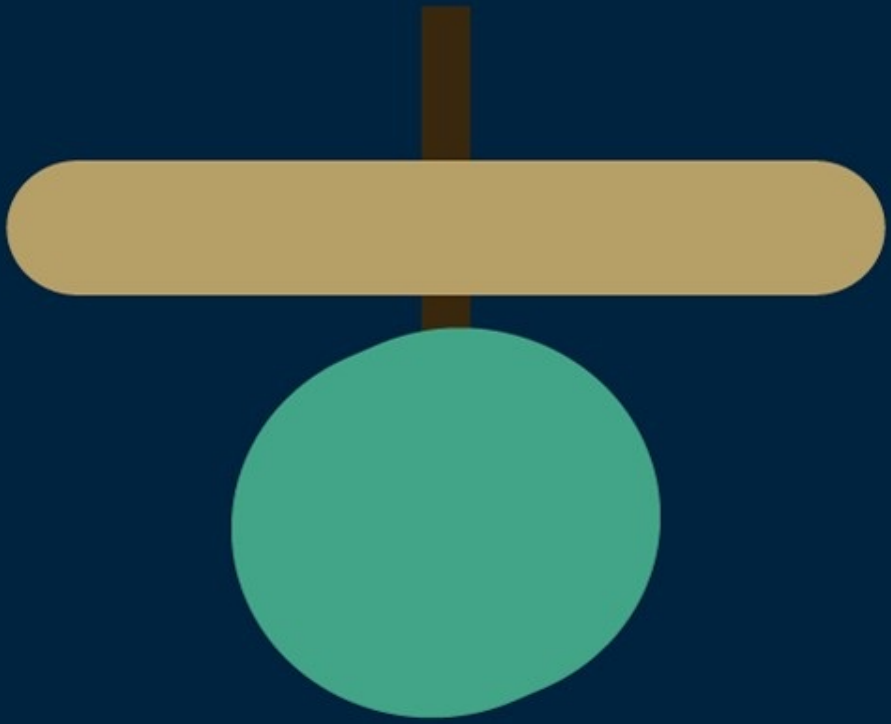
The Rational Structures



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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *Mediation Therapy* by Janet Miller Wiseman

Created in the United States of America

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The Rational Structures

> Just like you, I trusted my mind, implicitly. The momentum of the daily world carried me, and I kept acting like an average man. I held on desperately to my flimsy rational structures. Don't you do the same.
>
> —Carlos Castenada, *The Power of Silence*[1]

Rational structures in mediation therapy are designed to assist clients to see more clearly. Seeing more clearly, understanding themselves and their relationship more fully are the goals of the rational structures. The rational structures are interwoven with the educational and sensory structures, discussed in chapter 5. As stated in the last chapter, frequently the first three rational structures may be posed to a couple or family sequentially, and the last four or five structures may also be posed in order. The structures in between are usually varied in placement, determined by the mediation therapist's sensitivity to appropriate timing and placement of the inquiries. I list here the twenty rational structures that promote clearer seeing and cognitive understanding:

1. What are each individual's separate goals for the intervention?

2. What are each individual's theories about the breakdown or impasse in the relationship?

3. How does each individual think their family of origin (FOO) or other significant parenting figures, would view their relationship crisis if they knew everything that the individual knows about it?

4. The impertinent questions: What attracted each person most to the other? What does each person like most about the other? What bothers each person most about the other? What would each person miss most about the other if the couple should ever separate? Trace major fights, themes of the fights, and so forth.

5. The essential lists.

6. What main internal issue is each person dealing with right now?

7. How do the first several years, or months, of the relationship compare to the last several years or months? Were there identifiable stages in between?

8. What positives have there been in the relationship? Which remain today?

9. What negatives have there been in the relationship? Which remain today?

10. What are the repetitive patterns in the relationship? The poulet-oeuf (chicken-or-the-egg) questions?

11. What are the collective issues in the relationship? Which aches, gripes, conflicts, and anxieties would need to be resolved for

the couple to have a rewarding relationship?

12. The geneogram depicting how the individuals' extended families have handled conflict.

13. Instruction in the importance of mutually understood, if not mutually agreed-upon, decisions.

14. Clarification of past misunderstandings and asking of forgiveness.

15. What will individuals carry forward into the future, whether living together or not?

16. An emotional sharing from the heart and a rational listing of alternative future directions.

17. Individual decisions reported, and negotiation to mutual or mutually understood decision.

18. A negotiated settlement between the two individual decisions.

19. Information about children's needs during crisis.

20. Planning the next steps after the negotiated settlement.

Rational Structure Number One: Each Individual's Goals for the Intervention

This structure always occurs in the mediation agreement phase of the process, and it serves to separate the individuals out from the problems

between them. Beginning the intervention by stating one's own goals for the intervention is a far cry from: "He or she *always* or *never* does X, so that I never get Y!" The mediation therapist's request to the individuals to state their goals helps individuate each individual, empowers each to view the potential effectiveness of the intervention as being within his or her own control and gives him or her a positive future-orientation. The request for goals makes it impossible to begin the intervention with character analysis and defamation, blaming each other, or with a focus on the past.

The initial focus is on the future, on what the individuals want in their lives. There is a deliberate defocusing from what went wrong, from blaming and accusing. Sustaining this positive frame of reference is critical for the progression of this decision-making intervention. Respect is paid to the importance of the partnership, while, at the same time, the initial focus is on each individual who makes a separate, personal statement. The process is begun with a direct and emotionally unladen sharing of individual needs and desires.

Rational Structure Number Two: Each Individual's Theories about the Impasse

Rarely do individuals view the breakdown or impasse in their relationship in exactly the same way. Openly expressing how each partner views what contributed to the difficulties has the possibility of broadening an

individual's overly simplistic understanding of the crisis in the partnership. The focus of people's theories is often less on finding fault and more on specifics: communication, sex, money, children, in-laws, being two entirely different types of people. Indeed, at least in heterosexual couples, the members of the couple are more different as a man and a woman than they have come to view themselves in their recent search for equality. Many couples have mistaken equality for sameness. She expects him to be as satisfied with listening and talking as he expects her to find rewards in quiet togetherness and mutual participation in activity.

Each partner hears the other's theories and priorities. There is no other possibility than to compare and contrast how each one views the crisis. The mediation therapist takes the time to be certain that each individual has heard and *understands* the other's theory about the impasse.

Each rational structure conveys a message alongside the question it poses of the partners. The "medium," or the form of the question, may well be the most important part of the message. In this case the fact that the question is asked conveys the following message: you are separate people entitled to view your crisis from your own individual standpoint. That the mediation therapist is recognizing and acknowledging each person's individuality and way of seeing the world is as important as obtaining each person's theory.

Rational Structure Number Three: Family of Origin's Point of View

Assume your family of origin (FOO)—that is, your parents or other significant parenting figures—know everything you do about the crisis in your relationship. What do you think they individually would think about it? This question challenges individuals to put themselves in their parents' place, to think as their parents have come to be known to think. Secondly, it gives the individual the opportunity to know that this viewpoint is, indeed, the viewpoint of the parent, not necessarily one's own viewpoint. Or, the parental viewpoint may indeed be one's own internalized parental message or superego.

A clear example of the former is Mary, a woman who stated that her mother's view most certainly would be extremely negative about her daughter divorcing, due to her orthodox religious views. Mary, herself, had been feeling very burdened by her decision to divorce, but realized that she views divorce considerably more liberally than her mother. Mary had been assigning more weight to her mother's strict orthodox views than to her own. When she differentiated her own values from her mother's, she became freer to empathize with the impact her decision was having on her mother.

This *circular question*—asking a question about another's viewpoint—is an indirect route to the individual's knowing how he or she views the

relationship crisis. Answers to how one's family views one's crisis are frequently multifaceted: "My mother would like to see us work on our relationship for the sake of her grandchildren, but my father never did think the marriage would work and is probably saying 'I told you so.'"

This question gets at introjects, internalizations, the superego. It can separate out the involved person's own conscious viewpoint from preconscious and unconscious internalizations. The answers may help the client, as well as the mediation therapist, to assess how differentiated a person is from his or her parents.

Thinking about how another views one's own situation tends to prompt one to clarify how one views the situation oneself.

Rational Structure Number Four: The Impertinent Questions

In mediation therapy, delving into family patterns in order to change maladaptive patterning is not a central goal. So it is that some of questions, which would be pertinent in family therapy, may seem impertinent in a decision-making process. Mediation therapists ask the following questions randomly, when appropriate, to increase clients' understanding of themselves and of each other for the future, in or out of the relationship:

1. What attracted you to your partner (your mate, your spouse) in the first place?

2. What do you presently like the most about your partner?

3. What did your partner bring to your unit that you lacked at the time you got together? Which of these characteristics still - contrast with your own characteristics?

4. What would you miss most about your partner if the two of you should ever decide to part?

5. What presently bothers you the most about your partner?

6. What do you presently need, want, or count on from your mate that you could and would like to do for yourself?

7. Do you see yourselves as being similar, as true opposites to one another, or just on opposite ends of the same continuum (that is, both having trouble with control, but partner one being overly neat and partner two overly messy)?

8. Are the difficulties between you recent and acute or are they long-standing? Are they a threat to the relationship?

9. What fears, if any, do you have about being alone or not in the relationship should you part?

10. Trace your major fights. What were the overt and the underlying causes?

11. What skills do you still desire to learn from your partner?

12. What are the factors that tie you together?

These questions, for the most part, were devised by Priscilla Bonney Smith, a student of mediation therapy.[2] They help a couple identify for themselves whether they are more complementary or opposite, or whether they are more symmetrical or similar. The questions help the couple to begin to assess what they may have wanted to make up for, in themselves, in their choices of mates. They begin to indicate to the individuals how independent and separate they are or how merged together and dependent they may be. The impertinent questions, ideally, help a couple tolerate the examination of how they might cope, should they desire or need to separate, to live apart, or how they might cope if they decide to live together.

The third question—What did your partner bring to your unit that you lacked?—gets at the positive side of what the individual undoubtedly now considers a very detrimental trait. It is my conjecture that when a partner is perceiving this trait negatively it is often because he or she is feeling a dire deficit in him or herself of that quality that was originally lacking and that helped to draw him or her to the partner.

Occasionally, the mediation therapist may want to present a couple with the whole series of questions, in an attempt to help them view their

asymmetry/symmetry, independence/dependence. Couples who are attempting to make marriage decisions are most appropriate for this serial inquiry. However, more typical than presenting the list of questions, these impertinent questions are part of a mediation therapist's basic knowledge and are asked when they are pertinent to the therapeutic discussion.

As with all the rational structures, these impertinent questions are meant to increase peoples' perspective of themselves and of their relationship(s) and to help them begin to accept what they see. The questions may also help the couple focus on the fact that their relationship, like every relationship, has a positive and a negative aspect; they need to appreciate that there is always a little bit of good in the worst relationships, and a little bad in the best relationships.

It should be apparent from some of the answers whether or not individuals enhance each other's strengths and whether or not a partner originally attempted to fill in gaps or missing qualities in him or herself in the choice of a mate. Some people may choose partners who are at the far end of a spectrum upon which they simply desire to be located; they wish to be more orderly, but have chosen someone so impeccable that there is no comfort in living with him or her. With the impertinent questions it may be apparent that their similarities are stultifying or that these similarities reinforce positive aspects of a person.

These questions may highlight the positive aspects or the oppressive aspects of complementarity or symmetry. They may help people to once again develop a sense of appreciation of themselves. Again, as with the other rational structures, the questions alone, even without the answers, are messages. Information, creepingly, helps people build a foundation on which a decision will rest. The impertinent questions, like the essential lists that follow, may be given to couples or families to complete at home to bring to a later session for discussion.

The point of departure of all of the impertinent questions is the individual self. Since couple decisions are composed of individual decisions, which are negotiated, the individuals in crisis in their relationship gravely need more information with which they may begin to arrive at an inner knowing of the direction to take with their relationship. The impertinent questions are designed to help the couple see more clearly, in order that they may eventually know more deeply.

Rational Structure Number Five: The Essential Lists

During the initial mediation therapy session, a couple will be given the following list of questions. As mentioned before, a few individuals object to list making, saying in essence, "I couldn't possibly quantify these very personal, emotional aspects of myself into a list. You don't write your feelings

down, you have them." Surprisingly, however, the great majority of individuals happily complete the task, rarely forgetting to return to the second session without lists in hand. In my experience, this is a decidedly greater return than for most homework given in psychotherapy.

The Essential List

1. What do you know you want and need in any good long-term relationship?

2. What do you know you cannot tolerate in any good long-term relationship?

3. What do you bring as problems/difficulties to any good long-term relationship?

4. What do you bring as strengths to any good long-term relationship?

During session two, individuals are instructed to keep their lists in hand and are asked, alternately, to read them aloud. Breaking the reading into eight parts with both people alternately reading answers to each question, then giving reactions to each other's answers (including sharing how many of the qualities listed under that question are present in their relationship), is a suggested point of departure. This breakdown of questions allows people to respond immediately to what they have just heard. If they don't spontaneously respond to each other's lists, the mediation therapist asks

them, broadly, what their response is to what they've just heard. Sometimes people are bewildered by a partner's response, sometimes pleasantly surprised, reinforced, or challenged. Often people compare and contrast their responses saying, "We want the same things; why don't we get along?" or, "Of course we don't get along!" Often enough, individuals spontaneously comment that people with their particular individual problems will naturally have difficult times with one another. They see the coexistence of their separate, but negatively interlocking problems, as problematic for the unit.

If their individual problems/difficulties overlap in an obviously destructive way that the individuals do not mention, the mediation therapist may diplomatically draw attention to the overlap. She or he may indicate that in some problematic relationships individuals have wants and needs or "cannot tolerates" that are not compatible. Then the problems lie at the interface between the two individuals, rather than within one or the other of them. Rather than being people with incorrigible personalities who are intransigent to change, it is possible that there may be two idiosyncratic individuals with their share of difficulties, and also with incompatible needs. In other words, it is not necessary to see every partnership that does not work as someone's fault. For example, very occasionally the lists have served as a litmus test determining whether or not a relationship would work. A former civil rights lawyer indicated on her needs list a mate who cares about discrimination. Her ornithologist husband indicated that he needed someone

who is particularly appreciative of nature and birds. He had no passion whatsoever for civil rights and she, with her passion for people, had no time for birds. The occupations of both of these individuals were also their avocations. Although they respected one another, they decided there was not enough commonality in their lives to feel satisfaction in their partnership. The complementarity, rather than enriching their lives, left each partner feeling alone. This was apparent on their lists. She wrote: "I need someone who rather passionately or least moderately passionately cares about discrimination of the less fortunate and minority peoples." He wrote: "I cannot live with someone who doesn't know a robin from a wren."

More often, the essential lists are not litmus tests, but become worksheets. Areas of compatibility and difficulty are highlighted for future work or to serve as a current understanding of the excessive difficulty the couple is experiencing in making this relationship work.

In over ten years of practicing mediation therapy, some differences between what men and women want in a good long-term relationship have become apparent. Women typically describe wanting emotional closeness as meaning wanting talking and listening while men use the same words to mean a participatory sharing, doing things quietly or actively together. One man honestly described the seven hours he and his wife spent in bed each night as being emotionally close. His wife said that this would be close only if

one of them, at least, were talking.

The essential lists put yearnings, limits, and core personal difficulties into words and visual representations. When these important personal requirements are merely alluded to, or barely spoken out loud, they may not be taken seriously, or even seen as legitimate. The lists may be frightening or evoke some resistance in a few people. These individuals may anticipate that they will recognize needs and desires that are very important for them to have in a relationship. At the same time, they fear they will recognize that there is very little hope of their realizing these desires in their current relationships.

It is natural for people to anticipate that these lists may lead to the conviction that action will be necessary. That action may be to see a need to improve themselves and their relationship. Or they may even acknowledge that further attempts to become effective, satisfied partners appear futile. Some other individuals may view achieving what they need and want in a relationship as selfish, and so object to making a list. A significant number of individuals may state the belief that people are wildly attracted to their chosen mates through chemistry or kismet. For these people, to rationally decide what one needs in another person or a relationship, is like trying to canoe upstream. Falling in love, without participation of consciousness, is a law of nature in this epistemology.

The question “What do you *know* you want and need in any good long-term relationship?” implies that self-reflection, learning from experience, choice, and rationality are equal, at the very least, to “falling in love,” chemistry, and kismet. From the mediation therapy perspective, one falls in love, indeed with one’s heart and emotions, but also with one’s head and rationality, with one’s eyes, ears, intuition, and inner wisdom—not simply as a product of chemistry. The lists proclaim this message to individuals: it is desirable to know yourself, what you want, what is healthy for you. It is not necessary to be entrapped by id, by unconsciousness, by chemistry, which is more than likely to be an attraction to the familiar.

The essential lists are written down and laid out for the individuals to see clearly. Making the lists involves the couple’s stepping back from the heated contemporary situation into a position of individuated self-knowledge. The lists are about individuals, not about complicated interpersonal issues in which people may have merged their separate identities. Couples are told that in making the lists, the individual’s point of departure might be that of a pristine young person with his or her future in front of him or her, combined with the perspective gained over the years in relationships and in life.

The lists are powerful because they force each individual to commit to words what he or she wants and does not want in a relationship. The lists provide a rational framework that makes into a conscious process looking for

or evaluating a partner, challenging the notion of just falling in love. The lists enable individuals to step outside the relationship to view their relationship. They remove blame; what one likes the other may dislike intensely. This is a structural barrier rather than a personal deficit.

The lists are, in a way, "personalized depersonalizations," and they work to clarify what individuals want, because the individuals can literally see in front of them a visual representation of what they want and don't want, without blaming the partner.

Inevitably, what one does not want to tolerate in a relationship will be what has been gathered, at some expense, as information about oneself in the contemporary or a prior relationship. It is acceptable to list these gems of knowledge derived from past relationships. The point of departure for the lists, however, is not the current relationship, per se, but the individual self, including all of his or her experiences to date, not simply the negative aspects of the current relationship.

Rather than beginning the mediation therapy with the couple saying, in essence: "Here we are, we ran into each other, there was a gigantic collision and now we need to put the pieces together or call it a lost cause," we begin from a time perspective prior to the individuals' colliding with one another. We begin when they were still whole or, more likely, partially whole or partly

formed individual entities.

Using this individual perspective in a “couple context” and controlled environment, mediation therapists figuratively project two video screens before them, one of each member of the couple. The partners appear separately, sounding wise from past experience. The individuals are aware of their needs and the difficulties each brings to a good long-term relationship. As they speak, the accompanying visuals of their experience move chronologically back and forth in time to depict the scenes from which they most likely gleaned their current self-wisdom. For example, one woman doesn’t want to tolerate active alcoholism. The scenes of years of struggle with the disease, first with her father, then her husband, appear for her with her words.

Often people know their critical wants and needs because they have suffered from not having had these things; they also know what they cannot tolerate because they *have* experienced those things. Individual problems are often only visible as a result of people having been in relationships; these problems would not have come to light had people lived solitary existences. This is the positive aspect of experiencing problematic relationships.

Viewing the relationship from the perspective of the individual gives mediation therapists maximum exposure to seeing the actors in action. The

usual perspective of the couple relationship at the onset of psychotherapy is one in which the couple automatically demonstrates how they have collided, their impasses and inabilities to communicate, their egregious pains and complaints. It is no small wonder that the psychotherapist often gets caught up immediately in the problems and miscommunications of the couple, which often enough present themselves simultaneously with the couple.

Using the essential lists, which have a distinctive individual perspective, gives the message that the individual came before the couple. The lists implicitly demonstrate the importance of setting limits, boundaries, and non-negotiable areas between individuals in a partnership. They encourage taking personal responsibility, rather than blaming or accusing the other. When one lists what one wants and needs in a good long-term relationship, one is stating what is unique about oneself, rather than demanding that the other be X way or provide Y attributes.

Indeed, in the lists, one is speaking about oneself and what one actually needs, not about the other's deficiencies or what the other cannot provide or give. The point of departure is listing legitimate needs of unique people, not preposterous needs or demanding items. The intention is that the individual be aware of the things he or she earnestly needs in a relationship, in order for it to be a good and long-lasting relationship. Adding asterisks, double stars or numbers to items on the list may help individuals weigh their criteria for

good relationships and weigh the relative importance of those things they do not want to tolerate over the long haul. Later on, when assessing their alternatives for a future direction, they may see how their most important criteria for a relationship are or are not met by each of their alternatives for a future direction.

The implications of the second question of the essential lists —what one knows one cannot tolerate in a good long-term relationship—are many. First, it is legitimate, acceptable, and understood that one will not be able to tolerate certain behaviors, which, for the listing individual, are non-negotiable. Second, the message of the question is that a good relationship is not just "anything goes." Having leverage is legitimate. It means that each person has standards, expectations, limits, and boundaries that need to be met.

Finally, the statements of one's own problem areas and strengths regarding relationships carry the message that, in mediation therapy, responsibility is expected of each individual; that blaming and accusations are not only ineffective but, in this intervention, are actually outlawed. Concerns may be transformed into "I" statements, that is, "I feel diminished when you talk about my sloppiness," rather than "You always make me feel bad about myself." "I" statements mean being able to talk about one's own problems and strengths objectively. Before talk of the relationship and any of its difficulties

begins, the lists enable people to take a good, solid look at themselves, separately.

A partner often may feel so grateful that his or her counterpart can acknowledge difficulties that it makes it easier to acknowledge his or her own foibles. The second person's feelings and stance toward the other may, by virtue of the acknowledgment, become more positive: "Even if my partner has this difficulty, at least he or she is aware of it and admits it openly."

Sometimes people become aware, through their mutual listings, that their interactional difficulties result from a poor fit between their problems, rather than just from the difficulties themselves. For example, if one partner knows that one of her major difficulties in relationships is being too confrontational with everyone, and her partner knows that he loathes confrontation to the extreme, then some of their difficulty obviously lies at the interface between them, not just within each of them.

If people cannot cite any of their own difficulties or problems, the mate often will say that this inability is a major problem; the other has blind spots about realizing contributions to the relationship's difficulties. Or the first person may state that living with a saint has major problems.

Rational Structure Number Six: Each Individual's Main Internal Issue

What main internal issue is each person dealing with right now? More often than not, individuals want specific examples of main internal issues. Some main internal issues have been:

finding a meaningful first, second, or third career

achieving autonomy in decision making from one's parents, spouse, or boss

finding a secure identity as a parent, partner, or worker

preserving feelings of independence, while learning interdependence in a relationship

handling one's own or one's parents' aging

dealing with an illness or handicap in oneself, a child, or parent

struggling with one's sexual orientation

dealing with success and its aftermath

beginning to deal with one's rage at not having gotten enough emotional supplies in childhood

grieving the loss of a person or place or capacity such as fertility, agility, memory

dealing with the agony of the unknown possibility of inheriting a dreaded genetic disease.

Each individual's acknowledging and taking responsibility for his or her internal issues has an obvious impact on the relationship. Taking responsibility for one's own struggles makes it less likely that those issues will manifest as a disturbance of the relationship. Throughout the life cycle, individuals will continuously have personal issues to deal with; it is probably not realistic to expect to be ever finished with personal issues. It is, however, realistic to expect to receive support from significant others in dealing with painful personal issues, without needing to attribute the pain to the couple or the family.

The thrust of the questioning in this and the other rational structures points away from blaming and accusing the other and toward taking responsibility for one's self and one's own issues. Again, as elsewhere in the structures, the "medium" is the message: You have internal issues. What are they? They are yours and do not belong to the couple.

Rational Structure Number Seven: Comparison of First Several Years or Months with Last Several Years or Months

How do the first several years, or months, of the relationship compare and contrast to the last several years or months? Were there identifiable stages in between?

These questions are intended to provoke a broad overview, not a detailed accounting. If seeds of discontent or inappropriateness have existed since the beginning of the partnership, they will surface here, as will nostalgic reminiscences of a better past. Comparisons to the present will be poignant, and stages in between may have been normal developmental stages or may represent a roller-coaster-like, progressively worsening situation.

I imagine that not many people unite in a relationship without at least thinking or believing that there are some positive reasons for doing so. While experience may have proven them in error, this question reminds them of their own positive and good, if naive, intentions.

If people remember elements of their original compact for togetherness; if they still reinforce each other in their life's work, even though their parenting styles have made them seem to be adversaries, this question may remind them of the goodness that appeared lost in the midst of their troubles.

However the relationship compares and contrasts with itself, the couple is advised to be aware of how their togetherness has stayed the same, changed, gotten better, and/or gotten worse. Have the individuals grown and matured during the time they have been together? Has the relationship grown and matured? Or have the individuals (and the relationship) stayed the same or gone backwards?

The use of charts depicting stages in the life of a couple seem to be appropriate for couples to use to gauge whether their difficulties seem to be in or out of line with normal developmental stages for a couple relationship. The chart I use to describe the stages of a couple relationship is found in Appendix D.

Rational Structure Number Eight: Positives in the Relationship

What positives have there been in the relationship? Which remain today? Paralleling the power of misunderstandings to hold a couple together is the power of positives to hold a relationship together. There is the hope that those positives will be enough to sustain a relationship over the long haul. Asking an individual whose relationship is clearly destructive to him or her about the positives in his or her relationship may, paradoxically, be the fastest way for him or her to see the destructiveness of the relationship. Since no relationship is all bad, helping an individual recall that although her vacations with her husband throughout the years were the highlight of the relationship, this was not enough to allow them to survive year-round, since one does not live by vacations alone. Not talking about the positives in a difficult relationship keeps the pain, the negativity, and, ultimately, the grieving at bay. Acknowledging with the couple that most couples who make decisions to part, as well as those who decide to stay together, experience

positives in their relationship, indicates to them that only by degree does one have a negative relationship or a positive relationship. Those who stay together have had and will continue to have hurts in their relationship, and those who judiciously decide to separate will have had many positives in their relationships.

Rational Structure Number Nine: Negatives in the Relationship

What have been the negatives in the relationship? Which remain today? At this point in the mediation therapy, eliciting the negatives in the relationship gives acknowledgment to those hurts just mentioned. Implicitly or explicitly, the couple is asked to look beyond the dynamics of the immediate hurts and presenting problems and to forgive in the interest of moving forward with their lives and their relationship. Robin Casarjian, author of *Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart*, describes forgiveness as a decision or choice to see beyond the reactive judgments of the ego in order to see that another's insensitivity and negative behavior is an expression of fear. She indicates her belief that all fear, at the bottom line, is a call for help, acknowledgment, respect, and love. She stresses that forgiving someone doesn't imply that we condone inappropriate or hurtful behavior, that we hesitate to establish clear boundaries as to what is acceptable to us, or that we act in a particular way. Rather, forgiveness is a shift in perception.

It is another way of looking at what has been done that allows us not to take another's fear-based and insensitive behavior so personally.

Anger often masks feelings of helplessness, disappointment, insecurity, and fear. Forgiveness allows us to see with greater clarity and insight the fear and pain that lie beneath the anger and resentment. To quote Casarjian:

> As we gain the clarity to not personally take offense because of another's fears and projections, we won't fall prey to feeling victimized. Taking offense in a deeply personal way is the ego's way of keeping the real issues in the dark. Forgiveness releases us from weaving complex scenarios of anger, guilt, blame and justification. Forgiveness challenges us to deal with the real issues, to see fear for what it is and to develop clarity, establish boundaries, take explicit action when it is called for—all the while keeping our hearts open in the process.[3]

Forgiveness allows us to respond rather than react. Not to forgive is to be imprisoned by the past, by old grievances that do not allow our lives to proceed with new business and with the potential for loving and caring in the moment.

Casarjian says that "regardless of your current relationship with the people who originally provoked your anger, if you continue to carry it around with you, it is important to realize that you are now responsible for holding onto it, or choosing to let it go."[4] She believes that unresolved anger eats away at individuals' self-esteem, negatively impacts physical health, and always inhibits goodwill.

Casarjian cites many potential secondary gains that people can get from holding onto resentment, some of which are listed below:

not feeling the feelings that may lie beneath the anger: sadness, fear, hurt, disappointment, guilt, and so forth

staying in agreement with others who are also resentful

getting attention

staying distant from others

avoiding intimacy

avoiding responsibility for one's part in what is going on

not risking other ways of being

avoiding the truth

feeling "right" or self-righteous

maintaining the familiar feeling of anger or resentment

retaining the feeling of being a victim—evoking sympathy

I tell my mediation therapy clients that I agree with Casarjian that forgiveness is a practical strategy: that to forgive releases both the other and the self. They are advised to fully acknowledge their deep disappointments,

their rages, their sadness, and anger, and then to let them go, to release them forever. Forgiveness is a very important part of the mediation therapy process.

By asking about the positives and the negatives of the relationship, asking that people learn to forgive the negatives and hurtful aspects of the relationship, the mediation therapist is conveying implicitly that she or he is not interested in having clients stay stuck in the past with what has hurt or not been accomplished. She or he is interested instead in having them move forward individually and collectively with their lives.

Rational Structure Number Ten: Repetitive Patterns in the Relationship

What are the repetitive patterns in the relationship? The poulet-oeuf (chicken-or-the-egg) questions? What patterns in your relating have you discovered over the years? How do you usually express anger, disappointment, or sadness with one another? What are the boundaries you construct between yourselves and the world?

Couples frequently find themselves engaged in repetitive, predictable struggles with one another, which they feel helpless to break out of or to change. I call these the poulet-oeuf questions: Which came first, my doing X to you, or your doing Y to me? For example, each autumn, she castigates him for

being unavailable to help with the storm windows and putting away the summer furniture; each autumn he moves deeper and deeper into more and more important projects at work.

Family systems therapists have emphasized that there is an emotional process between two people, a sequence of events that is circular and not linear, as opposed to a cause and effect sequence of events. Each person's behavior has an impact on the other, but does not cause the other to behave in a certain way. If a sequence of interactions between a couple is punctuated at any given point, a circular loop may be traced to see what one event follows the next, but a linear line of explanation cannot be made.

For example, let us punctuate the aforementioned situation at the point of the wife's identifying the need to take in lawn furniture and put up storm windows. We cannot assume that her husband is getting deeply into his work at this time in order not to do the seasonal chores. He may always be overwhelmed at work in the fall. His wife may be asking him for help (instead of hiring help) because it is less threatening for her to say she needs help with the house, than to say she needs her husband emotionally and physically. Or her husband may create work projects when home projects loom large. We simply do not know. We do know, however, that this dance of arguments about storm windows and lawn furniture occurs predictably for this couple on or around September 15 every year.

If couples can identify their ritual fights or dances, they may be able to work backwards, attempting to understand the emotional underpinnings. They may be able to give up repetitive, frustrating behaviors that undermine their individual and collective self-esteem. When the wife in our example was able to identify that she needed her husband emotionally, even when his work was at a peak, the arguments over lawn furniture and storm windows ceased. They began eating together near his office, several nights a week, and she hired a high school student to take in the lawn furniture and a fix-it person to adjust the storm windows. On the other hand, the husband could have been the first to break up the repetitive ritual dance by attempting to problem-solve with his wife when he recognized that she obviously had an important need.

Couples frequently ask for examples of ritual dances. The mediation therapist can easily give examples from professional and personal experience. A typical ritual dance around the expression of anger in a heterosexual relationship is that a man will be furious internally about his own feelings of inadequacy, something he has done or feels unable to do, but he feels unable to share these feelings for fear of exaggerating them and making them even bigger than they are. He is withdrawn, uncommunicative, “dead” to his partner. His partner, not understanding that he is furious with himself, interprets his quiet, internal inferno as being unexpressed fury at *her,* even as rejection. If she then steels herself to his deadness, herself projecting an air of

aloofness, he will, of course, interpret her behavior as reinforcement of his inadequacy. Breaking into this pattern, helping to create new ways of dealing with angry feelings, comes only after the identification of the ritual dance.

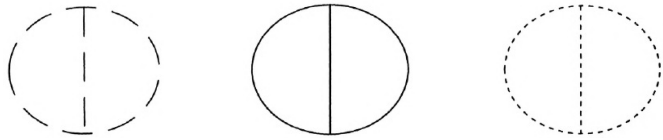
Another example of a ritual dance involving the expression of sadness involves a woman who over many years has been deeply sad about her mother, who is chronically ill. Her partner is compassionate, very empathic, but also obligated to be disciplined in his profession. When the woman becomes sad she relies on her partner, who very often is there to listen to her, hold her, and to understand. On the occasions when his own work or his own family problems preoccupy him, this woman responds hysterically: he must be involved with another woman, although she knows he is not; or: he has quit loving her and that they should no longer be partners. This pattern is predictable and does not occur when she is disappointed or angry. Only when she is sad and he is not fully available to her does she become super-sensitive; the sadness turns into suspicion and a hysterical pattern within their relationship.

Again, identifying the pattern is essential to breaking into it to create new ways of obtaining emotional needs—in this case, comfort for sad feelings. The woman in this example used a cognitive understanding to stop herself each time she began to accuse her partner of having an affair and to look within for sad feelings she might be in need of sharing.

Habitual responses to conflict are endemic. He wants to go to the woods for vacation, she to the shore. He always says they should take separate vacations, she always says they should divorce. No one ever suggests the lake with woods beyond.

Just as couples tend to have repetitive ways of dealing with angry feelings, sad feelings, disappointment, and conflict, they also tend to have fixed boundaries between themselves and the rest of the world. Boundaries within and between a couple and the outside world are typically static. Extensively adapted from Jurg Willi in *Couples in Collusion,* figure 4-1 represents three typical boundary situations.[5]

Figure 4-1. Boundary Diagram



Diffuse (Leaky) Boundaries	Rigid (Skintight) Boundaries	Ideal Boundaries
Boundaries between members of a couple and the world outside are too open, the sense of "we-	Boundaries between members of a couple and the world outside are too closed; there is stagnation for lack	Closeness *and* privacy between members of a couple is preserved and there is connectedness to

ness" is not there. Boundary between the individuals is also too open; there is not enough privacy and separateness.	of stimulation, and connectedness to others. Boundary between individuals is too closed. Individuals are not intimate.	and distance from the world outside. Individuals preserve their privacy and independence, while joining in interdependence.

Source: Adapted from Willi, Couples in Collusion, 18.

The first diagram shows a couple with too-permeable boundaries between them as individuals. They are “consorting to be schlepps” as one bright mediation therapy couple described it; they are too close, too enmeshed in one another’s lives. In addition, the boundary between them and the rest of the world was too open; there were too many people in their home at one time and they were out of their nest too much of the time to have a bounded sense of coupleness, a discrete sense of “us” as a unit. Their ritual patterns were over involvement in each other’s personal affairs and neglect of their mutual needs as a couple.

The second diagram shows a couple with too rigid a boundary between them. Their activities and time are spent alone, separately; there is not enough of a sense of “we” as a unit. They do not, however, have the problems of enmeshment and collusion in each other’s problems. This couple also has a rigid boundary between itself and the world outside. The individuals here

don't let many people into their nonunit and seldom go out emotionally into the world of people. Their ritual patterns were under involvement with one another, as well as with the larger world. The final diagram illustrates an ideal couple admitting others to their partnership, preserving privacy for themselves and sharing openly with one another.

Structure number ten asks not that people solve their repetitive, ritual patterns or dances, only that they identify some of them (not in itself a simple task). In general, people do not fully enjoy being entrapped by their repetitive patterns and do enjoy, to a degree, beginning to see what these patterns are. If there is a chicken, will there always follow an egg? or was it the egg that creates the chicken? If I push this button, will you always react in one predictable way? Is this our ritual dance, with no real beginning and no real end? Sometimes this dance is a repetition compulsion so strongly rooted in individual personalities that in order to route out the tangled weeds, the whole bunch must be pulled traumatically out of the ground—in these cases a dramatic separation of the partners in some way must occur.

The entangled interaction may actually serve a variety of functions. For those who genuinely fear intimacy, the ritual dance helps to avoid that kind of contact. For others who would otherwise be totally isolated, the ritual dance may keep them connected to another human being, however negatively. Identifying the ritual dance or joint repetition compulsions is a beginning step

toward assessing whether or not the behaviors must continue or not.

Rational Structure Number Eleven: Collective Issues

What are the collective issues in the relationship? Which aches, gripes, conflicts, and anxieties would need to be resolved for the couple to have a rewarding relationship?

This structure asks the couple to spell out those things that would have to be addressed and remedied for the couple to have a rewarding relationship. Matter-of-factly posing a long list of possible difficulties lets the couple know you expect there to be problems in any relationship, and that talking about them forthrightly is also expected. Yetta Bernard's "aches, gripes, conflicts, and anxieties" covers the ballpark of these feelings.[6] It doesn't take couples long to begin to answer this question, which may be posed several times by asking, "Have you forgotten anything?"

At this juncture, problem solving is not necessary; the not-so- simple description of the aches, gripes, conflicts, and anxieties is the point. Problem solving needs to come later. When couples try to move into a problem-solving mode at this stage (when they are supposed to be concentrating on identifying the problems between them), the mediation therapist gently but firmly sets limits on the discussion, separating identification of issues from

the actual problem solving. (In-depth problem solving of collective issues could occur in a subsequent contract after the completion of mediation therapy.) Making a decision with good understanding of what the individual and collective issues are is ambitious enough for the mediation therapy contract. On the other hand, if couples *strongly* request that the mediation therapist help them work on and resolve a single issue, the request may at times be granted.

As was done previously with other questions, the couple is asked whether these interpersonal issues pose a threat to the relationship (see rational structure number four). People readily indicate in the affirmative if the issues pose a threat to the relationship, even though they typically are not happy to see and admit this threat. The question separates toxic differences from terminal differences and indicates the areas in which the couple needs to work if they decide that they want to continue the relationship.

Examples of aches, gripes, conflicts and anxieties are:

"I feel that you constantly try to plan and control my life."

"I don't feel loved by you on a daily basis."

"I yearn for a close and loving sexual expression with my partner."

"I will not be able to forget or to forgive your affair."

"I've never felt that you *really listen* to me."

"You make important decisions which effect me, without me."

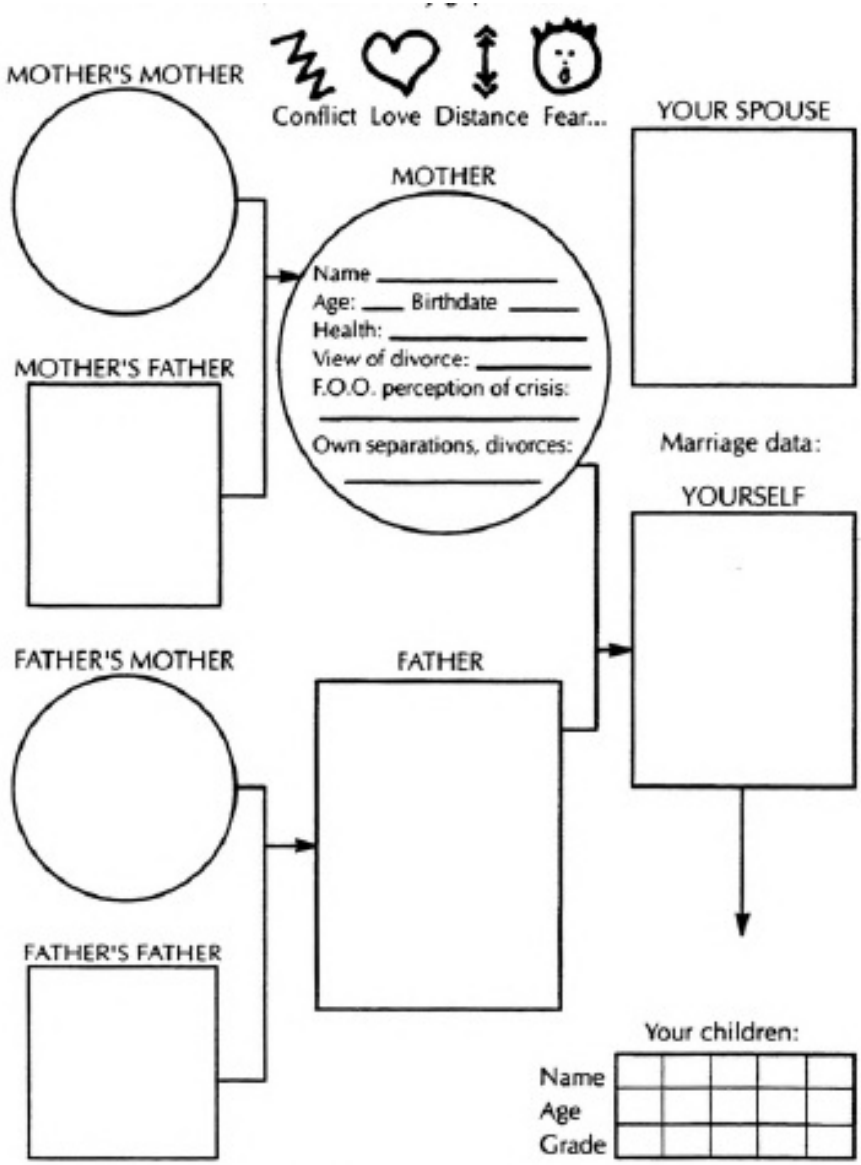
Prioritizing the collective issues from most to least difficult helps a couple see in what order they would want to address the issues, when an appropriate time arises to work on them.

Rational Structure Number Twelve: The Geneogram

Not every couple requires a specific, focused period of time during which a three-generational family map, or *geneogram*, is composed. The majority of couples, however, learn an enormous amount about themselves and their families by doing the homework assignment of individually composing a three-generational geneogram focusing especially on the quality of relationships in the family of origin. The mediation therapist either draws a basic geneogram to illustrate what is expected, or gives clients forms, such as the one in figure 4-2, with instructions on how to complete them.

Figure 4-2. A Sample Geneogram

Complete each shape as outlined below in the Mother's circle. To signify death, place an X in the shape. To illustrate feelings between individuals, use the following symbols:


MOTHER'S MOTHER
Conflict Love Distance Fear...
YOUR SPOUSE
MOTHER
Name
Age: Birthdate
Health:
View of divorce:
F.O.O. perception of crisis:
Own separations, divorces:
MOTHER'S FATHER
Marriage data:
YOURSELF
FATHER'S MOTHER
FATHER
FATHER'S FATHER
Your children:
Name
Age
Grade

Source: Adapted by Janet Miller Wiseman, and Annette Kurtz, and Bob Wiseman from a concept by Murray Bowen.

Almost any information about each individual's three-generational family system will be useful for the mediation therapist, but instructions are given to focus on the following:

5. How did couples in the family handle anger, sadness, conflict, and disappointment between them?

6. What are the attitudes of grandparents, parents, and yourselves about marriage, separation, divorce, and so forth.

7. Were there any models for good relationships in the family? Extended family? In the neighborhood? Anywhere?

8. List dates (and probable causes) of deaths, births, divorces, separations, anniversaries, adoptions, miscarriages.

9. List occupations, educations, interests.

10. Indicate medical, mental/biological illnesses, alcoholism, and so forth.

11. List any divorces, separations, living together without marriage, homosexual partners that you are aware of.

12. How did couples get along? Hearts (love), zig-zags (conflict)?

13. Add up the number of significant losses for you in your lifetime,

through death, divorce, moves, and the like.

14. List areas of strength for all family members.

Seeing a conglomerate of losses may make it evident to people why they cling to one another in the face of great conflict and tension between them; they may feel they simply cannot endure another loss.

For the most part, couples in mediation therapy have enjoyed and learned from making their family maps. Clearly the focus in doing this specialized geneogram is on how couples have gotten along or not gotten along, what they have done to solve their difficulties or how they have institutionalized them. Sadly, individuals do not realize that, unwittingly, they are emulating the other models they have seen, trapped by the only visions they have seen for interaction in relationships.

The heat is taken off the couple relationship during the time they construct their family maps, because the maps remind them that they did not grow up in a vacuum, that they have a context for experiencing relationships. Before the contemporary problematic relationship were relationships that may have inadequately prepared them or negatively influenced them for being in a loving, intimate partnership. Especially important to individuals is to be reminded of how their models or antimodels handled conflict, which they are so totally immersed in at the moment. The intent is to help

individuals achieve understanding and self-compassion, not rationalizations for difficult behavior.

Frequently the form for making the family map is given to couples at the end of the third or fourth session. If, for some reason, the mediation therapist does not have time or thinks it inadvisable to request a geneogram from the couple, she or he will want to make one him or herself, including the information the individuals give about their perceptions of their parents' views of their crisis (FOO perceptions) and their individual theories about the breakdown in the relationship. The mediation therapist's geneogram will be a shorthand visual notation of the individuals' family contexts, relationships, and attitudes. Copies of the geneogram made by the mediation therapist or of the couples' geneograms can be made for the couple and for the mediation therapist. Asking for areas of strength, including beliefs, values, spiritual or religious orientation makes the geneogram more rounded and less focused on problem areas.

Rational Structure Number Thirteen: Importance of Mutuality in Decision Making

By about session six, the mediation therapist begins to offer instruction in the process of decision making. While instruction in decision making will be elaborated in chapter 7, suffice it to say here that explicit statements are made to the couple, approximately halfway into the process, that indicate the

therapist's confidence in the couple's own decision-making abilities. She or he reminds them that thinking, reasoning, deducing are only part of the process —the head part.

As they have been gathering rational information about themselves, their families, and their relationships, the individuals have also been expressing what is in their hearts, that is, their emotional selves, to one another. They have also learned, symbolically, to take the veils from their eyes to see what is actually there in their relationship. They have taken the plugs out of their ears to hear what they are saying to one another. More important, they have learned to hear what they are saying to themselves. They have been instructed to listen carefully to their intuition—(what they know without thinking) and to their inner wisdom— what their guts, essences, and inner selves know.

The couple is reminded, in timely fashion (in a reinforcing, "hypnoticlike" suggestion), that they have been gathering sensory, rational, and emotional information and that they are, at this point, much better prepared than they were, initially, to leap from well-rounded information, with courage, to a decision, that place of silent knowledge or inner knowing. The suggestion that they are becoming more capable of making a decision appears to give people confidence in their abilities at this time to move into a decision-making mode.

Rational Structure Number Fourteen:
Clarification of Past Misunderstandings and Asking of Forgiveness

Having prepared the couple with the permission and encouragement to make decisions, or rather to recognize their decisions, the couple is preparing to let go of their ambivalence, their indecision, their relationship as they knew it, and possibly of one another. It is appropriate at this particular time, and not before, to ask each of them to think about what they have done, or the other has done, that they believe was misunderstood, was incompletely understood, or was otherwise unfinished business. Perhaps there was an affair, the motivations for which were never completely understood by one or both individuals, or perhaps one of them wanted very much to work on the relationship during a trial separation, while the other partner understood the separation to mean establishing autonomy and separate time and space.

Once misunderstandings in the relationship have been clarified, the mediation therapist asks the couple whether there are situations for which they would like to ask forgiveness, or anything for which they would like to offer forgiveness. These unfinished misunderstandings, like the positive aspects of a relationship, tend to hold a couple together. Hope seems to spring eternal that one day, one will be able to *make* the other understand and everything will be all right. Or, one clings to the hope of being proven right or being vindicated. One hopes to have the slate wiped clean by cleaning up the misunderstandings. The model of forgiveness designed by Robin Casarjian,

which was discussed earlier in this chapter under the discussion of rational structure number nine, is the suggested model for helping couples learn to forgive after their misunderstandings are clarified.

If partners are waiting for clarification of a past misunderstanding, they can neither move forward together in a positive vein nor move apart. Usually forgiveness is not possible without clarification.

Rational Structure Number Fifteen: What Will Individuals Carry Forward into the Future, Whether Living Together or Not?

This structure may appear to be a trick question calculated to force the hand of the individuals about their decision, before they are directly asked what they desire the future of the relationship to be. It is. It automatically gets the individuals to the heart of their vision of their relationship in the future. When, for example Maria Taylor hears, "What do I want to carry over into the future from our relationship whether together or apart?" she most likely will leap to her vision of the future first, then think of what she would like to carry over. She may think that she wants in the future always to have her husband's daily support for her career doing ceramics, which positions her in the future as quite probably still being engaged in the marital relationship with her husband. Or she may want to carry over into the future a positive parenting relationship with her husband, which may or may not imply continuing to live

together.

The structure of the question is suggestive. There are many things in most relationships that could be left behind to mutual benefit. Identifying what is enhancing, what is supportive, and what is positive to carry forward into the future helps people visualize the future into which they would like to grow.

Rational Structure Number Sixteen: An Emotional Sharing from the Heart and a Rational Listing of Alternative Future Directions

Having clarified past misunderstandings and having asked for forgiveness, having reassessed the positives and the hurts of the relationship and established what they would like to carry over into the future, people are frequently disposed, at this juncture, to share their emotions honestly with one another:

> "I want you to know that no matter what happens in our relationship, I will never forget or quit appreciating what you did for me when I was first recovering from my depression."

> "I want you to believe me when I tell you that I know how much I hurt you when I had the second affair—you were heartbroken."

> "Our children will always know and respect you as their father, and not someone else I might be with, or marry in the future."

"I believe the rockiness in our relationship this past year had a lot to do with our decision making about whether to be married, and I don't believe we will always have a rocky relationship."

Sharing emotions openly with one another is an important part of being honest with themselves and the other person, an important part of making a decision about their futures. Whatever has been concealed, or held back, those difficult positive and negative areas are given permission to be shared:

"I want you to believe that my homosexuality is not a reflection of my view of your attractiveness as a woman, and, in my view, does not detract from the legitimacy of our children."

"Even if our baby looks like the man with whom you had the crazy affair, I will love 'our' child as my own, for the rest of my life."

At the end of the emotional sharing, the couple is encouraged to allow the open spirit of their mutual sharing to continue onward and inward toward the open recognition of their individual decisions about the future direction of the relationship. They are encouraged to enter that place of inner knowing of their decision, rationally understanding it after the decision is known. Individuals are encouraged to know what they know already and to acknowledge to themselves what they know.

If appropriate for an individual couple, at this point they are each asked to list alternatives for a future direction. A disenchanted but conservative

wife might list as her three major alternatives:

· Postpone all decision making until all the children are out of college

· Separate for two years, then decide about the future of the marriage

· Separate indefinitely

Her unhappy husband might list his alternatives as:

· Divorce immediately

· Have wife move out of house, separate for two years, then decide

· Leave for Alaska next month

How each alternative matches what they want to accomplish in mediation therapy—to get out of limbo and become better parents—and matches what they want and want not to tolerate in a good long-term relationship is examined. Final decision making about the future direction of the relationship is specifically not attempted at this time.

Rational Structure Number Seventeen: Individual Decisions and Negotiation to Mutual or Mutually Understood Decision

When individual decisions are called for, they are typically shared with great sighs of relief. They may have arrived at a decision earlier and shared it

then, or waited until this point. Some few individuals will not have yet unearthed their decisions. If the individual decisions are the same—we each decide to stay married and build upon our foundation, or we each decide to separate, or divorce, to marry, to become engaged—there are only the conditions to be negotiated and children's or family's needs to be discussed. They may have decided to help his mother buy a multilevel medical care condominium, rather than building an addition to their home, but have the financial arrangements yet to agree upon.

Like genes, when individual decisions are disparate, one decision may be the dominant one, the other the recessive one, which is no longer seen in the final outcome. For example, a firm decision to separate or divorce will be dominant over a decision to stay together. How and when to accomplish the breaking apart are the issues left to negotiate. Nonetheless, helping the couple make the decision a mutually understood decision, if not a mutual or somewhat mutual decision, is, as was previously stated, an important part of the process.

The mediation therapist will help the person who wants the relationship to continue, to accept and understand the hows and whys of the other's decision. More important, the mediation therapist needs to be able to help that person understand the destructive aspect of wanting to continue in a relationship with someone who clearly does not have the same goal—and

his or her resistances to acknowledging this destructive aspect. Attempting to help that person fully understand the other's perspective and feelings contributes to a mutually understood decision.

Angry and vengeful feelings, and feeling rejected, are frequently present in a nonmutual decision and may propel a person to undertake the separation and divorce actions that otherwise he or she might be too paralyzed or depressed to undertake. It is not suggested that the mediation therapist attempt to modify the defense line of anger. The mediation therapist is encouraged to respect the angry feelings and to aid the partner at whom they are directed to accept that anger, without having to like it or agree with its causes. Understanding the perspective of a partner leaving a relationship does not entail liking the decision or curbing one's anger about the decision.

In chapter 6, techniques for negotiation and conflict resolution are comprehensively discussed. Some of those techniques are used here to help couples negotiate their individual decisions to mutual or mutually understood decisions. For example, if the members of a couple have both decided individually to separate, they will need to discuss the goals and the meaning of the separation, as well as its duration. Or, if one member of a couple knows definitively that she wants a divorce, while her husband believes in the potential of their relationship, what is not negotiable is the divorce, but what may be acceptable (in terms of negotiation) to the woman is an ongoing

cooperative partnership around the parenting of their children. She is proposing divorce, and his counterproposal is the cooperative parenting partnership, which makes the divorce, not a mutual decision, but a moderately mutually accepted decision with the continued coparenting.

As much time as possible is spent at this stage of the mediation therapy so that individual decisions may, if possible, become mutually acceptable decisions to both members of the couple.

In the case of the couple with a decision to make about the location of his mother's home, he strongly felt that, out of loyalty to his mother, he should be able to provide a warm and congenial home, within his home. His wife strongly felt that her mother-in- law's steadily declining health, and her insistence on having daily meals cooked in old-world fashion, were reasons enough to want to have his mother at a geographic distance from the family, at a medical-care condominium. In this way she could easily receive medical care but live close enough to be a regular visitor to their home while she was able.

Her husband felt that his mother would prefer having her own quarters within their home, and that it was his duty to provide this for her. When his mother's doctor shared his opinion that it would only be several years before the elder lady would require ongoing daily care, her son began a grieving

process and accepted the preferability of the medical-care condominium for his mother. He negotiated with his wife the number of meals his mother could still cook in their home, and the number of visits each week that his wife and children would make to his mother at her condominium.

This couple described feeling good about the negotiation, which resulted in his mother living at a geographic distance from the home, where she could get medical care progressively as she needed, and still be a regular visitor to their home.

Couples are reminded that mutual decisions go a long way toward decreasing passion, abandonment, jealousy, and rage, currently as well as later, for the individuals and the couple. Individuals have the satisfaction of a mutually generated and created decision, which turns out often to be more optimal than either of their individual optimal positions. Mutual, mutually acceptable, or mutually understood decisions are experienced with relief. The individuals gain considerable energy, which was bound up in their indecision. Typically this decision making takes place in session ten, eleven, or twelve. At times, around session seven, as discussed previously, people ask for an extension of their twelve-session contract, so that there will be additional time for exploration and decision making.

More typically, around the latter two sessions, couples will ask what will

happen if they don't reach decisions by the appointed time. I always assure them that they can have an extension if needed, but that I don't anticipate that this will be the case—that time is not infinitely on one's side in the decision-making process.

As mentioned in chapter 2, sometimes couples also want to know whether they may recontract for work after the decision-making phase is over. As previously indicated, a break in time is recommended after a decision is made.

Rational Structure Number Eighteen: Negotiated Settlement Between the Two Individual Decisions

The mediation therapist strives to help a couple or family achieve the highest level of understanding possible of each other's positions, for their own as well as any children's healthy adjustments in the future. If the understanding never comes, then the nonmutual position of their decisions is emphasized: "Anna Samuelson wants to go on the record as being in 'violent opposition' to the divorce, but as acquiescing to it, nonetheless." Putting positions on an imaginary record seems to go some way toward the person in opposition feeling that somewhere, someone has heard a profound opposition, that there is no complete understanding between them of why one partner has made the decision.

More typically, people will have both arrived at similar decisions, or they will have some understanding of why the partner has made the decision he or she has made. As stated previously, a dominant decision may obscure another decision, but there is typically room for negotiation about the timing of implementing a decision or about the conditions of the decision.

Rational Structure Number Nineteen: Children's Needs

If, in mediation therapy, parents choose to divorce (or hospitalize a parent or child, or whatever), the mediation therapist may well dialogue with them about the needs of their children or their parents or others affected directly. Using the divorce example, research studies on effects of divorce on children, indicate that it is not primarily the structure of the living arrangement—either living with one parent, visiting the other, or living alternately with each parent—that determines children's adjustment; rather, a good adjustment results from high quality parenting over time and from parents considering their children a top priority.

I believe that at the time of divorce, each parent needs to take new vows of responsibility to the children, choosing where possible to take one hundred percent of the responsibility for all children, and choosing to learn new parenting skills. Many parents will need to learn to set consistent, firm limits with the children. Many others will need to learn to listen to their children, to

nurture them, to be on duty constantly. It won't do to say to oneself, when the children are running wild: "Oh well, they have good limits at their other home"; or when they're hurt, "He [or she] cuddles them well when they're hurt." Complementary parenting will, of course, still be useful, but, when parenting alone, each parent will be called upon for a more rounded set of parenting skills than in a two-parent family.

Chapter 8 provides explicit information about children's needs at various age levels, boys' development versus girls' development, temperaments, and propensities to loyalty conflicts. Some parents will, advisedly, decide that their children need a network of extra support during the divorce such as seeing more of grandparents, aunts and uncles, beloved babysitters, or, in some cases, professional counselors. Accepting the reality that their parenting may well be diminished during the separation or divorce is a success rather than failure.

Rational Structure Number Twenty: Planning the Next Steps after the Negotiated Settlement

Whatever decision a couple or family has made in mediation therapy, the individuals will soon need to begin to implement a plan for carrying out the decision. People who choose to divorce often discuss their children's needs and the mode of reaching their divorce settlement—usually negotiated through attorneys or a divorce mediator.

Couples who decide to live together decide when and in whose home, with what furniture and under what mutual agreements. Those who decide to marry often simultaneously rejoice and express fears that the marriage may alter their relationship in frightening ways. Those who stage a marriage or living together commitment over time heave a sigh of relief for a moment that they haven't made a final commitment before they are ready, then with the next breath a sigh of frustration that the ultimate decision still is not made.

Whatever decision a family or couple makes—joyously experienced or with pain—they are out of the state of limbo, conflict, confusion, ambivalence. The stress of not knowing, of being on the horns of a decision or dilemma, being stuck in one position with no forward momentum, is over.

Summary

Combining the information gleaned from asking the above previously unrelated twenty rational structures, yields a sum much larger than the individual structures. This sum, synthesized with the educational, sensory, and emotional structures is the integrated pool of information used by mediation therapy clients in their creative decision-making processes.

Notes

[1] Castaneda, The Power of Silence, 247.

[2] Smith, Priscilla Bonney, mediation therapy exam, Lesley College.

[3] Casarjian, Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Jurg Willi, *Couples in Collusion* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1989), 18.

[6] Bernard, “Conflict Resolution With a Couple,” videotape.

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