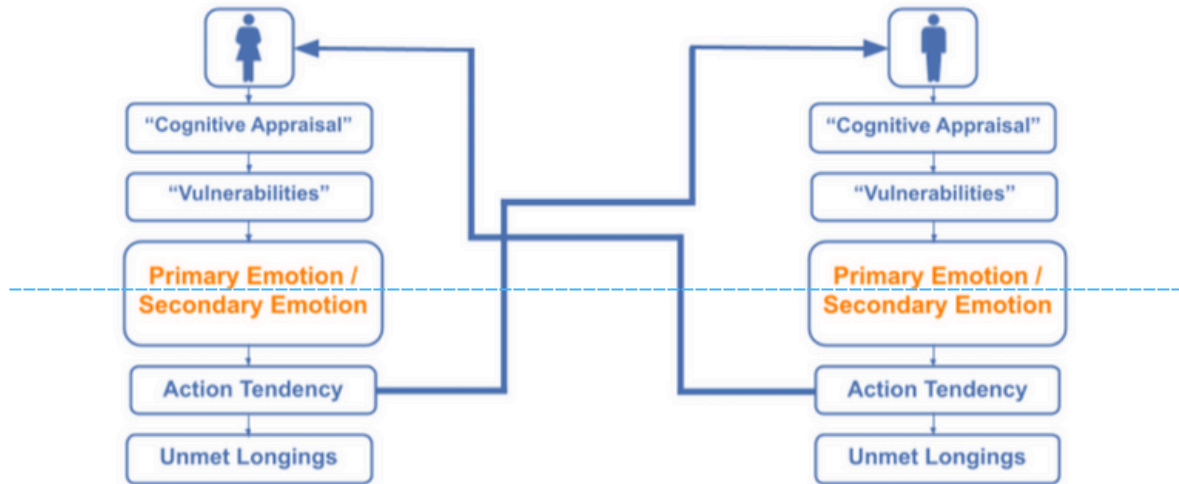


MAPPING YOUR DISCONNECT CYCLE

Based on your work to this point, you should be able to see yourselves in this graphic of the Disconnect Cycle. Note that the Action Tendency (Actions, on Fight Cycle) tend to be a Trigger for your spouse. Be encouraged, though, the Connect Cycle is hidden inside! Stay tuned for Week 4 to learn where.



As previously discussed, we “protest” to restore a perceived disconnect in the relationship. When there is a healthy work-through pattern in a securely attached couple, the protest leaves you feeling closer....hence, the term “make-up sex.”

However, if the protest system is an insecure attachment pattern (two people who are expressing from an anxious, avoidant, or fearful pattern), then this leaves the couple feeling even further apart and entrenched in their negative appraisal of their partner. This fight cycle is the enemy to the “us.” Believe it or not, **your partner isn’t the enemy**. It is the negative dance that you both do together that is the problem.

John Gottman has been doing long-term, longitudinal studies on couples for decades. He has successfully been able to watch the way couples fight and with 99% accuracy, predict which couples will end in divorce. That’s right, just by the way they fight. He has narrowed four different ingredients in their fight cycle that he calls the “four horsemen,” marriage killers. So, if you have defensiveness, criticism, stonewalling, or contempt while you fight, these are strong warning signs that it’s time for a change!

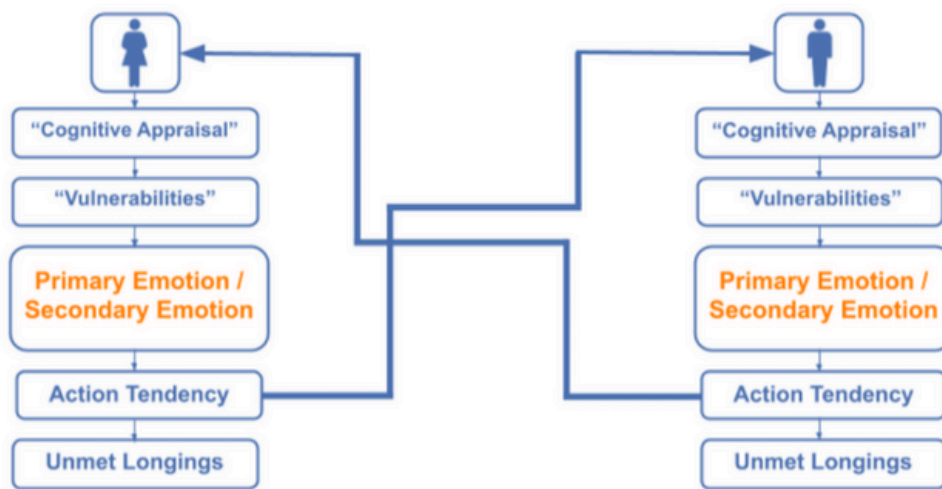
Lets quickly define each:

DEFENSIVENESS is when a partner cannot receive the other’s influence and wants to quickly dismiss, defend or reject their partner’s feedback or perceptions.

CRITICISM is when a partner attacks the other partner, rather than wanting to attack the problem (when we identify our partner as having the problem, rather than “us” having a problem that together we need to attack).

STONEWALLING is when one partner refuses an opportunity to have a protest heard, discussed, and worked through. It could look like a refusal to have a discussion or purposely giving the silent treatment as a form of a punitive reaction. This can also be expressed as withholding sex for long periods of time.

CONTEMPT can be the most destructive. Contempt is a general disregard of caring about the other partner. An “I don’t care” position is quite the opposite of what was originally felt at the altar. In the beginning, we desire and vow to “live happily ever after” and it mattered how our partner was feeling. If contempt or indifference of the other person’s discontent or feelings is present, it is the hardest to come back from.



UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS:

TRIGGER: All Cycles begin with a neutral trigger. This can be a theme of conversation, a particular word or words, a behavioral gesture, a location, a response, etc.

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL: The Trigger begins our personal assessment of it. We have to make sense of it. We begin the “story in our head” at this moment. It is a very fast operating system.

VULNERABILITIES: Sometimes, the “story in our head” activates “Amy” (our amygdala, the negative emotional memory center). This can be often those core sensitivities that we bring from our family of origin, past romantic relationships or from our spouse (identified in Week Three Homework). You will be able to tell if your back brain has been activated by the visceral feeling of “warning” felt in your body (i.e. a sucker punch feeling in your stomach, tightening of the chest, a lump in your throat, stiffening of your neck/shoulders, tingling in your hands or head, etc.) There is something about the “story you are telling yourself” that is emotionally threatening. What is the threat? Why is this trigger so important at this moment? If the “story you are telling yourself” is true, then what does that mean?

PRIMARY EMOTION: This threat will activate a primary emotion. A primary emotion is a soft, vulnerable emotion. This can be hurt, rejected, unimportant, insignificant, abandoned, unheard, etc. There are a plethora of these. I reckon them to when a dog is so trusting, they roll on their back and offer their belly for you to rub. Primary emotions leave us feeling open, exposed, and vulnerable.

SECONDARY EMOTION: Because vulnerability in the moment where you feel emotionally threatened isn't comfortable, we move into a secondary emotion. This emotion is for self-protection in the moment. Remember, this all happens in nanoseconds. These can be anger, frustration, indifference, etc. These are the activating protective emotions. This is the emotion that our spouse will see or sense from you.

ACTION TENDENCY: This is the behavior that you will do in the moment. If someone were a fly on the wall, what would it see/hear, not see/hear from you? Depending on what you identified from previous modules, do you fight, fly, or freeze in this moment? Do you use any of the "four horsemen" mentioned above as your action tendency pattern? This is where your tendencies to either escalate, shut down or move away occur. Do you use any of the defense mechanisms such as defending, justifying, explaining, minimizing, rationalizing? Do you increase the volume of your voice and tone? What happens in your body such as clenching your fists, pointing your finger, furrowing your brow? Do you nag, scold, accuse, etc.? You get the picture.

UNMET LONGINGS: What is your desire from your spouse in this moment? Did your protest accomplish it? You will see in a disconnect cycle, the protest system doesn't typically leave you with your longings met. Typically, the protest system is counterproductive to getting these needs met. It gets in the way of bringing you back connected with your partner.

ACTION STEP ONE:

Look again at the graphic. Now, map a cycle that has taken place recently where you were protesting (as you begin to look back on it through new lenses of understanding).

TRIGGER: _____

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL: _____

VULNERABILITIES: _____

PRIMARY EMOTION: _____

SECONDARY EMOTION: _____

ACTION TENDENCY: _____

UNMET LONGINGS: _____

ACTION STEP TWO:

Now, map a cycle where your partner was protesting first. Do you find differences in the two? Some of the steps might not be known to you. If so, we encourage you to ask your partner in a curious (information gathering) way.

TRIGGER: _____

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL: _____

VULNERABILITIES: _____

PRIMARY EMOTION: _____

SECONDARY EMOTION: _____

ACTION TENDENCY: _____

UNMET LONGINGS: _____

NOTES:

- If understanding the “story in your head” is a new concept, you may struggle with identifying it. Look back on INTERPRET in Mapping Your Fight Cycle.
- If identifying primary emotion is challenging, we understand. When you have been in a chronic state of self-protective emotion for a long time, it is easy to think you only feel secondary emotion. For example, anger may be the only emotion you believe you feel in these moments. Slow it down in your mind and “*replay the video*”. Pay attention to your body and try to catch it again, slowly.

ACTION STEP THREE:

Connect with your spouse and compare notes. Do you have similarities in your answers?

ACTION STEP FOUR:

Map a cycle together with your spouse. Be careful, you may be reactivated. That’s ok because you will now have the information in the “here and now”. Don’t be afraid to do this in a calm moment by going back and dredging up an old cycle. We have to understand this, so that we can identify it moving forward when it presents itself in real-time, in the moment.

ACTION STEP FIVE (cont.)

TRIGGER: _____

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL: _____

VULNERABILITIES: _____

PRIMARY EMOTION: _____

SECONDARY EMOTION: _____

ACTION TENDENCY: _____

UNMET LONGINGS: _____

ACTION STEP SIX:

Now, begin to pay attention to when all of this occurs in real-time and make enlightened observations. We haven't discussed what to do with this information yet, but it's good stuff!! For now, we want you to practice recognizing it when it occurs and making more and more mental and physical notes about what is going on when it does.