

Gottman's Magic Ratio

The presence of positive affect during everyday interaction is crucial. However, for a relationship to be healthy, both positivity and negativity are necessary. Dr. Gottman's **balance theory** of relationships implies the unusual point of view that negativity is important in healthy partnerships. Negativity plays many pro-social functions, such as allowing couples to identify and work out interaction patterns that do not work, and alerting partners to the differences in each other's perspectives. Our research indicates that couples (and couple therapy) should not declare war on negativity! A relationship without conflict would not be able to move forward.

As time passes and each partner's goals, feelings, and perspectives change, it is important to discuss the issues that arise and address the ways in which you can interact more positively in the long run. In "Manage Conflict", the next level of the Sound Relationship House, you will learn proven strategies for effectively managing conflict in your relationship. Today, however, we focus on maintaining the Positive Perspective.

Research suggests that what really separates the happy couples from the miserable is a healthy balance between their positive and negative interactions. All couples have different styles of approaching conflicts. Some yell and slam doors, while others retreat into separate corners of their home and fume quietly. Neither style necessarily spells relationship doom. Volatile couples can stick together when their frequent arguments are conducted in the context of mutual love and passion, and when their disagreements are had in a state of Positive Sentiment Override (PSO). As we mentioned in our last blog, PSO establishes the presence of positive affect in problem-solving discussions and transitively determines success of repair attempts during conflict resolution.

However, balance does not mean a fifty-fifty equilibrium. Dr. John Gottman charted the amount of time couples spent arguing versus interacting positively - touching, smiling, paying compliments, laughing - and found there is a very specific ratio that exists between the amount of positivity and negativity in stable relationships.

The magic ratio is 5:1. In other words, as long as there are five times as many positive interactions between partners as there are negative, the relationship is likely to be stable. It is based on this ratio that Dr. Gottman is able to predict divorce! Very unhappy couples tend to have more negative than positive interactions. The bottom line is even though some level of negativity is necessary for a stable relationship, positivity is what nourishes your love.

Material adapted by Suzanne Welstead (2016) from an article written by Ellie Lisitsa at *The Gottman Institute*.

Link: www.gottman.com