

Engaging Male Withdrawers using Emotionally Focused Therapy

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Description

Engaging withdrawn men in couple therapy is often challenging, particularly when the man is engaged in compulsive sexual behaviors such as affairs and pornography. Therapists will learn to how to engage withdrawers both with their own internal experience and disowned aspects of the self and with their partner. Videos of therapy and experiential exercises will be used to facilitate learning objectives.

Learning Objectives

Therapists will:

- 1) Be able to better create a safe environment for withdrawn men in couple therapy.
- 2) Use an oral attachment history to identify and move through emotional blocks.
- 3) Help withdrawn men access, identify with, value, and integrate disowned needs and aspects of self.
- 4) Know when to have men turn and engage directly with their partners.

Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples was conceptualized and published by Dr. Sue Johnson and Dr. Leslie Greenberg in the 1980s.

EFT for couples has been developed primarily by Dr. Johnson since that time. The pages that follow are based on Dr. Johnson's training, development, and research.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Johnson for her brilliance, compassion, and dedicated service to couples, families, and therapists throughout the world.

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EFT Brief Review

*All knowledge is experience
everything else is just information*

Albert Einstein

*“We can not solve our problems with the same level of
thinking that created them”*

Albert Einstein

Primary Roots of EFT

Experiential
Therapy
(Perls)

Person
Centered
Therapy
(Rogers)

Systemic
Therapy
(Minuchin)

Attachment
Theory
(Bowlby)

A Dance of Distress



1) When it goes wrong what happens?

Development of Romantic Love



1. Couples find something interesting about the other and therefore seek to spend time with each other.
2. They share experiences, thoughts, feelings, values, perspectives, hopes, dreams.
3. Sharing involves risking, particularly as the relationship becomes deeper and they risk reaching to each other for comfort and connection.
4. The more accessible, responsive and attuned they are, particularly in vulnerable moment, the more intimate and safe and bonded the relationship becomes.
5. This intimacy, bonding, attuned connection, and safety creates deep and powerful love!

Development of Distress



1. Given enough time, all couples have misunderstandings, mis-attunements, disappointments, and minor betrayals.
2. If not effectively repaired, the injured partner risks sharing less, at least in the area of the hurt.
3. Over time with enough injuries, instead of risking vulnerable connection, the focus becomes protection.
4. The fewer safe, intimate connections they have, the more distant they become.
5. The fuel of emotional accessibility, responsiveness and engagement dries up, which leads to more misunderstandings, mis-attunements, disappointments, and betrayals.
6. Negative emotions and negative interactions become the norm and further rob the relationship of intimacy and loving connection.

The Negative Cycle

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Pursuer

Withdrawer

Behavior

Behavior

Perceptions/Attributions

Perceptions/Attributions

Secondary Emotion

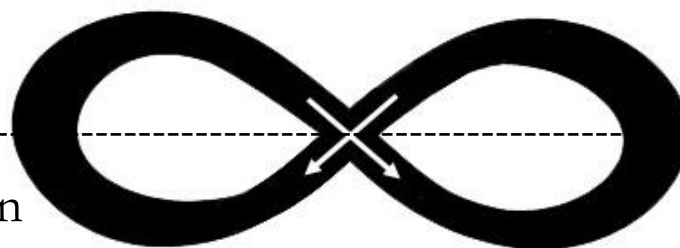
Secondary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Unmet Attachment Needs

Unmet Attachment Needs



EFT Brief Review

Adult love relationships are attachment bonds.

Accessibility, responsiveness and engagement (ARE)
are the building blocks of loving relationships.

Couples therapy is about

1. The security of the attachment bond,
2. Accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement of the partner.

There are 9 EFT Steps, which build on each other.

EFT Steps are Additive

9) Consolidate new cycles

8) Facilitate creation new solutions

7) Ask for needs and wants - bonding

6) Promote acceptance and responsiveness

5) Own disowned needs, emotions and share

4) Reframe as cycle and attachment emotions

3) Access underlying attachment related emotions

2) Identify the negative interaction cycle on all levels

1) Create an alliance and identify the core conflict issues

Common EFT Interventions

Emotional Expansion

- Empathic Reflection
- Validation
- Evocative questioning
- Empathic Conjecture
- Heightening
- RISSSC –
 - Repeat
 - Images
 - Soft
 - Simple
 - Slow
 - Client words

Restructuring Processes

- Track and reflect cycle both within and between
- Reframe in terms of cycle and attachment intentions and longings.
- Enactments (shaping new interactions)

Engaging Men in Treatment

- 1) Coming to treatment (pre-treatment)
- 2) Committing to treatment (Stage 1, Step 1)
- 3) Opening up in treatment (Steps 3 and 5)
- 4) Going the distance in treatment (Steps 5 & 7)

Engaging Withdrawers

Coming to treatment (pre-treatment)

- a. They are part of the solution.
- b. There will be no ambush.

Stage I & II

- Withdrawer Reengagement may start in Stage I, but it is primarily an early Stage II process.
- Stage I must be done (the couple must be deescalated) before full withdrawer reengagement

Step 1

1. Develop alliance and identify conflict issues
 - Help both feel deeply heard and understood
 - Sometimes allowing withdrawers to be withdrawn helps create safety in session.
 - Assess fears/concerns about therapy
 - Provide realistic hope for change
 - There is structure and order
 - Emotion is logical!

Attachment History

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- An attachment history involves doing a history of each person's experiences in attachment relationships.
- It is particularly important to focus on
 - 1) what people learned about comfort and connection in relationships
 - 2) past traumas and how people adapted
 - 3) how people may have found healing in relationships.

Attachment History

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Childhood Attachment Relationships

- 1) Who did you go to for comfort when you were young?
- 2) Could you always count on this person/these people for comfort?
- 3) When were you most likely to be comforted by this person/these people?
- 4) How did you let this person/these people know that you needed connection and comfort?

Attachment History

by Scott R. Woolley ©

- 5) Did this person/these people ever betray you or were they unavailable at critical times?
- 6) What did you learn about comfort and connection from this person/these people?
- 7) If no one was safe, how did you comfort yourself? How did you learn that people were unsafe?
- 8) Did you ever turn to alcohol, drugs, sex or material things for comfort?

Attachment History

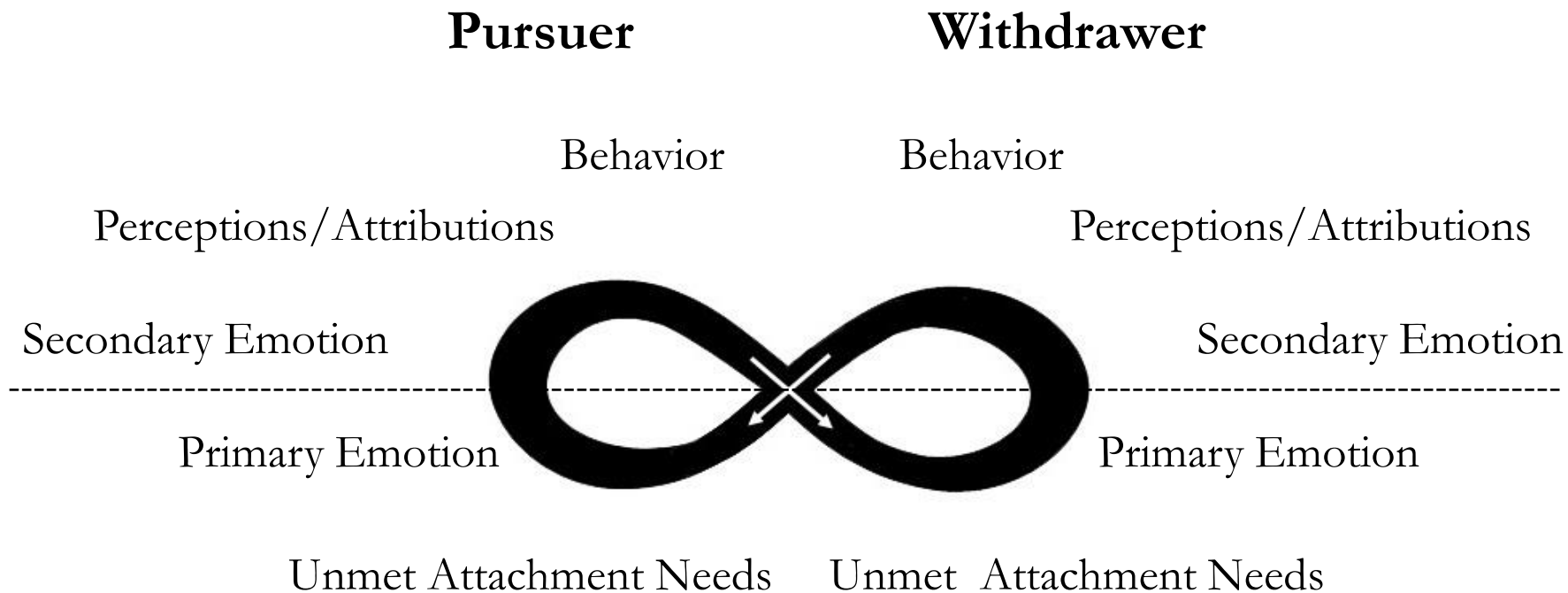
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Romantic Attachment Relationships

- 1) Have there been times when you have been able to be vulnerable and find comfort with your partner?
- 2) Have there been any particularly traumatic incidences in your current or previous romantic relationships?
- 3) How have you tried to find comfort in romantic relationships?

Step 2: The EFT Negative Cycle

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Step 3: Access unacknowledged emotions & attachment needs

Client Statement: “I feel numb/empty”

Therapist Responses:

- Can we just stay there a moment? (process directive)
- You feel numb (reflect)
- When Mary says “.....”, you feel numb. (repeat stimulus, put in context of cycle/interaction)

Accessing and Expanding Emotional Experience in EFT

- And then you stay silent, say nothing? (action primed by “numb” withdrawal).
- What’s that like for you, to go numb, stay numb?
- How do you feel as you talk about this right now?
- What’s happening for you as you talk about this?
About going numb?

Accessing and Expanding Emotional Experience in EFT

- How do you do that? (Frames client as agent in creation of experience).
- That's how you protect yourself? (Conjecture about function)
- If you didn't do that what would happen?
- As you say that, you clench your fist tight, like holding on?
- That must be hard, to feel you have to numb out all the time?

Accessing and Expanding Emotional Experience in EFT

- That's the way you have of protecting yourself here?
- You shut down, shut off, go somewhere else, go away, hide, chill out.
- It's like, I won't feel, is that it? You can't get me?
- And then you feel like he's not there with you? (to other)
- You can't stay and hear her say “....”, you have to go away?

Accessing and Expanding Emotional Experience in EFT

- Can you tell her “I shut you out”? (enactment)
- For you it’s like you feel so battered, so criticized that you are numb?
- When you talk about this it reminds me of one of my other clients. He spoke of how it was so painful to hear that he had disappointed his wife that he’d just space out... (Disquisition).

Step 4 Reframe the problem

- The cycle is framed as the common enemy and the source of the partners' emotional deprivation and distress.
- Problematic behaviors are reframed in terms of their attachment intentions (the other person is so important)

Reframing

- 1) It so painful to hear that you disappointed her? You pull away to protect yourself because she means so much, right?
- 2) You don't want things to spiral out of control, so you pull back to protect the relationship – right?
- 3) You get angry because he is so important, and you are so lonely, and you can't bear the distance between you.
- 4) You both get caught in this cycle, that is really, really painful for both of you, and yet you both unintentionally contribute to.

Step 5: Promote identification with disowned attachment needs and aspects of self, and integrate these into relationship interactions

- Deeper than Step 3
- They own and integrate disowned parts and attachment related emotions.
- They share directly with the partner

“I go into my hard place, shut down, and don’t see you because it so painful that I am disappointing you.”

Integration

- 1) People often feel there are different “parts” of themselves. Particularly trauma survivors.
- 2) All parts have attachment needs and specific strategies to meet those needs
- 3) Parts and their associated needs are not bad, but the strategies used to meet those needs may be destructive and out of line with the values of other parts.

Integration

- 4) We work best when our parts are connected, integrated, and inform each other -
 - a. We see a bigger picture and context
 - b. We have better access to our values and beliefs
 - c. Strategies are more likely to be contextually appropriately consistent with our values.

About Scott

Scott R. Woolley, PhD has trained thousands mental health professionals in couples therapy in Asia, Europe, Russia, and South, Central, and North America.

He holds the rank of Distinguished Professor in the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International and is a founder and Director of the San Diego Center for Emotionally Focused Therapy and the Executive Director of the Training and Research Institute for EFT at Alliant (TRI-EFT Alliant).

Dr. Woolley earned a B.S. in Economics and an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Brigham Young University, and a Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Texas Tech University. Dr. Woolley is a Certified EFT Therapist, Supervisor, and Trainer.

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