

Recommendations for a Stable Marriage

Adapted from What Predicts Divorce?

The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes

By John M. Gottman; Hillsdale, H.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994

Speculations about the prescription for a healthy and happy marriage:

- 1) Couples need to regulate arousal in discussion of problems.
- 2) The male needs to learn to soothe himself when hearing complaints.
- 3) Couples need to develop a repertoire of repair tactics to use during conflict.
- 4) Listening to the speaker's complaints needs to exclude defensiveness and substitute an emotionally neutral (or better yet, an empathic) response.
- 5) Both spouses need to substitute calming thoughts during conflict, like
 - a) "I love him; he is upset right now and I don't like this interaction, but I still love him."
 - b) "I'm not happy with things at the moment, but there's a lot I like about this marriage."
 - c) "I don't have to take this personally."
 - d) "Just relax and sit back."
 - e) "This is just not about me."
 - f) "There are a lot of things I admire about him. I'll try to think of a time when things were much better between us. There was that vacation we took to Hawaii."
- 6) Listeners need to provide the speakers with feedback that validates the speaker (not stonewalling), like looking at the speaker, facial movement, head nods, relaxed breathing and neck and brief vocalizations (preferably assents such as "Yeah," "Okay," "Mmm-hmm" and the like). Validation does not imply agreement, just that the listener could see it from the speaker's viewpoint.
- 7) Husbands need to not withdraw from conflict.
- 8) Wives need to start conflict softly.
- 9) Husbands need to accept influence from wives when they complain.
- 10) Husbands need to de-escalate low-intensity negative feelings from wives.
- 11) Wives need to use humor to effectively soothe their husbands.
- 12) Husbands need to use positive emotions and de-escalation to effectively soothe themselves.
- 13) Couples need to use gentleness, soothing and de-escalation instead of active listening skills.
- 14) Couples need to use high ratio of positivity to negativity during conflicts.

*This and following recommendations are from John M. Gottman, James Coan, Sybil Carrere, Catherine Swanson: "Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions" in The Journal of Marriage and the Family, Minneapolis, February, 1998, Vol. 60, Issue 1, pages 5-22