relationship.

22. Flooding - One emotion or a set of emotions becomes so aversive and so prominent that it takes over the emotional world of a person.

23. Fondness and Admiration System - Shows the level of respect and affection that partners feel and express to one another; includes positive nostalgia, pride, loyalty, spontaneous expressions of sentiment and feeling, good memories, and genuine displays of affection.

24. Four Horseman of the Apocalypse - Negative and toxic communication patterns and behaviors that includes being critical, contemptuous, defensive, and/or stonewalling (emotional and/or physical disengagement) towards one’s partner.

25. Fundamental Attribution Error - Each spouse sees the marital problems as residing in a defective character trait of the partner.

26. Honoring Dreams - Each member of a couple keeps in mind the hopes and dreams of the other; dreams should be realized and given attention, depending on their extent of attainability.

27. Influence (Accepting) - A couple is able to accept influence by yielding some to find a common ground so that a position of compromise can be reached. By accepting influence, the couple can find those parts of their partner’s position that they can understand and with which they can agree.

28. Influence (Rejecting) - A couple is not able to yield on a conflictual problem so that no
common ground can be found. By not accepting influence, no compromises can be made; therefore, the couple will remain in gridlock.

29. Influenced Steady State - How an individual is affected by the partner in the process of interacting.

30. Interactive Behavior Domain - The coding of one's partner's behavior and emotion as they interacted in various contexts.

31. Love Maps - Knowing and actively making maps of your partner's psychological world and having yours known as well is essential. Love maps measure the amount of cognitive room partner's have for the relationship and are the foundation to the SRH Model.

32. Marital Disasters/ Disasters of Marriage - A couple who handles conflict disastrously. These couples lack the skills to successfully regulate conflict for solvable problems and become gridlocked for perpetual problems. The couples cannot adjust to the perpetual problems nor regulate the amount of conflict leading to an absence of positive affect.

33. Marital Masters/ Masters of Marriage - A couple who handles conflict masterfully utilizing Gottman’s healthy techniques for perpetual and solvable problems. For problems that are situational and not perpetual, five patterns of interactions distinguish the masters from the disasters. These include: 1) start-up (harsh or softened), 2) influence (rejecting or accepting), 3) repair and de-escalation (failed versus successful), 4) compromise, and 5) using positive affect to self-soothe one's partner. For problems that are perpetual, couples are able to avoid becoming gridlocked, can adjust to the problems, and can regulate the amount of conflict so that there is still positive affect present even during conflictual times.

34. Mental Health Problems/Issues - Symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and anger as reported on a self-completed measure known as the Symptom Checklist -90 constructed by Derogatis in 1983.

35. Negative Affect Reciprocity - Refers to the increased probability that a person’s emotions will be negative (anger, belligerence, sadness, contempt, and so on) right after his or her partner has exhibited negativity.

36. Participants - An adult male or female age 18 and over who are in a married or non-married relationship with or without children.

37. Perception Domain - Ascertaining individual’s perceptions of self and others through the use of questionnaires, video recall procedures, attributional methods, and personal interviews.
38. Positive Affect Models - Positive affect is measured by humor, affection, interest, and engaged listening.


40. Physiological Soothing - The ability to reduce states of diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) such as lowering one’s heart rate and blood pressure. The withdrawal ritual (taking a break from a conflictual discussion at least 20 minutes or more) assists the parasympathetic nervous system response in restoring the body to calm.

41. Problem-Solving Skills - The ability to regulate conflict and identify solvable and perpetual problems.

42. Regulation of Conflict (Perpetual Problems) - Problems within a relationship that are not solvable such as differences in one’s beliefs about values/morals, religion, politics, and/or parenting.

43. Regulation of Conflict (Solvable Problems) - Solvable problems are ones that are not perpetual and are situational, meaning they can be solved in the here and now of the conflict. Gottman suggests five steps to solve situational problems including: 1) softened start-up, 2) repair and de-escalation, 3) accepting influence, 4) compromise, and 5) physiological soothing.

44. Repair Attempts - The couple’s ability to comment on the communication itself, support and soothe one another, or they express appreciations to soften the complaints.

45. Self-regulatory Skills - Skills as defined by Gottman that include ways in which one deals or copes with stressful situations (both with personal, social, and environmental interactions).

46. Sentiment Override (Negative) - Negative sentiment override occurs when one person sees the other’s comments as ridiculing or attacking; there is often a lot of defensiveness and open hostility with negative sentiment override.

47. Sentiment Override (Positive) - Positive sentiment override means that conflict between the couple is considered as informative and allowing for improvement rather than accusatory or hostile.

48. Social Skills - The ability to interact within a relationship in a healthy manner. These skills include: 1) recognizing and avoiding the four horsemen, 2) softening startups, 3) accepting influence (especially for men), 4) soothing physiological arousal (relaxation techniques to assist partners in calming down; may take over 20 minutes for the body to slow itself down to calm
levels, 5) recognizing and responding to repair attempts, and 6) compromise.

49. Start-Up - The way a topic of disagreement is broached, either described as harshened (associated with a negative affect) or softened (associated with a positive affect).

50. Start-Up (Harsh) - The way a topic of disagreement is broached that escalates from a neutral to a negative affect. The harsh start-up by the wife was associated with marital instability and divorce.

51. Start-Up (Soften) - The way a topic of disagreement is broached that predicts marital outcomes that is associated with positive affect.

52. State-Dependent Learning - To learn about strong emotions such as anger, one must be in the state of that strong emotion (one must be angry).

53. Steady State (Influenced) - How an individual is affected by the partner in the process of interacting.

54. Steady State (Uninfluenced) - What each person brings to the interaction before being influenced by the partner. This is determined both by the history of the relationship and the person’s temperament. The influenced steady state is how an individual is affected by the partner in the process of interacting.

55. Stonewalling - Occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction. Men were found to consistently stonewall or emotionally withdraw than women.

56. Turning Toward Versus Turning Away - Turning toward means establishing and progressing emotional connections in a marriage, and turning away means abandoning connections and ignoring those things that brought the couple together in the first place.

57. Withdrawal Ritual - A time away from a conflictual discussion so that each partner can self-soothe. An effective break must be at least 20 minutes or longer.
REFERENCES


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EDUCATION

PhD, Interdivisional Program of Marriage and the Family – May 2012
Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Sciences, College of Human Sciences, Tallahassee, Florida - Dissertation Topic: AN INITIAL QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF GOTTMAN’S COUPLES RESEARCH: A WORKSHOP FROM THE PARTICIPANTS’ PERSPECTIVE

Master of Arts, Specialization: Counseling Education – August 1997
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Florida Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MT 2169)
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CERTIFICATIONS

Certified Clinical Supervisor (CCS # 081) Certified
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CLINICAL TRAINING/ EXPERIENCES

**Associate Therapist**, January 2009- Present – The Mending Group, Orlando, Florida: Provide out-patient mental health and substance abuse counseling and referrals. Assist with Family training to area mental health professionals and students.

**Substance Abuse Therapist**, January 2010 – August 2011, University of Central Florida Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Services, Orlando, Florida: Provided outpatient substance abuse/ mental health counseling and consultation and referrals to students enrolled at the University of Central Florida. Provided crisis interventions when necessary and provided community service addressing substance abuse on the campus to undergraduate and graduate students.

**Mental Health Therapist**, February – May 2009, University of Central Florida Counseling Center, Orlando, Florida: Provided outpatient mental health counseling and consultation and referrals to students enrolled at the University of Central Florida. Provided crisis interventions when necessary and provided community service addressing mental health wellness on the campus to undergraduate and graduate students.

**Clinical Director**, July 2006- October 2007, Seminole Work and Learn and Sawmill Academy for Girls, Tallahassee, Florida: Provided all license required mental health assessments for all youth and consulted with the psychiatrists regarding all psychotropic medications (education and monitoring). Provided crisis interventions when needed and provided all state mandated mental health trainings to all program staff. Provided individual, family, and group therapy and supervised all paraprofessionals. Reviewed all state and federal guidelines to ensure the appropriate quality of services were provided and documented, as well as conducted monthly chart reviews for quality assurance.

**Associate Therapist**, September 2000 – August 2007, Psychological and Family Consultants, Inc., Tallahassee, Florida: Provided individual, family, and couple therapy to adolescents and adults. Provided consultation and referrals when necessary.


**PhD Student Practicum**, August 2002 – December 2005, Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic, FSU, Tallahassee, Florida: Provided individual, family, and couples counseling. Provided a manualized substance abuse curriculum for the clinic and trained all counselors in the curriculum. Provided supervision to first year doctoral students and reviewed all clinical documentation for quality assurance.
Clinical Director, September 2004 to October 2005, North American Family Institute, Inc., Monticello, FL: Provided clinical supervision to all counselors and provided clinical assessments/interventions. Reviewed all state and federal guidelines to ensure the appropriate quality of services were provided and documented, as well as conducted monthly chart reviews for quality assurance.

Clinical Supervisor, January 2004 – July 2004, Jefferson County Correctional Institute, Monticello, FL: Provided counseling to adult prisoners with substance abuse issues. Reviewed all state and federal guidelines to ensure the appropriate quality of services were provided and documented, as well as conducted monthly chart reviews for quality assurance.

Substance Abuse Coordinator, December 1999 to September 2002, Georgia Pines Mental Health, Developmental Disorders, and Addictive Diseases Services, Thomasville, Georgia: Coordinated 16 male and female substance abuse programs throughout the state of Georgia.

Adult Intensive Outpatient Coordinator, June 1999 to October 1999, Bradford Health Services, Tuscaloosa, AL: Provided individual, group, and family therapy and coordinated all clinical services.

Coordinator and Counselor, September 1995 to June 1999, Walker Recovery Center, Jasper, AL: Coordinated five programs and provided clinical supervision for nurses, Master’s, and Bachelor’s level clinicians.

Transition Specialist/Case Manager, October 1994 to July 1995, Futures Unlimited, Tuscaloosa, AL: Coordinated services, advocated, and arranged placement for individuals with mental retardation.

Mental Health/Substance Abuse Counselor, September 1988 to August 1994, Walker Regional Medical Center, Behavioral Medicine Unit, Jasper, AL: Provided individual and group therapy for psychiatric and chemically dependent in-patient and out-patient clients.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Instructor – Fall 2007 to Present
Department of Educational and Human Sciences, Counselor Education Program University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida – Provide lectures for Marriage and Intimate Relationships, MHS 2441, to undergraduate students and provide lectures and clinical supervision for Practicum in Counselor Education, MHS 6803 and Counseling Internship, MHS 6830, Family Counseling I, MHS 6430, and Family Counseling II, MHS 6431 to advanced graduate level students.

Guest Lecturer - Spring 2005
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, Marriage and Family Therapy Program Valdosta State University, Valdosta Georgia – Provided multiple guest lectures for Psychopathology and Psychopharmacology, MFTH 7400, to advanced graduate level students.
**Adjunct Instructor** - Fall 2003
Department of Academic Affairs, Division of Academic Support and Counseling
Department of Nursing, Division of Health Care Professions Tallahassee Community College, Tallahassee, Florida – Taught *College Success, SLS 1501*, for undergraduate students focusing on career planning and development in the Counseling Department and to undergraduate nursing students focusing on study skills and critical thinking in the Nursing Department.

**Adjunct Instructor** – Fall 1996
Bevill State Community College, Jasper, Alabama – Taught *General Psychology, PSY 200*, to senior citizens in the Psychology Department.

**Instructor, Psychological Nursing Rotation** – 1990-1991
Bevill State Community College, Jasper, Alabama – Taught *Crisis Intervention and Group Processing* to nursing students in the Nursing Department.

**PRESENTATIONS**


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Work in Progress:


RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Graduate Research Assistant, Fall 2006 – August 2007, Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Sciences, Tallahassee, Florida: Research is currently being conducted with adolescent males and females ages 12-18 in two Department of Juvenile Justice residential programs.

Research Fidelity Monitor and Research Coach, 2005 to 2006, Justice Research Center, Tallahassee, Florida – Research is currently being conducted on the efficacy of The Works Initiative including the model Thinking For a Change (T4C).

Animal Research Specialist, Gnotobiology (Isolated Animal Research- Microbiology), 1986-1988, The University of Alabama, Birmingham, Alabama - Provided record keeping and up-keeping of isolated research animals.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Susan Johnson: Emotion Focused Therapy, Smart Marriages Conference, Orlando, FL, July 2009
Salvador Minuchin: Structural Systematic Family Therapy, Advanced Summer Intensive at The Minuchin Center for the Family, New York City, NY, July, 2005
Salvador Minuchin: New Developments: 40 Years Later in Family Therapy, Orlando, FL, April, 2005.
John Gottman: Marital Therapy: A Research-Based Approach, Orlando, FL, April, 2002
Albert Ellis: Treating Anxiety, Depression, and Anger Effectively, Jacksonville, FL, February, 2001

AFFILIATIONS

American Counseling Association (ACA)
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)
Tallahassee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (TAMFT)
Marriage and Family Therapy Graduate Association (MFTGA)
National Association of Forensic Counselors (NAFC)
American College of Certified Forensic Counselors (ACCFC)
Florida, Georgia, and Alabama Substance Abuse Associations
International Consortium for Addiction Professionals

HONORS AND AWARDS

Florida State University Certificate of Appreciation of Service to the Graduate Student Colleagues and the Academic Community at FSU, 2003-Present
Hortense Glen Honor Society (Upper 1% of College - FSU)
Kappa Omicron Nu (Family and Consumer Science Honorary)
Phi Alpha Honor Society (Social Work Honorary)
Chancellor’s List (National Graduate Honor Society)
The National Dean’s List and Florida State University Dean’s List
University of Alabama at Birmingham Dean’s List
Monticello New Life Employee of the Month, April 2005
Georgia Pines Outstanding Achievement Award for Job Service and Dedication presented by Substance Abuse Services, May 2002
Walker Regional Medical Center Employee of the Month, September 1990 and May, 1993
Medical Laboratory School (Military)
Expert Field Medical Badge awarded by General Norman Schwartzkoff