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An exploration of two couples workshop approaches: Getting the Love You Want by Imago Relationships International and The Art and Science of Love by The Gottman Institute

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An Exploration of Two Couples Workshop Approaches: Getting the Love You Want by
Imago Relationships International and The Art and Science of Love by The Gottman

Institute

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

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Dedication

This research project is dedicated to all the people who have helped deepen my understanding of the personal struggles within romantic relationships. There are too many of you to name, but I want you to know that I am thankful for all you have taught me.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the Counseling Psychology faculty at James Madison University for creating rich and dynamic learning experiences that allowed me to grow both as a person and as an emerging professional. I would like to thank Dr. Eric Cowan for his support, patience, enthusiasm, and creativity throughout this significant endeavor. I would like to thank Madeleine Dupre for her continual encouragement and zest, Don Roe, and the rest of the AT department at the Commonwealth Center for helping me strive to be a better person. I am thankful for Kathleen McCraw, a cherished friend from my undergrad days, who eagerly reviewed my paper in the nick of time. I would especially like to thank my fiancé, Jimmie, for enriching my life, inspiring me to push myself, being patient, giving me unconditional love, and for always believing in me. I would like to thank my family for giving me the space to blossom in life. For that I am truly grateful. I will always love them dearly. I would also like to thank my sister, Sam, for fostering my development.

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to examine, compare, and evaluate two differing approaches to couples' workshops. Chapter 1 will use one couple's story to illustrate the epidemic of romantic relationship/marriage dissolution. Chapter 2, the literature review, will introduce two workshop approaches by Harville Hendrix and John Gottman. This chapter presents literature that supports the workshops and highlights couples' therapy research. Chapter 3 will review each workshop separately with respect to their goals, structure, and how they express underlying ideas. Also, a comparison and evaluation will be provided for both. Chapter 4 will follow with a summative evaluation of my learning experiences as a person, student, and professional. Finally, chapter 5 will discuss the limitations of the workshops and will propose ideas for future analysis.

HENDRIX'S IMAGO COUPLES' WORKSHOP AND GOTTMAN'S ART AND
SCIENCE OF LOVE WORKSHOP: AN EXPLORATION

Chapter 1: The Romantic Relationship and Marriage Dissolution Epidemic

Lisa and Kevin's Story

Lisa was the type of woman who allowed herself to be vulnerable with people despite being quite familiar with pain and disappointment. For five years, she was in pursuit of a meaningful and emotionally deep relationship. She wanted to be with someone who would celebrate and accept who she was. Lisa knew she had to be emotionally ready for such a relationship.

When Lisa first met Kevin (not their real names) through mutual friends she knew immediately that she wanted to be near him. Hoping he was single, Lisa struck up a conversation with Kevin. It was important to find out as much as possible about this attractive gentleman. She noticed that she could not stop smiling because she felt giddy inside thinking about the possibility of starting a relationship with him. Not wanting to welcome doubt into her heart, she turned her wish over to God.

After a short period of time, Lisa and Kevin developed a relationship and it started to become complicated. They had strong thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. They did not agree on much, which was bothersome. They could not always understand each other. They had similar and differing values. They came from very different families. They began experiencing a great deal of conflict. It was not uncommon for them to yell and say horrible things to each other. During conflict they were struggling to feel valued, loved, accepted, and emotionally safe. They wanted to marry, grow old together, and have a wonderful life because of how much they loved each other. However, during the

tough times they wondered if they were right for each other, if they wanted to stay together, and if the relationship was too difficult to sustain. Choosing to focus on what worked well in the relationship they married within six months. Unfortunately, after a couple years of marriage and countless fights, they decided to divorce. Both left the marriage feeling hurt and confused. They wondered how they could have married the wrong person.

Scope of the Problem

Kevin and Lisa's relationship is similar to many couples' experiences. Being stuck, feeling doubt, and living in negativity can lead to the downfall of any relationship. Now, as an engaged woman working towards my professional goals, I can both understand and identify with others who highly prioritize their romantic relationships. Television, movies, books, magazines, and many people focus heavily on the importance of romantic relationships. Successful relationships require a great deal of devotion, which is contrary to how American society, literature, and the media display romantic relationships as being effortless, conflict-free, and full of passion.

Many parents teach their children that the prince will sweep the princess off her feet and that they will get married, have children and live happily ever after. However, numerous people pursue divorce when they have fallen out of love. Television, magazines, movies, and novels, depict divorce as commonplace and acceptable for couples if their relationship and spouse do not meet their expectations. It is alarming that individuals grow up without being given a realistic image of romantic relationships. Essentially, "happily ever after" is more appealing than the reality that good relationships

require “teamwork,” regular maintenance and tune-ups (Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976; Hendrix, 1988; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001).

Many people walk down the aisle in pursuit of “The American Dream” without giving much thought to the fact that statistics are gloomy. More than 50% of first marriages split up and more than 70% of second marriages split up, which unfortunately leaves many children dealing with the associated impact of their parents divorcing (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Silver, 1994; Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002; Hendrix, 1988; Markman et al., 2001). When a relationship dissolves it has the potential to greatly affect those ending the relationship as well as their children’s overall well-being in many negative ways (Gottman, 1994; Markman et al., 2001).

Affairs, breakups, and divorce continue to be common exits for many suffering couples. These common exits allow individuals to continue to bring the same issues into their future relationships. These individuals assume that the other person was the problem instead of taking a deeper look at themselves (Hendrix, 1988). When individuals feel their partner is problematic, they choose to grow outside of the context of a romantic relationship and thus deny themselves the joy and possibility of growing as an individual while in the context of a meaningful romantic relationship. Some couples try to protect themselves from the pain of divorce by not getting married.

Rationale

When I ask myself “What is the most meaningful thing in my life?” The answer is simple: relationships. When I was growing up, my relationships with my family were more significant to me than anything else. As a student in college I increasingly valued the times that I spent with my friends and the connections that we developed. On my

journey throughout graduate school I have discovered that my roles in life as a person, student, and emerging professional are deeply interconnected and overlapping. For example, to be an effective counselor I must continually work on myself. My personal and professional relationships benefit as I increase my awareness of my thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and motivations. Venturing into a new phase of my life, as a fiancé and an aspiring counselor, I am interested in relationships more than I have ever been before.

To further my own growth and promote the goals of this project I explored two theoretical approaches to couples counseling. I also attended, with my fiancée, two workshops based on these ideas to obtain a firsthand account of their methods and procedures.

Since I hope to work with couples in the future, I intend to focus on gaining knowledge, experiences, and research-supported methods of improving romantic relationships. Ultimately, I hope to draw connections between what I learn from two specific couples' workshops, couples' research, and my prior work, in community counseling agencies, with married couples and families. Carlson and Sperry (1999) relate that counselors should be aware that there are obstacles that get in the way of intimacy such as individual expectations, fear of closeness, and lack of respect for differences. In gaining a deeper awareness of how I could have improved my prior work with these couples, I hope to more effectively counsel couples in the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the main concepts of two approaches to couples' workshops. This overview is composed of four parts. The first part provides an outline of Harville Hendrix's Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT). The second part offers a synopsis of John Gottman's Theory and Marital Intervention. The third part supplies the reader with literature that supports Hendrix. Finally, the fourth part presents the reader with literature that supports Gottman.

Imago Relationship Therapy: Hendrix

Dr. Harville Hendrix created Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) (Hendrix, 1988; Hendrix, Hunt, Hannah, & Luquet, 2005). IRT examines couples' unconscious inaccurate perceptions of each other. These perceptions develop when people choose partners to satisfy their unmet childhood needs. While committing to one another, partners unconsciously impose unrealistic expectations, especially during conflict. These unconscious expectations create a reoccurring struggle of partners attempting to have their needs met.

Through Imago Therapy, couples identify unmet childhood needs and become aware of how these needs create unrealistic expectations of partners. Imago Therapy helps couples re-commit with greater consciousness and understanding. When re-committing to one another, partners re-focus their energy on the relationship, learn about their own childhood wounds and needs, and gain compassion for their partner's unmet childhood needs. Coercion highlights the resurfacing of childhood wounds (unmet childhood needs) that one's partner is not satisfying. However, without the use of coercion, partners create healing by willingly meeting one another's needs. IRT suggests

individuals fulfill their own needs, rather than demanding this of their partners. After accepting responsibility for self, partners experience the joy of safety and do not engage in coercion.

This heightened awareness establishes a stronger sense of connection helpful especially during disagreements. In formulating this approach to couples' therapy, Hendrix drew on influences from a wide range of fields including elements from the behavioral sciences, cognitive therapy, Gestalt psychology, Transactional Analysis, systems theory, and even Western spiritual tradition. IRT was greatly influenced by Jung's idea of the "imago" (Hendrix, 1988, p. 37). Jung's idea was that the "projection" of the archetypal images originates in the family of origin (Jung, 1971, p. 173). The image is "always unconsciously projected upon the person of the beloved...one chief reason for passionate attraction" (Jung, 1971, p. 173). In the book, *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, Hendrix explains the theory of Imago Therapy by educating couples about how to facilitate closeness in relationships.

Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples is divided into two major parts: the "unconscious marriage" and "the conscious marriage" (Hendrix, 1988, p. xxviii). The first part refers to initial attraction and romantic love (a time in the relationship when one's needs are eagerly met). The end of romantic love leads to the development of a power struggle between partners. This power struggle typically occurs when partners commit to one another and begin using coercion to attain unconscious needs and expectations that their partner is no longer meeting. According to Hendrix, the power struggle grows as a result of unmet childhood needs. In order to attain a more fulfilling relationship, the second part of the book describes the need for couples to foster a

“conscious marriage” by learning more about themselves. As each partner recognizes his or her unmet needs, they are more aware of the need to address them independently and as a couple. Finally, part three outlines a ten-week course on relationship therapy that allows couples to become aware of their rooted needs and equips them with healthy strategies to meet them.

The Unconscious Marriage

While exploring the concept of the “unconscious marriage,” Hendrix shares that humans have evolved to unconsciously seek safety and therefore avoid physical and psychological death. These security-seeking operations are based in primitive brain structures, such as the limbic system. Hendrix refers to the limbic system as the “old brain,” driven by primal needs of survival. People unconsciously select romantic partners who possess the worst and best traits of their caretakers. These similar traits create the reenactment of childhood wounds. When expecting to meet one another’s needs, partners reenact childhood wounds that create an opportunity for healing (Hendrix, 1988).

Hendrix explains that romantic relationships begin with romantic love. The intensity of romantic love is temporary and produces a chemical euphoria in the brain. When feeling energized and complete, partners experience chemical euphoria. Couples show vulnerability by self-disclosing during chemical euphoria. Romantic love subsides after 14-20 months of committing to one’s partner.

Partners’ unmet needs and perceptions become apparent at the end of romantic love. When accustomed to feeling happy, partners desire more satisfaction. Partner satisfaction diminishes when couples disagree about their unshared expectations. While disagreeing, couples feel alone and vulnerable and experience increased security needs.

Partners fight for power, agreement, and congruency to preserve their sense of security and safety from death.

The Conscious Marriage

When developing a “conscious marriage,” couples acknowledge that relationships seek to resolve childhood needs and wounds. IRT encourages couples to foster healthy expectations, promote love in the relationship, and maintain an accurate image of their partner. When contributing to the relationship, partners accept individual responsibility for their needs and goals. Partners who take responsibility for their own needs give each other space to feel distinct and yet also connected.

Hendrix encourages partners to use their “new brain,” while becoming conscious of their tendency to satisfy instinctive needs of the “old brain” (Hendrix, 1988, p. 11). The “new brain,” or the pre-frontal cortex, identifies potential benefits or dangers using logic to investigate, examine, and discriminate a situation. IRT suggests couples learn more about their partner and themselves. When developing new techniques to satisfy personal desires, partners create the space needed to value one another’s needs. Couples acquire the love they want by accepting their relational difficulties and committing to moving forward consciously.

While creating greater consciousness in marriage, couples draft a vision for their relationship. This vision focuses on positive attributes desired in the relationship. These positive attributes are rooted in the present tense and convey a sense that what is desired is already happening. IRT encourages couples to incorporate their vision into their daily lives.

When incorporating a vision, couples heal by closing their exits and focusing more energy on themselves, their partner, and their relationship. Partners “exit” their relationships by focusing their energy away from their partner and the relationship. When learning to identify and reduce exits that are present, couples choose to improve the relationship.

IRT suggests couples integrate the “container transaction” process into their relationship. This process helps couples manage their anger by listening and acknowledging it. Individuals agree to verbally express their anger when they are frustrated about specific issues, instead of waiting until they are so overwhelmed by their anger that they regrettably lash out and attack their partners’ personalities. When attempting to acknowledge one another’s anger, partners are not pressured to agree, accept blame, or match feelings (if one partner is verbally expressing sadness the other partner is expressing sadness) (Hendrix, 1988, p. 183). Hendrix divulges that anger is natural: “When we feel joyful, it is because of life energy is allowed to flourish. When we become angry, it is because our life energy has been thwarted” (Hendrix, pp. 183-184).

The “couple’s dialogue” facilitates healthy verbal expression (Hendrix, 1988, p. 155). This style of communication requires partners listen to, reflect back, validate, and empathize with what is said based on a summative understanding of how their partners feel. Couples confirm an accurate understanding of their partner by mirroring what is said and restating it. While validating one another’s feelings, partners minimize their own point of view. If partners minimize personal perspective and the need for agreement, they convey the ability to take in what their partner is saying. When

empathizing, partners identify with the feelings linked to a situation. Hendrix suggests couples devote themselves to continually working on their conscious marriage:

“Ultimately, it takes a lifetime together for a couple to identify and heal the majority of their childhood wounds” (Hendrix, p. 11).

Literature Supporting Hendrix

Collective Nature

Family systems theory and Imago therapy see “relationships as a crucial aspect of nature and evolution” (Hendrix et al., 2002, p. 71). It is in loving “interpersonal fusion” that “the deepest need of man... to overcome his separateness” is achieved (Fromm, 2000, pp. 17, 9). Therefore, marriage is viewed as “nature’s way of healing itself” (Hendrix et al., p. 66). According to Fromm (2000), “love is a choice” rather than a temporary feeling (p. 49). In nature there is a balance between harmony and discord. Fortunately, humans, like nature, are capable of constant change, repair, and healing.

Myths about Happiness

Western culture places high regard on individual and relational goals (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Society encourages individuals to follow their dreams of happiness, while holding onto themselves. Western culture reassures individuals that pursuing personal fulfillment welcomes the right partner into their lives (Bellah et al., 1985). The right partner helps them achieve their personal dreams. Personal dreams may include professional success, personal success, relational success, or all of these. These high expectations for success, rooted in childhood fairytales, lead people to believe that romantic relationships are uncomplicated, pleasant, painless, and easy to balance with other desires (Fromm, 2000).

A person's capacity to share romantic love with another is based on how he or she handles messages received in childhood that are simple, confusing, and contradictory (Gaylin, 1986; Hunt, 1959). Society encourages unhappily married people to divorce and states that individuals are to blame for relational dissolution. Therefore, many people choose not to take ownership of their roles in relational problems. People continue to believe they ensure lifelong happiness and security in life by attaining the ideal mate (Bellah et al., 1985; Fromm, 2000; Gaylin, 1986; Hunt, 1959). Western culture highlights marriage as a place of individual refuge and happiness. However, marriage is a journey of growth where happiness may exist given the right conditions. When people can cherish their most fragile and important relationship they keep it flourishing.

Journey of Growth: Optimal Therapeutic Conditions for Change

Commitment.

When attempting to sustain a relationship, couples commit to one another (Fromm, 2000; Gaylin, 1986; Hendrix, 1988; Stuart, 1980). Relational therapy helps when it explores both the relationship and the individual (Hendrix et al., 2005). Since “wounding occurs in relationship, healing and growth can occur only in the context of a relationship” (Hendrix et al., p. 26). According to Hendrix et al. couples with a stronger sense of “us” are better able to heal themselves. Imago Therapy stresses the importance of couples changing their thoughts and behaviors about themselves and each other; as positive change in the relationship can only occur with the presence of a new script (Hendrix et al., p. 97).

Communication.

When attempting to constructively communicate, partners create positive change in the relationship. The three necessary components of communication are listening, validation, and empathy. These components create a safe space where partners feel their thoughts and feelings are heard and understood (Hendrix et al., 2002; Markman et al., 2001; Stuart, 1980). Several studies (Gottman et al., 1976; Lederer & Jackson, 1968; Rogers, 1972; Stuart, 1969) found that in order for couples to improve their communication; individuals must take ownership for fulfilling their own needs, participate in listening fully, be clear about needs, talk as they did while courting, and commit to healthier conflict management (as cited in Gullick & Peed, 1978).

Partners struggle to accept their own responsibility for change when they expect to change one's partner, (Stuart, 1980). However, when willingly attempting to meet one another's needs, partners foster individual progress, relationship growth, and the healing of childhood wounds (Hendrix et al., 2002). The Imago theory encourages partners to ask for positive, specific, and measurable behavior changes (Stuart, 1980). These specific changes require partners to understand how current behaviors trigger old wounds (Stuart, 1980; Hendrix, 1988). Imago theory suggests couples develop a picture of improved interaction (Fromm, 2000).

Consciousness.

While developing a new picture of relating, couples increase their level of awareness and consciousness (Hendrix, 1988; Jung, 1971). A conscious relationship requires individuals to be separate and yet connected to one another (have a balance between I and we). Fostering consciousness demands a greater understanding of the

impact thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have on a relationship. Developing awareness helps prevent automatic unconscious projecting that stems from childhood (Hendrix, 1988; Jung, 1971). The “degree to which that unconscious exists” can determine how conflict is handled and the overall quality of the relationship (Jung, 1971, p. 164).

Gaining consciousness within a romantic relationship is not simple or painless (Jung, 1971). While improving the level of consciousness, partners replace interfering automatic behaviors with logic. The “old brain” protects existence, whereas the “new brain” improves existence (Hendrix, 1988; Penfield, 1975, p. 15). The “new brain” is only accessible if a person feels safe from both psychological and physical “death” (Penfield, 1975, p. 15). Continual practice accessing the “new brain” minimizes the need for defenses and projections in order to feel safe, especially during conflict. The presence of safety fosters true connection. True connection occurs when partners genuinely share who they are (Hendrix, 1988; Jung, 1971).

Brief Introduction to Gottman

Dr. John Gottman, a revered researcher in the field of couples’ therapy trained as a mathematician and a research psychologist (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 19). Gottman stresses the importance of saving the institution of marriage, preventing divorce, and improving couples’ relationships; yet, he understands that his goals are not appropriate for everyone.

Gottman extensively studied couples in the marriage lab he and his wife created in Seattle, Washington. Gottman and his research team conducted experiments on the difference between happy and troubled couples, and met with couples individually to gather their separate and connected histories. Additionally, he collected current

perceptions of the history of a relationship. These research studies allowed him to determine which “responses, thoughts, and physiological reactions place couples on a path toward divorce” (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 20). His clinical and scientific efforts permit him to infer with great accuracy which couples are moving toward divorce.

Preventing divorce is possible if continual effort is put into the relationship.

Gottman’s Theory and Marital Intervention

Unlike “behavioral methods” to marital therapy, which focus predominately on dealing with conflict, the “Sound Marital House” (SMH) theory suggests couples fare better with conflict when they are optimistic and share a strong friendship (Gottman, 1994, p. 426). This theory suggests therapies that teach “active listening” as a skill to address solvable conflicts is unhelpful (Gottman et al., 2002, p. 426). The purpose of this “empirically based marital intervention” is to decrease the affect matching (taking on a partner’s emotions as one’s own), specifically the negative affect matching (Gottman et al., p. 302). This intervention seeks to increase the overall positivity in the relationship, especially during conflict (Gottman et al.).

Gottman’s theory and marital intervention, “The Gottman Theory of Marriage—the “Sound Marital House,” (SMH) has three foundational parts (Gottman, 1999; Gottman et al., 2002). When attempting to have a lasting marriage, partners need a higher level of positivity, less negativity, and to maintain a level of control during conflict (Gottman et al.). Stable couples have a strong friendship.

Building friendship.

There are three ways a couple can restore their friendship. First, partners take time to get to know one another. Attachment develops when partners acknowledge each

other's feelings, including anger. Second, couples eliminate the presence of disrespect by verbally sharing more appreciation. Gratitude builds when individuals recall and share what they like about their partner. Finally, partners create more special and meaningful moments. Couples who are better friends perceive each other's negative attitudes as positive, establish parameters for conflict, and preserve a more positive attitude during conflict. Friendship creates a safe environment in the relationship. Genuine marital friendship exposes "myths about marriage," which couples believe. These beliefs can negatively interfere in the relationship (Gottman et al., 2002, p. 301).

Unsolvable problems.

The majority of conflict in marriage is rooted in fundamental differences and without solution. When couples believe that their individual hopes are possible, they can do well in handling unsolvable problems. These hopeful couples create new meaning for themselves "that fuels both intimacy and estrangement" and bypasses "marital gridlock" (Gottman et al., pp. 301-302). When experiencing gridlock on the other hand, couples feel horrible constantly. The SMH encourages couples to have open conversations about recurrent issues. These conversations help couples acknowledge their perpetual problems. Perpetual problems contain deeper meaning. When partners understand this meaning they create respect for one another.

Solvable problems.

A small portion of marital conflict is solvable. SMH encourages couples to use four skills with solvable problems. These four skills facilitate a process that allows for mending (Gottman et al., 2002, pp. 426-427). This process involves entering a discussion gently, taking ownership of one's part in a problem, reducing the emotional charge

connected to an issue in order to mend, and finding acceptable common ground.

Gottman et al. (2002) found that increased positive affect allows couples to internally calm down and externally reduce the intensity of their conflict. SMH suggests couples create a calm environment using a technique called “physiological soothing” (Gottman et al., p. 300). This technique lowers blood pressure and heart rate, which permits couples to hear one another. When attempting to listen to one another during a conflict, partners can easily become overwhelmed by their thoughts and feelings if they do not work at being calm (Gottman et al.).

Literature Supporting Gottman

Partner Interaction

How couples handle their disagreements plays a large role in determining the health and longevity of a relationship (Carrère & Gottman, 1999; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Jacobson & Addis, 1993; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Kurdek, 1993). A dose of negativity is essential for the full growth of a relationship (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007; Gottman & Silver, 1994). However, there must be a 5:1 ratio of positivity to negativity in order to prevent relationship dissolution (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010). Couples can prevent this unfortunate outcome if they know the “... signs of dangers” (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 71). The red flags are lack of laughter, withdrawal, disappointment, disrespect, negative thoughts about partner and the relationship, and a disproportionate amount of negativity (Alexander, 1973; Bray & Jouriles, 1995; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Silver, 1994).

Stable marriages consist of people able to move through unavoidable conflict (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Three stable approaches of conflict management are the

validating style, the conflict-avoiding style, and the volatile style of problem-solving. Validating couples are more even tempered, compromising, and accepting during conflict. They directly and respectfully choose what to discuss during conflict. Conflict-avoiding couples prefer to accept differences, focus on the positive in the relationship, and deal with conflict indirectly. Volatile couples share immense passion, free expression, and conflict in their relationships. Gottman encourages validating and conflict-avoiding couples to increase their expression of thoughts and feelings and suggests volatile couples constructively edit their expression and contain their emotions.

Characteristics of Positive Interactions/Satisfaction

The happiest couples understand and appreciate the limitations within marriage and continue to strive for relationship growth. These couples gauge their expectations accordingly (Gottman & Silver, 1994). These realistic expectations allow partners to love and respect each other. These relationships are built on expressing excitement, appreciation, and interest for listening to one another (Gottman et al., 1976). SMH encourages partners to value their differing needs and past experiences (as making them who they are) (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978) and relate to each other in a more loving and accepting way during conflict. These happy partners carve out more space in the relationship for fun and positivity, show restraint during conflict, have more positive perceptions about their partner and relationship (Baucom & Lester, 1986; Gottman & Silver, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985), give apologies, display flexible emotionality, and experience difficult times as fleeting.

When couples equally share the relationship responsibilities they feel better about the relationship, enjoy positive touch, and have a better sex life (Gottman & Silver, 1994;

Kolb & Straus, 1974). Satisfied couples agree more often (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). Bakeman and Gottman (1997) discovered that couples tend to experience long term changes in “marital satisfaction” when they easily become overwhelmed by their thoughts and feelings during conflict discussions (p. 192). Relationships fare better when partners take ownership for thoughts, statements, and behaviors. Content couples usually refrain from “emotional bookkeeping,” weighing the distribution of giving and receiving (Murstein, Cerreto, & MacDonald, 1977, p. 543).

Increasing Intimacy

SMH suggests couples value alone time, devote energy to personal growth, and make time to be grateful for the relationship (Gottman et al., 1976). Partners must be receptive, show interest, and provide friendship for one another. When attempting to plan for their future, partners think of wanted change, gain more understanding of each other, share fantasies, act silly together, and share in harmless deviant behavior. Closer couples enjoy sharing feelings, fun moments, and quality time with one another. Once close and intimate, partners can expose and deal with hidden agendas. Good relationships go through “cycles of closeness and apartness,” which is natural (Gottman et al., p. 147).

Chapter 3: Review of Couples' Workshops

In this chapter, I am describing for the reader what it was like to attend two couples' workshops. This chapter is composed of three parts. In the first part, I address Hendrix's Imago workshop. In the second part, I discuss Gottman's Art and Science of Love workshop. Lastly, in the third part, I present a comparison of the main points of these two workshop approaches.

In the first part, I provide an overview of the goals of Hendrix's Imago workshop. Then I illustrate the Imago workshop structure by highlighting what I found valuable (using examples to display how it felt to engage in the workshop exercises). Lastly, I summarize how underlying ideas were expressed in the Imago workshop.

In the second part, I indicate Gottman's Art and Science of Love workshop goals. Then I depict important points in the workshop structure (emphasizing how it felt to be involved in the workshop by using examples of the exercises). Finally, I recap how underlying ideas were conveyed in the Gottman workshop.

Imago Workshop: Hendrix & Hunt

Goals

Hendrix and Hunt wrote *Getting the Love You Want: Couples Workshop Manual* third edition in 2005. The purpose of the Imago workshop was to assist people in developing a "new way to love" (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. i). Couples achieved greater connection implementing this new style of loving. The workshop was not intended as a substitute for couples' therapy. Couples learned about the foundation of the "Imago Process" in a safe environment conducive to engaging in the experiential parts of the workshop. This safe environment allowed couples to better understand their emotions

and conflict. Couples were responsible for figuring out how to apply what they learned from the workshop into their lives.

Structure

Hendrix finds it important for couples to communicate using a precise structure, connect emotionally with one's childhood caretakers, understand their "imago," explore how they picked their partner, experience closeness, share their needs, show appreciation, and change the way they look at their relationship. I am going to walk the reader through these select powerful exercises in this workshop.

Day one.

The facilitator created a sense of security in the workshop by having couples sign a confidentiality agreement with the understanding that only first names would be used. Couples felt protected knowing they would only be asked to do what the facilitators were also willing to do. Facilitators introduced the importance of modeling by demonstrating dialogue (more specifically mirroring and reflecting one another's thoughts).

Imago dialogue.

Imago theory intends for the dialogue composed of three parts, mirroring, validating, and empathizing (MVE) to help couples feel accurately heard and understood. The facilitator encouraged couples tune in, offer eye contact, slow down, and listen deeply to one another during the Imago dialogue.

In this chapter of the paper, fictitious monologues and dialogues illustrate how these workshops' manuals formatted their exercises, role-plays, demonstrations, structured dialogue, and worksheets from the workbook.

This is an example of a married couple engaging in an Imago dialogue. Notice in this example how effectively the couple listens to one another, checks for accuracy, validates and empathizes.

W1: I came to this workshop because I care about us. I love you and want our relationship to work.

H1: I heard you say because you love me, care about us, and want us to work, you pursued this workshop. Did I get that?

W2: Yes that was it.

H2: Is there more about that?

W3: Nope.

H3: I can understand that you would want to come to this workshop to help us.

H4: I can imagine you might have felt scared to ask me to come to this workshop with you. Is that what you were feeling?

W4: Yes, and I also felt hurt that you were initially reluctant to come with me.

H5: So you were hurt by my initial negative reaction. Did I get that?

W5: Yes.

Imago theory encourages couples to switch roles at this point in order for both partners to be heard.

H6: What I experienced inside as I listened to you just now was happiness that I have such a loving wife.

W6: So you felt happy to have such a loving wife when you listened to me. Did I get that?

H7: Yes.

The couple in this example started talking reluctantly. However, they ended up sitting closer and smiling at one another because they felt hopeful about genuinely connecting. This dialogue prepared couples to experience the rest of the workshop.

Guided visualization.

The facilitator guided the group through a visualization of “childhood memories” (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. 15). This visualization allowed individuals to find a safe space in their mind, go there, and experience their caretakers as they did in childhood. This example shows how the facilitator started a guided visualization. Notice how it would feel to personally experience one’s childhood caretakers, as an adult looking back on one’s childhood, in this guided visualization.

F1: I am going to turn off the lights (speaking softly). I want you all to get comfortable. Please close your eyes. Imagine a place where you feel safe. Notice how it looks, what it smells like, how it feels, what it tastes like, and the sounds you hear. Imagine your caretakers approaching your safe space when you were a child.

Couples learned about what they needed in childhood and did not receive after “confronting their caretakers as an adult looking back on childhood” in order to better understand their current behaviors in their romantic relationships (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. 15).

Imago construction.

After the visualization, couples were equipped to explore their Imago construction, a profile of childhood caretakers. This is an example of a male's Imago construction of his childhood using the manual worksheets (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. 24). The worksheet prompts are in bold. Notice this male's childhood wounds and what he yearned for in his upbringing.

M1: My unconscious childhood agenda was to get my caretakers, who were sometimes critical, demanding, and minimizing **with whom I often felt** rejected **because they frustrated me by** telling me no one would ever want to marry me **which made me fear** abandonment **to always be** loving, encouraging, and enthusiastic **instead of** critical, demanding, and minimizing **so that I could have experienced** being seen, always feeling safe, and accepted **and always felt** loved.

By creating a profile of childhood caretakers, couples learned how deeply their childhood impacted them, both positively and negatively.

The power struggle-partner profile.

This is an example of a male's power struggle-partner profile (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, pp. 48-49). Notice the similarities between the example of an Imago construction of childhood and this dialogue. What does this male need from his partner that he also needed from his caretakers and did not receive?

M1: I tend to be drawn to a person whom I often experience as critical, untrusting, and jealous **with whom I frequently feel** insecure **because she frustrates me sometimes by** highlighting mine and my family's flaws

which activates my worst fear which is abandonment. **I wish this person would always be** loving, encouraging, enthusiastic, supportive, and thoughtful...**so that I could always feel** helpful, calm, glad, proud, satisfied, loved, sprightly, warm, thankful, curious, strong, and certain...

Couples learn about their deepest unmet childhood needs by exploring the power struggle profile. When attempting to create a power-struggle profile, couples learned how similar their partners were to their caretakers.

Re-imagining-the holding exercise.

The facilitator taught couples the importance of re-imagining their partners through an exercise called “Holding” (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. 62). This is an example of the holding exercise. Notice how comforting and safe it would feel to share the sadness of one’s childhood, while being held by one’s partner’s heart.

F1: I want you all to find a comfortable space on the floor. Decide who will be the holder and holdee. I want the holders to hold their partner against their chest while they are in the fetal position. I am going to turn out the lights. Allow yourselves to experience the holding by silently taking in the details of the experience. When you are ready, I want the holders to ask their partner to share the pain in their childhood.

Holder 1: **Tell me about the pain in your childhood.**

Holdee 1: I felt hurt growing up because I was not accepted for who I was.

Holder 2: **What was the worst part of living with your family?**

Holdee 2: The worst part was not feeling safe to be myself.

Holder 3: **Thank you for telling me.**

Holdee 3: **Thank you for listening.**

The facilitator encouraged couples to switch roles at this point. Couples learned what it was like to be held and to hold one another, if they liked it, and why it was difficult for them. The facilitator asked couples to share their thoughts about the overall experience.

Day two.

Restructuring frustrations-behavior change requests.

This exercise was intended to draw couples' attention to hidden desires surrounding frustrations, turn the desire into a positive request for behavior, and to learn how to have an effective behavior change request dialogue. This is an example of a couple engaging in the behavior change request dialogue. Notice how the male in this dialogue reaches out to his female partner in lines M5 and M6 and the power and healing that happens in lines F9 and M9.

M5: You get frustrated when I do not clean up after myself. The story you tell yourself is that I don't care about your feelings and then you react by blaming me. What scares you is that I ignore you because I disapprove of you. Those feelings of disapproval remind you of when your parents disapproved of your not cleaning up after yourself and then ignored you. Did I get you?

F6: Yes...

F9: Thank you for being willing to give me this gift. It will begin to heal my childhood hurt of disapproval, reduce my fear that you do not care about my feelings, and help me feel seen for who I am all the time.

M9: So you are thankful that I listened to you. It will heal your childhood hurt of disapproval, reduce your fear that I do not care about your feelings, and help you feel seen for who you really are all the time. **Thank you for giving me this opportunity to stretch for you. It will help me overcome my fear of abandonment and help me grow back into being a more connected, considerate partner** to you.

The facilitator encouraged couples to switch roles at this point. Couples learned that despite the difficulty in verbally expressing their needs, it was rewarding to know that their partners were willing to stretch for them in order to heal old wounds.

Re-romanticizing your relationship.

A conscious relationship was built with an increased level of positivity in the relationship including caring behaviors, surprises, fun, and expressing love. The facilitator encouraged couples to talk about behaviors that make them feel loved, surprises they would appreciate, and fun activities. These conversations led the couples to think about what they appreciated about one another. The facilitator encouraged couples to pick one person to sit down and receive positive flooding first.

This is an example of a woman loudly shouting her appreciation for her partner (also called positive flooding) as he sits in a chair and she circles around him. Notice how it must have felt to be the male receiving the positive flooding and how this experience could bring a couple closer to one another.

F1: I love your great smile! I think you have amazing eyes!

F2: I love how thoughtful you are! I love how generous you are!

F3: I love your surprises! I love how you hug me!

F4: You mean the world to me!

Couples learned what it was like to give and receive positive flooding and how they felt about it. The flooding experience allowed couples to appreciate one another, especially if recently they had been unable to do so.

Re-visioning your relationship.

In order to find healing, couples needed to consciously use their unconscious in order to develop a relationship vision. Individually, people were asked to think about their “vision of a deeply satisfying love relationship” and then come together to create a mutually satisfying vision (Hendrix & Hunt, 2005, p. 85). This is an example of the beginning of a couple’s mutual relationship vision. Notice what this couple deeply desired from their relationship.

We make each other’s deepest needs a priority.

We are truthful with each other.

We feel safe with each other.

We support each other’s goals.

We have a satisfying sex life.

Couples learned to visualize how they wanted their relationship to be. The new relationship was attainable, but would require daily work.

The Imago workshop provided me with an emotionally vivid experience that was enriching and difficult. I learned a lot about myself, my partner, my family, and my childhood from participating in this workshop with my fiancée. I learned how to better communicate with my fiancée, how my childhood is connected to my current behaviors,

and what I need from my romantic relationship. I left this workshop feeling more bonded with my partner.

How Underlying Ideas Were Expressed

The core ideas of the workshop were expressed through experiential learning using the “three parts of the couple’s dialogue...mirroring, validating, and empathy” (MVE) (Hendrix, 1988, p. 143). After couples were able to “construct their imagos, the inner images of the opposite sex that guided them in mate selection” using their knowledge about which caretaker’s traits affected them the most they were able to proceed consciously through the rest of the workshop (Hendrix, 1988, p. 156). The exercises provided couples with opportunities to see and feel the power of accurate understanding. This heightened level of understanding provided a safe space for individuals to see the wounding present in each other and inspired the desire for healing.

Art and Science of Love Workshop: Gottman

Goals

Gottman and Gottman wrote *The Art and Science of Love: A Workshop for Couples, Couples Manual* in 2011. This manual suggested the purpose of this approach was to allow couples to take the first step in their relationship journey. While the workshop did not claim to solve all marital problems, it hoped to create a small and gradual change in the path of one’s relationship. This workshop was not meant to be therapy. Research has found that small changes maintained on a daily basis, turn into larger changes during the relationship lifespan. These large changes built stronger and better relationships. The workshop was intended to feel simple and doable if it was

successful. SMH encouraged couples to begin doing positive things in a small way for one another.

Structure

The facilitators explained the workshop was meant to be psycho educational in format. This format used an experiential style of learning. The presenters informed couples that they were consultants to rely on if couples became stuck during an exercise. The presenters had couples sign a form stating they understood the purpose of the workshop.

Gottman found it is important for couples to show appreciation, turn towards one another, manage stress, establish rituals of connection, develop passion, process their fights, discuss their dreams-within-conflict, and create a legacy. I am going to walk the reader through these particularly powerful exercises in this workshop.

Day one.

The facilitators encouraged couples to change two important factors in their relationships. The encouraged change included developing a better friendship and learning how to more constructively handle conflict. The presenters explained there were four particular styles of interaction that led couples to divorce. They were criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. When attempting to increase positivity in the relationship, couples were able to prevent divorce and improve the relationship. The facilitators taught couples the importance of how they talk.

Appreciation exercise (10 minutes).

Research found when people were upset; they had a tough time seeing the positives in their partner. This is an example of how a couple shared appreciations with

one another. Notice how this couple explained the overall specific positive attributes they loved about one another.

F1: I find you to be affectionate, thoughtful, creative, handsome, and silly. You are affectionate every time you see me. You are thoughtful and creative when thinking of gifts and surprises to give me. I find you handsome whenever I look at you. When you are silly with me you sing me funny songs and make me laugh.

M1: I think you are energetic, fun, and warm. You are so excited to see me and talk to me when I get home from work. You like to have fun, go out, and relax. I have more fun with you than I do with anyone else. You are warm towards me when we cuddle.

Individuals thought about their partners' strengths and heard about their own strengths, which allowed them to embrace being positive and hold off being negative.

Turn towards.

The facilitators taught couples that a bid for attention could result in turning towards, turning away, and turning against. Turning towards involved paying attention to one's partner, doing something nice for one's partner, and/or helping one's partner with something. Turning away involved ignoring one's partner. Couples turned against when they angrily responded to one another. Those couples who were able to turn towards more often tended to be happier overall. The facilitator explained to couples that turning towards one's partner created more emotional connection (especially done daily). A stronger relationship was focused on "us," rather than I.

Managing stress exercise (30 minutes).

Research found couples who were better at dealing with stress outside of the relationship maintained stronger and more fulfilling romantic relationships. The main goal of the exercise was to understand one's partner before trying to solve the problem. The facilitators instructed couples not to side with the enemy, whatever the partner was upset about. This is an example of a couple having a stress-reducing conversation. Notice how this couple connects emotionally and reaches out to help, while talking about their stressors outside the relationship.

M1: I am stressed out by work, graduation, my friends, and my family.

My job comes with a great deal of stressors. The environment, the people, and the work itself are stressful. I am scared about graduating and yet ready for it to be over. There are a lot of changes going on in my life and it affects my friends and my family.

F1: That sounds exhausting and overwhelming.

M2: Yes it sure is.

F2: What is most upsetting to you about this?

M3: I feel like I cannot balance everything in my life and I am afraid to fail.

F3: It makes sense that you would worry about failing when you have so much on your plate.

F4: I am always stressed by my job. There is always more work to be done. I cannot seem to make everyone happy. I feel like I will never have enough knowledge about what I am doing. The details of my job are

tedious. I am scared because I do not have job security and I thought I did.

M4: Is there anything I can do to support you in this?

F5: Yes, please understand when I need to carve out time to focus on my job.

M5: Okay I can do that. How about we have this sort of conversation every night when we see each other or talk on the phone?

F6: Absolutely.

This exercise gave couples a chance to actively listen to their partners' stressors that did not revolve around the relationship problems and see how that felt. When attempting to actively listen, couples foster stress reduction.

Rituals of connection exercise (30 minutes).

The facilitators taught couples that rituals of connection create turning towards one another. Research found that rituals of connection were helpful in relationships. This is an example of a couple building a ritual of connection. Notice how actively this couple processed creating and implementing a new way (ritual) to connect with one another.

F1: I want to build a ritual of connection around get-aways.

M1: I want to build a ritual of connection around dinner times.

F2: Well which one should we tackle today?

M2: Let's discuss the get-aways. What is meaningful about this for you?

F3: This is meaningful for me because it is a time to get out of our routine schedule and it is usually stressful. I would like it to not be stressful.

M3: It should be less stressful. When will this be done?

F4: How about once every three months?

M4: Sure. How long should it last each time?

F5: I was thinking at least a weekend.

M5: I like the sound of that. Who will initiate it?

F6: How about we alternate?

M6: Good idea. It will incorporate the element of surprise and an agreed upon budget. How should it end?

F7: I agree. It should end with a relaxing walk.

M7: Wonderful. Will you plan it first?

F8: Sure I can do that.

Couples learned to devote time to making the relationship more special by modifying a stressor in the relationship. By devoting this time for one another, couples were able to protect their relationship from external stressors.

Salsa cards exercise (20 minutes).

The facilitators taught couples that sex is a topic which can be difficult to discuss and encouraged couples to put effort into courting each other, talking about sexual wants and needs, and creating a space that allowed for sexuality to be important in the relationship. The facilitators told couples to be accepting rather than critical. Gottman and Gottman (2011) found that “romance, passion and good sex thrive only when there’s an atmosphere of safety and warmth” (p. 28). This is an example of one couple talking about sex, romance, and passion. Notice how this couple addressed adding more excitement to the physical part of their relationship.

F1: Let's start with the medium spicy deck of cards, okay?

M1: Sure.

F2: I would like to take time touching each other without having sex.

M2: That sounds fine. I want to have sex in a totally new place.

F3: I am okay with doing that. Let's look at the hot spicy deck of cards.

M3: Sure. I would like you to put on your favorite music and dance naked for me.

F4: I can do that. I would like to spread paint on a large canvas and roll around naked, making love, and then frame the creation.

M4: That sounds new and exciting. Since we have plenty of time let's look at the mild, spicy card deck.

F5: I want to light candles next to the bed, cuddle and talk.

M5: Sounds good. I want you to plan a date with me where we do something new for both of us.

F6: Okay sure. This was fun!

M6: Yes it was.

Couples learned to become more comfortable talking about sex and have more fun with it. Talking about sex openly gave couples ideas for new ways to spice up their sensual and sexual relationship. These ideas allowed them to think about incorporating what they wanted in their relationship future.

Day two.

Process a past regrettable incident exercise (30 minutes).

This exercise involved processing an agreed upon regrettable incident following the same steps as depicted in the video couples watched of John and Julie Gottman. This is an example of a couple processing a past regrettable incident. Notice how the couple shares their feelings, takes responsibility for the regrettable incident, and attempts to figure out a way to do things differently in the future.

F1: What recent fight do you want to talk about?

M1: How about when we fought about our conflicting future dreams?

F2: Yeah that will do.

M2: Well I felt defensive, sad, and powerless when we fought about our future.

F3: I felt worried, like you didn't even like me, and like leaving when we fought about our future.

M3: I thought I knew what you wanted for our future. Our argument made me question if I really knew you. I did not want to be with someone who did not want the same things as me.

F4: So you felt like you did not know me and my wants. You weren't sure if you wanted to stay with me. That makes sense you would feel like leaving if you did not know your partner.

M4: Yes that is right.

F5: I felt like I was not accepted or liked because we did not want the same things. I did not feel it was okay to not know what I wanted. I

worried you would leave me thinking I was not right for you. I did not think I could bear the pain of you leaving so I wanted to leave.

M5: I get how you would feel disliked, worried, and ready to leave when our fight was so heated.

F6: I've been very stressed and irritable lately.

M6: I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately.

F7: Next time I think we should take a 20 minute break if we are flooded emotionally before continuing such a serious conversation.

M7: I think I can be more accepting of where you are and more sensitive to how stressed out you have been.

F8: I can show you more appreciation even when I am stressed out.

Couples felt empowered by discussing an argument without getting back into the fight. The discussion led to a deeper level of understanding between partners. Partners felt better after hearing one another take some responsibility for the fight. The facilitators led couples in a concise group process of this exercise.

Listen to your partner's underlying feelings and dreams.

During gridlock, couples found they were unable: to successfully reach compromise, reach understanding, reach acceptance of influence, reach softened-startup and repair because they were feeling stuck. Buongiorno (1995) found that couples usually waited six years upon realizing they had a serious problem before seeking professional help. Couples moved past gridlock into dialoguing about perpetual problems by willingly sharing their dreams, hopes, values, and histories. When couples shared their dreams with one another, they felt safe, heard, and accepted.

Dreams-within-conflict exercise (30 minutes).

The facilitators encouraged couples to continue talking about perpetual gridlocked problems they chose to discuss earlier in the workshop without attempting to solve the problem (Gottman & Gottman, 2011, p. 64). This is an example of a couple beginning to discuss their dreams-within-conflict. Notice what the individuals in this relationship want out of their perpetual gridlocked problem.

F1: One dream I have about our differences in optimal sexual frequency is to explore who I am. I also want to get over my past hurts and heal. I would also like to get over my personal hang up about sex.

M1: What do you believe about this problem?

F2: I think it is still hard for me to deal with what I have been through and it affects how much I want to be sexual with you.

M2: I hear you. As for me I want to explore the physical side of myself. I want to feel loved and as though I am building something important with you.

F3: Does this relate to your history or childhood in some way?

M3: Yes, I do not usually feel this excited by my partner. I also do not want to end up divorced like my parents so I believe it is important to put energy into our sexual relationship.

F4: Well that makes sense that you would feel that way about our sex life given what you have been through.

Couples felt the positive difference between this type of discussion and arguing about a perpetual problem. This discussion encouraged couples to express their dreams

within the conflict with each other. This expression led couples to feel more connected moving forward in their lives together.

Make life dreams come true.

The facilitators explained to couples that dialoguing provided an in-depth opportunity to learn about individual hopes. By “accepting influence and compromise, you can keep working on ways to honor you and your partner and make both of your dreams, in some way, come true” (Gottman & Gottman, 2011, p. 76).

Mission and legacy exercise (15 minutes).

This is one example of a couple creating shared meaning. Notice how this couple expressed what they want out of life and how they intended to help each other accomplish these dreams.

M1: I am trying to have a family and a wonderful wife in my life. I am trying to provide for my family by pursuing my professional goals. My dream is to have a loving relationship and raise amazing considerate, intelligent, and respectful children. My life mission is to have a family and do a great job at work. I want to be remembered as someone who put a 100% into everything in my life.

F1: I want to accomplish my professional goals. I want to have a loving and fulfilling relationship. My dream is to be able to help others. My life mission is to make people feel better about themselves. I want to be remembered as someone who cared about others.

M2: How is our relationship supporting your life’s mission?

F2: We both have professional goals and understand our ambitions. We both desire a loving relationship and love each other very much. We are both dedicated.

M3: Yes all of that is true.

F3: What changes might you make in our relationship to accomplish your dreams?

M4: I would like a guarantee that we both want to pursue further education, marriage, and children. I want to know that you want those things just as much as I do.

F4: I can see how you would feel that way.

Couples learned to appreciate their dreams. These dreams represented individual and combined hopes. When sharing future hopes with one another, couples talked about how to move any obstacles.

The magic five and a half hours a week.

Gottman proposes that couples spend energy and time staying connected to one another as friends. When establishing a close friendship with one another, partners express more admiration and affection during partings and reunions. This close friendship allows couples to process their fights. This process allows couples to figure out how to do things better next time. Gottman provides an exact formula for success in his workshop. If you are interested in learning about the magic numbers, I suggest you attend one of his workshops.

I found this workshop to be helpful and yet exhausting. My fiancée and I interpreted the exercise instructions differently, which was frustrating. I was more

focused and present in this workshop than my fiancée (as he was preoccupied with his upcoming week), which created a unique dynamic for us. It was difficult to stay mentally, emotionally, and physically present on the first day of the workshop because we had a fight about our fundamental differences. I felt how hard it was to be positive about my partner and my relationship after our fight. I have found the exercises and information in this workshop to be useful in my daily life.

How Underlying Ideas Are Expressed

The facilitators expressed underlying concepts clearly, directly, and precisely throughout the Art and Science of Love workshop. The workshop ideas (based on research findings) were articulated in leader presentations, leaders' demonstrations of role-plays, fourteen exercises, and a video. When attempting to learn from the fourteen exercises in this workshop, partners took small steps toward positive relationship change. These exercises helped couples begin building a stronger friendship and a better way to handle conflict together by creating an environment of safety, respect, and understanding.

Comparison of Two Couples' Workshop Approaches

Important Similarities

These two methods viewed relationships as a journey of connection and trust. Trust and connection among partners increased using experiential learning. Connection developed by spending more time on the relationship, getting to know the other person, and focusing on the intimacy, sensuality, and sexuality in the relationship. Presenters lectured and demonstrated theoretical ideas in the workshop. When attempting to understand past experiences, partners learned about current needs. The facilitators explained that both short-term and long-term positive changes in relationships were

possible. Long-term change required more investment in the relationship. Facilitators emphasized the importance of accepting one's partner, without demanding change. These approaches encouraged individuals to ask, at an agreed upon time for positive specific behavior changes. These methods found constructive communication (listening, validating, and empathizing) crucial and doable in healthy relationships.

Healthy relationships required conflict management. Conflict management expressed individual and relationship needs. When attempting to learn new skills, couples exposed their needs. These skills accentuated soothing, sharing appreciation, accepting responsibility, and adding more positivity (enjoyable activities) in the relationship.

Important Differences

The Gottman approach was heavily science-research based in informing what works in relationships. Before attempting to change, couples accepted one another unchanged. Short-term change focused on the here-and-now. Long-term change was achieved one small step at a time. This technique used "dreams-within-conflict" to help couples deal with gridlocked perpetual problems in their relationships. When exploring these dreams, couples discovered what they hope to achieve in life. Exercises such as these were meant to be fun and help re-build couples' friendships. Friendship was founded on dialoging (listening, validating, and empathizing) openly without a particular format. When struggling to understand the exercises, couples raised blue cards to signal the presenters. The presenters did not share much of themselves and their relationship struggles, but did explain that anger was a form of healthy expression. The format was precise and did not allow much interaction between workshop presenters and couples.

The Imago approach was rooted in clinical experience and global research of couples. Facilitators taught couples a doable and specific format for communicating: involving mirroring, validating, and empathizing (MVE). MVE was the foundation of all the exercises. The flexible structure allowed couples more time for exercises, informal questions, deep emotional connection, and group process. The presenter created safety and compassion for couples by modeling how to share personal struggles in her romantic relationship.

Facilitators demonstrated for couples the need to understand present struggles and individual histories. While attempting to increase knowledge of past histories and current behaviors, couples allowed change to happen. Increased knowledge helped couples understand individual Imago constructions, created in childhood. Childhood experiences explained choosing romantic partners with traits similar to caretakers. When attempting to heal childhood wounds, couples willingly satisfied one of their partner's requests (needs) at a time. The facilitators explained that individual growth (striving to be a great partner) proceeds overall relationship improvement.

Chapter 4: Personal Experience of Workshops

In this chapter, I share what I learned from my experience of exploring couples' work. My experiences included reading the resources on couples, attending the two workshops, writing this paper, and thinking about my previous work with families, children and adolescents. This chapter is organized into four parts. The first part conveys what I discovered about myself from this journey. The second part provides what I gathered as a student from this rewarding and yet grueling process. The third part shares what I gained as an emerging professional from this overall experience. Lastly, the fourth part evaluates the advantages of these two couples' workshops.

Evaluation of Learning and Experiences

As a Person

This overall intense experience taught me more about myself and my romantic relationship. As a sensitive person, my childhood experiences still influence me. When attempting positive change, I relentlessly criticize myself and my partner. I stunt my personal growth by feeling scared, overwhelmed, and negative. I am less regretful about what I say out loud when I slowly think and edit my speech. While appreciating small moments in my day, I prevent myself from dwelling in past regrets or future endeavors. I feel more fully alive and emotionally centered when I welcome spontaneity in my life. I manage how overwhelming I can feel by relaxing, dancing, and spending time with the people I care about. I encourage my perfectionist striving when I internalize external pressure to be a better person and to accomplish more. When I feel successful I look at my perfectionism as strength; although, when I feel unsuccessful I look at perfectionism as damaging to my self-concept. I accept the responsibility of developing realistic

expectations for myself, my partner, and our relationship. I intend to meet my own needs and therefore minimize unnecessary disappointment.

I withdraw from others when I am hurt and feel emotionally disconnected. My relationships require a balance of joy and stress. I need to verbally appreciate what works well in my relationships. I must practice patiently listening to my partner without reacting. I have learned verbally sharing many points of disagreement with my partner is not helpful for our relationship. I strive to give my partner and myself more validation and empathy. I invest a lot of myself into my personal relationships because I care a great deal about connecting with others. I find it difficult to manage the stress in my life and maintain healthy and stable relationships. I feel that I have much more to learn about myself, my family of origin, how to be more mindful in my interactions, and how to work on connecting and managing conflict in all of my relationships.

As a Student

I was pleased to find many resources on couples. I am glad I delved into the research before attending these two styles of workshops. While, I gained a deeper appreciation for the process of researching, I struggled to understand some of the terminology and wording. I can see how clinical practice is informed by research. I liked talking with professionals who work with couples and I felt financially supported by the professional community. I am interested in differing styles of couples' therapy, certifications, and relationship education. I intend to continue building on my newfound knowledge of couples.

I am truly grateful for the experiential style of my graduate program and these workshop approaches. However, I wish I had been required to more thoroughly improve

my scientific writing skills in this program, as I found the writing of this project challenging. The thought of temporarily not being a student is bittersweet because I connected with many kind-hearted, creative, intelligent, and talented people. I will miss being offered many affordable, unique, and amazing growth opportunities. These experiences were meaningful and will continue to influence my overall development.

As a Professional

The cost of these workshops was not low, but it was money well spent and in comparison, much more affordable than divorce. I can see the important connection between this experience and my previous work in the field with distressed children and families. Typically, children who are not raised in healthy and supportive environments have a difficult time relating to others. However, when couples, parents or caretakers, are stronger in their dyad connection, children fare better.

Another workshop member and I imagined what it would be like if children were raised learning these workshop skills, either in the home, at schools, or in the community. If caretakers could demonstrate for their children the importance of nurturing a healthy romantic relationship, instead of telling fairytales about effortless love; children could learn to manage whatever struggles they encounter in romantic relationships. If children could relate to one another in a more constructive way, a great deal of positive systemic change would occur in the future. My systemic view of change informs the therapeutic work I will be doing in the future.

I witnessed the benefits of these workshops for both non-distressed and distressed couples. I understand the need for safety and structure in couples' work. I observed the importance of giving and receiving validation and empathy during the workshop

exercises. It was encouraging to see people working on their romantic relationships. I have more compassion for how much it takes to create and maintain a healthy relationship. I feel more competent as an emerging professional; after obtaining more knowledge about romantic relationships. The compassion that resonates within me will guide my future work with couples.

Advantages of the imago workshop.

The Imago workshop created several collective opportunities. This method used an attachment perspective to help couples understand current behaviors in their relationship. The smaller, intimate, and comfortable learning environment encouraged individual expression. Imago workshops were widely available in the state of Virginia and across the U.S. as compared to the Gottman method. The Imago presenter was passionate about this approach to couples work. This workshop focused on the content and format of discussions between couples. The Imago method suggested that couples can heal their childhood wounds in their present relationships by creating and working towards a relationship vision incorporating one another's values.

Advantages of the art and science of love workshop.

The Art and Science of Love workshop was affordable, practical, and precise. Research found this method to have a high success rate for helping couples create positive change. Couples willingly embraced the concept that small daily changes create huge relationship improvement. Relationship improvement requires that couples process their discussions in order to find meaning. While discovering the meaning in one another's lives, couples shared what they would want their eulogies to say. The facilitators gave couples a portable kit of resources to help them improve their friendship,

manage conflict, and improve their overall relationship weekly (with a specific daily breakdown).

Chapter 5: Concluding Considerations

Limitations of Workshops

Couples workshops are not affordable for many because the \$600-\$700 cost does not include meals or lodging. The workshops require an entire weekend (all day Saturday and Sunday), which leaves little time to travel home and get ready for the upcoming workweek. These workshops are not available to everyone. Many of the workshop approaches offered originated on the West Coast, with fewer presented on the east coast. There were no workshops offered within 100 miles of Harrisonburg, VA. The closest workshop was two and a half hours away and the other was around three hours away. The workshops overall did not draw a diverse population.

These two approaches to couples' workshops did not allocate enough time for exercises and focused instead on lecturing. The facilitators at the workshops did not address how to handle or support couples if they became emotional during the exercises. Some couples found these workshop approaches required a lot of effort and sustained attention, which was overwhelming.

Ideas for Further Analysis

Couples' workshops need to be more affordable in order to suit the needs of the general public. These couples' workshops should be heavily advertised in the media. Unfortunately, there is still stigma attached to divorce and getting therapy as a couple. However, if the media strongly supports the development and continual maintenance of healthy relationship work it may prevent the dissolution of marriages. More couples might attend couples' workshops if they were widely accepted and appreciated in our culture. There needs to be more research to support the effectiveness of these two

approaches to couples' workshops. A workshop tailored to teaching children the importance of healthy communication should be explored in the future.

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