



The Joys and Challenges of Romantic Attraction

Romance Writers Association – National Conference
Gold Coast – 19th August 2012

Dr John Barletta, PhD

Counselling, Consulting, and Clinical Psychologist



My Overview



- I will examine romantic relationships from an integrated perspective, & provide writers with research-supported psychological info about how people successfully connect intimately,
- I'll discuss behaviours & attitudes that contribute to, & take away from, developing quality relationships,
- Finally, I'll provide some remedies for the challenges of romantic relationships for your writing, whether it's category, single title or women's fiction.

Our Definition

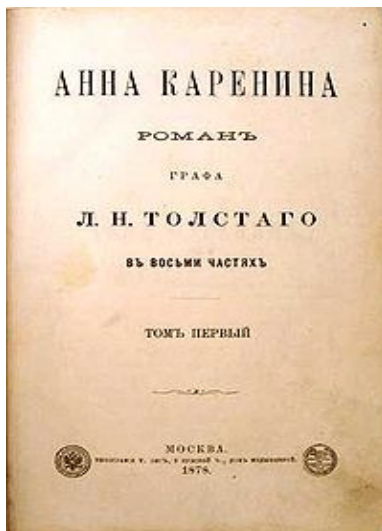


Romantic Attraction/Relationship:

- *Romance is the expressive and pleasurable feeling from an emotional attraction to another person associated with love,*
- *In the context of love relationships, romance implies one's deep and strong emotional desire to connect with another person intimately,*
- *And there must be an emotionally satisfying and optimistic outcome.*

Leo Tolstoy, 1878

Happy families are all alike;
every unhappy family is unhappy in
its own way. (*true?*)



Couple Complaints

Males

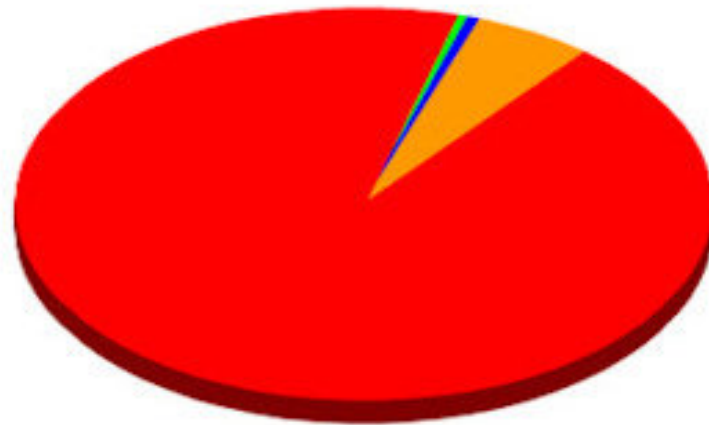
Communication	75%
Conflict	74%
Lack of Affection	39%
Incompatibility	36%
Sex	25%

Females

Communication	78%
Conflict	72%
Lack of Affection	55%
Incompatibility	34%
Sex	11%



Time spent after an argument



- apologizing
- accepting defeat
- accepting victory
- thinking of clever things I should have said

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Meshing

With PROBLEM-SOLVING and REMINISCENCE,
happy couples mesh, and it looks like it's two people
telling the same story...

Unhappy couples:

Have deficits in communication,

Think negatively about partner,

Recall events more negatively than they actually were.

Predictors of Problems

1. Couples' adaptive processes
i.e., communication, interaction
2. Stressful events
i.e., children, unemployment
3. Enduring vulnerability
e.g., divorced parents.



HIGH RISK FACTORS

for Males - Parental **divorce**

for Females - Parental **violence.**

Tasks for Connecting

Detach emotionally from family-of-origin,
Build togetherness through intimacy & expand sense of self to include the other,
Expand to include children, while maintaining the emotional richness of marriage,
Confront the inevitable development,
Make the relationship safe for expressing differences,
Establish an imaginative & pleasurable sex life,
Shared laughter & humor,
Provide nurturance & encouragement for partner,
Sustain the innermost care of the relationship
e.g., the history, good times, memories.



Unlike Bob and Jenna, Frank and Sylvia were in a serious relationship.

Let's Look at the Research

What is
Dysfunctional (Challenges) &
Functional (Joys)
in Romantic Relationships?



Drs John & Julie Gottman



Myths about Dysfunctionality

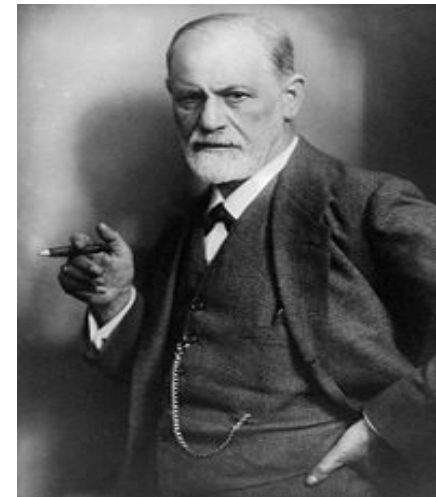
Quid Pro Quo (*emotional accountant*),
Extra-relationship affairs are the major
cause of divorce, (*ice not fire at the end*)
Monogamy is for women,
Gender differences cause divorce, (*emotions*)
Dominance structures in relationships are
dysfunctional.

Myths about Dysfunctionality

Demand-Withdraw pattern, (*female* → *male*)
Behavior change, (*not feeling accepted*)
Problem solving & conflict resolution,
Mind reading, (*delivery is critical*)
Meta-communication (*not lack of, but affect*).

Myths about Dysfunctionality

Need complementarity,
Residues of issues from family-of-origin,
Projective identification,
Reinforcement erosion,
High expectations.



And now research-supported data
(over 30yrs) about dysfunction in
romantic relationships...
i.e., the real correlates of unhappiness
(the 8 predictors of misery!)
“the disasters of marriage”

Truths about Dysfunctionality

1. More negativity than positivity ($1:0.8$),
2. Escalation of negative affect
(Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse),
3. Emotional disengagement & withdrawal
(turning away, or against, bids),
4. The failure of repair attempts.

Truths about Dysfunctionality

5. Negative sentiment override,
6. Maintaining vigilance & physiological arousal,
7. Chronic diffuse physiological arousal,
8. The failure of men to accept influence from their partner.

And now data (over 20yrs) about
what works in romantic
relationships...

i.e., the correlates of happiness
“the masters of marriage”

***(Tolstoy was wrong...in happiness,
there is much greater diversity!)***

Styles of Relationships

Validating (*support/negotiate*)

Volatile (*passionate*)



Avoidant (*minimize*)

Styles of Relationships

Lack of compatibility doesn't predict a break-up, but how couples handle inevitable incompatibilities...& the way they resolve conflicts & their overall quality of emotional interactions that does...

A Happy Relationship?

1. Personality (*enduring qualities*) that people bring,
2. The *fit* between two people
(*Two neurotics can have a good marriage if they don't push each other's buttons*),
3. Couples who don't trample on each other's enduring vulnerabilities (*sensitivity*).

A Happy Relationship?

Fighting is healthy – airs grievances,
Relationship grows as differences are
reconciled,
Problems often develop during times of
transition,
A happy marriage is good for your health.

Truths about what is Functional

Good relationships are matched in preferred conflict style

(Avoiders, Validators, Volatiles),

5:1 ratio of + to - interactions (emot. bank a/c),

Good relationships are characterized by *dialogue* rather than *gridlock* with perpetual problems *(69% of issues)*.

Truths about what is Functional

Softened startups when raising an issue

(woman's role is critical; raises 80% of issues),

Men accept, not bat back, influence,

Use of effective repair attempts, applied at

lower negativity threshold, & pre-

emptive repairs too *(avoid negativity;*

review past successes with conflict).

Truths about what is Functional

Male role in de-escalating low-conflict negativity (*male soothing critical*),
Anger not dangerous, but 4 Horsemen are,
Presence of positive affect during conflict,
Acceptance of partner, humor, lots of affection (*even amusement*), & active coping with (69%) unresolvable issues.

Sound Relationship House



The Gottman Institute
help • connection • hope

Tools for strengthening
relationships, based on
35+ years of research.

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Dr John Barletta 2012


Dr John
Barletta

A Sound Relationship



Build *Love Maps*,
Share fondness & admiration,
Turn *Towards* not *Away/Against*,
The Positive Perspective
(*Positive Sentiment Override*),
Manage conflict.

A Sound Relationship

Make life dreams & aspirations
come true, &
Create shared meaning.

[*Trust* - being on each other's side; &
Commitment - that is lifelong].

Negotiating a Style

Togetherness vs Separateness,
Romance & Companionship,
Expressing Emotion,
Philosophy & Beliefs,
Persuasion,
Honesty,
Traditional Roles.



Keys to Improving a Relationship

Calm down - recognise feelings; deliberate effort to calm down; reversing distress,

Speak Nondefensively - nondefensive listening & attitude; then speak nondefensively,

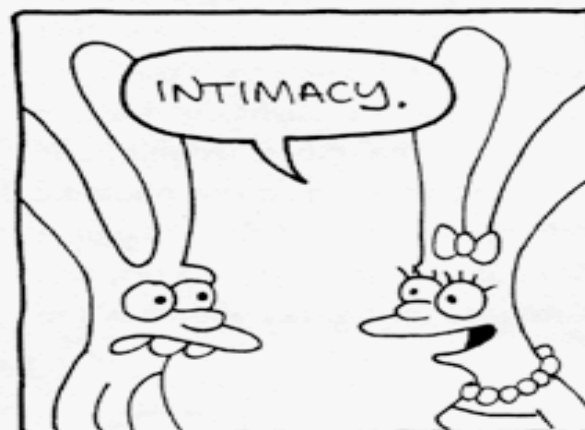
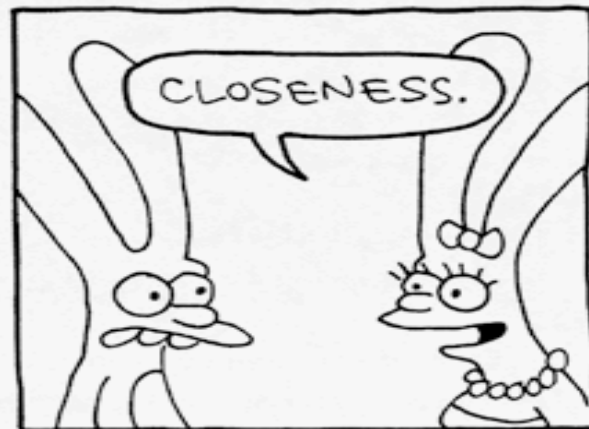
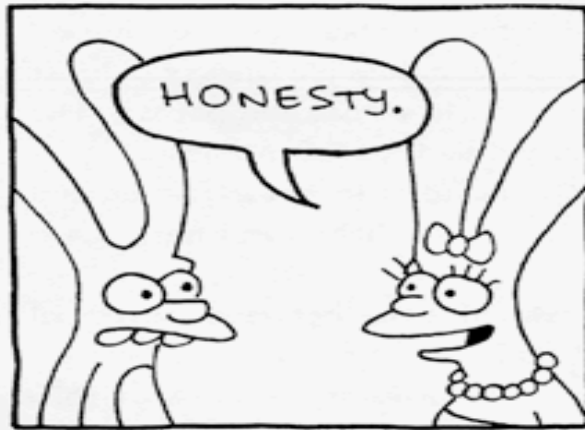
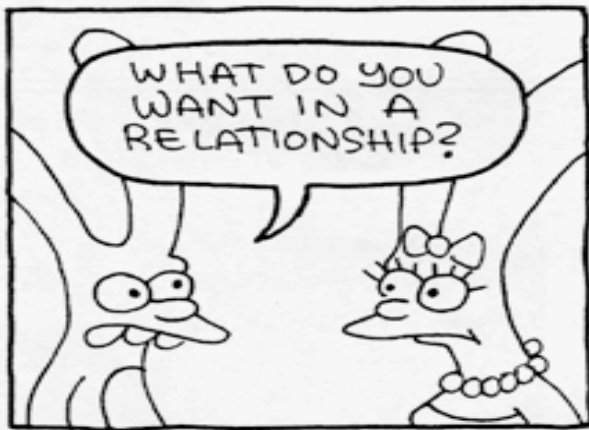
Validation - see things from partner's perspective; let partner know you understand them; antidote to the four horsemen,

Overlearning - try & try again! Practice the skills of *fighting smart*.

LIFE IN HELL

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The End

Thanks for the invitation.

Enjoy the rest of the conference.



Foreword by Professor Patrick McGorry

The Home Therapist



A practical, self-help guide for
everyday psychological problems

Edited by Dr John Barletta and Jan Bond



Dr John
Barletta



Dr John Barletta

Counselling, Consulting, and Clinical Psychologist

DipT, BEd, GradDipCouns, MEdSt, PhD, M.A.P.S.

For nearly 30 yrs I've provided education, counselling and psychological services. I specialise in adults and relationships, and enjoy helping people challenged by various issues, as well as those seeking greater satisfaction in life. In addition to therapy, I consult, provide medico-legal and psych reports, and conduct workshops.

Experience:

Teacher

School Counsellor

*Relationship
Educator*

Consultant

Academic

Therapist

T: 07 3356 4400

F: 07 3356 4600

M: 041 383 1946

john@johnbarletta.com

www.johnbarletta.com

The Grange Practice

Level 1, Suite 2

3 Days Rd

GRANGE QLD 4051

AUSTRALIA

