

China American Psychoanalytic Alliance

**A Roadmap for Couple Therapy:
Some Essential & Practical
Recommendations**



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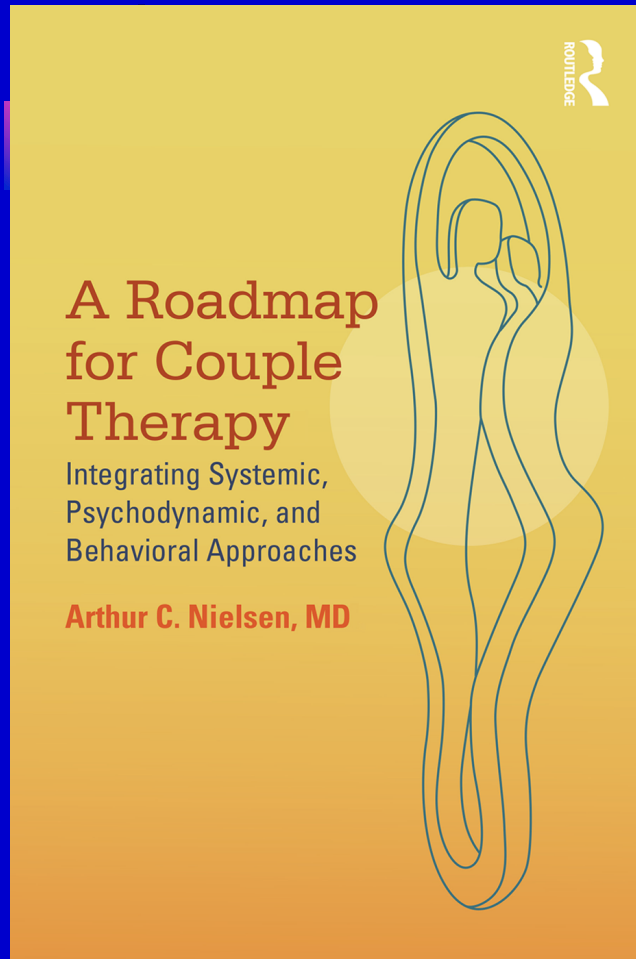
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Couple Therapy



- Difficult
- Important
- Uniquely powerful
- Rewarding

Essential & Practical Recommendations



- Most important ideas from book
- Beginners & experienced therapists
- Cross-culturally relevant (hopefully)



Plan for Today

- Importance of Couple Therapy
- Couple Therapy 1.0
- Upgrades
 - Psychoanalytic
 - Systemic
 - Educational
- Case example
- Sequencing Map
- Q & A



Some Statistics: USA

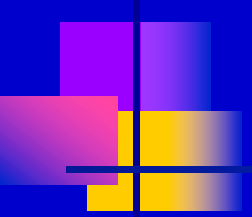
- 90% of Americans will marry.
- 40-50% of first marriages end in divorce, 20% in first five years.
- 20% of married people substantially unhappy.



Some Statistics: PRC

- Divorce rate rising for past 13 years.
- 3.8 million divorces in 2015.
- Higher rate than Europe, lower than US; 39% of marriages in Beijing, lower in rural areas.
- Higher for partners born since 1980.

Why more divorces now in PRC?

- 
- Extramarital affairs—most blamed cause
 - Easier to obtain, less stigma, references no longer needed
 - Gender/financial equality
 - Conflicts with parents
 - One child families: selfishness? lack of sibling conflict?

Some Statistics:

Marital Happiness or Not

- Marital success augments general well-being, physical health & economic success.
- Marital conflict, unhappiness, and divorce cause declines in all these areas, and similar problems in the next generation.

Some Statistics: Couple Therapy



Couple therapy improves marital success and happiness in approximately two-thirds of unselected distressed couples with effectiveness rates that are “vastly superior to control groups not receiving treatment.”

Final Key Statistic

Best Predictor of

Success versus Unhappiness



How Couples Manage Conflict

Development of My Model: Beginning, 1975



Yale & The
Connecticut
Mental Health
Center



Couple Therapy 1.0

- Talk to Each Other (TTEO)
- Obvious advantages
 - Resembles lessons
- Emotional temperature
- Neutrality
- Mediation
- Not very successful

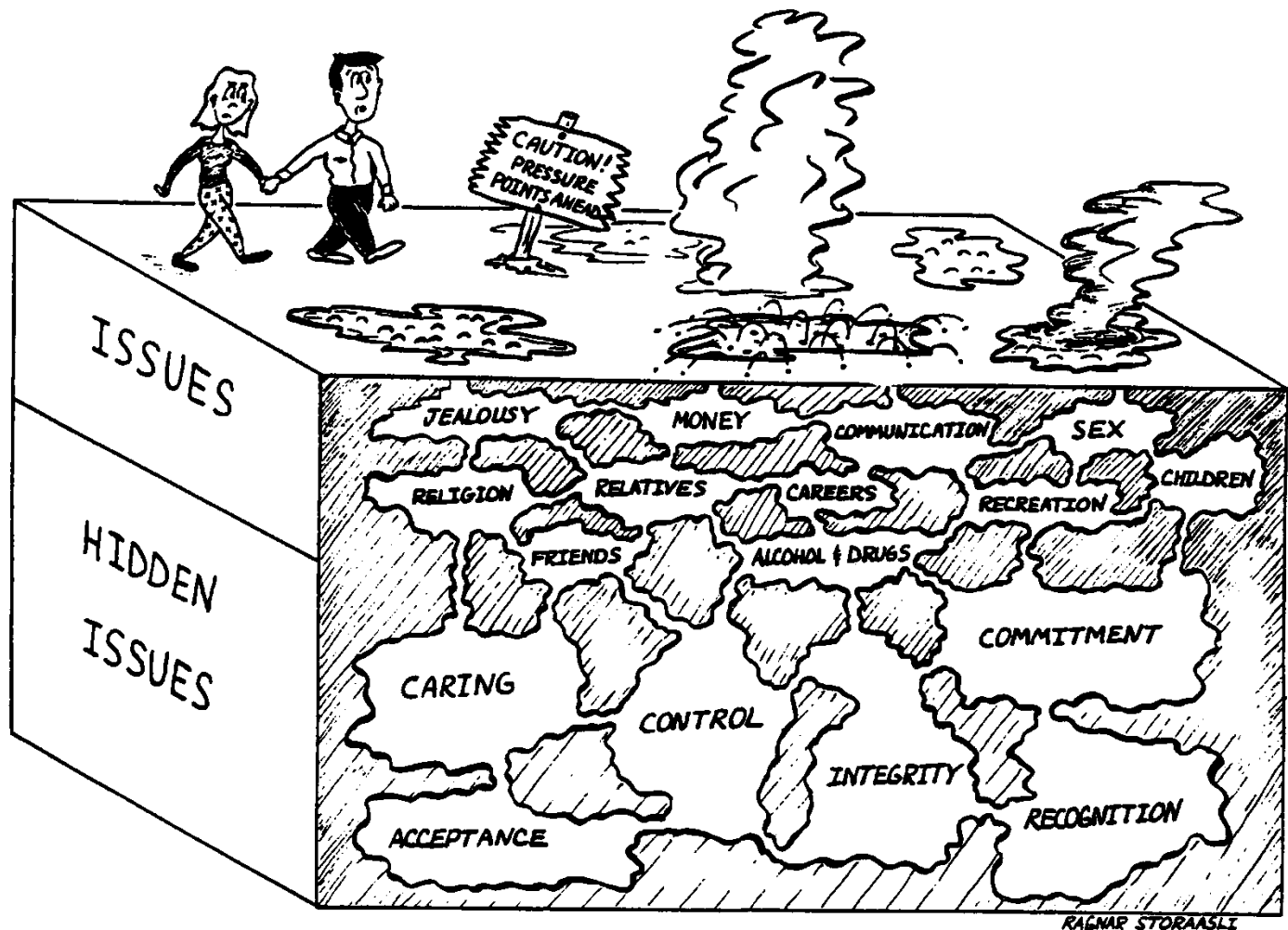
Psychoanalytic Upgrades



Sigmund & Martha Freud
Wedding 1886

Psychoanalytic Upgrades

#1: Hidden (often unconscious) issues

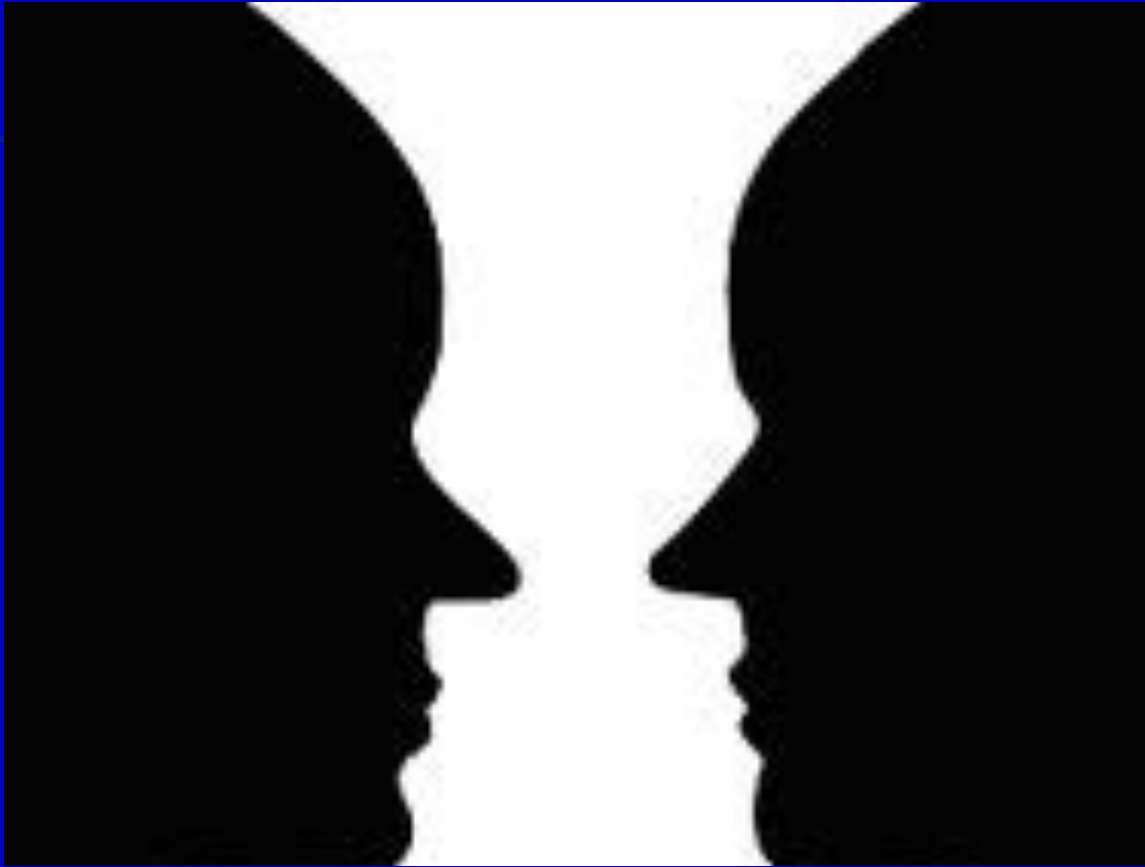


Psychoanalytic Upgrades

#2: Divergent meanings of events



The Rubin Vase



What do you see?

The "You're both right!" Intervention



Art & Patty: My role models & first patients



Psychoanalytic Upgrades

- #3: Defensiveness
- #4: Indirectness
 - “Asking for things”
- #5: Empathy
 - “Make a better case”
 - “Reframing”



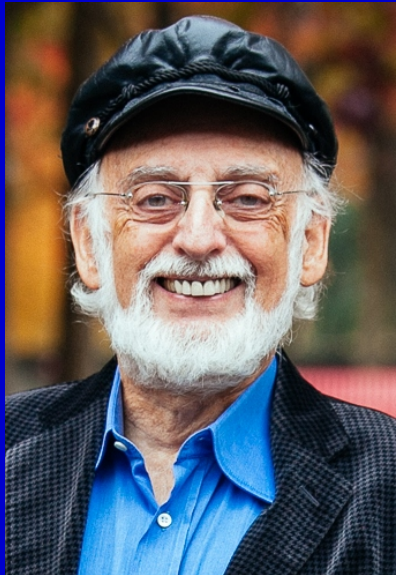
Psychoanalytic Upgrades

- #6: Transferences—fears and wishes
 - Transference allergies (“hot buttons”)
 - Core Negative Images
 - Maps of the world/ “Default settings”

- #7: Countertransference
 - Useful/diagnostic
 - Interfering

Systems Upgrades

Process: John Gottman's findings

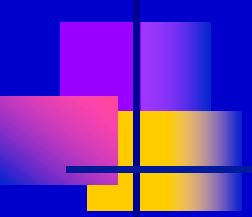


- Newlywed study & The Love Lab
- "Process" not "content"
- "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse":
 - Criticism
 - Defensiveness
 - Contempt
 - Stonewalling

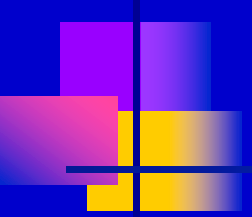


Systems Upgrades

More on Couple Maladaptive Process

- 
- Hard startups
 - Defensive responses: fight or flight
 - Contempt
 - Stonewalling
 - Invalidation
 - Cross-complaining
 - Escalation, polarization and vicious circles
 - Deeper psychological sensitivities, fears engaged
 - Fears of each seem confirmed (transferences)
 - “Negative interpretation”
 - Relationship itself becomes topic

Adverse consequences

- 
- Alienation, dissatisfaction, resentment, hopelessness
 - Initial complaint not resolved and instead things feel worse.
 - Doubts about the relationship
 - Loss of positive forms of intimacy
 - Talking, joking, touching, hugging, sex, etc.
 - Negative expectancies increased
 - Even good things interpreted negatively (“He was nice today, but just wait...”)
 - Conflict avoidance
 - Nagging

Result: Process Focus Upgrade



- Most important upgrade to Couple Therapy 1.0

- All contemporary couple therapists

- Goal: Collaborating Couple, “Work Group”

- Stops blame game, blames the process

- Stops “marital judge”

- Experience near (Chemical reaction)

- Stops escalation due to mutual deafness

- Only the neighbors!

- Hold your problem solving!

- Not herding cats!

Behavioral/Educational Upgrades



Howard Markman



Scott Stanley

Markman, H., Stanley, S., & Blumberg, S. (2001). *Fighting for your marriage* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Northwestern: Marriage 101



Bill Pinsof



Nielsen, A. C., Pinsof, W., Rampage, C., Solomon, A., & Goldstein, S. (2004). Marriage 101: An integrated academic and experiential undergraduate marriage education course. *Family Relations*, 53, 485-494.

Behavioral/Educational Upgrades

Most important things to teach couples

#1: A moment of choice!

- Remind yourself you have power to make this better or worse.
- Choose to “fight fair.”
- Remind yourself that safety and healthy process are crucial.



Behavioral/Educational Upgrades

Most important things to teach couples

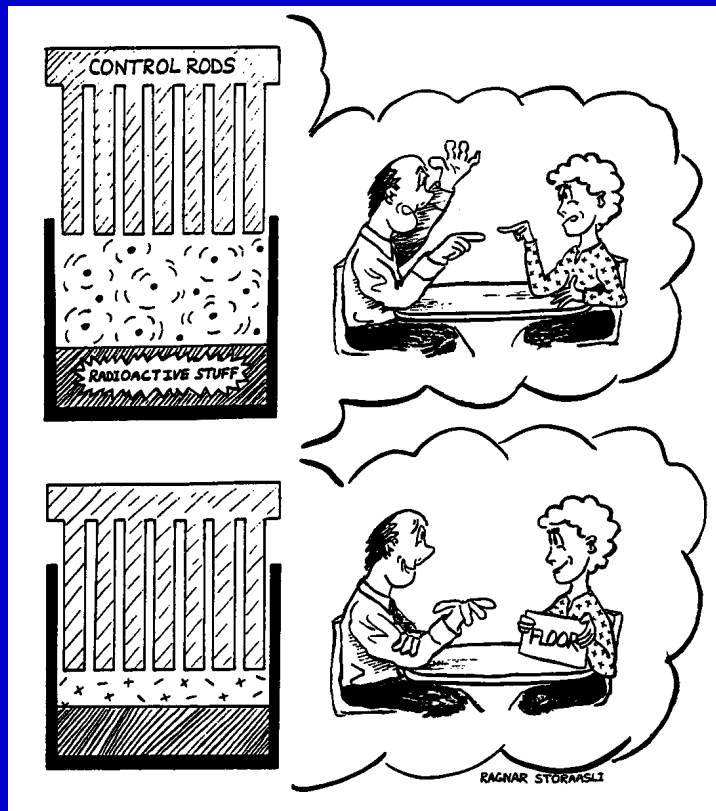
#2: Follow the 3Cs

- Calm
- Curious: About self and partner
- Caring (helpful)

Behavioral/Educational Upgrades

Most important things to teach couples

#3: *Use the Speaker/Listener Technique*



Speaker-Listener Technique increases safety, reduces emotional temperature, allows communication.



Speaker-Listener Rules

Rules for both

- The speaker has “the floor” and the other takes the role of “listener.”
- Share the floor.
- Can use concrete prop for “the floor”, e.g., a pillow or book.
- No problem solving



Speaker-Listener Rules

Rules for the listener

- Paraphrase what you hear
- Focus on what the speaker is saying.
- Don't rebut.



Speaker-Listener Rules

Rules for the speaker

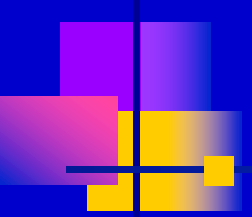
- Speak for yourself. Don't be a mind reader.
- Don't go on and on.
- Stop and let the listener paraphrase.

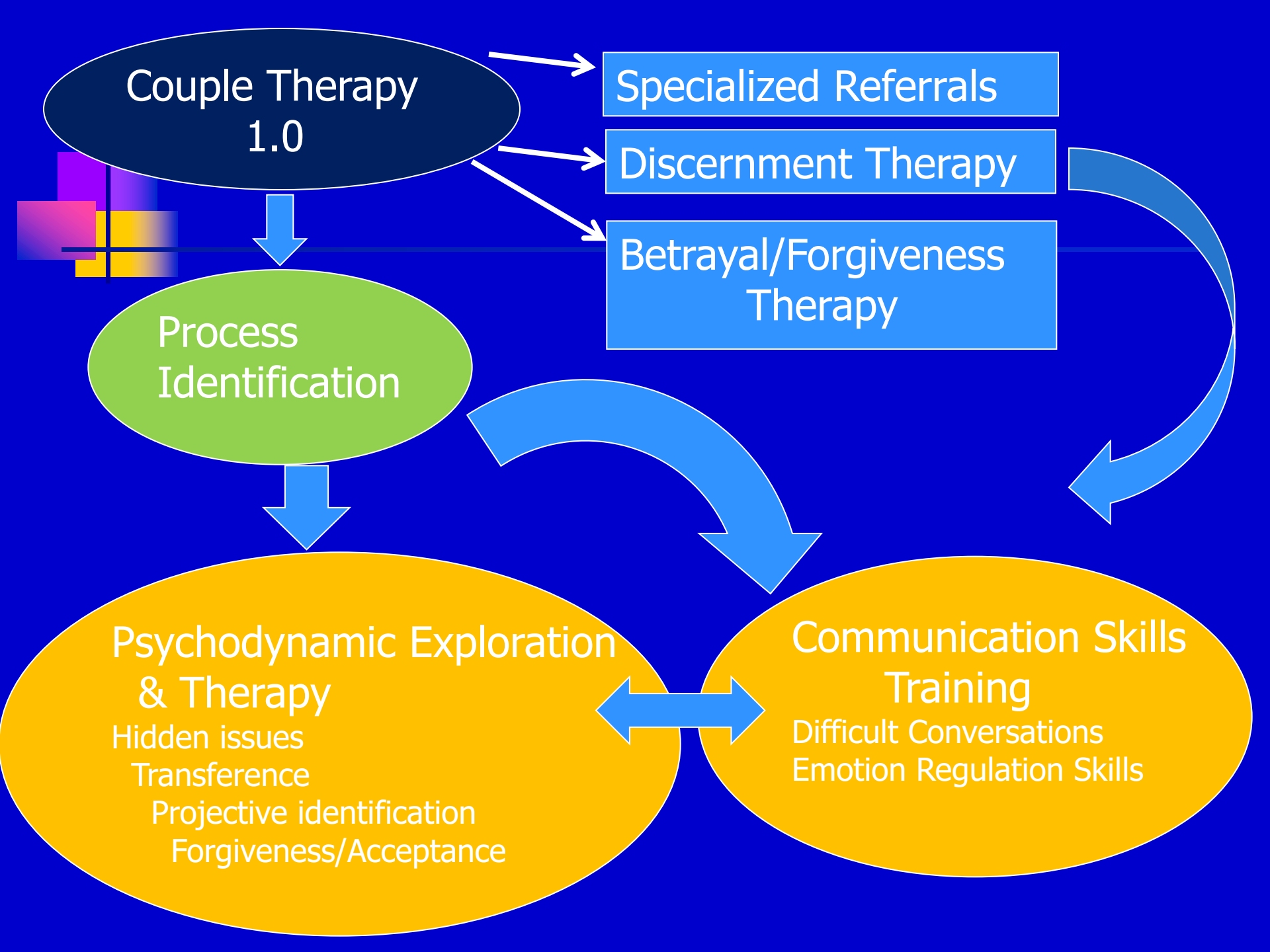


Case Example:

THE INTIMIDATOR & THE NOVELIST

Key Interventions

- 
- Focused on process after Couple 1.0 proved limited.
 - Kept emotional room temp workable by moving in and out.
 - Remained neutral: “You’re both right.”
 - Did some “witnessed individual therapy”
 - Fostered corrective experiences.
 - Taught some speaking/listening rules.



Psychodynamic
Exploration &
Therapy

Communication
Skills Training



Specific Problem
Discussions

Problem Solving
Negotiation
Training

Encourage Positive
Experiences

Encourage
Better/Restored Sex



Take Home Points

- Couple Therapy 1.0: Let them try by themselves.
- Focus next on the process.
- (For most) Next to psychodynamics.
- (For most) Interweave skills training.
- When process allows, discuss specific problems
- Concurrently, encourage positive experiences.
- When possible, work towards sexual connection.



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A Roadmap for Couple Therapy

Integrating Systemic,
Psychodynamic, and
Behavioral Approaches

Arthur C. Nielsen, MD



Time Remaining: Q & A

To obtain the book, go to
www.arthurnielsenmd.com
Will take you to Amazon page

To obtain the PowerPoint
slides, go to
www.arthurnielsenmd.com