

PACT

A Psychological Approach to Couple Therapy®1

UNCOVERING  
DECEPTION IN  
COUPLE THERAPY

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HUMAN COMMUNICATION,  
EVEN ON A GOOD DAY, IS  
TERRIBLE

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Human communication, even on a  
good day, is terrible

• We only approximate each other's minds

• You've never lived outside of your head and you never will

• Verbal communication is fraught with errors

• All memory is filled-in with confabulation (emotions, images, junk, etc)

• As distress increases, so do misappraisals

• Words deceive as do our senses

• 99% of our day is fully automatic (memory-based)

• We mostly don't know what we are doing or why

• We constantly make things up

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### Human communication, even on a good day, is terrible

People deceive with their words, faces, voices, and bodies

- Demo self-soothing
- Demo unnecessary movements
- Demo body pointing (cheating)
- Demo eye blocking
- Demo motor disruption
- Demo motor jerkiness
- Demo narrative errors
  - Story backwards and forwards
  - Switching out topics and returning to track consistency
  - Demo deflecting

Watching the human animal in its dyadic orbit

- This is about NATURE, not PATHOLOGY

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### Human communication, even on a good day, is terrible

Body rarely lies – track:

- Facial expressions (over-expression, under-expression, still face, resting face, upper-mid-lower face, etc)
- Eyes (pupils)
- Heart rate (neck, wrist, ankle, nose)
- Skin color
- Breathing (chest, belly)
- Muscle tautness (striated areas)
- Posture
- Gestures
- Voice (pressure, speed, volume, prosody)
- Movements (or lack thereof)

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### Human communication, even on a good day, is terrible

Understand the brain and neuroendocrine system

- Resource demanding versus resource conserving structures
- How certain structures affect muscle movement
- How certain brain structures affect speech and prosody
- How *arousal* regulation is different from *affect* regulation
- How to track arousal over affect
- How to manage your own arousal and that of your couple
- How your own brain can fool you

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### OUR BIG JOB

What *is* this versus what *to do* about it?

- Job is to understand what's going on, otherwise go down the rabbit hole
- Many therapists do poorly in this area (diagnostics)
- Things are rarely what they seem in the psychobiological world

Locate pain, amplify it, and leverage it toward secure functioning

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### PACT STRATEGIC TECHNIQUES FOR GETTING AND USING INFORMATION

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### The setting

- Furniture: rolling chairs
  - Static furniture for staging
- Video for video frame analysis
  - With and without the couple present

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### What we do

**We question everything, and suspect everyone**

**We play the long game**

- Therapists play the long game; couples play the short game
- People deflect, hide, because they fear loss
- Their fear of loss makes them do things that cause problems
- They're afraid that their next move will be the last move
- We believe in relationship resilience and model it
  - Relationships are sticky and breaking up is really hard to do
- We are the clowns at the bullfight
  - We say things beyond the pale so they can pull it back to reality
  - We use hyperbole
  - We use presumption

**We catch people in the act of being themselves**

- Surprise (in next video)
- Pressure

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### What we do

**We set them up to prove or disprove our hunches**

**We constantly push them toward secure functioning**

**We serve reality, clarity, and self-activation**

- The therapist does not
  - Bend reality
  - Kick the can down the road
  - Avoid anything
- The primary goal of therapy is clarity on the way toward secure functioning
- Corral partners so they must clarify themselves
  - Skillfully defeat avoidance and deception
- Only then can they move forward based on what's true

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### What we do

**We use forensic-type interviewing skills**

- Switch out topics
- Use surprise
- Tense and relax
- Presumptive technique – “You’re done with her, right?”
- Use hyperbole

**Strategically stage interventions that will smoke out deception**

**We are the same in session as we are in the outside world**

- Be more expansive

**We sell secure functioning and nothing more**

- In this life or the next
- No judgement
  - Etoh Drugs Affairs Porn Polyamory

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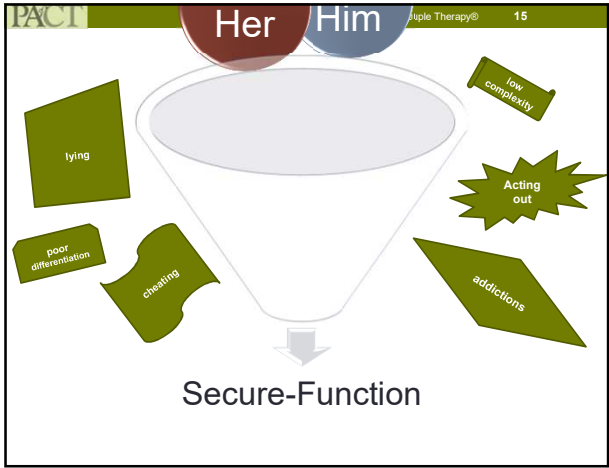
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### How we do it

- Scan for somatic reactions
- Collect tells
- Notice timing
- Pressure/relief cycle
- Occasionally tip the couple
- Track narrative coherence
  - Saying too much
  - Saying too little
  - Misleading
  - Deflecting
  - Contradicting
  - Speaking tangentially

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### DEMO & TEACHING

- Get a baseline (collect tells)
- The power of cross-tracking
- The power of cross-questioning
- The power of cross-interpreting
- The power of going down the middle
- The power of declarations
- The power of bending metal

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DEMO & TEACHING: How Cross Dialog Works

• The power of corraling questions

• The corraling Q catches people in lies, people who aren't telling the truth

• Throw the corraling Q down the middle ("Do you guys tell each other everything?")

• Spot somatic response in both partners (if exists)

• Respond to somatic response ("Oh, I'm confused. One said yes, the other no.")

• Use their reactions against each other ("I guess you guys don't have an agreement.")

• Tighten the queries ("What *wouldn't* you guys tell each other?")

• It's a trap they can't get out of

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Conclusion

• Don't believe anything, suspect everything; collect evidence, always prepare to be wrong

• Therapists must use strategic methods for getting information quickly

• That information should come from multiple streams, only one of which is verbal narrative

• Become a Sherlock without tipping your hand

• Who are these people? What do they really want? And what are they up to?

• People lie, deflect, defend, hide, mislead, and most of all, make things up in the absence of know why they do what they do

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Conclusion

• We have to work with problematic states or we can't prepare couples when they go "live"

• The couple therapist is always playing the long game and the couple the short game

• The couple therapist must apply pressure and maintain a certain level of stress and distress otherwise partners won't care or be interested

• Pressure and throwing couples off occasionally helps the therapist to catch partners in the act of being themselves

• Study people under stress (political season)

• Video record your work and review

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HAVE FUN WITH YOUR COUPLES!

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