

What will you sacrifice for your couple?

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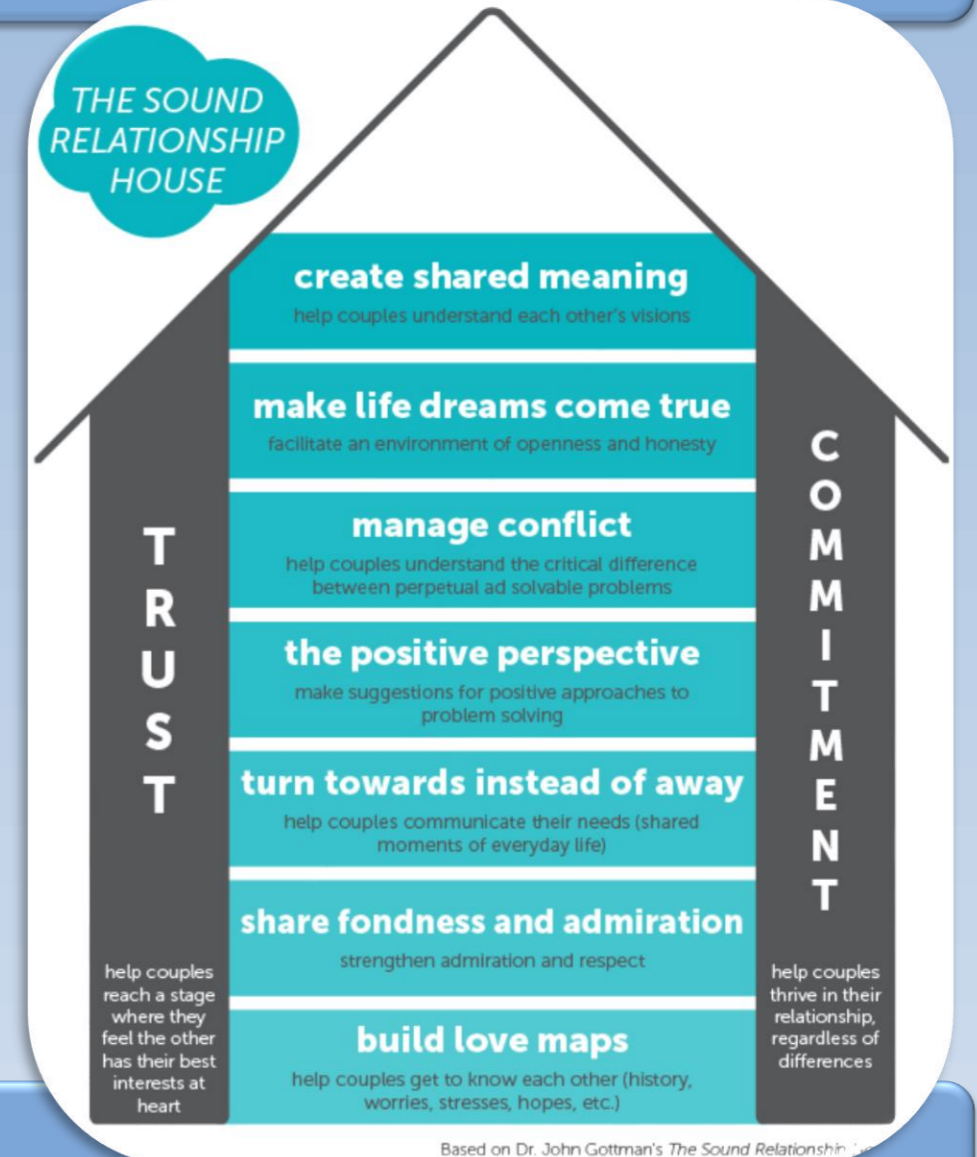
Introduction

According to Gottman & Gottman (2017), there are **seven principles** that will prevent a couple from breaking up. The principles are connected to each floor of **the Sound Relationship House**. The two walls holding up the house are **trust** and **commitment**, which are great predictors of marital satisfaction. Indeed, self commitment in the relationship increases when people perceive that their partner is implementing costly actions to benefit the relationship (Impett, Le, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2014). However, commitment is multifaceted, and can sometimes include a notion of **sacrifice** (Johnson & Horne, 2016).

"Sacrificing for someone you love may show them you care and may even make you feel good about yourself" (Gordon, 2012, p.2).

People engage in sacrifice for many different reasons, but not all of them lead to conjugal satisfaction (Gordon, 2012).

Although some studies have shown that partners are more satisfied and engaged when they feel that the other is sacrificing for the relationship, it depends mostly on the purpose of this act (Impett, et al., 2014). If the sacrifice has **"approach motives"** (for example seeking to make the partner happy or to enhance intimacy), it increases the quality of the relationship. But if it has **"avoidance motives"** (where the goal is to avoid conflicts or negative feelings such as guilt), the sacrifice can decrease satisfaction and even increase the probability of breaking up (Gordon, 2012).



Objectives and Methods

The present study aims at highlighting various relational processes that may lead a person to sacrificing a part of his/her Self or his/her family for the couple, and at showing the quality of the relationship of these couples. Most studies on couples rely on individual self-reported questionnaires. In the present study, we used a mixed methodology (direct observation of interactions and questionnaires). A total of 305 individuals completed the questionnaires (mean age: 29 y (sd=10,8); 16% men and 84% women; 71% no child & 29% with children; mean relationship duration: 5,8 y (sd=7y)), and twenty couples were observed directly. Two case studies will be presented in the present poster.

Protocol: *The Sound Relationship House Assessment* (Gottman & Gottman, 2014) ; *New Sexual Satisfaction Scale – short version* (Stulhofer, Busko & Brouillard, 2010); *The Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (Spanier, 1976); *Sociodemographic questionnaire* (Scali, 2018).

Results

Arnaud & Louise

Hobbies: Party

Education: He has completed graduate studies and is now working with Louise, at his request

Past relationships: Has dated a lot of girls and didn't really had a serious relationship before Louise

Present relationship: Seems very committed to Louise, shares his home projects with her, he says she will his wife and the mother of his children. However, he sometimes feels rejected by Louise, and he questions their relationship once a week.

Sacrifices: Less partying and less going out with friends

Passport: ARNAUD 29

Marital satisfaction: 100 (Barely satisfied)

Sexual Satisfaction: 34 (Unsatisfied)

Relational dynamics: 15 via questionnaires, 9 via interview

Conflict management: 10 via questionnaires, 5 via interview

Hobbies: Travel (she was considering moving to another country)

Education: She has resumed her studies in Belgium and is doing an internship at Arnaud's workplace, who had insisted a lot on it

Past relationships: Has stayed 8 years with a man with whom she was engaged.

Present relationship: Difficulties in managing Arnaud's partying habits and does not trust him completely (because he would not be sincere about the relationships he maintains with his ex-girlfriends). Ambivalent about the relationship

- She has modified her personal plans for this relationship,
- She is not ready to marry him and she regularly threatens to leave the house.

Sacrifices: Trading her travel plans for the package "home, marriage and baby".

Passport: LOUISE 27

Marital satisfaction: 105 (Barely satisfied)

Sexual Satisfaction: 34 (Unsatisfied)

Relational dynamics: 8 via questionnaires, 9 via interview

Conflict management: 3 via questionnaires, 4 via interview

Bertrand & Françoise

Hobbies: Enjoying life

Past relationships: He was married and had two children. He was looking for another serious relationship because his marriage was failing.

Present relationship: The couple first lived separately and then moved in with Bertrand's daughters. Their attempts to create a step family did not succeed: there were lots of tension in the couple because Bertrand's daughters did not accept that their father left their mother. However, as they had to fight hard to stay together, it strengthened their relationship, and his love, trust and commitment to Françoise are very strong.

Sacrifice: He's in conflict with his daughters who are mad at him because of Françoise

Passport: BERTRAND 57

Marital satisfaction: 136 (Very satisfied)

Sexual Satisfaction: 51 (Very satisfied)

Relational dynamics: 17 via questionnaires, 17 via interview

Conflict management: 13 via questionnaires, 11 via interview

Hobbies: Libertinism (which allowed her to meet Bertrand)

Past relationships: she was married and had two children. Although she cared about her husband, she wanted to have fun with other men.

Present relationship: As they had to fight hard to stay together, it strengthened their relationship, and her love, trust and commitment to Bertrand are very strong.

Sacrifices: She divorced and split up her former family to create a step family with Bertrand and his daughters.

Passport: FRANÇOISE 47

Marital satisfaction: 136 (Very satisfied)

Sexual Satisfaction: 60 (Very satisfied)

Relational dynamics: 16 via questionnaires, 17 via interview

Conflict management: 12 via questionnaires, 12 via interview

* Marital satisfaction: range 0-151 ; M = 115,29 ; SD = 15,585 / Sexual satisfaction: range 12-60 ; M = 42,27 ; SD = 8,846 / Relational dynamics : from 0 to 18 / Conflict management: from 0 to 14

Discussion

When people sacrifice themselves to make their partner happy, that can potentially increase **commitment, trust and happiness**. The analysis of these two couples shows that sacrificing oneself for the relationship can lead to very satisfied conjugal and sexual relationship or, conversely, unsatisfied relationship.

❖ In particular, people who sacrifice for **approach-motivated reasons** (for long-term collective gain as a couple or to help fulfill the partner's dreams) tend to be happier and have more satisfying relationships (just like Bertrand and Françoise).

❖ However, although sacrificing to make a partner happy can be a good thing, people who consistently **prioritize other's needs above their own** can pay a cost in self-esteem and mental health over the long run (just like Arnaud and Louise). According to Gordon (2012), sacrifice is a hallmark of a close relationship, but it should not lead to satisfying the partner at the cost of one's own happiness (by neglecting one's own needs).

The right kind of sacrifice can bring people together, but sacrificing for the wrong reasons may be worse than no sacrifice at all. (Gordon, 2012)

Therefore, it is important to consider the pros and cons of a sacrifice, to have clear communication with the partner, to ask the "tough questions", and to make sure both partners are sacrificing for the right reasons.

ASK YOURSELF:

- How committed am I in my relationship?
- Do I trust my partner?
- What is my motivation to make this sacrifice?
- Why should I be the one giving up what I want?
- Do either of us want it more?

ADVICES:

- Make sure you are both clear about your own desires and priorities.
- Has your partner expressed thanks for your willingness to sacrifice? If your partner isn't aware that you consider your act to be a sacrifice, he or she won't be able to appreciate your selflessness.
- Work with your partner to see if there is a solution that doesn't require much of sacrifice from either of you.
- Make an arrangement that suits both of you.

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