

Couple vs individual  
counselling  
which do I prefer and why?

CCAA Workshop

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*"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden."*

*(Proverbs 30:18–19 NIV)*

“Landing a single engine plane in the jungle” clip

*Discuss with your neighbour  
what you see in this video  
that reminds you of  
individual counselling*

# The jumbo jet!



What are the Differences?



# What makes relationship counselling different?

- dealing with conflict and violence
- taking a more active gate keeping role
- understanding emotional family systems to a greater extent
- assessing levels of empathy given to individuals and the impact on the partner
- assessing couple dynamics
- holding appropriate hope for relationships to heal
- working with three clients in the room
- Lock, N. & Miller, H. (2010) St Marks Voc Grad Dip in Rel Counselling Manual

# More Differences (2)

- relate to men and women simultaneously without bias from own history
- be aware of responses and reactions of one client while working with the other
- assess when to intervene and when to allow process to flow between the couple
- understand communication issues

# Therapeutic alliance

*“a conscious, collaborative relationship between the patient(s) and therapist.*

*A successful therapeutic alliance, includes an emotional bond based on mutual trust and positive regard, shared goals, and clearly defined tasks, all of which elaborate the participants' respective roles and responsibilities toward successfully accomplishing their purpose.”*

Bordin, E.S. (1994). Theory and research on the therapeutic working alliance: New directions. In A.O. Horvath & L.S. Greenberg (Eds.), *The working alliance: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 13-37). New York: Wiley.

# Therapeutic Alliance in Relationship Counselling

*“the degree of importance and the extent of the role of the therapeutic alliance play in couples, marriage and family counselling is unclear”*

- Mahaffey, B.A., & Lewis, M. (2008) *Therapeutic Alliance Directions in Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling*
- [http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas08/Mahaffey\\_Article\\_7.pdf](http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas08/Mahaffey_Article_7.pdf) Accessed march 2010

# Therapeutic Alliance in Relationship and gender issues

*“The inclusion of two or more family members in the therapeutic process introduces complexity into the relation between alliance and outcome. Results of this study corroborate prior research demonstrating an association between alliance and therapeutic outcome. In addition, associations between alliance and outcome were stronger for wives compared to husbands. A more revealing finding was that when wives' alliance scores were higher than husbands' scores, the outcome of therapy was reported to be more positive than when husbands' alliance scores were higher than wives' scores.”*

Quinn, W., Dotson, D. & Jordan, K. (1997) Dimensions of Therapeutic Alliance and Their Associations with Outcome in Family Therapy in *Psychotherapy Research*. Vol 7, Issue 4 Winter 1997 , pages 429 - 438

# Gender issues and the TA

- *“Men are seen as as carrying “positional power” based on control of resources and status. Women, are regarded as having “relational power,” or oversight of the emotional aspects and intimacy in relationships*
- *“both men and women often experience this power differential and see the man at a disadvantage when he enters the therapy relationship.”*
- *(Blanton & Vandergriff–Avery, 2001”*

# Therapist response to gender issues

- Attempt to engage the male more strongly at the beginning of therapy
- Be aware of partners positioning themselves differently at different stages of the therapy
- Invite discussion early concerning the clients' reactions to the therapist's gender
- Acknowledge possible gender identification with partner who is same sex as the therapist
- *Garfield, R. Family Process 2004 Dec; 43(4): 457-65*

# Blocks to forming a therapeutic alliance

- *“partners who reported early family distress were more likely to have difficulty forming positive alliances in couples therapy.”*
- *“Attachment research such as that from Eames and Roth (2000) also suggested that early relational disturbances can limit a partner’s ability to develop a positive therapeutic alliance.”*

Garfield, R. *Family Process* 2004 Dec; 43(4): 457-65

- **Loyalty bonds**

# Loyalty Bonds

The partners' emotional bond, however, is very different in strength and quality from their bond with the therapist. Although partners in therapy may demonstrate high levels of anger with each other, the loyalty dimension of their relationship often keeps them strongly attached to each other and to their dysfunctional behavior patterns.

*Garfield, R. Family Process 2004 Dec; 43(4): 457-65*

# Loyalty Bonds (2)

Therapists often find themselves struggling with these difficult forces in the couple that seem to resist their best healing efforts.

*Garfield, R. Family Process 2004 Dec; 43(4): 457-65*

# Reflection space

Choose some picture cards or beads to reflect what happens to you in either your preferred OR non preferred counselling setting.

Find a partner and talk about your cards/beads.

Happy flying!

