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Making Marriages Work: Common Factors of Marriage Theories

Jilynn Leeuw

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Introduction

Most people know that an alarming 40 to 50 percent of marriages end in divorce (American Psychological Association, 2015). Research shows that most of these divorces are not because of physical abuse or addiction, but the two primary reasons people divorce are to either escape a relationship that has been painful, loveless or destructive or to seek a more satisfying single life or with another partner (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

However, people may be surprised to discover that their difficulties or unhappiness still exists with their choice of a single life or new partner. They may think the divorce solved the problem. Sadly the problem often still exists in their life or with new partners. If divorce is truly the answer, shouldn't the problem go away when the relationship goes away? Shouldn't the problem disappear when the partner gets married to someone else?

We find the opposite is true, the problem does not go away, but the divorce rate for second marriages is 60 percent (Weiner-Davis, 1992). Also, after a divorce a couple may expect arguments to stop, however when children are involved marital arguments often do not cease with the divorce (Weiner-Davis, 1992). Therefore, trying to run away from unhappiness or arguments by getting a divorce is often not the answer. So how can people learn to live in and enjoy a happy and successful marriage? There are a number of different theories and reading materials. It is hard to know where to start. This made me see the need to develop a new theory that combines the major components of some very relevant marriage theories today. I will review Marital Enhancement through Cognitive Self-Disclosure, the Triangular Theory of Love, The Five Love Languages, Gottman's Method Couple Therapy, and Divorce Busting: a Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy, to determine what these major theorists are saying are the most

important factors to a successful marriage. From these theories I will create a new theory combining the common factors of a successful marriage.

Defining a Successful Marriage

Many people define successful marriages in many different ways. Many think a marriage is successful if two people are happy together for a period of time while others may think a marriage is successful if two people stay together until death. Therefore, in order to find the common factors of a successful marriage it is important to first define what a successful marriage is. For this study, I believe the most important idea is that couples find a way to live together and to not divorce. Therefore, the definition of a successful marriage for this study will simply be that a marriage is successful if a couple can find enough qualities in their partner that they would rather stay together for the rest of their lives than live without that person. I also want to stop and mention that although most of the following research, if not all, was conducted on heterosexual couples, I acknowledge that some say “marriage” can be between two committed individuals regardless of their gender.

Marital Enhancement through Cognitive Self-Disclosure

The first theory of what it takes to make a successful marriage was developed by Edward Waring. He is a therapist who focuses on studying marital intimacy. His theory is that marital intimacy increases a couple’s relationship and family functioning. He believes the way to increase intimacy is through cognitive self-disclosure. Waring’s definition of intimacy includes eight different dimensions.

1. The Conflict Resolution: how easily couples can resolve differences of opinion.

2. Affection: defines the degree of emotional closeness the couple expresses.
3. Cohesion: the feeling that both couples are committed to the marriage.
4. Sexuality: how much sexual needs are communicated and fulfilled in the marriage.
5. Identity: describes the couple's level of self-confidence and self-esteem.
6. Compatibility: the degree couples can work and play together.
7. Autonomy: defines how couples become independent from their families of origin and their offspring.
8. Expressiveness: the degree that thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings are shared between the partners (Waring, 1988).

When a couple is intimate with each other they gain predictability in their relationship, an emotional feeling of closeness, a cognitive feeling of understanding, and their attitude changes to commitment. Waring reports that, "intimacy is the dimension which most determines satisfaction with relationships which endure over time" (Waring, 1988). Waring found that increasing a couple's cognitive self-disclosure is the single best way to increase their level of intimacy. Cognitive self-disclosure involves revealing one's needs, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and theories regarding a relationship; it makes the partners known to each other and develops self-awareness (Waring, 1988).

This does not include emotional disclosure where couples reveal their feelings. Waring uses cognitive self-disclosure because he found that when couples were experiencing problems in their marriage, their feelings towards each other are often negative. When couples shared negative feelings it often resulted in distance between the couple. Therefore, the way to increase

intimacy which increases satisfaction in one's marriage and family functioning is to disclose information through cognitive self-disclosure (Waring, 1988).

There was a study done to test this theory. 24 couples were involved in this study and they underwent the self-disclosure therapy to improve intimacy for ten weeks. Afterwards, researchers tested how well intimacy positively correlated with marriage adjustment. They found that it correlated with $r = .48$ and $p < .01$ (Waring, 1988). Next they tested intimacy along the eight different dimensions described above. The test reliability ranged from .73 to .90 with a reliability of .89 for the total intimacy score (Waring, 1988).

Triangular Theory of Love

The next theory that attempts to define aspects of a loving relationship is the triangular theory of love which was a research based theory developed by Sternberg. This theory describes three different dimensions that are often seen in relationships. These three concepts are commitment, passion, and intimacy.

Commitment

Commitment is described as the thinking or cognitive aspect of love. Being in a committed relationship means making a conscious decision to love one another and to decide to maintain that love despite any difficulties that may arise (Crooks & Baur 2014).

Passion

Passion is described as the component that fuels the romantic feelings, physical attraction, and desire for sexual interaction. When passion is present in a relationship it motivates the couple to be united with each other (Crooks & Baur 2014).

Intimacy

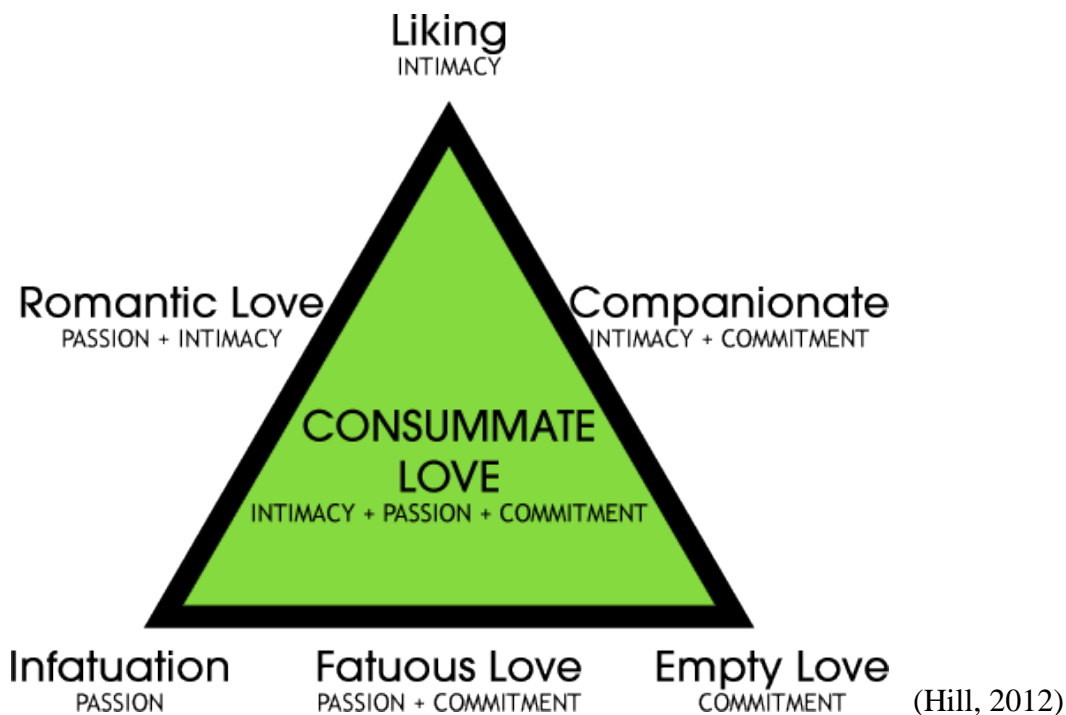
Intimacy is the third part of the triangle. Intimacy is the emotional side of love. It gives the sense of a bond with another person by feeling warmth, sharing, and emotional closeness. In intimate relationships, each partner is willing to help one another and they are willing to share their most private thoughts and feelings with each other (Crooks & Baur 2014).

Figure 1 shows how these three ideas can be expressed using the symbol of a triangle. The three corners each hold one dimension of the relationship; if one of the concepts is not present there would not be a complete triangle and without a complete triangle there would not be complete love in the relationship. A relationship must have all of these to have complete love and without any of the ideas present, there is non-love. Relationships also might only have two sides or even one side of the triangle and they can form different types of love (Crooks & Baur 2014).

If a relationship is only intimate Sternberg describes it as just liking someone or being in a friendship. If only passion exists then the relationship is categorized as infatuation. If only commitment exists it leads to empty love. If there is only intimacy and commitment a relationship may experience companionate love. Companionate love is often shared between couples who have shared many years together. The next type of love is fatuous love which is a combination of passion and commitment. This type of love often is characterized by a whirlwind of courtships or when someone may long for a person without really having conversations with them (Crooks & Baur 2014).

When a relationship is characterized by passion and intimacy it is described as romantic love. Romantic love is often short term. Finally the last type of love in Sternberg's theory is consummate love which is the fullest kind of love that individuals strive for. In Sternberg's theory he states that relationships evolve over time and couples may experience these different types of love throughout their relationship. Sternberg also states that in the beginning of a relationship there is mainly passion, but as the passion starts to fade commitment and intimacy should evolve. Couples need to have commitment and intimacy, otherwise when their passion fades, their relationship will be on unstable ground. Studies were conducted to test Sternberg's theory and they found that in a dating relationship couples often reported the presence of intimacy and commitment which in turn predicted a stable and durable relationship. Another study found that married couples had a higher level of commitment to their relationship rather than unmarried couples (Crooks & Baur 2014).

Figure 1:



Gottman Method Couples Therapy

The Gottman Method Couples Therapy created by psychologist John Gottman and his wife is another theory that tries to explain how couples can better their marriage. This approach to working with couples entails therapeutic skills, scientific dispassion, and scientific authority. Gottman created this theory by opening a “love lab” where he videotaped couples and their interactions in the most ordinary moments. He studied these couples and used an elaborate coding system to track their verbal exchanges, facial expressions, signs, clammy hands, rolling eyes, and heart rates. From this information, Gottman found that he could predict divorce with 91 percent accuracy by analyzing seven different variables in a couple’s behavior (Butler 2006).

In the theory Gottman describes seven principles that should be in a marriage in order to make it successful.

Principle One: Enhance Love Maps

Gottman describes a love map as the part of the brain where all relevant information about a partner’s life is stored. This means that “couples are intimately familiar with each other’s world” (Gottman & Silver, 2000). If couples do not start off with knowing each other in an intimate way, it is easy for their marriage to lose its way when their lives have sudden and dramatic shifts (Gottman, & Silver, 2000).

Principle two: Nurture Fondness and Admiration

Gottman states that “fondness and admiration are two of the most crucial elements in a rewarding and long-lasting romance” (Gottman, & Silver, 2000). Fondness and admiration pronounces that even though a partner may become distracted by another’s personality flaw, they are still feel the person they married is worthy of honor and

respect. Fondness and admiration can be tested by listening to how the couple views their past and it can be improved by simply reminding one's self of the positive qualities their spouse has. Simply acknowledging and discussing positive aspects of a spouse and of the marriage can strengthen a bond between couples (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Principle Three: Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away

When a couple turns toward one another, it shows a basis of emotional connection, romance, passion, and a good sex life. It also shows that the partners are emotionally engaged with one another. Turning toward each other does not have to mean taking a romantic vacation or a big candlelit dinner; turning toward each other can be done and should be done in small ways. Turning towards each other can just mean couples are helpful to one another (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Principle Four: Let Partners Influence Each Other

Gottman found that the happiest and most stable marriages were those in which husbands and wives treated each other with respect and shared power and decision making (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Principle Five: Solve Solvable Problems

Principle five and principle six both deal with how to solve or cope with problems. Gottman states there two different problems in marriages: resolvable and perpetual. Perpetual problems will be in couple's lives forever in some form or another. Gottman states that resolvable problems and perpetual problems need to be identified and distinguished in order for couples to develop coping strategies. Couples need to find a way to distinguish these so they can work on the fifth principle, solve their solvable problems. In order to do this, couples may need to learn a new approach to solving

conflict. Many couples divorce because of how they argue so Gottman developed an approach to resolving conflict in a loving relationship which is laid out below.

1. The first step to resolving a solvable conflict is to have a soft startup.

Gottman's research found that discussions end on the same note they started. So in order to start solving a conflict, the one who brings up the topic needs to do it in a way that is void of any criticism or contempt.

2. The next step in solving a problem is to learn to make and receive repair attempts. Repair attempts are necessary to deescalate any tension in order to come to a place where both partners can compromise. A repair attempt can be anything from making a joke to a couple saying they are sorry; it does not really matter what the repair attempt is what matters is that the repair attempt is received.

3. The third step is for partners to soothe themselves and one another.

4. Compromising is the fourth step; couples need to accept influence from one another. Couples must keep their mind open to their spouse's opinions and desires.

5. The last step in solving a problem is for partners to be tolerant of the other's faults. If partners are not tolerant of their spouse's flaws then they will never be able to reach a compromise because one will always try to change the other. Once a couple has learned how to solve their solvable problems through arguing correctly, they have completed the fifth principle (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Principle Six: Overcoming Gridlock

Overcoming gridlock is the sixth principle and it describes how couples need to work on the perpetual problems in the relationship. The goal of overcoming gridlock is not to solve problems, but to move from gridlock to dialogue. Gridlock normally happens when a partner has a dream for their life and they do not feel that dream is being addressed or respected by their spouse. When couples are in a happy marriage they realize that one of the goals of their marriage is helping each other realize one another's dreams. In order to overcome gridlock, one needs to express understanding and interest in their partner's dream, offer financial support for their dream (if needed), and finally become part of their spouse's dream. When overcoming gridlock couples need to understand they are not trying to solve the problem, they are just trying to get to the point where they can have a discussion about the issue without hurting one another (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Principle Seven: Create Shared Meaning

In order to create shared meaning, couples need to develop an atmosphere where partners feel encouraged to openly discuss their opinions or beliefs. Sharing goals can create a deeper intimacy between spouses and it creates a space where couples work together to achieve their shared goals (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Gottman since added to the Gottman Method Couples Theory. He also added a visual called the Sound Relationship House. Figure 2 shows that all the seven principles previously described make up the floor of the house, but there are two more important aspects of a marriage that make up the walls. These principles are trust and commitment. Gottman describes trust as knowing each partner will have each other's best interests in mind. The other side wall is commitment. Commitment is believing and acting on the belief that the relationship completes a

lifelong journey for better or for worse. It acknowledges that if things do get worse, the partners both work to improve the relationship. Commitment also implies focusing on a partner’s positive qualities and comparing them to others in a favorable way. Commitment does not allow room for trashing partners or magnifying negative qualities (The Gottman Institute, 2014).

Gottman started researching couples in 1972. He has done extensive research through interviewing couples, videotaping them, and getting physiological reads. He then analyzed data from marriages where couples stayed stable and happy even through tough times. Gottman then found what was similar with all these marriages and this resulted in the Seven Principles. To test the Seven Principles, Gottman followed up with participants of the Seven Principle therapy after nine months; researchers have found that nine months is the magic number when determining if a marital therapy was successful or not (Gottman & Silver, 2000). Gottman followed up with 640 couples and found that only 20 percent of the couples relapsed compared to the 30 to 50 percent relapse rate for standard marital therapy. They also found that before the Seven Principle Workshops 27 percent of the couples were at very high risk for divorce. Three months after the workshops these couples were only at a 6.7 percent risk for divorce and after nine months these couples were at a 0 percent risk for divorce (Gottman & Silver, 2000).

Figure 2:



(The Gottman Institute, 2014)

The Five Love Languages

The Five Love Languages is another theory which tries to explain how to make a marriage successful. This theory is not based on research, however I believe it raises a couple great points. Gary Chapman, whom developed this theory, has more than 35 years of experience as a marriage counselor and developed the five love languages on the basis that communication is very important in relationships. His theory suggests that each individual has their own way of feeling they are loved or what he calls, their love language (Chapman, 2013). Chapman describes five different love languages.

1. Words of Affirmation: When one's love language is words of affirmation they like to be positively acknowledged by either the way they look, an action they have taken, or something about their personality or character.
2. Acts of Service: When a partner helps another. Examples of these are a massage, washing dishes, or doing laundry. This love language speaks to the "action speaks louder than words" saying.
3. Receiving gifts: A partner sees a gift as an expression of love; it implies thought, effort, and expense.
4. Quality Time: When a partner's love language is quality time, the partner equates spending time together as love. This time does not need to be filled with talking; it can just be any activity that focuses on being with each other. The way they receive love is knowing that their partner is willing to give time and undivided attention to them.

5. Physical Touch: Physical touch has an emotional power and can be expressed by lovemaking, holding hands, or kissing. Chapman states that, “the answer to keeping emotional love alive is learning and really jibing with each other’s language.” (Chapman, 2013).

Therefore, Chapman describes the key to satisfaction is learning a partner’s love language and communicating in a way that speaks to their love language. He describes that learning which love language a partner is can be a simple way to have better communication (Chapman, 2013).

Divorce Busting: Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy

Michele Weiner-Davis is a Clinical Social Worker who practices Family and Marriage Therapy. Weiner-Davis’ approach to developing a successful marriage and preventing divorce is based on the Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy. This approach is research based and looks into finding solutions to a problem rather than developing explanations for the problem. It is task oriented and helps couples focus on the future by envisioning what their relationship could look like. The theory also believes in the snowball effect meaning that one minor change can create a major change in a relationship. Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy is often less time consuming, less painful, and more humane because it does not focus on causes or explanations for the problem; it just focuses on finding what works and how to build on that. Therapists practicing the model believe that each problem has a solution until proven otherwise (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

Identify Misconceptions in Marriage

Weiner-Davis states in her book, *Divorce Busting*, that one of the first steps to improving a marriage is to identify any misconceptions of what marriage is. Unreasonable

expectations about what a marriage is can destroy what actually may be a healthy sound relationship. Some of the misconceptions or illusions that many have about marriage Weiner-Davis identifies as problems: believing spouses cannot change, believing that spouses cannot communicate, thinking spouses may be nagging, thinking that they have grown apart, believing a relationship cannot be saved after having an affair, and thinking they do not love each other anymore. Instead she states that when people believe their spouse cannot change it may be just because they did one thing wrong, but then people start to see that response as a personality trait, not as a specific response to one specific situation. Also when spouses say they cannot communicate it is often just because men and women have different ways of communicating. When a spouse says the other nags them all the time, the one that is nagging often just wants to create intimacy. If a couple believes they have grown apart, it is often because their perceptions of each other changed, not the people in the relationship. And when a spouse cheats on the other or when they feel they do not love each other anymore, it is a choice to stay in the relationship. It is also a misconception that romantic love lasts forever (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

Set Goals (Less of the Same)

After misconceptions are dealt with, the next step is to set goals. Weiner-Davis states that setting goals will help couples envision what they want to accomplish and it will enable them to identify what they need to do differently for that to happen. She also describes rules that need to be set in order to set goals. Rule number one is to describe what couples want to accomplish rather than describing what they are doing wrong. Rule number two is that goals should be clearly defined in behavioral or action terms. When setting goals

Weiner-Davis often focuses on couples doing less of the same behavior after a problem arises. She states that “problems in marriages are maintained and aggravated by the particular way that people go about solving them” (Weiner-Davis, 1992). Often when a spouse tries to solve a problem in a marriage they use the same approach to solve it.

When the problem continues to exist they continue to use the same or escalate the same approach to solve it. This more-of-the-same approach often maintains the problem and may even increase it. Therefore, Wiener-Davis states that couples need to be aware of their own actions and recognize how they respond when a problem arises. Once they change and do less of the same behavior, changes in the relationship are often inevitable (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

Examine the Differences between Good Times and Bad Times

The next step to divorce busting is examining the differences between when couples experience good times and when the problem occurs. Couples should clearly describe what troubles them about their spouse and their marriage then they should identify exceptions or times when that problem does not seem to occur, is less frequent, shorter in duration, less intense, or less annoying. Then they should determine their role in making these exceptions happen and then repeat what has worked. For example, if the couple remembers that their marriage was better before they had kids and they were able to go on dates and talk, they should plan on a time to go on more dates alone so they can talk. They then should determine their roles so maybe the husband decides when and where they will go on the date and arranges the babysitter while the wife decides topics she would like to talk about on their date (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

'If it Doesn't Work, Do Something Different'

Finally, Weiner-Davis' last step to busting divorce is 'if it doesn't work do something different'. In order to do this the couple must identify patterns of interaction that have not been working then they must find specific ways to stop these unproductive patterns.

Couples often work like clockwork; a relationship is often sequential so A causes B causes C causes D causes A and so on. For example (A) the wife may complain (B) the husband responds by getting angry (C) then the wife defends herself (D) and the husband gets angrier (A) which causes the wife to complain again. When a spouse does something different to interrupt this sequence, the cycle must change. For example if (A) the wife complains, (J) but the husband starts being supportive by holding her then it is very unlikely that the wife will need to respond by (C) defending herself instead she will have to find a different way to respond. To make this happen, Weiner-Davis describes a few techniques; the first is to change anything. This could be by changing the way the couples react (perhaps doing less of the same), changing where they argue, changing the time they argue, or changing who is most likely to handle certain issues. Another way to respond could be to add a new step into the sequence like the example described previously. A spouse could also respond by doing a 180 from what they normally do. In order to do this they must describe what they see as the problem, figure out how they have been handling the problem so far, and then do the exact opposite of whatever they have been doing. If they notice that their spouse has started to change then they should stick with the plan (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

Once couples have followed all these steps and are starting to see changes in their relationship, Weiner-Davis states that the best way to maintain these changes is to reflect on how

they happened so they can do more of what has been working. First they should identify changes and then describe what they attribute the changes to. Next they should describe what they need to do to keep the changes going, determine any potential challenges, and then develop a plan to overcome these challenges. Next they should define backsliding which is reverting to old and unproductive habits. Once they have defined backsliding they should develop a plan to reverse it (Weiner-Davis, 1992).

Concepts Not Needed for Success

A few of the theories included factors that may be important to the theory, but not necessarily important for a successful marriage according to our definition of a successful marriage. One of the factors is passion from the triangular theory of love. This factor is important to form complete love in a relationship, however a relationship does not have to always have passion to be successful; a couple can still enjoy time with their partner without having to be romantically in love at all times (Crooks & Baur, 2014). Also, with the five love languages theory, the most important concept is not necessarily what the five love languages are, but being able to understand what each partner's love language is and how they can best feel love in a relationship. Its most important points for our purpose are: first of all knowing what makes a partner feel loved and second of all honoring the partner by practicing what makes them feel loved.

Summary of Concepts for a Successful Marriage

Following is a chart that summarizes each concept in each of the five theories described above.

| | |
|---|--|
| Enhancing Marital Intimacy through Cognitive Self-Disclosure | Intimacy: -Conflict Resolution -Affection -Cohesion -Sexuality -Identity -Compatibility -Autonomy -Expressiveness |
| | Cognitive Self-Disclosure: -Revealing one's needs, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and theories regarding a relationship (without feelings) |
| Triangular Theory of Love | Intimacy: -Share private thoughts and feelings (emotional) -Willing to help one another |
| | Commitment: -Conscious decision to love one another |
| Gottman Method Couples Therapy | Enhance love maps: -Become intimately familiar with each other's world |
| | Nurture fondness and admiration: -Respect and honor partner |
| | Turn toward each other instead of away: -Emotionally engaged with one another -Helpful to one another |
| | Let partners influence each other: -Treat with respect -Share power and decision making |
| | Solve solvable problems |
| | Overcome Gridlock: -Allow partners to work on their dreams |
| | Create a shared meaning: -Atmosphere where partners can discuss opinions -work together towards goals |
| Five Love Languages | Know what fills partner's love tank |
| | Honor partner by practicing what makes them feel loved |
| Divorce Busting: Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy | Identify misconceptions of marriage: -Recognize unreasonable expectations/misconceptions |
| | Set goals (less of the same): -Envision what couples want to happen -Couples identify what they need to do differently |
| | Examine differences between good and bad times: -Clearly describe troubles -Focus on good times |
| | If it doesn't work do something different: -Identify patterns of interaction -Find ways to stop unproductive patterns |

Combining the Marriage Theories

As I began to look at the previous chart, I started to notice similarities between the five theories. For example, almost every theory had components of intimacy; they were just defined a little differently. I continued to notice these similarities and group them together. After I was done grouping, I found that the theories are made up of just five basic principles: intimacy, commitment, overcoming conflict, cognitive self-disclosure, and honor partners. These five principles are the basis for my new marriage theory; I believe they are the concepts that are needed for a successful marriage.

Following is a table that shows the five different theories and how the concepts were combined to make the new theory. The box on the left shows the theory and the box on the right summarizes key points in that theory. Then it shows what categories these key points were divided into based on the color. Pink shows characteristics that describes intimacy. Orange shows concepts that relate to commitment. Green shows concepts that work towards overcoming conflict. Red shows ideas that relate to cognitive self-disclosure and purple is used to show concepts that are geared towards honoring partners.

KEY:

Intimacy Commitment Overcome Conflicts Cognitive Self-Disclosure Honor Each Other

| | |
|--|--|
| Enhancing Marital Intimacy through Cognitive Self- Disclosure | Intimacy: -Conflict Resolution (overcome conflicts) -Affection (intimacy) -Cohesion (commitment) -Sexuality (intimacy) -Identity (honor each other) -Compatibility (intimacy) -Autonomy (commitment) -Expressiveness (intimacy) |
| | Cognitive Self-Disclosure: -Revealing one’s needs, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and theories regarding a relationship without feelings (cognitive self-disclosure) |

| | |
|---|--|
| Triangular Theory of Love | Intimacy: -Share private thoughts and feelings (emotional) (intimacy) -Willing to help one another (honor each other) |
| | Commitment: -Conscious decision to love one another (commitment) |
| Gottman Method Couples Therapy | Enhance love maps: -Become intimately familiar with each other's world (intimacy) |
| | Nurture fondness and admiration: -Respect and honor partner (honor each other) |
| | Turn toward each other instead of away: -Emotionally engaged with one another (intimacy) -Helpful to one another (honor each other) |
| | Let partners influence each other: -Treat with respect (honor each other) -Share power and decision making (honor each other) |
| | Solve solvable problems (overcome conflicts) |
| | Overcome Gridlock: -Allow partners to work on their dreams (honor each other) |
| | Create a shared meaning: -Atmosphere where partners can discuss opinions (intimacy) -work together towards goals (commitment) |
| Five Love Languages | Know what fills partner's love tank (intimacy) |
| | Honor partner by practicing what makes them feel loved (honor each other) |
| Divorce Busting: Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy | Identify misconceptions of marriage: -Recognize unreasonable expectations/misconceptions (cognitive self-disclosure) |
| | Set goals (less of the same): -Envision what couples want to happen (commitment) -Couples identify what they need to do differently (overcome conflicts) |
| | Examine differences between good and bad times: -Clearly describe troubles (cognitive self-disclosure) -Focus on good times (honor each other) |
| | If it doesn't work do something different: -Identify patterns of interaction (overcome conflicts) -Find ways to stop unproductive patterns (overcome conflicts) |

I also am including a table that defines each of the five different concepts in my new marriage theory. Each definition is composed of the concepts from the previous chart that made up the category. For example, the previous chart shows commitment as a key concept five times. These five concepts were then used to define the category 'commitment'.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Intimacy | A sense of emotional closeness with spouse. This means that the couple creates and engages in an atmosphere where opinions, ideas and beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about a relationship can be discussed. They share their private thoughts and feelings with one another, become known to each other, and know what makes one another feel loved. Being intimate with each other also involves fulfilling sexual needs and being able to work and play together. |
| Commitment | A conscious decision for partners to love one another and stay with each other no matter what; this has to be sensed from both spouses in the marriage. This involves a couple becoming independent from both their family of origins and their kids and being able to be with each other. When a couple is committed to each other, they work together towards goals and are able to envision the future they want together. |
| Honor Partner | Showing partners love and respect in the relationship and in decision making. This means that the couple is willing to help one another, they choose to practice what makes the other feel loved, and they focus on the good aspects of their partner and relationship instead of focusing on things that went wrong. They also contribute to their partner’s level of self-confidence and self-esteem and allow them to work towards their dreams. |
| Overcome Conflicts | Spouses are able to solve the problems that can be solved and work through differences of opinions. They can do this by identifying their patterns of interaction and then identifying what they need to do differently to stop unproductive patterns. |
| Cognitive Self-Disclosure | Revealing one’s needs, thoughts, attitudes, opinions and principles about marriage without sharing feelings. This includes recognizing and discussing unreasonable expectations and misconceptions in marriages as well as being able to clearly describe troubles without being offensive. |

Therefore, based on these definitions, I believe that these five concepts are very important factors in a successful marriage. It may be difficult to have these five factors in a marriage at all times, but I would argue that the basis of a marriage should have these factors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be very overwhelming to try and find the magical solution to make a marriage work. There are a lot of different books with different theories that state they can save a marriage or make a marriage successful. However, with so many options it can be difficult to know what may actually work. That is why I decided to try and combine a few major theories. Once each theory was reviewed connections could be drawn. Instead of five different theories

each with their own principles, I found that the theories had a lot of similarities. I argue that from those theories there are five things that should be in a marriage to make it successful. These five concepts include intimacy, commitment, honoring each other, overcoming conflict, and cognitive self-disclosure. I believe that these components are the key factors for a successful marriage.

However, my attempt to combine the major principles of a successful marriage is as yet untested and would need to be the object of research before knowing whether or not the combination of these principles is efficacious.

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