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[Return to Current Issue](#)

Review of The Art and Science of Love: A Workshop for Couples

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Abstract: This article reviews The Art and Science of Love: A Couple's Workshop on the following criteria: the extent to which the program is research based and empirically validated, how well the program meets the needs of struggling relationships, and ease of use. The need for relationship education using empirical research is summarized. A program description reveals components and typical use of the workshop. The Art and Science of Love: A Couple's Workshop is a useful resource for Cooperative Extension agents to recommend to couples.

The Need for Relationship Education and Enrichment Programs

If couples and families do not have available proven resources and science-based information that strengthen their marriages and families, they can lose their motivation to farm, ranch, work, or play. We can provide all the information we want on various topics, but if we do not also provide information and resources that improve marriage relationships, they may flounder or fail. Extension agents who recognize signs of trouble and who tactfully provide sound resources can help strengthen couples and families, and provide the foundation for profitable family businesses.

The marriage relationship not only affects the individuals who are married, but also influences the entire family's functioning, including children's adjustment. Katz and Gottman (1996) found that unhappiness within a marriage results in spillover to the way mothers and fathers co-parent their children. The way couples interact seems to play a direct role in the way they parent their children. There is a clear link between marital conflict and factors of children's adjustment, such as behavioral problems, poor social functioning, poor health, depression, anxiety, emotional insecurity, and low self-esteem (See Cummings & Davies, 1994, 2002; Davies et al., 2002; Troxel & Matthews, 2004).

Cooperative Extension agents need to be aware of valuable resources in the area of family life. Due to the negative consequences of marital conflict on parents and their children, relationship education and enrichment programs could play a role in improving family life for Cooperative Extension clientele. While we refer couples to other trained professionals for therapy, Extension agents can provide educational resources to families in the area of relationship enrichment. Just as parent education is important to the lives of children, so is relationship education, as evidenced by the link between the couple relationship and child outcomes. The Art and Science of Love: A Couple's Workshop is an at-home, self-paced program that Extension agents can recommend to couples to reduce negative interactions and increase positive interactions, thus reducing conflict and improving relationship satisfaction and providing the foundation for profitable family businesses.

Program Description

The Art and Science of Love: A Couple's Workshop uses the research discoveries of Gottman and his colleagues and puts valuable evidence-based information into a light-hearted and easy-to-follow program for couples to improve their relationships. The DVD workshop includes 7 hours of footage presented by John Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman, a manual that follows and supplements the video material, and instructions and templates for valuable exercises. Gottman and Gottman (2005) report that the workshop assists couples in answering five areas: How their relationship is doing, what makes relationships change, how to turn around a troubled relationship, how to ensure a relationship will continue to grow, and how to make relationship improvements last.

The program includes introduction, creating a love map of your partner's world, building fondness and admiration, how to turn towards each other, how to have a stress-reducing conversation, the difference between a solvable problem and a gridlocked problem, flooding and self-soothing, regulation of conflict, softened start-up, no fault discussions and accepting influence, changing gridlocked problems to perpetual dialogues, relaxing and soothing one another, processing a fight, creating shared meaning, and the magic five hours a week (Gottman & Gottman, 2005). The workshop aims to create "a culture of appreciation" between couples.

Is the Material Clearly Research Based?

The Gottmans describe research studies and empirical findings to support each segment of the workshop, but the manual contains no references to studies. The workshop is intended for couples' home use and not for group facilitation, which may account for the oral reference to research in lieu of written references. Research backing for each concept presented can be found in 30 years of publications in peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Gottman, 1999). Concepts presented in the workshop spring from research on which negative interactions can destroy relationships, positive interactions that foster relationship satisfaction, and techniques for maintaining couples' relationship improvements (Gottman, 1993, 1999; Gottman & Gottman, 1999; Carrere & Gottman, 1999).

Evaluation Criteria and Conclusions

- Is the material clearly research based? Yes, the workshop is based on over three decades of well-designed, published research on couple relationships.
- Does the material address the needs of struggling relationships as identified in the research literature? Yes, negative interactions that lead to relationship dissolution and positive interactions that lead to

relationship satisfaction identified in the research literature are highlighted in the workshop. The DVDs and manual exercises address ways to minimize negative interactions and maximize positive interactions in order for couples to strengthen their relationships.

- Is there empirical evidence of the workshops' effectiveness for improving intimate relationships? The Art and Science of Love has yet to be empirically tested for its effectiveness in improving couples' relationships.
- Is the workshop easy for busy couples to use? Yes, the workshop includes DVDs, a manual, and two copies of the couple exercises. The 12-hour workshop is easily spread out to accommodate busy schedules.

Cooperative Extension agents may recommend this program through newsletters and advertising or may even offer it through their office as a resource for checkout. This program is not recommended for couples experiencing violence, substance abuse, or severe psychopathology. This program does not require facilitation by an Extension agent and is instead intended for couples to use independently. The Art and Science of Love: A Couple's Workshop is not intended to replace couples therapy, but instead may be used in home by stable couples to improve their relationship and reduce conflict. It is one more tool that skilled Extension agents can recommend to individuals and couples with questions about marriage preparation and education, parenting, divorce, school adjustment, anxiety, and stress.

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