RELATIONSHIP RHETORIC: REPRESENTATIONS OF INTIMACY IN CONTEMPORARY SELF-HELP LITERATURE

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Abstract

Western culture is infatuated by stories and images of romance at the same time that it is alarmed by a perceived disintegration of the institution of marriage. Relationship guides (self-help books on relationships) play a role in reflecting and reinforcing both the infatuation and the alarm. This discourse analysis of ten popular relationship guides, along with interviews of 21 readers, provides an in-depth analysis of how the genre works at the rhetorical level.

Although authors employ various methods to assert their credibility, interviews with readers suggest what is most important is the ability to persuade the reader that the author genuinely cares about improving relationships. Readers seem to have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the books, sometimes treating them as true advice manuals and sometimes treating them more like novels. They are skeptical of the genre (and of authors’ motives) at the same time that they maintain hope that the next book will provide the answer they are looking for.

Authors use various metaphors that allow for descriptions of marital issues as minor problems (e.g., bumps in the road) as well as providing for alluring and captivating descriptions of marital bliss. Several common terministic screens filter perceptions of marriage in a way that highlights individual responsibility and obscures any notions of social or political responsibility. Ultimately, relationship guides are a rhetorical response to a situation of failure. They provide consolation and comfort (an aspect that readers identified as very important) as well as compensation (techniques for reconciling the failure and pointing readers in directions that will make them feel more successful).
Relationship guides both reflect and reinforce the *discourse of the good wife* – a discourse that naturalizes the unequal gender division of responsibility for maintaining a good marriage. This is seen particularly in the genre’s major godterm *acceptance*, which, through rhetorical methods that may not be consciously used by authors, deflects attention from expectations of change by husbands or society. Thus, although the reader may obtain comfort and a sense of shared misery from reading the books, she remains isolated in her problems.

**Keywords:** Self-Help; Intimate Relationships; Marriage; Discourse

**Subject Terms:** Marriage; Rhetoric and Psychology; Self-Help Techniques; Social Control; Women – Books and Reading; Women – Psychology
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Chapter 1: Relationships and Self-Help Books in Context

Discourses of Relationships

Relationship guides are written against the backdrop of a Western society that views relationships in certain limited ways. This section looks at literature from sociology, communication, psychology, and family therapy in an attempt to ascertain the common discourses of intimate relationships. The areas I have considered relevant for this section include analyses of representations of marriage, love, commitment, sexuality, desire, and romance. I begin with a brief sketch of historical and social constructions of love and relationships.

"There seems to be a wave of renewed interest in theorizing marriage and its place in the current western world" (Burns, 2003, p. 511). A preoccupation with marriage is evidenced in various forms of media: romance novels, magazine articles, magazines aimed specifically at brides, television (talk-shows, sitcoms, dramas, and soap-operas) movies, and of course, relationship guides. It is also evidenced in the attention shown by politicians, religious leaders, academics, and popular writers. This attention often surfaces as concern regarding the current 'state' of marriage.

Eric Sager, the director of the Canadian Families Project at the University of Victoria, says Canadians should not be overly alarmed by the latest news from Statistics Canada [regarding divorce statistics]. For more than a century, he says, people have been predicting social collapse as a result of divorce rates going up. (Foot, 2000)

The end result of this [divorce, crime, and substance abuse] is what appears to be an indication that the social fabric in Canada is weakening. (Dr. Gus Thompson, quoted in Whyte, 2000)

Many forces have merged to destroy the human family. Just as patriarchal men have run away from home if they couldn't be the boss, there has been a strong feminist push to declare men to be unnecessary, and potentially dangerous, in the lives of women and children. (Pittman, 2002)

In America over the last thirty years, we've done something unprecedented. We have managed to transform marriage, the most basic and universal of human institutions, into something controversial. For perhaps the first time in human
However, as Stephanie Coontz makes clear in her 1992 book *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, this harkening back to a better time is based more on illusion than on fact. Marriage is a part of how a culture organizes itself – for the purposes of child-rearing, and also for purposes of distribution of labor and wealth – and different cultures have organized in different ways.

For most of recorded history (and to this date in some cultures) love was considered secondary to societal obligations, if it was considered at all. Marriages were generally arranged by parents and other family members with a vested interest in the social and economic union. Where and with whom the married couple lived depended on various cultural factors; generally newlyweds were expected to live with relatives and children were often raised communally. There is some anthropological evidence that the notion of passionate love does not exist in some cultures (Berscheid & Walster, 1978).

Beginning in about the twelfth century, France imported the notion of courtly love from Islamic Spain. The precursor to romantic love, courtly love was typified by knights of the king’s court, and associated with facing danger and conquering obstacles.

[For] a woman of the Middle Ages, courtly love counterbalanced the debasement of arranged marriage and acknowledged her presence as an individual. The lover, who could be any man but her wedded husband, spoke to her as if a saint, using the language of adoration and reverence. In her name, he chastened his spirit, fought battles, defended her honor, and created love songs. In her presence, he was cleansed and perfumed, bright and clever. He wished to receive the ‘gift of mercy,’ but if she declined, she was not loved any the less. (Jeter, 1989, p. 182)

Although courtly love contains many of the elements of romantic love, it was something that occurred only outside marriage, and only for the upper classes. Social obligations remained primary for some time. In Western cultures there was a gradual shift towards the consideration of love between marriage partners – but within certain limits (social class, for instance). The Victorian era saw a number of social changes, including the increasing influence of capitalism, and new relations between the sexes, both of which influenced the way relationships were conducted. The separation of
work/labor and home shifted the onus of financially supporting families onto men, and women became responsible for creating happy homes (Ryan, 1981).

As a result, love began to assume an increasingly important position in the consideration of marriage. This was due in part to the isolation from family that men often experienced in the workplace, placing the burden of emotional support more fully on the wife. "Precisely because men had to adopt a calm and calculating demeanor in their public sphere, they sought a richly expressive private counterpart. Family constituted more than a tranquil haven; it became a site for deep passions" (Stearns & Knapp, 1993, p.771). However, these changes, and more to follow in the twentieth century, were not always easily incorporated:

The changes toward greater inequality between the sexes in the nineteenth century resulted in the creation of new myths. One myth that developed was the idea of woman as a nonresponsive sexual partner. Males were supposed to take the lead, were supposed to woo and win the lady, who, on the one hand could be emotional, child-like, and not very trustworthy, and on the other hand, cold, distant, and remote, especially in the marriage bed. (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992, p. 41)

Stearns and Knapp (1993) outline a number of changes in the Western ideal of romantic love during the past century. They note that romance became increasingly the realm of women, while men pulled away from the emotional investment that was previously valued. They cite consumerism, increased sexual opportunities, and objectification of women as partly responsible for this shift. In America, "love, which men needed in the 19th century and could afford because women were so clearly separate in other respects, was now downplayed as part of a revised scenario of male separateness and perceived superiority" (p. 789). Despite the stereotype of men as less interested in relationships, Kephart (1967) suggested they may be the more 'romantic' ones. In his survey of American college students in the 1960s he found that women were more likely than men to say they would marry someone they respected even if they did not love them (76 percent of women, compared to 35 percent of men). By the 1990s though, students were much less likely to say they would marry without love (ten to twenty percent for

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1 This review applies to Western cultures, and historically has more relevance for the upper classes, who tended to set the trends.
both men and women according to Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002, who surveyed the literature). According to cross-cultural research there are still collectivist cultures where people are willing to marry without love, with the United States having the lowest proportion of such people (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Perhaps in the same way that the separation of family and labor in the Victorian era created the need for a ‘safe-haven’ for men, the increased inclusion of women in the work force in the latter part of the twentieth century has created a similar need for women.

It is difficult to know what critics of the current ‘state’ of marriage mean when they refer to ‘traditional’ marriage. It does not appear that there has ever been a time when marriage was both a stable and a (satisfactorily) romantic union for the majority of people. However, given the accelerated pace of change in how marriage (and family life) is performed/enacted in Western cultures, it is not surprising that there is interest in, and concern for, the possible side-effects of these changes. According to Fincham, Beach, and Kemp-Fincham (1997) a significant proportion (about forty percent) of the presenting problems seen by mental health professionals in the United States are related to marital issues.

Most of the American sources I encountered cite the current divorce rate at about fifty percent (e.g., Rice, 2005, Waite & Gallagher, 2000, p. 174), although Coontz and Folbre (2002) state that the rate has fallen to approximately forty percent. In Canada, the rate appears to be between thirty-six percent (Ambert, 1998) and about forty percent (Le Bourdais, 2004). In 1970 the Canadian divorce rate was closer to ten percent, suggesting a four-fold increase in divorce in thirty years (Le Bourdais, 2004). Alongside changes in the divorce rate, there are changes in the marriage rate: while in the 1960s (and until the mid 1970s) nine out of ten Canadian women were expected (statistically) to marry, at the turn of the century this number fell to just over five of ten women (Le

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2 The calculation of divorce rates is not a straightforward thing, and can only be stated with certainty after the fact (i.e. for a period when all marriages have ended either in death or divorce). In a review of divorce rates per 1000 married women, Conway-Turner and Cherrin (1998) report that in 1990 the rate in the United States was 21, compared with 13 in Canada.

3 Divorce rates also vary within countries. In Quebec the divorce rate is higher than in the rest of Canada (approximately fifty percent according to Le Bourdais, 2004), and D’Antonio (2004) reports that the divorce rate in Texas is close to double that of Massachusetts.
Bourdais, 2004). However, this statistic does not necessarily reflect a decrease in conjugal living, as the majority of Canadian men and women wish “to have a lasting relationship as a couple” (Lapierre-Adamcyk, Le Bourdais, & Marcil-Gratton, 1999, cited in Le Bourdais, 2004). Many couples are choosing to cohabit rather than to marry.4

In an article entitled *The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage* Cherlin (2004) points out two ways that marriage has responded to social changes in the twentieth century. The first, following on the heels of the depression and World War II, is the move from institutional to companionate marriage, and a focus on emotional satisfaction and romantic love. The second transition, beginning in the 1960s, he calls the “ethic of expressive individualism” which involves a focus on self-development, occurring within a relationship that is “flexible and negotiable” (p. 851). He also notes that “although the practical importance of being married has declined, its symbolic importance has remained high, and may even have increased” (p. 855). This is a particularly important point which ties back in with the assertion made near the beginning of this chapter to do with the American infatuation with marriage. Although it appears that the divorce rate lies between forty and fifty percent, given that a large number of people never marry and that we do not have statistics on the break-up rate of cohabiters, it is difficult to say what percentage of people actually maintain life-long intimate relationships, but it is likely substantially less than fifty percent. This makes people who do ‘survive’ in relationships a probable minority, and perhaps a bit of a curiosity.

In an increasingly fragmented world (Bauman, 2000, 2003) people tend to rely for their identity less on traditional social networks, and more on personal relationships (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). This sets up a Catch-22 in which people require intimate relationships for their happiness more than ever (or at least believe they do), yet lasting relationships are more rare than at any other time. It is no wonder that couples who stay together are to be envied.

Infatuation with marriage is profitable – it sells movies (‘chick-flicks’), clothes (the average wedding dress in the U.S. costs about $800; Geary, 2003), travel (the

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4 Again, there is a difference between Quebec (with a cohabitation rate of 30 percent), and the rest of Canada (where the rate in 2001 was 12 percent). Quebec appears to be similar in attitude to Sweden, where the cohabitation rate was also 30 percent. The rate for the United States was 8.2 percent. (Le Bourdais, 2004)
average American honeymoon costs $3,700; Banay, 2006) and sundry other items (the average cost for a wedding gift in the U.S. is $85; Lagorce, 2004). According to a British source, one average wedding generates over 47,000 pounds in spending (Consumer Advice, 2005), and Lagorce (2004) reports that the “wedding industry” reaps seventy billion dollars per year in the U.S. Clearly there is a vested economic interest in marriage, one that is supported by bridal magazines and Hollywood films that script how marriage is to be performed (cf. Geller, 2001) – from the engagement (preferably done in public, often as a stunt, at which the bride-to-be must feign surprise), to shopping for the dress and registering for gifts, to the shower, the ‘stag’ and ‘stagette,’ the rehearsal dinner, the ceremony (five attendants on each side, and lots of tears), the reception, and, sometimes, a glimpse of the honeymoon (generally a tropical beach).

At the same time that people are infatuated with marriage, there is also some recognition that popular portrayals are not reality. Eva Illouz (1998) suggests that “the narrative biographical construction of the romantic self is [very] contradictory” (p. 163). She gave respondents different love stories (some more ‘romantic’ and some more ‘realistic’) and found that reactions to these stories depended on how questions were asked and the context in which they were framed. The ‘romantic’ story was generally denigrated as irrational and based on fantasy until respondents were asked to compare it to the other stories, when it was re-evaluated as ‘interesting’ and ‘magical.’ “Despite respondents’ insistence that the realist model is the most likely to be successful, their most ‘memorable’ love stories almost always correspond to the basic structure and meaning of love at first sight” (pp. 171-172, italics in original).

The romantic narrative appears to have a powerful allure, appealing to people despite their more rational beliefs. Discussions of divorce rates rarely take into account the contradictions in the narratives people use to guide the way they live their lives. The most common reasons cited for the increase in the divorce rate seem to be the liberalization of divorce laws, secularization, and feminism (Rice 2005). Although these

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5 One thing that tends to get left out of these discussions is the importance of education and economics to a stable marriage and family life. D’Antonio (2004) reports that in the United States those states with higher levels of education and household incomes also had lower divorce rates.
are convenient targets, they are more likely correlates of the changes in marriage attitudes than causal factors.

The divorce rate didn’t start wildly escalating until the 1960s, but not because of social movements like women’s liberation. The new social movements were responding to wildly evolving technological and economic realities. Which is to say, the social movements came about because they could—because technology and commerce created an intoxicating liberty from the old necessities. Freed from those family necessities technologically, what was one to do with that freedom? The women’s movement attacked that question with a vengeance—now that the chores were no longer necessary, what were women for, what forms could they create that would give their lives meaning? That wasn’t the rhetoric, but that was the situation. Technology created more social space, so to speak; a space that was far more expansive than traditional marriage could manage; a space that has yet to be defined, since it’s still evolving, ever more wildly, goaded on by ever more drastic technological innovation. The instability of marriage today is what happens to a confined form when it’s asked to cope with a drastically transforming unconfined social space. (Ventura, 2004, p. 64)

Although systems of marriage are shaped by social, economic, and political forces, they are cloaked in rhetoric specific to the beliefs, values, and goals of particular cultures (Farrell, 1999). “Conceptions of love are related to beliefs current in their time period, because theories of love are also theories about people. These theories of love are strongly related to ideas about the nature of humanity” (Beall & Sternberg, 1995, p. 427).

The socially constructed nature of romance is illustrated by Bulcroft, Bulcroft, Smeins, and Cranage (1997) in their examination of the “North American honeymoon” from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. They note that current honeymoon practices are promoted as if they have always been the standard, and that because “romance is often conceptualized as intrinsically personal and nearly devoid of cultural influences, one might expect the honeymoon to have varied little over time” (p. 469). However, they demonstrate changes in the nature of honeymoons consistent with other cultural changes. In particular, the promotion of the nuclear family over the social group placed an emphasis on romance, which has been capitalized on by the free market. Honeymoons have gradually become big business with high expectations. As it becomes common for men and women to experience several ‘romantic’ relationships before marriage there are “elevated expectations on the contemporary honeymoon in that it now must exceed all
previous romantic experiences, thereby confirming the choice of the marriage partner as one’s ‘true love’ and ‘ultimate destiny’” (Bulcroft et al., 1997, p. 468).

Another example of the social construction of love can be found in the history of jewelry advertising. Howard (2003) discusses the confusion in the Catholic Church in the 1940s when wedding rings for men were marketed by the jewelry industry (apparently priests were unsure of whether ‘double ring’ ceremonies were legitimate, and if so, whether the groom’s ring was to be blessed in the same manner as the bride’s ring).

The industry knew it had a vested interest in wedding customs that involved jewelry purchases and united in national campaigns to promote new traditions that required their expert, specialized services. Beginning in the 1920s, jewelers and their professional associations began running national campaigns to promote branded diamond engagement rings using national advertising and trade campaigns, tie-ins with Hollywood movies, and various merchandising schemes. (Howard, 2003, p. 838)

The idea that engagement rings should sport diamonds was aggressively marketed by De Beers (a diamond cartel). The advertising plan (“to romanticize diamonds required subtly altering the public’s picture of the way a man courts – and wins – a woman” Epstein, n.d.) involved advertisements and stories featuring celebrities wearing diamond rings. It was apparently highly successful, as, according to Epstein, in three years (between 1938 and 1941) diamond sales in the United States had increased 55 percent. De Beers eventually adopted as their motto the slogan “A Diamond is Forever,” and over half a century later the link between diamonds and romance remains as strong as ever.

As suggested, the notion that one marries one’s ‘true love’ is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, the notion has been naturalized through elaborate scripts that let men and women know what to expect in romance/love/marriage, and that suggest that this is the way it always has been. When Bachen and Illovz (1996) interviewed children and youth about ‘love stories’ they found television and movies to be particularly potent sources of narratives about love and romance, followed by songs and music, then by books. As a source of love stories, family members lagged far behind, with friends falling somewhere between family and books. What children appeared to be learning from the media was that romance is highly entwined with the consumption of leisure and
luxury. Love stories ended in marriage (or possibly with having children) and often included having a good job and nice house.

In an exploration of emotions and beliefs about love among adolescent females, Simon, Eder and Evans (1992) were able to list the norms for romantic love within this group. There was strong consensus that romantic feelings should occur only for someone of the opposite sex, and this was reinforced by name calling and labelling of teenagers who did not comply. While it was believed that one should have romantic feelings for only one boy at a time, it was also important to this population to always be in love—to demonstrate that one was popular and heterosexual. However, these girls struggled with the thin line between showing they were popular, and looking like a slut, which is not surprising given the close association in our culture between love and sex. Charles Lindholm (1998) notes that this association is both culturally and historically specific (and not necessarily representative of people’s experience), citing a 1988 definition of love as “an urgent desire for sexual intercourse with a particular individual” (p. 244).

According to Sprecher and Metts (1989) there are five beliefs basic to the romantic ideal: 1) Love at first sight; 2) There is only one ‘true love’ for each person; 3) Love conquers all; 4) True love is absolutely perfect; 5) We should choose a partner for love rather than for other (more practical) reasons. One source of these ideals is the romance novel genre: “Within this genre love is represented as a powerful and consuming force which stands over and above the lovers, a power in the face of which they have no control and even less responsibility” (Treacher, 1988, pp. 77-78).

A number of feminist researchers have studied the romance novel genre (as represented by mass marketed books such as Harlequin Romances). Although there is a certain amount of variation, there is a fairly standard plot line\(^6\), which goes something like this: woman meets man; man is scary/dangerous/mean; woman resists man; woman is overpowered by her feelings for man, who leads her to true love (and sexual fulfillment) for the first time (Radway, 1984; Talbot, 1997). Men are the leaders, women the followers, men are strong and aggressive, women are passive and weak. Men know

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\(^6\) The romance novel genre has been evolving and may no longer adhere as closely to these plot points; my own (admittedly limited) review of the genre suggests current books can deviate somewhat, particularly in terms of the obstacles to reaching the final stage (marriage), but that this plot line can be considered a sort of prototype.
what women want/need, while women often seem muddled about their needs. Men “are always knowledgeable about women’s desire. The hero’s task is to teach the heroine what she secretly knows but will not admit to herself” (Talbot, 1997, p. 117).

Why do women read (in massive quantities) books that portray them in such limited (many would say negative) ways? It may have to do with women’s discontent; that they find in the books something lacking in their own lives. Radway (1984) suggests that the books offer women emotional sustenance, as well as a way of re-interpreting their often less than satisfactory relationships. Reading these books “may very well obviate the need or desire to demand satisfaction in the real world because it can be so successfully met in fantasy” (p. 212). Tania Modleski says romance novels “speak to very real problems and tensions in women’s lives. The narrative strategies which have evolved for smoothing over these tensions can tell us much about how women have managed not only to live in oppressive circumstances but to invest their situations with some degree of dignity” (1982/1988, p. 14). Treacher (1988) suggests that romance fiction fills a need for love and relationships to be more simple and clearly defined. In this vein Talbot (1997) notes that in romance novels “problematic relationships are reinterpreted as good ones. Men do not need to change. Women just have to learn how to understand them” (p. 119).

According to Talbot (1997) the maximization of gender difference is a crucial variable in romance novels. DeFrancisco (1997) discusses two basic frameworks used within research on gender differences in the field of communication: the ‘social power’ model, and the ‘cross-cultural differences’ model. From a social power perspective, it is important to focus on the unequal hierarchical positions held by girls/women and boys/men. Differential access to power and privilege create differences between groups of people, whether based on race, education, physical ability, gender, etc. From a cross-cultural differences model, gender differences “are a result of innocent socialization in different sociolinguistic cultures” (DeFrancisco, 1997, p.40). In the first model, differences are inherently problematic, in that they are based on social coercion rather than choice. In the second model, differences are only problematic when one ‘cultural group’ fails to understand another. It is this second perspective which would seem to best explain the gender differences in the romance novels. Within this genre there are always
misunderstandings between the heroine and hero early on in the story, but as the women come to understand the motivations of the men, the misunderstandings melt away into an acceptance, and even a celebration, of the gender differences between them. The appeal to women readers might be the belief/hope that they too can get past their difficulty in understanding their male partner, and discover the bliss promised by this genre.

Talbot (1997) refers to the narrative practice of maximizing and eroticizing gender differences as a ‘discourse of sexuality.’ This discourse presents a way of talking about difference that naturalizes and even makes appealing such behaviors as male aggression and sexual forcefulness. A number of authors examining relationship issues have identified various discourses, or ways of talking about problems that tend to render them non-problematic. As Hare-Mustin (1994) says “there co-exist several different discourses that define what is expected of men and women in relation to each other, and that produce feminine and masculine identities. These identities then become part of an individual’s ‘nature’ and constrain and impel an individual’s choices” (p. 24). The major discourses I came across in my review of the literature include the ‘discourse of male sexuality’, the ‘discourses of equality’, the ‘discourse of marriage’, the ‘discourse of heterosexuality’, and the ‘exchange of goods discourse.’ These are discussed in the sections that follow.

**Discourse of Male Sexuality**

This discourse was first identified by Hollway (1984) and elaborated by Hare Mustin (1994), Reinhols, Muehlenhard, Phelps, & Satterfield (1995) and Gilbert and Walker (1999). The basic premise of this discourse is that males ‘need’ sex, and that they are therefore justified in pursuing sex (aggressively). Gilbert and Walker suggest that this premise is “a derivative of the sociobiological myth that in the animal kingdom there exists a male imperative to pursue and procreate, and a complementary female role to be selectively receptive” (1999, p. 397). Women are the ‘objects’ that arouse male desire, and men are not responsible for this arousal; it is caused by a woman’s seductiveness, and a man’s inability to control his physiology. Men “are overwhelmingly sexual beings who inevitably respond with sexual arousal to even the slightest provocation or
innuendo...once a man is sexually aroused, there is no stopping his progress to orgasm ... compelled by forces beyond his control” (Reinholts et al. 1995, p. 145).

Reinholts et al. (1995) note how the language used to discuss male-female sexual relations works to conceal or trivialize sexual coercion. Speaking of sex as ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ or as a ‘need,’ for instance, places a responsibility on women not to resent unwanted sexual advances. As with many other topics, it is the male mode that is taken as the human norm. “The dominant discourse regards women’s lack of interest in sexual relationships with their husbands as abnormal or dysfunctional. In contrast, men’s ‘need’ for sex is seen as normal and functional” (Hare Mustin, 1994, p.26). An example of this kind of discourse follows in the excerpt of a response from Ann Landers to a woman unsatisfied with her sex life and writing for advice in 1970 (it was republished in 1998, as Ann felt it had “stood the test of time”):

As for sex with your husband, don’t knock it, honey. There are plenty of husbands who aren’t interested and an equal number who are getting sex someplace else.... No marriage can maintain the honeymoon level of excitement forever... Count your blessings. Too many people fail to appreciate what they have until they have lost it. Don’t let this happen to you.” (Cited in Farrell, 1999, p. 112)

It is important to note that the male sexual discourse is used by women as well as by men. The discourse provides a lens for women through which they can view otherwise confusing male behavior. For instance, it helps young women beginning the dating process to reconcile their expectations of being ‘treated like a lady’ with the reality that they are often sexually harassed. In a concept related to the male sexual discourse, Reinholts et al. speak of the theme of ‘men as untrustworthy.’ “When women are told that they cannot trust men, they learn to expect not to trust men, and they learn to accept a society in which they form relationships with partners whom they cannot rely upon to honor their own wishes. Sexually coercive male behavior becomes normative and acceptable rather than aberrant and unacceptable” (Reinholts et al., 1995, p. 147).

Hollway (1984) and Hare-Mustin (1994) also discuss a related discourse: the ‘permissive discourse.’ Within this discourse, men and women are considered to be equal in terms of expressing their sexuality. Use of this discourse denies or obscures social and biological differences between men and women in terms of their desires for,
and practices of, sex. It also ignores differences in consequences (e.g., women can become pregnant, and are far more likely to be labelled negatively for engaging in sexual practices than are men). The discourse assumes that men and women both are free to make their own decisions about when, where, and with whom to have sex. Therefore there is no such thing as unwanted sex.7

Dominant discourses often obscure other, alternative discourses. Although the notion of female desire is alluded to within the permissive discourse (‘women want it just as much as men’), there is no concept that female desire may be different than male desire. And with the predominance of the discourse of the male sexual drive, it may be difficult for men to conceive of other ways of desiring women. Sexual preferences that include anything other than man-woman coitus are not considered at all within these discourses, although there are other (marginalized) discourses that address homosexual preferences. No discourse of sexuality admits of nonsexual preferences. Hare-Mustin (1994) points out how this accounts for the fact that women often find it easier to leave a husband when they have another man to go to. We simply don’t have positive ways of talking about women being on their own.

**Discourses of Equality**

Within a ‘marriage between equals’ discourse men and women in relationships together are talked of as if they were on equal footing. Research shows that it is actually very difficult for couples to create equal relationships, that women consistently do the majority of home and child care (even when they work outside the home; Hochschild, 1989/2003), and that expectations of equality held prior to marriage are rarely met (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996). Hare-Mustin states that marriage “reflects the problem of how to manage inequality in a society whose ideal is equality” (1994, p. 29). Thus we have developed a way of speaking about marriage that reflects the ideal and obscures the reality.

There are two major belief systems upon which discourses of equality rest. The first is the belief that men and women are ‘naturally’ or ‘essentially’ different, and so

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7 This discourse would presumably not apply to cases of obvious rape, especially if a woman were actively fighting off an attacker. Rather, it is meant to apply to the more subtle uses of coercion that involve women (and possibly men as well) in sex that they do not necessarily desire.
Relationship Rhetoric

each should do within the relationship what they are naturally good at doing. Although couples tend to enter marriage with an expectation of equality, when this expectation is not met it is often easier to adjust one’s definition of equality than to challenge the status quo. Thus what has always been ‘women’s work’ or ‘men’s work’ tends to remain women’s or men’s work, but that is now defined as reasonable and equal. Gilbert and Walker note how “theories of science and justice have considered the gender structure as just and appropriate” (1999, p. 402). Knudson-Martin & Mahoney refer to this as the ‘myth of equality’ within which “one’s inability to do everything that is part of one’s own ‘half’ must be a reflection of personal inadequacies rather than a family problem that needs to be addressed. Thus, the myth may reduce problems to the level of the individual, leaving relational or societal inequalities unchallenged” (1996, p. 146).

In a similar vein Fine, Genovese, Ingersoll, Maepherson, and Roberts (1996) discuss the ‘Family as Safe Haven’ discourse which “supports and is supported by the economic realities of gender inequality and holds that for women and children, the (idealized) family seems to be the safest place. Supported mainly by a man’s wages, especially in white working- and middle-class homes, women with children do not have to look far to witness how untenable life is for those outside this unit” (p. 147). However, rather than address the paucity of choices for women, the discourse reinforces the naturalness of this condition: “men are naturally providers for and protectors of women, and good women are naturally wives and mothers” (p. 147, italics in original).

The second belief that supports a discourse of equality is that how chores and responsibilities are divided within a marriage is purely a matter of individual choice (rather than a reflection of the sociopolitical context). Thus a couple will justify their division of chores because of their own particular circumstances – the wife may decide to stay home and look after the baby because the husband’s job pays better, so it clearly would not make sense for him to stay home. Edley and Wetherell (1999) interviewed teenage boys about their visions for the future, and found that at a general level they endorsed the notion of equality within their anticipated relationships. However, when it came to specific issues (e.g., child care, housework) they tended to switch to a more ‘practical’ discourse, discussing relative incomes and skills (for instance boys often assumed that their future partners would be ‘better at’ cooking, childcare, etc.) Edley and
Wetherell note the dilemma of conflicting beliefs and expectations: “People today will overwhelmingly present themselves as ‘believers’ in sexual and racial equality.... Indeed, this notion has become part of our contemporary common sense. A safer strategy, therefore, would be one that allowed the speaker to manage the dilemma without disrupting this liberal ideal. One way of doing this is by separating out the principle of equality from the practice of everyday life” (1999, p.187, italics in original).

**Discourse of Marriage**

Rachel Lawes notes how, in Western culture, there is a tendency to treat marriage “as a singular entity that exists independently of the conversations that are held about it” (1999, p.2). She interviewed a number of men and women with a focus on the discourse used to discuss marriage and found they tended to alternate between a discourse of ‘marriage in theory’ (which she labelled the ‘romantic’ repertoire) and ‘marriage in practice’ (labelled the ‘realist’ repertoire). The romantic repertoire included such terms as ‘the right person,’ ‘commitment,’ ‘making the effort,’ ‘working at the relationship’ and ‘communication.’ In the realist repertoire marriage was seen as “something that is liable to wear out and is characterized by debt, infidelity, ‘staying together for the sake of the children’ and illness.... a discourse of fatalism and passivity” (p. 10). Lawes notes that all of her interviewees generated both discourses at different times, depending on the questions asked and/or the rhetorical effect they were trying to achieve. “Talk about marriage is not unitary, nor is it randomly fragmented; it is organized into contradictory sets of discursive resources that allow, for instance, speakers to assert both that marriage is ‘for life’ and that it is not with equal rhetorical force” (pp. 15,16).

**Discourse of Heterosexuality**

The discourse of heterosexuality is closely related to the discourse of marriage, as marriage is considered the logical conclusion of being heterosexual. Mills (1997) notes that the term heterosexuality gained currency only following the 1960s when words such as homosexuality and gay began to claim legitimacy. Yet, according to Gilbert and

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8 In a sense, there was no need for a term for heterosexuality when it was presumed that that was what everyone was. An abstract term like heterosexuality may be better understood by what it is not (what it is dialectically opposed with) than by what it is. Heterosexuality is generally opposed with homosexuality (a
Walker (1999) discourses of heterosexuality are among “the most pervasive and profound” ways we have of talking about human relationships. Hyde and Jaffe note that the “media abound with models of heterosexuality and messages that heterosexuality can bring about popularity, power, and pleasure” (2000, p. 290).

Despite lip-service to notions of equality between the sexes (as per the discourse of equality) the discourse of heterosexuality is deeply embedded within patriarchal attitudes of marriage, and notions of ‘natural’ differences between men and women. Gilbert and Walker (1999) discuss ‘life plots’ that feed into this discourse: “The ‘accepted female life plot’ conceals a woman’s personal agency and a sense of self separate from the needs of others” and ends with the marriage plot where she “is subsumed within the man’s history” (p. 396). The male plot, in contrast, is about personal agency and control of one’s own fate. Within heterosexuality males are expected to ‘take the lead’ - whether this is in dancing, initiating dates or sex, deciding where to go or what activities to engage in. Males are also generally expected to pay for activities they initiate, often with expectations that they will be duly ‘rewarded’ (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Gilbert & Walker, 1999).

Mills (1997) was able to shed light on the discourse of heterosexuality by interviewing a group of feminist women who were in relationships with men, but who were resistant to some of the ‘traditional’ ways of doing relationships. She found that they had difficulty defining themselves - they weren’t lesbian or gay or homosexual, but if they used the ‘heterosexual’ category people seemed to make certain automatic assumptions about how they lived their lives. These assumptions included notions that they would be married, use their husband’s names, want or have children, be ‘domestic’ and ‘do things as a couple.’ One woman who did not live with her partner was particularly aware of the pressure of the heterosexual narrative that when relationships are serious they must ‘progress’-- from dating to living together (optional) to marriage to children.

term often associated as much with lifestyle as with sexual practices), and as long as homosexuality is ‘bad,’ heterosexuality is ‘good.’ In some radical feminist circles heterosexual may be opposed with feminist (which may be apposed with lesbian), and therefore take on a negative connotation (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993). Mills (1997) suggests that for any woman who grapples with the nature of being (performing) hetero- or homo-sexual, any term is problematic.
Because heterosexuality is the assumed state of affairs, it does not seem to require explanation or elucidation. It is just the way things are (and always have been) – unless you are in some way ‘deviant,’ and then there is a term to describe that situation (such as homosexual, butch, spinster, barren, childless, dyke). Despite the fact that the word itself only refers to sex between males and females, the discourse of heterosexuality implies a specific type of relationship with fairly rigid gender roles.

**Exchange of Goods Discourse**

This is a discourse more prevalent in professional writing, but that has also made its way into popular language. Lindholm (1998) notes how the utilitarian and causal language of science, when applied to issues of love and relationships “tends strongly to reduce romantic attraction to something else, that is sexual desire, the exchange of pleasure, maximization of the gene pool and so on” (p. 247). In sociobiological theory it is common to talk about ‘investment’ when discussing male-female bonding, as in the following example: “The most effective male tactics for promoting a sexual encounter involved investing time and attention and communicating love and commitment to a woman... Women were particularly effective, however, when conveying signals of immediate sexual access and enhanced physical appearance” (Greer & Buss, 1994, p.185). The bottom line within this theory is that men offer security and women offer sex, and this is considered a fair trade.

Reinholts et al. (1995) note that the theme of ‘sex as a commodity’ goes hand in hand with other common themes of heterosexual relationships. When women are valued for their outward appearance (and, sometimes, for deeds they can perform), they come to be seen as objects that can be owned. They cite an article from *Glamour* magazine that suggests virginity makes a woman “more attractive in the marriage market,” and note that “women who have sex without getting enough in exchange are said to be ‘cheap’” (p. 149).

The ‘exchange of goods’ model has had a major influence in marital therapy. Within this model attention is paid to the negotiated ratio of costs and rewards, and therapists will emphasize “negotiating skill and the use of conscious, rational control to change problematic behaviors” within the relationship (Johnson 1986, p. 262). Morgan
& Shaver note how it is common within many disciplines to “account for commitment to romantic relationships with economic models predicting commitment from the costs and benefits of the relationship” (1999, p. 109). If people feel they are better off within the relationship than out of it, they will remain in the relationship. For women this could be a matter of simple economics, particularly if they have children, when they are likely to face a significant drop in their standard of living should they leave the relationship (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

The exchange of goods discourse is an attempt to quantify relationship behavior – to simplify complicated relationship processes that our language often does not seem to have words for. Unlike the other discourses discussed it is a more deliberate application of a discourse that has been predominantly used in one field (economics) to another field (relationships). What all the discourses have in common is they way they are used without critical reflection, and therefore shape our notions of relationships in ways of which we are often unaware.

**Self-Help and Relationship Guides**

Self-help is somewhat vague term that can be applied to various activities including attending groups, seminars, or workshops, reading books, and watching certain television shows. Salerno (2005), discussing the “self-help and actualization movement” for which he uses the acronym SHAM, says:

> Whether you follow self-help’s teachings or not, you have been touched by it, because SHAM’s effects extend well beyond the millions of individual consumers who preorder Phil McGraw’s latest book or attend Marianne Williamson’s seminar-style love-ins. The alleged philosophies at the core of the movement have bled over into virtually every area of American social conduct and day-to-day living: the home, the workplace, the educational system, the mating dance, and elsewhere. (p. 3)

My particular interest is in self-help books addressing what Salerno calls “the mating dance,” and I use the term relationship guide to delineate this particular category of self-help. Relationship guides are a relatively recent entry in the genre of self-help books, for, according to Starker (1989) prior to the 1960s books addressing issues of intimacy between men and women were not considered suitable material for the lay public. As
psychology gained popular appeal in the latter part of the twentieth century, books on topics such as depression, anxiety, parenting, and relationships (often written by psychologists) began to take up more and more space on the self-help shelves of bookstores. And, with these new topics, according to Grodin (1991), readership of self-help began to shift from a primarily male to a primarily female activity.

In 1978 The American Psychological Association struck a Task Force on Self-Help Therapies which concluded that the involvement of psychologists in the self-help movement could be beneficial to consumers (Rosen, 1987), and there were sporadic publications and debates on the issue in professional forums into the early 1990’s (Forest, 1988; Gambrill, 1992; Halliday, 1991; Lazarus, 1988; Mahoney, 1988; Quackenbush, 1991; Rosen, 1987; Starker, 1988). Some of the issues raised included matters of professionalism, ethics, economics, and efficacy. The conclusion of Gerald Rosen, a major contributor to the field, was that "commercial considerations, rather than professional standards, have been influencing the development of treatment books" (1987, p. 46). And these ‘commercial considerations’ are not incidental; according to McGinn (2000; cited in Wood, 2002) self-help books generated sales of over $560 million in 1999. McGee (2005) reports that in New York one bookstore “allocates a quarter mile of shelf space to the various subcategories of self-improvement literature” (p. 11) and adds that between one-third and one-half of Americans buy at least one self-help title in their lifetime.

For the remainder of this chapter I will look at academic critiques of relationship guides, which I define as books that offer advice on how to improve intimate relationships. I do not include books that tell people how to ‘catch’ a spouse, or that provide rules for dating. The most popular relationship guide author for academic critics is John Gray whose *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992) has sold millions and generated a franchising empire. Gray’s basic thesis is that men and women are different because they are socialized in different cultures (similar to the ‘cross-cultural differences model’ discussed above). He purports to provide a sort of dictionary that can help the two genders communicate and understand each other better. Wood (2002) compared Gray’s major points about communication differences between men and
women with what was in the academic literature and concluded that there was no basis in fact for his assertions about the different needs of men and women.

In her examination of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, Crawford (2004) noted that “virtually every aspect of personality, motivation, and language is polarized” (p. 60). Cowlishaw (2001) describes this polarization as a subject-object binary that is “so much a part of modern western thought that we can easily fail to notice its controlling, limiting, structuring presence” (p. 170). She suggests that Gray portrays men as subjects who act and women as objects who feel. Two authors who looked at Gray’s *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* came to similar conclusions. Potts (1998) says Gray represents the masculine body as an active subject, and the female as a passive receptacle. Peterson (2000) notes that Gray’s discussion of sexual clothing and communication “makes it clear who is in charge: he is verbal agent; she is nonverbal/visual object” (p. 5). Both Potts and Peterson observe that in the Mars and Venus world, women must adapt to – and even take responsibility for – men’s sexual desires, which are portrayed as ‘needs.’ Crawford says that Gray’s ideology reproduces “antiquated gender roles and [reinforces] the institution of patriarchal marriage” (2004, p. 65).

Murphy (2001) wonders why women are so enamored with John Gray’s books and explores why feminist books appear on the same shelves in bookstores. She suggests that while feminism has been good at “naming the problem... it has never promised to produce happiness” (p. 166). Deep anger at injustice, the underpinning of a feminist consciousness, is not sustainable, she suggests, especially when women have to deal with day to day realities of work, housekeeping, children, and relationships. A self-help book that promises to make any part of this reality easier has obvious appeal. Gray’s books imply that feminism has taken us in the wrong direction, and state that rather than criticize gender differences we must embrace them, which includes accepting that women are the relationship oriented gender. Murphy finds that the books dismiss any societal and cultural influences on behavior and that “the reader is often presented as solely responsible for a personal relationship” (p. 162).

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9 An example of the discourse of male sexuality.
In a similar vein Hazleden (2003) notes the “paramount importance of the self” in what she terms relationship manuals. Readers are encouraged to have a relationship with their ‘selves’ which is prior to relationships with others, and may even negate the need for relationships with others. She finds that the books encourage people to monitor their own behavior, take responsibility for themselves, and not rely on others.

“Self-help literature permits and requires a notion of social obligation in that technologies of the self such as self-discipline and self-knowledge are the ‘right’, or ethical, thing to take on, not only for the sake of the self, but for one’s partner and for the wider society. By prescribing what is emotionally ‘right’ or ‘healthy’ for the individual they also provide a picture of how healthy relationships between individuals should be conducted, and the healthy society that would result” (p. 425).

In her examination of relationship self-help books, Faludi (1991) found that they focus women on what they do wrong – not on what they do right, or on what men do wrong. They pathologize women; they suggest that if women have problems they asked for or created those problems themselves. In fact, they created those problems through their pursuit of feminism and independence, which drove them away from men and relationships: “Feminism gave women swollen, and consequently, sick, heads” (p. 336). Faludi concludes that self-help texts work in the service of the backlash against feminism. “Via popular psychology, the backlash insinuated itself into the most intimate front lines, impressing its discouraging and moralistic message most effectively, and destructively, on the millions of women seeking help from therapy books and counseling – women who were already feeling insecure and vulnerable” (p. 336).

De Francisco and O’Connor (1995), in their study of relationship guides, conclude that these self-help books not only reflect white middle and upper class American ideology, but that they support patriarchy, are misogynist, and potentially dangerous to women. They do not mince words, noting that “these depictions of men all serve to excuse relational irresponsibility while condoning sexual, physical, or psychological abuse” (p. 226). They conclude their paper with the following strongly worded message: “To call these books self-help for women is insidiously misleading and disempowering, for they come dangerously close to furthering the oppression of women” (p. 226).
The majority of the criticisms of self-help books have been written by feminists, who have generally found the books to be detrimental to women's progress and to the notion of egalitarian relationships. Some authors have attempted to find what might be good or useful in the books, or at least to understand their appeal, given that they are read in such large numbers. Zimmerman, Holm and Haddock (2001), for instance, suggest that the books "represent both the progress and tensions of current social change" (p. 130). In their analysis of best selling relationship books they assessed whether the books were empowering people to resist gender stereotyping. They concluded that two of the female authors did encourage resistance to stereotyping, but that the most popular books were the most disempowering.

Crawford (2004) suggests that self-help texts may allow for multiple readings. She says that the "language of difference" used by Gray may mean that his books "afford their female readers a discourse for articulating problems of inequality in relationships and for holding their partner accountable. In doing so, the readers may make visible some unexpected sites of contention and create interpretations that compete with the texts' own ideology" (p. 75). From a somewhat different perspective, Hochschild (1994) notes the difficulties women have in adapting themselves to what she calls the "stalled gender revolution" (p. 19). She suggests that self-help books for women offer "psychic armor" which may be necessary for survival in today's world. Although she would prefer to see changes at a societal level, she doesn't see feminism offering useful solutions to women. They therefore need to find answers where they can.

A few authors have interviewed readers of self-help books, though none have focused specifically on readers of relationship guides. Grodin (1991) delineated three themes for readers, the first of which had to do with construction of meaning. She states that women "took pride in their active construction of textual meaning, and their resistance to much of what they read in self-help books" (p. 126). The second theme was about readers' "dis-contents," and Grodin notes that they often found the books patronizing, and did not buy into the notion that women have more problems than men. The third theme concerned separation and connection. Through the self-help books women often felt connected with others with similar problems.
Grodin concludes that self-help texts can be empowering insofar as they are “a place for women to bridge the pain of cultural discontinuity, maintain connections with others, and develop identity and self-expression” (p. 132). She also notes the limitations of the genre: Self-help texts do not discuss the cultural oppression of women, and are built on notions of individual pathology and failure. However, women read self-help texts actively and seldom “swallow” a text whole; they reject some aspects of the books, and interpret others to suit their own situations.

In her study of self-help reading, Simonds (1992) found that readers’ responses to questions about reading self-help were varied, and sometimes ambiguous and ambivalent. One reader complained that the books were not complex enough, but stated that she continued to read them because they helped her feel less alone. Several readers used the books as a “quick fix” – one reader talked about the excitement of seeing a new book, and stated that these books gave her “a sense of total possibility” (p.32). Simonds concluded that women read self-help books for validation, inspiration, comfort, and “explanations of situations they could not understand” (p. 7). She also noted the contradictions inherent in the genre: “buying self-help, whatever form of media it takes, is about alienation and hope: about personal dissatisfaction and societal inadequacy; about wanting to conform to achieve magical happiness and about wanting to create new arrangements.” (1992, p. 226).

Rapping (1996) immersed herself in the self-help culture (mainly the ‘recovery movement’), which included talking with consumers of groups, talk-shows, and books. Of the women she spoke to who had “been a part of second wave feminism” she says “they felt embarrassed and frustrated by the fact that their man problems had not gotten better but had, often, gotten worse. They were down on themselves for this ‘failure’ to maintain non-sexist, gratifying relationships such as their mothers would never have thought of seeking. And their self-contempt was fueled – not allayed – by their feminist consciousness” (p. 139). Rapping concludes that the self-help movement addresses the same needs as did the feminist movement previously.

Not much has been written regarding the motives of self-help authors. Kaminer (1992) and Tiede (2001) are fairly contemptuous of authors, implying they are in it for the money. Faludi (1991), the only writer to have interviewed self-help authors, paints a
picture of selfish, ambitious, and fraudulent people. Salerno (2005) calls the entire self-help movement a “sham” (the title of his book, and an acronym for the ‘self-help and actualization movement’). He states that the movement “has filled the bank accounts of a slickly packaged breed of false prophets” (p. 2). Dolby (2005) says that, though she can see the temptation to “simply pan the whole self-help movement as opportunistic on the part of writers and sheep-like and wimpish on the part of readers” (p. ix), she is “prepared to see the writers and the readers of self-help books as sincere and intelligent people” (p. ix). She concludes that most authors “clearly see themselves as concerned—if distant—mentors, as teachers, or, if as healers, then as healers who educate rather than as conjurors who prescribe magic rituals and practices to obedient believers” (p. 78).

Unlike many critics of the movement, though, she looks at a wide range of books, rather than focusing on the more popular ones.

In addition to the motives of authors, one must also consider the motives of the publishers. From a marketing perspective, Falling Buzzard (2002) analyzed John Gray’s book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, and noted that an earlier version of the book with a different title (*Men, Women and Relationships*) was declined by publishers. She attributes the success of the book to ‘brand marketing,’ an important component of which is having a title that allows variations for future books (e.g., *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom*). Other aspects of brand marketing include extending the line to new products such as games and CD-Roms, and something she calls ‘product saliency’ which involves keeping the author in the public eye. “As Gray readily admits, his success today has less to do with audience satisfaction than with building a brand name that people recognize and trust, a name so reliable that Gray has been called the Coca-Cola of psychology” (p. 91).

Peterson (2000) also analyzed the appeal of John Gray’s books, although more from a rhetorical than a marketing perspective. She noted how “smaller-scale textual elements such as acknowledgements, lists, boldface text, repetitions, pictures, and other features reinforce the sexism of Gray’s case studies, metaphors, and myths” (p. 2). She also noted how the covers of the books promote other Mars/Venus products and services.

DeFrancisco and O’Connor (1995), in their analysis of relationship guides, suggested that the books have a particular packaging and language style. They have
provocative titles (e.g., *The Don Juan Dilemma: Should Women Stay With Men Who Stray*?), and are entertaining, “easy reads” offering personal stories and case studies. They are “full of buzz words, psychological jargon, and original phrases coined by the authors... the child within...the seesaw effect...dual monogamy” (p. 219), and they offer simplistic “quick fixes.” From talking to five editors of self-help books, Simonds (1992) was able to map what is required by some publishing firms to get a self-help book on the market. The most important elements include titles and book covers that promise happiness, authors who are not perceived as detached professionals (in particular they should disclose details about their own lives), and authors who write with passion and sincerity.

Overall, the academic literature on relationship guides (and on self-help in general) is not very complimentary. Despite the perception by most critics that the genre is not legitimate, readers are clearly attracted to whatever it is that these books offer, and although some authors have attempted to understand the appeal of the books, this understanding is incomplete. What is missing from the literature is an in-depth analysis of how the genre works. This would be particularly important for anyone who wanted to use the genre for more feminist purposes.

The feminist voice may be continually shut down by Gray’s texts but women who identify as feminist are still reading these self-help manuals. It is this apparent contradiction that provides a space for a feminist appropriation of the genre. How do we integrate feminism into our daily lives? Perhaps in the future the answer to that question will be provided by books with titles such as: *How to Make your Man a Feminist in 9 Easy Steps!* Or *I’m a Feminist, You’re a Feminist, We’re OK.* (Murphy, 2001, p. 166)

It is my hope that by applying a more rhetorical, generic perspective I will shed additional light on what it is that the genre of relationship guides does (not just what it says), and on how it does what it does. Intimate relationships are a crucial part of most people’s lives, and the functioning of those relationships is of deep interest to many, as discussed in the first part of this chapter. A more thorough knowledge of the relationship guide genre seems to me to be a crucial part of understanding the current state of relationships, and of influencing perceptions and practices of relationships.
Chapter 2: Method

Many of the authors cited in the previous chapters, whether analyzing self-help texts, or other texts related to relationships, relied on discourse analysis for their methodology. Many did not articulate the particulars of their method, and even those who devoted space to discussing discourse analysis did not always make it entirely clear how they applied the method to their texts. Discourse analysis has become increasingly popular since the 1960s, as noted by Rosalind Gill:

Suddenly it is no longer just linguists who are interested in language, but sociologists, geographers, philosophers, literary critics, historians and social psychologists too. Language is no longer simply a sub-disciplinary area or topic, but a central concern of researchers across disciplines. This shift was brought about by the prodigious influence of poststructuralist ideas, which stressed the thoroughly discursive, textual nature of social life. (Gill, 1995, p. 166)

This chapter will discuss methodology as it pertains to discourse analysis, as well as the two related disciplines of genre and rhetoric.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a “complex and heterogeneous field” (Gill, 1995, p. 167) practiced in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. As noted in the citation above, poststructuralism has highly influenced the recent surge of interest in discourse; other important influences include linguistics, ethnomethodology, and psychoanalysis (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995, p.1). Different fields focus on different types or samples of discourse, ranging from single words (or even pictures) to entire genres (such as ‘academic papers’), including both written and spoken examples. What appears to be most basic in defining discourse is that it be naturally occurring (i.e., not produced for the purpose of the analysis) and that it be regarded in context (van Dijk, 1997a).

Discourse can be focused on at a structural level, a social level, or both (in fact the two cannot be completely separated, but emphasis may be placed on one level or another, depending on the purposes of the analysis). “A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of
those ways of thinking and behaving” (Mills, 1997, p. 4). If one were focusing on the ‘systematicity’ or structure of a text, one would pay attention to the following sorts of details: graphical and visual aspects, syntax, semantics, style, and rhetorical structures such as alliteration, rhyme, irony, and metaphor (van Dijk, 1997a).

At the contextual level “a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Mills, 1997, p. 11). My reading of the literature suggests three key terms at this level: context, power, and action. When discourse analysts look at context they take into account such factors as participants and settings (van Dijk, 1997a), social, economic, and political structures, (Gavey, 1989), and historical issues (Parker, 1992). These are all important in determining why a text has been produced at a particular time and place, whom it is aimed at, and what functions it might serve.

Power is a crucial aspect of discourse for many analysts, particularly from a Foucaultian perspective (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Mills, 1997). For Foucault, power is a complex relationship between people (rather than an economic entity, as in Marxism), and is dispersed throughout societal structures, particularly knowledge systems of the human sciences (e.g., economics, medicine, etc.) People – or more specifically, their identities – are the effects of power, as negotiated through various aspects of a society’s structures, and in particular through the discourses used within those structures. Within this framework, discourse is a vehicle of power, “not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but... the thing for which and by which there is struggle” (Foucault, 1981, pp. 52-53).

Thus in discourse analysis there is often a focus on the relationship between language and society, and how power is played out within various systematic ways of speaking and writing. Volosinov (1973) suggests that all language use is a matter of power and ideology, “an arena of class struggle” (cited in Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 262). For Bakhtin (1986) one definition of discourse involves the use of words in a way which presumes authority. Also important in Bakhtin’s work is the idea that texts are inter-related, that they build on and influence each other, or, as Condor and Antaki
suggest, there is an “infiltration into one speaker’s utterances of the interests and perspectives of the other” (1997, p. 338). This relates to the third key term identified above: *action*, or as Ruth Wodak calls it, social practice.

Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. (Wodak, 1996, p. 17)

From this perspective individuals engaged in discourse can be seen as social actors. Condor and Antaki, in discussing the relationship between social cognition and discourse suggest that in a sense social cognition is discourse, and is practiced by members of social groups who are invested in those groups: “the social actor speaks and thinks as a part of, and on behalf of, a collective identity. Human social perception and action are, on occasions, shaped by the tendency of individuals to internalize the needs and interests of the specific groups with which they identify” (1997, p. 332). In this way truth is produced (and sometimes challenged) by social actors with vested interests (Mills, 1997).

This also leads to a perspective on hegemony, wherein the tendency for people to identify with and internalize the discourse of their social affiliations influences their participation in their own oppression (Mills, 1997; van Dijk, 1997b). “Language is so structured to mirror power relations that often we can see no other ways of being, and it structures ideology so that it is difficult to speak both in and against it” (Parker, 1992, p. xi). In other words, what we can say, even what we can conceptualize, is limited and shaped by the discourses we have available to us. This also makes more clear the view of Foucault that discourse is both the site and the object of power struggles, for those who control discourse may also control thought and action.

We know that discourse analysts may focus on syntax, semantics, style, and historical, social, economic and political factors (among others), but do they do anything more than merely pointing out their existence? Sometimes simple knowledge of such factors as, for example, when, where, or by whom a text was published, or a speech
given, may be enlightening in and of itself. Generally though, discourse analysts want to move beyond description to draw conclusions about the object of their study. What allows them to justify that their conclusions are valid, and that similar conclusions would be reached by others analyzing the same discourse? Deborah Cameron (1998) suggests that while discourse analysts should always be concerned with this question, that not having a concrete, rigorous methodology should not deter investigators. She refers to an argument in the literature regarding ‘tools’ for discourse analysis, and suggests it may not be “anything more than a rather tedious disciplinary turf dispute” (p. 969).

In a primer addressing discourse within social psychology Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that good discourse analysis is the result of practice and a certain degree of intuition. Certainly one does get a feel for how discourse analysis is done by reading studies using the method, and given that any discourse can be seen as having multiple authorship, as the result of a building, or packing together process (Condor & Antaki, 1997), it is logical to perceive discourse analysis as a dialectical process.

Although some authors have made attempts to delineate some sort of methodology, or a list of questions to ask in discourse analysis (Parker, 1992; van Dijk, 1997a), these methods have to be adapted to the particular discourse being analyzed (single words, pictures, conversation, published texts, etc.). No single method can cover the complexity of various types of discourse. It may be that it is the process of asking questions that is most instructive, for although different investigators might come up with different answers, asking the questions sometimes reveals aspects of discourse that might otherwise have gone un-noticed. Presenting possible answers to the questions can open up lively and productive debates (cf. Crawford, 1995 on Tannen, 1990; or Widdicombe, 1995 on Gavey, 1989).

For researchers who identify their method as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and generally for feminists (DeFrancisco, 1997; Squire, 1995) it is more important that discourse analysis be in the service of advocacy and change than that it follow any particular method.

Instead of merely focusing on their discipline and its theories and paradigms, such discourse analysts focus on relevant social problems. That is, their work is more issue-oriented than theory-oriented. Analysis, description and theory formation play a role especially in as far as they allow better understanding and critique of
social inequality, based on gender, ethnicity, class, origin, religion, language, sexual orientation and other criteria that define differences between people. Their ultimate goal is not only scientific, but also social and political, namely change. In that case, social discourse analysis takes the form of a critical discourse analysis. (Van Dijk, 1997a, pp. 22-23)

There are, of course, criticisms of discourse analysis: Gill points out that the same features of discourse analysis which are useful in feminist analysis – “its problematizing of truth claims, its stress on the socially constructed nature of all knowledge, its rejection of the idea of the unified, coherent subject, and its attention to power as a local practice – also make it problematic” (Gill, 1995, p. 168). The most common concerns regard issues of relativism, and inattention to extra-discursive phenomena. As Gill suggests above, when knowledge and power are considered to be entirely socially constructed, we may neglect other important aspects of oppression or injustice, such as political and economic factors (see also Cameron, 1998; Hollway, 1995). Wetherell, a social psychologist, states that discourse analysis “emphatically privileges the linguistic or the social/linguistic over what has conventionally been understood as the psychological” (1995, p. 134). In a similar vein, Widdicombe suggests that the stress on political or ideological interventions creates a “research agenda...set up to exclude detailed analysis of the ways people themselves give meaning to their identities and actions” (1995, p. 108).

Perhaps the biggest danger in discourse analysis is the same as that for any other method, which occurs when researchers have an over-riding faith that their method is infallible. Gill reminds us, that like other researchers, “discourse analysts (myself included) have a number of subtle (and not so subtle) devices for privileging particular versions of the world – including straightforward assertion, smuggling in particular (unproblematized) accounts via other sources, and being selective about the injunction to focus on participants’ orientations” (1995, p. 175). At the end of this chapter I will consider in more detail methodological issues in qualitative analysis.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

In this section the focus is on the work of Kenneth Burke, who developed an extensive philosophy and methodology for rhetorical criticism. The most basic notion for
Burke is that language is symbolic action. Burke focuses not on what words say, but on what words do. He calls his method dramatistic because he sees all rhetorical situations as acts. The use of symbols (and words are symbols) constitutes an act. In drama when the hero tells the heroine that he loves her, the viewers are interested in what follows from this disclosure; what the saying of the words does to the characters (does the heroine swoon, or does she flee to France, does her father hire assassins, does the hero struggle with regrets?) Similarly in analyzing a text, Burke is concerned with the effects of choosing certain words and certain ways of presenting ideas; he wants to know what these choices do – what possibilities they suggest or deny. Key in this is the notion that words and things/ideas do not have a one-to-one representation: “Even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality” (Burke, 1966, p. 45, italics in original).

Burke’s approach to understanding rhetorical situations (and all situations that involve language are rhetorical) is not easily laid out. His method is not rigorous in the scientific sense; it does not involve a clear order of doing things, and a description of what analyses one has done in Burkean terms will not necessarily lead to replicability. Authors who attempt to summarize Burke differ in which of his terms/ideas they choose to highlight, and there is no manual that lays out a Burkean method. I was drawn to Burke for this project because of his philosophy that “language is a strategic response to a situation” (Brock, 1990, p. 183). Thus, an examination of an author’s (or a genre’s) language should provide answers to questions regarding how the situation is perceived (and not perceived) and what strategies are (and are not) considered appropriate. In what follows I will discuss four approaches designed to aid in this sort of understanding.

**Terministic Screens**

From what Burke calls a “scientistic” perspective, terms serve the function of naming or defining. From a “dramatistic” perspective, terms serve the function of directing attention, and when attention is directed towards certain objects/ideas, it is also deflected from other objects/ideas. The term “terministic screens” was inspired by photographs Burke saw that were taken with different colored filters, wherein different
aspects of the same object were more or less noticeable depending on the particular filter or screen that was used (Burke, 1966).

Entitlement is a term that is sometimes used convertibly with terministic screens. Paying attention to how something is titled allows us to be aware of how the author is attempting to direct our attention. If I entitle my cat “a companion animal” I am directing attention differently than if I refer to my cat as “my pet.” If I see important events in life through a “screen” of fundamental Christianity then I will likely use different titles for events than if my “screen” is feminist (e.g., pro-life vs. anti-choice, miracle vs coincidence). Burke’s point is that by paying attention to key terms and entitlements we can make inferences about an author’s “screens” or “filters,” which will allow us to notice how our attention is being directed, (and, therefore, also will allow for realizations of what our attention is being deflected from).

Clusters

The work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses ‘associational clusters.’ And you may, by examining his work, find ‘what goes with what’ in these clusters…. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together” (Burke, 1941, quoted in Wolin, 2001).

Although Burke himself did not provide a clear method for cluster analysis, Rueckert (1982) and Berthold (1976) are more specific about the procedure, which Berthold describes as “an objective way of determining relationships between a speaker’s main concerns, as well as a [way] to discover more about the motives and characters of speakers” (p. 302). The process begins with an Index, which is “necessarily selective; one is guided by terms that are either of high intensity or high frequency” (Rueckert, 1982, p. 84). These terms may be ‘entitlements’ as discussed above, and, in Burkean terminology, are, when clearly central, called God Terms, or if less central, Good Terms (or Devil Terms if they counter the God Terms). Once pivotal terms have been listed the researcher creates a Concordance: an exhaustive list of terms that appear with the indexed terms. Berthold (1976) breaks this down into two pieces: Cluster Analysis, or terms that “go with” the key terms (appositions), and Agon Analysis, involving terms that ‘go against’ the key terms (oppositions).
Relationship Rhetoric

Each opposition consists of a good term and devil term placed in some form of contrapoition. No particular grammatical structure is common to all agons. Agons may involve direct opposition between terms, as when the speaker contrasts a good and a devil term. Opposition may also be expressed by describing a form of competition between two terms. In addition, the speaker’s imagery may portray a direct opposition. Agons, like clusters, may be formed indirectly by opposing each other through mutual relationship to third terms. (Berthold, 1976, p. 304)

Master Metaphors

"Metaphor is a device for seeing something in terms of something else.... metaphor tells us something about one [event, person, etc.] as considered from the point of view of another.... And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a perspective upon A” (Burke 1945/1969, pp. 503-504). An examination of an author’s use of metaphors can help to illuminate the author’s perspectives, and the directions in which he/she is attempting to move our attention. Particularly important are master or root metaphors, which are “comparable to the semiotic concept of myth, utterances that constitute common sense, the norm, general opinion” (Coe, 1996, p. 441). Such metaphors are often so common or taken-for-granted that they are overlooked. For instance, when we speak of someone “falling in love” we are using a metaphor in which love is being seen from the perspective of some kind of “fall” or “falling into.” From this perspective love could be seen to involve more luck than knowledge, skill and effort (Fromm, 1956/1963).

Audience Cooperation

From a dramatistic perspective, with a focus on what words do, we need also to take into account potential responses to the words. Burke suggests that an essential function of language is “as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 43). Language is addressed to an audience (which may be, or can include, the self), and it generally involves some attempt to “induce cooperation.” Therefore, it is important to examine the means used to persuade the audience to cooperate with the author’s intentions.

Two terms important in this regard are “identification” and “consubstantiality:”
A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identificado* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so.

Here are ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (Burke, 1950/1969, pp. 20, 21, italics in original.)

Cooperation will be enhanced when the audience identifies with the author; when there is substance that is shared. Shared substance may include ideas, people, and institutions and the language used by rhetors “will reveal the substance out of which they expect to identify with their listeners” (Brock, 1990, p. 187). An author may wish to unite or divide at various levels. For instance, an author may highlight things that all women have (or are presumed to have) in common, if the goal is to address as many women as possible. Or, if an author wishes to persuade a particular subsection of women of his/her ideas, the author may stress differences between that group and others groups of women (e.g., in terms of class, education, access to resources, etc.).

An author may also address audiences at various levels of abstraction. For example, in making an argument for reforms in the medical system, one could argue at a highly abstract level (e.g., “we all want better health care”), which might get the attention of a large audience, or at a more specific level (e.g., “the technology of x-ray machines must be improved”) which would be likely to attract the attention of a more specialized group of technicians.

Hierarchy generates the structure of our dramatistic society. In society the social, economic, and political powers are unevenly divided. Power endows individuals with authority. Authority, in turn, establishes definite relationships among people, reflecting how much power they possess. These relationships can be viewed as a ladder of authority or the hierarchy of society. (Brock, 1990, p. 184)

People may accept or reject their positions within a hierarchy, or they may reject the hierarchy altogether. Acceptance leads to order and comfort, rejection to a state of discomfort which Burke calls guilt.

Guilt reduces social cohesion and gives people the feeling of being less than whole, so that they strive to have this guilt canceled or to receive redemption. The act of purification may be either mortification or victimage. Mortification is
an act of self-sacrifice that relieves guilt, whereas victimage is the purging of guilt through a scapegoat that symbolizes society’s guilt. (Brock, 1990, p. 186)

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) give as an example of this process the case of the working mother, made to feel guilty by her disruption of a hierarchy within which “a woman’s place is in the home.” She may transfer her guilt to the government, to her employer or to her spouse. “Such challenges and demands disrupt the social order; so, from time to time, public action is needed to remove the guilt” (p. 72). Public action could take the form of a government day-care initiative or a program aimed at helping mothers stay home with their children.

Hierarchy and its correlates of acceptance and rejection are important concepts in Burke’s work, as they are relevant to human motivation, and the dramatistic method is all about understanding motive. When one feels discomfort within a hierarchy, one is motivated to change, and change will be facilitated by instilling similar motivation in other people. Depending on the audience and the issues, a rhetor may be more persuasive if placed similarly within the hierarchy, or if perceived to be higher on the ladder. It may be instructive to assess which hierarchies an author is dealing with and whether she/he is advocating acceptance or rejection of these hierarchies, as well as where guilt is placed.

**Genre**

Conceptualizing discourse in terms of genres adds an important dimension. Like the proverbial snowflake, no two examples of discourse will ever be exactly the same, but discourse must follow certain conventions in order to be intelligible. When there are enough similarities in form, substance, and purpose various texts may form a genre. Moving the level of analysis from the text to the genre allows for increased understanding of the nature and function of the discourse.

Within recent work in genre studies there has been a shift in emphasis from form and situation to rhetorical action and strategy (Coe, Lingard & Teslenko, 2002). For instance, in studying the reports of psychotherapists one could focus on the length, format, and language used, and on the situations which give rise to the writing of such reports. However, one could also focus on the strategies used and the actions accomplished in writing such reports, as did Berkenkotter and Ravotas who noted that
these reports “support a billable diagnosis thereby fulfilling its institutional purpose” (1997, p. 256). They also noted that the reports failed to serve the purpose of providing certain information that would be useful in guiding treatment. Similarly, a study by Lingard of the genre of physicians’ oral presentations explored how the “acquisition of a medical genre facilitates the acquisition of medical values” (1998, p. iv).

Coe and Freedman (1998) summarize the focus of new genre theories as follows: “A genre is a socially standard strategy, embodied in a typical form of discourse, that has evolved for responding to a recurring type of rhetorical situation” (p. 137). There are a number of important elements in this definition that merit elaboration. That the contexts are “recurring” is essential to theories of genre. Genres are a response to a perceived need or desire – one that is not satisfied with only one example of the discourse. For instance, although some critics would suggest that Harlequin romances are ‘all the same’ there is a desire on the part of many readers for seemingly endless examples of this genre. Within the education system there is a recurring demand for student essays, thus the need for forms of writing to respond to this demand.

Coe states that generic structures are:

> pre-prepared ways of responding, frozen in synchronicity. They embody our social memory of standard strategies for responding to types of situations we encounter repeatedly. Like an attitude, a genre may be understood as an incipient action, i.e. a potential action waiting for an activating situation. When we see past the uniqueness of a particular situation and recognize it as familiar, we activate (at least provisionally) a structure we have previously decided is generally appropriate to that type of situation. (1994, p. 183)

In this sense, generic structures are similar to schemas – cognitive structures that help people make sense of incoming stimuli and provide order to what could otherwise be a rather chaotic world. They help people decide, from among numerous possible responses, which responses will be useful and/or sanctioned.

This blends into the notion of genre as “socially standard.” As with schemas, generic responses are developed within a social community (Bazerman, 2002; Pare, 2002). Communities have common goals and purposes and create shared identities. Swales, for instance describes discourse communities as “socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals” (1990, p. 8). Part of the method for
achieving these goals is to provide shared “strategies” for responding to recurring situations. “For all our differences, our ability to act together is founded on shared perspectives, attitudes, values, and ways of doing, on individual identification with community. The members of particular human communities and cultures are able to act together because they are able to shape discourse in socially expected and institutionally sanctioned ways” (Coe, Lingard & Teslenko, 2002).

The shaping of discourse involves constraints as well as possibilities. The rules of a genre are often tacit, and although participants in the genre may not be able to consciously explicate them, these rules nevertheless function to limit what is communicated within a discourse. The values and ideologies of communities are reproduced through generic structures. Genres are both responses to and creations of social situations as they reflect and endorse perspectives and beliefs. Genres comprise action; more than simple representations, they are active participants in the shaping of cultures.

This brings me to the final point of the summary of genre given above; namely that genres “evolve.” Coe (1994) states that genres should be understood as “evolving rhetorically in contexts of situation. To persevere, they must somehow ‘work,’ must serve rhetorical purposes, achieve desired effects, be ‘ecologically’ functional” (p. 185). As situations change, genres adapt. But they do so in ways that serve a purpose, in ways that reproduce and regenerate social structures, whether that be, for example, the authority of physicians (Lingard, 1998), the structural hierarchy of the university (Fuller & Lee, 2002), or the social order of the capitalist marketplace (Bazerman, 2002).

**Methodology**

As this is a cross-disciplinary project, it is important to address discipline differences in practice regarding choice of method. In the humanities, and in much of the social sciences, a qualitative approach to research is fairly standard. As I am doing mainly a textual analysis, it seemed appropriate to borrow methods used by those who study texts in depth. However, the material that I analyze is largely psychological in nature, and within psychology quantitative research is considered to be part of the “received view” of scientific empiricism (Stiles, 2003). Silverman (1998) notes that
outside of the social sciences “qualitative researchers still largely feel themselves to be second-class citizens whose work typically evokes suspicion, where the ‘gold standard’ is quantitative research” (p. 79). Thus, in this section I will address the kinds of concerns often raised by researchers regarding qualitative analysis, which can be loosely grouped under the headings of reliability, validity, and self-disclosure.

**Reliability**

Reliability can be summarized as “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions” (Hammersley, 1992, cited in Silverman, 1998, p. 86). Qualitative research is ‘messy’ in comparison with the protocol of testing a null hypothesis, which makes it particularly important that the researcher is clear about her/his goals and process. Stiles (2003) defines reliability in qualitative analysis as the trustworthiness of the observations (p. 484), and suggests that what is important is not that all observers would necessarily see (or look for) the same thing, but that the observations be permeable.

According to Stiles (2003) permeability is enhanced by methods that involve immersion in the data, iteration, grounding, and, when interviewing, asking ‘what’ rather than ‘why’ of participants. Discourse analysis encourages these methods, and they will be discussed in more detail further on (under Methods and Materials). Stiles also addresses methods of assessing permeability, suggesting that investigators provide information regarding their own orientations and internal processes as well as the context of the investigation (discussed under Self-Disclosure).

**Validity**

According to Stiles (1993) validity “concerns whether an interpretation is internally consistent, useful, robust, generalizable, or fruitful” (p. 607). Smith (1996) suggests that one cannot directly transfer the “canons of validity” for assessing quantitative research to qualitative research. He lists four dimensions for evaluating

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10 It is important to note that although quantitative methods have generally evolved taking into account issues of reliability and validity, the success with which they have done so is a matter of debate (cf. Hammersley, 1996; Silverman, 1998).
qualitative research that are relevant to textual analysis. The first is internal coherence, i.e. asking if there is a coherent argument that “deals with loose ends and possible contradictions” (p. 192). The second involves the presentation of evidence; it is important that enough of the raw data be included that the reader can assess the validity of the interpretations. The third dimension he calls “independent audit,” which essentially means that an observer could reconstruct the argument based on the evidence given. The fourth dimension he calls “triangulation” which involves using more than one method or source of information. Ultimately, the goal of qualitative analysis is not to uncover any immutable truths:

Reframing the goal of research as fostering understanding by people, rather than making statements that are objectively true, changes the concept of validity. Validity still concerns the trustworthiness of interpretations, but this trustworthiness must be judged from the perspective of particular people, rather than according to some universal or absolute standard. (Stiles, 2003, p. 487)

**Self-Disclosure**

“Investigators cannot eliminate their values and preconceptions, but they can work to make them permeable” (Stiles, 1993, p. 613-614). My interest in relationship guides stems from the work I do as a couples/marriage therapist. Working with couples from a variety of backgrounds, and with a range of beliefs about how relationships should function, has challenged me to be clear about my own beliefs. My work with couples builds on traditional therapeutic approaches targeting behavioral exchanges and communication patterns (e.g., Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). Additionally, I draw on several newer schools of therapy, including Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, which suggests that behavioral change may not always be able to occur without a recognition of, and an ability to deal with, the powerful emotions that often occur in couple’s interactions (cf. Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Johnson & Greenberg, 1994). I also use Interpersonal Therapy, which builds on cognitive therapy and incorporates the notion of interpersonal schemas, allowing for an assessment of individual ways of responding to perceived interpersonal threats (cf. Safran & Segal, 1996; Safran & Muran, 2003). Narrative Therapy (cf. Angus & McLeod, 2004; White & Epston, 1990), which stresses the importance of developing alternative ‘stories’ about the reasons for, and the
potential solutions to one's difficulties, and consequently, allows for a consideration of contextual issues, including power differentials, also informs my work.\footnote{Of the schools of therapy listed, narrative is the most compatible with a feminist perspective. While feminism informs some of my life choices, and guides my approach to research, it is not necessarily a strong component of my therapeutic approach, as very few clients express an interest in this perspective.}

Although I have been in a committed, monogamous, and highly satisfying heterosexual relationship for twenty-six years I have never legally married. My decision not to marry in the traditional religious or legal sense was undoubtedly influenced to some extent by family history. On the maternal side, my grandfather left my grandmother (who was pregnant with their second child) when my mother was ten years old—not a common event in the 1940s. My grandmother worked up to three jobs at a time, while my mother carried the primary responsibility for looking after her younger brother. On the paternal side, my grandfather died when my father was eight years old. His mother worked hard to provide for her three children through the depression, and never remarried. Thus, the female role models in my family were, of necessity, strong and independent (though not necessarily psychologically healthy) women. As a child, both my mother and my maternal grandmother confided in me far more than was appropriate, and I was very aware of their marital discontents (my grandmother remarried at age 50). I learned to be a good listener, and this, along with my desire to keep the peace, undoubtedly influenced my later choice of profession.

I perceive many problems with how marriage is conceptualized in popular culture—the results of which often show up in my therapy office—and I was curious to know how relationship guides dealt with and/or contributed to these conceptualizations. I have toyed with the idea of writing a relationship guide myself, and believed that this purpose would be served by a solid understanding of how the genre works. My expectations for the self-help books I read can be described as a mixture of pessimism and optimism. On the one hand I expected a certain amount of psychobabble and simplification; on the other hand, I had clients, whose opinions I respected, who credited self-help with assisting in their insights and changes. I hypothesized that there might be two kinds of relationship guides; those written by experts on the relevant research, and those written by uncredentialed individuals who simply had an opinion to share. Knowing that it is
mainly women who read these books, I suspected that there would be some that aimed to empower women in terms of their choices in (or out of) relationships, while there would probably be others that would promote a fairly conservative view of marriage.

Stiles (2003) states that "part of the investigator’s responsibility is to reflect on implicit assumptions within the institutional and cultural context...that may affect the interpretations" (p. 486). Undoubtedly the biggest influence for me was the existing literature on self-help, which for the most part is not sympathetic to the genre. This literature fed the pessimism discussed in the previous paragraph. However, it also made me alert to the need to look for contradictory evidence. Other therapists I talked with usually had a few self-help books or authors they thought well of and liked to recommend to clients and a number of my clients also had favorites. While I respect all of my clients, and share social status (i.e., educated professional) with some, I am also aware that there is a power differential in terms of specialized knowledge. As the interviewer I reminded myself to be aware of my position in having studied these texts from an academic perspective, versus their position of needing (or feeling they needed) relationship guides to improve their lives.

As with my expectations for the project, my reactions as the project proceeded were mixed. I was disappointed that the books (particularly those by the more academic authors) were not more in line with the messages I like to impart to my clients, and I was surprised at the degree of sexism that went unchallenged by both authors and readers. On the other hand, I highly valued the process of learning firsthand from both the texts and the respondents. I found the process of immersing myself in the texts to be exhilarating; it felt indulgent to allow myself so much time to examine the material. Similarly, I relished the opportunity to discuss women’s experiences in reading these books. In a sense the interviews were a role-reversal where I paid clients (either mine or someone else’s) for their expertise. Through the interviews I felt more connected with the everyday experience of women struggling in relationships, and even the ‘worst’ book had something to teach me.
**Method and Materials**

As mentioned, other studies of self-help texts have mainly utilized some sort of discourse analysis. In my analysis of the discourse of self-help for relationship problems I wanted to address how the literature functions as a genre; what it ‘does.’ I chose to be guided in this quest mainly by means and methods derived from the works of Kenneth Burke. As discussed, Burke’s methods are not completely clear-cut, and would not necessarily lead to replicability by another researcher. However, using these guidelines allowed me to be consistent in my approach to each book (an approximation of objectivity), and to document what I have done, making it easier for others to judge the validity of the conclusions. For this reason, I have also included lengthy appendices, so that readers may refer to examples of the texts.

To summarize the Burkean approach discussed above, my textual analysis proceeded as follows:

1. I read each book from beginning to end, highlighting terms and metaphors that struck me as important, either because they preaced or summarized arguments, or they appeared often.

2. Once I had read all of the books and had a list of terms and metaphors that were common, I re-read the books looking for further instances of these terms and metaphors, as well as for words that occurred along with the popular terms (appositions, or words that help to elucidate the meaning of the term, and oppositions, or words that help to define the terms by describing what they are not).\[12\]

3. Metaphors were sorted by topic; those that seldom occurred were deleted from the analysis.

4. Popular terms were sorted and re-sorted until I felt I had a reasonable representation of important words along with their appositions and oppositions.

As there was a fair bit of overlap amongst word clusters, this was a difficult process, and one that might have different results if done by a different person.

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\[12\] Although this might suggest that a content analysis would be useful, I did not believe that a mere count of words would capture either the variety of words used conjunctively or the complexity of the organization of terms.
The ‘entitling’ words I chose all appeared frequently and I believe anyone else reading the books and using this method would notice the same words. They might, however, choose to organize them differently.

Keeping in mind the importance of ‘triangulation’ in qualitative research (Smith, 1996, Stiles, 1993) I interviewed readers of relationship guides (more on this below), and also asked a number of questions of the texts. From a rhetorical perspective I searched the books for ways in which they attempted to create consubstantiality and induce cooperation with their readers. Drawing on previous literature addressing self-help, as well as concepts common in discourse analysis I attempted to situate the genre within historical, social, and political contexts. I searched the literature for discourses commonly used to describe intimate relationships and examined the texts for representations of those discourses. Questions relevant to a generic approach are explicated in the final chapter.

It was with some trepidation that I decided to interview readers of relationship guides. A person reading these texts from a critical position informed by academic research is likely to see different things than a person reading for concrete suggestions on how to improve a relationship. I could see no point in trying to assess if these books ‘work’ without formulating (and being able to impart to readers) what it means for a self help book on relationships to ‘work’ (a topic for an entirely different thesis). Further, as suggested by Silverman (1989) and Stiles (2003), one must be careful regarding expectations of what respondents can contribute: “There is a danger in assuming that because participants have more direct access to their own experience, their interpretations of it are likely to be more valid” (Stiles, 2003, p. 485). In the end, it didn’t feel right to not include readers. Whether they saw the same things in these books as I did or not, I believed they could provide valuable information regarding the genre, particularly since the existing literature on readers of self-help is sparse.

The decision to interview rather than to use some other method of data collection from respondents was fairly straightforward. I did not have a hypothesis to test, and I was as interested in exploring my responses to what respondents had to say as I was in hearing what they had to say. I wanted to form an impression of readers, and felt I could not do this any other way than face-to-face. For this purpose it made sense to provide as
natural a setting as possible, and I considered the idea of interviewing women in their homes (surrounded, hopefully, by their self-help books). In the end, I decided on small focus groups, as I thought that a discussion among women might seem more natural than a one-on-one interview. Madriz (2000) suggests that “the interaction among group participants often decreases the amount of interaction between the facilitator and the individual members of the group. This gives more weight to the participants’ opinions, decreasing the influence the researcher has over the interview process” (pp. 836-837).

Interviewing is not an objective process; “it is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 695). The act of asking a group women to come together to share their thoughts about relationship guides imparts a sense of what is considered normal or natural to do, as well as what is considered a worthwhile topic to discuss. The interviewer “is a person...carrying unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases—hardly a neutral tool” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696). Despite what I noted in the previous paragraph about the group process decreasing the researcher’s influence, my choice of questions, and responses to answers, undoubtedly influenced respondents in some way.

Influence by the interviewer cannot be erased, but it can, to some extent, be directed. In “empathic interviewing” the researcher is sensitive to the contextual factors that may impact the interview process (e.g., race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation) and works to make the process valuable for the respondent as well as the interviewer. Fontana and Frey say of the empathic approach to interviewing that it is “a method of morality because it attempts to restore the sacredness of humans before addressing any theoretical or methodological concerns” (2005, p. 697). This approach suggests to me a privileging of the position of the respondent and is compatible with my stance as a therapist. It is also compatible with a feminist perspective:

The interaction occurring within the group accentuates empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation.....The awareness that other women experience similar problems or share analogous ideas is important in that it contributes to women’s realization that their opinions are legitimate and valid. This awareness may contribute to raising consciousness among women that their problems are not just individual but structural and that these problems are shared by other women. (Madriz, 2000, p. 842).
My sample of readers was limited to women who responded to my inquiries, whether through word of mouth or an advertisement in a local paper. They are not necessarily representative of readers at large, but they nonetheless have something important to contribute. Citing Polkinghorne (1988), Stiles (1993) notes that rather than seeking goals of prediction and control, qualitative analysis attempts to provide “knowledge that deepens and enlarges the understanding of human existence” (p. 598). Intimate relationships are an integral part of human existence and my aim is to contribute to a pool of knowledge regarding how they are conceptualized and problematized. I offer a perspective based on deep immersion within a particular genre. This immersion may come at the cost of representativeness, as I limited my sample to ten texts (a number I felt I could reasonably handle in terms of maintaining deep familiarity). However, I believe I have chosen texts that represent the variety, if not the extent, of what is available to readers of the genre. The next section provides more detail regarding the choice of relationship guides.

**Relationship Guides Used in this Study**

For this project I wanted books that were popular, but I also wanted some variety in terms of the authors. Previous evaluations of self-help books have used various methods of selection; in one study the authors chose the top ten best-selling books, and ended up with multiple books from the same authors, so I did not want to use this method. Some authors used bestsellers from certain years, and others used books that addressed specific issues, such as codependency. Some studies included so many books that it is unlikely they were examined in any great detail. As I was going to be reading the books very closely I decided to limit the sample to ten, and as I wanted some variability in terms of the authors’ credentials and style, I looked both for authors who were ‘best-sellers’ and authors whose names appeared in the professional literature (including in the advertisements sections). I also chose five female and five male writers.\(^1\) In this section I provide the names and authors of the books with a brief description of each.

\(^1\) Two male writers had co-authors; these details will be provided in the appropriate sections.

The cover of this book indicates that it is a *New York Times* bestseller. In the year 2000 Doyle was on the talk-show circuit, and she caught my attention because she appeared to be advocating a ‘return to traditional marriages,’ in the vein of Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, who wrote *The Rules*. The back cover describes the book and author in the following way:

Like millions of women, Laura Doyle wanted her marriage to be better. But when she tried to get her husband to be more romantic, helpful, and ambitious, he withdrew—and she was lonely and exhausted from controlling everything. Desperate to be in love with her man again, she decided to stop telling him what to do and how to do it.

When Doyle surrendered control, something magical happened. The union she had always dreamed of appeared. The man who had wooed her was back.

The underlying principle of *The Surrendered Wife* is simple: The control women wield at work and with children must be left at the front door of any marriage to revitalize intimacy.

To illustrate her points, Doyle uses her own experiences liberally throughout the book, so that at the end of reading it one feels one knows her fairly well. She does not claim any knowledge of psychology or therapy, and her book does not reflect any schools of therapy. One critic stated: “she seems to think that in order to have a healthy, productive relationship a man must be convinced that a woman blindly worships him and always thinks he's right” (Carnell, 2001).

Sample chapter titles:

1. Respect the Man You Married by Listening to Him
2. Give Up Control to Have More Power
3. Keep Surrendering a Secret
4. Take Care of Yourself First


This book is a *New York Times* bestseller and there has also been a 2000 edition. John Gottman, Ph.D., started out in mathematics, and is currently professor emeritus of
Relationship Rhetoric

psychology at the University of Washington. He has authored several self-help books, as well as numerous professional publications. His co-author, Nan Silver is a writer/editor, and does not appear to be involved in the research. Gottman’s research facility in Seattle has been named the “love lab” by the media, and featured on such shows as Dateline NBC. He and his wife, Julie Gottman, conduct couples workshops and train therapists in their method. He is often cited in literature on behavioral marital therapy, in particular as regards his notion that relationships require at least a five to one ratio of positive to negative experiences. Much of the advice in his book is similar to what a behavioral marital therapist might offer.

Sample chapter titles:

3. Principle 1: Enhance Your Love Maps
4. Principle 2: Nurture Your Fondness and Admiration
5. Principle 3: Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away
6. Principle 4: Let Your Partner Influence You


This book, along with Gray’s other Mars/Venus books and products, has been a phenomenal commercial success. In a 1997 *Time* article, author Elizabeth Bleick stated that “according to publisher HarperCollins, [it is] the best-selling hard-cover nonfiction book ever—and has been published in 38 languages. The book has earned Gray somewhere in the neighborhood of $18 million” (p. 68). In 2004 the book was re-released with the subtitle “The classic guide to understanding the opposite sex.” John Gray was married to Barbara DeAngelis, another relationship guide author for two years in the early 1980s. Shortly after they divorced, he married his current wife, Bonnie.

Although all of Gray’s books list him as “John Gray, Ph.D.” his degree was by correspondence from the non-accredited Columbia Pacific University in San Rafael, California (which has since been closed by the state regulating agency). His bachelor’s and MA came from the Maharishi International University (Gray spent nine years traveling with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi according to Bleick, 1997). Gray’s book is subtitled “A practical guide for improving communication” and he focuses on what he
describes as the different languages spoken by men and women. Although he does not
credit her, his work appears to be based to some extent on Deborah Tannen’s (1990)
research on gender and communication.

Sample chapter titles:
2. Mr. Fix-It and the Home-Improvement Committee
3. Men Go to Their Caves and Women Talk
4. How to Motivate the Opposite Sex
5. Speaking Different Languages


This book, also a *New York Times* bestseller, has been popular for longer even
than Gray’s. With his second wife, Helen Hunt, Hendrix created The Institute for Imago
Relationship Therapy in 1984, and has since been offering workshops and seminars for
couples and for therapists, who can opt to train in the Imago method. Hendrix holds a
Ph.D. in Psychology and Religion from The School of Divinity at the University of
Chicago, and was a professor for a time at the Perkins Divinity School at Southern
Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

Hendrix’s theories are based on credible philosophical, psychological, and
physiological works, although he does not conduct his own research. His basic premise
is that people are attracted to a love partner based on the patterns they learned for
intimacy as children. His book adheres to the program he uses in therapy with couples,
progressing from an understanding of the patterns individuals learned as children to
exercises designed to break old habits (many of which involve communication techniques
such as empathic listening). Hendrix has been featured a number of times on Oprah.

Sample chapter titles:
1. The Mystery of Attraction
2. Childhood Wounds
3. Your Imago
4. Romantic Love

At the beginning of her book, the author is described as follows:

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., is one of our nation’s most loved and respected relationship experts. Renowned for her work on the psychology of women and family relationships, she served as a staff psychologist at the Menninger Clinic for more than two decades. A distinguished lecturer, workshop leader, and psychotherapist, she is the author of *The Dance of Anger* and many other bestselling books. She is also, with her sister, an award-winning children’s book writer. She and her husband live in Kansas and have two sons.

Lerner’s doctorate is in clinical psychology from the City University of New York. According to her website, she is in private practice, and travels to lecture and present workshops. Her books are a blend of personal experience, knowledge gained from clinical practice, and advice based on academic literature (mainly from psychology and feminism). As is indicated in the subtitle, this book addresses communication, and includes comprehensive and detailed discussions on many communication topics.

Sample chapter titles:

1. Finding Your Voice
2. Voice Lessons from My Father
3. Our First Family: Where We Learned (Not) to Speak
4. Should You Share Vulnerability?


Although this book appears never to have made the New York Times bestseller list, a Wiley, Jossey-Bass catalogue (1999) called it “the best-selling book in its field” (p. 41). It has been published several times, the most recent being 2001, and there are also related versions, including *Fighting for your Christian marriage, Fighting for your African-American Marriage* and *Fighting for your Jewish marriage.*

Our approach is based on the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP™) and fifteen years of research at the University of Denver.... In PREP workshops, couples are taught the skills and attitudes associated with good
relationships through specific steps and exercises. Because of its roots in solid research and its straightforward approach, PREP has received a great deal of attention from couples across the country, professionals in the field of marital counseling, and the media.\footnote{I have seen couples in my practice who have attended PREP workshops.} (Markman, p. 2)

The authors state that the book is in “the same form as the manual couples receive in our workshops” (p. 3). The PREP program has some similarity to Gottman’s, as their research has overlapped (Markman and Gottman have published together). They focus on communication, commitment, and enhancing pleasurable activities. This book is unquestionably the most academic; its list of recommended readings includes journal articles, and there is no personal information shared about the authors, although the back cover states: “You have seen the authors on 20/20, 48 Hours, and The Oprah Winfrey Show.” The authors all obtained Ph.D.s from accredited universities, and the first two have many academic publications. Blumberg is in private practice and a PREP consultant for businesses and organizations.

Sample chapter titles:
1. Four Key Patterns That Can Harm a Relationship
2. The Differences Between Men and Women in Conflict
3. Communicating Clearly and Safely: The Speaker-Listener Technique
4. Problem Solving


This book is McGraw’s second \textit{New York Times} bestseller. He has authored five books, each of which has at least one ‘companion’ book (such as a workbook or a cookbook). According to Hollandsworth (2003) McGraw had never thought of writing a self-help book “until Oprah brought up the idea. ‘I don’t think I had ever read one of those damn things,’ he said” (p. 6). McGraw’s disdain for the field of self-help is clear in his writing; he often asserts that he is doing something different than what other authors (and other therapists) do. Much of his book is centered on attacking “myths” about relationships; myths that have been promulgated by other less astute clinicians and writers. He does not have any faith in insight, analysis, or communication. His focus is very much on the individual (although he does provide some exercises for couples to do
together), and on accepting gender differences (with some similarity to Gray on this matter). He makes reference to very little in the way of published research.

McGraw has a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of North Texas in Denton, but did not take to clinical work; so moved to what he calls the “field of human functioning and strategic life planning” (inside backcover). This included founding Courtroom Sciences Inc. (from where he was hired to help Oprah defend herself in a suit launched by Texas cattlemen over her comments regarding mad-cow disease). He used to appear weekly on Oprah, until she helped him launch his own daytime show in 2002. According to various media (cf. Wikipedia, n.d.a) McGraw has been accused of unethical business practices, of having a sexual relationship with a client, and of being abusive to his first wife, as well as to staff. In 2006 he settled in a class action against him for promoting weight loss drugs that did not work. He is currently married to his second wife Robin McGraw (who has written her own self-help book) and has two sons, one of whom appears to be following in his footsteps (writing and lecturing on self-help topics for young adults, as well as hosting television programs).

Sample chapter titles:
1. It’s Your Time; It’s Your Turn
2. Defining the Problem
3. Blowing Up the Myths
4. Eliminating Your Bad Spirit


Page has written several self-help books, including one entitled *If I’m so Wonderful, Why am I still Single?* In 1997 *Now that I’m Married* was re-released under the title *The 8 Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive*. On her website she is described as follows:

Susan Page began her career as a Protestant Campus minister at Washington University in St. Louis and Columbia in New York, and later became the Director of Women’s Programs at the University of California at Berkeley....

Susan grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and is a graduate of Oberlin College and San Francisco Theological Seminary. She lives in Berkeley, California, with her husband, Mayer Shacter... (Meet Susan, n.d.).
Her book is based largely on her interviews of people who responded to her advertisements for couples in happy relationships, although she states that her methods were not scientific. From these interviews she distilled eight ‘traits’ or behaviors that are practiced by those in good relationships. Her discussions of these ‘traits’ include numerous examples from the couples she interviewed (and some from her own life). She also includes discussions of some theoretical issues, occasionally citing academic sources.

Sample chapter titles:

1. *Trait 1: Desire, Belief, and Commitment*
2. *Trait 2: Goodwill*
3. *Trait 3: Clear Values Part A: Time*
4. *Trait 3: Clear Values Part B: Aliveness*


Schlessinger has authored a number of books, both for adults and for children, and according to the jacket of this book, five of them have been *New York Times* bestsellers. Her most recent book on marriage (not counting the one to be released in 2007), *The Care and Feeding of Husbands*, appears to be similar in its advice to Doyle’s book. In her books and on her syndicated radio program she expresses very strong and conservative views. In the book being analyzed here she valorizes the Jewish faith (to which she converted in 1996), however, she has since renounced Judaism. She has received unwanted publicity for such incidents as her first husband posting nude photographs of her on the internet, and her mother’s body being found in her apartment months after she had died. It also appears that she commenced an affair with her current husband while he was still married with dependent children, despite her strong admonitions against this sort of behavior (these incidents have been covered by various media, cf. Wikipedia n.d.b)

Although Schlessinger calls herself Dr. Laura, her Ph.D. is in physiology, not in psychology. She received certification in Counseling from the University of Southern California, although it appears she has not kept up her licensing as a marriage therapist.
This book bears no resemblance to any kind of therapy program; for the most part it is a series of rants about the stupid things people do (hence the title). There are no references to any theories or research. The book jacket states:

Using real-life situations from her radio call-in show and from listeners’ letters, Dr. Laura offers firm yet compassionate advice on how to find greater happiness in life and in love. She urges couples to set their priorities straight, learn the difference between privacy and secrecy, stop making stupid excuses for their mistakes, and face their responsibilities to each other and to their families.

Sample chapter titles:
1. Stupid Secrets
2. Stupid Egotism
3. Stupid Pettiness
4. Stupid Power


Among the first in her field to courageously speak out about the pitfalls of unnecessary divorce, Michele has been active in spearheading the now popular movement urging couples to make their marriages work and keep their families together. She is the author of six books including her best-selling books, *Divorce Busting,* and *The Sex-Starved Marriage*... 

Michele is the Director of the Divorce Busting Center with offices in Boulder, Colorado and Woodstock, Illinois. In addition to her private practice, Michele is a highly acclaimed and sought-after speaker...

Michele’s work is highly regarded in professional circles. She was the recipient of The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy’s prestigious Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Marriage and Therapy Award and Smart Marriages’ Impact Award. (About Michele, n.d.).

Weiner Davis lists MSW after her name, but does not indicate where she earned her degree. Her book does not cite academic sources, nor does she conduct research. She has written on solution-focused therapy, and there are elements of that approach in her book. She is clearly passionate about her belief that divorce is almost always to be avoided, which she attributes partly to the “devastating” effect her parents’ divorce (which came around the time she graduated high school) had on her (p. 14). She strongly believes that only one spouse need work on the marriage to make it successful (in contrast, Hendrix does not even allow singles to attend his workshops – if they are not in
an intimate relationship they must bring a friend or family member with them). Weiner Davis refers often to her husband and children in this book.

Sample chapter titles:
1. The Not-So-Great Escape
2. Step Number One – Start with a Beginner’s Mind
3. Step Number Two – Know What You Want
4. Step Number Three – Ask for What You Want

Summary

These ten books are a reasonable representation of what is available in the way of relationship guides. All of the authors are described as ‘best-selling,’ and five of the books are New York Times bestsellers. Half of the books are authored by women, and half by men (although the Gottman and Markman books do include a female co-author, as discussed). I loosely classified five books as ‘academic’ and five as ‘non-academic.’ Books I classified as ‘academic’ were those that were based on a university centered research program (Gottman and Markman), included original data (Page), or drew on academic research (Hendrix, Lerner). Four of these authors (all but Page) have (legitimate) doctorates. The rest of the books I classified as ‘non-academic.’ Of these authors, McGraw has a legitimate doctorate in psychology, Schlessinger in physiology (with additional training in therapy), and Weiner Davis has a MSW.

The personal agenda of the non-academic authors comes across more clearly than that of the academic authors, who are more likely to couch their advice in research and theory. However, all of the authors seem to have a fairly conservative bias. A number of them (Weiner Davis, Hendrix, Markman, Gottman, Gray, Page) are regular presenters (or have associates who present their work) at the Smart Marriages annual conference. Although attendance at this conference does not necessarily mean one is a conservative, the organization itself is a part of the American “marriage movement,” with links on its website to such organizations as the Heritage Foundation. Gottman and Markman are among the authors listed on the second edition of Why Marriage Matters: 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences, a manuscript published by the Institute for American Values. While three of the authors are on the advisory board of Smart Marriages (Weiner Davis, Hendrix, Markman), none are affiliated with the Council on
Contemporary Families, an organization that attempts to look at marriage issues beyond the rubric of "family values."

I would like to note at this point that although I criticize all of the books in detail, I believe they all contain information of merit. I often recommend the book titles of the academic authors to clients, or give them photocopies of sections of the books. On occasion, when working with a client who desires a particular sort of marriage, I might recommend portions of either McGraw or Weiner Davis. I once recommended Doyle (with caveats) to a woman struggling with her role as caregiver for her ill husband, but have never recommended Gray or Schlessinger.

**Typographical and Referencing Conventions**

When referring to the relationship guides I use only the first author’s last name, and do not include the year of publication. In tables, authors’ names are abbreviated to the first three letters of their name (except for Weiner Davis, who is referred to as WD). The non-academic authors are always listed on the left-hand side of tables. Entitlements for clusters are in capital letters and highlighted. Major appositions (terms that go with/are similar to) and oppositions (terms that are opposed within clusters) are highlighted in a lighter shade. Oppositions are italicized. When a table cell contains a dot it means that examples of the term, metaphor or method can be found in that author’s book. Typographical conventions are listed in the table 1.
# Table 1: Typographical Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On the Page</th>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>metaphor</td>
<td>Bold type</td>
<td>The word is being used as a linguistic example (used to highlight words from word clusters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metaphor</td>
<td>Underlined</td>
<td>The word is being used as a linguistic example (used to highlight words from word clusters that are not the current topic of discussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metaphor</td>
<td>Italic</td>
<td>Indicates emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'metaphor'</td>
<td>Single quotation marks</td>
<td>The word(s) is being highlighted, generally to indicate it is often used by the author(s) but is not a direct quotation, or to indicate a degree of distancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;metaphor&quot;</td>
<td>Double quotation marks</td>
<td>The word(s) is a quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject, Phoros</td>
<td>First letter capitalized</td>
<td>The word is a technical term (generally capitalized only the first time the word is used within a chapter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3: *Relationship Guides: The Basics*

This chapter addresses some of the means of persuasion commonly found in the genre of relationship guides. From a classical rhetorical perspective, relationships guides use all three of the main forms of persuasion: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos (although, not surprisingly there is somewhat more emphasis on logos in the books by academic authors, compared to those by the non-academic authors). This chapter is concerned particularly with *ethos* – with how authors present themselves and their works as credible. “The prestige of a speaker, his/her appearance, likeableness, credibility, social class, voice, etc. contribute to his/her ethos” (Watson & Hill, 2003, p. 99). Unless an author is already known to the reader, or recommended by someone the reader respects (for instance Oprah), the first chance an author has to portray credibility is on the book cover. After discussing book jackets, I list four ways that authors attempt to establish credibility within the texts. Likeability is developed mainly through tactics discussed in the third section of this chapter (Audience).

*Book Covers*

There is nothing in particular that is common to all of the books that identifies them at first glance as relationship guides. The covers vary in style, although they could probably all be described as busy. Three of the book covers are somewhat “feminine” – two because of their colors (yellow, green and peach for Shlessinger, shiny purple on purple for Page) and the Doyle book because it is rather “pretty” with its curlicues and red rose. The books that don’t have author pictures on the front either have interesting font combinations, or some kind of illustration. Gray’s book combines a strong bold font in upper case navy blue letters for the male part of his title (Men Are from Mars) with a finer font in lower case italics in pinkish purple for the female part of his title (Women Are from Venus). The font of his name, of course, matches the font for the male part of the title. The two books with the most obvious illustrations are Weiner Davis’s, which has two gold bands overlaid on the title, and Gottman’s, whose title is contained within a large gold band.
Seven of the books contain the words "New York Times Bestseller." In five cases (Gray, Doyle, Gottman, Hendrix, and McGraw) this refers to the current book and occurs at the top of the front cover. In two cases (Schlessinger and Lerner) the term refers to another book or books the author has written. The covers of the Weiner-Davis and Page books make reference to a previous book the author wrote, and only the Markman book makes no reference to being a best-seller or to other books (even though he has written at least one other self-help book). Whether it is the book or the author that is a New York Times Bestseller bestseller, the use of this term would seem to transfer some of the respectability of the New York Times even though the newspaper simply reports what is selling well in stores it canvases, and is not actually endorsing the author or the book.

With two exceptions all books have endorsements from other authors and/or critics. The exceptions are McGraw and Schlessinger, whose book jackets are quite similar, both featuring author pictures on the front, along with title and author name (although Schlessinger's colors are softer, while the McGraw cover is in bold black, red and white). The back covers of both books list 10 points the author makes in the content of the book. The Markman book has endorsements from a newspaper, a magazine, and a scholarly journal on the back cover. Of the remaining books, five have author endorsements on the front cover, and two on the back cover. Weiner-Davis, Doyle, and Page all have endorsements from John Gray. Gray has endorsements from Hendrix and Page, among others. Hendrix has an endorsement from M. Scott Peck (a religious writer of self-help) and Lerner has an endorsement from Mary Pipher (an academic who sometimes writes for a more general audience). Gottman has an endorsement from Daniel Goleman (also an academic who sometimes writes for a more general audience). With the exception of Page, whose back cover contains endorsements from seven self-help authors, all covers give at least a little information about the book's content.

Most of the authors' names are predominant on the front covers of their books, generally in print that is as readable as the title. The one exception is the Markman book, which has the three authors' names in the smallest font of any of the books. The Markman book is also the one in which the character of the author(s) is the least exploited. For the rest of the books the author is a central character, and therefore it makes sense that their names are often on par with the titles of the books.
Eight of the books have author pictures. Three have pictures on the front cover—their media appearances: McGraw, who appeared on *Oprah* regularly for years and now has his own television show; Schlessinger, who is heard daily on radio by millions of listeners, and has her own television show (not syndicated as far as I know); and Hendrix, who has made numerous appearances on *Oprah* and other television shows. For these authors, recognition of their photos may be an additional selling point. Weiner Davis, Gray, and Doyle have small photographs of their faces on the back cover, and Lerner and Page have similar pictures inside their books next to descriptions of themselves. The two most academic books (Markman and Gottman) do not contain author pictures.

Five of the authors' names are followed by Ph.D. (Hendrix, Gray, Gottman, McGraw and Lerner). Although Schlessinger's doctorate is a Ph.D (in physiology) her author name is Dr. Laura Schlessinger. The Markman authors' names are followed by Ph.D. on the back cover but not on the front cover. In the *About the Author* sections of their books Page's name is followed by M.Div., and Weiner Davis's name is followed by M.S.W. Doyle is described as having earned a journalism degree.

All of the books offer some description of the author(s). Eight have a section within the book, usually titled "About the Author" that ranges from a few sentences to two pages. Gray's book has only a short section on the back of his book, and Schlessinger has an even shorter section inside the jacket of her book. Sometimes information appears both on the jacket and the inside of the book. In this section the author's status is noted with words like *expert, leader, famous, renowned,* or *internationally known.* Most of the authors are described as being workshop leaders, and reference is often made to previous books they have written. All of the books except the Markman book state where the authors live, and most mention whether the author is married and has children. The Weiner Davis author description is fairly typical:

Michele Weiner Davis, M.S.W., is an author, internationally renowned seminar leader and therapist in private practice in Woodstock, Illinois. Her highly acclaimed seminars have earned her recognition among both professional and lay audiences. Weiner Davis's work has been featured in most popular magazines and newspapers. She is a frequent guest on television and radio talk shows such
as *Oprah*, *48 hours*, *The Today Show*, *CBS This Morning*, and *Evening News* and CNN. Michele is happily married and they have two children.

In summary, the major methods of presenting credibility on book covers are to include “Ph.D.” or “Dr.” with the author’s name, to refer to the *New York Times* bestseller list, to include titles of previous books, to include a photograph (especially if the author is well-known), to have endorsements from other self-help authors or from critics, to refer to the author’s appearances in the media, and to describe the author as both an expert and someone who conducts workshops. These methods are summarized in Table 2.

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*Author Credibility (Within Text)*

There appear to be four major ways that authors present themselves as experts, including claiming academic or research expertise, referring to experience with clients,
citing their own experiences, and comparing themselves to others. The second section of Table 2 shows which authors use which methods.

**Research Expertise**

Not surprisingly, the academic authors rely on research (their own or others) to a greater degree than do the non-academic authors. For Gottman, Markman, and Page, their research is what sets their books apart from other relationship guides. Page claims she is the only person to have looked at happy relationships, suggesting everyone else has missed the boat by only looking at unhappy marriages. She interviewed couples in happy relationships and distilled her “eight traits” from this data. Gottman and Markman, whose works are based on longstanding research programs, also promote their work as unique:

> For sixteen years I have spearheaded the most extensive and innovative research ever into marriage and divorce. (Gottman, p. 1)

> The techniques and strategies in this book are based on the most up-to-date research in the field of marriage. We base our suggestions on solid research rather than “pop-psych” speculation. (Markman, p. 3)

Although his methods of research are as questionable as his academic degrees, Gray claims to base his advice on a research program as well. Speaking of an enlightening incident with his wife he says:

> It inspired my seven years of research to help develop and refine the insights about men and women in this book. (Gray, p. 3)

The following two quotations complete the information given about Gray’s research:

> As a result of questioning more than 25,000 participants in my relationship seminars I have been able to define in positive terms how men and women are different. (Gray, p. 4)

> All of the principles in this book have been tested and tried. At least 90 percent of the more than 25,000 individuals questioned have enthusiastically recognized themselves in these descriptions. (Gray, p. 4)

The average reader would probably not be able to distinguish between the bona fide research of Gottman and Markman, and the pseudo-research of Gray. To her credit, Page is more clear about the limits of her research.
Hendrix sometimes refers to his Imago Therapy as if it has been scientifically validated although as far as I can tell there are no actual studies of the effectiveness of his program. Like other authors, Hendrix suggests that his work on relationships arose of necessity, because previous theorists had not been able to provide useful information:

I wanted to know why couples were having such a difficult time staying together and why they were so devastated when their relationship fell apart. Nothing that I had read in the professional literature seemed to give an adequate explanation. (Hendrix, p. xvi)

What the academic authors have in common is that they assert their credibility by referring to their own research and/or the research and theories of others who are well-established. Lerner does this in a low-key fashion, simply acknowledging her debt to other thinkers. The other four authors want the reader to believe that they have discovered or formulated something new; something no-one else has thought of. The non-academic authors also want to persuade their audiences they have something entirely original to offer, but they use other methods, as discussed in the remaining sections.

**Clientele**

All of the authors make some reference to their clientele. Clients include any one who has in some way put money into the author’s pocket:

And last, but certainly not least, my clients and loyal Web site visitors are owed special gratitude. I feel enormously privileged that they have allowed me to become an intimate part of their lives and trusted me to help them restore their love and keep their families together. I have learned so much from you, the real experts. Thanks for your faith in me. (Weiner Davis, p. 6)

Once again, thanks also to the thousands and thousands of seminar participants, who taught me year after year what makes real-world relationships work or not. I hope that my work in general, and my writing in particular, shows that I was the real student and clearly was the one who “got the training.” (McGraw, p.x)

Although McGraw humbly claims to be the one who learned the most, implying that his clients were the experts, he also leaves no doubt as the desirability of what he has to say when he asserts that “thousands and thousands” have attended his seminars. Doyle, Gray, Hendrix, and Weiner Davis also refer to the thousands of people their programs
have helped (Gottman refers to “hundreds” – a more realistic number for quality workshops versus mass marketing strategies).

Discussions of the benefits achieved by clients are common ways for authors to promote the benefits of their ideas. Academic authors are more likely to use statistical terms (e.g., Gottman says his accuracy at predicting divorce is 91 percent), but all of the authors refer to the feedback they receive from clients:

I know this is true, because I get the letters, calls, faxes and e-mails telling me so from all over North America. (Schlessinger, p. 179)

Although research is often used to promote ideas and credibility, it appears that knowledge gained through research needs to be embedded in real-life experience, and that actual interactions with distressed couples is paramount. The interactions can take various forms (email, letters, radio calls) but all of the authors except one (Doyle) have trained and/or worked as therapists, and all of the authors have done “workshops” (which are seldom defined, and appear to range from small group interactive formats to large audience lecture situations). All of the books contain ‘real-life’ examples, which will be discussed in a later section.

**Personal Experience**

All of the authors except one (Markman) disclose something about their personal lives. The two main topics about which authors disclose their personal experiences are religion and relationships. As discussed in the section on Spirituality (chapter 5) most of the authors promote some sort of religious beliefs or affiliations.

I was helping Gary put up Christmas lights one night (because he was too chicken to go up the ladder) and I paused, looked at him, and said, “What am I, dog meat? How come God doesn’t talk to me?” Gary never even missed a beat as he was untangling the Christmas lights. He said, “I guess the real question is, why won’t you hear him?” …

The incident with Gary also gave me new understanding about my relationships with others—to make sure I didn’t sabotage those relationships by living with some preconceived notion of how those people should relate to me. (McGraw, pp. 70, 71)

Self-disclosures about religious practices and beliefs are generally related to improvements in relationships. Authors want readers to know that they have struggled
and that one of the things that has helped in the struggle is their religion. Schlessinger is a bit of an anomaly – although she preaches religion more than any of the authors, she does not reveal any struggles within her own relationship. The only struggles she discloses are with feminism, as discussed in the section on Gender (chapter 6). When it comes to her own marital relationship she has very little to say.

I’m often asked how I juggle a radio program, writing books, a charitable foundation, making jewelry for charity auctions, and being a wife and mother. Actually, I tell them, it’s really very easy...

I literally squeeze my career and interests into whatever is left over from family time. I travel very little, and when I do, the family comes with me, unless our son has to be in school; then, dad is with son at home for the one or two days I may have to be gone to testify for a bill in some state, or lecture about morals in advertising to an ad council.

Bottom line? I don’t juggle. (Schlessinger, pp. 141, 142)

This self-disclosure serves several purposes:

- “I’m often asked...” – this sets the author up as an interesting person that others want to know about.

- “I juggle a radio program, writing books, a charitable foundation, making jewelry for charity auctions, and being a wife and mother.” – the author is clearly talented, and does more than the average person. She is offering herself as a role model; after all, most people wish they could “juggle” more things more efficiently.

- “Dad is at home for the one or two days I may have to be gone” – this section needs to be seen in the context of Schlessinger’s rant about the importance of mothers in children’s lives (on the following page she slams a woman politician for choosing to engage in a career, even though the father is at home with the children). She minimizes the amount of time she spends away from the family, and suggests that it is all right when there is a father to supervise. However, there is a hint of defensiveness in this sentence, where she refers to:

- “The one or two days I may have to be gone.” She doesn’t want to be away, she has to be away. Why? Because she is on important work, testifying or lecturing, where her expertise is demanded. Thus, this self-disclosure reminds us of the status of the author, and if she is required by governments and councils surely the reader will have
much to gain from her expertise. It also suggests the author is selflessly giving of her time and knowledge for the benefit of others, rather than for any personal gain.

Schlessinger does not attempt to relate to her readers. Her focus is on berating rather than relating, a style that has gained her much attention on her radio program. Other authors are more likely to commiserate with the reader. Even Gottman, whose authority rests largely on his scientific approach, and who reveals little else about his relationship, identifies with other men regarding the housework issue:

When I complain that I’m doing all of the housework, my wife says, “Good!” because she knows that means I’m actually doing half. (Gottman, p. 205)

The other seven authors all offer quite a bit of information about their personal lives and relationships.

I remember when I first learned to redirect my energies into the little things. When Bonnie and I were first married, I was almost a workaholic. In addition to writing books and teaching seminars, I had a counseling practice for fifty hours a week. In the first year of our marriage, she let me know again and again how much she needed more time with me. Repeatedly she would share her feelings of abandonment and hurt. (Gray, p. 187)

In this passage Gray is identifying with men and their common complaint of not being appreciated for the hard work they do. He discusses the difficulties he, like other men, had with slowing down at work and the changes he made (coming home an hour earlier and considering his wife his eighth client of the day). He concludes by telling us of the benefits of his plan:

I started to slow down, and to my surprise not only our relationship but also my work flourished, becoming more successful without my having to work as hard. (Gray, p. 188, italics added)

Note that, like Schlessinger, Gray slips references to his success into his personal self-disclosures. This can be seen as well in the following quotation from Weiner Davis:

Crazed, I was yelling and walking past my bedroom door where my husband was sitting watching television. As he saw me rush past our door like a madwoman, he calmly pointed to me and said, “And there she goes, world-renowned solution-oriented therapist.” Even I had to laugh. (Wiener Davis, p.155, italics added)

Although authors often manage to balance self-disclosures of their ‘everyperson’ behavior with reminders of their status, for some authors their own personal struggle in
relationships is a more crucial part of the knowledge they have gained. Doyle, for instance, doesn’t ask her readers to do anything she hasn’t done herself. She is a sort of ‘guinea pig’ for surrendering; testing her notions first on herself and then on friends. She often uses self-disclosures as a way of anticipating and minimizing reader resistance:

Deferring to my husband was the hardest part of surrendering for me. I know that I’m smart and I didn’t see why I should have to go along with what he thought just to avoid an argument. Why shouldn’t he defer to my thinking to preserve intimacy? (Doyle, p. 246)

By showing how she struggled with the same problems readers are likely to have, and ended up happy, Doyle represents herself as an expert.

McGraw, who also draws much of his credibility from his personal experience, takes readers through a similar process, first “confessing” to his faults, then arriving at the desired happy ending:

I’ve told you the price you pay for resisting the natural order of things. I’ve paid that price. But today I am so thankful that Robin is the way she is. I now realize I would have ruined everything if I could have changed her years ago. (McGraw, p. 262)

The self-disclosures from Lerner have a somewhat different flavor to them. She neither confesses bad behavior, nor promises bliss. Her role is more one of presenting the ups and downs of relationships and making suggestions for how to cope:

But when things aren’t warm between us, Steve is definitely not up to hearing my complaints. He may react to the slightest negative edge in my voice. When we’re both high in reactivity, tempers can flare....

Usually it doesn’t take long before one of us changes course and does the necessary repair work. Steve may knock on the door of my study and say, “Please forgive me. I acted like a jerk. Give me a hug.”... Or I’ll take the initiative to apologize: “We’re both under a lot of stress. I apologize for my part. Let’s just drop this and try to get along.” I may be convinced of my relative innocence and believe “my part” is only 2 percent, but I don’t feel compelled to make this point. These days, we’re both pretty good at repairing a disconnection before much time has passed. (Lerner, p. 137, 138)

Self-disclosure is a common way to bolster credibility. Most of the authors have “been there,” and claim to know firsthand the struggles the readers face. For a number of them, their own struggles have been the impetus to find a new, improved way of doing
relationships. What sets most of the self-help authors apart from the readers with whom they identify is that they have overcome their struggles and found the path to happiness.

Comparative Credibility (Put-downs)

Another common way for authors to bolster their credibility is to suggest that they are different from everyone else, and this often involves derogating other authors, therapists, or ideas. Schlessinger derogates everyone and everything secular and feminist, but she does not do this in a way that directly compares her or her ideas with others in the field. Doyle’s book does not contain a single put-down that I can find, and to her credit, this is in keeping with her instructions to women on how to conduct themselves with dignity and grace. The other eight authors all rely to some extent on put-downs. McGraw is one of the most outspoken authors when it comes to asserting the superiority of his book:

The truth is that those rules are largely myths, generated by well-intended but utterly misinformed counselors, and by equally misguided but maybe not so well-intended authors who might be more interested in selling books than providing aid. (You may decide I’m no better, but that’s a chance I’ll take by raising the issue.) (McGraw, p. 46)

In this passage McGraw targets the three main recipients of put-downs: therapists, self-help authors, and “myths.” These categories are discussed below.

Myths.

The back cover of McGraw’s book lists “ten myths about relationships” which he discusses at some length in the book. Gottman also targets myths about relationships:

The notion that you can save your marriage just by learning to communicate more sensitively is probably the most widely held misconception about happy marriages—but it’s hardly the only one. Over the years I’ve found many other myths that are not only false but potentially destructive to a marriage because they can lead couples down the wrong path, or worse, convince them that their marriage is a hopeless case. (Gottman, p. 13)

The concept of communication, a major component of many relationship guides, and of much marital counseling, also comes under attack from Page (who calls it a “cliché”) and from Lerner (who refers to it at one point as “glib”). Wiener Davis lists a number of ideas about relationships as fallacies and misconceptions:
There are two primary areas in which people’s “expertise” clouds their thinking when they’re having relationship problems. The first involves dearly held fallacies about love and marriage. The second has more to do with faulty misconceptions about how to bring about change in their relationships. (Weiner Davis, p. 50)

Hendrix, taking a more academic point of view, doesn’t put down popular notions about relationships; rather he suggests there was a theoretical void which he will fill:

As I researched the professional books and journals, I was surprised to find... no comprehensive theory to explain the intricacies of the male-female relationship. No satisfactory explanation of the powerful emotions that can destroy a marriage. And there was nothing that explained what I found so painfully missing in my first marriage. (Hendrix, p. xxvii)

Whether by suggesting that there is a void in knowledge regarding relationships, or by suggesting that current thinking is wrong-headed, these authors set themselves up as offering something new and different.

**Therapists.**

When you went looking for help, most of those in the ‘helping professions,’ with their textbook therapies and psychological theories, seemed to have absolutely no understanding of how to help you. It is amazing to me how this country is overflowing with marital therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists, counselors, healers, advice columnists, and self-help authors—and their approach to relationships is usually so embarrassing that I want to turn my head in shame. (McGraw, p. 10)

Compared to McGraw, most of the other authors’ put-downs of therapy and therapists are fairly mild:

Yet repeatedly I have heard people say that they have benefited more from this new understanding of relationships than from years of therapy. I however believe that their years of therapy or recovery work provided the groundwork that allowed them to apply these insights so successfully to their life and relationships. (Gray, p. 7)

Gray ascribes the put-down of therapy to the mouth of other “people,” while suggesting that he believes therapy to be useful, thus asserting the superiority of his methods without appearing to be boastful. Gottman, Hendrix, and Weiner Davis all state at some point that they have been less than effective therapists (like the majority of therapists, presumably), but have now learned how to be truly helpful.
Sadly, most marriages at this stage get the wrong kind [of help]. Well-meaning therapists will deluge the couple with advice about negotiating their differences and improving their communication. At one time I would have done the same. (Gotman, p. 46)

By showing how they have been fallible, these authors make it more believable that other well-meaning people are not to be trusted. Because they have seen the error of their ways, they are superior to the run-of-the-mill therapist. They have gained expertise that few if any others have, and the reader will benefit greatly from what they have to share.

**Self-help.**

In addition to asserting what is good about their books, authors also often assert what is not so good about other books:

We believe that many people are resistant to reading self-help books out of a concern that a lot of the material will be more of the latest hype from the “guru-of-the-month” club. If this is a concern, you’ll find this book refreshing in the no-nonsense, commonsense, concrete ideas that are presented. A lot of self-help books help people understand themselves or their partner but do little to help them actually change patterns. All the insight and good intentions in the world won’t help if your relationship doesn’t change. (Markman, p. 8)

While Markman seems to be suggesting that most self-help books are benign, Gray implies they may actually do harm. Interestingly, Gray’s book is the type of book that Markman refers to as “hype.” Other authors target Gray more specifically:

The notion that “men are from Mars”—the opposite rather than the neighboring sex—can lead a woman to lose her voice, make excuses for her partner, and tolerate behavior that is too costly to her own self. It also encourages the man to avoid the challenge of finding his own authentic voice and taking full responsibility for his choices. (Lerner, pp. 9, 10)

In the following quotations Page and Weiner-Davis are referring to the types of books written by each other:

I began to search the literature for books about happy marriage – but they all turned out to be about how to drag your awful relationship up out of the gutter and make it tolerable. (Page, p. ix)

In hopes of finding answers to your marital problems, you’ve searched the Internet, read magazine articles and even taken up residence at your local bookstore. But unfortunately, your search for solutions has come up short. Although there is an inordinate amount of information for people whose relatively stable marriages can stand some tweaking, there is a dearth of practical,
psychobabble-free tools for people teetering on the brink of divorce. (Weiner Davis, p. 12)

There are numerous relationship guides available for consumption, and authors want to distinguish theirs—to assure readers they are making the right choice in choosing their book over others. They do this by asserting their own expertise and by putting down the theories and practice of others. Although they all try to distinguish themselves from the pack, they use remarkably similar means. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss how authors create consubstantiality with their readers.

**Audience**

An important consideration in classical rhetoric is the nature of the audience. Aristotle (2007) noted a number of audience characteristics that a successful rhetor needs to take into account (such as age, class, power and ability). Relationship guides are generally targeted at a large and diverse potential audience, and all that one can assume readers will have in common is a certain measure of distress regarding their relationships. Therefore, it becomes particularly important for authors to establish a relationship with the readers. In this section I look at the ways in which authors include the reader, encouraging her to feel like she is precisely the person for whom the book is written. First I look at what clues can be found within the texts to say who the author thinks the audience will be. Then I look at four more subtle ways that authors persuade the reader to stay involved with their books (use of ‘we’, case examples, scare tactics, and encouragement).

**Targeted Audience**

There is nothing on the covers of most books to indicate specifically who the target audience is, with the exception of Doyle, whose cover makes it clear her book is aimed at women. Information on the back cover of Doyle’s book narrows the target population somewhat in highlighting that the book addresses the need for women to give up control in relationships, however, one might need to look within the book to find out whether one has a problem with control as defined by the author. Generally, information
given on the covers is vague, promising “reconnection” with a partner, “lasting love,” or “getting what you want in your relationships.”

Even among the texts that attempt to define a target audience, most people are likely to find themselves included:

The time-tested techniques of this book can be used by any couple—from the newly engaged to long-time partners—who want to solve problems or prevent them from happening. This book is for anyone interested in marriage, whether you’re newlyweds, married twenty years, or trying marriage for a second or third time. (Markman, p. 7)

*The Dance of Connection* continues my long tradition of writing for women. Yet I certainly hope that men will read this book and find themselves well represented and richly rewarded. (Lerner, p. 8)

Whereas Markman and Page say their books are written for *couples* (implying that both partners should read the book), Weiner Davis is writing to the one partner who is more concerned about improving (or keeping) the relationship. She is very clear in her belief that it only takes the work of one partner to keep a marriage together, as she discusses in a section subtitled “It takes one to tango” (p. 65). McGraw also suggests that, done correctly, one partner can improve a marriage:

You can’t control your partner.... But you can inspire your partner. You can give your partner a whole new set of behaviors and new set of stimuli to respond to.... You can stop sabotaging yourself and your relationship, and you can start inspiring the kind of reactions you want from your partner. In the face of such constructive input, he or she can’t fight alone, argue alone, or continue to be offended. Your partner can pout for a while, perhaps withdraw and be suspicious for a while, but eventually he or she is going to feel pretty stupid sitting over in the corner while you seem to be getting so very much happier and so much more optimistic and at peace with yourself. (McGraw, pp.12-13)

From what can be discerned of authors’ intentions, there seem to be three categories of target audiences: the couple (Gottman, Gray, Hendrix, Markman, Page); either member of a couple (McGraw, Schlessinger, Weiner Davis); and women (Doyle, Lerner). None of the authors address the likelihood of men actually reading their books. With the exception of Weiner Davis, who is writing for people whose relationships are in imminent danger of dissolving, the texts are aimed at a very wide audience, including
anyone with the least level of dissatisfaction in a relationship (or even those who are happy in their relationships, according to Page).

For readers who may not be sure that a particular book has relevance for their own situation, authors have strategies to include them, as discussed in the next section.

*We’re All In This Together*

When it comes to the challenge of speaking wisely and well, we’re *all* in this soup together. (Lerner, p. 8, italics added)

*All* couples experience frustrating events and *all* couples confront difficult issues. (Markman, p. 119, italics added)

The use of the word *all* in the above quotations includes the reader in a way that most would find difficult to argue with. Other words used to include readers are *most* and *every*:

If you are like *most women*, you are already thinking about how your life will fall apart if you stop controlling your husband. (Doyle, p. 31, italics added)

In his self-confessed “in your face” style, McGraw won’t hear of anyone not identifying with his position:

I’m talking about *everyone* here—not just people whose lives already are full of bitterness and contempt. Those of you who wake up every day wanting the best out of your relationship occasionally find yourselves losing control with your partners, feeling a little crazy as your temper rises, thinking dark and perhaps apocalyptic thoughts. It’s a *natural human impulse*, and don’t let any therapist tell you otherwise. (McGraw, p. 138, italics added)

Hendrix’s style is different, but his message is the same. By suggesting that our motives may be unconscious, he undercuts any argument against his theory that *every* relationship works along the same lines:

I see a similar tendency in virtually *every* love relationship. People try to exorcise their denied negative traits by projecting them onto their mates. (Hendrix, pp. 75-76, italics added)

When authors suggest that *everyone* struggles with the same problems, they naturally include themselves, often seen through the use of the terms *we*, *us* and *our*. Authors’ use of these terms tends to correlate with use of self-disclosures. The fewest self-disclosures are found in the works of Markman and Gottman, who write in a more
detached style, consistent with their expertise as researchers. Doyle, Hendrix and Lerner, who self-disclose throughout their books, use *we* fairly consistently.

The joyful abandon that fills us as children and makes a brief reappearance when *we* “fall in love” is the same emotional current as the rage that *we* hurl at our partners in a Friday-night fight. (Hendrix, p. 183, italics added)

This quotation follows a self-disclosure about his own childhood, and it is clear that Hendrix is including himself alongside his readers in this description. Hendrix and Lerner identify with people in general, while Doyle identifies with women in particular, and both use the word *we* to describe situations or processes they think are common to everyone. The other five authors use *we* inconsistently. Gray seldom uses the term in the majority of his book, but in the last chapter uses it a great deal. This is the only chapter in which he does not divide things strictly along gender lines, discussing love as a common human need. It is also a chapter in which he self-discloses:

Just as love may bring up *our* past unresolved feelings, so does getting what you want. I remember when I first learned about this...  (Gray, p. 280, italics added)

Like Gray, Schlessinger generalizes a great deal about men and women, lumping them into generic categories, however she seldom includes herself in her generalizations.

McGraw uses *we* occasionally throughout his book, although he is more likely to take an authoritative tone. The exception is in his “letter to women,” where he identifies with men in general:

Speaking personally and to blow the whistle on my brethren, *we* men *don’t* get it! We want to get it and we sometimes think we get it, but we don’t.... The really stupid stuff we do and, more important, don’t do, comes from ignorance and from what I’m sure would seem to you to be a bizarre set of priorities that we are so welded to that they can dominate and define us. (p. 295, italics in original)

Hendrix also identifies with his male readers:

So if *we* men feel uncomfortable showing *our* feelings to others in the first place, you can hardly expect *us* to want *our* partners to empathize with *us* should *we* happen to let a feeling slip out! *We’d* just as soon that they overlook the momentary lapse and focus on *our* steely logic instead! (p. 132, italics added)

In this passage Hendrix is making the point that men sometimes behave in ways that are counterproductive. By including himself (as well as by using exclamation points) he softens the message a little.
If readers don’t find something to identify with in the books; if they don’t think the books are for and about people like them, they are unlikely to stay interested. The next section looks at what readers may find to identify with in the case examples.

**Case Examples**

Authors vary in their use of case examples, and although there is some overlap, I have divided the books into four categories (minimal use of examples, examples mainly about women, examples mainly about couples, and transcripts), depending on the predominant use.

**Minimal Use of Case Examples.**

Gray generally uses stories about “Venutians” and “Martians” to illustrate his points, as well as stories from his own marriage with Bonnie. Sometimes he inserts names of men and women to illustrate a hypothetical conversation, but I found only two instances where he referred to clients he had seen.

Susan and Jim had been married nine years. Like most couples they started out loving each other, but after years of increasing frustration and disappointment they lost their passion and decided to give up. Before getting a divorce, however, they attended my weekend relationship seminar. Susan said, “We have tried everything to make this relationship work. We are just too different.”...

In just two days, Susan and Jim gained a totally new understanding of men and women.

They fell in love again. Their relationship miraculously changed. (Gray, p. 3)

Gray’s examples give little identifying information about the clients and end happily, making them examples many people could (and would want to) identify with.

McGraw relies mainly on his relationship with Robin, and occasionally on his parents or grandparents for illustrations. I found six references to people he had seen either in his office or in seminars. Like Gray, he gives little in the way of identifying information, although he does go into more narrative (and entertaining) detail. Note in the following quotation how he manages to slip in a reference to one of his “high-profile” connections:

There is not a better example than George and Karen. This couple, purportedly very much in love, attended one of my seminars on relationships. They had been referred to the seminar by Karen’s attorney, an excellent, high-profile divorce...
lawyer of national repute, but one who preferred to see relationships healed rather than dismantled.

... Karen, after some creative investigative work, became convinced that George was away for the weekend with "some little slut-dog-whore." Totally enraged and decidedly self-righteous, she talked her way past the doorman at his new separate apartment building and gained access to his penthouse. Once inside, she found a butcher knife in the kitchen and methodically hacked a hole in the heart of every shirt, suit, and sweater hanging in his closet. (McGraw, p. 62, italics added)

Unlike the example quoted above from Gray, in McGraw's example there is no happy ending. As with other case examples, McGraw does not tell us whether this hapless couple divorced or whether they benefited from the seminar and lived happily ever after. This may be because he does not have an ongoing relationship with clients who come to seminars. In fact, Gray and McGraw may be the authors who use case examples the least precisely because they have the least intimate relationships with clients. Perhaps in an attempt to compensate, they are the authors who are the most blatant in asserting how many people they have had contact with. In addition to claims to having seen thousands of people, they both make reference to the number of individual clients they have seen:

Instead of seeing eight clients a day I started seeing seven. I pretended that my wife was my eighth client. (Gray, p. 188)

Then one day she [Robin] slammed two fingers in the car door in the middle of the afternoon, and when I didn't cancel a half dozen patients to come home and put ice on it, she was deeply offended that I was not there in there in her time of need, and concluded that I didn't love her any more. (McGraw, p. 260)

Although these passages are both meant to tell us something about the authors' relationships with their wives, they also tell us something about their attitude towards clients. While it is certainly not unheard of to see eight clients in a day, if done regularly this is a lot, and does not speak to quality work. And although Gray lightens his client load, it is not in an attempt to be a better therapist, but because his wife wants more time with him.

McGraw's suggestion that he would have had to cancel a half dozen people in the middle of the afternoon implies that he was seeing more than eight people in a day, which, if true (McGraw may be embellishing for the sake of a good story) would indicate a factory like approach to therapy. In addition, his use of the word "patients" rather than
“clients” suggests a more authoritarian perspective than is usual for therapists or psychologists. McGraw has stated that he did not enjoy doing individual therapy, and did not practice it for long before moving into the more lucrative business of courtroom consulting.

Readers will find more to identify with in terms of case examples in the remaining books, as described in the following three sections.

**Descriptions of Women.**

Doyle and Lerner are writing specifically for a female audience, thus their examples tend to represent women. Both make fairly liberal use of case examples, including stories about their own lives and examples from their friends’ lives. Their stories sometimes include male partners, but are generally written more from the female perspective, although Lerner does include some examples of men she saw in therapy. Doyle is not a therapist, and her examples come from friends and women in her “surrendered circle” groups. In the following quotation the woman, who has been a “friend for years” is referred to by two names, which may be a typographical error due to the use of pseudonyms, but may also be a part of the latitude that is likely used in case examples (by other authors as well).

Sophie had done nothing but work, clean the house, chauffeur the kids from one activity to the next, and plan for a big party she was throwing on Saturday. At the end of the week, the dog wrestled with a skunk, and Sally just lost it. She came to me with a litany of complaints about her husband, Justin. He didn’t make it to the cleaners when he said he would. His car was filthy. He left the fax machine on instead of the answering machine again. (Doyle, p. 71)

Sophie/Sally is dealing with problems that would likely seem familiar to many women. The following quotation from Lerner represents a woman with similar struggles on the home front.

Maria, a homemaker with two children, had just celebrated her fortieth birthday when her husband moved his elderly mother into their home. His work often kept him on the road, and his large Italian-American family had geographically dispersed, leaving Maria as the primary if not sole caretaker for his mother. Maria began to absorb more anxiety than she could manage, but since she thought she should be able to handle it, she didn’t feel entitled to protest....

As Maria felt increasingly worn down, she began to complain to her husband. But she complained ineffectively, in a manner that invited him to disregard her concerns. As she found herself fulfilling the stereotype of the
bitching, nagging, and complaining wife, she felt even more inadequate and incompetent. (Lerner, p. 31)

Lerner uses the term *stereotype* in this passage, and that is what many of the case examples are. Although Lerner and Doyle are very different in their philosophies and their advice, their case examples contain many similarities. They are often about women struggling with children and home concerns, and with men who have different priorities. These may be, as Lerner hints, at the root of the stereotypical problems that lead many women to read relationship guides.

**Descriptions of Couples.**

For three of the academic authors (Gottman, Hendrix, and Markman) I found about fifteen case examples each in the first 100 pages, and they almost all refer to couples. Hendrix uses a few examples of men or women to illustrate personal psychological issues related to childhood. Because he, more than any author, is interested in theory, and because his theory postulates that childhood experiences shape our approach to relationships, Hendrix’s case examples tend to be the longest and most well developed. This is particularly the case for two examples which are described in detail in a 43 page chapter at the end of the book entitled *Portrait of Two Marriages*. The following quotation is typical of how he uses case examples:

> John, a man in his thirties who came to me for counseling, was particularly adept at denial. He was a computer programmer who had designed a software program that was so successful he used it to start his own company. For the first ten minutes of each session, he would talk about his company and how well it was doing. Then the conversation would grind to a halt, he would avert his eyes, and he would get around to the real topic of conversation, which was Cheryl, the woman he loved. He was utterly bewitched by her and would marry her in a second if she would only say yes. But Cheryl kept refusing to make a commitment. (Hendrix, pp. 54, 55)

The example of John and Cheryl continues for another three and a half pages, with theory woven into the story, but with the emphasis on detailed descriptions of John and Cheryl’s histories and their interactions.

In contrast, Markman’s case examples tend to be more to the point:

Ted, a thirty-four-year-old construction worker, and Wendy, thirty-two, who runs a catering business out of their home, were married for eight years when we first
saw them. As with many couples, their fights started over small issues... (Markman, p. 14)

This passage is followed by a short ‘transcript’ of what each member of the couple has to say about putting the cap back on the toothpaste, and then by the some generalizations about arguments.

Gottman’s use of case examples resembles Markman’s more than Hendrix’s:

Dara and Oliver say their lives are hectic but happy. She attends nursing school at night, and he works long hours as a computer programmer. Like many couples, including those who remain content as well as those who eventually divorce, Dara and Oliver acknowledge that their marriage isn’t perfect. But they say they love each other and are committed to staying together. They positively beam when they talk about the life they plan to build.

I ask them to spend fifteen minutes in the lab trying to resolve an ongoing disagreement they are having while I videotape them. (Gottman, p. 25)

What is different about this quotation from Gottman, compared to Markman, is that Gottman gives a stronger impression that he actually saw the couple in clinical practice. Markman never refers to having videotaped or audiotaped or even to having actually met any of the people he refers to in case examples. In his Acknowledgments section Markman says:

By using composites and altering details, we have disguised the identities of the couples in the vignettes. Nevertheless, the stories told by many couples over the years are so strikingly similar that the themes in the case histories we include will speak to a variety of people. (Markman, p. xv)

Even the fact that Markman refers to these stories as “vignettes” makes them seem more utilitarian and less real, especially compared to Hendrix, who focuses on the intimate details of peoples’ lives, rather than the ‘striking similarities.’ This may be one of the reasons the Markman book is not as popular.

Transcripts.

Although Page often gives some identifying information about the couples she interviewed, similar to authors in the previous section, she also often prints partial transcripts of the conversations. Weiner-Davis sometimes refers to a person or couple she worked with, but gives less information regarding age, occupation etc. She prints many letters she has received from people who have attended workshops or read her
previous book. Schlessinger seldom refers to anyone she personally knows, but prints numerous transcripts of conversations she had with people who called into her talk show. I call the information from these three authors ‘transcripts,’ although the authors themselves do not make it clear whether they are actual verbatim copies of material, or composites, or representative examples.

Dear Michele,
My husband and I have been having a really rough past couple of years. We have two kids, ages four and six. Until recently, we were on the verge of separation and possible divorce. I found your book, and am now seeing real hope in my marriage....

By showing my husband more patience with his moods, and giving him his time alone, I have found that he is less and less in his cave and more with the family. We have both shown each other more love and respect than we have in over two years....

I thank God for helping me find the love and support I needed to save my marriage! God Bless You! (Weiner Davis, pp. 12-13)

Weiner Davis’s transcripts are generally from people who have worked out their problems (with the help of her advice). The last chapter of her book is devoted to longer letters from satisfied customers, and she asks readers of the current book to correspond with her. Gray also asks readers to write to him to share their stories, although he asks at the beginning of his book, which might entice readers to read his book to see if they feel they have something to say.

Page often prints several transcripts in a row to demonstrate a point. In her section on ‘spending time together’ she quotes from five interviewees, of which I’ve included the first two:

Marsha, a corporate vice-president, told me she was a recovering workaholic and that she had trouble confining her disease to the office. ... I asked her what the secret of her recovery was:

MARSHA: Fred! He has been so patient with me, but at the same time relentless. He just keeps gently insisting that I set limits....

Several other people talked about their struggle to balance work and family

MARGARET: When I was single, I couldn’t imagine how I could ever have time for a partner in my life. But after I fell in love, I found out.... You know, you make time for the things that are really important to you.

(Page, pp. 49-50)
By including quotations from several people Page increases the chance that readers will find someone to identify with. And even if readers don’t identify with any particular quotation, the fact that there are a number of people saying the same thing is persuasive in and of itself. This is a tactic used by Schlessinger, whose book is comprised of about one third transcripts. In her section on Feminism she quotes from six women, and the following passage is about one third of what she quotes from a woman who discovered that God is better than feminism:

My husband and I got married when I was twenty-four and discovered I was pregnant. I told him upon our ‘agreement’ to get married that I was going to continue to work... and we were going to keep everything ‘separate and equal.’ I had my own checking account and he had his own. We even filed separate tax returns. There was no way I was going to be ‘dependent’ on any man. After our little girl was born I came to the realization there was NO way I could go back to work and leave her with a sitter or a day care. I didn’t come right out and tell my husband... how could I admit this ‘weakness’ and then on top of that be ‘dependent’ on him. So, instead, I got resentful and angry... hated him for existing. (Schlessinger, p. 57, ellipses in original)

In the first two chapters of her books Schlessinger includes 57 transcripts, of which 42 are from women and 10 are from men (for five transcripts the gender of the person being quoted is unclear). In Weiner Davis’s book I found 51 letters, of which 34 were from women and 17 from men. I located 99 portions of transcripts in Page’s book, with 63 representing women, and 36 representing men. The percentages of examples that come from women are as follows: 81% for Schlessinger; 67% for Weiner Davis; and 63% for Page. The use of transcripts reveals a gender bias that is not as apparent in the other books (with, of course, the exception of books aimed specifically at women).

With the exclusion of Page, all of the books use only case examples from heterosexual couples.

With one exception, all the couples have been together at least seven years, many of them far longer. Five of the couples are childless, and the rest have children ranging from six months to thirty-five years old. The couples represent a wide variety of backgrounds and professions and include one lesbian and two gay couples. (Page, p. 12)

Like Page, most authors use case examples from a “variety of backgrounds and professions” and from a range of ages. However, the ‘variety’ tends to include more of
the middle range in terms of both socioeconomic status and age. As discussed in the section on *Self*, Page’s informants tend to be reasonably well off. When authors refer to work or career, clients are often described as professionals, sometimes described as unskilled, and never described as poor. They are most often in their thirties and forties, and likely to have children, although many case examples are non-specific about children. They are sometimes on second marriages, with step-children involved. In general, I would say that case examples represent a better-off portion of the population than average, and although the readers of self-help may also be better-off than average, even if they are not, it is probably more likely that they would want to identify with those in a better position than those in a worse position.

**Scare Tactics**

All of the authors except Lerner make some kind of reference to there being risk involved in marriage, and/or to some form of hostility toward marriage in the culture at large. The implication is that readers need help to reduce the risks, or maneuver the obstacles from society.

It is my observation, from talking to tens of thousands of men, women, and children over a span of a quarter century on my syndicated radio program, that these last few decades of the millennium have been horrendously *destructive* to the ability of men and women to relate, commit, and enjoy building and being a family. (Schlessinger, p. 1, italics added)

Most people want a satisfying marriage that lasts a lifetime. Yet, couples marrying today have a 50 percent chance of getting divorced.... *We believe that marriage is the most risky undertaking routinely taken on by the greatest number of people in our society.* (Markman, p. 1, italics in original)

As in the quotation above from Markman, references to the divorce rate are common.

Research shows that over two-thirds of couples, married or otherwise, who attend relationship counseling are worse or at least no better after one year. The *divorce rate* in America refuses to drop below fifty percent, and twenty percent of us will divorce not once but twice in our lifetime. (McGraw, p. 6, italics added)

Not only does McGraw reference the divorce rate; he also cites statistics on the efficacy of marital therapy. These statistics are well known to most therapists, but usually cited with different wording, such as ‘about one third of couples improve, one third stay the
same, and one third are unhappier than they were.’ McGraw lumps two groups together so that he can emphasize the word worse, and make it appear that relationship counseling is failing dismally.

Some authors cite divorce statistics as if the dire consequences of divorce are apparent to all, while others spell out consequences more specifically:

The damaging effects of destructive marital conflict and divorce on spouses and children are incalculable. These effects include economic, medical, and mental health problems. For example, marital problems are one of the top causes of depression, and depression is the most common mental health problem in our society. Marital distress and divorce cause distracted and poorly motivated workers, which leads to great losses in productivity in our society. Divorce is also a leading cause of poverty in America, dividing families and leaving many children in poor, single-parent homes. (Markman, p. 2, italics added)

According to Markman (and other authors) divorce and/or marital distress can lead to problems in every area of life, and can permanently harm children. If this is not enough to scare the (female) reader, the following might be:

A single mother’s standard of living almost always decreases significantly after divorce. (Weiner Davis, p. 22)

Women who retain custody of their children suffer, on the average, a 33 percent decline in their standard of living after divorce, adding to their feeling of bitterness and their general stress. While divorce is supposed to free the parties emotionally, more often it ties them up for years with feelings of anger, despair, loneliness, and the fear of risking love again. (Page, p. 229)

Authors vary in the degree to which they use scare tactics, with Lerner using them the least. Interestingly the three books that place the most stress on the terrible consequences of not having a good relationship are written by women (Doyle, Weiner-Davis, and Schlessinger).

Encouragement

Scare tactics are balanced by encouragement. Authors use various methods to convince the reader that they care and that they truly want the reader to have a better life. In the following quotation Gottman expresses sympathy for the difficulty readers may have in following his advice:
In this chapter I’ve tried to give you practical advice to help you solve some common marital problems. But sometimes, no matter how diligently you try to end a conflict, it just can’t be done. (Gottman, p. 216)

Because the task is difficult, authors offer praise and encouragement:

If you follow the key points in this chapter, you’ll be qualified for a degree in relationship fun. You can do it. (Markman, p. 262)

But still, you’re reading. For this, I give you a world of credit. (Weiner Davis, p. 42)

Encouragement often involves use of the pronouns I and you. The author is attempting to address the reader personally, as if there were only the two of them involved. The effect can be similar to what one would expect in a letter:

You, dear reader, will get to know us—and our own marriage—better in the pages that follow. What I regret is that I can’t know more about you and your partner. For even though we have never met, you and I have a relationship. I have been thinking about you for many months as I wrote. (Page, p. xii, italics added)

McGraw actually includes a section in his Conclusion called A Personal Letter from Me to You:

To My Women Readers,
I conclude this book with a candid and personal letter from my heart to yours. (McGraw, p. 295, italics added)

To My Men Readers,
I’m assuming that this letter is the first thing you’re reading in this book. Either way, give me three minutes to talk to you man to man. (McGraw, p. 298, italics added)

McGraw tailors his terms of endearment to the gender he is addressing in an attempt to connect at a personal level. Of all the authors he uses I and you the most—in fact, every opening sentence at the beginning or last paragraph of a chapter contains either or both of these words, often as many as four or five times. The following quotations appear at the beginning and end of his Prologue:

If your relationship is in trouble, big trouble or small, I’m going to tell you straight-up how to fix it. I’m not going to try to be cute or glib, and I’m not going to hit you with a lot of clever buzzwords.... I’m going to give you the straightforward, no-nonsense answers that work—answers that have always
worked, but have just been buried in a deluge of pop-psych nonsense. (McGraw, p. 1, italics added)

So that is your precondition. As you go forward into this book, you must contemplate everything that’s presented with an eye toward how it can get you back in touch with yourself…. Tapping into your core of consciousness, rediscovering your inner strength and drive for greatness, can be the single most significant act of your life, and your greatest gift to your relationship partner. (McGraw, p. 4, italics added)

McGraw is asserting who he is, and who the reader is. The reader is someone willing to achieve drive and strength, led by a man who knows everything there is to know about relationships. By beginning sections with I and concluding them with you, he sets up a process whereby he, the expert, takes the lead, and then, in a sense, passes the baton to the reader.

Encouragement tends to occur at beginnings and endings, whether of books or chapters. Authors often open and close on a personal note. The following quotations are found on the last pages of their respective books:

By gradually releasing your judgments and blame and persistently asking for what you want, you can create the loving relationships you want, need, and deserve.

You have a lot to look forward to. May you continue to grow in love and light. Thank you for letting me make a difference in your life. (Gray, p. 286, italics added)

As you stretch the period of thanksgiving one day beyond a week, and then another day, and then another, you’ll receive a great gift: You will begin to forgive yourself. Grace and forgiveness will enter your world. (Gottman, p. 266, italics added)

These are sort of ‘benedictions,’ in which the author is heaping blessings upon the reader who deserves gifts and other good things. By showing they care about the individual reader, by encouraging and praising the reader, and by referring to the reader as deserving, authors invite readers to enter into a close and trusting relationship.
Chapter 4: Readers

Participants

I interviewed 21 women, 8 of whom were clients from my private practice, and 13 who responded either to an ad in the local paper or to a poster in their local library or workplace. Although I did not directly ask women whether they had seen or were seeing a therapist, many of the women volunteered this information in the course of conversation and I would say that the majority of the women had received, or were receiving, some counseling. I did not interview any men, as there were only a few serious inquiries.

Eleven of the women were in a current committed relationship (five married, four common-law) and of these seven had had one or two previous committed live-in relationships. The length of time in their current relationships ranged from three to 23 years, with a mean of 11.8 years. Three of these women rated their satisfaction with their relationships as high, and the rest rated their satisfaction as medium.

Ten of the women were not currently in a committed relationship, although all had at least one previous committed relationship. Five of the women had divorced once, one had divorced twice. None of the single women were unhappy about being single, and three of them thought they might stay single for a long time, or possibly forever.

The women ranged in age from 25 to 67, with a mean age of 42. In response to the question about ethnicity four of the participants left the question blank (these women all appeared Caucasian) and eight indicated Canadian or Caucasian. Two of the women indicated native ancestry, and two wrote that they were Italian. The remaining five indicated English, African Canadian, German/Russian/Canadian, East Indian, and Euro-Asian. The names I use in this chapter to identify participants are pseudonyms.

All of the participants had graduated from high school, 14 had some post-secondary education and three had university degrees. Five of the women listed themselves as homemakers, and four of these had children at home. One woman was retired, but continued to facilitate counseling groups. Four of the women were self-employed and the others did a variety of office, sales, or technical jobs.
**Procedure**

Five of the groups were comprised of three participants, while one group had only two, and one group had four. All meetings were held in a small comfortable boardroom, where I provided coffee, tea, water, and a plate of cookies. We sat at a table and participants filled in a consent form and short questionnaire regarding demographic information and books that they had read. I told the women that I had a number of questions in mind regarding relationship guides, but that I was also interested in what they thought was important to say about these books. I began each session by asking the same question about how they chose books to read. From there I might ask further questions depending on their answers, or refer back to my list of prompt questions.\(^{15}\)

For each question or topic I gave each woman a chance to speak, by either asking if anyone had anything to add to what had been said, or by asking the women individually what they thought. If a woman brought up what I considered to be a new topic before everyone had had a chance to say something about the current topic, I would ask that the new topic be put on hold for a bit. The women sometimes addressed each other, but more often addressed me. Occasionally a woman would bring up something I considered irrelevant (e.g., a twelve step program their friend had attended) or start in on a personal story that was going to take too much time, and I would suggest we leave the issue to discuss later if we had time. The women were unfailingly cooperative and friendly with each other and with me, and there was always laughter. Most participants spontaneously told me that they had enjoyed the session, and none indicated any dissatisfaction. The interview sessions took between an hour and an hour and a half, at the end of which participants were each paid fifty dollars.

**Books Read**

Each participant had read at least two self-help books that were specific to relationships. Many could not remember names of all the books they had read. Of the

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\(^{15}\) I videotaped the first interview, but found that I was able to make shorthand notes that included enough verbatim information that I discontinued the taping. Quotations from respondents do not necessarily include indicators of pauses (ellipses may mean I’ve left out part of what they said – generally vocal fillers such as ‘um’ or ‘you know’ – or that they trailed off before beginning again).
ten books I focus on in this project, only seven had been read by any of the participants (see Table 3). Titles of other books women listed having read can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 3: Relationship Guides Read by Respondents
Beside each book is listed the number of the 21 respondents who read each book.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Book</th>
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<td>Markman</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>McGraw</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Schlessinger</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Weiner Davis</td>
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**Beginning**

**Inspiration**

For most of the participants self-help reading was an integral part of their lives. For instance Karen said that reading relationship guides was a sort of “hobby” for her whether she is in a relationship or not. Thus, these women tend to be on the look-out for material, whether in their local bookstore, the library, a second hand store or reading library in the church basement, or the internet. Some were more systematic than others, like Audrey who browses bookstores on line regularly, reading the reader reviews. “There are so many that are promising,” she said, which is why she does her “research first on line to make sure.” Tamara, also an internet browser, said “I’m married and I want to make my relationship better, so it’s on my mind.”

A few of the readers made the internet their primary source of information, but like all of the women, they were open to information from various sources, including television, magazines, and friends. Not surprisingly, Oprah was a major source of inspiration to many of the women. The second group of three women that I interviewed all agreed that they would read a book recommended by Oprah even if it didn’t seem
particularly relevant to their current situation, so that they wouldn’t be “out of the loop.” Alaine said “if everyone’s talking about it, you’ve got to know.” These women don’t say they read every book recommended by Oprah, but if she refers to a book more than once, or has the author on as a guest, they would certainly take notice.

Some of the women said they have no time to watch daytime television, and some do not consider Oprah a more credible source than any other. Only Linda said she wasn’t impressed with Oprah. She was more likely to find out about books through magazines, as were several other women, and they particularly liked when the magazines carried excerpts from the books. All of the women browsed bookstores to a greater or lesser extent, although the two serious internet surfers often ordered books on line, and so could go long stretches of time without visiting a bookstore. Some of the women used their local library, but didn’t seem to find this as satisfying. My general impression was that women with higher incomes were more likely to browse bookstores, and to prefer to buy books rather than borrow, whether from the library or a friend.

A few women turned to self-help only when something particular was bothering them. Lily said that when she has something on her mind she will type a key word into Google and “see what comes up.” What comes up is often a reference to a self-help book, and then she will go to the Chapters site and read the reviews on line. Two or three of the women had not read a relationship guide in several years, as they were feeling satisfied either in their relationships, or in being single. However, if something were to arise that was problematic, they would turn to relationship guides again.

Two of the participants said they were not currently interested in relationship guides for their own use (although they had been at one time). One was a 67 year old single woman who ran groups for newly separated or divorced people. She used the books as a resource for helping others. The other was a 51 year old woman who had divorced twice and left two common law relationships. She said she was “done with relationships” but was still interested in relationship advice for her daughters’ sake.

Participants varied in the degree to which their choice of books was influenced by friends and family. Kate described herself as part of a network of people who share books. Others were more careful about talking about relationship issues with friends. Some were concerned that suggesting a self-help title to a friend might be seen as critical.
Some would not be comfortable having others know that they were reading a self-help book, while others (generally the younger participants) agreed that although there might be some bias against self-help, that wouldn’t stop them from, for example, reading a self-help book on public transit. This seemed to be particularly true for the women who were more enamored of the “12-step” type books.

Although I did not ask women directly about their counseling experiences the topic surfaced a number of times. Most of the women seemed to have received counseling at some point in their life, and many had had books recommended to them by a therapist. In response to the question about getting started Susan said it “depends on what’s going on in my life... when I’m in a relationship I generally have a counselor... when I’ve identified the un-ease I want to learn as much as I can.” For many of the women self-help books were an extension of counseling, although they were not seen as replacing counseling. Books recommended by therapists were usually related to more individual issues; only a few said that a therapist had recommended a relationship guide.

Authors

While questions about choosing books were answered easily, questions specific to authors provoked more thoughtfulness. Generally they did not seem to have thought much about what author factors, if any, were important to them. For instance, when I asked the second group whether it was important that an author have a degree the responses were as follows:

Georgia: I don’t value a book more if they have credentials.
Anne: I don’t think it influences me... but it might... you sort of ignore the letters after their name, but you expect them.
Liz: It might...
Georgia: It does count for something... shows they’ve studied the field.
Liz: It might make me pick up the book faster... but I may not agree with it any more... When I see them on TV it’s more ‘they’re charismatic,’ or ‘I like their voice.’

Note that Georgia began the conversation by saying that credentials were not important, but when the other two women suggested they might play a role, she said they “count for something.” This sort of process often happened in the groups, particularly regarding issues the readers did not seem to have thought about previously. Thus there
may have been a certain degree of responding to perceived social pressure, however I
don’t believe this was a strong component of the process. The participants were all
friendly and appeared willing (eager sometimes) to learn from each other and from the
process. Thus they were willing to consider new opinions. The next group of readers felt
free to disagree with each on the issue of credentials:

Jessica: Having a degree is a minimum requirement.
June: I think what Gottman does [is important]... studying people.
Alaine: I’m not particularly impressed by degrees.
June: Life experience is important.
Alaine: Street smarts.

In this group one woman felt it was important for an author to have a degree,
whereas the other two named other factors. Interestingly, June did not seem to be aware
that what she valued – research – is facilitated by university education and affiliation.
Karen summed up the value of a degree by saying that “A Ph.D. is good... if it was the
same title, I’d take the Ph.D. every time.” However this reader also wanted to know that
authors got their information from “various sources” and that “they’re in a happy
situation.” She cited Joyce Mayer (a Christian minister who lists no degrees after her
name) as someone who was “very positive, sounds peaceful in her writing” whereas “Dr.
Laura had problems... her marriage broke up... I wouldn’t buy anything from her.”
The sixth group was also critical of Schlessinger – Sunita found her “judgmental” saying
“she’s off in lala land,” and Susan said “I don’t like her tone... her covert judgments.”

Knowledge about authors’ personal lives had a strong impact on some readers.
The authors that the women seemed to know the most about included (not surprisingly,
since they have their own T.V. and/or radio programs) Dr. Phil and Dr. Laura. John Gray
was also a name that came up often. About half of the women seemed to have some
knowledge of these authors’ lives, and they often seemed unsure of what to do with this
knowledge. Discussing Phil McGraw’s T.V. show the women in the second group had
the following to say:

Alaine: I’m a huge Dr. Phil fan... I think he’s different... a different level.
June: His books have more depth.
Jessica: He’s down to earth... though sometimes it’s fluffy stuff.
Later in the conversation when we were discussing the influence of popular culture McGraw’s name came up again. June commented that he was into a lot of “self-promotion” and cited his protein bars. Alaine who had called herself a “huge fan” said “what does he know about food?” and Norma said he was “getting too greedy... too big an ego.” The sixth group was also knowledgeable about McGraw. Sunita said she’d been “hearing things about how difficult he is... he and Oprah aren’t talking... something going on there.” This prompted the following responses:

Susan: He’s not living what he says... relationships are supposed to be the thing... he’s exploiting it... no-one can have as perfect a marriage as he does... he calls her a perfect wife.

Sunita: He comes across as perfect... that irritates me.

John Gray also generated some interesting conversations. A number of women had seen him on T.V. and he did not seem to have left them with a good impression. One woman described him as “creepy” with a “snake oil evangelist kind of feeling.” Some of the women had also seen his first wife Barbara DeAngelis, who alluded to her negative experiences in a previous marriage, and this influenced their feelings about Gray as well. Anne said of his current wife: “Bonnie must be an idiot too... what I read about her letting him stay in his cave.” Despite a general dislike for Gray all but two of the women had read his book (or parts of it). “Hasn’t everyone?” asked Liz.

Gray, McGraw and Schlessinger were the only author names familiar to the majority of participants. Although some of the women wanted to know as much as possible about authors, many said they didn’t want to know too much. This was particularly true when it came to self-disclosure within the books. As discussed in the next section, this is something women look for when deciding whether or not to purchase or borrow a book.

**Deciding**

Although women sometimes had their minds made up about purchasing or borrowing a book from information they had received on T.V. or online, there is also a decision process for most women when browsing. Without exception they wanted books that were easy to read. Although a few women thought it was possible for a book to be “too simple” this was considered much less of a problem than if a book was too difficult.
Linda, an articulate woman who likes to read (she said she had just donated 200 books to her local library) said she wants “clarity… simple, not dry.” She didn’t like books with words she couldn’t understand, a sentiment echoed by other readers. Jessica noted that although ideas could be difficult, the prose needed to be easy.

The preference for simplicity extended to other aspects of the books, including the title and the layout. Some women mentioned they preferred large print and books that aren’t heavy to carry. There was a preference for short chapters and simple self-contained sections. They tended to shy away from books they described as academic or theoretical. Tamara, who has a graduate degree, says she gets “bored” if books are “too high for me.” Lucy said she likes “simple, straight up, uncomplicated information you can apply” and got unanimous agreement from the three other women in the group.

However, they also didn’t want to feel they were being duped. Audrey said she really disliked books that promised “5 or 10 tips or secrets.” These readers know that relationships are complicated and they want books that acknowledge the complications without adding to them. They also know that there is a fair bit of repetition both within and between the books. Thus they are willing to put some time into browsing through the books and reading sample passages. If a book has a title that piques their interest they will generally examine the front and back covers, then move to the table of contents. If they see something in the chapter headings that strikes them as relevant to their current situation, or that promises insight into men they will examine the layout of the book. Books with long unbroken passages of writing are likely to be returned to the shelf, whereas suggestions of humor make it more likely they will hold on to the book.

It was not easy for the women to describe exactly what they were looking for in relationships guides. For most of them relationships were an extremely important part of their lives, and they took seriously their efforts to understand and improve their relationships. But as Jessica said “it’s easy to feel anxious about the topics” to which Nazim added “If you’re confused, you don’t want more complications.” Lana said that for some relationship issues you “want to be eased into it” and Lucy said “I want to be engaged at the heart level rather than the intellectual level.”

One thing that seemed to help ease anxieties and engage women “at the heart level” was case examples. Jessica said they were “probably the part I was most interested
in reading...an easy way to see what the book is promising.” Lily said case examples “illustrate the point the author is making... puts it in context.” She liked that “someone else went through—really went through that.” Tamara said case examples “makes them [books] interesting... breaks it up... otherwise it’s stressful, feels like your studying ... makes it fun.”

Though case examples were something all of the women looked for in a relationship guide, they didn’t necessarily agree on the optimal way to include these anecdotes. Some said they had read books that had too many case examples; Linda particularly disliked this, saying she found it confusing. She said she would prefer an author use one couple as a case example throughout the book. Kate agreed with her that it can be really confusing if there are too many, but said she doesn’t like following the same couple through a book; she prefers “a different couple here and there to illustrate a point... self-contained examples.” Lily liked “lots of them.”

Case examples are one of the main things women gravitate to when deciding whether to purchase a book or not. Case examples serve several functions: they help break up the text, illustrate key points, provide entertainment or “fun,” and suggest to the women who the book is written for. If they find something in the case examples with which they can identify they are much more likely to keep the book.

Case examples can also indicate to the readers that authors have had experience with “real” people and “real” problems. It is important to these readers that an author’s wisdom come from personal experience and not just from “book learning.” However, as discussed in the previous section, authors tread a fine line when it comes to self-disclosure. When I asked the sixth group about author self-disclosure I got the following responses:

Susan: I don’t like to hear about their own lives... depending on how personal it is...it takes away from the credit I give them... It’s a fine line. [She made a comparison to counselors disclosing issues about their own lives.]

Sunita: I quite agree... not to the degree where it’s all about that person.

Lily: I wouldn’t want it in a counselor, but if an author has gone through something that motivated her, she’s come through it, I appreciate her letting me know there’s light at the end of the tunnel.

Susan: There’s 2 types of books—the author’s been to hell and back, and the author has worked with clients...
Jessica said that self-disclosures could be “distracting.” She discussed a book she read by DeAngelis in which the author only approved of getting into relationships with “guys who are into self-improvement.” While she didn’t agree with the author’s point of view, upon reflection she said she was glad she knew this about the author, because it helped her know which parts of her advice to accept or reject. Tamara said “if I see them, their personality, that’s good…but I don’t want to know that much.”

Lana said it was important to her to know the author’s “agenda.” She said she’d prefer the information was in a forward rather than in the main text, but she wanted to know things like how often and how long an author has been married and “if they know how it feels to sit with this problem.” Readers wanted a sense of compassion from authors, and for this reason they felt it helped to know something about the author. But they did not want to read biographies, and they did not want to feel the author’s opinion was being “forced” on them.

The ideal author has three kinds of expertise, represented by a degree, by case examples showing they have successfully helped others, and by disclosure of some personal information indicating knowledge of the “struggle.” The last two items appear to be required, while the first is a bonus. The ideal relationship guide has a mix of factual information, stories, and entertainment, and is presented in an easy to read format.

Reading

The majority of the women start relationship guides with the intention of reading from beginning to end, which they succeed in doing for books they consider good. Anne, an avid reader, generally starts at the beginning “except if I’m desperate – then I go right to a section.” Lily described herself as a “beginning to end person,” although “sometimes there’s a particular thing I go to first, but then I go back to the beginning.” Kate said she starts out by trying to read a book right through, but if it’s not a really good book, she’ll “peter out.” She divides books into two categories: read, and half-read, and other women in the group immediately identified with this.

There were various other approaches to the books. Karen said she will “flip through, read the boxes, quizzes… if it’s really good I’ll scan through again.” Linda said “I look through the index… by now I know most everything, I don’t need to read
everything.” Generally, there seemed to be two approaches to the books – one was to treat them as true advice manuals, which happened when readers were looking for assistance in solving an immediate, pressing problem, and the other was to treat the book more like a novel.

When I asked about the exercises in the books, only one woman (Kate) was enthusiastic about them. She had not only done exercises within relationship guides, but had also bought some of the workbook companions, although she said she had burned one of them because she didn’t want anyone to see her answers. Linda said she wouldn’t dare write in a book for that reason. Karen said she had done some of the exercises, if they were easy. When I asked this group of women if they’d done any exercises that were meant to be done with their partner they all said no, and Kate jokingly added “not unless he doesn’t know about it!” When I asked this question of the next group Susan said a previous boyfriend had bought McGraw’s companion workbook for Relationship Rescue but it was “way too much work.”

About a third of the women skipped the exercises sections altogether, one third read or skimmed them and sometimes did them “in their heads,” and the other third had done some, particularly if they were “easy.” The word “easy” came up often; women were more likely to stay with books they considered an easy read. For some of the women this had to do with how busy they were; they wanted a book they could pick up when they had a few spare minutes, and put down again without losing the flow. Georgia said “you can only absorb so much at once... sometimes it doesn’t make sense as you’re reading, but later something will trigger and you go ‘oh yeah.’”

When I asked the women what advice or information stood out for them, they usually had to think about this. There were several themes that emerged, with acceptance of differences and boundaries being predominant. Only one woman actually used the word boundaries, but other responses seem to fit this category. Sunita said “don’t give your whole self away to somebody else... keep a portion of you for you. They say you become one person in a relationship, but you should keep a portion of yourself. I learned this from experience too.” Georgia said “stop blaming and take responsibility for your part in it... You can’t control what others do.” For this woman taking responsibility for her part meant facing the fact that her husband of 20 years was not going to change (no
matter what she did) and leaving him. Norma, who had also recently left her husband of 18 years said she had learned “to not get into a relationship at all.” Then she laughed and said “to be more selective – watch for red flags.”

Jennifer talked about the “different ways men and women feel loved” and said this was a “real eye-opener…huge for me.” Speaking specifically about John Gray’s book she said it “tells you how you can motivate him” and “get around him.” The other two in the group were not convinced when she said “I think you can do it with just about any man.” Nazim, who was in the same group, said she has a “greater acceptance of differences in all people…they are not going to be like me.” Lucy was also influenced by John Gray, saying “this goes back to Venus and Mars – men are different from women…. But in a positive way, to make allowances for it.”

A couple of women mentioned communication as the theme that stood out for them. Others mentioned issues of self. Lucy said “the whole thing about your sense of self-worth – in terms of how you feel about yourself. Hello, didn’t you know that to begin with… no I didn’t and I got the hell beaten out of me.” Liz said “It’s left me with a feeling of ‘be gentle with myself.’” Lily said they’ve helped her get her self-esteem back and that they “help you feel good about yourself” and show “how to not fall into the same pattern again.”

Other responses indicated that readers got both validation and hope from the books:

Linda: If you answer in a loving way the relationship will eventually become loving. [Although this did not seem to be the case in her own 15 year marriage.]
Tamara: All marriages are difficult; I’m not the only one. Also, men and women are different. When I read these books it doesn’t seem so bad.
Alaine: To trust my own judgment. I found I knew a lot of what they were saying.
Lucy: It depends on the book… Kinda prepares you… one of the many many things that can help a person prepare for relationships… a tool… like a manual.
June: Anything’s possible if you try. I mean, they’re useful… shows you there are other alternatives, reasons… opens it up.

Validation and hope appeared to be more important to these women than specific advice or solutions to problems. Liz said “even if it’s not a solution, it’s nice to read it… get some comfort from it, know that you’re not crazy… others have gone through it.”
group all agreed that they get comfort, peace of mind and a feeling that “you’re not the only one.”

*Comfort* was a word that came up several times, and in groups where the word was not mentioned by one of the women I always asked about it, and always got a positive response. Particular things in the books that contributed to a sense of validation and comfort were author self-disclosures and case examples, as illustrated in these excerpts from the second group.

Jessica: I know there must be thousands of other people with similar problems.
Georgia: I’m a nosy person. I’m getting a view into something personal.... This poor slob has it worse. It feels less clinical and more personal.
Alaine: It helps you better to identify.

Knowing that they were not alone in their struggles was sometimes all that women felt they needed to get from a relationship guide. A number of the groups had discussions about men and the problems they posed in relationships, and the books gave them the sense that it was normal for women to struggle with this issue. The women in the sixth group suggested that men tend to make women feel like relationship problems are all their fault, and the books were a sort of antidote to this. Lily said “sometimes you think you’re completely wacko—then you see something in a book that tells you you’re not.”

However, even if they couldn’t verbalize the specifics, most women did feel that the books offered useful advice. Some of the women mentioned that advice from relationship guides was applicable to relationships other than intimate ones (e.g., parent-child, or friend relationships). Susan said the books helped her to “cope with my feelings... if I’m angry at my partner... knowing how and why, and to live with it if I’m not going to change my life, or change my life if I’m not going to live with it.” Tamara said self-help made her feel educated and empowered. Audrey wanted more from self-help than just knowing she wasn’t alone. In discussing the issue of comfort she responded that “there’s comfort in knowing you’ll learn new things... if I’m upset I’ll call a friend.”

The value of the books was sometimes found in reminders of things they already knew, or had forgotten. There was general agreement that there was much repetition both within and between books, but for the most part this was seen as a good thing. Liz said
“you tend to hear the same thing again and again... which isn’t a bad thing... it starts to sink in and you start using those tools. But sometimes you think ‘seen that – next!’”

Some of the women had favorites that they returned to – often in times of distress. Anne shared that recently when her husband had been yelling and swearing at her she went to her bedroom and picked up *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* to re-read. She seemed to derive quite a lot of comfort from this.

As mentioned near the beginning of this section relationship guides seem to be read both as advice manuals and as novels. Women vary, both between and within themselves (depending on their current situation), on which aspect of the books is more important, but a good book provides both. A number of women mentioned the importance of “tools,” but all felt that advice needs to be illustrated with case examples and/or author self-disclosures, which provide the more comforting and validating piece. Alaine talked about reading the books to relax – she wants the author to ‘get to her quick,’ to raise her interest with examples and not too much theory. Norma said “it tells a story, illustrates a point... information about the background of families... get to know these people, how they feel.” Jessica said that case examples were like soap operas “and you bring your own to it.” A book without case examples, she said, might be effective, but not as much fun.

**Evaluating**

Participants’ memories of what they had read in relationship guides (or even which books they had read) was not particularly good, except for a few women who had either just finished or were in the process of reading one. What they took from relationship guides seemed to get tangled up in knowledge they had received from other books, from media, from counseling, and from their own experiences and processes. For most women there was not a firm line between relationship guides and other self-help books, and many women felt they had learned things of relevance to relationships from a variety of self-help books.

Liz had the most difficult time of any of the participants separating relationship guides from other self-help books – in fact she seemed somewhat offended by the idea, emphasizing that any book that helped a person improve herself would also help her
relationship. Audrey’s view was probably more typical – she believed there were
different types of self-help but that they were related, saying that self-help is generally
about “self love and self-esteem... [and] if you don’t love yourself you can’t be in a
satisfactory relationship.” She divided self-help books into two stages, saying the ‘self’
part is “the preliminary stage...then there’s the ones on how to communicate with a
partner.”

When I asked how many of the books were helpful, women responded in the
range of 50 to 75 percent, with more women endorsing the higher values. Some women
felt they were becoming more selective as they grew older and more experienced, and
one woman suggested there is a category of “beginner books” (which would include the
Peter Pan books and John Gray’s books), with which the other women in her group
agreed. As discussed in the previous section an important part of the reading process was
validation and comfort, and women did not expect to learn a great deal from a
relationship guide – in fact they were generally happy if they learned one new thing, or
even if they simply reinforced something they had learned before.

With a few possible exceptions (the younger readers) these women knew they
were not going to find any final solutions to their problems within relationship guides;
rather, they were looking for people who had gained valuable experience about
relationships to share that experience with them. From this point of view, author
credibility was very important, and an author’s advice wasn’t likely to be given much
credence if he/she didn’t demonstrate some personal experience and understanding.
Georgia said “some authors mean well, but don’t know enough to write a book.” Anne
said “I want to know where they’re coming from... it rings more true to me if it sounds
like it comes from their experience ... then they’re writing it because it’s true and not
because they want to make money.”

As discussed, authors tread a fine line in disclosing just the right amount of
personal information. These readers were somewhat wary of authors’ motives, as
suggested in the following comments from the second group:
June: You know when you’re being conned, when they’re doing it for the
money.
Jessica: Depends where you are – sometimes you need the motivation. I could write the books, but sometimes you need the positive reinforcement, even though you know it.

Alaine: If I’m in that space, I’m willing to be conned.

June: If I’m looking for answers to a specific thing.

This exchange represents to me a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the books, which I detected in other groups as well. Sheila said “there are more bad ones (relationship guides) than good... I’ve found very few that help.” However, she also said that the first one she read (recommended by her counsellor) “saved her life.”

The next exchange occurred in group four:

Jennifer: Most books say the same thing.

Yvonne: They might as well be in the fiction category... if all men and women did that, then sure the world would be great.

And when I asked group three whether authors were experts I received the following responses:

Sandra: Three quarters of them aren’t. It’s a business, right?

Lana: She [an author] went on her own relationship. I’m as much an expert on my relationship as she is on hers.

Despite the ambiguity, all participants intended to read more relationship guides. Alaine said “my skepticism has made me more choosy – I’ll skim the book before borrowing or buying... Do you really have anything new to tell me?” But, she said “I don’t want to miss anything” to which June responded “just in case – you want to know.”

I asked the women whether the books made them feel they were doing things wrong, and received a variety of responses. The women in group five said:

Karen: [puzzled] that’s why you read them.

Linda: It’s education.

Karen: It’s good to know.

In group four Nazim and Yvonne said that when books make them feel they are wrong they shelve them. Jennifer said Gray’s book made her feel that way and she was angry at first, but now wishes she had had the information earlier. Lucy didn’t like books that were “shame based” and indicted the whole category of new age books for saying “if you did this better...” Jessica liked the books “that validate better than the ones that tell me
I’m doing something wrong” to which June responded “they all need to make you feel you’re doing something wrong to sell their books.”

In group two there was some discussion about whether the books could make people more messed up. The women, who were all over forty, thought this was possible, especially for “younger women,” mentioning Gray’s Mars/Venus dichotomy as an example. They all saw self-help books as generally useful, within limits:

Jessica: I think these books are helpful but for real problems see a therapist.
June: The books may get you to that point... where you recognize what you can’t do on your own or from a book.
Alaine: The books don’t say ‘here’s how you walk this into real life.’

Although women varied in the degree to which they felt relationship guides told them they were doing things wrong, and in the degree to which they were willing to tolerate this message, they all seemed to feel than they got more validation than invalidation.

When I asked whom the books were written for, participants in all groups responded “women.” In group two I asked why there are so many relationship guides and June said “I think it’s called men.” Anne said relationship guides are “written for women, to fix men,” an opinion that was fairly common, although women differed in the degree to which they felt this was a problem or not. The following exchange occurred in the first group:

Georgia: Even though I was the one who read it, it still benefited the relationship
Anne: It opens a dialogue.
Liz: And then it comes down to whether the man is willing to do anything.

Liz said that her partner’s unwillingness to read any books made her angry and that this had helped her to leave the relationship. June said “You can read all the books you want, but it won’t change anything if the guy doesn’t realize there’s a problem.”

Very few of the women had had a partner who had read any self help. Jennifer said she had convinced a former partner to read Gray and she felt it had helped the relationship, but her current partner wouldn’t read any self help. Liz said she thought her ex-husband had read John Gray after she left him. Similarly, Linda said she knew a man who had read a relationship guide when his relationship was falling apart, but it was too late. Lana said “women read ‘em, men need ‘em” and joked that the only exposure her
husband had had to relationship guides was “what I read to him when he was on the toilet and couldn’t escape.”

When I asked why the books are aimed at women and not men Sheila said “that answer is in the self help books.” When I pushed this I got the following responses:

- Audrey: They often don’t recognize there’s anything wrong.
- Lily: It’s like they say… men are from Mars.
- Sheila: Men have a different way of communicating.

Other women had similar responses. Karen said “men are culturally raised … to fix things… Men are quite simple” She pointed out she didn’t mean that “in a bad way”. Linda said men focus on “career, money, fixing the car” and that they don’t like “dealing with kids, changing diapers, house stuff – they’d rather be playing golf.” She said “women still aren’t equal… if anything we’ve gone backwards” Kate agreed with her.

Karen said “you can’t change thousands of years of programming…” and Linda said men “don’t want to change the status quo.”

There was a certain amount of “men-bashing” that went on in most groups, but with only a few exceptions it was not mean-spirited. Nazim, who was currently single and had had a number of unsatisfactory relationships, said she was “sick of books for women” and wanted one for men. When I asked what she thought would get a man’s attention she laughed somewhat bitterly and said “if it had playboy pictures in it.”

Generally, the women were frustrated by men’s refusal to engage in either self-improvement or relationship improvement. When I asked group five if they would like to see men read more relationship guides Linda said that was “wishful thinking” adding that you were lucky if you could get a man to read at all. Kate was more optimistic, saying she gives “thoughtful books” to men she knows. Karen was conflicted – she wasn’t sure she would admire a man who read relationship guides, saying she “might think he’s a wimp… or competing with you.” She said “knowledge is power” and wasn’t sure what would happen if “he knew what I know.” She was the only participant to openly display this ambivalence.

When I asked participants whether the genre was sexist it was clear that most women had not thought about this. Many women responded by discussing the larger context of relationships or society in general. Linda said “it’s still a man’s world… I
fought in the women’s movement, and now I’m just tired” and added “I’m lucky my man does housework and cooking, but I want more than that.” She reads relationship guides in the hopes of figuring out how to get “more than that.” The other two women in this group, currently single, had a discussion about the “double standard” regarding the “stigma to being a divorced single mom” (Kate) “whereas a single dad is worshipped” (Linda).

The first group consisted of women I know through my private practice, and because they are intelligent and thoughtful women I was surprised by the blank looks on their faces when I asked about sexism. Anne said she considered herself “a heat-seeking missile for sexism,” so if she hadn’t noticed any, there wasn’t likely to be any. She pointed to a book written by a man that was unsympathetic to men, saying that “Dan Kiley takes the view that men are babies and should just grow up.” At a later point in the conversation she remembered hearing about “The Rules” and seeing the authors on T.V. Liz had also heard of this book and they both thought the concept was disgusting. Anne said “it’s worse than a Cosmopolitan questionnaire to catch a man.” On hearing what the book was about Georgia said “you want men to pick up books and read them, and you put books like that on the shelf?”

When I asked specifically about John Gray and sexism, this group did agree his Mars/Venus concept was sexist, although Anne added “‘to be fair to John Gray, the concept is something people can relate to... it’s wildly popular.” But, she said “the way he worded what he said betrayed his views... the woman waits around while the man is off in his cave.” She added that the woman is supposed to “understand” (with sarcasm and air quotes) the man. Georgia said it “helped me understand more about men, but the cave went too far.” Although they weren’t enamored of the book, they all had wanted their partners to read it.

In the second and third groups when I asked about John Gray and sexism I received the following responses:

June: Yes, it’s offensive.
Jessica: It’s women doing all the work.
Alaine: That would be a fair interpretation.
Sandra: It’s typecasting – putting people into gender roles. Life’s not like that.
Lana: Some things [Gray says] are true... but it seems sexist.
None of the women were complimentary of John Gray, but none wanted to completely dismiss him either. The only other author to come up spontaneously in discussions of sexism was McGraw, with Yvonne saying she thought he was “a male chauvinist pig.” As discussed earlier, some readers had mixed reactions to McGraw, but Yvonne was the only one to call him sexist.

The women in group six believed that some authors lived in an “unreal” world, especially if they were celebrities. In discussing Schlessinger, Sunita said her book was unrealistic because it advocated women stay at home with their children. When I asked the group if this was an example of sexism, they thought it might be, but it was clearly not something they had thought much about. Similarly, when I asked if there were problems in the books regarding social and economic issues, they were initially puzzled, as were all the women I asked. When I explained that I had noticed that many of the books seemed to assume that readers had a fairly high income level, none of the women seemed perturbed by this, with the exception of Lucy, who said she had noticed this.

In group two the discussion of sexism led women to wonder about the relevancy of author gender. Although they hadn’t paid attention to it previously, they thought they would in the future, suggesting that perhaps women authors might be less manipulative. They also thought they would like to see a relationship guide written by a male/female team. In group six Susan said she didn’t like books by men, citing John Gray in particular, although she didn’t want to write him off completely because a former partner had read one of his books, and she thinks “it’s important men be able to connect with a book.” Lily said “a man doesn’t understand what a woman goes through.” I asked if a woman would understand what a man goes through and she said no; and in discussion this group agreed that books by men were more for men and books by women were more for women. (The three of them also agreed they were more likely to choose women in all professions, including therapists, GPs, and lawyers.) Sunita said she liked when books were coauthored by a man and woman, and she mentioned a Vancouver couple, Jim and Judy Sellner, but said they lost credibility with her after the second time they divorced each other.
In group seven the discussion on sexism touched on how to entice men to be more interested in relationships. Lucy talked of a social evolution in perspectives on relationships that was reflected in changes in relationship guides. She said the Mars/Venus book was “pivotal to me... there is a difference and it is ok,” and that this was a kind of beginning. She believed that men taking more responsibility for relationships “is where society needs to go and it’s going to take men to do it.” She added “that’s one of the appeals of Phil McGraw – he’s the biggest wolf in the pack,” suggesting that he might be the kind of man who could show other men it is alright to be interested in relationships.

Summary

For some of the women I interviewed, the line between relationship guides and other self-help books is blurry, and it seems that most looked for similar things in a self-help book whether it targets relationships or some other issue. My readers did not seem to perceive that relationship guides are written for couples; like the other self-help books they read, they perceive that relationship guides are mainly written for women to read alone. Although the respondents all indicated they would prefer men read more (of any kind of self-help) there was a general sense of resignation that this would not happen.

Although respondents had criticisms of various aspects of the genre (certain authors, or ways of presenting material), the genre as a whole appears to be unquestioned as a valid part of their lives. They are comfortable with a culture that focuses on the problematic nature of relationships, whether the medium is books, television, radio, or the internet. Oprah was a strong influence on many of the respondents; if she had regard for a particular author or book, the women were likely to read it. There was a sense of not wanting to be ‘out of the loop.’ In fact, it seemed many of these women felt obligated to participate in the genre and to be knowledgeable about the current thinking on relationships. Two of my respondents who said they had no interest in being in a relationship themselves read the books in order to be able to assist others in their relationships. For my respondents, knowing about relationships appeared to be an essential aspect of being a woman, and relationship guides, along with daytime television, seemed to be the main source of their knowledge.
What struck me as particularly important in discussions with respondents was that there was no stepping outside of the genre; no questioning of whether the intense focus on improving relationships was taking place within a valid structure; and no consideration of contextual issues. Relationship guides are part of relationship hegemony; that they would and should be written seemed to be a given. Respondents had their views on who was qualified to write them, and on what they liked and didn’t like within them, but never doubted their overall legitimacy. In fact, their criticisms, framed within the confines of the hegemonic discourse of relationships, may add legitimacy to the genre. Gemin (1997) suggested that criticisms of codependency literature increased rather than decreased the legitimacy of the discourse. Although he was not speaking of criticisms by consumers of the discourse, there would seem to be a similar effect. The sense that there is variety and choice within the genre allows people to feel like critical consumers, and responsible citizens (a topic I will expand on in the next chapter).

Respondents’ criticisms of the genre did not appear to have been well-formed prior to the interviews. They had a sense of what they were looking for in the books (which could vary depending on their current needs) but were not always able to easily articulate their preferences. I noted some contradictions in responses (e.g. one respondent stating that McGraw is more real than other authors at one point, then later saying some of his stuff is ‘fluff’) but this is probably to be expected given that the respondents were likely thinking these things through for the first time. There was also some ambiguity (similar to that noticed by Simonds, 1992) in their relationships with the books, exemplified by the woman who noted that there were more bad than good books, but that the first one she read “saved her life.”

Criticisms were almost always of particular books or aspects of books, with very few generalizations (one respondent stated that ‘authors are just in it for the money”). For instance some respondents did not like books that had too many case examples, or revealed too much (or too little) information about an author. For women who are browsing, the form of the book appears to be very important; they wait for something to catch their eye, then look at the back cover and table of contents. The kinds of things noted in the previous chapter to do with descriptions of the author, and a promise of something different had an influence on my respondents. The credentials of the author,
though, was something most hadn’t thought much about. It seemed more important that they like the author (based on either what they saw on/in the book, or had heard elsewhere) than that the author have a degree (although if they liked two authors equally, they might be more likely to choose the one with the degree). Some readers seemed to appreciate when an author’s work was based on research, but did not recognize the importance of academic credentials in conducting or evaluating research. Author expertise was evaluated mainly on the basis of ‘real-world’ experience; this could involve having overcome their own relationship hurdles and/or helping couples as a therapist. There was some ambiguity on this point as well though; many of the respondents felt that their own experience with relationships made them experts on the topic too (enough that a couple suggested they could write their own relationship guide), and they wanted more from an author than personal experience. Grodin (1991) found in her interviews of self-help readers that they often found the books to be patronizing, and there is an element of that here. Readers do not want to be talked to as if they are neophytes at relationships. However, this was far less a problem for my respondents than for Grodin’s, who did not appreciate the message that women have more problems than men—something my readers did not find to be a problem in the relationship guide genre. This may be an important difference between current relationship guides and older self-help books.

A major factor for these readers seemed to be the sense of hope that they would find something new and useful (also noted by Simonds, 1992). Although the respondents believe there are some bad or not useful self-help books, they believe the majority of them have something of value to offer. All of the readers felt they had learned from previous books, with the predominant themes being acceptance of differences, and learning boundaries. None of the respondents noted any vast and enduring improvement in their relationship as a result of reading relationship guides, but all of them seemed to feel better (if only temporarily) for having read them. When the feeling wears off, they seek another book. And this seemed to be the most important theme in reading relationship guides; that they impart a sense of comfort.

Simonds (1992) noted ‘validation and comfort’ as an important part of the reading experience for her respondents, while Grodin (1991) emphasized a sense of connection with others. Both of these themes were apparent in my interviews. Readers appreciated
feeling they were not alone in their struggles; that other women experienced the same problems, and that writers/experts sympathized. Reading the books often seemed to confirm for them that they did know what relationships are about and that if their relationship wasn’t satisfactory it wasn’t because they didn’t know about relationships. Faludi (1991) suggested that relationship guides focus attention on what women do wrong, but my respondents seemed to take from the books a sense that they were doing much that was right.

Relationship guides seem to offer women a short-term solution to the dissatisfaction they feel in their relationships. The ideal relationship guide is easy to read, and doesn’t contain much that is complicated or challenging. It incorporates narratives (case examples of varying lengths) that let the reader know others suffer the same problems. The books often repeat themes that are familiar to the readers, and this is comforting in that it bolsters their sense that the problems in their relationships are not their doing. The genre seems to impart the message that men are incapable of participating fully in relationships, and readers’ frustration at this state of affairs is ameliorated by reading. When the frustration builds again, they move on to a new book, with some hope that they may find something to improve their situation (some way of getting the best out of their man), but mostly with the anticipation that they will be soothed. In the short-term readers feel better, but in the long-term, the cycle is perpetuated. The genre offers the illusion of connection with fellow sufferers, but keeps women alone and preoccupied with their plight.

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16 The exercises that are included in many of the books are generally skipped by readers.
Chapter 5
The Bumpy Road: Metaphors and Terministic Screens

Metaphors

Marriage is, at times, an intensely painful experience for many people. To be in a ‘til death do us part’ relationship that not only does not live up to the ideal that was expected, but also encompasses hurt, fear, confusion and possibly depression and anxiety, leaves some people feeling desperate. When the desperate person turns to the self-help literature for comfort and for answers, she is greeted with a focus on the positive. The difficult, painful aspects of relationship become, for instance, bumpy roads or rocky stretches, with the promise of a beautiful terrain at the end of the voyage. The women I interviewed wanted non-academic and easy to understand examples that would help to calm their anxiety by easing them into the material. The transformation of pain and uncertainty into concrete terms through the use of commonplace metaphors is an important function of relationship guides.

Finding concrete words for the difficulties and emotions experienced by couples in relationships can be difficult. Further, people generally do not want to read ‘clinical’ descriptions of marriage difficulties, for that is not how they perceive their own lives and relationships. As Otto (2000) says of the use of stories and metaphors in therapy, “when no one wants to listen to a list of social principles, many will listen to an Aesop’s fable. Stories tend not to evoke defensiveness as direct instructions may” (p. 167). Kopp and Eckstein (2004) note that “although false as literal, logical expressions, metaphors accurately express the speaker’s subjective viewpoint and emotional experience” (p. 163).

Metaphors maintain a respected place in psychotherapy (Kopp, 1995; Martin, Cummings, & Hallberg, 1992; Mio & Katz, 1996, p. xi; Siegelman, 1990) although exactly how they contribute to the therapeutic process is a matter of opinion. Miller (1998) suggests that metaphors are effective because they allow clients to understand new and sometimes abstract ideas through language that is familiar. In a similar vein, Atwood and Levine (1991) say that metaphors allow clients some distance from their problems, which enables them to gain different perspectives. Lyddon, Clay, and Sparks (2001) note
that human thought processes are naturally aided by metaphors, so it would only make sense that they would be useful in the therapeutic context. They then detail the ways that metaphors can aid in relationship building, accessing and symbolizing emotions, uncovering and challenging tacit assumptions, and introducing new frames of reference.

From a rhetorical perspective metaphors are a crucial component of persuasion. In summarizing Aristotle’s thoughts on metaphor Griffin says “metaphors help an audience visualize—a ‘bringing-before-the-eyes’ process that energizes listeners and moves them to action” (2006, p. 326). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958/1969) discuss the importance of “argumentation by example,” whether it be analogy or metaphor. Richards (1936/1979) states that “metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language” (p. 92), noting how new arguments or ideas can only be understood in terms of something else. As discussed in Chapter 2, metaphors direct attention, but they also deflect attention; following Burke (1945/1969) an analysis of an author’s use of metaphor allows for insight into the author’s perspectives and motives.

Within the texts I examined I found a wide variety of metaphors, and a high degree of overlap. Many of the metaphors are used by all of the authors, and I have included in my discussion only those referred to by at least eight of the ten authors (see Table 4 for which authors use which metaphors). Metaphors not included are those to do with fabric and sewing (used by five authors), cleaning metaphors, marriage as a recipe, and people as machines with buttons to push or turn (used by two to four authors). A list of quotations from the texts representing each type of metaphor can be found in Appendix 2. For a list of the Phoros (focus of the metaphor, such as water), and Subjects (the ‘thing’ being described by the metaphor, such as emotions) see Appendix 3.

Table 5 lists the major metaphors and their typical subjects. Interestingly, the various Phoros of the ten metaphor categories refer only to six Subjects, which can be seen as testimony to the creativity of the authors, who have found numerous ways to refer to a limited number of topics which are the domain of the Relationship Guide.

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17 He also notes that old ideas (essentially all ideas) were initially understood in terms of something else, and that these comparisons become 'dead' metaphors, but that is an issue beyond the scope of this work.
Table 4: Metaphors

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Metaphors that Invoke the Elements

This section includes metaphors relating to journeys, weather, water, and space. As discussed in Chapter 3, master metaphors are over-arching metaphors that are used in a common-place way, and are generally unquestioned. I consider journey to be a master metaphor within relationship guides; it is used by all the authors and appears to be the most useful metaphor for describing all the important aspects of relationships (it is the only one to refer to all topics identified as Subjects). It encompasses the other metaphors in this category, as journeys are things that can happen in space, in all kinds of weather, and over terrain that includes water.

Aliveness has a lot to do with living in the present, with accepting that all we have in life is the journey, with all its mountains and valleys, all its bumpy roads and flat, boring stretches. (Page, p. 72)

But because people are unfamiliar with the emotional terrain, the normal hills and valleys of marriage, these predictable transitional periods are often misunderstood, causing overreactions. Those who manage to weather these universal stormy periods usually come out the other side with greater love and commitment to their spouses. That’s why I want to offer you a marriage map. (Weiner-Davis, p. 59)
Too often, couples begin to seek help for their marriage after they've already hit troubled waters. (Gottman, p. 45)

Table 5: Main Phoros and Subjects of the Metaphor Categories

(Phoros are listed with the master metaphor first; Subjects are listed in approximate order of frequency)

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<tr>
<th>Type of Metaphor</th>
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When relationships are referred to as *journeys*, difficulties may be called *distances*, *storms*, or *troubled waters*. Changes and efforts are likely to be referred to as *weathering* the journey, and the advice of the author can be portrayed as a *map*, or as coming from a *guide*. This reinforces the notion of the author as expert, as someone who has ‘been there’ and knows the landscape. From this perspective relationships take on a somewhat linear quality, with a progression of *steps* leading to a specified endpoint. Readers who do not reach this endpoint have strayed from the *path*, and need to refer back to their *guide* or *roadmap* (author/self-help book) for assistance.

While this metaphor acknowledges the difficulties of relationships it does so in a way that suggests these difficulties are fairly easily overcome (or bypassed). There is *always* a route; it is just that the inexperienced traveler may not know how to find it. *Bumpy roads* and *thunderstorms* are no excuse for deciding against a relationship journey; one must accept the challenge and continue moving forward. The journey, once begun, must be completed (which would only happen when ‘death us do part’). The implication is that the reader should be a good traveler; accepting some inevitable pitfalls for the reward of completing the journey.

This metaphor directs our attention towards possibilities and a sense of accomplishment at taking on challenges. It is a positive spin on marriage, likely to excite readers; for who doesn’t like to go on a journey? Although the answer is never spelled out, the insinuation may be that only the weak and faint-hearted don’t like to go on a journey.18 Journeys contribute to human growth (another metaphor of movement, to be discussed) and growth is good, and the marriage journey provides a kind of growth which people don’t want to miss out on. Readers who do not embark on and complete this journey can be expected to have incomplete lives.

The journey metaphor could be applied to ways of life other than being married, and in self-help books that do not focus on relationships, life itself is often referred to as a journey (cf Askehave, 2004). When relationship guides refer to life as a journey, however, it is always within the context of marriage. One could imagine that life as a...
‘single’ person could be a journey, as could life with a series of relationships or loves. The journey metaphor is not unique to marriage, but is used effectively to highlight the attractiveness of this particular journey.

What is deflected with this metaphor are the unattractive consequences of marriage as it is defined by these authors. The good traveler has a spirit of adventure, and is expected to delight in what is different and new. The comforts of home, the predictability of the familiar, are left behind, and, in the context of journey, devalued.¹⁹ Our culture encourages a positive attitude towards journeys, and in capitalizing on that attitude, relationship guides deflect our attention from the possible rewards of a life unencumbered by the need to accommodate another person in a ‘nuclear family.’

By calling marital disagreements and difficulties rocky stretches relationship guides minimize the pain and suffering experienced by many readers. ‘Anyone can get through this’ they seem to be saying, ‘if they just persevere.’ These books promise a way out of the difficulties, claiming to have a different road map than the reader has tried before. Even though the reader may have tried many times, and many ways, to find her way out of difficulties, she must try again. It is up to her to ‘steer the course’ and regardless of the course her spouse may be on it is up to her to ‘get the marriage back on track.’ By referring to marriage as a journey, and the reader as the driver, the responsibility of the spouse is diminished, for the direction of this journey can apparently be navigated by one person. In fact, it is possible to conceive of the spouse as part of the terrain to be dealt with rather than as a traveling companion. Another possibility is to see the reader of the relationship guide as taking on the role of travel guide for the less informed (and possibly less willing) relationship partner.

**Organic Metaphors**

The connecting threads of these metaphors have to do with growth, movement, and healing. The levels metaphors generally refer to emotions (which are often buried deeply) while the most common Subjects of medical and growth metaphors are

¹⁹ Travel or quest literature is an important part of the Western literary tradition, from Homer and The Iliad to the present. The protagonist in Travels with my Aunt (by Graham Greene, 1969) learns that the regular daily life he has lived (and found satisfactory) until he was over 50 is dull and unsatisfying in comparison with the travels and adventures he has with his aged, but wise—because she has travelled—aunt.
relationships and changes. **Growth** emerges as a master metaphor, used by all the authors (except Lerner) as unquestioningly positive. It also subsumes the other categories as the growth of a relationship involves being familiar with one’s **levels**, as well as healing from one’s **wounds**.

Akin to the notion of moving forward in the journey metaphor, the growth metaphor tends to keep the reader focused on what is ahead. Growth is good, and the only other option offered is death.

Very few people, indeed, are able to **grow** in love. Yet, it does happen. When men and women are able to respect and accept their differences then love has a chance to **blossom**. (Gray, p. 14)

It [goodwill] is the **soil** in which all the other qualities are **planted** and **grow**. (Page, p. 35)

Like **flowers** without sunlight and water, many marriages **wither** and **die** from a lack of attention to the best parts of the relationship. (Markman, p. 233)

Many authors invoke the gardening metaphor to make their point: like a flower, a relationship can **blossom**, or it can **wither** and **die**. Both the gardening and medical metaphors discuss solutions in fairly simple terms; for instance the unhappy relationship needs **sunshine** or a **dose** of time. There are always solutions or antidotes to problems framed in these metaphors, and, as with the journey metaphor, the results are always positive.

Growth and health are part of New Age philosophy (Aldred, 2002; Taylor, 1999) and also can be seen from a neo-liberal perspective as part of the requirements of a responsible citizen.\(^{20}\) In much the same way that GNPs are expected to grow indefinitely, there seems to be no limit to the growth an individual should experience, whether by attending seminars, reading self-help, or exposing oneself to the topics discussed on daytime talk television. Although there have been some successful attempts to make businesses partially responsible for the health effects of their products (e.g., the tobacco companies) there is also an increasing emphasis on personal responsibility for health.

\(^{20}\) I refer here to concepts of neoliberalism that draw on the work of Michel Foucault (in particular his conception of ‘governmentality’) as discussed by such authors as Hay (2000), Rimke (2000) and Rose (1996).
Self-help books on health issues comprise a large section of most bookstores, and health and fitness are common topics on television, whether on day-time talk shows, infomercials, or the shopping channel. Women appear to be the prime targets of health information (and are the most likely to act on such information according to Waite & Gallagher, 2000) and readers of relationship guides are likely to be influenced by medical and growth metaphors.

These metaphors capitalize on women's inclinations to take responsibility for their own growth and health and extend that responsibility to the relationship. When health and growth are understood within the common culture to be correlated and to be positive then it is an easy step to extend that outlook to relationships. In the same way that the emphasis on personal responsibility for health deflects attention from, for example, government responsibility to ensure breathable air and quality water, the medical metaphor deflects attention from societal responsibilities for ensuring good marriage and family environments and/or societal contributions to difficulties commonly found in marriage. Marriage (and family) as a self-contained entity (like a flower) will thrive with the right attention and medicine from the reader. Guidance from the doctor (author) will help the patient (reader) learn how to diagnose and treat marriage problems.

Make no mistake: the sick relationship is like any other ailment that is subject to diagnosis. If you make a wrong diagnosis, you not only treat the wrong thing; you ignore the real problem because you already think you are on track. (McGraw, p. 24)

Although I did not find the use of medical language to be as pervasive as Ebben (1995) reported in her analysis of self-help books, all of the authors I studied used medical metaphors to some extent. McGraw seems to have relied on this metaphor more than the other authors, and it is probably not coincidental that he also emphasizes a doctor-patient relationship. He refers to himself as “Dr. Phil” throughout his book (as he does on his television show), and is the only author to call the people he counsels “patients,” a custom more in keeping with the practice of medicine than psychology. Schlessinger also refers to herself by her first name preceded by “Dr.,” both on her television and radio programs, and on the cover of her book. Not incidentally, I suspect, these two authors are the most authoritarian.
The medical metaphor, when extended to the relationship between the author and reader, appears at first to take the responsibility for a healthy relationship away from the reader and place it with the author. After all, it takes a ‘doctor’ to diagnose the problem and prescribe the medicine (and these ‘doctors’ are quite willing to diagnose, without having ever met the patient). However, the onus is strictly on the patient to comply with the treatment prescribed – to be a good patient. With attention directed to ‘treating’ the symptoms, there is no room for analyzing the problem or looking for other contributing factors. The good patient trusts her doctor and does what she is told. The problem of reductionism – reducing complex chains of socio-cultural factors to a single item – that besets medical science also appears in the self-help literature. Just as the social determinants of physical and emotional health are frequently overlooked in the search for biological causes, so the web of social factors contributing to troubled relationships is ignored in this literature.

**Metaphors of Technology**

I identified three commonly used metaphors related to aspects of technology, including those to do with finances, with war, and with building or repairing. What these metaphors have in common is an emphasis on skills, strategy and/or planning. A wise person plans investments, based on a sound knowledge of her assets and liabilities. If she is going to win a war, she needs to strategize about which battles are worth fighting, and be knowledgeable about which weapons to use. In order to build a relationship she will need the correct skills and tools.

Most marriages are run like a commodities market, with loving behaviors the coin in trade. (Hendrix, p. 121)

Before you choose from the marriage-saving “weapons” below, you should make sure the battle you’re fighting is worth fighting for. (Weiner-Davis, p. 103)

Well, there you have it: the tools and clarity necessary to create what you want and deserve in your relationship. (McGraw, p. 299)

In all of these metaphors there is a correct way to proceed, which becomes apparent when either enough information has been gathered, or enough planning has taken place. And there is a definite goal, whether in the form of a pay-off, a win, or a
strong house. These metaphors might be termed more 'logical' than other common metaphors used in the guides, and therefore be more appealing to some readers, including, likely, men. The book that works hardest at including both partners in the reading process is Markman's and he relies most heavily on these metaphors, possibly because he wishes to reach men. Markman is the only author to state that he is making deliberate use of metaphors (in a section titled “Marriage and the Stock Market”, p. 191). Other authors are less systematic in their use of metaphors, and I would speculate that, with some possible exceptions, they are not used consciously.

The war metaphor seems to be the most useful of this group for identifying relationship difficulties, with disagreements and problems being referred to as wars, battles, or attacks. The financial metaphor also refers to difficulties, though more of an individual and emotional nature, e.g., paying the price, or emotional bankruptcy. The building metaphor is the most commonly used for referring to the relationship itself. Relationships are described in terms of buildings, with foundations and walls. They can be strong or weak, can be damaged and repaired. For the Subject of relationships, building is a master metaphor, and it has a reassuring quality.

Honesty is the only foundation on which trust can be built. (Lerner, p. 126)

Desire, belief, and commitment form the essential foundation on which couples who thrive build their “house.” With such a foundation, a couple can withstand the hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and floods that assault them as they go through life. (Page, p. 16)

In the same way that a securely built home will protect an individual from the cold and wet, a securely built relationship will protect one from the difficulties of marriage (also described in terms of elements like weather and water). And for those who like to think concretely, relationship guides can be seen as providing a sort of blueprint that, if followed correctly, will ensure stability.

By focusing attention on following a plan to build the relationship house authors deflect attention from the context in which the house is built. They assert that if the relationship house is unsteady it is because the reader hasn’t built a firm foundation, perhaps because she didn’t have the correct tools. One could extend the metaphor by noting that a firm foundation can only be built on firm ground, and that the post-modern
society provides anything but firm ground for long-term commitments of any sort (Bauman, 2003). When authors address obstacles to committed relationships they are generally dismissed as either the malicious intentions of bad people (like feminists) or the unintended consequences of well-meaning people or myths. Like **bumps in the road**, they are easily overcome. The possibility that marriage is not the only or the best way to live life today is never considered, and in fact, these metaphors discourage readers from even entertaining the possibility. If they are not happy in their relationships it is because they have done something wrong (which can be corrected), not because they are attempting the impossible.

**Subjects of Metaphors**

Table 6 lists in the first column the four major Subject categories (I have deleted the life/self category as it only appears in one category of metaphors, and collapsed the difficulties and emotions categories, as emotions are generally considered a difficulty). In the second column I have named the referent of the subject, and in the next three columns I have noted how each metaphor category addresses the Subject and referent. The *author*, who is the one to dispense *advice*, is in each metaphor an expert, whether presented as a guide, doctor, or teacher. These are not terms usually *explicitly* referred to in the relationship guides; by using metaphors the authors are able to *imply* their expertise in these ways. When an author speaks knowledgeably about the terrain of marriage, it is assumed that he/she has traveled the terrain and can act as a guide for the reader. Authors

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<th>Subject, Skills</th>
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<th>Technology</th>
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<td>Good Traveller</td>
<td>Responsible Patient</td>
<td>Good Apprentice</td>
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<td>Avoidable Repairable</td>
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<td>Move Forward</td>
<td>Grow Upward</td>
<td>Become Solid</td>
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encouraging their readers to grow and heal are placing themselves in a position of healer or doctor. And whether they are discussing the strategies of war, of investing, or of building or repairing, authors are taking on a position of expertise and authority.

Correspondingly, the role of the reader is to listen carefully and follow advice. A good traveler does not complain about the bumps in the road, and a compliant patient dutifully swallows the bitter medicine, or does the exercises prescribed by the doctor. I have used the word ‘apprentice’ for the technology metaphors, even though it is really only appropriate for the building metaphor, as it captures the essence of the relationship implied in the war and financial metaphors. In any case, the reader should do as told and not complain.

The implications for problems across the metaphors are also consistent. When problems are conceived of as elements (rocks, troubled waters) encountered on a journey, they can be avoided (with the right roadmap). And although some storms may be inevitable, this is not a problem, for the sun will soon shine again. Within the organic metaphors the difficulties referred to are generally personal emotions, and these are most likely to be wounds or to be deeply buried. These problems are not avoidable; in fact they must be faced head on and healed. Within the technology metaphors problems are most likely to be discussed in terms of the war metaphor, and these battles and attacks are avoidable with the right weapons. When weapons (or poor investments, or faulty foundations) create damage, however, there are techniques for repair.

The general conception of relationships or marriage in these metaphors is of movement, whether forward or upward. Relationships can always become better and the prototypical metaphor for this concept is the growth metaphor, which implies there is no end to the possibilities, placing a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of the reader to continue to find ways to make the marriage wonderful. Readers are applauded for taking advice and encouraged to work hard, whether in taking the steps of the journey, or in healing their wounds. They are not generally appealed to as having their own wisdom or knowledge in the matter of relationships. They are not usually presented with alternatives so that they can decide for themselves the best course of action; they are told what to do (and often how and when to do it) and expected to follow directions.
When the reader is expected to take on the responsibility for the relationship this way, there is no attention paid to either the more immediate or the more remote context (i.e., the spouse, or the society which sanctioned the marriage in the first place). Marriage is placed entirely within a positive framework, and the reader is endowed with the ability, as well as the responsibility to make it positive. No one else is responsible, and if the reader’s husband won’t help with housework, and the government rescinds daycare benefits, and the reader is exhausted, she must not expect help – other than in the form of an expert to tell her how to do it right. Marriage can continue to grow and improve if she is a good traveler/patient/learner.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, metaphors can be a powerful tool (to use a common metaphor) for persuading an audience to adopt an author’s position. The metaphors in the relationship guides work on both the Pathetic and the logical level. They help authors construct arguments and organize evidence, particularly for authors who use them consciously, like Markman. Not surprisingly, Markman tends to use more of the technical metaphors, as his is the book with the strongest appeal to Logos, and metaphors based on building and finance, for example, lend themselves well to logical descriptions. But the main function of the metaphors is an appeal to pathos, particularly at the level of ‘fear versus confidence,’ which was one of the key emotional pairings identified by Aristotle (2007, pp. 130-132). On the one hand there are dark images of storms and death, while the other hand offers calm waters and thriving gardens. At an emotional level the reader is encouraged to ‘jump on board’ the author’s ship, which is a steadfast, seaworthy vessel, bound for paradise.

**Metaphors We Love By**

‘Metaphors we love by’ is a twist on the title of a classic book on metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) called *Metaphors we live by*. In this book they describe how important metaphors are to our ability to understand, experience, describe, and structure many everyday concepts. This is particularly the case for more abstract concepts, such as emotions “which are not clearly delineated in our experience in any direct fashion and therefore must be comprehended primarily indirectly, via metaphor” (p. 85).
It is important to note that metaphors can be classified in various ways. Lakoff and Johnson say that metaphors work in networks; for instance we don’t just say ‘argument is war;’ we draw on all sorts of expressions related to war (battles, weapons, attacks) and then map these concepts on to aspects of arguments. Stern (2000) points out that the process of deciding on networks and mappings is not always clear, and I would certainly agree. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson discuss the ‘container’ metaphor, which includes **boundaries** such as **walls** and **fences**, and terms for states of being, such as **falling** (e.g., into love or depression) and **entering** (e.g., a period of calm). I generally chose to include terms like **walls** and **boundaries** as part of either the **spatial** or **building** metaphors, and terms like **surface** and **hidden**, which could be seen as part of the family of **containers**, I categorized as **levels**.

In their study of metaphors used by clients in brief therapy, McMullen and Conway (1996) found that the most common self representations were descriptions of being **fragmented** versus **together** or **whole**. In looking through their descriptions I noticed that many of the Phoros they categorized as having to do with fragmentation or togetherness were ones I had categorized in different ways. For instance, **lost** would more likely fit with the journey metaphor in my reading, and **injured** and **healing** with the medical metaphor. Which families or networks metaphors belong to is not a straightforward matter, although I would venture to say that it is the utility of such categories that is the more important issue.

Despite some differences, there were also similarities in the metaphors I and others have noticed. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) list a number of common metaphors for love, as it is a concept they suggest can really only be understood metaphorically. These include: ‘love is a journey,’ ‘love is a patient,’ ‘love is war,’ ‘love is a physical force,’ ‘love is madness,’ and ‘love is magic’ (pages 49 and 85). The examples given by Lakoff and Johnson suggest that the last three of these are mainly used to describe the beginning stages of love, and of these three the only one that appears noticeably in relationship guides is the ‘magic’ metaphor, which I included as a word that clustered with **spirituality**, rather than as a metaphor. Perhaps this is because there were not enough metaphorical expressions to constitute a family or system, as there were with the other metaphors. The other three metaphors (love as a journey, as a patient, or as war) coincide
with metaphors I catalogued, and although Lakoff and Johnson include these as metaphors of love, the examples they give tend to pertain more to relationships.

I would suggest that metaphors for love and metaphors for relationships are different, at least in terms of emphasis. Lakoff and Johnson were interested in showing how integral metaphors are to human perception and construction of the world, and so were not concerned with such subtle differences. But these differences are important, at least they are if we are interested in using metaphor to our advantage. As mentioned, only one author appeared to be using metaphor deliberately; yet if these metaphors are ones ‘that we live by’ then it would seem advantageous to first know which ones they are, and then to be aware of their potential and their limits.

While some authors have pointed out systems of metaphors within schools of therapy (e.g., family systems therapy, narrative therapy, Legowski & Brownlee, 2001) and others have written about particular metaphors in case studies (e.g., technology and sports metaphors, Miller, 1998), I found no research on which metaphors clients are most likely to use in relationships. Further research would need to be undertaken to determine if the metaphors I noticed in the relationship guides are indeed the predominant ones for discussions of marriage, but given that they were all used by the majority of authors, and since a number of them overlap with ones noticed either by the therapy researchers mentioned above, or by Lakoff and Johnson, it would certainly seem that they are a good place to start.

The choice of metaphors is likely not a highly conscious process, but a reflection of ‘common sense’ thinking (cf. Coe, 1996 p. 441), which can also be seen as an aspect of the hegemonic ideology (O-Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994) of our pro-marriage culture. In her discussion of the meaning of metaphors in psychotherapy Siegelman (1990, p.153) says “the choice of metaphors is both reflective and determinative: The therapist’s ‘personal myth’ shapes the metaphors he or she will use, and these in turn, become filters through which experience is passed.” Each author has her or his own ‘myth’ (both a narrative and an ideology) of marriage which influences the words and tropes s/he will choose to describe aspects of relationships. These filters or lenses are not necessarily the same as the arguments authors might make more overtly. For instance most of the authors (with the exception of Schlessinger and
perhaps Doyle) would not state outright that women are or should be more responsible for relationship success than men, and some, if asked, would even disagree with the statement. Yet their choice of words and use of metaphors may reinforce women’s responsibility in this domain. Deignan (1997) in her exploration of metaphors of desire used in English language found that “metaphor plays a part in creating and reinforcing stereotypical images of sexual desire” (p. 21). More importantly, she asserts that “speakers can use metaphor to express value judgments implicitly and without rational justification. These may be value judgments which many people would find unacceptable if stated in non-metaphorical language” (p. 21). Some psychologists who have written about the use of metaphors in therapy have noted the need for an examination of the values and meanings hidden in metaphors, and highlighted the ethical issues involved in metaphor use (Cederborg, 2000; Hoskins & Leseho, 1996; Lowe, 1990). Terministic screens can also work to reinforce values and ideologies in an indirect fashion, and it is to these we turn next.

Terministic Screens

The referents of the metaphors (Table 6) are also, though perhaps not quite as directly, referents of four of the seven word clusters I identified (truth, self, spirituality, and skills). The truth cluster is a reflection mainly of the author, and the self cluster of the reader, while the spirituality cluster encompasses notions of marriage, and the skills cluster addresses the problems found in marriage. Each of these clusters can be seen as providing a sort of terministic screen, or lens, through which the particular referent is viewed. It is important to remember that word clusters are not necessarily consciously chosen by authors; they are words that tend to appear when arguments are being introduced or summarized, and may or may not support the conscious argument.

Appendix 4 lists the word clusters I drew on for this chapter, Appendix 5 provides examples (quotations from the books), and Table 7 summarizes which clusters are used by which authors (because this analysis takes place at the level of the genre – as represented by the ten books – it does not apply with equal emphasis to all authors).
### Table 7: Word Clusters: Truth, Skills, Self, Spirituality

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**Truth Cluster**

As discussed in the metaphor section, authors set themselves up as experts, whether in the form of a guide, healer, or master. The word *expert*, however, is nowhere to be found in these texts, at least not in terms of the authors’ own descriptions of themselves. Expertise is implied metaphorically and through the terministic screen of *truth*.

The *truth* of these *principles* is self-evident and can be *validated* by your own experience as well as by *common sense*. (Gray, p. 5)

If you or someone you love is contemplating divorce, you will want to know what I have learned about the *truth* about divorce. (Weiner-Davis, p. 21)

I am about to share with you ten of the most *dangerous* relationship *myths* that are commonly taught, believed in, and practiced. When you read them, your initial reaction might be to wonder if I have gone nuts. Some of these *myths* have been part of your mind-set for so long that you might have difficulty even contemplating the idea that they are *false*. You may very well think that if the *myths* I’m going to share aren’t *true*, then they *should* be *true*. They sound so *right*, they sound so nice. (McGraw, p. 47 – italics in original)

Important words that cluster with *truth* include *reality*, *fact*, and *correct*, and the common oppositions for these words are *myth*, *belief*, and *wrong*. Readers are assumed to have been taken in by *myths* and *wrong* beliefs, and authors are there to set them straight; to tell them what is *real*, *correct*, and *true*. The reason why this word cluster is particularly relevant to the *author* referent discussed in the metaphor section is because each author has – or claims to have – a different version of relationship *truth* to promote. Most authors assert their version by putting down other authors and experts (as discussed in chapter 3). Whereas the author knows the *facts*, others speak *psychobabble*, and where the author is *correct*, others are simply *wrong*. In keeping with the spiritual aspect of the books, it is as if some of the authors are warning readers against false prophets. This terministic screen points our attention towards the expertise of the author, who, amidst a sea of *myths* and *false* beliefs, purveys the *truth*, and will save us from the dangerous untruths that abound in society.

Schlessinger is the most adamant in asserting that she speaks the *truth*, which is not surprising, as she is the most overtly religious. In her book, *truth* and *reality* are
opposed with such words as evil, sick, pride, and feminist. The enemy is feminism, which leads to evil, sick practices (such as affairs, women having babies out of wedlock, and working before their children go to school). The solution is G-d, scripture, and religion – the ultimate authority, the ultimate truth. McGraw is also very adamant in his assertions that he knows the truth. He claims to impart powerful knowledge that will help the readers in ridding themselves of the destructive influence of popular myths.

Myths, along with incorrect beliefs, opinions, and information, are enemies of good relationships for a number of authors.

There are malevolent forces in the world, conspiring to ruin relationships. Most people are unsuspecting, and therefore vulnerable to the dire effects (pain, unhappiness, divorce) of these forces. Schlessinger, and to a lesser extent, Doyle, identify these forces as driven by feminism (to which Schlessinger adds secularism). Weiner-Davis lists “well-meaning” friends, family, and therapists, the legal system, and “media myth-makers” as other forces that seduce people into “the divorce trap.”

Although the non-academic authors are more likely to set up a strong opposition between the truth, which they impart, and the myths and misconceptions which need to be vanquished, there is a degree of this evident with the academic authors as well.

Gottman, who prides himself on being the most innovate researcher in the field, states that his approach:

contrasts dramatically with the standard one offered by most marriage therapists. This is because as my research began to uncover the true story of marriage, I had to throw out some long-hallowed beliefs about marriage and divorce. (Gottman, p. 8).

Although he doesn’t suggest any malevolent intent, he nonetheless creates a division between himself as the holder of the truth, and others as mere purveyors of wrong information.

There is wrong information (and thinking and behaviors) and there is correct or right information (and thinking and behaviors). Gray often speaks of “correct interpretations” while McGraw talks of “correct interventions strategies” and the importance of “right thinking.” Schlessinger praises a co-worker for making the “correct
decision” to put family first. Weiner-Davis says there “isn’t a single correct way to get things back on track, there are many” (p. 158).

Fact is another word used in the same vein as truth. Gray often begins sentences with either “The truth is...” or “The fact is...” Weiner-Davis says one must accept “the fact that you and your spouse will have your ups and downs” (p. 159). Speaking of men and women who aren’t married to each other spending time together Schlessinger says that it is:

simply a fact that proximity is dangerous in and of itself because it allows opportunity for inappropriate feelings to evolve. (Schlessinger, p. 211)

She, like all of the non-academic authors, feels no need to back up her assertion with any data. For the most part, this was not an issue for the readers I interviewed. They felt free to disagree with authors (especially with Schlessinger) on the basis of their own experience or beliefs, but did not feel strongly that claims need be backed by evidence.

Hendrix writes of a reluctance to accept the “simple truth” that people have their own points of view (p. 131). In the quotation from Gray at the beginning of this section, he says that the truth of his assertions is self-evident and “can be validated by your own experience as well as by common sense” (p. 5). Similarly, Schlessinger writes of the basic biopsychological reality of healthy, normal women [that it] makes me mad that feminists would deny this undeniable reality and, in so doing, cause substantial harm to so many women. (Schlessinger, p. 52).

McGraw also implies that it is obvious that gender differences must be accepted as they are, and people who have trouble with this are victims of “wrong thinking” (p. 49).

The truth, the reality of relationships, is both complicated and simple. For the non-academic authors there are simple truths about gender differences that anyone with common sense can see. Ridding ourselves of wrong thinking on this count will solve many of the problems in relationships. But there are also many myths, promulgated by either well-intentioned or malevolent sources, that require expert intervention. Each author has their own version of this particular truth.

There are degrees of truth, variations of truth, and types of truth. In addition to simple, truth can be basic, deep, full, plain, whole, and real, and it can also be technical or partial. There are important truths, new truths, higher truths, deeper truths,
psychological truths, and one’s own truth. Things can be especially true, equally true, or tried and true. While the focus so far has been on truth as facts and certainties that authors claim to have access to, the word truth is also used to refer to a subjective state of being,

The ability to speak our own truths forms the core of both intimacy and self-regard. (Lerner, p. 3)

The implication here is that there is a true self and a (or more than one) false self. The most typical opposition for this kind of truth is denial. When people are not “in touch” with themselves and their own truth, they are in denial. A number of the authors address this problem, suggesting that it must be overcome before a good relationship is possible. McGraw, for instance advises not bringing your partner into the “reconnection” process until your denial is overcome. In summarizing what the reader should have accomplished before approaching the partner he says:

You have acknowledged the truth, gotten yourself out of denial, developed the right thinking and the right spirit… (McGraw, p. 192)

Interestingly, there is no discussion of how to proceed if the partner (rather than the reader) is in denial.

A person in denial is generally focused on the wrong things and therefore unable to progress in a relationship in the right way. This can be because of an unwillingness to change personal habits or ways of thinking, and it can also be because a person has been taken in by one of the myths or evil forces at work against marriage, such as feminism, as described in the following quotation by Schlessinger:

Though choosing to have a major career instead is a reasonable, personal choice for some women, diminishing the value of motherhood and marriage by outright denial and attack or by relegating them to the edge of a woman’s more important worker existence is cruel, because it denies the basic psychological and biological truth of women to bond and nurture; and that of men to provide and protect. (Schlessinger, p. 10)

Denial in this case is society-based, and influences women in the wrong way.

Knowing one’s truth is essential to a good relationship:

As you add to your growing fund of knowledge, you are creating reality love, a love based on the emerging truth of yourself and your partner, not on romantic illusion. (Hendrix, p. 136).
Illusions, like myths, interfere with truth. Truth is different for every person, and as suggested in the preceding quotation from Hendrix, for every couple. Lerner takes this a step further and includes families and communities, suggesting that as more individuals come forth to tell their truth.... Previously dishonored individuals, families, and communities begin to develop a proud identity based on an authentic voice and the shedding of silence, secrecy, stigma, and shame. When we collectively challenge the shaming and stigmatizing myths of the dominant culture, we make room for more honest conversation. (Lerner, p. 35).

This level of analysis is rare. Although the academic authors sometimes address contextual issues, Lerner is the only one to go into any detail about how notions of self are influenced by culture. I would argue, though, that this use of the word is still problematic, despite the contextualization. The word truth seems to be applied to what would more reasonably be called a personal perspective as easily as it is applied to notions that could be verified as facts or not. This cluster diverts attention from the complexity of individuals and relationships, as well as from debate over the benefits of various living/living arrangements for both individuals and societies.

Because many of the authors write more than one book, and also have other goods for sale (from workshops to t-shirts), they have much to gain by promoting themselves. They may believe that if they can convince readers that they know the truth (and that they can help the reader find her own truth) when no-one else does, they can increase their profit margin, (along with their own self-esteem). Of course these motives may not be in the conscious mind of the author (or the editor) and this is not to deny that authors may have altruistic intentions. It may be a fine line between persuading readers you know the truth and leading them to believe your intentions are less than honorable. The readers I interviewed wanted a promise of something ‘different’ in a book, but they also did not believe that any one book was likely to have ‘the’ answer.

Spirituality Cluster

For many of the authors, their certainty that they hold the truth, and that they know what is necessary for a good marriage is backed up by their religious beliefs. With one exception, the religious background of each author is easily discerned. Five of the
authors are Jewish (Gottman, Lerner, Markman, Schlessinger, Weiner-Davis) and four are Christian (Doyle, Hendrix, McGraw, Page). Although Gray’s book has a “new age” feel to it, he does not divulge any personal information that indicates a religious background. However, media investigations have determined that Gray spent many years training with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Both Gottman and Markman include reasoned discussions of spirituality/religion and its impact on marriage. These authors stress that while a good marriage does not require any specific religious belief, couples who share a belief system are likely to be happier. The McGraw and Doyle books also contain sections specific to the importance of religion; however these authors are much stronger advocates of including religion in marriage, and references to religion/spirituality appear elsewhere in the text as well. Hendrix and Page both have previous careers as Christian clerics and their books include numerous references to things spiritual. Schlessinger’s identity is strongly based on being a practicing Jew, and her book is the most blatantly religious. Next to the Lerner book, the Weiner-Davis book contains the fewest mentions of religion, however she is clear in her endorsement of religious practices:

They also agreed that it was important to attend church on a regular basis, something they had stopped doing for many years. They found that their commitment to spirituality boosted their commitment to each other. Steve and Judy beat the divorce odds and have never been happier. (Weiner-Davis, p. 172)

References to God, prayer or religion (Christian or Jewish only) appear in all of the texts with the exception of Gray’s. Appositions for these words include, among others, complete, perfect, divine, bless, God’s plan and God designed. The implication is that there is a cosmic order, designed by God for our benefit, and that we shouldn’t mess with God’s work:

as part of God’s overall plan for our lives, He provides for us a mate.... For that reason I do not believe that you can reject and criticize your mate and at the same time accept God and his will for your life. (McGraw, p. 289)

One of the most profound truths is that G-d made us incomplete; and, [sic] it is not a Ph.D. that completes us. What completes us is a joining with our gender counterpart. (Schlessinger, p. 70)
Although most of the authors are openly religious (in the sense of practicing Christianity or Judaism) their use of spirituality is not necessarily tied to religion. The line between Christianity and New-Age spirituality has never been well-defined, but has become increasingly more blurry. According to Goode and Brownlee (1997) the central tenet of Gnosticism, which they define as “self-knowledge is knowledge of God” (p. 35) also formed the basis of New-Age spirituality. New-Agers did not need to reject religion outright therefore, only aspects of it – particularly the ‘organized’ aspects.

For a generation of lapsed Catholics, Protestants and Jews, the do-it-yourself aspect of self-knowledge is an attractive alternative to organized religion. The pursuit of enlightenment needs no intermediaries, no tedious Sunday sermons, no church socials or collection plates. There is no hierarchy, no central religious figure. In Gnostic terms, Christ was an illuminated teacher who brought the world gnosis, rather than the son of God who died to atone for human sins. (Goode & Brownlee, 1997, p. 35)

Amazon.com’s religion and spirituality editor, Douglas McDonald says it is a matter of people creating “their own personal spirituality with a patchwork religion drawing from a variety of sources” (cited in Marty, 1999, p. 879). Similarly, the senior editor of the Free Press division of Simon & Schuster (promoters of New-Age titles) sees spirituality as a “melting pot” (cited in Rosen, 2002, p. 26).

The blurring of the line comes not just from the New-Age side, but also from the Christian side. A number of Christian preachers on television for instance, are looking increasingly like New-Age leaders, as they stray from traditional biblical lectures and wander into what looks suspiciously like self-help territory (e.g., John and Helen Burns on local cable, and Joyce Meyer, internationally syndicated). John Makay (1980) suggests that the goal of achieving a state of grace used to be the domain of Christianity, but has been appropriated by psychotherapy, which offers grace “without the conditions and commitment necessary for Christian salvation” (p. 186). Rather than lose

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21 The exception is Schlessinger, for whom everything is tied to religion. She asserts that relationships are our duty and to be conducted in G-d’s way so it is no surprise that she offers more oppositions to words in the spiritual category than other authors. If we don’t have religious values she says, we have liberal muck; we are either moral or we are operating on animal instincts; and if we are not doing G-d’s work, we are being self-serving. Like many fundamentalist preachers she inspires her congregation with fear as much as with incentive.
parishioners to this new form of salvation, it may well behoove Christian leaders to ‘join with the enemy.’

Relationship guide rhetoric has it both ways, appealing to readers in a New-Age spiritual vein, but (for most) with the more traditional Jewish or Christian religious perspective as a back-up. Vague words like higher power will appeal to a wide range of readers, for the term is meant to be defined by the individual.

Whatever your faith, trust that your husband is the instrument of a higher being and make a decision to appreciate what He has created. Remember how miraculous it seemed to meet him and fall in love and marry? Your husband’s presence in your life is no less miraculous today, so don’t take it for granted. Your higher power brought you together for an important reason—so that you could grow into your best selves. Remember that the challenges that your husband presents are partly your lessons to learn. (Doyle. p. 235)

The idea that there is a divine purpose to relationships is common to many of the books. The notion of divineness takes relationships beyond obligation to God, and into the realm of the mystical. Hendrix explains his goal of “helping [couples] experience the divine” as follows:

What I’m talking about is a native spirituality, a spirituality that is a gift to us the moment we are conceived, a spirituality that is as much a part of our being as our sexuality, a spirituality that we lose sight of in childhood but that can be experienced once again in adulthood if we learn how to heal old wounds. When we regain awareness of our essential inner unity, we make an amazing discovery: we are no longer cut off from the rest of the world. Because we are in touch with the miracle of our own being, we are free to experience the beauty and complexity of the world.... It is my conviction that one of the surest routes to this exalted state of being is the humble path of marriage. When we gather the courage to search for the truth of our being and the truth of our partners’ being, we begin a journey of psychological and spiritual healing. (Hendrix, p. 207)

Although Gray does not reference God, there is a sense of a divine presence that has orchestrated the world in a miraculous way, beyond the comprehension of mere Earthlings:

The strange and beautiful Venusians were a mysterious attraction to the Martians. Their differences especially attracted the Martians.... In a magical and perfect way their differences seemed to complement each other. (Gray, p.44)

Words like miracle, magical, mystical and mystery are used by at least half of the authors. Appositions include glory, prosperity, ecstasy, and beauty, among others.
The implication is that there is a kind of other-worldly realm which can be achieved when relationships work well. In this realm, it appears, peoples' lives are not subject to the regular laws of nature. Doyle, for instance, promises both “electrifying closeness” and financial prosperity. Surrendered wives receive more gifts than ever before, and their husbands earn more money, and all of their problems seem to magically disappear.  

In the Gnostic/New-Age tradition of seeking enlightenment, Relationship Guide authors can be seen as “illuminated teachers” to borrow Good and Brownlee’s term (see quotation on previous page). While the relationship guide authors do not use the term enlightenment, they do promise a sort of divine state. Long-standing difficulties magically fade away as the miraculous first feelings of love are re-activated and the exalted state of happy marriage is reached. When this screen is activated, relationships are taken out of the realm of the mundane and placed on a spiritual level that can sound very appealing. Marriage takes on an other-worldly status (seen most clearly in John Gray’s “Venus and Mars” scenario) and in this way our attention is diverted from the social and practical reasons for the pairing of individuals, and the problems arising from these pairings, problems with which every society throughout time has struggled (Coontz, 1992; Farrell, 1999; Graff, 1999).

Popular conceptions of spirituality include a fatalistic component (evident in the currently popular phrases to do with ‘karma’ and what is ‘meant to be’). Readers may not understand why they are in a marriage with someone they can’t get along with, but they must trust that there is a good reason (known by God or some higher power). By accepting the challenge (taking the journey), readers will find a better life, and be a better self. The spiritual reader lifts herself above the mundane difficulties of everyday life, believing in a purpose bigger than herself.

By directing attention towards the good things that are possible in relationships, authors keep readers invested in ‘working on the relationship.’ Relationships are portrayed as providing rewards greater than any other endeavor on earth, and all other pursuits must take a back seat. Relationships are both wonderful and necessary, and there are no alternatives. As suggested by the metaphors, one must keep one’s relationship

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22 Even Gottman, who is relatively practical, uses the term “the magic five hours” in describing the importance of couples spending time together.
moving – forward, upward – and not look back. Only by doing so will one reach the exaltation promised by relationship guides. This desired state of bliss becomes almost like a drug, with authors encouraging dependency, supported by a culture that reinforces the perception of relationships as providing the antidote to any and all individual problems.

By focusing so much attention on the supposed rewards of marriage, authors not only divert attention from the very real problems of marriage; they also divert attention from other ways of living a rewarding life. When alternatives — such as divorce, or being a ‘single parent’ — are mentioned, they are often held out as warnings of the fate that awaits the reader who does not work hard on her relationship. The spiritual life is a married life; the non-married life is therefore non-spiritual, non-rewarding, and clearly the domain of those who have failed (discussed further later in this chapter).

**Skills Cluster**

In addition to promoting marriage authors have to acknowledge problems that occur in relationships. As we have seen, authors have many metaphorical ways of referring to problems (*bumpy roads, brick walls*, etc.) and to ways of dealing with problems (*steering straight, building strong foundations*, etc.). The next chapter discusses two specific word clusters (communication and acceptance) that address problems in marriage, while in this chapter I will focus on the more general category of skills.

The skills cluster encompasses a fairly diverse group of words that have in common an attitude towards problems that suggests, as do the metaphors, that problems are tolerable and fixable. First, relationship guides are generally referred to as *guides* or *programs* (four of the books use the word *guide* in the sub-title, while others use *guide, manual*, or *program* in their descriptions of their books).

Here is a *manual*, a user’s *guide*, for one of life’s great adventures. (Markman p. xi, foreword by Dean Edell)

As with the journey metaphor, the notion of a *guide* provides reassurance and comfort that the reader (traveler) is in good hands, and that the terrain is passable. *Program*
implies something simple and straightforward, especially when reinforced with words like **practical, clear** and **solid**.

The next group of words has to do with **effectiveness**. All of the authors promise **results**, and assert the **effectiveness** of their programs. Authors may refer to **research** to support the validity of their views, but authors who don’t have any supporting research for their perspective still claim that their programs are **proven** or **definitive**. There is no hesitation in asserting that there are answers to the problems that plague relationships.

The results of these **studies**, not my own **opinions**, form the basis of my Seven **Principles** for making marriage **work**. These **principles**, in turn, are the cornerstones of a remarkably **effective** short-term therapy for couples that I have developed. (Gottman, p 8)

You will want to read Part 4 over and over and over. That’s because it is full of **success** stories of people who feel as you do about the importance of making marriages work, people who used my **proven** seven-step **program** and managed to make their relationships more loving than ever. (Weiner-Davis, p. 45).  

**Steps**, generally packaged in numbers ranging from three to ten are common ways of organizing information or referring to **skills** (the word **step** is found in three of the sub-titles). Other popular words are **techniques**, **tools**, and **principles**. **Skills**, however they are labeled, are likely to be described as **simple, straightforward**, or **practical**, implying that anyone can learn and apply them.

A few **simple principles**, thoroughly understood and regularly **practiced**, can turn failing relationships around, and send already thriving relationships into the stratosphere. They are essential **skills** for **friendship**, for **intimacy**, for parenting. (Page, p. 117)

Let’s begin with the first **step**, mirroring, which is a **straightforward** communication **technique** commonly used in couples therapy. (Hendrix, p. 143)

When the **skills** screen is activated, marriage problems become minor obstacles that can be easily fixed with a little practical advice. This word cluster is particularly compatible with the building metaphor, which suggests that there is a logical method to putting together a good relationship that, like carpentry, can be learned. With the right **skills** and **tools**, one can **build** a great relationship and/or **repair** a damaged one.

The final group of words in this cluster has to do with **practice**. Although authors assert the simplicity of their programs, they also encourage readers to **work** hard, often
by engaging in the **exercises** provided. While building or fixing relationships may be a straightforward and simple process, it requires dedication. Like physical exercise, the **exercises** provided by the authors need to be practiced regularly to become effective.

You must **work** hard to ensure that your perceptions of yourself and your partner are on the mark.... These are new **skills** that you are learning, and like any new **skills** you learn, you can master them only through **practice**. And I mean you have to **practice** them often. (McGraw, p. 212).

The skills screen keeps readers focused on the ‘fixable’ aspects of relationships, and diverts attention from the issues, like class and gender problems, that are not so easily fixed. The focus is on **doing** rather than understanding. This has the effect of making marriage seem simpler than it is; any two people (and for most authors, any one person) who learn the skills can make a marriage work, regardless of whatever external factors are at play. The net effect of this screen is to place the responsibility for the success of marriage on the readers, for if they study and practice, they will have the skills required for a good marriage; hence if their marriage is not good it is because they have not studied and practiced properly. No blame can be placed on the author, or any other people or social forces. The **skills/tools** are right there, waiting to be learned and put into **practice**. Thus, it behooves the reader to be the sort of person who will do as instructed, as discussed in the next section.

**Self Cluster**

Given that relationship guides are a subset of the self-help genre, it would seem important to know something about how authors conceive of the self. When I asked my readers what they remembered from relationship guides many mentioned ‘self’ words (such as self-esteem and self-care), although their memory was not so good that they could reliably distinguish between relationship guides and other self-help books. None of the authors directly address what **self** is, but there are many hints to be found in the way the term is used, and the words that cluster with it. Of note is that the **self** cluster overlaps significantly with the **truth** cluster, as discussed above. The implication is that not only is there a right way to **do** things, there is a right way to **think** and to **be**.

The notion of a **true self** implies a unified self that is consistent across time and situations, although there is also the somewhat contradictory message that this **self** can,
and indeed should be modified. The notion of strengthening the self (pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps) is in keeping with the American individualist ideal, and the neo-liberal view that peoples’ preferences are “simply a given and not the subject of social control or manipulation by others” (Hamilton, 2003/2004, p. 64.) The ‘right’ way to be, from a neo-liberal perspective, is the type of person who functions well in a capitalist society—as Cloud (1998, p. 15) says, the “autonomous, knowledgeable social agent” who believes in “individual choice” and “individual responsibility for one’s own well-being.”

This version of self can be dialectically opposed with society. Unlike the structuralist view, which sees people as constituted by the societies and structures they are exposed to (Chandler 2002, p. 181), the neo-liberal view denies the influence of society on the self. This perspective invites readers to position themselves as equal to everyone else in the quest for a good marriage. Such variables as gender, class, and culture are rendered irrelevant, as we focus on the necessity of the true self to be honest and real in order to find happiness in marriage. Thus there is society and there is self; and a good marriage is up to the self, and has little or nothing to do with society.

In terms of the kind of self required for a good marriage, the relevant word cluster includes words pertaining to strength and power.

If I have inner strength and I trust myself, then proving my worth to others will be unnecessary. I will not need to base my worth on outdoing or dominating others. If I know and love myself, I don’t have to fear losing control. I trust that I will not betray myself, so I can relax. I can let myself be completely open. If I know and accept myself, then I love myself too much to give myself over to you completely. My self-respect won’t allow it to happen. I can be devoted to you and still maintain my integrity. I can take care of myself. (Page, p. 157)

It is the strong, powerful person who has what it takes, and by implication, the weak and powerless person who does not. The person who achieves a good marriage has self-respect, self-confidence, and self-control, while the person who struggles suffers from self-doubt and self-neglect. Strength words are more typically seen as male than female qualities (more on that in the next chapter), but in this context authors are referring to self (or inner) strength and power (as in self-empowerment), and not to strength and power in relation to other people.
To know more about what authors mean by strength it is helpful to look at the dialectical oppositions. These involve a variety of emotion words, including pain, shame, anger, and guilt. Emotions are more typically associated with women, and the message here is that women should be strong (like men) in warding off these nasty feelings. The implication is that to succumb to these emotions is to be weak, although authors are more likely to use words like lost, inadequate, and confused. Although readers are encouraged to be honest and to know themselves, if what they “know” has anything to do with these negative emotions, this apparently is not something they should be honest about. A strong self is a contained self—in keeping with the neo-liberal view it is not affected by its surroundings, and, contrary to the weak self, has only positive effects on its environment.

To be a strong self requires courage and dignity:

The tone of my voice alone would make me cringe with self-recrimination. Through surrendering, you will find the courage to gradually stop indulging in these unpleasant behaviors and replace them with dignified ones. (Doyle, p. 15)

**Courage** is what is required to look inside oneself, and to acknowledge one’s bad qualities, and **dignity** is what should replace those bad qualities. As with **strength**, this use of **courage** is different from the way it is typically used when referring to men. Men are more likely to be seen as acting courageously when they are acting upon the world (firefighters and police officers, for instance), whereas **courage** is what women need to look within and then to present a different persona to the world. This sort of courage is similar to the type of courage we ascribe to medical patients undergoing onerous conditions or treatments. No matter how unpleasant the illness (marriage) or the antidote (the author’s advice) patients are admired for being strong and courageous.

Just as the courageous patient does not complain about her suffering, neither does the courageous spouse. She acts with dignity, which could be seen as the female counterpart of the strong and silent male image that is a part of the masculine stereotype in Western cultures. Readers who act with dignity do not let those around them see that they are ruffled or upset; they do not ‘indulge in unpleasant behaviors’ (Doyle, p. 15). To be dignified is to be in control of one’s emotions, to have one’s behavior not be affected
by either one’s internal or external environment. It is to accept one’s unfortunate position in life and to make it non-problematic for others.23

In the same way that strength and courage are qualities of a good patient, they are also desirable qualities for those undertaking journeys, particularly journeys with unpredictable routes and destinations. A good traveler doesn’t complain about the hard road ahead, she keeps her doubts to herself and shows her confidence and maturity. If she stumbles she picks herself up and dusts herself off with dignity. Whether as a good patient or a good traveler (or a good wife), the reader is invited to position herself as an unproblematic companion, strong enough to handle whatever obstacles arise without inconveniencing anyone.

If the reader is not the kind of self needed for a good marriage, authors offer both consolation and encouragement. Consolation comes in the form of explanations about how the reader may have suffered as a result of childhood problems, and encouragement involves advice about how to care for the damage or wounds the person has suffered. While I have said that the general view of the self is the neo-liberal view of a self-contained, pre-configured individual, authors do make allowances for some influences on self-development, although for the most part the only influences acknowledged are parental ones. By allowing for various forms of wounding and damage to the self, authors leave some room for improvement. If an individual has been wounded, then she must be healed, and once healed will be able to function at a higher capacity.

We all started out life whole and vital, eager for life’s adventures, but we all had a perilous pilgrimage through childhood. In fact, some wounding took place in the first few months of our lives. (Hendrix, p. 19)

Discussions of damage and wounding position the reader as one who needs help, but this help comes in the form of advice to help oneself, as seen in the cluster of words to do with self-care and self-acceptance. This places the reader in the somewhat inferior position of not having figured out how to look after herself. People who do not look after themselves properly are portrayed as unpleasant people to be around, and are encouraged to see themselves as deserving and worthy of self-care, self-love, etc.

23 A google search for “dignity” resulted in a majority of hits (at least on the first few pages, as there were millions of hits) describing services for underprivileged or marginalized people, including the poor, the elderly, and non-heterosexuals.
If you don’t know all these parts of yourself, you can’t love your whole self. (Page, p. 156)

There is no rationale given as to what might make a person worthy of self-care; it appears to be a given, and can be seen as a form of flattery (perhaps to compensate for the ‘inferiority’ of not knowing how to care for the self). Advertisers sometimes use the same tactic (e.g., McDonald’s restaurant slogan ‘You deserve a break today’) in aid of inducing people to buy their product.

When you take the time to listen to your feelings you are in effect saying to the little feeling person inside ‘You matter. You deserve to be heard and I care enough to listen.’ (Gray, p. 244)

Telling readers they are deserving of self-care may incline them more towards the author’s point of view, and influence them to believe the author really cares about them. And if the author cares, the reader should care too. There is generally no discussion in the texts of obstacles to self-care (which might include lack of money, time, and support from others); readers are simply told they must do what it takes to look after themselves. If they do not, they are to blame for not only their own unhappiness, but their spouses’ as well.

Table 8 lists major terms used to describe the self, followed by the oppositions that are most used and/or implied. The third column lists dialectical terms that authors do not use, but that, if used, would focus attention in a different direction.

**Table 8: Dialectical Terms for the Self Cluster**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Terms (used by authors)</th>
<th>Oppositions (used by authors)</th>
<th>Possible Oppositions (not used by authors)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
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<td>Courageous</td>
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<td>Dignified</td>
<td>Shameful (emotional)</td>
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<td>Self-care</td>
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<td>Social support</td>
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<td>True self</td>
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<td>Feeling self</td>
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Burke (1945/1969, cf. pp. 33-35) noted the importance of assessing the dialectical terms used by authors for abstract terms, and of exploring whether other dialectical terms might alter the focus of the argument. For instance, when courageous is contrasted with weak, it takes on a more positive meaning than when contrasted with cautious (or other terms such as prudent or careful). When self-care is opposed with self-neglect, issues of 'social-care' are left out of the argument.

Although I have included weak as an opposition for only the first two words in Table 8, it can be seen as a synonym for the other oppositions used by authors as well, particularly for emotions, as emotional displays are often considered displays of weakness. Similarly, the neglected self will be a weak one, and a false or wrong position or opinion will be weak. With weakness as the alternative, the authors flatter readers into believing that if they do as instructed they will belong to the group of strong, courageous and dignified people who succeed—a group which includes the authors.

As with the metaphors, the terministic screens are mainly an appeal to pathos. This is particularly true of the truth, spirituality and self clusters, which like most of the metaphors, ignite fears of the consequences of not being competent in these subjects, then entice readers with descriptions of the rewards of competency. Like the technical metaphors, the skills cluster contains elements of an appeal to logos, with an emphasis on practicality, and references to programs, steps, or research. For the main part, though, readers are targeted at an emotional level, and the shame implied by not conducting the self appropriately is one of the emotions mentioned by Aristotle (2007) as a common component of the pathetic appeal of an argument. Readers are invited to identify themselves as strong, courageous individuals, to position themselves alongside the authors as possessing a self capable of creating and sustaining a desirable marriage.

Failure

Relationship Guides are a rhetorical response to a situation of failure. David Payne (1989) suggests that “any failure must be therapeutically treated rhetorically by (1) providing a definition of the failure, (2) assigning fault or blame for the failure, and (3) pointing to options for repairing the failure” (p. 53). The ultimate failure is divorce, and anything that might contribute to dissolution of the marriage is at least a minor failure.
The definition of the failure is seldom explicitly stated; it is a sort of enthymeme—in other words, it is taken as a given that relationship break-up and/or distress is a situation of failure. The nature of the failure is referred to metaphorically with terms such as sick, weak, damaged, dying, gridlock, drought and spiraling downward.

The assignation of blame for the failure is a bit tricky. Authors do not point fingers directly at the reader, for obviously they do not want to alienate the reader, yet they have much to gain by convincing the reader to assume responsibility (the genre would die if they were unable to do so). The self cluster provides the most information for how blame is assigned, suggesting that it is ultimately the weak self who is at fault. As I mentioned, though, authors offer consolation for the weak self, proposing that the roots of weakness are to be found in childhood experiences. Payne (1989) asserts that consolation and compensation are the primary rhetorical responses to failure, and suggests that they involve three dialectical arguments, which he calls the topoi of failure. These are self-society, past-future, and spiritual-material, and I will look at how the terms and tropes of relationships guides fit into these topoi.

"Consolation involves dissociating the individual from the loss, emphasizing other persons, past successes, and spiritual gains or substitutes for the material loss....Compensation emphasizes individual involvement, future possibilities for change or repair, and material gain" (Payne, 1989, p. 45). As one would expect in advice books the emphasis is on compensation, but the authors must make some attempt at defining the source of the loss, and involving forces other than the individual reader. Although the metaphors and clusters discussed in this chapter certainly hint at what the reader must do to compensate for her failures, the clusters described in the next chapter are even more specifically focused on compensation. It is the tropes and terms of the current chapter that provide clues to the management of consolation.

Consolation is ultimately a spiritual endeavor, according to Payne (p. 45) and undoubtedly the spiritual element of these books offers comfort to many readers. Readers are reminded that some things are out of their hands, and that miraculous and magical things can happen, if they keep the faith. The truth cluster, to some extent,

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24 Based on Aristotle's use of the word to refer to "places to look for arguments" (cf. Darsey, 2004).
amplifies the spiritual one, assuring readers that there is truth, and that their troubles have arisen from not having access to this truth. The truth cluster also lays blame for marital problems on those who disseminate false ideas about marriage, including other authors and therapists. These tactics console the reader by focusing on societal contributions to their problems.\footnote{References to societal contributions are limited to attacks on the institution of marriage, and never include any suggestion that there is anything wrong with the institution itself.}

Another allusion to the societal sources of individual problems is found in the self cluster, where authors suggest that individuals may have been wounded by parents who may themselves have been deficient at relationships. This notion also involves the past, offering consolation by putting the source of the problem at a different time and place. Similarly, it is implied that readers have not had the opportunity to learn the proper skills for marriage, for they have not been exposed to the right guide or teacher.

The self-society topos is the most important to the task of reconciling people to their marital situations. Adaptation to society requires that individuals internalize social definitions and actualize them in self-change as part of the ongoing construction and management of reality. Managing social reality entails dealing through language with the moments where the dialectic does not work perfectly to align self and society. These are conditions that lead to feelings and interpretations of failure. (Payne, 1989, p. 22)

When individuals are unhappy in marriage – especially if they are unhappy enough to consider dissolving the union – they have failed at reconciling the self-society dialectic,\footnote{This failure will produce what Burke calls a state of guilt, which is discussed in the next chapter.} and this failure must be put right. An individual at this point is faced with the problem of allocating blame to society or to the self. While the self-help genre places the blame for such failures on the individual, it does allow for some influence from outside the individual, including the social, the historical, and the spiritual. Thus the reader is consoled and encouraged to compensate, which is seen more clearly in the next set of word clusters, to do with future possibilities, individual involvement, and material gain.
Chapter 6: The Good Wife

While the clusters of the previous chapter defined the ways in which failure could occur in relationships, the clusters which are the focus of this chapter offer the solutions (or the compensation, as Payne, 1989, would say). Each cluster discussed here more or less addresses one of the previous clusters: the imperfect self is corrected through instruction in gender; a lack of skills is countered with communication; for encouragement in spirituality there is acceptance; and for those unaware of the truth about marriage, there are instructions in intimacy. I begin with gender as it provides a terministic screen through which the other clusters are filtered.

Terministic Screens

Gender Terms

The analysis of gender terms differed slightly from the analysis of word clusters as I was simply looking for places where authors described men and women (see Appendix 6 for a list of terms, and Appendix 7 for examples of how they are used in the texts). These descriptions were usually not part of explicit arguments; for the most part they accompanied case examples. However, I also made note of places where authors did explicitly address gender issues, as well as any self-disclosures that reflected ideas about gender.

In their explicit arguments about gender, authors can be placed on a continuum from acceptance and/or amplification of stereotypical gender differences (mainly the non-academic authors) to some questioning of gender roles, and, occasionally, suggestions for challenging them (from academic authors). This range in the treatment of gender issues might lead one to believe that relationship guides vary widely in their advice. However, differences between authors’ explicit viewpoints may be overshadowed by implicit viewpoints. As can be seen in Table 9, although the academic authors use fewer stereotypical gender terms than non-academic authors, they all use them.

The over-riding theme in the language used to describe women and men is that women belong in the home, and men in the workplace. An essential part of being a good homemaker is caring for children, which is clearly seen as a priority for women, but not
for men. Men are expected to provide financially for the family, and are typically described as hardworking, smart, and successful.

When their daughter Alice was born, Maggie decided to give up her job as a computer scientist to stay home with the baby. (Gottman, p. 49)

George was the breadwinner in the family, while Ellen was a stay-at-home mom. He worked hard to support his wife and four children and she was a very devoted mother. (Weiner-Davis, p. 83)

Table 9: Gender Words

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Although women were often described as having jobs or careers, these were almost always less prestigious jobs than their partner’s and/or secondary to the women’s home interests.

In her study of prototypical perceptions of femininity and masculinity, Visser (2002) found the most consistent notion of masculinity involved independence, particularly as related to career and status, which fits well with the descriptions I
catalogued. For women the most marked aspect of the prototype was a concern with outward appearance, which I found to be secondary to the homemaker aspect, but nevertheless a strong component. Appearance includes not only physical beauty, but also a loving and happy demeanor.

NO MATTER WHAT YOU’RE FEELING TODAY, only show him happiness and contentment. Show him someone he will want to return to. (Weiner-Davis, p. 136, emphasis in original)

Marla, a woman in her late twenties [had] regular, pleasing features. She was wearing little makeup, and her naturally blond hair was held back from her face in a loose ponytail. (Hendrix, p. 176)

References to men’s appearance were rare, and generally implied strength:

He was tall and slender, and he was wearing a corduroy jacket. Anne remembers thinking that he looked “rugged yet neat.” She also thought he had a presence about him, an aura of self-confidence and intelligence. (Hendrix, pp. 210-211).

Stephanie noticed that his physical stature and crossed arms commanded respect. (Doyle, p. 170)

Men are good as long as they are hardworking and successful in their chosen field; if they choose to be husbands and/or fathers this is secondary to their main purpose. But a woman cannot be a good woman without having the characteristics of a good wife and mother, and, it appears, these two terms are not highly differentiated; in fact they seem to overlap completely with the exception of the attachment of sexual interest to the wife role. In other words what makes a woman a good mother—taking care of the home, being happy, loving, nurturing—is also what makes her a good wife, as long as she is also attractive (physically, sexually) to her husband.

Sex is not the focus of any of the relationship guides I examined, although most either alluded to sex or discussed it in some detail. References to sex tend to laud women who make themselves ‘available’ to their husbands, and condemn women who reject their husband’s advances.

Then, when Carol rejected his physical advances, he hit a low point. He started questioning his manhood. (Weiner-Davis, p. 173)
Several authors coax their readers to have sex, implying (sometimes asserting) that it is women’s duty to satisfy their partners sexually.

Your marriage contract includes an agreement to have a mutually exclusive sexual relationship, and you owe it to your marriage to manifest your intimacy physically and to keep your end of the bargain.

Make yourself available for sex at least once a week whether you feel like it or not. (Doyle, p. 206)

My interpretation of her excuse for not being a loving, available partner was that she interpreted intimacy and sexuality as demands on her (instead of an opportunity for pleasure and bonding).... I told her that these issues were standard feminist propaganda, that her husband was not tuned in to any of that, and that she’d better not mess up her relationship with them. (Schlessinger, pp. 193-194)

Women who don’t do their duty are portrayed in negative terms, such as cold, frigid, and rejecting.

The depressed, frigid wife would have to recover her energy and sensuality. The reluctant lover would have to lower his barriers to intimacy. (Hendrix, p. 162)

There are no corresponding negative words for men in terms of sexuality. In the Hendrix quotation above the woman is “depressed, frigid” while the man is “reluctant.” This use of asymmetrical terms for parallel concepts divides responsibility for the problem unevenly. Women’s responsibility is further emphasized when we are warned that men who are rejected sexually may not feel like real men, suggesting that women need to look after men’s needs and wants (although sex is not specifically referred to as a ‘need’ for men, this is certainly implied). The vocabulary used in these limited discussions of sex tends to correspond with that used in more extensive treatments, such as Gray’s Mars and Venus in the Bedroom (Potts, 1998).

When men are portrayed in terms of their work and abilities, while women are described in ways pertaining to their physical attributes and homemaking abilities, the standard division of labor is normalized. The descriptions of women found in these relationship guides flatter women who ‘do it all,’ holding up an implausible if not impossible standard for readers to measure themselves against. As long as husbands bring home a good paycheck, women are expected to take on the rest. When these gender differences are seen as natural, normal, and even God-given, there is clearly no recourse.
God didn’t design us to be the same; he designed us to be different. He made us different because we have different jobs in this world, and yet we criticize each other for being who we are. (McGraw, p. 261)

Attention is deflected from any sense of unfairness in carrying more than half of the workload, as well as from issues of power that arise when economic resources are distributed unequally. Readers instead are encouraged to focus on the satisfaction that comes from making others feel good.

The descriptions of women can be quite compelling, especially when authors offer portrayals of their own mothers and wives. When Weiner Davis thanks her mother for giving her the “rare gift of unconditional love” (p. 5), or McGraw describes his wife as having “class” and thanks her for making him a “success,” there is an implicit message to readers that to be the kind of woman who is admired they need to adhere to the ‘traditional’ gender roles. This message is strongly reinforced by the negative terms used for women who don’t conform; terms such as critical, nagging, controlling, and bitchy.

No one likes to feel nagged or unappreciated. No one likes to be constantly criticized. If you don’t appreciate your spouse, someone else will. (Weiner-Davis, p. 201)

Because these terms tend to cluster (and not just in relationship guides), use of any of them can imply the dreaded ‘b’ word. Thus even though an author may use only some of the ‘milder’ terms, such as critical or controlling, the other terms are implied.

It is important to note that when authors use these terms they are not necessarily explicitly addressing a female audience. Authors may appear to be writing to whomever is reading, and although men may be less likely to read relationship guides, they do sometimes pick them up. However, there is little chance that a man would see himself in these descriptions, mainly because in the case examples such behavior is almost always displayed by women. In addition, any of these words that could be applied to men (e.g., critical or controlling) simply do not have connotations that are as severely negative as when they are applied to women.28

27 Her father she thanks for “teaching me the importance of achievement and success.”
28 There is a trend among younger people to apply traditionally female labels such as ‘bitch’ or ‘whore’ to men. I have not come across any academic literature on this trend, but it is my perception that these labels are worn differently by men, sometimes even proudly.
While there were many positive words in the relationship guides for describing men and their behavior, there were no clearly negative words. At worst men were described as engaging in behavior or activities that women might not like, including withdrawing (or going to ‘the cave’) and watching too much t.v. or drinking too much alcohol.

Harry, for his part, was withdrawn and defensive. (Lerner, p. 143)

Bernard was withdrawn. (Hendrix, p. 71)

When they did have time together, they’d frequently run into difficulties because Simon wanted to watch a lot of sports on TV and Rachel was very upset about this. (Markman, p. 139)

The authors, however, did not tend to sanction men for such behavior; certainly not in the same way that women were sanctioned for being critical (e.g., of men’s behavior) or nagging. When it comes to men’s undesirable activities we are reminded that different gender behaviors are natural and normal (and even necessary). Women’s undesirable behavior, however, is unacceptable, and potentially lethal to marriage.

Despite authors’ attempts to portray the genders as ‘different but equal’ by emphasizing the importance of the contributions to marriage and family made by both men and women there is a clear androcentric bias in these relationship guides. For instance, what women need protection from is never really made clear in these books. In reality, women mostly need protection from men, but rather than expecting men to help change this circumstance, women are advised to align themselves with ‘good men’ (who, I assume, will protect them from ‘bad men’). Doyle actually uses the term “good guys,” making explicit what most authors only hint at. ’Good guys’ are those who don’t abuse alcohol or their wives, or sleep around; and even men who do these things may be good guys reacting to bad wives. Doyle repeatedly tells women that if husbands are misbehaving their wives are likely to blame, generally because they are being too controlling.

Women, on the other hand, have far less freedom in their behaviors. Although they are expected to perform a much wider range of functions (including the ‘male’ one of working outside the home, as well as homemaking and childcare) they have less
latitude regarding how they do their duties. When men withdraw or retreat to their 'caves' or go drinking with their buddies, it is women who must pick up the slack, and do so with a smile. Women’s schedules are subordinate to men’s for it is men who perform the more important functions.29 In the following passage Weiner Davis is discussing her list of times for not approaching her husband with a request (there is no corresponding list of times she is not available):

As you read what I’ve just written, you’re probably thinking that Jim has a very long list of times that he is unapproachable. I’d have to agree. But there are lots of other times when he is more receptive: on weekends before the kids wake up, over dinner when we go out together, on his car phone when he is returning from work. (p. 91)

All of this seems to lead to the conclusion that women need men – and marriage – more than men need women. Women are often warned of the dire consequences of divorce – financially, emotionally, and of course, on the children (which has already been established as women’s responsibility).30 Weiner Davis, with her “divorce busting” program is the most blatant in encouraging her readers to do whatever they must to avoid divorce, but other authors also stress that women must behave well in order not to lose their husbands. They must not be controlling, nagging, bitches, but rather should be attractive, happy, and sexually desirable. As discussed in the previous chapter, women must make sure they take proper care of themselves so they can take proper care of their families.

Although the overwhelming message in this genre is that women need men, I found myself wondering, as I read through the various descriptions of men, why a woman would possibly want one in her life. As with portrayals of men on popular sitcoms, the picture I got from most of these books is that men are bumbling fools. From spending

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29 The distinction between productive and reproductive labor is relevant here. Since the industrial revolution, men have been the primary workers in the productive realm of paid work, while women’s reproductive work (childbearing, childrearing, housekeeping, and other duties that make it possible for men to do paid work) has been devalued (Gray, M. 2000; Waring, 1999). As Giminez (2005) asserts, reproduction is always subordinate to production in a capitalist society, whose values include property ownership and individual responsibility, because these values determine how reproduction is done.

30 Rice (2005) reports that widely cited research about the damage done to children in divorce is “seriously flawed.” Newer, more thorough research shows the vast majority of children whose parents divorce go on to function well within the normal range of adjustment. What is more important to children’s functioning is the degree to which they are exposed to parental conflict – whether the parents are together or apart.
their time watching tasteless television to not knowing how to clean a toilet or feed a child, to withdrawing or being unavailable to their wives and families, they are not painted as a particularly attractive lot. Phil McGraw, who is likely the most well-known self-help author of the day describes men – including himself for most of his married life – as being basically clueless about relationships, and tells women not to expect too much. In their study of articles on relationship issues in popular magazines, Duran and Prusank (1997) found that both men’s and women’s magazines generally portrayed men in some deficient light. The women’s magazines tended to be more sympathetic to men’s deficiencies, and promoted “the notion that such problems could be solved if women attend to them appropriately” (p. 178). The women I interviewed certainly seemed to buy the notion that not a lot could be expected from men when it comes to relationships.

This is one of the contradictions inherent in relationship discourse. Women are supposed to want relationships with men, yet men seem to have little to offer relationships. Researchers disagree on the health benefits marriage confers on women, yet there is a strong consensus that it provides clear health advantages for men (Cancian, 1987; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993; Whitson & El-Sheikh, 2003). Married men make more money and engage in less risky behavior than unmarried men, and are more likely to receive medical attention for health problems. They also tend to maintain better connections with their family members. In the same way that they mother their children, women mother their husbands, looking out for them, encouraging them in healthy behaviors and relationships. So why is it that women are the ones working so hard at keeping relationships together?

What women gain from marriage may not necessarily be anything specific to the relationship; in many cases it is the status and security that comes with the title ‘Mrs.’ Married women are generally better off financially than single women (Waite & Gallagher, 2000) and some of the books warn that divorce will result in a decline in one’s standard of living. When mentioned in relationship guides, divorce is almost always portrayed as a very serious problem, to be avoided if at all possible. None of the books address the complexities of divorce or its relationship to changing expectations of marriage.
Because relationships have been defined as the domain of women—one of the natural gender differences—when relationships fail it is because women have failed. McGraw states that men and women were made differently because they have different jobs to do, and these books reinforce the notion that in order for men to do their job properly, women must first do theirs. If they nag and bitch, men will withdraw. If they are happy, loving caretakers, their men will succeed, and this will reflect on the women. As Barbara Risman says, “once a person is labeled a member of a sex category, she or he is morally accountable for behaving as persons in that category do” (1998, pp. 22-23). One of the behaviors of the female category involves seeking out information to enhance relationships, as evidenced in my readers’ felt responsibility to be ‘in the loop’ regarding relationship advice.

As I have indicated, being a member of the woman category entails behaving as a good wife. The language of relationship guides creates a gender lens that highlights the appealing features of wifedom, and deflects attention from the problems created by a system that privileges male desires over female. Bem (1993) describes three gender lenses: essentialism, androcentrism, and gender polarization, and they all apply to relationship guides. The use of words like natural and normal gender differences suggest that differences described by authors have always existed and will always exist, as they are either biological or God-given in nature (in either case, essential). And of course there are differences between men and women, but what we make of those differences and how they influence our lives depends to a large extent on how we frame them. Seen through the lens of gender polarization differences are large rather than small, and significant in terms of how they affect all areas of life. When men are strong, smart, and hardworking then they are suited to different tasks than women who are beautiful, loving, and nurturing. The use of the words opposite sex also reinforce this polarization. As noted in chapter two, romance novels also employ gender polarization.

From the perspective of the androcentric lens not only are males more valuable than females, there is also an implicit notion that the male perspective is the norm. In order for this lens to be recognized we need to contrast the terms found in the self cluster with those used to describe men and women (see tables 7 and 9). As discussed in the previous chapter a good self is a strong self, yet this word never appeared in any of the
relationships of women that I catalogued. Discussions of self were generally written in a
gender-neutral way, although flattering descriptions used more male terminology. Good
selves are real, true, strong, courageous selves, terms that fit more closely with those
used to describe men. Selves that do not fit these descriptions are wounded and in need
of self-care and healing. It is the deficient self, the one who doesn’t think she is worthy
who needs this advice. This fits with comments made by readers about the importance of
self-esteem and self-care as prerequisites to a good relationship.

In 1972 Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz found that
psychotherapists listed the same characteristics for a healthy adult, sex unspecified, as
they did for a healthy man, but not for a healthy woman. The terms applied to women,
men, and adults in these relationship guides suggest the same phenomenon, putting the
readers of these texts in a bind, as to be a healthy woman is to be an unhealthy person,
and vice versa. The price of being a healthy person may simply be too high for many
women, and in fact it may be impossible in some settings, for to display the
characteristics of a healthy adult (male characteristics) can bring derision, which does not
foster a climate in which health can flourish.

In the sixties and seventies the self-help section included books written by
feminists (e.g., Friedan, 1963/1970; Jongeward, 1976; Phelps & Austin, 1975) that
encouraged women to shed stereotypical female behavior and pursue more ‘male’
activities. In keeping with the spirit of the feminist backlash (Faludi, 1991) today’s
relationship guides tend to disparage feminism, whether boldly, as in the case of
Schlessinger who blames feminism for most of the world’s problems, or more
surreptitiously, as in the case of McGraw and Gottman who want to assure readers that
when they say something men may not like to hear that it is not ‘feminist rhetoric.’

This book is not some feminist-mentality witch hunt designed to give her
ammunition to fry your ass and blame you for what isn’t working in this
relationship. (McGraw, p. 298, italics added)

“Wearing the pants” was once the norm for a husband, but times have changed.
Maybe all of this sounds like a feminist line, but it’s also the reality.
(Gottman, p. 110, italics added)
Even Lerner, generally regarded as a feminist writer, seems to avoid the term. Feminism has become a dirty word, one that would seem to fit with the negative words applied to descriptions of women, including **controlling** and **bitchy**. If feminism has failed women (as Rapping, 1996, suggested) then women find themselves in the position of needing other tactics to create fulfillment in their lives. If unhappy in their relationships they are urged to **accept** notions of ‘traditional’ femininity, which will bring them and their families the peace and **intimacy** they desire. **Acceptance** and **intimacy** are major terministic screens in relationship guides, and, along with **communication**, the final word clusters to be discussed. Table 10 lists the clusters used by each author, while lists of the related terms can be found in Appendix 8, and examples from the texts are quoted in Appendix 9.

**Acceptance**

**Acceptance** is, to use a term from Burke, a godterm (a summarizing title that reduces the complex to the apparently simple; 1945/1969, p. 105) in relationship guides. It is one of the terms that my readers were most likely to mention when I asked them what they had learned from the books. This term is highly gendered in relationship guides, not just because it is mainly women who read these books, but also because of the preponderance of negative words opposed with the term; negative words similar to those discussed in the section on gender. As can be seen in Table 10 the main opposition for **acceptance** is **critical**, followed by **controlling**, **rejecting**, **judging**, **blaming**, and **negative**. As was the case with negative words in the gender section, discussions involving these words tend to be written in either a gender-neutral way or with specific reference to women, but rarely to men.

Of all the word clusters, **acceptance** had by far the highest number of opposing terms, and from a Burkean perspective the meaning of the term within this genre is perhaps more easily understood by what it is not, than by what it is. The importance of the dialectical terms in defining this cluster can be seen in Table 11, which shows how attention is directed by the choice of particular opposing terms.

**Acceptance** seems to involve not commenting on any behavior in your partner that you do not like, for to do so is to be **blaming** and **rejecting**. There seem to be no common
Table 10: Word Clusters: Acceptance, Communication, and Intimacy

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Table 11: Dialectical Terms for the Oppositions of the Self Cluster

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<tr>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Receive</td>
<td>Abandon, let loose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Misjudge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame</td>
<td>Appreciate, forgive</td>
<td>Glorify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that the oppositions appear more negative when opposed with the terms used by the authors than when opposed with other possible terms.

terms for verbalizing discontent in a respectful manner. Although some of the academic authors attempt to put criticism into context their brief discussions get lost in the plethora of warnings about the dire consequences of such behavior. To criticize, control, or reject is to court the possibility that one’s partner will leave, and as discussed in the section on gender, when a marriage ‘fails’ it means a woman has failed.

if you are often critical, you may be pushing your spouse into the arms of another, more supportive person.... No one likes to feel nagged or unappreciated. No one likes to be constantly criticized. If you don’t appreciate your spouse, someone else will. (Weiner-Davis, p. 201)

In a myriad of ways she tries to change him or improve him. She thinks her attempts to change him are loving, but he feels controlled, manipulated, rejected, and unloved. He will stubbornly reject her because he feels she is rejecting him. When a woman tries to change a man, he is not getting the loving trust and acceptance he actually needs to change and grow. (Gray, p. 146)

None of us feels good about ourselves when we’re nagging, critical, or controlling. I certainly didn’t. The tone of my voice alone would make me cringe with self-recrimination. Through surrendering, you will find the courage to gradually stop indulging in these unpleasant behaviors and replace them with dignified ones. (Doyle, pp. 14-15).

There is no corresponding list of behaviors for men to avoid. Of course the admonishments to readers in general would seem to include men, but the pairing of critical, in case examples, with women’s behavior lets us know that this is not really a behavior we have to worry about with men. As mentioned in the section on gender, at
worst men will ‘go to the cave’ or drink and watch sports with their buddies. This behavior, however, is to be accepted, as a natural gender difference (or, as Schlessinger says, women must have a “patient sense of humor about guy stuff” p. 59). Criticizing and blaming, though, are not behaviors to be accepted or treated with patience; they need to eradicated, and quickly. By opposing these terms (criticize, control, reject, judge, blame) with acceptance, they get excluded from any conversation about what should and should not be accepted. By apposing these terms with negative, authors further emphasize their illegitimacy.

If women are doing most of the behavior that is opposite of acceptance, then it appears that they are the ones most in need of learning to accept. Just what is it that women need to accept? Differences.

Couples in relationships that are working well have learned to use their understanding of their similarities and differences to work as a team rather than as enemies. They’ve usually developed the capacity to connect on several dimensions of intimacy… (Markman, p. 40)

Through understanding the hidden differences of the opposite sex, we can more successfully give and receive the love that is in our hearts. By validating and accepting our differences, creative solutions can be discovered whereby we can succeed in getting what we want. And, more important, we can learn how to best love and support the people we care about. Love is magical, and it can last, if we remember our differences. (Gray, p. 14)

Men and women are different, we are told over and over again, and these differences are natural, normal, and need to be understood. Understanding in this context generally appears to be synonymous with accepting, as there are few reasoned, intelligent discussions of gender differences that might actually lead to increased knowledge and understanding of the complexities involved. Some authors (non-academic ones) actually disparage the notion of understanding anything at a deep level; McGraw for instance asserts that “analysis is paralysis” (p. 213) and insight is “mental masturbation” (p. 78).

I was taught that couples needed to understand the root cause of their problems before they could find solutions…. All of this introspection was fine and dandy, but the truth is, it rarely helped people solve their marital problems…. I learned
that insight doesn’t necessarily lead to change. Insight leads to insight. (Weiner-
Davis, p. 75) 31

All I ask is that you follow what I ask you to do. You don’t have to like it, you
don’t even have to understand it, you just have to do it day in and day out,
trusting that the results will come. (McGraw, p. 215)

By enumerating the differences many women have observed in their male
partners, and describing those differences as natural (or biological, or God-given,) most
authors feel they have done their job in assisting readers to understand. Although there
are exceptions (some of the academic authors occasionally question stereotypical gender
behavior) these tend to get lost in the sheer volume of exhortations to understand,
respect, and trust, all used synonymously with accept.

[Goodwill] includes a willingness to focus on positive qualities; an attitude of
gratitude; mutual tolerance and acceptance; respect; trust; and the ability to
give. (Page, p.35-36)

Respect is often apposed with honor, which could be seen as going a step past
acceptance to admiration.

So what does it mean to respect your partner? It means that you accept his
choices, big and small, even if you don’t agree with them. You honor his choice
of socks and stocks, food and friendships, art and attitudes. You listen to him and
have regard for his ideas, suggestions, family and work. That doesn’t mean you
have to make the same choices—just that you accept his. (Doyle, p. 35)

Fan the flames of respect, honor, and admiration on a conscious level and work
to be proud of your partner. (McGraw, p. 264)

Gottman is the only author to discuss respect in the context of power and gender:

It’s certainly just as important for wives to treat their husbands with honor and
respect. But my data indicate that the vast majority of wives—even in unstable
marriages—already do that. This doesn’t mean that they don’t get angry and even
contemptuous of their husbands. It just means that they let their husbands
influence their decision making by taking their opinions and feelings into account.
But too often men do not return the favor. (Gottman, p. 100)

References to power imbalances are almost non-existent however, within this genre, and
for the most part readers are urged to be grateful for what they have, and appreciate

31 Recent research suggests that Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy is actually more effective over the long
term than traditional Behavioral Couples Therapy (Lebow, 2006, p.85).
what their partners give. If they have difficulty with this, they are encouraged to pretend they are appreciative and grateful (to *act as if*) and promised this will make everyone, including themselves happier.

If you're not happy, try behaving as though you were—see how that lightens life up for you and your family. (Schlessinger, p. 176)

You do have to act like you have faith that your marriage will improve.... The more you act like you respect, trust and appreciate him, the more you’ll start to believe that he deserves that treatment, and the less you’ll worry about trying to run his life. (Doyle, pp. 136-137, italics in original)

Far from its etymology of ‘looking again’ or ‘looking at’ (Skeat, 1980, p. 445), used this way respect seems to imply a kind of blindness. This perspective is strengthened when we remember the list of oppositions to acceptance words; there is to be no criticizing or judging, for this sort of bitchy behavior is unbecoming. A woman who doesn’t feel grateful must make herself act this way, for this is proper and attractive behavior in a woman, and the only option given to being critical or controlling. As discussed in the previous chapter, particularly regarding the journey metaphor and the self cluster, the behavior of one person (the reader) is all that is required to make or break the relationship. It doesn’t matter what the partner is doing, as long as the reader behaves as the best possible person she can be (within the specific parameters of ‘feminine’ behavior).

In addition to being respectful, readers are also urged to trust their partners. As I have noted, most authors suggest (and Doyle asserts) that men can be divided into ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ If the man is bad (addicted, abusive or adulterous), the reader should not be with him, and if he is good (not addicted, abusive or adulterous), he is worthy of trust. Doyle’s meanings for accept, respect and trust are all exemplified in the following passage:

When he takes the wrong freeway exit you don’t correct him by telling him where to turn.... if he keeps going in the wrong direction you will go past the state line and still not correct what he’s doing. In fact, no matter what your husband does, you will not try to teach, improve, or correct him. (Doyle, p. 35)

It is interesting that men, who, even by their own acknowledgment (in the case of Gray and McGraw), are incompetent when it comes to relational matters, are to be trusted so
completely in terms of the decisions they make. This is another contradiction in the discourse of relationship guides; women are instructed (sometimes explicitly, often implicitly) to take on responsibility for home, family, and relationship, yet are not to question decisions made by men in these areas.

**Trust**ing and **accept**ing mean **forgiving**, but also mean **receiving** which may be used for discussions of gifts, whether of physical objects, or time, or compliments.

Make a point of graciously receiving everything your husband offers you, whether it's help with the children, a necklace or a spontaneous shoulder massage. Accept your husband's thoughtfulness good-naturedly and recognize that receiving graciously is the ultimate act of giving up control.

Even if you're not sure you want the gift or think he can't afford it, receive it with open arms and good humor. Be on the lookout for gifts you might not have noticed before.

Make "receive, receive, receive" your mantra. (Doyle, p. 108)

Doyle is explicit that there are material as well as spiritual rewards for women who accept, citing, for instance, examples of surrendered wives whose husbands have subsequently become more financially successful.

**Communication**

**Communication** is an important cluster, not only because it is the only cluster of words I found that could be called a **skill** (despite the stress that most authors placed on the acquisition of skills), but also because it is one of the few terms mentioned by my readers when I asked them what they remembered as being important from reading relationship guides. As can be seen in Table 10 **skill** is one of the words that commonly appears with **communication**. Because of the overlap with the **skill** cluster, **communication** is connected with words like **practical**, **tools**, and **techniques**. Two authors (Gottman and McGraw) denigrate communication techniques, attempting to set themselves apart from the pack.

Perhaps the biggest **myth** of all is that **communication**—and more specifically, learning to resolve your conflicts—is the royal road to romance and an enduring, happy marriage. (Gottman, p. 8)

Oh, yes: **empathy**. The pabulum cure-all. Sounds logical, doesn’t it? Sounds pretty darn lofty and unselfish, right? The problem is, it’s a crock. (McGraw, p. 48)
Despite their disparagement, Gottman and Gray often fall back on discussions that reflect standard communication practices. All of the other authors discuss communication in a positive light, although the emphasis placed on the concept, and the pages devoted to it, vary widely. The subtitle of Gray’s book is *A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Relationships*, and he stresses communication throughout his book (although in a very different way than does Lerner, who also focuses on communication). Schlessinger and Page emphasize the importance of communication as follows:

**Communication** is the most important key to just about every interpersonal problem. (Schlessinger, p. 85)

98 percent of good communication is listening.... Listening means putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. It means trying to understand a different point of view before you try to make yourself understood. It means empathizing — that is, identifying with or vicariously experiencing — the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person. That’s all. It couldn’t be simpler. (Page, p. 120)

Directions on how to listen, understand and be empathic are directed at the reader; with the exception of Lerner there is no consideration of how to evaluate whether one is receiving good communication in return. Understand is also a major apposition of acceptance, where it had much to do with accepting gender differences. Within the relationship guides Doyle and Gray (whom Doyle credits with influencing her thinking) were the only ones to tackle this issue. Gray’s entire thesis is that men and women communicate differently because they are from different cultures (planets) and therefore need a ‘dictionary’ (which he provides) to understand each other. This has been termed the ‘cross-cultural differences model’ (DeFrancisco, 1997, p. 40) which asserts that any differences between men and women arise from misunderstandings due to their socialization in “different sociolinguistic cultures” (rather than having anything to do with social or economic status). The solution, of course, is for men and women to understand (accept) each other. Except that, as we have seen, understanding and accepting is women’s work, not men’s.

Although not all the authors so clearly promote a cross-cultural differences model as does Gray, the word clusters show a great deal of support for this position. The social
power model, which addresses the inequity to power and privileges between men and women, and would ask what benefits accrue, is not considered by any of the authors. Although Lerner and (possibly) Gottman might ascribe to the social power model if asked, the unqualified use of these word clusters seems likely to promote the idea that most problems can be solved by individuals who work to understand each other.

The major oppositions in the communication cluster are defensive, critical, judge and blame.

- Complain but don’t blame.
- Make statements that start with ‘I’ instead of ‘You’.... Phrases starting with I are usually less likely to be critical and to make the listener defensive...
- Describe what is happening, don’t evaluate or judge.
(Gottman, p. 164)

With the exception of defensive, these are words that apply more to women than to men (as discussed in the previous two sections), again suggesting that it is women who need to do the lion’s share of relationship work. Readers are told that if they listen hard enough, empathically enough, they will understand (and if they understand they will accept).

If they don’t it is because they are being critical, judging, or blaming, which is unbecoming. In these words it is hard to find any middle ground, where a person could disagree without being ‘bad.’ These oppositions direct attention to unattractive or unfeminine behavior, and keep readers from noticing that there can be legitimate and important reasons for disagreeing, and for asserting one’s opinions. Attention is also deflected from differences in power and resources, from noticing that men may ‘speak a different language’ because it brings them benefits. There is no recognition in this discourse of any need for social change, thus if the reader is unhappy with the status quo she needs to change her thinking or behavior. If she doesn’t she will risk not experiencing intimacy.

Intimacy

In the intimacy cluster are found the words that essentially define what a good marriage is, and why it is worth the work involved.

At the heart of my program is the simple truth that happy marriages are based on a deep friendship. By this I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each
other’s company. These couples tend to know each other *intimately*...
(Gottman, pp. 19-20)

Our human souls cry out for two things: We want a special *connection* with another human being, specifically, *intimacy, closeness*, and *unconditional love*. (Page, p. 200)

**Love, connection, romance, joy, and peace** are the rewards one can expect to reap when one does *marriage* properly. With the exception of terms to do with *sex*, these descriptions of a good marriage are weighted more towards women’s priorities (or what are supposed to be women’s priorities) than men’s. Two of the appositions that appear prominently in the intimacy cluster also appear in the gender section. The term *love*, which is generally synonymous with *intimacy*, shows up in descriptions of women as *loving* (which tends to mean nurturing and caring). The term *happy* is also one that is applied to women, but not men. In his descriptions of Martians and Venusians John Gray describes women as the ones who are interested in things like connecting and nurturing friendships, and making sure everyone is happy. Gottman describes “forgiveness, compassion, understanding, and love” as the “female qualities of God” (p. 113).

The oppositions in this cluster, although not explicitly more relevant to women, may have a stronger impact on women than men. The term *negative* clustered in the *acceptance* section with descriptions of bad behavior of women and suggests that the only alternative to being happily married is being the sort of woman who is unattractive (*negative, critical*, etc.). In addition, to be *alone* is more likely to be a problem for someone who is *loving* and *nurturing* (who would then have no-one to nurture) than for someone who is *strong* and *successful*.

A major task for partners in a close relationship, therefore, is to be able to handle these *negative* feelings constructively, without high levels of *conflict* or the *loneliness* of avoidance. (Markman, p. 47)

In the end, accept his position. Remember that your goal is to bring *intimacy* to your marriage and to get out of the *lonely* trap…. (Doyle, p. 246)

When Gray mentions “negative” emotions they appear to apply particularly to women, who are advised to deal with them on their own:

*If* we are to feel the *positive* feelings of *love*, happiness, *trust*, and *gratitude*, *we* periodically also have to feel *anger*, sadness, *fear*, and sorrow. When a *woman*
goes down into her well is when she can heal these negative emotions. (Gray, p. 130)

Some of the words in the intimacy cluster are used both to define intimacy, and to suggest methods of gaining intimacy.

This young woman wanted to feel loved, cherished, valued, and special. She wanted to be in a safe, loving, warm commitment. Yet, she did nothing to ensure that because none of that is the norm any longer. She wanted to feel supported by her community when the sanctity of her unsanctified relationship was broken. That support is not there. In other words, today’s societal norms do not provide for or create or support romance and a place for valued, safe, and truly intimate relations. (Schlessinger, p. 4, italics in original)

In the above passage an intimate relationship is a commitment. Commitment is an important word for many authors (Markman devotes two chapters to the topic) and can be used to discuss adherence to an author’s program as well as dedication to a marriage. Good people are committed people. There is no room for questioning whether people have been reasonably informed when they made commitments to life-long marriages. Nor do these books (with the possible exception of Lerner’s) assist people in evaluating the pros and cons of their commitments.

Readers who are committed are willing to make the marriage more important than other variables (such as personal satisfaction or ideals of fairness). Similarly, trust appears to involve keeping an eye on the long term goal of staying married, trusting that it will be worth it. The “rational indicators” for evaluating trust in the passage by Doyle below are the guidelines she gives for deciding whether one’s husband is one of the good guys.

It is not a pipe dream to believe that God has provided for you another person in this world whom you can trust with your most intimate and vulnerable secrets and needs. (McGraw, p. 21)

Those of us who have trouble trusting others when every rational indicator says that we are safe are reacting to our fear. (Doyle, p. 23)

Whereas in the acceptance cluster trust is used alongside giving, receiving, and forgiving (applicable to spouses), in the intimacy cluster trust correlates with being positive, and taking risks.
Megan will have to come to trust Johann again for both of them to relax in their relationship. Let's hope that her trust will not be misplaced. To trust again is a risk. Your partner could let you down again and there's no way to be sure that this won't happen. That's why they call it trust. (Markman, p. 226)

Readers are encouraged to make themselves vulnerable and to trust that the outcome will be good; that is, to focus on the positive. In the chapter where the above quotation from Markman appears, he gives several examples of one partner hurting the other, discusses the need for the offending partner to take responsibility, and acknowledges the possibility that a partner may be let down again. However, the examples all focus on positive outcomes, reinforcing the notion that it is safe and desirable to trust wholeheartedly.

Relationship guides assume a common definition and understanding of love, as well as intimacy and other related terms, as positive and unproblematic. Of the important terms in this cluster, intimacy and romance, in particular, are fraught with contradictions. “Romance as a discourse takes extramarital relations as its model. The discourse of intimacy, on the contrary, assumes a monogamous relationship as its paradigm” (Shumway, 2003, p. 144). Shumway is not the first to suggest that current conceptions of love are best viewed as discourses, or narratives, for they are complicated terms not easily defined.

Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life – a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of sublime love. The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance,' but this story now became individualized, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes. The rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the emergence of the novel: the connection was one of newly discovered narrative form. (Giddens, 1992, p. 40)

This may be one of the reasons why relationship guides rely heavily on case examples, and in a sense relationship guides can be seen as extensions of romance novels. Speaking of readers of romance novels Talbot (1997) says:

To be the vicarious recipient of the hero's attentions and experiencer of desire, she has to accept a feminine subject position congruent with that of the focalized character.... The feminine subject position offered may.... reinforce her perception of possible real relationships and her sense that her gendered identity is 'natural.' (p. 119)
While romance novels offer vicarious pleasure, women read relationship guides because they want to be the actual “recipient of the hero’s [husband’s] attentions” (note that hero is one of the words used by some of the relationship guide authors in describing men). The subject position is the same, and is subordinate to the more important position of the hero/husband. Women are weak and needy, but also desirable for what they can offer men, and this is the natural state of affairs.

Shumway says that the romantic narrative “assumes that there is a right man or woman out there for each person. It projects a life story that involves meeting that individual and living with him or her in marriage” (1999, p. 114). Love is seen as a powerful force which people cannot resist (Treacher, 1988, p. 83); pre-ordained, and part of the cosmic plan (Ingraham, 1999, p. 120; Shumway, 1999, p. 121). A crucial part of the narrative is the perception that each story is individual and different, so that a reader (and participant) can feel reassured that “her adoption of the conventional role...was the product of chance and choice, not of social coercion” (Radway, 1984, p. 17).

Romance novels typically end at the point that the marriage starts, with the assumption of ‘happily ever after.’ Whether a day, a month, a year, or a decade later, many women realize that nothing magical happened when the officials pronounced them wives; that in fact marriage to the man of their dreams has created more distress and work than happiness. When a woman has bought the romantic narrative she is not likely to ask the question: what is wrong with the institution of marriage? Having played the role of an individual making her own choices she can only ask: what is wrong with me? When, according to the narrative, she has met the man she is fated to be with, she can only blame herself when she is not happy with fate. And when she turns to relationship guides for help, she is met with the comforting language that pulled her into the romantic narrative in the first place, the language of intimacy and romance and love. She is reaffirmed in the notions of ‘true love’ and ‘ultimate destiny’ that were discussed in chapter 1.

The narrative of romance is a powerful and appealing one, promising, as it does, both excitement and happiness. Women are influential creatures in romance, as they are able to conquer the ‘natural’ resistance of men to committing to a relationship (Radway, 1984). R. Johnson (1983) says that “romance is not a love that is directed at another
human being; the passion of romance is always directed at our own projections, our own expectations, our own fantasies. In a very real sense, it is a love not of another person, but of ourselves” (p. 193). The ‘romantic’ woman is a woman in love with a projection of herself as powerful enough to overcome the difficulties inherent in male-female relationships. Although her power is limited to her ability to be loving, nurturing, and sexually appealing, she is assured this is all part of the natural order. This is what it means to be a wife, which is what most North American girls aspire to, dreaming from a very young age of the day they will show off to the world – the day of their wedding.

Geller (2001) points out how obsessed American girls and women are with the image of the bride (who becomes a princess when she ‘gets’ the prince), saying of Princess Diana and her big wedding gown that “in a century in which women have done pioneering research in the sciences, served on the United States Supreme Court, and walked in space... this pampered, giddy child bride remains our most popular and cherished icon” (p. 367).

Within relationship guides the basic premise of romantic love is never challenged. Yet romance may be inherently incompatible with intimacy, which is why romance narratives tend to end at the point where the marriage begins. Romance is about passion and adventure and had its origins outside of marriage. Shumway (2003) discusses two of the greatest love stories of American film (Casablanca and Gone with the Wind) and notes how both depict intense love relationships that end in separation. He suggests that the “positive evaluations of unhappy love stories suggest a covert awareness of the problems of romance that the culture in general ignores” (p. 113). People may identify with the implausibility of sustaining intense romantic passion throughout a long-term commitment.

Romance could be seen as a precursor to, or a stage in, intimate relationships, and some of the authors do tell readers that they can not expect to sustain the high levels of passion (which they may describe as hormonally induced) that were experienced at the beginning of a relationship. However, within the genre there is a great deal of overlap between intimacy and romance, and readers may be encouraged to use romance to increase intimacy. Romance is often apposed with physically intimacy, and both of these words are often found alongside sex and passion. I touched on this topic in the
section on gender differences, noting that part of being a good woman is to be attractive and ‘available,’ and that men are often portrayed as needing sex to maintain their masculinity. When women run up against problems in the sexual arena the advice they are given in these books tends to be along the lines of ‘do it anyway’ or ‘get medical help.’ The possibility that sexual problems have anything to do with the structure and expectations of the heterosexual relationship is not entertained.

The word clusters discussed in this chapter, like those of the previous chapter, involve a strong appeal to pathos. Words like love, intimacy, romance, loneliness and fear, for example, are likely to work more at the emotional than the logical level. Although the communication cluster, as with the skills cluster, involves some appeal to logos, the devil terms (e.g., critical and judgmental) are shaming. Readers’ fears are aroused then soothed. Like romance novels, relationship guides, with their focus on romantic goals, appeal to “the emotions rather than the intelligence of their female readers” (Geller, 2001, p. 17). Ideas about love, intimacy, and romance are complex and contradictory and by not addressing the complexity or the contradictions, relationship guides contribute to the ‘discourse of marriage,’ which, as discussed in chapter 1, involves an idealization of marriage as existing independently of the way we talk about it. In the next section I will revisit the various discourses related to relationships that were enumerated in chapter 1.

**Relationship Discourse**

With the exception of the ‘discourse of marriage’ the discourses identified in chapter 1 are all built more or less around notions of gender difference, and were well represented in the relationship guides I read. According to Talbot (1997) the discourse of sexuality involves maximizing and eroticizing gender differences, a notion very similar to Bem’s (1993) gender polarization lens (as discussed in the gender section). Although there is less eroticisation of these differences in relationship guides than in romance novels, some of the authors (mainly the non-academic ones) directly relate differences to heightened sexual satisfaction. Doyle in particular is emphatic that the greater the differences between a man and a woman (what she calls “gender contrast”), the greater the sexual pleasure. While not all authors discuss gender differences in relation to sexual
intimacy, overall, gender differences are portrayed as large and significant. As discussed, even authors who try to challenge sexist gender roles use language that suggests important differences between men and women. What makes men attractive is being strong, smart and hardworking, while women are admired for being beautiful, loving and nurturing. These terms directly or indirectly tell readers what to expect and how to behave in the bedroom, and imply that men will take the lead, while women will put their partner’s pleasure before their own.

Within the discourse of male sexuality, these differences are seen as natural and normal, and therefore not seen as implying any inequality. Women and men are ‘equal but different’ and naturally complement one another. Men need sex and women are the objects of desire, and therefore required to provide sex. The male model of sexuality is taken as the norm for all humans. This is not surprising given the general tendency for ‘gender-neutral’ discussions of human behavior to employ male norms, as discussed above with reference to the Broverman study. The problem is, of course, that ‘gender-neutral’ is not really neutral at all; discussions of persons that do not openly invoke gender tend to employ terms and ideals descriptive of men and not women. When women are addressed they are typically seen in much different terms than men, setting up a double bind for women. If they behave like women they are substandard humans, and if they behave like men (or ‘people’) they are deficient women.

In terms of sexuality, the only resolution for women is to behave like women – to be attractive and sexy (but not too attractive and sexy) and put the man’s ‘needs’ before her own – while complying with male norms for sex, which means denying or pathologizing any dissatisfaction she might feel. Hollway (1995) asserts that egalitarian heterosex would require an “identity of similarities, as opposed to being caught in the discourses and fantasies of gender difference” (p. 100). She suggests that feminism has been unable to put forward any positive views on heterosex, thereby allowing the right wing to colonize sexuality. Clearly this is a complicated area, which we wouldn’t expect a relationship guide to resolve. However, the language of relationship guides reinforces a discourse of male sexuality that keeps women stuck in a problem they often cannot name.

As with the discourses of sexuality and male sexuality, the discourses of equality naturalize or essentialize gender differences. While in the previous two discourses
Relationship rhetoric

differences were discussed in the light of sexuality, here they are discussed in more general terms, applicable to the day-to-day functioning of the family. As noted in chapter 1, ‘believing’ in equality between the sexes is ‘common sense.’ When questioned about their beliefs people will adhere to an ideal discourse wherein men and women have equal opportunities within the family unit. When questioned about day to day functioning they use a more practical discourse, in which men and women do what they do because they are ‘better’ at those things. A clear example of this discourse at work comes from McGraw who says “I think it’s great that women can have powerful careers and that men can stay at home changing diapers” followed by the inevitable BUT: “the more we attempt to blur roles into a unisex world, the more we are spinning out of control and try to fix ‘what ain’t broke’” (pp. 48, 49).

Relationship guides support this discourse by implying that men and women choose their roles because they are naturally good at them, and therefore derive satisfaction from them. When relationship guides describe women primarily in terms of their homemaking abilities and appearance, they close off other options, and may make women feel that there is something wrong with them if they prioritize a career or economic independence, or choose not to marry or have children (or even if they ask for ‘help’ around the home). Similarly, when men are portrayed as inept at home functions but hardworking and strong, women are discouraged from either choosing men who prioritize family and relationships, or from asking for their partners to make changes in that direction. The discourse of equality would have us believe that these differences in male and female roles create no inequities or problems.

The discourse of heterosexuality, as noted in chapter two, is both powerful and prevalent. Although dictionary definitions of heterosexuality refer to sexual desire, the heterosexual discourse goes far beyond preferences in sexual behavior. To be heterosexual is to follow a pre-ordained plan that looks pretty much the same for every person, depending of course on their gender. Within this discourse every woman wants to marry, to have children, to be ‘domestic,’ while men, if they choose to marry, want to be in charge. Like most media, relationship guides do not offer alternatives to this discourse, and, while one would not expect a book about relationships to go into detail about alternatives, it seems to be the unspoken premise of this genre that marriage
(practiced a certain way) is the only route to happiness. Further, readers are often warned that deviation from this route brings pain and suffering. There are direct references to these consequences in terms of warnings about the effects of divorce on children and on women's economic standing, and there are also subtle messages that women will pay a price should they decide to leave a marriage. These come in the opposites to the words used to discuss intimacy (such as pain, fear, and lonely) and in the absence of positive words used to describe women apart from their relationships with men and children. For men, on the other hand, the positive descriptions (with the exception of the provider terms, and possibly those related to being chivalrous) are equally applicable to men in or out of relationships.

Although the exchange of goods discourse is not a prominent one in these relationship guides, there is some indirect support. The basic premise of this discourse is that sex is a commodity, given to men by women in exchange for economic and other security. The words used to describe men and women certainly suggest that what men have to offer is their ability to provide, while women are prized for being attractive and loving. And, as mentioned, women are sometimes warned of the economic losses they will suffer if they leave a relationship.

These discourses are all ways of rationalizing gender inequity, which seems to be one of the major functions of relationship guides, yet none quite captures the essence of the discourse of this genre. I propose a new term: the discourse of the good wife. Although the majority of the relationship guides are not overtly written specifically for women, the analysis of word clusters tells us that the major responsibility for marriage falls on wives, not husbands. There is no corresponding ‘discourse of the good husband’ although there may be a ‘discourse of the good man.’ As mentioned in my discussion of the discourse of heterosexuality most of the descriptions of men are equally applicable to men in or out of relationships, while the majority of descriptions of women place them

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22 For instance, although husbands are expected to be good providers, they are also admired for having a high paycheck when they are single. Husbands are expected to protect wives, but the credo of ‘women and children first’ applies to all men, whether married or not, and popular culture depicts good men (single or married) as protectors of women. If there is a discourse for husbands it may be as simple as ‘shave, shower, and show up,’ a phrase my (male) partner often repeats when we observe family weddings and the incredible amount of work involved for women in becoming wives, compared to that for men who become husbands. Although some couples make sure that they are pronounced ‘husband and wife’ it is still
Relationship Rhetoric

in the family setting. The message for women is that they are not whole or complete until they are wives.

Girls and women dream of becoming wives, and are encouraged in their dreams, according to Chrys Ingraham (1999, p.15), by an entire “wedding-industrial complex” which involves hundreds of companies worth 32 billion dollars a year. Young girls’ toys include a “Caboodles Wedding Playset,” “My Size Bride Barbie” (a three-foot doll in a wedding gown that fits young girls) and Mattel’s set of bride and groom dolls. The ‘biggest day of a woman’s life’ is the day she becomes a wife. In Hebrew and Greek the word for woman is also the word for wife (Geller, 2001, p. 27), and the Oxford English Dictionary says that historically wife meant woman, then a woman of “humble rank” or a woman “engaged in the sale of some commodity.” Although the dictionary no longer equates the terms, in popular culture they are equated; a woman is not seen as fully and legitimately a woman until she is a wife.

Romance novels and other media suggest to women that once they have become wives, they will live happily ever after. As Geller says “wedlock has tended to offer women immediate social and psychological rewards while obstructing long-term female progress” (2001, p. 19). The kind of romance sold to women is not sustainable, and when they realize life is not what they imagined they tend to blame themselves, for a good wife is one who maintains a happy marriage. Relationship guides tend to appeal to women’s emotions more than their intelligence (and this is something that my readers said indirectly—that they wanted), reinforcing the familiar messages they have received all their lives that if they are attractive enough and nice enough they will attain status and happiness.

When women get married they become wives, and feel (perhaps even welcome) the pressure to behave like wives.

At the moment of marriage...they unwittingly gave up much of what they enjoyed, and enjoyed about themselves, as well as what their husbands enjoyed about them, in order to aspire to a more conventional, more conforming, more proper and modest and toned-down version of themselves called a ‘wife.’ (Heyn, 1997, p. 26)

common for priests and ministers to say ‘man and wife,’ a further indication that married role involves little change for the man.
In her interviews with married women Heyn explored the transformation of women into wives, and came to the conclusion that they feel the presence of what she calls the “witness,” a presence that reminds them constantly of the rules of the marriage game. The “witness” was born in the late seventeenth century (and applies mainly to Western industrialized societies), when industrialization began to change the nature of work from something done at home to something done away from home. Prior to this, husband and wife had generally worked as a team at the family business, but now men and women were relegated to separate spheres; men did the work, while women kept the home (no longer considered ‘work’). For this new state of affairs women needed guidance, and conduct books for women flourished. Since that time it seems to have been persistently believed that women need to be told how to conduct themselves as wives. And perhaps they do, for the role does not seem to come naturally; as Heyn says, women find themselves turning into someone not quite themselves when they become wives.

Despite being purportedly addressed to men and women, relationship guides still function as conduct books for women/wives. Some of the books do not even use the term wife and the word relationship is sometimes substituted for marriage, making it appear that these books are modern guides to finding love and happiness, rather than a continuation of a long tradition of controlling women’s behavior. As pointed out by Benokraitis (1997) subtle sexism can be more insidious than blatant sexism, and by disguising their message to women as general advice to everyone the message is not only more palatable, but also more powerful. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that relationship guide authors deliberately set out to reinforce stereotypes of wifedom, but that unless they recognize and challenge common discourses they may nonetheless be reinforcing these stereotypes. The readers I interviewed, were, for the most part, oblivious to sexism in the genre. Although some actively shunned the more explicitly sexist authors like Doyle and Schlessinger they did not realize that many of the same messages are being subtly reinforced in books by authors who seemingly support more egalitarian arguments.

The over-riding message or theme in this genre is that if women work at it they can achieve happiness for themselves and their families. The opening line in Markman’s
book is “good marriages take work” (p. 1), a seemingly ‘common-sense’ statement, meant to apply equally to men and women. However, marriage is not the same thing to men as to women, as documented by Bernard (1982) who coined the phrase “his and hers marriage” and by Maushart (2001), who says that to “imagine a genderless marriage—a marriage in which roles and responsibilities are determined irrespective of gender considerations—is to imagine a paradox” (p. 13). What men (husbands) need to ‘work’ at in marriage is different than what women need to ‘work’ at. The word clusters suggest that men need only work at providing, while women do the rest, a job Maushart (2001) terms “wifework.” The work of being a wife is precisely what the discourse of the good wife is about, and in the next section I shall put forward some hypotheses about how that discourse is sustained in relationship guides.

Compensation

The purpose of relationship rhetoric is to make the work of being a good wife look attractive and rewarding. A crucial part of this rhetoric involves the creation of a set of standards for failure.

A sense of failure motivates rhetorical responses that imply further responses aimed at resolving the failure and its attendant problems. The power of failure to motivate resolving responses is so great that we often invoke failure as an interpretation precisely to bring about the kinds of attitudes and actions that are associated with it. (Payne, 1989, p. 9).

The terms and tropes discussed in the previous chapter do not single women out as failing in marriage; they are generally gender-neutral. Any person can be deficient in terms of their skills, their spirituality, their self-hood, or their knowledge of the truth. However, as I have discussed, the criteria for ‘good person behavior’ versus ‘good gendered behavior’ place women, but not men, in a double bind. Therefore, for women, failure is inevitable, increasing motivation to work at the solution.

Therapeutic rhetoric involves both consolation and compensation. Once readers have been assured that they have failed (or are in danger of doing so) and have been consoled to some degree, they are motivated to move forward (a predominant theme in the metaphors) towards solutions. The word clusters discussed in this chapter are the methods offered for repairing the failures. The inadequate self becomes a gendered self.
Those unaware of the truth of relationships are educated in intimacy. The unskilled learn to communicate. Most importantly, the self becomes more spiritual by learning the art of acceptance.

As noted in the previous chapter there are three topoi central to rhetorical situations of failure: self-society, past-future, and spiritual-material (Payne, 1989). Consolation is provided through social, historical, and spiritual explanations. Compensation involves precisely the opposite, and we see in the word clusters of the current chapter that change most clearly involves a focus on the self. Although I have noted that self-help responses to marital distress tend to be near-sighted, opting for short-term solutions rather than attending to long-term changes, the ostensible focus of relationship guides is on building for the future (of the relationship). Readers are kept focused on what they are working towards (intimacy) and any pain or discomfort they are currently experiencing is considered to be worth the (not too distant) future recompense.

The acceptance cluster provides somewhat of a material twist on spirituality. Acceptance is what brings intimacy, the earthly reward for good wifely behavior. Acceptance is used two ways, the most prominent of which involves a kind of giving (of one’s respect, trust, understanding). It is also used in its more literal form, as in acceptance of gifts. These gifts can be intangible ones, like respect or caring, or more tangible, like compliments or jewelry. Acceptance bridges the gap between the spiritual and the material, connoting a good and worthy person, deserving of worldly compensation.

In each of the pairs of word clusters there is a potential failure and a potential solution. The clusters pertaining to the potential failures are all fairly gender neutral, implying that men and women can fail equally at creating good marriages. The solution clusters, however, are all weighted towards women, as I have stressed throughout this chapter. Problems in marriage, therefore, however and by whomever they were created, are to be fixed by women, and this is the crux of the discourse of the good wife. A good wife wants to make her marriage work by being a good (feminine) self, a spiritual (accepting) person, a skilled (unopinionated) communicator, because she knows the truth, which is that if she does all these things she will experience love and intimacy.
(never mind the unwanted sex or unreciprocated efforts), and if she doesn’t she will be alone, lonely, and unhappy.

This discourse is similar to the discourse of equality in terms of using the is/ought fallacy, suggesting that men and women do different tasks because that is the way it is ‘meant to be.’ It goes further, though, by positioning women as desiring this situation as the only road to true happiness. Like all the discourses discussed it is a way of managing contradictions, of reframing problematic experiences so that they become manageable, and possibly even desirable. Marriage as it is currently conceived is a concept that is problematic for many people, if we take the statistics on the divorce rate as an indicator. This situation is in direct contradiction to the narrative of romance that has developed over the last two to three centuries. To resolve this contradiction blame has to be placed on either the institution of marriage (for not allowing romance to thrive) or on the people who are performing marriage (incorrectly).

To make sense of how this contradiction is managed, it may be helpful at this point to turn to Burke, whose dramatistic view of society includes the notion of hierarchy as intrinsic to the human condition. In order to ensure stability in societies where resources and power are not divided equally (as is inevitable) human beings have created hierarchies, or ladders of authority (Burke, 1954/1984, p. 276). A person’s position within a hierarchy can lead to estrangement from others in different positions, a situation Burke discusses under the heading of mystery.

Owing to their different modes of living and livelihood, classes of people become ‘mysteries’ to one another…. This condition of Mystery is revealed most perfectly in primitive priestcraft, which serves in part to promote cohesion among disparate classes, and in part to perpetuate ways that, while favoring some at the expense of others, may at times thereby endanger the prosperity of the tribe as a whole.

But in a society so complicated as ours, the normal priestly function, of partly upholding and partly transcending the Mysteries of class, is distributed among many kinds of symbol-users. (Burke, 1954/1984, p. 276).

Among those assuming the role of ‘priestly functions’ Burke names educators, which would include the writers of relationship guides. These authors both ‘uphold and partly transcend the Mysteries’ of marriage by virtue of their position as experts and through their use of rhetoric. They transcend with their claims to know the truth, where no-one else does, and uphold by imbuing marriage with a sense of purpose beyond the grasp of
mere mortals, as with their discussions of spirituality, magic, and mystery, and their stress on the naturalness and normalness of gender differences.

Of course people can choose to accept or reject any hierarchy, and, in fact, because everyone belongs to multiple hierarchies (e.g., family, work, religious) there will be times when those hierarchies are in conflict and one will have to be rejected in order to satisfy another. However, according to Burke, rejection leads inevitably to guilt: “As Mystery is the obverse expression of the disrelationship among classes, so the reverse expression is Guilt” (Burke, 1954/1984, p. 278). For Burke, guilt is not necessarily the result of any personal transgression, but is inherent in the human condition, as demonstrated in the story of ‘original sin.’ People will inevitably have feelings of discomfort (guilt) when rejecting structures that have functioned to keep order in society.

As discussed in chapter 1, marriage has always been an important institution for ordering social and economic relations. As social and economic situations have changed, so has the structure of marriage, but its utilitarian function has been hidden under the mystery that serves to keep it desirable regardless of one’s position within its hierarchy. Because the least desirable position within this hierarchy is the position of wife, this is the position that requires the most buttressing. The discourse of the good wife serves to make the place of ‘low person on the totem pole’ look appealing. The woman who rejects that position must deal with the guilt of rejecting a social hierarchy.

When we sense that we have failed, or when failure is thrust upon us, we must repair our confidence if we are to move on—to try again or to shift directions in pursuit of success and satisfaction. This sense of having failed or fallen short of our mark is a symbolically constructed sense; failure is an interpretation that is collaborated between self and others about our characters and our situations. To repair or resolve senses of failure, we must induce change in those symbolic collaborations. To induce such changes in someone, either in ourselves or others, is the purpose of rhetoric we make. (Payne 1989, pp. 3,4)

Readers turn to relationship guides when they perceive either that they have failed (in having a happy or satisfying marriage) or that they will fail (to keep the marriage intact). Relationship guides collaborate in constructing the sense of failure that women feel by enumerating the ways people can fail at marriage (not being a good enough, spiritual enough, skilled enough self, and not having knowledge of the truth). Reparation comes in the form of being a gendered self – which for men means doing nothing, and for
women doing everything. The ‘good wife’ is a symbolic collaboration that exists long before women read relationship guides; the guides need only convince women there are good reasons to continue to subscribe to this version of themselves.

Probably the most persuasive rhetoric for attaining this end is found in the acceptance cluster. Words in this cluster were often apposed with words in the intimacy cluster, reminding women of the ‘rewards’ they will receive for altering their behavior, and were clearly gendered, reminding women of the scorn and pain they can expect if they do not alter their behavior. Although the main opposition for acceptance was criticize, and although reject, another common opposition, is a more typical antonym for accept, I would propose that the real dialectical opposition for accept, as used in this genre, is expect. When readers are told to honor and respect their partners and, if they have difficulty with this, to “act as if” they do, and to be grateful for what their partners give; and when it is implied that if they do not they are being critical, controlling, etc. it seems to me that what they are really being told is not to expect anything from their partners. To accept what you have is to not expect anything different, and this is the substance of the discourse of the good wife. A good wife should be grateful simply to be a wife; if she is not she has failed at the most fundamental level.
Chapter 7: Form and Function

In this chapter I will summarize and extend my observations of the genre of relationship guides, as well as my impression of the readers. As described by Coe and Freedman (1998) genre is a "socially standard strategy, embodied in a typical form of discourse, that has evolved for responding to a recurring type of rhetorical situation" (p. 137). There are three important components to this definition: the recurring situation, or context of the problem; the form of the discourse; and the functional relationship between the situation and the discourse (i.e., how the discourse works in responding to the situation). I will use these components to guide my discussion.

Recurring Situation

The situation that relationship guides are responding to is one of failure. Large numbers of people are dissatisfied in their marriages, and this is associated with problems at many levels. At the psychological level, Whiffen (2006) suggests that the high depression rate for women is associated with their disappointment in marriage. At the economic level, depressed individuals miss work, take expensive medications, and utilize health services at a high rate. Divorce causes disruption at the social level, with children sometimes being displaced; and at the economic level, as the income of divorced people generally decreases. Politicians are forced to respond to the changing needs of families (e.g., providing welfare for single mothers; instituting maintenance enforcement programs), and religious institutions are forced to adapt to changes in how families are perceived in relation to spiritual values.

The readers I interviewed did seem to believe that they had failed, whether in their choice of mate, their inability to motivate their mate, or their difficulty in accepting their situations. In dramatistic terms this failure can be seen as a challenge to hierarchy. For Burke hierarchies are both social and terminological, and terminological hierarchies hegemonically support social ones. When people object to – or are unable to work within the confines of – a hierarchy, there is ensuing drama. The disruption of social order (or even the threat of disruption) tends to lead to a state of discomfort, or as Burke terms it, guilt. Burke (1954/1984) suggested two methods of resolving guilt: mortification and
Victimage. Victimage would involve a scapegoat, which could be in the form of an individual or institution. For an institution as widespread and deeply entrenched as marriage, it would be difficult to name a scapegoat. The alternative, mortification, "involves personal sacrifice by the guilty. The individual or group experiencing guilt makes a symbolic offering to appease society and thus restore balance to the social order" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). If individuals are willing to make a sacrifice to restore order, then relationship guides can be seen as a response to the need for symbols of sacrifice. By legitimizing the genre, the guilty show their willingness to assume responsibility for the disorder and to work to restore the hierarchy. David Payne (1989) suggests that the experience of failure is rhetorical because it is a symbolic construction negotiated between self and others. The response, therefore, is also rhetorical, and the next section will summarize the form that rhetorical response takes.

Form of the Discourse

The implicit messages of relationship guides, as discussed in the chapters on metaphors and word clusters, largely involve an appeal to Pathos. Like romance novels, they work at an emotional level, retelling the story of romance. Burke called form "an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (1931/1953, p. 124). The sequence of romance novels (as typified by Harlequin) is generally of the sort where woman meets man, woman resists man, woman realizes she loves man, woman learns from man what it really means to be woman, and the two live happily ever after. Readers know and expect this sequence; the earlier parts of the sequence 'arouse' their desire for resolution, which the later parts 'fulfill.' In a similar way relationship guides (along with other forms of media) provoke feelings of guilt and fear, highlighting the various ways a woman can fail at being a wife, which arouses a desire for the resolutions offered by the authors. The sequence of relationship guides could be seen as: woman promises to be happy with man forever; woman discovers she is unhappy; woman feels guilty; woman

33 In radical feminist works, men were sometimes named as the scapegoats for problems in marriage. The Catholic church and legal systems could be perceived as scapegoats in the sense that attacks on their policies led to changes in divorce proceedings.
seeks salvation; and, with help, rectifies the situation, living happily ever after. The end point of the relationship guide is the same as the end point of romance novels.

The rhetorical method of the genre is not, of course, entirely pathetic. There are appeals to Logos as well, particularly in the books by the academic authors. Most of the authors supply reasoned arguments for at least some of their assertions, sometimes citing research or statistics, and sometimes comparing their ideas to those of others (which almost always involves derogation of other ideas or authors). All of the authors use examples to 'prove' their points, although the case examples typically speak more to the emotions than the intellect. One of Aristotle's prime methods for a logical appeal involves the use of the Enthymeme, or an incomplete syllogism. Aristotle said "the Enthymeme must consist of a few propositions, fewer often than those which make up the normal syllogism. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself" (2001, p. 1332).

Within the relationship guides there is a "familiar fact" that does not require explication. This "fact" is that marriage is good. From this, one could construct the following syllogism:

- Major premise: to be married is good
- Minor premise: the reader is a married person
- Conclusion: the reader is good

Not every reader of a relationship guide is married, and, indeed, if the reader is not married, she may well feel inferior (a failure). It is another unstated assumption that everyone wants to be married, and, in fact, should be married. This leads to a set of propositions that do not quite fit the definition of a syllogism, which involves descriptive logic, whereas the following involves prescriptive logic:

- Major premise: married people should be happy
- Minor premise: the reader is a married person
- Conclusion: the reader should be happy

When marriage is considered to be good, it is implied that it is a state with which individuals should be happy. Therefore, if an individual is unhappy, it is because of

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34 Even though the guides sometimes use the term 'relationship' alongside the term 'marriage,' there is in most books a clear privileging of marriage over common-law relationships.
faults within him or herself, not within the institution. These unarticulated assumptions
can be very powerful: “because they are jointly produced by the audience, enthymemes
intuitively unite speaker and audience and provide the strongest possible proof... The
audience itself helps construct the proof by which it is persuaded” (Bitzer, 1959, cited in
Griffin, 2006, p. 322).

According to Aristotle the appeal to Ethos is the most important consideration for
an author. Authors have various methods of asserting their expertise, including noting
their degrees and experience, citing their research, listing themselves as New York Times
best-sellers, and including endorsements of their work from professionals, celebrities,
and/or clients. Authors with a high profile (which generally means an endorsement from
a celebrity) were more likely to be considered by my readers for purchase. But what
seemed to confer the most ethos was Goodwill: the author’s ability to convince the
reader she or he cared about the reader’s plight. Although degrees were not entirely
irrelevant to readers, experience (through their own mistakes, or through counseling
others) and compassion were paramount. Therefore it was important to readers to be
given some information about the authors, and most of the books provide a paragraph or
two, including, often, where the author lives, along with marital and parental status.
Most books also have a picture of the author, usually on the front or back cover, but
sometimes inside the book.

Within the texts, authors used several methods to convince readers that their
interests were shared, including case examples, the inclusive pronoun ‘we,’
encouragement, and scare tactics. Readers’ responses suggested that case examples are
crucial to the success of a book, although there was a range of preferences in terms of the
number and length of examples desired. Use of words like we, everyone, and most
women, was common, and seemed to serve the purpose of letting readers know that they
are not alone, an extremely important function of the books for the women I interviewed.
Authors also expressed sympathy for how difficult it is to make changes, and offered
praise and encouragement. Generally, this was done in a ‘personal’ manner, as if the
author was speaking directly to the reader (an example would be ‘I know this is hard, but
you deserve a great marriage, and you can do it!’) Another method of engaging readers
at the emotional level was what I called ‘scare tactics.’ According to most authors
divorce is a dire problem, to be avoided at all costs. Readers are warned of the pain and
despair they will suffer if they divorce, the likely loss of income they will endure, and the
harmful effects on their children. Authors are there to save the reader from this horrible
fate (a fate which at least half the authors know personally), if only the reader will align
herself with the author and her/his program.

In his study of codependency literature Gemin (1997) noted a shift from author as
expert to author as sympathizer. Although most of the authors I studied encompassed
both of these roles, there was a range, with academic authors being somewhat more
expert and non-academic authors playing more of the sympathizer role. This split was
perhaps even stronger for male compared to female authors, with male authors, for
instance, more likely than female authors to use words from the skills cluster. The
communication cluster (the only consistent skill to be found in these books) was used
more by academic authors, while the acceptance cluster was used more by non-academic
authors. Doyle, a non-academic female author, with no academic or professional
qualifications is the most sympathetic, while Markman, a male professor who discloses
no personal information is the most expert. As noted, some of the readers I interviewed
said that they preferred and trusted women authors more than men, perhaps because they
appreciate the sympathetic angle. This would be in keeping with the unanimous desire to
derive comfort from reading relationship guides. However, readers also wanted to feel
they learned something from the books (even one thing), and wanted to believe that
authors knew what they were talking about, suggesting the sympathy role needs to be
balanced by expertise. Authors had various ways of asserting that they had something
new and original to offer, and this possibility was part of the allure of the genre for many
of the readers.

In relation to what Simonds (1992) and DeFrancisco and O'Connor (1995)
suggested regarding the form of self help books, my findings do not differ greatly. The
books are still, for the most part, entertaining and easy reads that promise happiness,

Aristotle listed happiness (eudaimonia) as the first of his Ethical Topics for Deliberative Rhetoric, and
his definition of happiness as “success...combined with virtue, or as self-sufficiency in life, or as the
pleasants life accompanied with security, or as abundance of possessions” (2007, p. 57) certainly fits with
what the genre promises. It is interesting to note that in Aristotle’s list of the “parts” required for happiness
(including, for instance, worthy friendships, health, and numerous children) he does not include marriage.
and this is consistent with what my readers wanted from the genre. The psychological jargon referred to by DeFrancisco and O'Connor has changed, and is, I believe, in less evidence. The books I examined are, for the most part, less blatantly New-Age than those discussed by previous reviewers, and this may represent a shift that readers desire (some of the more thoughtful readers I interviewed talked about an evolution in self-help). Authors seem to sense that readers do not want too much jargon – McGraw even promises that he will not give his readers any “psychobabble.” All but one of the guides contained a subtitle promoting the practicality of the book, and there is less of a focus on the ‘quick fixes’ suggested by DeFrancisco and O’Connor. Although the authors I read generally assert that relationship problems are solvable (often by the reader alone), readers are often told the process is a difficult one, requiring hard work.

At the most basic level, the books were similar in size and length. Readers wanted books that were easy to read and that did not require sustained concentration, and the books I examined generally fit this bill, although some of the books by the academic authors (particularly Hendrix) did include some theoretical material that would require a degree of attention. Book titles were ‘catchy’ (Relationship Rescue, Divorce Remedy) and covers generally displayed colors, fonts, diagrams or symbols that would be more appealing to women than men. Although most of the books were ostensibly written for male or female readers of any sexual orientation, the genre is, for the most part, aimed at heterosexual women.

**Function of the Genre**

What the genre does – the part it plays in the drama of human relationships – has been, indirectly, the focus of the last two chapters. The metaphors and terministic screens all direct and deflect attention in certain ways, in aid of accomplishing certain goals. In this section I will look more closely at what is accomplished by the genre, using the five questions posed by Coe and Freedman (1998, p. 139) to direct my discussion.
1) What sorts of communication does the genre encourage, what sorts does it constrain against?

As discussed above, there are certain expectations and requirements for books in this genre. Books have to be both entertaining and reasonably easy to read. They must contain illustrations of their points in the form of stories or vignettes about people the reader can identify with. This form discourages in-depth or wide-ranging discussions of relationships, keeping the level of communication to a sort of lowest common denominator. While some of the academic authors write at a slightly higher level of difficulty, there are limits to how much thought provoking material a relationship guide can include. Readers neither expect nor desire too much challenge from the genre.

Readers want to feel included in the relationship guides they read, which encourages authors to communicate in a ‘personal’ style, as though they were addressing the reader directly. Authors write as if they know the reader personally, and issues of context become irrelevant. In keeping with a ‘therapeutic culture’ (cf. Cloud, 1998; Furedi, 2004; Payne, 1989) the communication is intimate and emotional, and seldom abstract or theoretical. Authors are ‘cheerleaders’ for the cause; they may come down hard on ‘enemies’ of marriage but are always supportive of the reader and optimistic for her future.

Within the relationship guide genre authors must communicate both their expertise on the topic of marriage and their sympathy for the individual reader. They are not likely to do well if they are perceived as detached, or as having political rather than personal interest in the topic. The discourse of this genre is mild, never inflammatory (unless, as mentioned, against the enemies of marriage). It is a monologic communication that needs to feel dialogic.

The genre encourages individual differences in writing style insofar as readers like to feel they ‘know’ the author. However it is fairly restrictive in terms of content, as it is an extension of the therapeutic, and therefore must address individual emotional issues. Readers buy the books because they want to improve unsatisfactory relationships – or at least become less unhappy with their relationship arrangement – not because they want to understand their role in a culture obsessed with the consumption of romance and intimacy.
Relationship guides reinforce the sort of communication that is representative of a therapeutic culture. Women who have read these books tend to talk to each other in terms of emotions and selves; they 'own' their feelings and they take responsibility for their own lot in life. Although they complain about men and even state sometimes that circumstances are not fair, the sorts of communication tactics they have for addressing these issues do not include any notions of change beyond the individual. In terms of the actual advice that readers remember, the women I interviewed could not list much that was specific. The main thing that they seemed to remember was acceptance, which included remembering that men were different from them, and therefore they needed to learn to communicate in ways men could understand. The other thing women mentioned learning from the books had to do with working on the self, as that was all one really had any control over.

2) Who can – and who cannot – use this genre? Does it empower some people while silencing others?

The genre is aimed at a very broad audience, and written at a high level of abstraction. While some of the books use the term marriage in their titles, many use relationship, or even more abstract concepts like intimacy or connection, in an attempt to appeal to anyone who wants a better relationship, married or otherwise. Despite this 'liberal' attitude towards living/loving arrangements, the content of the books generally conforms to fairly prototypical heterosexual notions of marriage. Nonetheless, the promotion of romance and intimacy may have broad appeal. Two of the books I examined mentioned their applicability to non-heterosexuals, and because there are few, if any, established narratives specific to non-heterosexual relationships, non-married and/or non-heterosexual people may derive guidelines for their own lives from narratives aimed at heterosexuals. Only one of the books I studied (Schlessinger) explicitly excluded non-heterosexuals from its advice. Individuals with other notions of relationship – including the more obvious ones, such as multiple partners, or 'open marriages,' but also those with more radical ideas regarding equity and politics– are less likely to feel included.
While the main audience for relationship guides is female, men are seldom deliberately excluded. Even Doyle's book, written specifically for women, was promoted on one website as recommended reading for men, and included comments from men who had read the book, saying it helped men to know what to look for/expect in a wife. Some of the books state they are written with a 'couple' audience in mind, and there is nothing specific about the books that prohibits men from reading them (other than that doing so might indicate an interest in emotional matters that is considered unmanly, a stereotype implicitly reinforced by the descriptions of men in the books).

Anyone who has experience with heterosexual relationships could potentially qualify as a relationship guide author. Some of the women I interviewed volunteered that they felt as qualified to write a relationship guide as many of the authors they had read. Laura Doyle, with no academic qualifications, and with no counseling training or experience beyond her get-togethers with other women, wrote a best-seller. She was well versed in the genre and in therapeutic culture prior to her own effort; she cites John Gray as a strong influence, and immersion in New-Age, twelve step ideas is apparent in her work. Most of the authors, however, do have degrees and training in therapy, and this tends to add to their credibility for at least some readers.

Part of my original motivation for this project was to assess whether I, as a feminist and a psychotherapist, would be able to write a relationship guide. Learning a new genre is not a simple process, as I have discovered while writing an interdisciplinary thesis, the format of which often goes against the grain of my learned habits of writing psychology papers. The writing style for self-help books is very different than for academic papers, and John Gottman, who has published numerous academic articles, appears to have had help\(^{36}\) wording his message in a way that would appeal to the publishers and readers of relationship guides. The other academic-researcher author I included in my sample (Markman) produced a book that not one of my sample of readers had read, and that I suspect most would consider dry.

\(^{36}\) Nan Silver is billed as co-author, though her name appears in smaller type than Gottman’s, and she has no noticeable presence in the book (unlike Gottman, who often talks in the first person about his research or his experiences). She does not appear as co-author on any of his academic publications, and her professional history appears to have been as an editor for women’s magazines.
For a text to be identified as a member of a genre tells us at the same time very much and very little about that text. The degree of pleasure and/or agitation I experienced in reading the ten texts I chose for this study varied greatly, in the same way that a viewer who enjoys one Western film will not necessarily enjoy them all. Genres allow for variation and, more importantly, they are not static, they adapt and evolve (Coe, 1994).

In effect, then, genres are agents of ideological closure – they limit the meaning-potential of a given text, and they limit the commercial risk of the producer corporations. But they are constantly transformed by the addition of new examples, so that in the end you have to conclude that there’s no such thing as a ‘typical’ Western, even though you can recognize one when you see it. (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994, p. 128)

Genres impose limits, but this does not mean the limits cannot be pushed. Whether stretched limits will be accepted by producers or consumers is a gamble, but if one is careful not to distort the boundaries so as to make the product unrecognizable as part of the genre, one stands a chance of contributing to the evolution of the genre.

I see two important considerations to take into account in attempting to write a relationship guide. The first has to do with conveying difficult psychological concepts in a form that readers will accept and understand. The second involves presenting material in a way that does not reinforce the sexism that is inherent in the discourse of the good wife. The first consideration is more one of content and explicit arguments while the second emphasizes form and implicit arguments.

As I have stated, there is a fair bit of variation in terms of the explicit arguments made by the relationship guide authors. Many of the terministic screens I discuss in this thesis are topics for which large bodies of literature exist in psychology, and, having familiarized myself with much of that literature, I am not impressed by the uncritical presentation of the material in many of the books. The more academic authors do a much better job with the material, although it is important to balance the desire to impart information with the knowledge that readers do not want books that are too demanding. What is important, I believe, is not that the psychological issues be presented in all their complexity, but that they be presented by writers who are knowledgeable and critical. As
consumers of the genre tend to read more than one (and often many) books, the more knowledgeable authors they are exposed to over time the better.

If, as I have argued, one of the primary functions of relationships guides is to keep alive the ideals of romance, and to offer consolation and hope to women who perceive themselves as having failed, then the production of such a book would be problematic for a feminist. The implicit messages of the books are largely sexist, and feminist scholars who have researched self-help aimed at women are generally highly critical of the genre. Although some authors attempt to address gender issues, their explicit messages may be overshadowed by the implicit messages of the discourse of the good wife. Thus, a feminist writer would be well served by paying close attention to her use of metaphors, terministic screens, and examples. While readers need to see themselves portrayed in the examples, there is certainly room for more diversity in the descriptions of men and women who are experiencing relationship difficulties.

I have concluded that writing a relationship guide would involve, for me, a struggle, and possibly a compromise. I believe the same would be true for any therapist concerned with issues of sexism and power, just as it is often the case in the therapy room. I do not, however, see this as a reason not to try. Within the books I read there were gradations of adherence to the standard discourses of relationships, and these gradations can likely be pushed further. The more women are offered consolation for their plight without a reversion to the standard romantic narrative, the less likely they are to continue to need such consolation.

3) Are its effects dysfunctional beyond their immediate context?

The immediate context of relationship guides is failed or potentially failing marriage, and if conceived narrowly then the effects of the genre can be seen as highly functional. Relationship guides function to promote marriage as the only legitimate road to intimacy and happiness, and in the process promote themselves as useful (even necessary) tools to life’s most important goal. Through the discourse of the good wife they encourage women to continue assuming responsibility for making marriage work.

Relationship guides also offer practical advice that may help people solve particular problems within relationships – even egalitarian relationships. However, this
advice is likely to work best within the discourses of romance and intimacy, and may actually be dysfunctional for marriages not based on these discourses. As an example, I have worked with some East Indian women who have tried to apply western notions of love and romance to their arranged marriages, or to displace an arranged marriage for western ideals, with sometimes disastrous results (including physical violence and community shunnings).

In the larger context, relationship guides perpetuate the very problems they claim to address. In the short term, the comfort offered makes readers feel better, and the advice, if taken, may effect different patterns in the relationship, but in the long term, nothing really changes. Women continue to take on the lion’s share of responsibility for relationships, and notions of men being incapable of participating fully are reinforced.

4) What values and beliefs are instantiated within this set of practices?

The values instantiated within the relationship guide genre are represented most effectively by the intimacy word cluster. Intimacy, love, connection and commitment are valued above all else, and are believed to bring happiness and romance. The alternative is to be lonely and unhappy. Although relationship guides do not always explicitly state that intimacy can only be achieved within marriage, neither do they discuss alternatives. The assumption is that marriage is the only route to a meaningful and fulfilling life. That this is more true for women than for men is also not discussed explicitly, but is clear in representations of women as wives and mothers, while men are portrayed as deriving fulfillment and status from career pursuits.

In chapter 1 I discussed the five beliefs of the romantic ideal (Sprecher and Metts, 1989), which included love at first sight, one true love, love conquers all, true love is absolutely perfect, and one should marry for love rather than other reasons. Relationship guide rhetoric tends to uphold these beliefs, particularly within the spirituality word cluster, which suggests an other-worldliness to romantic unions. The assumption in many of these books is that whom one ends up with as a spouse is ‘fated’ and if one is not having a ‘perfect’ time with this person, then one is not faithful or spiritual enough.

At the same time that relationship guides promote romantic notions of perfection and bliss, however, they recognize that romantic discourse, while alluring, is not enough.
Readers are likely to have become disillusioned with romance to some extent, or would not be reading relationship guides. A number of authors have pointed out that while romance is appealing, it is also generally recognized as unrealistic (Illouz, 1998; Shumway, 2003). Thus relationship guides must manage the contradiction between readers’ desire for and belief in romantic unions with their knowledge that falling in love does not necessarily mean falling into a happy relationship. The women I interviewed appeared to have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the guides, treating them sometimes as true advice manuals, and sometimes more like novels.

From the perspective of what Giddens (1992) calls the “pure relationship,” individuals enter into relationship for its own sake, rather than for social or moral reasons, and therefore are likely to dissolve relationships that do not deliver sustained happiness. Although most of the guides I looked at use the term relationship synonymously with marriage, they are not promoting ‘pure relationships’ as perceived by Giddens.37 The use of words like commitment, trust, and courage in connection with intimacy impart an ethical dimension that encourages people to stay in marriages and words from the truth and skills clusters tell readers that if they work at it they can both rekindle romance and attain intimacy.

Beliefs about marriage involve contradictory notions of equality versus practicality, of romance versus work, and of individual rights versus the happiness of others. Relationship guides manage these contradictions through discourses that are presented as though they were complementary. Men and women are both portrayed as having a stake in marriage, and with the exception of a few books, relationship guides are ostensibly targeted at both genders. Discussions of ‘relationship’ are, for the most part, gender-neutral (as well as being neutral in regard to sexual preference), asserting benefits for anyone and everyone. The ‘practical’ side of this is addressed through the godterm acceptance, which covers the differences between the genders and encourages women to embrace these differences. By so doing, differences become a matter of choice and are not representative of any form of systemic discrimination.

37 They are, however, likely influenced by the popular perception of relationship as what happens in marriage nowadays, compared to previous times when marriage was (supposedly) more scripted and less individually tailored.
The contradictions between the romantic and realist versions of marriage are managed mainly within the *spirituality* and *skills* clusters. Marriage is simultaneously magical and hard work. Spouses are promised happiness in marriage, and the contradiction between expectations of individual needs being met with meeting the needs of others is managed by convincing readers that their happiness will come from meeting the needs of their spouse. It is primarily the self cluster that asserts the right to individual happiness within a relationship, and it is the gendered descriptions of spouses that indicates the ways a woman’s happiness is obtained. Because women are so often described in terms of their service to others, and their sexual appeal, they learn to equate these aspects with their own happiness.

The only alternative offered by relationship guides is a life of loneliness and unhappiness. The genre reinforces the belief that marriage is the only attractive option for women and that they will lack purpose and identity if they do not marry. Many of the authors also suggest that there are malevolent forces at work that might try to convince women otherwise. It may be a smart rhetorical move to set up an ‘enemy’ against which author and reader can unite in their common cause of keeping the marriage together. Geller calls this the “fantasy of a world hostile to marriage” (2001, p. 367), and it may be that this plays a role in reinforcing the romantic notions of marriage. Shumway (2003, e.g., chapter 1) notes the importance of a ‘triangle’ in romance; that integral to the romantic narrative is an obstacle for the lovers to overcome. In the romance novel genre obstacles can include a range of factors (including the heroine’s own lack of knowledge of herself), but are essential to the romantic plot. In the relationship guide genre obstacles may strengthen the romantic narrative, reinforcing the desirability of a happy ending – the same happy ending we see in romance novels. It is no accident that authors who are the most vocal against divorce are also the ones who assert the most obstacles to marriage.

Another belief instantiated by the genre is that there is a right way to do marriage and that there are people who know what that is. Each of the authors would have the reader believe that they, and they alone, know the right way. The master metaphors are particularly useful for promoting the notion of authors as experts; whether in the form of leaders, guides, or healers. The readers I interviewed seemed to believe and not believe
this at the same time. While they made some derogatory comments about authors’ motives, they also seemed to harbor hope that, one of these times, they would pick up the book that really had the answers.

5) What are the political and ethical implications of the rhetorical situation constructed, persona embodied, audience invoked and context of situation assumed by this genre?

The relationship guide genre assumes the widest possible context, namely that relationship/marriage is good for everyone; that it works for all people under all circumstances. The corollary is that any problems that arise in marriage are the results of individual failures, not of the institution itself. As noted by critics of ‘therapy culture’ the postmodern response to dis-ease is to look within.

It is a characteristic current assumption that all human conflicts are, to a significant degree, psychological problems and that they can, with enough reading, guidance, determination and industriousness, be set right at the level of psychical individual self-discipline. Our era’s preoccupation with mental and emotional hygiene for the soul and the mind encourages individuals to think of all behaviour as psychologically explicable in origin and effect. (Rimke, 2000, p. 73).

Not only can ‘emotional hygiene’ be obtained through the intimate relationship, it cannot be found any other way. According to Furedi, “therapeutic culture is primarily about imposing a new conformity through the management of people’s emotions. Through framing the problems of everyday life through the prism of emotions, therapeutic culture incites people to feel powerless and ill” (2004, inside of front cover). Relationship guides reinforce conformity by offering only visions of pain and loneliness to those who do not follow the suggested path. People who feel ‘powerless and ill’ will turn to the therapeutic for aid, which will reinforce their powerlessness to do anything but adjust their own feelings to match societal expectations.

Authors have notions of who they think might read their books, as well as ideas of the attitudes they might wish readers to bring to their works. In the first case they are addressing a preconceived audience, and in the second they work to invoke the audience they desire (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). Relationship guide authors know that the majority of their readers will be female, and this likely influences them to write in a warmer, more
personal style than they would for a predominantly male audience (an example can be found in the difference between the two ‘letters’ McGraw writes to men and women readers). The reader they want to invoke is one willing to accept guidance, one who will position herself as less knowledgeable and in need of the advice the author has to offer. The main methods for creating this situation include the metaphors, which position authors as guides or healers (friendly experts) and the truth cluster, through which authors assert their superior knowledge.

The personal style in which the books are written invites readers to believe they are important to the author. John Fiske says that “in recognizing that it is us being spoken to, we implicitly accept the discourse’s definition of ‘us,’ or to put it another way, we adopt the subject position proposed for us by the discourse” (1987, p. 53). The words in the gender category also impart information about the position proposed for readers. A good woman/good wife is one who cares about the quality of relationships; who willingly takes on the responsibility of looking after others. A subject position is a place within a moral order, involving rights, duties, and obligations (Moghaddam, Hanley, & Harre, 2003, p. 139) and to accept the position is to accept the obligations as well.

If readers do not feel like part of the ‘us’ being spoken to, they will not likely accept the position offered by the genre. The women I interviewed were quite willing to take on the duties and obligations of the position offered them, that of being the sole person capable of creating a good marriage. Even women not currently in relationships (including one who said she would never be in another relationship) felt responsible for keeping knowledgeable about relationships. As mentioned above, in addition to the duties and obligations of the role, there are also rights, which in this case would include feelings of pride and accomplishment in being the indefatigable champion for the intimate relationship. These feelings are reinforced through the glowing praise given to women who play the role well, as seen in the case examples and self-disclosures.

Within this position other goals and desires are always subordinate to those of improving the relationship. Men are portrayed as protectors and providers, while women tend the home and children. Of course many of the women in the case examples, as well as most of the women I interviewed, had jobs outside the home, but work and creative pursuits, while important and fulfilling for many women, are generally seen as secondary
to the primary role of wife and mother. Women who read relationship guides are positioned as either having failed, or being on the brink of failing, at their most important function in life. They may have been wounded as children, they may be lacking in some basic skills, but if they are good women they want to learn how to succeed at their primary purpose.

When women are kept busy seeking understanding in places that offer no contextual information they can quickly forget that there is a context. At the same time that they are told they must take on the major responsibility for a relationship they are also told they cannot change others, and that they must accept things as they are. All they can do is manage their own emotional reactions.

*The reading of a book on the attaining of success is in itself the symbolic attaining of that success.* It is while they read that these readers are ‘succeeding’ . . . The lure of the book resides in the fact that the reader, while reading it, is then living in the aura of success. What he wants is easy success; and he gets it in symbolic form by the mere reading itself. (Burke, 1941/1967, p. 299, italics in original)

Although this passage was written in an earlier time, regarding a different form of self-help (what Burke called inspirational literature), it is equally apt now. Relationship guides reinforce readers’ beliefs that they are doing the right thing at the same time that they reassure them that what they are doing is difficult, and they are not alone. Women who have been primed to ‘do something’ about their relationships are doing what responsible citizens are supposed to do: they are seeking guidance, and by continuing to do so, they continue to succeed.

Marriage is a hotly contested issue in many quarters at present. Some of the American states have been offering financial incentives to unwed mothers to marry, and many governments in the western world have been dealing with gay marriage initiatives. This is in addition to the hue and cry about the divorce rate by religious and social commentators, and the proliferation of books and programs aimed at ameliorating the problem. Historically, marriage has been in ‘crisis’ at numerous times and places (Coontz, 2003), and as is typical in times of social unrest or change there have always been attempts to maintain the status quo. Relationship guides appear, on the surface, to be embracing ‘new’ ideas about intimate relationships based on the mutual happiness of both parties, but in actuality are telling at least one party what that happiness is supposed
to look like. And it looks suspiciously like self-sacrifice, despite being dressed up in the glamorous apparel of intimacy, romance, peace and love.

The relationship guide genre reproduces the dominant ideology regarding marriage, with far-reaching consequences for everyone, as we are all affected by marriage and how it is done, or not done. Just as people seem always to want to know the sex of a new baby, they also want to know the relationship status of an adult. How we relate to and how we judge others has much to do with this status. Relationship guides reinforce the notion that women must be married (preferably with children), and that they carry the majority of the responsibility for the success or failure of the marriage. The division of labor among the sexes is reinforced; men are seen as suited to the highest paying work outside the home (and possibly to fixing the car or mowing the lawn, which are still technically outside the home) while women are seen as suited to housework and childcare (and possibly to work outside the home because they want to contribute to a better lifestyle by adding to the family income).

Cloud, (1998) drawing on Gramsci, suggests that the therapeutic is a hegemonic discourse, and from this perspective women can be seen as collaborating in their own oppression by buying into the notions of common sense imparted by the genre. Case examples that portray women as struggling with the many demands on their lives, but always prioritizing family, are a primary means of promoting common sense. Shumway (2003 p. 149, e.g.,) suggests that the case example is an extreme form of the realist genre (and perhaps a genre in its own right). Realist texts are particularly effective at suppressing contradictions, and encouraging the reader to “adopt a position from which everything seems ‘obvious’” (Chandler, 2002, p. 180). Other methods of making the discourse of the good wife ‘common’ include repeated use of metaphors that highlight the ‘obvious’ rewards of journeys and growth, as well as terms that create binary oppositions between good versus bad behavior or outcomes. The godterm acceptance is particularly potent for making acquiescence to her position common sense for the woman reader, given that the only alternative is one of pain and suffering, which bankrupts the notion of choice.
Relationship guides promote the romantic notion of individual choice in whom we marry\textsuperscript{38} but offer no other choices than to marry. The illusion of having made a choice reinforces a woman’s felt responsibility towards her marriage. If she believes she went into the situation willingly and knowledgeably she is more likely to feel that any problems belong to her individually rather than to the social or political context. Although she obtains comfort and a sense of shared misery from reading relationship guides, she remains isolated in her problems. Some of the books even suggest that people not talk about their marital problems with anyone other than a professional (one who is aligned with the author’s views of course).

The more that people buy into the notion of marriage as an individual choice, devoid of social or political influence, the less likely it is that there will be change in the status quo. As Cloud says, the therapeutic “offers consumption, self-care, and consolation as substitutes for meaningful social change” (1998, p. 18). At the same time that readers are reassured that their position may be difficult they are encouraged to consume the life-style that comes with marriage and to be good, emotionally controlled selves (Coontz, 2003 documents the correlation of the consumer lifestyle with the ‘traditional’ marriage of the 1950s). The therapeutized citizen is so busy taking responsibility for herself (and being a good wife) that she has no time or energy for social action.

**Conclusion**

The last point brings me to the question of whether we need change where relationships and marriage are concerned. Coontz (2003) says that marriage is a much better deal for most people nowadays than it has been historically. The option to leave a marriage (and the corresponding divorce rates) does not have to be seen as negative; since the institution of no-fault divorce for instance, there have been significant drops in domestic violence, as well as in the rates of married women killing either themselves or their husbands (Coontz, 2003, p. 293). As discussed in Chapter 1, the current state of

\textsuperscript{38} There is a common theme in the genre that choice of partner is fated, but it is still presented as a choice. This paradox is so common in religious and new age language that it seems to go un-noticed.
marriage is generally considered a ‘crisis’ by people who have a romantic notion of a ‘traditional’ marriage that never really existed.

Some critics suggest that the regulation of relationships creates the very problems it is meant to circumvent.

Wedding, marriage, romance, and heterosexuality become naturalized to the point where we consent to the belief that marriage is necessary to achieve a sense of well-being, belonging, passion, morality, and love. And we live the illusion that marriage is somehow linked to the natural order of the universe rather than see it as it is: a social and cultural practice produced to serve particular interests. (Ingraham, 1999, p. 120)

Ingraham goes on to say that, rather than looking for solutions, experts focus on studying divorce and ‘broken homes’ “without ever calling into question the very structures that create the conditions that produce these outcomes” (p. 120). From this perspective, marriage is inherently problematic. The case is stated even more forcefully by Geller (2001):

I believe that marriage is destructive, because it perpetuates negative hierarchical divisions such as the celebration of wives and the accompanying denigration of spinsters, the artificial distinction between good (sexually monogamous) and bad (sexually experimental) girls, the exaltation of conjugal love over platonic friendship, and the privileging of institutionalized togetherness over solitude. Wedlock is tainted by the historical residue of female subordination; an overwhelming, oppressive social history that many modern brides and grooms are simply not aware of. (p. 46)

Although most critiques of marriage come from a feminist perspective, Kipnis, in a polemic she entitles Against Love (2003) suggests that relationships, as currently conceived, are unfulfilling for everyone. Without regulation and enforcement, she suggests, marriage would not endure.

Clearly love is subject to just as much regulation as any powerful pleasure-inducing substance. Whether or not we fancy that we love as we please, free as the birds and butterflies, an endless quantity of social instruction exists to tell us what it is, and what to do with it, and how, and when. And tell us, and tell us: the quantity of advice on the subject of how to love properly is almost as infinite as the sanctioned forms it takes are limited. (p. 40)

There is unquestionably a shift in attitudes toward marriage, with more people choosing to live together (now a normal ‘stage’ in relationship progression to marriage,
but also, for many, a legitimate choice in its own right), more people marrying at an older age or not at all, and legitimization of homosexual unions in several countries (Coontz, 2003). People often speak of their ‘relationship’ even if they are married, suggesting a shift in emphasis from the ‘institution’ to the personal. However, commitment in the form of marriage remains the ideal, as represented by popular culture, and by relationship guides. If change is in the wind, it is a breeze, not a hurricane.

Although I agree that marriage is inherently problematic – from the time and energy young girls devote to fantasizing about their wedding day, to the production of the bride as a spectacle, and the relegation of the groom to supporting role, to social systems that support inequity in labor and remuneration, to the discourses of relationship that bury contradictions and promote identities that are impossible – it is probable that as humans we require some guidelines for structuring our behavior. Despite our idealizations of ‘relationships’ as being about the interests and desires of two individuals, the personal is nonetheless political, and how we practice love affects and is affected by economic, political, and social practices.

By emphasizing the importance of sociopolitical factors in personal relationships, I do not mean to undermine the contribution of individual variables. Although I have said, for instance, that more women than men are unhappy in marriage, this does not mean that there are not some very happily married women and unhappily married men. Highly educated couples tend to have more egalitarian gender views and also to report more marital satisfaction. If people are going to make individual choices with regards to relationships, then people who can make educated choices are likely to fare better, and relationship guides could play a role in this education. This would imply that authors themselves need to be educated, and on the whole, books written by academic authors did a better job of addressing contextual variables.

Despite this, however, it is important to note the constrictions of the genre. In terms of metaphors and word clusters, there were few meaningful differences between academic and non-academic authors. While writers might like to think they are free agents, penning their own individual ideas, they are, like spouses who think their love is pure, more influenced by their context than they likely realize. As Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko (2002) say “genres require writers and speakers not only to ‘dance’ particular
attitudes and values, but also to adopt particular rhetorical stances, to write or speak from particular subject positions” (p. 4).

Authors who do wish to convey a different attitude may not realize that the form of the genre could undermine their intended message. An author who attempts to address issues of gender inequity, yet uses case examples that promote stereotypical images of women as homemakers is probably unaware that she is contradicting herself. An author who urges acceptance of some things, although not of others, might feel he is making a powerful statement, but if readers of his book are immersed in a genre where acceptance is a godterm, then that author’s powerful statement may be but a whimper in the chorus.

It has been suggested that readers do not always accept the dominant reading of a text, that they may actually resist the hegemonic discourse (cf. Hall, 1980). The readers I interviewed believed themselves to be critical consumers of self-help, and for the most part, they seemed to know what they wanted from a relationship guide. They did not believe everything they read, nor did they believe that all authors had honorable intentions (i.e., of helping readers, rather than making money). However, their criticisms were all within the genre; they had no notion that there might be anything wrong with the genre itself. They appeared to have internalized much of the rhetoric of the genre, talking in terms of self and spirituality, asserting the importance of acceptance of differences, and communication skills. There was little, if any, recognition of the sexist and classist bias of the genre, nor of the contradictions inherent in the intimate/romantic version of relationship championed in the texts. As Chandler points out, “while resistance at the level of the message is always possible, resistance at the level of the code is generally much more difficult when the code is a dominant one” (2002, p. 182).

The readers I interviewed seem to have adopted the subject position of the good wife, ready and willing to take on the challenge of single-handedly improving the state of not just their own, but also their friends’, daughters’, and mothers’ relationships. To be fair, I know from my professional relationship with some of the readers that they have insisted their husbands participate in therapy, knowing that there are limits to what they can do themselves (and some have even divorced the ones who refuse to participate). Despite this, though, these women are still willing to take on the lion’s share of the responsibility for the relationship. They all aspire to be good wives.
My own experience of interviewing these clients/readers has led me to increased understanding of the influence of this genre. I was surprised that so many of them seem to have accepted the genre wholesale, apparently unaware of the oppressive rhetoric, despite the discussions some of these same women had initiated with me about the unfairness of societal expectations of wives and mothers. This is the power of the therapeutic, which acknowledges oppression, but offers consolation, compensation and conformity in place of any real change (Cloud, 1998, Furedi, 2004, Payne, 1989).

While my observations of the conformity of relationship guides to a therapeutic culture is not entirely original, and while other critics have also noted the dangers of self-help rhetoric to the well-being of women, what I hope to have added to the argument is a more in-depth analysis of how this genre works. If, for instance, one wanted to use the genre for a more subversive purpose, one would need to know how to manipulate its techniques. Knowing the major metaphors, terministic screens and godterms might empower an author to tinker with a genre to her or his advantage. If we remember Burke's dramatistic view of discourse, and keep in mind the action performed by a genre, we stand a better chance of our work doing what we want it to do.

I began this section by wondering if there was a crisis in marriage. Certainly there is a perception that there is a crisis, and certainly there are large numbers of people who are unhappy with the state of their own marriage, evidenced by the massive popularity of relationship guides, and the increasing demand for marital therapists. I noted in my discussion of discourse analysis in chapter 2 that for some researchers, particularly feminist ones, it is important that discourse analysis lead to change. I hope that my elucidation of the means and ways of persuasion within the relationship guide genre provides useful information for responding to the marriage 'crisis' in different and productive ways.
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Appendix 1: Other Relationship Guides Read by Respondents

Below is a list of relationship guides (other than those analyzed in this project) that women mentioned they had read. Many women had difficulty remembering the authors of books they had read; where possible I have inserted the author name and the year the book was first published.

Are You the One For Me? (Barbara DeAngelis, 1994)
Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin (Anne Katherine, 2000)
Can This Marriage Be Saved (Margery Rosen, 1994)
Codependent no More (Melody Beattie, 1989)
How To Have An Affair With Your Husband, Before Someone Else Does (1987)
Love and Living (M. Radhakrishnan)
Loving for Life (Judith and Jim Sellner)
Mars and Venus on a Date (John Gray, 1999)
Men Who Hate Women and The Women Who Love Them (Susan Forward, 1987)
Passionate Marriage (David Schnarch, 1998)
Prepared Companions: Communications Manual For Loving Relationships (Robert Lees)
The Emotionally Abused Woman (Beverly Engel, 1992)
The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands (Laura Schlessinger, 2003)
The Verbally Abusive Relationship (Patricia Evans, 1992)
The Wendy Dilemma (Dan Kiley, 1984)
Too Good To Leave, Too Bad To Stay (Mira Kirshbaun, 1996)
Women Who Love Too Much (Robin Norwood, 1986)
You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation (Deborah Tannen, 1990)
Appendix 2: Metaphor Examples (Quotations)

Journey

Certainly the journey of creating a loving relationship can be rocky at times. (Gray, p. 6)

Marriage is a psychological and spiritual journey that begins in the ecstasy of attraction, meanders through a rocky stretch of self-discovery, and culminates in the creation of an intimate, joyful, lifelong union. (Hendrix, p. xxvi)

Aliveness has a lot to do with living in the present, with accepting that all we have in life is the journey, with all its mountains and valleys, all its bumpy roads and flat, boring stretches. (Page, p. 72)

You may feel like you are lost in a maze from which there is no real exit, no route that leads back to your core of consciousness and all of the strength and wisdom that resides there. Well, I’m all about creating a route and an exit for you whenever and wherever you want it. (McGraw, p. 14)

To navigate your way out of gridlock, you have to first understand its cause. (Gottman, p. 216)

The marriage map is meant to give you a broad overview of the experiences most couples have when they negotiate the marital terrain. (Weiner-Davis, p. 59)

In fact, he will have to transform in order to stay in step with you as you leave the bumpy road of not trusting him and steer onto the smoother road of having faith in him. (Doyle, p. 31, italics in original)

The solution always is getting back on the soul train someone threw you off. (Schlessinger, p. 65)

It’s about you waking up in the morning with a refreshing realization that you are paddling and steering your own canoe. It’s not about blaming yourself for where you’ve been, it’s about directing yourself toward where you are going. (McGraw, p. 115)

Weather

He may have to weather a few emotional storms or droughts, but the reward is much greater. (Gray, p. 121)

Relationships go through seasons like this…. Couples who thrive don’t enjoy the storms, but they don’t worry about them, because they have the perspective of years together, they know that the storms or dry seasons will pass, and that periods of abundance will always follow. (Page, p. 109)

The change may be abrupt or gradual, but at some point husbands and wives wake up to discover that they’ve migrated to a colder climate. (Hendrix, p. 65)

If you can warm up the emotional climate, or at least put a few cracks in the ice, you’ll be better able to speak your own truths (Lerner, p. 137)

But because people are unfamiliar with the emotional terrain, the normal hills and valleys of marriage, these predictable transitional periods are often misunderstood, causing overreactions. Those who manage to weather these universal stormy periods usually come out the other side
with greater love and commitment to their spouses. That’s why I want to offer you a marriage **map.**  
(Weiner-Davis, p. 59)

**Water**

Too often, couples begin to seek help for their marriage after they’ve already hit **troubled waters.**  
(Gottman, p. 45)

Commitment is the **bridge** over all sorts of **troubled waters;** it gives people the substrate upon which to build a real relationship.  
(Schlessinger, p. 159)

For example, what accounts for the emotional devastation that frequently accompanies the breakup of a relationship, that deadly **undertow** of feelings that can drown us in anxiety and self-pity?  
(Hendrix, p. 7)

When we’re **drowning** in emotions, it’s impossible to think creatively or clearly.  
(Lerner, p. 58)

If you are going to rescue your relationship, the first **lifeline** we have to throw is to you so that you can pull yourself out of your **emotional swamp.**  
(McGraw, p. 13)

**Space**

He needs **space** to be independent.  
(Doyle, p. 151)

Ironically, by making an agreement to stay within the relationship for three months, the isolater often ends up with more psychic **space** than before.  
(Hendrix, p. 105)

All he can do is maintain a cool **distance** and assert his need for **space.**  
(Lerner, p. 54)

I want to stay **close** to you, but I also need to maintain some emotional **distance** from the problem.  
(Page, p. 88)

For some, drugs and drinking work. For others, it’s **walking away from the scene**—thereby creating the crime.  
(Schlessinger, p. 204)

Her voice lands in the middle of the floor, in the widening **space** between them.  
(Lerner, p. 9)

Indeed, you are on the verge of creating a relationship that is going to be rich in emotional experience and one that will consistently become your **soft place to fall.**  
(McGraw, p. 145)

As I have said on air, putting **steel windows** up to keep out the dust also keeps out sunlight, the sound of birds and children playing, and the fresh smell of flowers.  
(Schlessinger, p. 94)

As you explore this list, remember that these little things can add up to create big **walls** of resistance and resentment.  
(Gray, p. 26)

It’s likely that you are doing everything right but you are hitting up against a brick **wall.**  
(Weiner-Davis, p. 151)

We create a **healthy boundary** around the self by exercising some control over what we conceal from—or reveal to—others.  
(Lerner, pp. 39-40)

Every day of their married lives, husbands and wives push against an invisible relationship **boundary**. One person habitually advances… the other habitually retreats…. Some couples stay locked in this particular **dance** step for the duration of their relationship.  
(Hendrix, p. 105)
Marriage is something of a dance. (Gottman, p. 92)

Many couples do this kind of dance when it comes to dealing with difficult issues. (Markman, p. 22)

**Organic Metaphors**

**Levels**

For all too many couples, the hidden issues never come out. Instead, they fester and produce levels of sadness and resentment that eventually destroy the marriage. (Markman, p. 141)

For the fuser this fear always lurks beneath the surface… (Hendrix, p. 105)

Finally, as I tried to give up my unpleasant behavior, I learned to dig a little deeper when my urge to control came up and simply say that I was afraid. (Doyle, p. 49)

Deep inside, every man wants to be his woman’s hero or knight in shining armor. (Gray, p. 137)

Using the first ground rule in this way will help you shift the conversation to the level of the hidden issue (Markman, p. 138)

You shouldn’t bury reasonable concerns by dismissing yourself as petty. (Schlessinger, p. 81)

When we are not able to speak authentically, our relationships spiral downward, as does our sense of integrity and self-regard. (Lerner, p. 5)

Their marriage has just taken a nasty tumble down the cascade toward divorce. (Gottman, p. 104)

**Growth**

Through this simple process… they had turned their marriage into a self-sustaining vehicle for personal growth. (Hendrix, p. 171)

Very few people, indeed, are able to grow in love. Yet, it does happen. When men and women are able to respect and accept their differences then love has a chance to blossom. (Gray, p. 14)

If you set the basic conditions for it [friendship] to happen, it will blossom and continue to build throughout your marriage. (Markman, p. 246)

It [goodwill] is the soil in which all the other qualities are planted and grow. (Page, p. 35)

Like flowers without sunlight and water, many marriages wither and die from a lack of attention to the best parts of the relationship. (Markman, p. 233)

Remember that the relationship lives or dies in the lifestyle and environment in which it occurs. (McGraw, p. 255)

As cold and cruel as it seems, when some people announce the death of their marriages, they really mean it. (Weiner-Davis, p. 151)

While it is true that bad experiences with … partners can leave you armed for bear… it is also true that shooting before you see the whites of their eyes (or the black of their hearts) leaves your relationship dead. (Schlessinger, p. 108)
Medical

In healthy marriages, spouses have the same definition of what it means to be loving. (Weiner-Davis, p. 53, bold type added)

On the flip side, instead of making sure you look good, it does little for the long-term health of a relationship to protect your spouse from him or herself. (Schlessinger, p. 40)

Make no mistake: the sick relationship is like any other ailment that is subject to diagnosis. If you make a wrong diagnosis, you not only treat the wrong thing; you ignore the real problem because you already think you are on track. (McGraw, p. 24)

When a relationship seems to be in trouble, it could be that all it really needs is a generous dose of time. The problem is often misdiagnosed. (Page, p. 63)

However, in the best of circumstances, what happened will leave her with a wound and a grief that will remain for many years. (Markman, p. 219)

During your childhood, did your family have to cope with a particular emotional problem, such as aggression between parents, a depressed parent, or a parent who was somewhat emotionally wounded? (Gottman, p. 58)

We are born in relationship, we are wounded in relationship, and we can be healed in relationship. Indeed, we cannot be fully healed outside of a relationship. (Hendrix, p. xix, italics in original)

A woman has the ability to heal a man of this addiction to success by appreciating the little things he does. (Gray, p. 189)

Technology

Build/Repair

Even if the husband doesn’t react this way very often, there’s an 81 percent chance that his marriage will be damaged. (Gottman, p. 101)

Sometimes couples allow the rest of a good marriage to be damaged by insisting on a resolution to a specific unresolved conflict. (Markman, p. 95)

We like to believe that any crucial relationship can be repaired. (Lerner, p. 215)

When you choose to bear anger at your partner, you build a wall around yourself. (McGraw, p. 97)

But by that time, most women have built a wall around themselves, one that is impervious to men’s efforts to change. (Weiner-Davis, p. 40)

Waiting until after marriage is not fair and not the way to build a secure foundation. (Schlessinger, p. 31)

Honesty is the only foundation on which trust can be built. (Lerner, p. 126)

Desire, belief, and commitment form the essential foundation on which couples who thrive build their “house.” With such a foundation, a couple can withstand the hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and floods that assault them as they go through life. (Page, p. 16)
Well, there you have it: the tools and clarity necessary to create what you want and deserve in your relationship. (McGraw, p. 299)

Validation is a powerful tool that you can use both to build intimacy and to reduce anger and resentment. (Markman, p. 20)

**War**

Instead, the cold war begins. (Doyle, p. 39)

Because of family wars, dating wars, and inner wars, the end is too often the tragedy of not being able to connect with comfort, with trust. (Schlessinger, p. 107)

In this case, winning the legal battle would mean losing the marriage-saving war. (Weiner-Davis, p. 37)

The husband sees this as an attack. Another battle begins. (Gottman, p. 21)

When our partners behave in ways that conflict with our self-interest, we have an arsenal of weapons to help us maintain our illusions. (Hendrix, p. 142)

As frustration and hostility mount, partners often try to hurt each other by hurling verbal (and sometimes physical) weapons. (Markman, p. 15)

If he assumes she is blaming him, then he draws his sword to protect himself from attack. (Gray, p. 37)

Let me tell you right now: this is dangerous saber rattling. You’re hitting the panic button, and as a result you’re knocking irreparable chinks into your relationship every time something goes wrong. (McGraw, p. 139)

Before you choose from the marriage-saving “weapons” below, you should make sure the battle you’re fighting is worth fighting for. (Weiner-Davis, p. 103)

**Repair** attempts are the secret weapon of emotionally intelligent couples. (Gottman, p. 22)

**Financial**

One colleague recently remarked that “time is the currency of the nineties.” Failing to spend enough of this currency on marital and family relationships becomes a major problem for many people. (Markman, p. 80)

Most marriages are run like a commodities market, with loving behaviors the coin in trade. (Hendrix, p. 121)

You are paying a big price for clinging to your analysis. (Page, p. 20)

Though it is reassuring that she’s finally copped to her own responsibility, it is sad that her children, like those of so many other folks ill-equipped to take on responsibility for even themselves, will still have to pay the price. (Schlessinger, p. 237)

You need to know your relationship’s assets and liabilities, the things that work well and the things that don’t. (McGraw, p. 22)
As your mutual dedication became clearer, it seemed safer to invest in the relationship. (Markman, p. 181)

By the end of the eighth week, his efforts were starting to pay off. (Weiner-Davis, p. 169)

The biggest payoff from this emotional bank account isn’t the cushion it offers when the couple are stressed. (Gottman, p. 81)

We have found that financial metaphors can help to explain why a long-term perspective is so vital. (Markman, p. 191).
Appendix 3: Metaphors, Phoros and Subjects

The terms (Phoros) from each metaphor are listed in the second column. The first column refers to the quotation in which the term can be found (listed in alphabetical order — A for Journey, B for Weather, etc. — then in numerical order as found in Appendix 3). The third column lists the subject of the metaphor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoros</th>
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<tr>
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<td>RELATIONSHIP</td>
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<td>A1 journey</td>
<td>marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 journey</td>
<td>marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 terrain</td>
<td>marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5 emotional terrain, hills, valleys</td>
<td>LIFE, SELF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 rocky stretch</td>
<td>self-discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 journey</td>
<td>life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8 train</td>
<td>life (way of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9 canoe</td>
<td>life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1 rocky</td>
<td>DIFFICULTIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 bumpy roads (&amp; mountains etc)</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 maze</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 gridlock</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 bumpy road</td>
<td>difficulties (not trusting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 smoother road</td>
<td>decreasing difficulties (trusting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 navigate</td>
<td>CHANGE, EFFORTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 steer</td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 in step</td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9 paddling and steering</td>
<td>changing (deciding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3 migrated</td>
<td>ADVICE, SKILL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 map</td>
<td>advice (s.h. book)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 route, exit</td>
<td>advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5 map</td>
<td>advice (s.h. book)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 bridge</td>
<td>skill (commitment)</td>
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<td>C5 lifeline</td>
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<td>B2 storms, dry seasons</td>
<td>difficult events; disagreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2 seasons</td>
<td>good and bad times</td>
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<tr>
<td>B3 colder climate</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5 stormy periods</td>
<td>difficult events; disagreements</td>
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<tr>
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<td>difficulties</td>
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### Table: Relationship Rhetoric

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</tr>
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<td>E4</td>
<td>deep inside</td>
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### Relationship Rhetoric

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### MEDICAL

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<tr>
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### Change, Efforts

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<td>G8</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>BUILD</td>
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<td>H10</td>
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<tr>
<td>H6</td>
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<table>
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<th>WAR</th>
<th>DIFFICULTIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>war</td>
<td>difficulty (disagreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>wars</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>battle</td>
<td>difficulty (legal process)</td>
</tr>
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<td>I4</td>
<td>battle</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I4</td>
<td>attack</td>
<td>difficulty (comment made by wife)</td>
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<td>I5</td>
<td>weapons</td>
<td>means of maintaining illusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I6</td>
<td>weapons</td>
<td>insults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I7</td>
<td>attack</td>
<td>insults</td>
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<td>I7</td>
<td>sword</td>
<td>insults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I8</td>
<td>saber rattling</td>
<td>insults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I9</td>
<td>battle</td>
<td>difficulty (disagreement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANGE, EFFORTS</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>war</td>
<td>efforts to keep marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVICE, SKILLS</td>
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<td>I10</td>
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<td>skill (conciliatory gesture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I10</td>
<td>secret weapon</td>
<td>skill (conciliatory gesture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I9</td>
<td>weapons</td>
<td>advice / skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>FINANCIAL</td>
<td>RELATIONSHIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2</td>
<td>commodities market</td>
<td>marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J7</td>
<td>pay off</td>
<td>romance</td>
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<tr>
<td>J8</td>
<td>payoff</td>
<td>romance</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>J3</td>
<td>paying a big price</td>
<td>suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>J4</td>
<td>pay the price</td>
<td>suffer</td>
</tr>
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<td>J8</td>
<td>emotional bank account</td>
<td>emotions (loving behavior)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J1</td>
<td>currency</td>
<td>time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2</td>
<td>coin in trade</td>
<td>skills (loving behaviors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J5</td>
<td>assets and liabilities</td>
<td>skills / lack of skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6</td>
<td>invest</td>
<td>skill (trust)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 4: Word Clusters: Truth, Skills, Self, Spirituality

Words that are indented were found in the text close to the first word above them that is not indented, or are versions of the non-indented word above them.

Words in the right hand column are words that are opposed with words in the left hand column. (Words in the right hand column that do not have a word directly opposite in the left hand column appear with the closest word above in the left hand column, with the exception of words at the end of a word cluster section, which are simply negative words that seem to fit the category.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truth</th>
<th>Fighting/harming</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>dangerous</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>denial</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>distorted</td>
<td></td>
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<td>evil</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>false</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>myths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pretending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychobabble poison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red herring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secret</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical truths</td>
<td>partial truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>untrue to ourselves</td>
<td>warm and fuzzy euphemisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>untrue to ourselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wrong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a ring of truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deepest truths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equally true</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>especially true</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full truth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>higher truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horrifying truth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>own truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whole truth</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
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<tr>
<td>accurate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authentic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common-sense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crucial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diplomacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fairness, goodness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-d (God)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guarantee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silence, secrecy, stigma, shame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Word Clusters: Truth (Continued)

humility
important
inevitable
inner feelings
knowledge
manners and discretion
painful
plain
possible
precious
reality
right
self-evident
simple
tried and true
trust
valid
fact
biological fact
sad fact
simple
correct
diagnose
knowledge
aware
powerful / power
common knowledge
reality

undeniable
certain
common wisdom
correct
fact / facts
guarantee
honest
I know
inside scoop
invariably
obvious
promise
proven
realism
really
right
trust me
validity

be right

romantic illusion

mistakes
unrealistic
incorrect
belief
expectations

defenses
hope
denial
feminists

Hollywood

unrealistic ideas
wrong


Skills
answers
clear
instructions
change
action
responsibility
solve
common sense
effective
exercises
fix
formula
action
change
common-sense
goals
long-range
manageable pieces
success
guide
definitive
practical
important concept
improve
insights
learn
manual
practical
training
user's guide
method
concrete
systematic
practice
principles
deep and timeless
fundamental
simple
tested
program
marital improvement project
progress
measure
research
exhaustive
objective
powerful
principles
real
results
scientific and professional

vague, unspecific goals

silly self-help talk
mistakes

conspiracy
opinions
Word Clusters: Skills (Continued)

solid straightforward true up-to-date well-founded results dramatic long-lasting real rules effective secrets skills creative effective exercises learn master patience powerful practice resolve simple specific solutions common sense lasting solid solution oriented straightforward no-nonsense steps proven simple specific step-by-step strategic success flourish techniques effective experiment interventions practical proven secrets simple specific strategies time-tested tools powerful

myth opinions damage vague, negative pop-psych nonsense failure flounder
Word Clusters: Skills (Continued)

- psychobabble-free
- reliable
- useful
- transform
- work
- hard
- practice
- double-talk
- fuzzy thinking

Self

- self-accepting
  - authentic center
  - balanced
- self-care
  - fulfillment
  - patience
  - good-natured
  - well-rested, well-nourished, balanced
- self-confident
  - honoring
- self-confident
- self-control
- self-discovery
- self-esteem

- secure
  - nature, self-loving person
  - strengths and limitations
  - power
  - personal dignity
  - success
  - healthy
  - courage and creativity
  - calm and confident
  - worth
  - empowerment
  - worthy and valuable
  - high standard
  - self-worth
  - dignity
  - security
  - dignity
  - self-control
  - centered
  - self-examination
  - courage
  - self-expression
  - self-honoring
  - respectful
  - self-image
- self-neglect
- trapped
- exhausted
- frazzled
- depleted
- fried and frazzled
- unattractive
- complaining
- selfishness
- devalued
- diminish
- insecure
- helpless
- empty
- meaningless
- too dependent
- too lazy
- toxic
- combative
- lost, out of control
Relationship Rhetoric

Word Clusters: Self (Continued)

- positive
- self-knowledge
- self-love
  - accept yourself
  - being real
  - courage
- self-regard
  - intimacy
  - integrity
- self-respect
  - surrendered
  - virtuous, mature
  - dignity
  - inner conviction
  - confidence
  - inner strength
  - integrity
- self-sacrificing
- self-worth
- best self
  - present, centered, and in touch
  - authenticity
  - courage
  - strength
  - work
- real self
  - limits and vulnerability
- sense of self
  - wonderful person
- uncensored selves
- be yourself
- encourage yourself
- forgive yourself
- protect yourself
- strengthen yourself
- take care of yourself
  - cool, strong, confident
- accepting
- well-being
- accountable / accountability
  - healthy
  - constructive
- change
- boundaries
- healthy
- shame
- anger and frustration
- control
- nagging, arguing
- unattractive, shameful
- self-serving
- emotional self
- self-serving illusion
- clobber yourself
- self-critic
- self-deception
- self-fulfillment
- self-involved
- false self
  - disowned self
  - camouflages
  - protects
- low self-esteem
  - guilt
  - regret
- pseudo-self
- misguided self-expression
- victim
**Word Clusters: Self (Continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limits</th>
<th>anger and bitterness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core values and beliefs</td>
<td>disconnected, emotionally isolated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>denial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centered</td>
<td>superficial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>emotionally dishonest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>wound angry sarcastic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will and grit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Core of consciousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deserve</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting clear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get real</td>
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<td>Non-defensive</td>
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<td>Courage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get right</td>
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<td>Growth</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In touch</td>
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<td>Feel</td>
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<td>Intuition</td>
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<td>denial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabotage</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Criticize</td>
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<td>Chronic frustration</td>
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<td>Self-defeating</td>
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<td>Childhood past issues</td>
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<td>Repressed emotions</td>
<td>pain and anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Word Clusters: Self (Continued)

- maturity
  - worth
  - personal power
  - take charge
  - dignity
  - self-esteem
  - dignity and respect
  - fulfillment
  - knowledge
  - psychologically sound

- needs
  - love
  - understood
  - deepest level
  - valid

- own voice
- personal
  - boundaries
  - separation and togetherness
  - spiritual growth
  - boundaries
  - beliefs
  - growth
  - change
  - healthy

- power
- proud
- recover

- responsible
- right spirit

- soul
  - nourish
  - strength
  - wisdom
  - softer

- unconscious
  - unconscious mind
  - unconscious perception
  - unconscious drives

- unresolved
  - feelings
  - childhood emotions
  - values,
    - beliefs and priorities

- convictions
- well-being

- immaturity
- denial

- victim

- pain, confusion, emptiness
- control
- resentment

- curiosities desires

- superficial
- desperate expressions
- suppress feelings, needs
- phony invisible

- power struggles

- wall

- self-doubt worthless
- repress / repressed
- lost self
- adapt

- compromising
- negative thinking
- inadequacy

- weakness

- compromise
- de-selfed
Word Clusters: Self (Continued)

worth and dignity  blaming and shaming  denials
work (on yourself) abandoned
change  primal fear
  emotionally abandoned terror
  basest instincts
  brats, narcissists, sociopaths
downright evil
  damage / emotional damage of childhood
  lost self
denial  ashamed
  excuses ugly secrets
  guilt shame
  remorse self-destructive
  silence deserve
  entitlement emotional baggage
hyperindividuality inadequate
superficiality immorality unfinished business
unmet needs childhood needs
weakness and fears wound, wounded, wounding tragically
perilous self-protection
defense neurotic abandonment
  dark side

Spirituality

bible
blessing / blessed privileged
beauty / beautiful wonderful
complexity magic
miracle
Christian counseling self-worth
relationship rhetoric

Word Clusters: Spirituality (Continued)

cosmic intention
divine
  profound
  purpose
God
  God bless
  God designed
  God-given gifts
  God-given
    united with the universe
God's plan
  Gifts
  G-d's work
  thank God
accept
bible
blessed
complete
creator
design
faith
  merciful
  love
  light
forgive
good
happiness
higher power
holy matrimony
Jesus Christ
love
master plan
moral
obligated
perfect
power
pray/prayer
protection
responsibility
serve
calm
truth
guardian angel
Heaven
  intimacy
magic / magical
  magic key
  magic tool
  magical feeling
  magical love
delighted
electrifying closeness
love
self-serving
reject criticize
dark, ugly
envy evil
control
daily life
Word Clusters: Spirituality (Continued)

- healing
- transformation
- trusting
- miracles / miraculous
- miraculously changed
- miraculously healed
- simple miracles
- generosity
- prosperity
- glory
- higher being
- higher power
- meaning and purpose
- meant to be
- protected and looked after
- secrets
- trust
- moral / morality
- values
- integrity
- mystery
- mysteries of love
- mysterious attraction
- ecstasy
- miraculous
- pray
- safety
- wisdom and divine guidance
- primitive yearning
- wish fulfillment
- mystical
- experience of oneness
- pray
- hope and pray
- faith
- religion
- religious journey
- serious Jew
- religious values
- religious base
- divine values
- accepting
- forgive
- core beliefs, values and practices
- good
- strong
- meaning
- prayers
- traditional
- sacred
- soulmates
- spiritual
- spiritual aspirations
- spiritual awareness

- resentment
- animal instincts
- distrust
- dishonesty
- negative expectations
- fear
- miserable
- funk
- liberal muck
- coincidence
- criticism and contempt
spiritual bonding
spiritual connection
  emotional
spiritual experience
  profound
  deep
spiritual growth
  safe, healed, whole
spiritual healing
  truth
spiritual journey
  ecstasy
spiritual life
spiritual needs
spiritual nourishment
spiritual path
spiritual potential
  complete
spiritual quest
spiritual retreats
spiritual time
spiritual union
  eros
spiritual yearning
  completion
accepting
beauty
  perfectly
  beautiful experience
blessed
  inner unity
  connected
commitment
connecting
divine
dreams
ecstasy
forgiveness
gifts
growth
healing
higher selves
inner life
journey
moral
mystical, inexplicable
original nature
perfect
practices
primal
support system
symbols
rituals
unique
values

Word Clusters: Spirituality (Continued)

divorce
conflict
split-off state
isolated
Word Clusters: Spirituality (Continued)

- sacred
- transcendent state
Appendix 5: Word Cluster Examples (Quotations)

Truth, Skills, Self, and Spirituality

Truth

The truth of these principles is self-evident and can be validated by your own experience as well as by common sense. (Gray, p. 5)

If you or someone you love is contemplating divorce, you will want to know what I have learned about the truth about divorce. (Weiner-Davis, p. 21)

Your quest for relational happiness must begin with right thinking—and that means first ridding yourself of wrong thinking—cleansing the ‘lens’ to your core of consciousness so that the truth, your innate wisdom, can shine through (McGraw, p. 47)

Expert Truth

(Reality, Fact, Correct, Wrong, Myths)

I am about to share with you ten of the most dangerous relationship myths that are commonly taught, believed in, and practiced. When you read them, your initial reaction might be to wonder if I have gone nuts. Some of these myths have been part of your mind-set for so long that you might have difficulty even contemplating the idea that they are false. You may very well think that if the myths I’m going to share aren’t true, then they should be true. They sound so right, they sound so nice. (McGraw, p. 47 – italics in original)

contrasts dramatically with the standard one offered by most marriage therapists. This is because as my research began to uncover the true story of marriage, I had to throw out some long-hallowed belief about marriage and divorce (Gottman, p. 8).

“[there] isn’t a single correct way to get things back on track, there are many” (Weiner-Davis p. 158).

“[it is] simply a fact that proximity is dangerous in and of itself because it allows opportunity for inappropriate feelings to evolve. (Schlessinger, p. 211)

“[it is a] basic biopsychological reality of healthy, normal women [and it] makes me mad that feminists would deny this undeniable reality and, in so doing, cause substantial harm to so many women. (Schlessinger, p. 52 italics added).

Individual Truth

(Honest, Denial)

If he can love himself only by burying and denying the, then his self-love is like the thinnest sheet of ice over a frigid lake. The slightest step truth in the wrong direction will plunge him into icy waters. Worse, he knows that Ginger’s love is based only on the parts of him that she can see. His constant companion is the fear that if she knew the real truth, she would abandon him.” (Page, p. 86)

You have acknowledged the truth, gotten yourself out of denial, developed the right thinking and the right spirit... (McGraw, p. 192).

Though choosing to have a major career instead is a reasonable, personal choice for some women, diminishing the value of motherhood and marriage by outright denial and attack or by relegating them to the edge of a woman’s more important worker existence is cruel, because it denies the basic psychological and biological
truth of women to bond and nurture; and that of men to provide and protect. (Schlessinger, p. 10)

Self-disclosure does not imply compulsive honesty, the sharing of trivial details, or petty acts of confession for the sake of technical truths. If an omission or partial truth does not create a barrier of any sort, then it does not preclude intimacy. (Page, pp. 160-61).

As you add to your growing fund of knowledge, you are creating reality love, a love based on the emerging truth of yourself and your partner, not on romantic illusion. (Hendrix, p. 136).

more individuals come forth to tell their truth. ... Previously dishonored individuals, families, and communities begin to develop a proud identity based on an authentic voice and the shedding of silence, secrecy, stigma, and shame. When we collectively challenge the shaming and stigmatizing myths of the dominant culture, we make room for more honest conversation. (Lerner, p. 35).

Skills

We believe that learning how to have a good relationship is largely a skill, like any other skill, that you can learn together as a couple. To help you do this, we provide specific instructions for exercises that can be practiced at home. Hence, this is a hands-on, “just do it” kind of book. (Markman, p. 8)

From time to time it’s a good idea to recharge your compromising skills by focusing together on solving a problem that is not related to your marital issues. What follows is a fun exercise that will give you practice in coming to consensus decisions... (Gottman p. 184)

I’m going to teach you a slew of specific techniques, methods, strategies to get your spouse’s attention and quickly lay the groundwork for more positive interactions..... In addition to becoming armed with new ideas and techniques to improve your relationship, I am going to teach you how to assess if what you’re doing is working. (Weiner-Davis p. 101)

I wish I could reassure you that reading this book will guarantee that you will finally be heard in your most difficult relationships.... Or that following my good advice will give you a deep sense of inner peace. (Lerner, p.2)

No book or expert can protect us from the range of painful emotions that make us human” (Lerner p. 2).

Skills, Techniques, Tools, Principles, Steps

- The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work – Gottman subtitle
- Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love – Markman subtitle
- A Seven-Step Strategy for Reconnecting With Your Partner – McGraw subtitle
- The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage – Weiner-Davis subtitle

Gray lists “the three steps involved in asking for and getting what you want” (p. 247). McGraw suggests making “a list of three specific action steps that you can take” (p. 191). Weiner-Davis offers a “7-Step Program” (title), and Hendrix lists “Ten Steps Towards a Conscious Marriage” (p. 249).

A few simple principles, thoroughly understood and regularly practiced, can turn failing relationships around, and send already thriving relationships into the stratosphere. They are essential skills for friendship, for intimacy, for parenting…. (Page, p. 117).
Let’s begin with the first step, mirroring, which is a **straightforward communication technique** commonly used in couples therapy. (Hendrix, p. 143)

Now that you understand some **powerful techniques** for communicating and solving problems, we turn to our five ground **rules** for protecting your relationship from mishandled conflict. (Markman, p. 101)

With this new awareness you will have the **tools** you need to get the love you **deserve**... (Gray, p. 6)

Well, there you have it: the **tools** and clarity necessary to create what you want and **deserve** in your relationship. (McGraw, p. 299)

**Guide, Program, Research**

- A Practical **Guide** to Finding Intimacy, Passion, and Peace with a Man – Doyle subtitle
- A Practical **Guide** From the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert -- Gottman subtitle
- A Practical **Guide** For Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships – Gray subtitle
- A **Guide** For Couples – Hendrix subtitle

Here is a **manual**, a user’s **guide**, for one of life’s great adventures. (Markman p. xi, foreword by Dean Edell)

It has forced me to become clearer and more specific about my Divorce Busting **program**. In fact, I have distilled it to seven **steps**. These **steps** will be the road **map** you need to save your marriage. (Weiner-Davis, p. 15)

I’m all about creating a **route** and an exit for you whenever and wherever you want it.... I’m prepared to kick a hole in the wall of the pain-ridden, unhappy **maze** you’ve gotten yourself into, and provide you with clear access to action-oriented **answers** and **instructions** on what you must do to have what you want. (McGraw, p. 14)

If your relationship is in trouble, big trouble or small, I’m going to tell you straight-up how to **fix** it. I’m not going to try to be cute or glib, and I’m not going to hit you with a lot of clever **buzzwords**. I’m not going to use a bunch of **psychobabble** or the **en vogue theory du jour**. I’m going to give you the **straightforward, no-nonsense** answers that **work**—answers that have always worked, but have just been buried in a deluge of **pop-psych nonsense**. (McGraw p. 1, italics in original)

We base our suggestions on solid **research** rather ‘**pop-psych’ speculation**. This means that we don’t just assume what may help couples but use **research** and testing to see what really works. (Markman, p. 3)

The results of these **studies**, not my own **opinions**, form the basis of my Seven **Principles** for making marriage **work**. These **principles**, in turn, are the cornerstones of a remarkably **effective** short-term therapy for couples that I have developed. (Gottman, p 8)

**Practice, Work, Exercises**

When you choose to use the **skills** and ground **rules** we present for handling conflict, you’re choosing to use more **structure**.... **Practice** is the key. We’ll cover many other important **principles** in this book, but none is more critical. (Markman pp 71-72)
It’s time to push back your sleeves and begin the hard work of repairing your marriage. And I do mean hard work. ... The hardest parts of this program are not the skills you will learn—they are amazingly simple—it’s the application of those skills. (Weiner-Davis, p. 47)

You must work hard to ensure that your perceptions of yourself and your partner are on the mark.... These are new skills that you are learning, and like any new skills you learn, you can master them only through practice. And I mean you have to practice them often. (McGraw, p. 212).

**Effective, Proven, Results**

You should start to see improvement after two weeks, so if you don’t, go back and review the basics. (Doyle, p. 255)

The results of this new program for understanding the opposite sex are not only dramatic and immediate but also long-lasting. (Gray, p. 6)

You will want to read Part 4 over and over and over. That’s because it is full of success stories of people who feel as you do about the importance of making marriages work, people who used my proven seven-step program and managed to make their relationships more loving than ever. (Weiner-Davis, p. 45).

When a solvable problem causes excessive tension, it’s because the couple haven’t learned effective techniques for conquering it. They aren’t to blame—far too many of the conflict resolution ideas recommended by marriage manuals and therapists are not easy to master or apply. (Gottman, p. 133)

**Self**

The challenge in conversation is not just to be our self but to choose the self we want to be. What we call ‘the self’ is never static, but instead is a work in progress. (Lerner, p. 4)

Accept yourself, not the self you wish you were, not the self you pretend you are, not the self that you polish up and present to the world, but your real, whole self. (Page, p. 157)

Happiness is a do-it-yourself job. (Weiner-Davis, p. 57)

**Self and Truth (Real, Denial)**

The ability to speak our own truths forms the core of both intimacy and self-regard. (Lerner, p. 3)

You have to get real about you. And when I say real, I mean one hundred percent, drop-dead, no-kidding real. No defensiveness, no denial—total honesty. (McGraw, p. 2, italics in original)

If you can admit that you frequently or sometimes control, nag, or criticize your husband, then it is up to you and you alone to take the actions described here to restore intimacy to your marriage and dignity and peace to yourself. (Doyle, p. 25)

I really don’t need two people to create wonderful changes in a marriage, and neither do you. You just need you. (Weiner-Davis, p. 69)

**Self and Strength/Power (Courage, Dignity, Shame, Pain)**

To look at oneself truthfully, honestly, requires courage:
It takes enormous **courage** to pretend, experiment, or act *as if* in the service of sharing a **self** that is more whole. (Lerner, p. 65)

The hardest thing to do is to look into a mirror with 100X enlargement—nobody cares to see their pores that big! It takes a lot of **courage** to face that, and I applaud my callers, even when it’s likely that they won’t face up till sometime after the call. (Schlessinger, p. 191)

The tone of my voice alone would make me cringe with self-recrimination. Through surrendering, you will find the **courage** to gradually stop indulging in these unpleasant behaviors and replace them with **dignified** ones. (Doyle, p. 15, italics added) I remember how **unattractive** and **shameful** I felt when I would boss John and complain... My **self-respect** deteriorated with each harsh word. (Doyle, p. 37)

If I have inner **strength** and I **trust myself**, then proving my **worth** to others will be unnecessary. I will not need to base my **worth** on outdoing or dominating others. If I know and **love** myself, I don’t have to fear losing **control**. I **trust** that I will not betray myself, so I can relax. I can let myself be completely open. If I know and **accept myself**, then I **love** myself too much to give **myself over to you completely**. **My self-respect won’t allow it to happen.** I can be devoted to you and still maintain my **integrity**. I can take **care of myself**. (Page, p. 157)

**Childhood, Healing**

We all started out life whole and vital, eager for life’s adventures, but we all had a perilous pilgrimage through **childhood**. In fact, some **wounding** took place in the first few months of our lives. (Hendrix, p. 19)

When a woman goes into her well her deepest **issues** tend to surface. These **issues** may have to do with the relationship, but usually they are heavily charged from her past relationships and **childhood**. Whatever remains to be **healed** or resolved from her past inevitably will come up. (Gray, p. 117)

**Self and Care/Acceptance, Deserve, Worthy**

Surrendering takes **patience** and concentration, which are nearly impossible to conjure when you’re fried and frazzled. Usually there’s a direct connection between **self-care** and your level of **tolerance** for your husband. (Doyle, p. 69)

If you recognize yourself in the description of the **self-critic**, the best thing you can do for yourself and your marriage is to work on **accepting** yourself with all of your flaws. (Gottman, p. 265)

When you take the time to listen to your feelings you are in effect saying to the little feeling person inside ‘You matter. You **deserve** to be **heard** and I care enough to **listen**.’ (Gray, p. 244)

I just love that excuse, ‘I **deserve** it.’ Where does that immature sense of entitlement come from? (Schlessinger, p. 50).

**Spirituality**

In our desire to be **spiritually** whole—to be as complete and perfect as **God** had intended—we chose marriage partners who made up for the parts of our being that were split off in **childhood**. (Hendrix, pp. 65-66)

Marriage, then, is **sacred** because it connects the individuals in the marriage to their higher **selves** and to the infinite and the **divine**. (Page, p. 166)
So stop worrying. Start reading. Keep praying. (Weiner-Davis, p. 15)

Religion, God/HIGher Power, Prayer/Bible

They also agreed that it was important to attend church on a regular basis, something they had stopped doing for many years. They found that their commitment to spirituality boosted their commitment to each other. Steve and Judy beat the divorce odds and have never been happier (Weiner-Davis, p. 172)

as part of God's overall plan for our lives, He provides for us a mate.... For that reason I do not believe that you can reject and criticize your mate and at the same time accept God and his will for your life. (McGraw, p. 289)

One of the most profound truths is that G-d made us incomplete; and it is not a Ph.D. that completes us. What completes us is a joining with our gender counterpart. (Schlessinger, p. 70)

Miracles, Magic/Mystery, Beauty/Divine

What I'm talking about is a native spirituality, a spirituality that is a gift to us the moment we are conceived, a spirituality that is as much a part of our being as our sexuality, a spirituality that we lose sight of in childhood but that can be experienced once again in adulthood if we learn how to heal old wounds. When we regain awareness of our essential inner unity, we make an amazing discovery: we are no longer cut off from the rest of the world. Because we are in touch with the miracle of our own being, we are free to experience the beauty and complexity of the world.... It is my conviction that one of the surest routes to this exalted state of being is the humble path of marriage. When we gather the courage to search for the truth of our being and the truth of our partners' being, we begin a journey of psychological and spiritual healing. (Hendrix, p. 207)

Whatever your faith, trust that your husband is the instrument of a higher being and make a decision to appreciate what He has created. Remember how miraculous it seemed to meet him and fall in love and marry? Your husband's presence in your life is no less miraculous today, so don't take it for granted. Your higher power brought you together for an important reason—so that you could grow into your best selves. Remember that the challenges that your husband presents are partly your lessons to learn. (Doyle, p. 235)

The strange and beautiful Venusians were a mysterious attraction to the Martians. Their differences especially attracted the Martians.... In a magical and perfect way their differences seemed to complement each other. (Gray, p.44)

Quite often, when one partner makes a positive change the other will also change. This predictable coincidence is one of those magical things about life. (Gray, p. 55)
Appendix 6: List of Gender Terms

Words that are indented were found in the text close to the first word above them that is not indented, or are versions of the non-indented word above them.
Words in the right hand column are words that are opposed with words in the left hand column. (Words in the right hand column that do not have a word directly opposite in the left hand column appear with the closest word above in the left hand column)

Gender
automatically
  automatically motivated
common male/female patterns
culture
domestic relations
cultural and ethnic backgrounds
cultural expectations
custom
different/differences
  completely different
differ in all areas
different languages
different needs, preferences
dramatic differences
enormous differences
expected
  genetically, physiologically, psychologically
healthy
inherently different
misunderstanding
natural
  natural difference
  programmed
natural order of things
normal
  normal
opposite sex
subcultures
supposed to be different
truth
valid
valid differences
ways of communicating
wired up differently
  division of labor
yin and yang
economic, social, and political climate
evolutionary plan
foreign language
gender
differences
gender appropriate
gender contrast
  conflict
gender counterpart
  incomplete
gender equity
Gender Terms (Continued)

gender gap
gender relations  gender inequality
  homophobia
gender roles
  natural
  rigid
  survival  evolution
  traditional
other filters (race, class, generation)
societal gender roles
human nature
instinctive / instinctual
  instinctive tendencies
  mysterious instinctive force
intimacy gap
natural
  healthy
  natural tendencies
  natural, inevitable,
  natural, normal, predictable
  natural and healthy process
natural cycle
  instinctively
  just happens
neighboring sex
normal
  natural
  healthy
opposites
attract
magnetism
opposite sex
married
merged whole
unique qualities
  healthy
schism
stereotypical

Women
adored and special
afraid of receiving
anger
  critical, contemptuous
  frustrated, humiliated
  jealous
  negativity
appreciated
attractive
  attractive blonde (wearing a bright print dress)
  attractive, intelligent, and delightfully sensual
coy
  pretty hair  sexy
Gender Terms: Women (Continued)

womanly shape and scent
sexy
ballistic
beauty/beautiful
awesome beauty and grace
beauty and culture
bitch/bitchy
biting, nagging and complaining wife
(stereotype of)
calm
conciliatory
caretaker
caring
sympathetic
children/social interactions
class and restraint
clean
cold
cold and accusatory
rejecting
shut down sexually
uncaring
complain
compulsive
computer scientist driven
connection
conservative
cried and pleaded
critical/criticizes
bitchy and critical
blaming and critical
caustic, critical
critical and controlling
critical and unloving
criticism and negativity
nagging
unavailable, critical
demanding
dependency and neediness
depressed
frigid
sexually repressed
devoted, compliant, and patient
discontent/unhappy
dream and fantasize/flirty
emotional, sensitive, intuitive
emotions, talking, sharing
exaggerate
exuberant/a delight
family person
fastidious
feeling
feminine/femininity
Gender Terms: Women (Continued)

feminine attributes  
feminine forces  
modesty, domesticity  
peacemaker, accommodator  
quiet and feminine  
silence and self-betrayal, self-sacrifice  
vulnerability  
flirtatiousness  
frustrated  
furious/fury  
gripping, picking fights  
happy  
harsh, push  
impulsive, outgoing  
instinctively understand  
intelligent, loving, bright outlook  
intense, energetic, passionate  
intuitive/intuition  
laundry, kids  
love, attachment, family, children  
makeup, perfume, pretty outfit  
manager of the claims department  
mother  
aggressive and dominant  
angry, emotional  
coldness  
comforting  
critical and angry  
critical, distant, unavailable  
devoted mother  
gentle  
good mother  
immaculate housekeeper  
insecure  
modesty  
nurture  
sexually repressive, distant  
stay-at-home mom  
warmth and petulance  

tragic/nagging  
criticism  
lecture  
nagging bitch  
naturally blonde hair, ponytail  
need  
nurturance, regeneration, sensitivity  
nurture  

bond  
offer unsolicited advice  
overwhelmed and emotionally involved  

controlling wife  
nagging, repelling  
screaming, complaining mother  
earn a living  

crass and coarse
Gender Terms: Women (Continued)

owner of her own dry-cleaning business
panics
patiently and lovingly
persists
play dumb
pleasing features wearing little makeup
PMS negative feelings
power self-esteem
primary caretakers
protected
gifts
frowned, spoiled, adored,
pursued, and treasured
supported
taken care of looked after
pursues
pushy, demanding
radiate love
rapport-builders
realtor
receiving graciously
relationship oriented
reservation agent for an airline
resistance to receiving (love)
rungs a catering business our of her home
sacrificing
sales clerk for a jewelry store
schoolteacher
secretary in a doctor’s office
seductress
sensitive sympathetic
sensitivity and discernment
fine-tuned
sex-kitten warmth
sexually inhibited
soft
feminine spirit flexible
gentle, delicate, receptive
tender, vulnerable, receptive
soothing
submit
sweetness devotion
talk/talking/discussing
traditional supporting role
unfair, irrational
upset, overwhelmed, confused, exhausted
vice president and secretary
vulnerable and sensitive
wife
wife and mother
withdrawn
womanhood
ideal woman

(he resists)
fried and frazzled
run-down anxious
(re - goal oriented)
sexually aggressive
overly critical correcting
ambition, aggression, control
(vs leader for men)
emotional, awkward
(vs doing the best he can)
henpecking
Gender Terms: Women (Continued)

what it means to be a woman
wise woman
youth and physical appearance
demanding
past her prime
rational and logical

Men
accomplishment
accountant for a major firm
achievements
problem solving
action-oriented
admiration proud, sexy, and strong
admired
talents
afraid of giving
angry
anger easily
attorney
authority
breadwinner
worked hard
brute strength
capable, loyal, hard-working
cave
caveman mentality
chivalry
complain
confident and accomplished
confused can’t keep up
connected

construction worker
contempt belligerence
control
controlled
critical nature
defend the cave
defensive
dependable
disorganized
distancer
distant
doing the best he can
dominant and in command
doormat
earns
easily frustrated
emotional and cried
father
distant, self-absorbed
entitlement
authoritarian

verbally-oriented
(s vs adored and special in women)
sensitive, emotional
guarded

no power impotent
(vs vulnerable and sensitive)
Gender Terms: Men (Continued)

effective discipline
passive and withdrawn
warm and caring good listener
fiery, opinionated
focused and withdrawn
formidable intellect
frustrated and angry
generous
goal oriented
good provider
good-looking man
hardworking / hard worker
  provided well
hero
  chivalrous proud powerful
husband
  husband and father
ignore, resist, defensive,
  contemptuous, critical
immature, unreliable
independent
  needs space
  independence or autonomy
insensitive
intellectually gifted
lack of compassion
laid back
leader
  lethargic, selfish, controlling, unromantic
little awareness
loan officer
logic and physical strength
loving man who will protect
manager of a restaurant
manages the meat section in a large grocery store
manhood
  manly man
  tough and aggressive helpless
masculine / masculinity
  masculine forces
  logic and power
  masculine attributes
  masculine instinct
matter-of-factly
mid-life crisis
muscle up
mustached, scholarly looking man
natural instinct
naturally thrifty man
needed
negative
outgoing confident passive
timid cautious
undermined emasculated
(she - relationship oriented)
macho
(vs submit for women)
emasculated
feminine
loving and nurturing
embarrassed and rejected
passive and less energized
Gender Terms: Men (Continued)

quiet, gentle
physical stature respect strong
power competency, efficiency, achievement
desire, power, passion
power and competence
power and social status
power and strength
powerful and accomplished at providing
powerful and masculine
success, achievement, efficiency
president and treasurer
pressured and criticized
private person
problem-solvers
promotions
protecting and providing
protecting and supporting
proud and masculine
provide / provider
   adore
   protect
   reliable provider for the family
rage
real estate agent
real men
remote
repressed anger
reserved warmth, humor, charm
resists
   resistance to giving (love)
respected self-esteem powerful
retreating
righteous indignant
self-confident, independent
sensitive pride
separateness
serving selfless
sex
   sexual beings, caretakers and lovers
   sexual initiative
shut down
single, good-looking man
slovenly
solution oriented
strength / strong
   strength, manliness, decisive
   strong and assertive
   strong and wondrous
stubborn
stuck
   stuck in his cave powerless
successful

impotent
passive, overly dependent
low status job
lazy and insecure
criticized and corrected

(she persists)
connection (women)
self-gratification
talking (women)
less than a man
Gender Terms: Men (Continued)

- bright dominating intellect
- imposing
- profitable
- successful businessman
- take care of you
- tough and fearless
- tuned-out, insensitive
- uncaring
- vulnerable
- withdraw
  - distant, forgetful, unresponsive, preoccupied
- quiet
- withdrawn, avoidant husbands
- won’t listen
- workaholic
- working in sales
- worth

shame
Appendix 7: Gender Examples (Quotations)

Overt Arguments/Opinions Regarding Gender

[This book] reveals how men and women 

differ in all areas of their lives. Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment. (Gray, p. 6)

Think of the distinct differences between a man and a woman as gender contrast. Opposites really do attract, so the higher the contrast, the greater the magnetism between the couple. The more feminine you are, the more masculine your husband will be. For greatest attraction, set your contrast to high. (Doyle, p. 199)

God didn’t design us to be the same; he designed us to be different. He made us different because we have different jobs in this world, and yet we criticize each other for being who we are. (McGraw, p. 261)

Women, more than men, (probably because of inherent biopsychological differences), pin their happiness on being wanted by the opposite sex. (Schlessinger, p. 161)

The fact that you are involved with a member of the opposite sex — and I emphasize the work “opposite” — means that you are trying to mesh your life with someone who is physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially different than you. You and your partner are as naturally compatible as cats and dogs, and take my word for it: there is no book, no speaker, and no therapist who can erase that natural difference. (McGraw, p. 249)

In chapter 5 you’ll learn how men and women commonly misunderstand each other because they speak different languages. A Martian/Venusian Phrase Dictionary is provided to translate commonly misunderstood expressions. (Gray, p. 11)

In communicating with your husband, the first thing you have to remember is that men have a different culture from women…. When we overcommunicate with our husbands, and beg them to tell us what they are feeling, they have the sense that they have just landed on foreign ground—and generally it feels like enemy territory because they are being interrogated and bombarded. (Doyle, p. 251, italics in original)

Their work is a great gift. We now recognize that men and women belong to different subcultures, and that even though the other sex’s behavior is different for ours, it is not wrong. If we judge it as “bad,” we are simply being myopic – and old-fashioned. Because we can now anticipate how the other sex will behave and recognize it as normal behavior, we can give up railing against it and instead accept each other and change our expectations.

We have at last realized that there are valid historical and psychological reasons for most of the dramatic differences between men and women. If we understand our differences, we can get along. We can honor and celebrate our separate subcultures, and still continue to work for social, political, and economic equality. (Page, p. 127)

We think many of the characteristic differences between women and men are not the ones people commonly think of. Through a better understanding of these differences, we hope to change the battle of the sexes into a team sport. (Markman, p.35)

I hate to say it because it matches our gender stereotypes, but, in my experience, women tend to value empathy more than men. (Hendrix, p. 151)
According to a rash of best-selling books, men and women can’t get along because males are “from Mars” and females “from Venus.” However, successful marriages also comprise respective “aliens.” Gender differences may contribute to marital problems, but they don’t cause them. (Gottman, p. 16-17)

When women equate requesting a behavioral change with trying to teach the proverbial pig to sing, we can’t strengthen our voice. Instead, we get sucked in by the latest research findings about how male and female brains are different, so men can’t really be expected to pick up their socks. It feels easier to give up and adapt to unfair circumstances, despite the enormous long-term toll of making such accommodations. (Lerner, pp. 9-10)

I believe that feminism addresses what I want at work, but says little about what to do in my marriage. In the workplace, I would never settle for anything less than equal pay, equal opportunity, and having a voice equal to my male counterparts. But at home, those qualities contribute nothing to the romantic, intimate relationship I want. With John, I am softer and more flexible, a feminine spirit who delights in being attended to. (Doyle, p. 158)

The seventies seems a long time ago, yet for too many of us the pendulum has not got swung back to center. Many people are still preoccupied with their own independence and self-sufficiency. (Page, p. 94)

“Wearing the pants” was once the norm for a husband, but times have changed.

Maybe all of this sounds like a feminist line, but it’s also the reality. (Gottman, p. 110)

This book is not some feminist-mentality witch hunt designed to give her ammunition to fry your ass and blame you for what isn’t working in this relationship. (McGraw, p. 298)

I also consider myself a “reformed feminist.” Having been at University in the 1960s, I was “enlightened” to believe that marriage and mothering were conspiracies to eliminate my power, worth, and vice. I carefully watched every word, nuance, attitude, suggestion, expectation, reaction, and behavior for proof that “he” was trying to dominate or disrespect me as a woman.

At the same time, I wore pretty clothes and makeup, expected to be asked out by the man, waited for him to open the door and pay the check, and played coy at the door after a date. How crazy-making was I? Looking back, though, the point is that there was a disconnect between social pressures and natural tendencies. (Schlessinger, p. 53)

[Feminism is responsible for:]
- alienating cooperative and warm relationship dynamics between men and women. (p. 7)
- distrust of the masculine and disdain for the feminine (p. 54)
- destruction of the family. (Schlessinger, p. 255)

Homemakers and Executives

When their daughter Alice was born, Maggie decided to give up her job as a computer scientist to stay home with the baby. (Gottman, p. 49)

George was the breadwinner in the family, while Ellen was a stay-at-home mom. He worked hard to support his wife and four children and she was a very devoted mother. (Weiner-Davis, p. 83)

But, unlike most psychotics, the woman basically functioned pretty well, and took excellent care of her family. She was absolutely devoted to her husband and children. (McGraw, p. 66)

Karen’s husband ran a large corporation and earned a six-figure income. (Doyle, p. 34)
Take the case of hardworking Nathaniel, who runs his own import business and works very long hours. (Gottman, p. 20, italics added)

Tony, who is an engineer with a construction firm, recently saved the company from financial disaster.... For this and other reasons, he was chosen to be honored as Employee of the Year... (Markman, p. 213)

Carol worked part time as a dental hygienist and Dean had a key position in computer sales. Although Carol enjoyed her job, she considered herself a family person first. Dean, on the other hand, was spending increasing amounts of time focusing on his work..... he received many promotions over the years and was earning a sizable salary. (Weiner-Davis, p. 172)

I often decry on my radio program the dearth of real men—men who sacrifice their dreams and desires to do what it takes to provide for their families... (Schlessinger, p. 192)

Ellen, went to law school when her two children were six and ten. Her generous and good-natured husband fully supported her, and helped her by taking over her share of housework. (Page, p. 104)

When husbands manage the money, they tend to be much more generous with their wives than the wives were with themselves. (Doyle, p. 94)

When we slice and dice the family income, we rob them of the joy of giving. No matter how successful he is, he feels like a little worker bee, passively providing for his family. Instead of showering his wife with gifts, he simply puts a roof over her head, food on the table, and clothes on her back. By contrast, when your husband controls the finances he is in the position to give you gifts every day..... more than anything, men love the pride that comes with providing for and treating their wives. That delicious feeling of self-worth makes him feel masculine—and that’s a wonderful jumping off point for intimacy. (Doyle, p. 94)

Heroes and Damsels

He was a big sports hero. She had such a crush on him... (Gottman, p. 64)

Deep inside every man there is a hero or a knight in shining armor. More than anything, he wants to succeed in serving and protecting the woman he loves. (Gray, p. 138)

However, when she does invite her husband to help, he sees an opportunity to be the hero, to be chivalrous and win her enduring adoration and gratitude. (Doyle, p. 166)

I was listening to your radio program when I heard you say something to the effect that you still believed in chivalry and that modern men don’t see it in the same way as in the past, because the feminist movement paints that behavior negatively.

But there is another side to this. In a modern world where a substantial number of particularly young women behave as boorishly, vulgarly, and slutishly as uncouth men do, falling on one’s sword is not a logical reaction from men. The concept of even acknowledging, not to mention protecting, a woman’s honor is about as foreign as the lunar landscape. What honor? Where? (Schlessinger, p. 6)

the way you mother his children, make a home, laugh at his jokes, know the names of all the constellations, admire his muscles, or wear your hair when you’re going to the beach. (Doyle, p. 218)

NO MATTER WHAT YOU’RE FEELING TODAY, only show him happiness and contentment. Show him someone he will want to return to. (Weiner-Davis, p. 136)
The strange and beautiful Venusians were a mysterious attraction to the Martians. Their differences especially attracted the Martians. Where the Martians were hard, the Venusians were soft. Where the Martians were angular, the Venusians were round. Where the Martians were cool, the Venusians were warm. In a magical and perfect way their differences seemed to complement each other. (Gray, p. 45)

The first year of our relationship was hell. I was trying to be myself, a strong and independent woman. I rarely asked him for permission to do things or spend money.... I rarely wear makeup or perfume or jewelry. Well, apparently that is not what he wanted. He would get upset that I didn't dress up more often, that I didn’t ask him about big decisions I made, that I refused to play the 'weaker sex,' and that I was working at a man’s job.

... I knew that the Bible says to submit yourself unto your husband.... it just means consider him first, and let him be the leader in family decisions.... Sometimes I would purposefully ask my husband to lift something heavy, all the while thinking I could do it myself, because it makes him feel needed. (Schlessinger, p. 54)

She is exuberant, filled with energy, and truly a delight to be around. Bruce’s one complaint about her is that he feels she talks too much and tends to dominate conversations. (Page, p. 41)

The female qualities of God: forgiveness, compassion, understanding, and love. (Gottman, p. 113)

Marla, a woman in her late twenties with regular, pleasing features. She was wearing little makeup, and her naturally blond hair was held back from her face in a loose ponytail. (Hendrix, p. 176)

He was tall and slender, and he was wearing a corduroy jacket. Anne remembers thinking that he looked “rugged yet neat.” She also thought he had a presence about him, an aura of self-confidence and intelligence. (Hendrix, pp. 210, 211).

Larry is a single good-looking man (Markman, p. 167)

It’s important to point out that Bob was a self-made millionaire who had worked hard for everything he had achieved. At six-foot-six, physically chiseled, with a dominant personality... (McGraw, pp. 153-4)

Stewart, a mustached, scholarly looking man (Hendrix, p. 165)

Stephanie noticed that his physical stature and crossed arms commanded respect.

.....Joe felt proud of how he had protected both his wife and child and that made him feel successful, which made him feel strong. (Doyle, p. 170)

Instead of putting on armor, rely on him to go to battle when it’s appropriate, then stand behind him for protection and to lend the support that your presence provides. (Doyle, p. 170)

Sex

Men’s chief complaint about women is that they aren’t responsive enough and aren’t interested enough in sex. Women’s chief complaint about men is that they proceed too fast. (Why do women fake orgasm? Because men fake foreplay.) (Page, p. 189)

Men really do want Betty Crocker in the kitchen and a sex kitten in the bedroom. (McGraw, p. 296)
Several other authors also use the term rejected when discussing sexual relations:

Don was beginning to believe that Melissa didn’t care when she’d rebuff his attempts to hug her when he’d come home. To be rebuffed physically or sexually seems to be particularly stinging to most people. It’s often seen as a deep rejection. (Markman, p. 273)

Mike wanted to have sex several times a week, but Lynne thought once or twice was enough. As a result, Mike felt frustrated and rejected. (Gottman, p. 202)

Then, when Carol rejected his physical advances, he hit a low point. He started questioning his manhood. (Weiner-Davis, p. 173)

Women find a man’s willingness to do housework extremely erotic. (Gottman, p. 205)

You need to start doing the things that are important to her, like talking about personal issues, spending time together, doing things as a couple, pitching in more at home, being more available to her, and asking her about her day. These are the kinds of things that soften women’s hearts. (Weiner-Davis, p. 285)

If you’re upset with your wife because she’s been cold and rejecting, the last thing you feel like doing is being kind and thoughtful. (Weiner-Davis, p. 285)

The depressed, frigid wife would have to recover her energy and sensuality. The reluctant lover would have to lower his barriers to intimacy. (Hendrix, p. 162)

So many men have told me that their wives are “bitchy” and naggy and it really turns them off. …. Even though you might feel hurt or rejected or unsexy because your spouse has been so apathetic, don’t be critical. Be kind. Be complimentary. (Weiner-Davis, p. 286)

Your marriage contract includes an agreement to have a mutually exclusive sexual relationship, and you owe it to your marriage to manifest your intimacy physically and to keep your end of the bargain.

Make yourself available for sex at least once a week whether you feel like it or not. (Doyle, p. 206)

In general I found that women in thriving relationships were concerned as much about meeting their partner’s needs as their own. They wanted to be interested in sex, and they actively worked at being eager and appealing sexual partners. (Page, p. 192)

One woman caller recently spoke angrily about how her husband, who works out of town Monday through Friday, comes home on Friday night and expects her to be dressed in something sensual and to be “playful.” She talked about how she is all week long with the house, the laundry, and the kids, and how dare he expect her to be his sex-kitten just because he’s home. I reminded her that he’s not been at a weekend party either, and he misses his family and the loving warmth of his wife.

She was stuck in playing martyr and clearly hostile about his supposed freedom…. What was wrong with his wanting her intimately when he got home? …

My interpretation of her excuse for not being a loving, available partner was that she interpreted intimacy and sexuality as demands on her (instead of an opportunity for pleasure and bonding). … I told her that these issues were standard feminist propaganda, that her husband was not tuned in to any of that, and that she’d better not mess up her relationship with them. (Schlessinger, pp. 193,194)

Most men tell me that having a good sexual relationship with their wives makes them feel loved, attractive, connected emotionally, good about themselves as sexual beings, caretakers, and lovers.
Many men pride themselves on their ability to please their wives sexually. Since a man's self-concept is often so strongly linked to how he thinks of himself sexually, an unsatisfying sex life often makes him feel less than a man. (Weiner-Davis, p. 274)

**Guy Stuff**

I have always contended that no woman should marry a man she doesn’t believe would swim through shark-infested water to bring her a lemonade. Likewise, no man should marry a woman who doesn’t have a patient sense of humor about guy stuff. (Schlessinger, p. 59)

So, feeling victimized, he poured himself a beer and turned on the TV. (Gottman, p. 104)

When they did have time together, they’d frequently run into difficulties because Simon wanted to watch a lot of sports on TV and Rachel was very upset about this. (Markman, p. 139)

The tasteless television shows were popular not just with my husband, but with many other men I know and respect who seem to find entertainment in places I never could. (Doyle, p. 142)

Harry, for his part, was withdrawn and defensive (Lerner, p. 143)

Bernard was withdrawn (Hendrix, p. 71)

When men feel disrespected, they withdraw. (Doyle, p. 39)

When a man is stressed he will withdraw into the cave of his mind and focus on solving a problem. He becomes so focused on solving this one problem that he temporarily loses awareness of everything else.

At such times, he becomes increasingly distant, forgetful, unresponsive, and preoccupied in his relationships. For example, when having a conversation with him at home, it seems as if only 5 percent of his mind is available for the relationship while the other 95 percent is still at work. (Gray, p. 31)

Our egos are fragile, and when the world seems to turn hostile, we do our turtle routine, shut down, pull inside ourselves, and aim the brunt of our frustrations at you. (McGraw, p. 296)

Think about how rejuvenated you’ve felt after a baby or wedding shower where only women are in attendance. Chances are you’ve felt great because you’ve simply basked in being a woman and in sharing perspectives and experiences unique to women. You’ve honored your feminine spirit. An important part of staying intimate with your husband is to remember who you are and what it means to be a woman. (Doyle, p. 124)

When the Martians were completely preoccupied and in their caves, the Venusians also did not take it personally. They learned that this was not the time to have intimate conversations but a time to talk about problems with their friends or have fun and go shopping. (Gray, p. 41)

Linda loved stylish clothes and working out at the health club near her office. Devon considered both of those frivolous wastes of money. He far preferred to spend his money on lunches out with friends and two skiing vacations every year. (Gottman, p. 198)

Zoey goes out once or twice a week with her long-time girlfriends, often to go shopping and sometimes to see a movie. This drives Maxwell nuts. (Markman, p. 146)
The Shrew

Laura Doyle, a feminist and former shrew, leads Surrendered Wife workshops and speaks to women about reclaiming passion and intimacy in their relationships. (back page of Doyle book)

I recently reported on a study from England which concluded that the largest cause of the overwhelming divorce rate is the bad behavior of women!... More and more women decide they’re entitled to their happiness no matter the cost to children, families, or society. The listener’s wife’s constant barrage of petty complaints is a symptom of a larger problem of this growing selfishness and insensitivity in general in our culture, and, more frighteningly, in women in specific. When the gender of nurturance, regeneration, and sensitivity becomes crass and coarse, the field of hope becomes barren. (Schlessinger, pp. 80, 81)

No one likes to feel nagged or unappreciated. No one likes to be constantly. If you don’t appreciate your spouse, someone else will. (Weiner-Davis, p. 201)

It is possible that your husband is thoughtless or inept, but until you give him your complete trust over a sustained period of time, you can’t be sure. Chances are he is a great guy who spends most of his time defending himself against your criticism. Until you stop trying to run his life, you’ll never know what it’s truly like to be married to your husband. I am not saying that you are the cause of your husband’s shortcomings. Your husband is always completely responsible for his own actions. If he is a poor father or neglects his family, that is not his wife’s fault. At the same time, if you are nagging, undermining, criticizing, or disrespecting him, you are crushing his confidence, intellect, and potential—both emotionally and financially. (Doyle, pp. 46, 47, italics in original)

Remember that your husband can meet whatever challenges arise and learn his own lessons as necessary. Trying to fix everything cramps his space, undermines his abilities and emasculates him. (Doyle, p. 148, originally all in italics)

Here are some brief examples of ways a woman might unknowingly annoy a man by offering advice or seemingly harmless criticism. As you explore this list, remember that these little things can add up to create big walls of resistance and resentment. In some of the statements the advice or criticism is hidden. See if you can recognize why he might feel controlled. (Gray, p. 26)

Let’s suppose that a woman routinely criticizes her husband for being disorganized. (Hendrix, p. 136)

If men’s task if to feel more, women’s is to nag less. Most women have to work to accept their partner the way he is. (Page, p. 177)

She insists that the only way the marriage will improve is for him to become more responsible and pay more attention to the kids. He insists that she needs to become less critical and controlling and more appreciative of all he does for the family. (Lerner, p. 139, italics in original)

Author Disclosures

A major cause of this unfortunate dynamic is that Greg, like most men, tends to overestimate the amount of housework he does. This has been documented by British sociologist Ann Oakley. I know this is true in my own home. When I complain that I’m doing all of the housework, my wife says, “Good!” because she knows that means I’m actually doing half. (Gottman, p. 204)

To some degree, she played the traditional supporting role—caring for the family, offering financial help, and being a sympathetic ear. But there were many times when she stepped outside
those bounds and strategically intervened in ways that would prove to be pivotal. (Hendrix, p. xvi)

A week after our daughter Lauren was born, my wife Bonnie and I were completely exhausted. Each night Lauren kept waking us. Bonnie had been torn in the delivery and was taking painkillers. She could barely walk. After five days of staying home to help, I went back to work. She seemed to be getting better. (Gray, p. 1)

That day, for the first time, I didn’t leave her. I stayed, and it felt great. I succeeded in giving to her when she really needed me. This felt like real love. Caring for another person. Trusting in our love. Being there at her hour of need. I marveled at how easy it was for me to support her when I was shown the way. (Gray, p. 2, italics added)

The immaturity and insensitivity with which I entered this marriage should have spelled its doom. But she would not permit it. My obsessive, workaholic lifestyle should have created a vast chasm. She would not hear of it. I have committed innumerable acts of idiocy, forgotten key events and commitments, said things I didn’t mean and omitted things I did mean, and should have said. There have been times that she had me dead to rights and showed the class and restraint to let it go. She chose not to confront and make issues out of my fallibilities, and chose instead to focus on my better qualities and the values of our family. She has loved me when I was anything but loveable and stood by me when, but for her, I would have been standing totally and at times deservedly alone. She made our marriage and me as her husband a success when it truly would have been easier not to. And she did it without my help and active participation. So can you. (McGraw, p. 297)

I noticed that she was low on milk. I offered to get it. She said she was already going to the store. To my surprise a part of me was disappointed! I wanted to get the milk. Her love had programmed me to say yes. Even to this day whenever she asks me to go to the store and get milk a part of me happily says yes. (Gray, p. 268)

My extraordinary husband, Mayer Shacter, is my most important partner in this book, for I couldn’t write about thriving marriage if I weren’t a part of one.... Mayer supports my writing with all manner of material and spiritual nourishment—from his sensational meals awaiting me when I come home from the computer to clever ideas and long conversations in which I clarify my thinking. (Page, p. xiii)

As you read what I’ve just written, you’re probably thinking that Jim has a very long list of times that he is unapproachable. I’d have to agree. But there are lots of other times when he is more receptive: on weekends before the kids wake up, over dinner when we go out together, on his car phone when he is returning from work. (Weiner-Davis, p. 91, italics added)

Years ago, I had been away from home at a conference. I was gone for about five days. During that period, I called home every day to check on my husband, Jim, and my children. By day three, I could tell that Jim was getting tired of playing Mr. Mom. He grew less than friendly with each passing call. (Weiner-Davis, p. 111, italics added)

As it turns out, the new division of labor John and I have is based partially on the strengths each of us brings because of our respective genders. For instance, while I was stressed out and resentful about making most of the money at a corporate job, John is happy and proud to be the primary breadwinner. While I’m neurotic about finding the perfect living room furniture and window treatments, John couldn’t care less what our house looks like—as long as I’m happy.... While managing the finances made me pull my hair out, John has a more relaxed approach that lets him make levelheaded decisions. I pretty much run the social calendar and invite people for dinner parties, which John enjoys but rarely initiates. We accept each other’s different interests and priorities. (Doyle, pp. 156, 157, italics in original)
I do put more emphasis on women, because I see them as the ones with the ultimate power. What women don’t allow, men can’t and won’t do. I learned this from my now deceased father.... he made the point that the upward or downward trend of the morals and morale of a culture was dependent upon what women did and permitted. He believed that men, rejected by women, would not continue the behavior that got them rejected in the first place. From womb (mother) to vagina (sex), he said, men are judged and approved of by women. Men behave badly when women accept it—simple as that. (Schlessinger, p. 8)
Appendix 8: Word Clusters:
Communication, Acceptance, Intimacy

Words that are indented were found in the text close to the first word above them that is not indented, or are versions of the non-indented word above them.

Words in the right hand column are words that are opposed with words in the left hand column. (Words in the right hand column that do not have a word directly opposite in the left hand column appear with the closest word above in the left hand column, with the exception of words at the end of a word cluster section, which are simply negative words that seem to fit the category. The exception is communication, which is used by some authors as a negative word.)

Communication

communication (McG)
crap
insights
listening
mushy
empathy
pabulum cure-all
communication (Got)
myth
active listening
validate
empathize
“good fighting”
conflict resolution (Got)
empathic
non-judgmental, accepting
active listening
emotional gymnastics

anger
anxiety
attacked
avoidance
blaming
conflict
confrontation
contempt
critical
defended
denial
fear
hostility
ignoring
interpreted
invalidation
lecturing
loneliness
mind readers
mistrust
moralized
nagging
react
communicate clearly
communicate effectively
communicate well

acceptance
accountable
acknowledge
apology / apologizing

affirm
appreciation
approach
approval
attention

attentive
authentic engagement
bond
boundaries
caring,
    empathy
    warmth
clear
clear channels
common sense
communing
complain

compromise
conflict resolution / management
    peaceful
    relax
connection
constructive

conversations
    safe and under control

rejection
repression
roadblocks
sadness
tension
withdrawal

mind reading assumptions
negative interpretation
hopelessness and demoralization
escalation and invalidation
escalation, invalidation, withdrawal

criticized, disliked, unappreciated
defensive
defensive
defensive
rationalization
self-involved

condemning complaining
disapproval invalidates
inattention frustration
invalidation

change or convince

explanations

intuit
critical
defensive
conversing
blame
criticism
contempt
critical
defensiveness
sarcasm

blame
criticism

criticism
attack
negative, controlling, judgmental
invalidating

negative interpretations
escalation, invalidation, withdrawal
Word Clusters: Communication (Continued)

attention  criticized  blamed
calm, open  ignored

closeness  collaboration  blame, accuse, criticize
compassionate listening  fear

collaboration  reactivity and distance
close, open  genuine and authentic exchange  reactionary compromise

collaboration  share
compassionate listening  vulnerable and authentic exchange

constructive  empathy

courage  empowering

courage  creative response  sparring

careful listening  dialogue  rudeness
collaboration  differently

collaboration  diplomatic  criticism or contempt

collaboration  direct  rhetorical questions

collaboration  disagreeing  judging

collaboration  discipline  red herrings

collaboration  effective  reactivity

collaboration  real issues  judging

collaboration  effective  sparring

collaboration  real issues  critical

collaboration  emotional connection  suppressed

collaboration  empathetic  complaints, criticism, negativity,

collaboration  relatedness  demands, excuses

collaboration  respect

collaboration  express  judgment

collaboration  forgiveness  critical

generous loving  suppress
generous loving  complaining and negativity

generous loving  silenced

generous loving  communicated

generous loving  complaints

generous loving  resentment

generous loving  react

honor and dignity (excuses, rationalizations)
humor, lightness, imagination  complaining and negativity
interpret correctly  judge or invalidate
intimacy  communicate complaints

intimacy verbal intimacy
### Word Clusters: Communication (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Words</th>
<th>Negative Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy, languages, expressions, connotations, listen</td>
<td>defensiveness, interrupt, attack, deaf ears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen carefully, listen deeply, listen well, available, caring, compassion, discipline, emotionally present, empathy, genuinely, commitment, practice, limits, love, open, understand, receptive, open heart, presence, real, respectfully, skills / skilled, talking, understand, validate, loving, beauty, heard, maturity, needs and desires, negotiate, openly, patience, positive, praise, problem-solve, relate, request, respectful, rules of good communication, safe, heard</td>
<td>attacking, critical, defensiveness, tempers, defensive, ultimatums, judgment fix, correct, or advise, defensive, angrily or critically, avoiding and shutting down, arguing, judgmental, conflict, conceal and deny, negative, destructive, criticize, criticism, blaming, disrespectful, unsupportive, criticize, put down, criticize, accusations, destructive patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Word Clusters: Communication (Continued)

clear
sensitive
share deep feelings

skills
simple
speak
speak wisely
clarifying
clarify
courage
courage
honorable
honorable
kindness, timing, tact
spontaneity and vitality
talk / talking
techniques
translation
trust
truth
understand

accepted
commitment
confident
heard
love, attention, support
relating with, listening to, supporting
respectful
up front
validatio
mirroring
voice
authentic voice
clarity, creativity, wisdom

Acceptance

conflict out of control
negative comments
anger and frustration

hostile, critical, distant
distance blame
protect ignoring
tense
silence
violations
silence and stonewalling
judging fighting
take it personally
panic

argue
ruckus
destructive pattern

reactivity, righteousness, criticism

anger
anxiety
attack
belittling
blaming
complain
contempt
control
criticism
advice
lectures
nag
complain
defensiveness
demand
depressed
Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)

disregarding
insensitivity
judge
negative / negativity
power struggle
pressure
pursues
put down
rejection
resentment
sabotage
sarcasm
undermine
unloved

accommodate
accountable
accurate
appreciate

acknowledged
affirming
affirming
compliment
encouragement
gratitude
love
approachable
approval
back off
balance
be there
benevolent
caring
commitment
compassion
compliments

attention
encourage
compromise

differences
give-and-take
teamwork
conciliatory
confirm
connection

blame
rejection
criticism
criticize
reject
judgmental

self-involved
fighting punishing

criticism
pushing
nagged
unappreciated
neglected
rejecting
critical
confrontation
critical, contemptuous

rigid and uncompromising

object argue
**Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)**

cooperate

relax
support
differences
encouragement
flexible
forgive

heal
love
generous
giving
goodwill

graciously
grateful
humility
joy
kindness
let go
lighten up
liked
love

mellow
negotiating
nonjudgmental
patient

back off
go with the flow
listen
positive
supportive
peace

harmony
tranquility

competition
complaints
control
critical
judgmental
lecture
resisting unsupported

battle

blame
despair rage
discord
fail to forgive
hurt
rejected

blame
blaming defending
selfish inconsiderate
conflicts disharmony

complaining

suffering
criticized, disliked, unappreciated
anger and hurt
unable to forgive grudge

fights

criticize
lecture
pushing

control demand
anger

pushy
complain
criticize nag
Relationship Rhetoric

Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)

positive
receive
appreciate
forgiveness
give
gracious

grateful
love
support
validating
recognition
reconnection
relax
respect

admiration

fondness
affection
appreciated
bond
calm
chivalry
concern
connection
cooperation
courage

curiosity
deferring
differences
dignified
effort
empathy
empowers
friendship
goodwill

critical
negative
reject
independent, capable

complaining
control
critical

fixing

bossy
controlling
critical
demeaning
disgust
dismissing
disrespect
insulting
distress
nagging
negativity

stress
anger
frantic shrew

criticism
judgment
criticism

suppression

nagging, critical
Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)

grateful
harmony
peace
honor

humor
intimate
love
mutual
nurturance
peace
receive
responsibility
reverence
romance
safe
supportive
tolerance
trust

truth
validation
vulnerable
sacrificing
safe
sharing
support

comforting
loving
surrender
intimacy
receive
vulnerable
thoughtful
tolerance
trust

dissatisfied
power-mongering
distress
agon

expectations
tension, bickering
resists
denying excusing
denial shame
controlling
anger and resentment
nag

competitive
denying
denial
questions
unloved
indifferent
control
responsibility
anxiety, worry
guarded

nagging, criticizing, belittling
betray
blaming
control
criticism
damage destruction
deny
dominate
judgment
manipulate
misinterpreting
mistrust
misunderstanding
Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)

admire  appreciation  balance  caring  
comfort  compassion  confidence  connection  courageous  
empathize  faith  

forgive  gracious  gratitude  happiness  honor  intimacy  love  
merciful  mutual  relax  risk  safety  security  share  succeed  support  understand  
upfront  truth  criticism  unconditional  understand  

affirming  cooperation  courage  empathy  love  
rejection  resisting  unappreciated  withdrawal  worry  angry  
indifferent  upset, disappointed, frustrated,  

fear  control  rationalizations, denial  negative expectations  doubt  controlling  afraid  blaming  
anger, sadness, fear, sorrow  unloving  anxiety  
insecurity emasculate cold  negative expectation  resentful  secret  
restrictions  price  demanding  disharmony  intolerant  judgmental  lecture or scold  resentful  
angry, hostile state
Word Clusters: Acceptance (Continued)

mutual
relax
safe
support
validation
validating
validate

struggle
confrontation and criticism
invalidation

Intimacy

abandonment
anger
anxiety
autonomy
avoid
blaming
competition
complain
conflict
control
nag
criticize
fear/afraid
constrained
contempt
criticize
defensive
depressed
distant
divorce
doubting
emasculating
criticism
correct
embarrassment
emptiness
engulfment
estranged
fear

grief and loss
guarded
independence
invalidation
lack of commitment
lonely
mistrusting
negative
pain

power struggle
promiscuity
resentment
restraint
self-sufficiency
Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

accept
affectionate
  physical
  making love
appreciate
  admire
attachment
  affection
attentive
beauty
  meaning
  purposefulness
bond
  merging
connect
love
nurture
support
protect
relaxed
caring
  harmony
comfort
sharing
touching
cherish
close
sharing
commitment

accountable
fidelity
God
honor
integrity
moral
obligation
promise

shacking-up
stress
tension
unloved
worries
rejected
threatened
expecting or demanding
criticism
ego
control
independent
selfishness
competition
power and control
criticizing and blaming
control
criticize
fear
lonely
power struggle
tension
Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

- responsibility
- vows
- compassionate
- connection
- closeness
- belonging
- closeness
- trust
- romance
- passion
- emotionally engaged
- caring
- connection
- forgiveness
- dedication
- commitment
- sensual
- spiritual
- caring
- courage
- listen
- loving
- mutuality
- respect
- validated
- conversation, communication
- cooperation
- courage
- strength
- courtship
- curiosity
- dignity
- fragile
- friendship
- acceptance
- bond
- care
- commitment
- harmony
- listen
- cruel
- anxious
- control
- depressed
- loneliness
- divorce
- unhappy
- lose their way
- criticism
- alone
- blaming
- criticizing
- disappointment
- distancing
- frustration
- isolation
- loneliness
- resentment
- conflict
- pretending
- questions
- interrogation
- combativeness
- fear
- lonely
- negativity
- advice
Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

patience  |   enemies
peace    |   emotional stress
positive |   angry
protect  |   conflicts
reconnect|   fights
romance  |   conflict
gerelaxed |   tension
        |   frustration
        |   hurt
refectd |   frustration and disappointment
respect  |   anger
support  |   power struggles
tender   |   resentment
thoughtfulness |   tension
trust   |   alone
fun     |   fear

commitment | honor
            | intertwine
commitment | financial, emotionally, logistically
            | joy
commitment | know / known
commitment | love

        | accept
        | affection
Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

close      healthy      needs
playful     positive     sharing
nurturing

open      caring      trusting

passionate

friendship      romantic

peace      joy      safety
physical closeness
sexual relationship
physical intimacy

connect      friendship

fun      lovemaking

sensuality
sex      sexual closeness
pleasure
vibrancy
positive
precious
procreation
reconnect
rewarding
vulnerable
relating

peace and joy
relax      respect      connection
risk
romance
attraction
bond (emotional)
fear      conflict
fear

open      caring      trusting

passionate

friendship      romantic

peace      joy      safety
physical closeness
sexual relationship
physical intimacy

connect      friendship

fun      lovemaking

sensuality
sex      sexual closeness
pleasure
vibrancy
positive
precious
procreation
reconnect
rewarding
vulnerable
relating

peace and joy
relax      respect      connection
risk
romance
attraction
bond (emotional)
fear      conflict
fear

defensive
guarded
distant
resentment
tense

controlling

anxiety
conflict
conflict
conflict
stress

angry
crisis
resentment
tension
sexual intercourse

power

illegitimate
disconnecting
conflict
conflict
crisis

rigid      judgmental

self-protectiveness
power struggle
## Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Connection</th>
<th>Relationship Terms</th>
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Word Clusters: Intimacy (Continued)

- safety
- sharing
- vulnerability

- commitment
- connection
- courage
- open
- risk
- sensitive
- softness
- strength
- tender
- trust
- truthful
- uncomfortable
- warmth
- warm
- wholeness

- secrecy
- self-absorption
- control
- criticize
- distance
- fear

- comfortable and easy
- fractured separated
Appendix 9: Word Clusters Examples (Quotations):
Communication, Acceptance, and Intimacy

Communication

Most couples say that the three major issues that cause problems are money, sex, and communication. (Markman, p. 119)

The most direct route to becoming a thriving couple, if you aren’t already one, is to begin to experience the pleasure of using effective, relationship-enhancing communication skills. (Page, p. 151)

Communication is the most important key to just about every interpersonal problem. (Schlessinger, p. 85)

Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that communication—and more specifically, learning to resolve your conflicts—is the royal road to romance and an enduring, happy marriage. (Gottman, p. 8)

Oh, yes: empathy. The pabulum cure-all. Sounds logical, doesn’t it? Sounds pretty damn lofty and unselfish, right? The problem is, it’s a crock. (McGraw, p. 48)

Communication is the only means we have of bridging that natural gap. Without communication we only have assumptions. And you know what assumptions usually make of us? Check out the first three letters of the word assumption for the answer. (Schlessinger, p. 84, italics in original)

Listening, Hear, Understand, Empathy, Defensive, Criticize, Judge, Blame

98 percent of good communication is listening. Listening means putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. It means trying to understand a different point of view before you try to make yourself understood. It means empathizing—that is, identifying with or vicariously experiencing—the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person. That’s all. It couldn’t be simpler. (Page, p. 120)

A relationship may reach a crisis point when we can’t make ourselves heard, or (on the other side of the conversational fence) when we can’t keep listening to another person who is wearing us down with complaints, criticism, negativity, demands, excuses, or irresponsible behavior. We may need an apology or acknowledgment that isn’t forthcoming. As we learn to better navigate these conversations and silences better [sic], we create opportunities to deepen our understanding of the self, the other, and our relationship. And we can learn when it’s time to give up and get out—that is, to save ourselves—even if we end up losing a relationship. (Lerner, p. 6)

These are ‘you’ statements. They blame, accuse, and criticize the person you are angry with. Beth’s partner has virtually no alternative but to feel blamed, accused, and criticized. His natural reaction will be to defend himself. (Page, p. 118)

- Complain but don’t blame.
- Make statements that start with ‘I’ instead of ‘You’.... Phrases starting with I are usually less likely to be critical and to make the listener defensive...
- Describe what is happening, don’t evaluate or judge.

(Rather than criticize or judge, readers are urged to understand and accept: When a man listens without judgment but with empathy and relatedness to a woman express her feelings, she feels heard and understood. An understanding attitude doesn’t presume to already
know a person’s thoughts or feelings; instead it gathers meaning from what is heard, and moves toward validating what is being communicated. The more a woman’s need to be heard and understood is fulfilled the easier it is for her to give her man the acceptance he needs. (Gray, p. 135)

Unfortunately, ‘helping’ in wife language translates into ‘controlling’ in husband language. (Doyle, p. 38)

As they share these intimacies, they may even experience moments of true empathic communication and become absorbed in each other’s world. During these rare moments, they aren’t judging each other. (Hendrix, p. 51)

Listening well is at the heart of intimacy and connection. When we are able to listen to another person with attention and care, that person feels validated and enhanced. Surely human consciousness would take a big leap forward if our wish to hear and understand were as great as our wish to be heard and understood. (Lerner, p. 204)

Acceptance
The number one need in all people, including you and your partner, is the need for acceptance. The number one fear among all people, including you and your partner, is that of rejection. The need for acceptance is so profound that I would venture to say that most, if not all, issues that cause conflict in a relationship ultimately come down to one or both partners feeling rejected—and in turn, wanting to feel accepted. (McGraw, p. 119)

[Goodwill] includes a willingness to focus on positive qualities; an attitude of gratitude; mutual tolerance and acceptance; respect; trust; and the ability to give. (Page, p.35-36)

Underlying integrity issues are expectations about being trusted and respected. And underneath all of these expectation [sic] are core expectations about acceptance by your partner. (Markman, p. 149, italics in original)

Respect, Honor, Act as if, Appreciation, Gratitude

The predominantly liberal press has a field day with the notion of ‘family values.’ Instead of a respect for a construct that connects, supports, nurtures, loves, and motivates each one of us, this institution is the object of perpetual derision and condemned... (Schlessinger, p. 48.)

When you honor and respect each other, you’re usually able to appreciate each other’s point of view, even if you don’t agree with it. When there’s an imbalance of power, there’s almost inevitably a great deal of marital distress. (Gottman, p. 97).

It’s certainly just as important for wives to treat their husbands with honor and respect. But my data indicate that the vast majority of wives—even in unstable marriages—already do that. This doesn’t mean that they don’t get angry and even contemptuous of their husbands. It just means that they let their husbands influence their decision making by taking their opinions and feelings into account. But too often men do not return the favor. (Gottman, p. 100)

When a man responds to a woman in a way that acknowledges and prioritizes her rights, wishes, and needs, she feels respected... Concrete and physical expressions of respect, like flowers and remembering anniversaries, are essential to fulfill a woman’s third primary love need. (Gray, p. 136)

So what does it mean to respect your partner? It means that you accept his choices, big and small, even if you don’t agree with them. You honor his choice of socks and stocks, food and friendships, art and attitudes. You listen to him and have regard for his ideas, suggestions, family
and work. That doesn’t mean you have to make the same choices—just that you accept his. (Doyle, p. 35)

Fan the flames of respect, honor, and admiration on a conscious level and work to be proud of your partner. (McGraw, p. 264)

‘Act as if’: pretend you are expecting good things to happen and watch what happens. (Weiner-Davis, p. 111)

It takes enormous courage to pretend, experiment, or act ‘as if’ in the service of sharing a self that is more whole. (Lerner, p. 65)

If you’re not happy, try behaving as though you were—see how that lightens life up for you and your family. (Schlessinger, p. 176)

[You do have to act like you have faith that your marriage will improve.... The more you act like you respect, trust and appreciate him, the more you’ll start to believe that he deserves that treatment, and the less you’ll worry about trying to run his life. (Doyle, pp. 136-137, italics in original)

If your husband is short-tempered with the children, check to see if you’ve been respectful. The quickest way to restore harmony for the whole family is to make apologize where you have been disrespectful. (Doyle, p. 182)

To cultivate an attitude of gratitude in your marriage, spend as much time talking about the good things in your life together as you spend complaining about your problems. (Page, p. 38, italics added)

You appreciate your partner’s sense of commitment and dedication.... You begin to appreciate the differences between you and your spouse. And what you don’t appreciate, you find greater acceptance for. You feel closer and more connected. (Weiner-Davis, p. 63)

Respect means that when he takes the wrong freeway exit you don’t correct him by telling him where to turn. It means that if he keeps going in the wrong direction you will go past the state line and still not correct what he’s doing. In fact, no matter what your husband does, you will not try to teach, improve, or correct him. (Doyle, p. 34)

The big secret in learning to be more flexible, accepting, and tolerant toward the person you love is to make an internal shift so that you can begin to see the qualities that are less desirable to you as acceptable. (Page, p. 41)

Understanding (Differences)

Couples in relationships that are working well have learned to use their understanding of their similarities and differences to work as a team rather than as enemies. They’ve usually developed the capacity to connect on several dimensions of intimacy... (Markman, p. 40)

Through understanding the hidden differences of the opposite sex, we can more successfully give and receive the love that is in our hearts. By validating and accepting our differences, creative solutions can be discovered whereby we can succeed in getting what we want. And, more important, we can learn how to best love and support the people we care about. Love is magical, and it can last, if we remember our differences. (Gray, p. 14)

I’m talking about taking your understanding about yourself and your relationship to a whole new level. (McGraw, p. 17)
Nor can you rely on traditional, conventional therapy in which you spend session after session with someone trying to understand where these attitudes came from—doing some analysis, perhaps, of what your mother or father did to you. (McGraw, p. 78)

I was taught that couples needed to understand the root cause of their problems before they could find solutions.... All of this introspection was fine and dandy, but the truth is, it rarely helped people solve their marital problems.... I learned that insight doesn’t necessarily lead to change. Insight leads to insight. (Weiner-Davis, p. 75)

All I ask is that you follow what I ask you to do. You don’t have to like it, you don’t even have to understand it, you just have to do it day in and day out, trusting that the results will come. (McGraw, p. 215)

Criticize (Control, Reject, Judge, Blame)

It is ironic that there is still such an emphasis on criticizing deadbeat dads for walking away, when an aborting mother is not seen as a deadbeat mom.... What’s the big deal about deadbeat dads when women can get sperm from a bank or an unsuspecting sexual partner and, like many movie and TV celebrities, just be a ‘single mom’ with no criticism? Sounds like woman [sic] are speaking out of two sides of their mouths.” (Schlessinger, p. 49)

Husbands and wives may be quick to complain and criticize each other, but [what they need to do is] to state in positive specific terms exactly what it is that they need from each other. (Hendrix, p. 163)

gently clarify or restate the point rather than responding angrily or critically ... be sincere in your effort to show that you are listening carefully and respectfully (Markman, P. 66)

It’s just a fact that people can change only if they feel that they are basically liked and accepted as they are. When people feel criticized, disliked, and unappreciated they are unable to change. (Gottman, p. 149)

Harry, for his part, was withdrawn and defensive. In withdrawing, he stopped moving toward his wife lovingly and affirmingly. In his defensiveness, he listened for the part of her criticism that he did not agree with, rather than listening for the part he might agree with.... Most importantly, Harry felt unable to tell Augusta that her criticisms bothered him, that he couldn’t tolerate feeling constantly scrutinized and evaluated. He never found his voice to say, ‘I need you to find a different way to talk to me about your important concerns, because I’m feeling flooded by so much negativity. I’ll listen to you better if you approach me with respect.’ Instead of clarifying this position and standing behind it as long as necessary, Harry allowed Augusta to go on and on. He then ignored her complaints, for example, by ‘forgetting’ to call when he was delayed at work.... When Augusta accused Harry of being passive-aggressive, he shut down further. Augusta’s own self-esteem plummeted as she found herself becoming the stereotypical nagging wife. (Lemer, pp. 143-144, italics in original)

people criticize us for the same reasons we criticize them. They want to be helpful and contribute to our betterment.... A more difficult situation arises when others chronically focus on us in a negative, controlling, or judgmental way (Lemer, p. 180)

behaviors that she needed to stop immediately:....
- Being critical and negative
- Blaming [husband] for their problems
- Expecting [husband] to change first
- Rejecting [husband’s] advances (Weiner-Davis, p. 180)
if you are often critical, you may be pushing your spouse into the arms of another, more supportive person. No one likes to feel nagged or unappreciated. No one likes to be constantly criticized. If you don’t appreciate your spouse, someone else will. (Weiner-Davis, p. 201)

In a myriad of ways she tries to change him or improve him. She thinks her attempts to change him are loving, but he feels controlled, manipulated, rejected, and unloved. He will stubbornly reject her because he feels she is rejecting him. When a woman tries to change a man, he is not getting the loving trust and acceptance he actually needs to change and grow. (Gray, p. 146)

None of us feels good about ourselves when we’re nagging, critical, or controlling. I certainly didn’t. The tone of my voice alone would make me cringe with self-recrimination. Through surrendering, you will find the courage to gradually stop indulging in these unpleasant behaviors and replace them with dignified ones. (Doyle, pp. 14-15).

If you’re criticizing, you’re not praising. And if you’re criticizing, you are not connecting. (McGraw, p. 85)

When I correct, criticize, or tell my husband what to do I automatically become his mother in that moment, which means he doesn’t see me as his lover. And there’s no bigger intimacy killer for him than feeling like he’s with his mother. (Doyle, p. 39)

They understand, accept, and cooperate with each other. They are not critical or judgmental. It is their goodwill and sense of fair play that lead them to make certain that they balance giving and receiving... (Page, p. 197)

**Trust (Give/receive, Forgive)**

When a woman lovingly receives a man without trying to change him, he feels accepted. An accepting attitude does not reject but affirms that he is being favorably received. It does not mean the woman believes he is perfect but indicates that she is not trying to improve him, that she trusts him to make his own improvements. When a man feels accepted it is much easier for him to listen and give her the understanding she needs and deserves. (Gray, p. 135)

Make a point of graciously receiving everything your husband offers you, whether it’s help with the children, a necklace or a spontaneous shoulder massage. Accept your husband’s thoughtfulness good-naturedly and recognize that receiving graciously is the ultimate act of giving up control.

Even if you’re not sure you want the gift or think he can’t afford it, receive it with open arms and good humor. Be on the lookout for gifts you might not have noticed before.

Make “receive, receive, receive” your mantra. (Doyle, p. 108, this was an opening section that was originally all in italics)

When a wife relinquishes control of when, how, and where sex happens, she is free to focus on receiving and being vulnerable. In response to this, the man’s masculinity awakens and he feels more inclined to be tender and generous with his wife. The more attention he gives her, the more likely she will feel grateful and satisfied. If she expresses this gratitude, the man feels appreciated and is likely to give even more. (Doyle, p. 207)

If she could accept the real him, their love would be based on trust and forgiveness, and would be deep rather than superficial. (Page, p. 86)

**Trust** is magical because people tend to live up to our expectations. (Doyle, p. 22)
when he takes the wrong freeway exit you don’t correct him by telling him where to turn. . . . if he keeps going in the wrong direction you will go past the state line and still not correct what he’s doing. In fact, no matter what your husband does, you will not try to teach, improve, or correct him. (Doyle, p. 35)

You both decide whether you’re going to… forgive each other or hold grudges, accept each other’s weaknesses or point fingers of blame, apologize when in error or smugly stand your ground, be generous and giving or put your own needs first. (Weiner-Davis, p. 55)

Forgiveness and restoration usually go hand in hand in a relationship as they did with Tony and Mary. Intimacy and openness in their relationship was quickly restored because no barriers were placed in the way. . . . When this happens, restoration, in which the relationship is repaired for intimacy and connection, will naturally follow. (Markman, p. 220)

To trust again is a risk. Your partner could let you down again and there’s no way to be sure that this won’t happen. That’s why they call it trust. As with forgiveness, it involves letting go. (Markman, p. 226)

Pain is the price that you pay for resisting the natural order of things—and nothing is more natural than supporting and accepting your intimate partner. (McGraw, p. 121)

You can have a perfect love life – if you simply define as perfect exactly what you have. (Page, p. 197)

Intimacy

Listening well is at the heart of intimacy and connection. When we are able to listen to another person with attention and care, that person feels validated and enhanced. (Lerner, p. 204)

Letting go of resentment can set you free and it can bring more love and happiness into your life. It opens the door to intimacy and connection. (Weiner-Davis, p. 207)

Our human souls cry out for two things: We want a special connection with another human being, specifically, intimacy, closeness, and unconditional love. (Page, p. 200)

Commitment

But commitment does mean that you have no hesitations whatsoever that your life is not together with this other person, this intimate partner whom you have chosen. To see why commitment is essential to a truly happy marriage, let us begin by looking at how the lack of commitment inhibits intimacy, and prevents the full flowering of a relationship. (Page, p. 29)

Without using some skill to overcome negative patterns, the resulting anger, contempt, and hostility can seriously damage the love and commitment in your relationship. (Markman, p. 101)

This young woman wanted to feel loved, cherished, valued, and special. She wanted to be in a safe, loving, warm commitment. Yet, she did nothing to ensure that because none of that is the norm any longer. She wanted to feel supported by her community when the sanctity of her unsanctified relationship was broken. That support is not there. In other words, today’s societal norms do not provide for or create or support romance and a place for valued, safe, and truly intimate relations. (Schlessinger, p. 4, italics in original)
I respect you tremendously for valuing your marriage, for honoring the commitment you made as a couple, and for devoting yourself so completely to bringing back your love. You are a very special person. The world should be full of people like you. (Weiner-Davis, p. 293)

Trust, Vulnerable, Courage, Risk, Positive

It is not a pipe dream to believe that God has provided for you another person in this world whom you can trust with your most intimate and vulnerable secrets and needs. (McGraw, p. 21)

Those of us who have trouble trusting others when every rational indicator says that we are safe are reacting to our fear. (Doyle, p. 23)

As it turns out, my fears were a conditioned response I had developed over the years to hide my own vulnerability—the soft underbelly that exposes me to both the greatest pain and the greatest pleasure. (Doyle, p. 23)

Without being vulnerable, I can't have intimacy. Without intimacy, there can be no romance or emotional connection. When I am vulnerable with my husband, the intimacy, passion, and devotion seem to flow naturally. (Doyle, p. 23)

Strive to be vulnerable with your husband by baring your most tender feelings and admitting when you're hurt rather than covering it with anger. When you feel the fear of being rejected or abandoned welling up, find your courage by reminding yourself that you are safe with your husband.... Vulnerability is not the same as weakness—it actually takes much more strength and courage to risk emotionally than it does to stay defended. (Doyle, p. 172)

Self-protectiveness is alienating and lonely. Somehow, the person has chosen safety over risk, and without risk there is no gain, and without gain there is no intimacy, and without intimacy there is no peace and safety that comes from being known and loved. (Schlessinger, p. 65 italics in original)

The solution always is love, bonding, commitment, purpose. The solution always is getting back on the soul train someone threw you off. (Schlessinger, p. 65)

I won't try to minimize the step I'm asking you to take. Intimate self-disclosure is one of the scariest and most difficult things you'll ever do.... It is my hope that you will decide it's a risk worth taking. I'm hoping you'll decide that you are strong enough to handle the risk, and that, should your partner prove to be a poor steward of this act of vulnerability and trust on your part, you can handle it. (McGraw, pp. 152-153)

We all tend to look to marriage as a safe haven, but there is a risk of getting hurt from time to time in any relationship.... Many things can cause minor or major hurts, including put-downs, avoidance, negative interpretations, abusive comments... affairs, addictions, and impoliteness. (Markman, p. 212)

Megan will have to come to trust Johann again for both of them to relax in their relationship. Let's hope that her trust will not be misplaced. To trust again is a risk. Your partner could let you down again and there's no way to be sure that this won't happen. That's why they call it trust. (Markman, p. 226)

In an unconscious marriage, you believe that the way to have a good marriage is to pick the right partner. In a conscious marriage you realize you have to be the right partner. As you gain a more realistic view of love relationships, you realize that a good marriage requires commitment, discipline, and the courage to grow and change; marriage is hard work. (Hendrix, p. 90, italics in original)
Couples who thrive are in the habit of focusing on the **positive** aspects of their relationship. One woman said to me, “People tell me my husband is conceited, but I just tell them, ‘He deserves to be.’” I thought her comment was a delightful way of telling him, “I’m on your side. I love you exactly the way you are.” Focusing on the **positive** is a **skill** that can be learned. (Page, p. 37)

**Sex, Happiness, Romance, Passion, Peace, Harmony, Friendship, Joy, Fun**

You **deserve** a **peaceful, happy**, mutually rewarding relationship that includes **fun**, support, **sex** and **intimacy**, companionship and freedom. (McGraw, p. 299)

We believe that men and women want most of the same things in a relationship: **respect, connection, intimacy, friendship, peace,** and **harmony**. (Markman, p. 37)

At the heart of my program is the simple truth that **happy** marriages are based on a deep **friendship**. By this I mean a mutual **respect** for and **enjoyment** of each other’s company. These couples tend to know each other **intimately**… (Gottman, pp. 19-20)

**Surrendering** is both gratifying and terrifying, but the results – **peace, joy**, and feeling good about yourself and your marriage – are proven. (Doyle, p. 19).

If you’ve lost your appetite for **sex**…. Part of the cure is to practice the other steps of **surrendering**—being **respectful**, receiving **graciously**, relinquishing **control**, expressing **gratitude**, and (perhaps most of all) practicing good **self-care**. As you commit to regular **physical** contact, you will begin to find more **enjoyment** in it…. If you’re thinking, “He doesn’t do anything to help me, so why should I do something he wants?,” remember that everybody loses during a long, **lonely** standoff. This attitude puts you no closer to restored **harmony**. Not least of all withholding **sex** as a bargaining chip in the relationship is a terrible misuse of physical **intimacy**. (Doyle, p. 209)

Physical **intimacy** isn’t all that marriage is about, but it’s one of the areas, like **fun** and **friendship**, where you can develop a **lasting**, satisfying ability to **connect**. (Markman, p. 280)

Learn to **talk** to each other about **sex** in a way that lets you both feel **safe**… Because most people feel so **vulnerable**… the key to talking about **sex** is to be gentle. A lovemaking session that starts with one partner criticizing the other is going to end faster than a ‘quickie.’ The **goal of sex** is to be closer, to have more **fun**, to feel satisfied, and to feel valued and **accepted**… (Gottman, p. 201)

If all of this sounds **humdrum** and **unromantic**, it’s anything but. Through small but important ways **Olivia** and **Nathaniel** are maintaining the **friendship** that is the foundation of their **love**. As a result they have a marriage that is far more **passionate** than do couples who punctuate their lives together with **romantic** vacations and lavish anniversary gifts but have fallen out of touch in their daily lives. (Gottman, p. 20)

The thriving couples I spoke with **feel** the excitement and beauty of their **love** for each other. They experience **desire** for each other; enthusiasm about each other; deep affection toward each other; and powerful, compelling emotions – in other words, **passion**. (Page, p. 213, italics in original)

being in a **close** and **loving** relationship is far easier than being in a strained or **distant** one. These days, our life together is surprisingly **peaceful**. But, paradoxically, it also resonates with a new energy, an energy fueled by our **close connection**… In addition to having a **passionate** **friendship**, **Helen** and I also have what we call a “**passionate** partnership.” (Hendrix, p. xv)
**Negative, Distance, Alone, Pain, Stress, Fear**

This distance and alienation sometimes fool people into thinking they’ve fallen out of love. (Weiner-Davis, p. 54)

A more viable approach is to stay connected and continue the conversation about the problem without distancing or blaming... It wouldn’t help matters if she distanced or emotionally disconnected from Ira. Rather Lorraine needed to move toward him with the goal of strengthening their bond by being a loving and generous partner... (Lerner, p. 125)

A major task for partners in a close relationship, therefore, is to be able to handle these negative feelings constructively, without high levels of conflict or the loneliness of avoidance. (Markman, p. 47)

In the end, accept his position. Remember that your goal is to bring intimacy to your marriage and to get out of the lonely trap... (Doyle, p. 246)

If you have not designed and carried out your life to create or allow distance instead of intimacy, combative instead of cooperation, blame and rejection instead of accountability and acceptance, you cannot maintain the erosion and pain that you are now experiencing. (McGraw, p. 11)

Several couples mentioned the shock and fear they experienced the first time they faced a hard time, and, instead of being able to rely on each other for support, found that they were emotionally distant, or that they had a hard time connecting at all. When one or both partners are anxious or depressed... the quality of closeness and connectedness between the two partners is adversely affected. (Page, p. 103)

Many (although not all, as we shall see in a moment) of the happy couples I interviewed had lives that were more or less free of long-term, chronic stress. And I began to ask myself: Are they happy because they are stress-free? Or are they stress-free because they are happy? (Page, p. 104)

As we look back on that year, we realize it was important that, even though we didn’t feel like it, we took several weekend retreats for ourselves. They gave us the impetus to slow down and reconnect... (Page, p. 106)

Being intimate and happy also means avoiding tension and conflict:

- **Sex** can be such a fun way to share with each other and deepen your sense of intimacy. But when communication is fraught with tension, then frustration and hurt feelings too often result. (Gottman, p. 201)

- **Tension** isn’t compatible with enjoyable, intimate lovemaking for most people. In fact, there may be no area of intimate connection that’s more vulnerable to the effects of conflict and resentment than your physical relationship. If you’re experiencing conflict in other areas of your relationship, it can be difficult to feel positive about sharing an intimate physical experience. (Markman, p. 271)

**Friendship** fuels the flames of romance because it offers the best protection against feeling adversarial toward your spouse. Because Nathaniel and Olivia have kept their friendship strong despite the inevitable disagreements and irritations of married life, they are experiencing what is known technically as “positive sentiment override.” This means that their positive thoughts about each other and their marriage are so pervasive that they tend to supersede their negative feelings. (Gottman, p. 20)
If we are to feel the **positive** feelings of **love**, happiness, **trust**, and **gratitude**, we periodically also have to feel **anger**, sadness, **fear**, and sorrow. When a woman goes down into her well is when she can heal these **negative** emotions. (Gray, p. 130)

The **truth** is, the less you **communicate** your complaints, **negative** thoughts, and **criticisms** to your husband, the better your **intimacy** will be, and the stronger your marriage. Withholding information from your husband **may** feel dishonest, but it’s really being mature and polite. (Doyle, p. 248)

Pamela’s belief that she had to maintain a mood of **cheerfulness** was wearing on her. It took energy to conceal and deny her real emotions and to pretend to her friends and family that she could always put aside her **fear**. It shut down the lines of **communication** and the possibility of a deeper **intimacy** with her partner. Pamela was locked into a position of unutterable **loneliness** until her partner, Sam, joined us in the therapy process. In this **safe** space, they learned to talk openly together rather than to continue “protecting” each other from **painful** facts and feelings. (Lerner, p. 43)