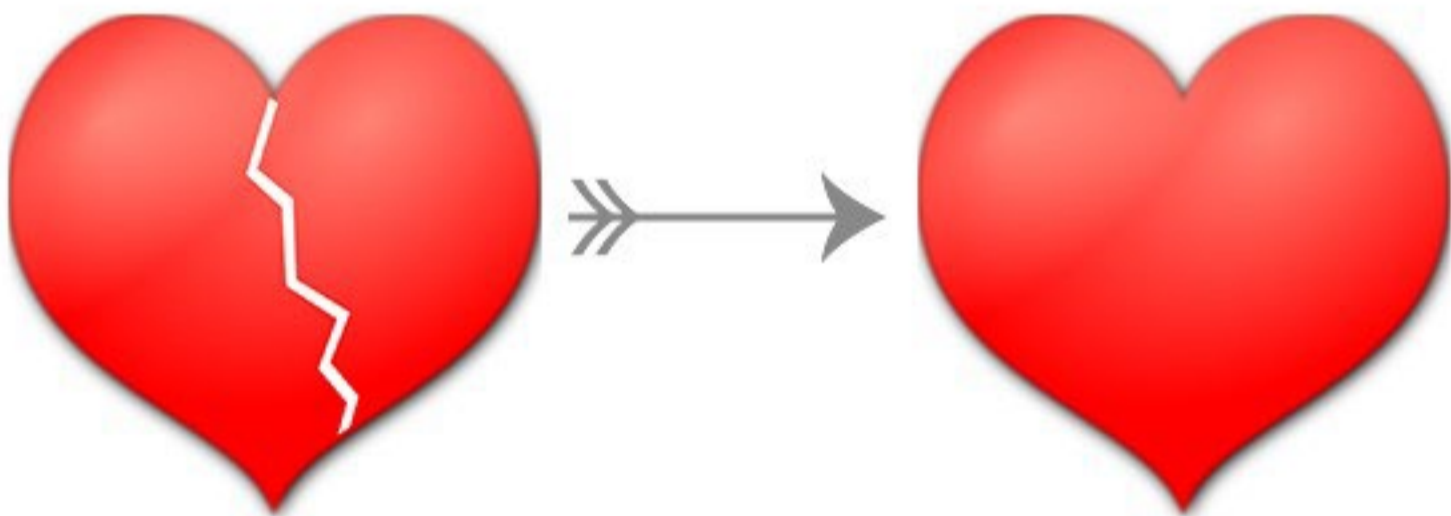


Relationship Surveys

BY

STEPHEN G. WARTEL



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Relationship Surveys

People in relationships wonder whether their relationship will endure. Will they and their partner be together or split up? In a long-term, committed relationship, a partner may consider whether to marry or not.

A group of researchers, Soonhee Lee, Dr. Ronald Rogge and Dr. Harry Reis, at the University of Rochester, looked at a variant of the implicit association test (IAT) used to detect implicit bias. They tested whether this variant, a Partner- Go/No-Go Association Task (Partner-GNAT), could predict if a relationship was headed for difficulty.

Their survey quickly flashes a stimulus word or one of 3 names/ characteristics you've entered for your partner, on a screen with "partner" and "good" or "bad" appearing at the top. Making a split-second choice, you tap or click if the word you see is a "good" or partner word on good screens or a "bad" or partner word on bad screens. Then scores are tabulated.

To validate the survey results, improve confidence in their validity, other surveys are completed, results compared. Research conducted has affirmed the predictive power of the Partner-GNAT: people scoring in a higher range were more prone to break-up over the next several months.

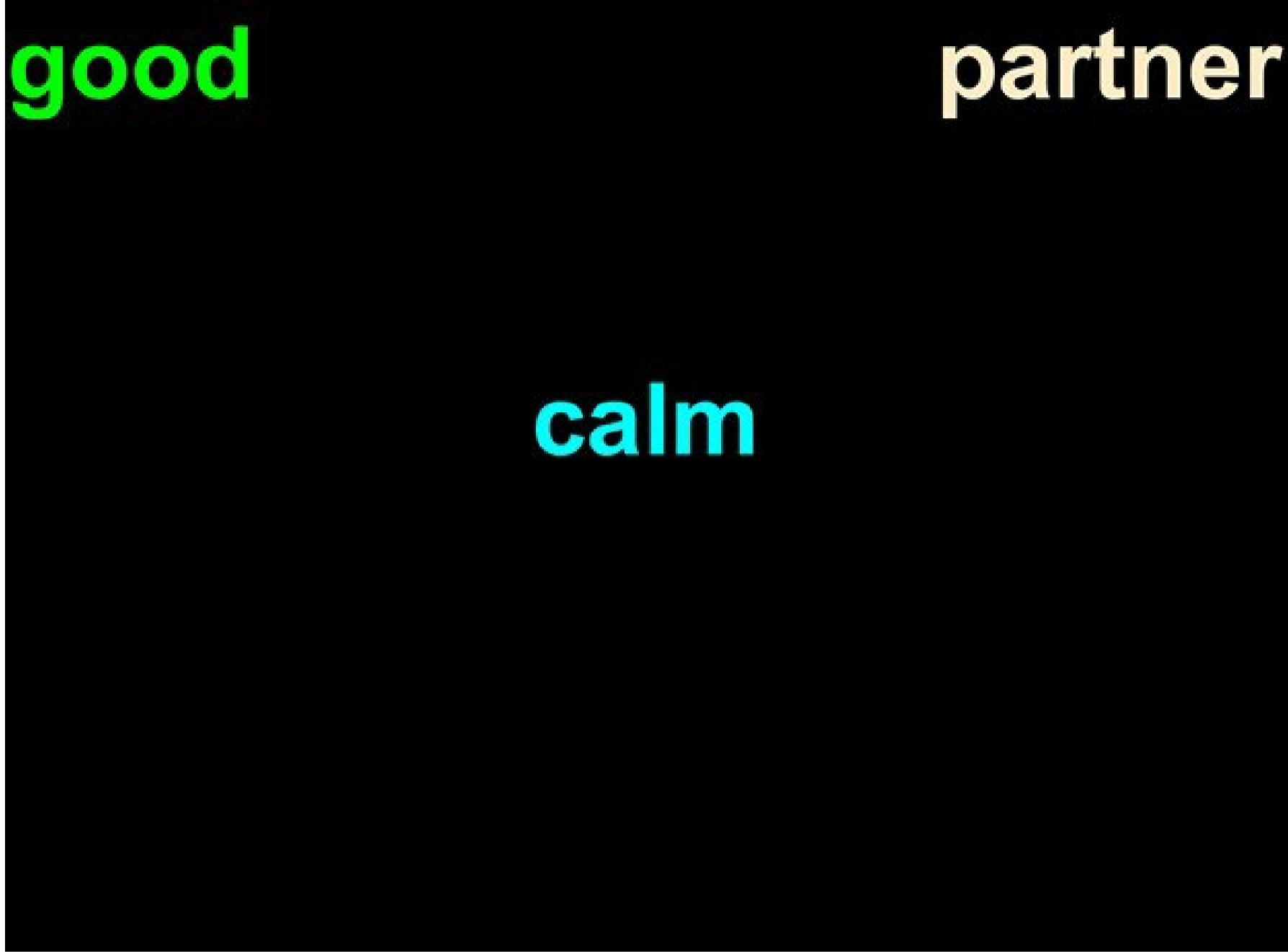
To simplify access, you can use an online version of the Partner-GNAT. coupled with 5 other surveys, Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale, IOS, (Aron, Aron & Smallen, 1992; Le, Moss & Maskek, 2007), an adapted (premarital) version of the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959; Stephen, 1986), the relationship satisfaction scale or RS (Røysamb et al, 2014), the Relationship Assessment Scale or RAS (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke & Hendrick, 1998) and the Couple Satisfaction Index or CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

The RS, although based on a Norwegian sample which would require caution in generalizing to other populations like one in the USA, has strong psychometric properties including predictive capacity for relationship dissolution at one year. Cross validating a number of surveys identifies consistencies and outliers useful when viewing results.

The Partner-GNAT survey, including 2 practice sets and the 2 additional surveys, can be completed in about 10 minutes. The 5 additional surveys, used to validate results, can be completed in several more minutes. After all surveys are taken, scores, graphs and suggestions are available.

Developers of the IAT (and by extension its variants like the GNAT) caution that survey takers do not base life-changing conclusions or decisions solely on the results of these surveys.

The following images illustrate the Partner-GNAT (stimulus words changed):

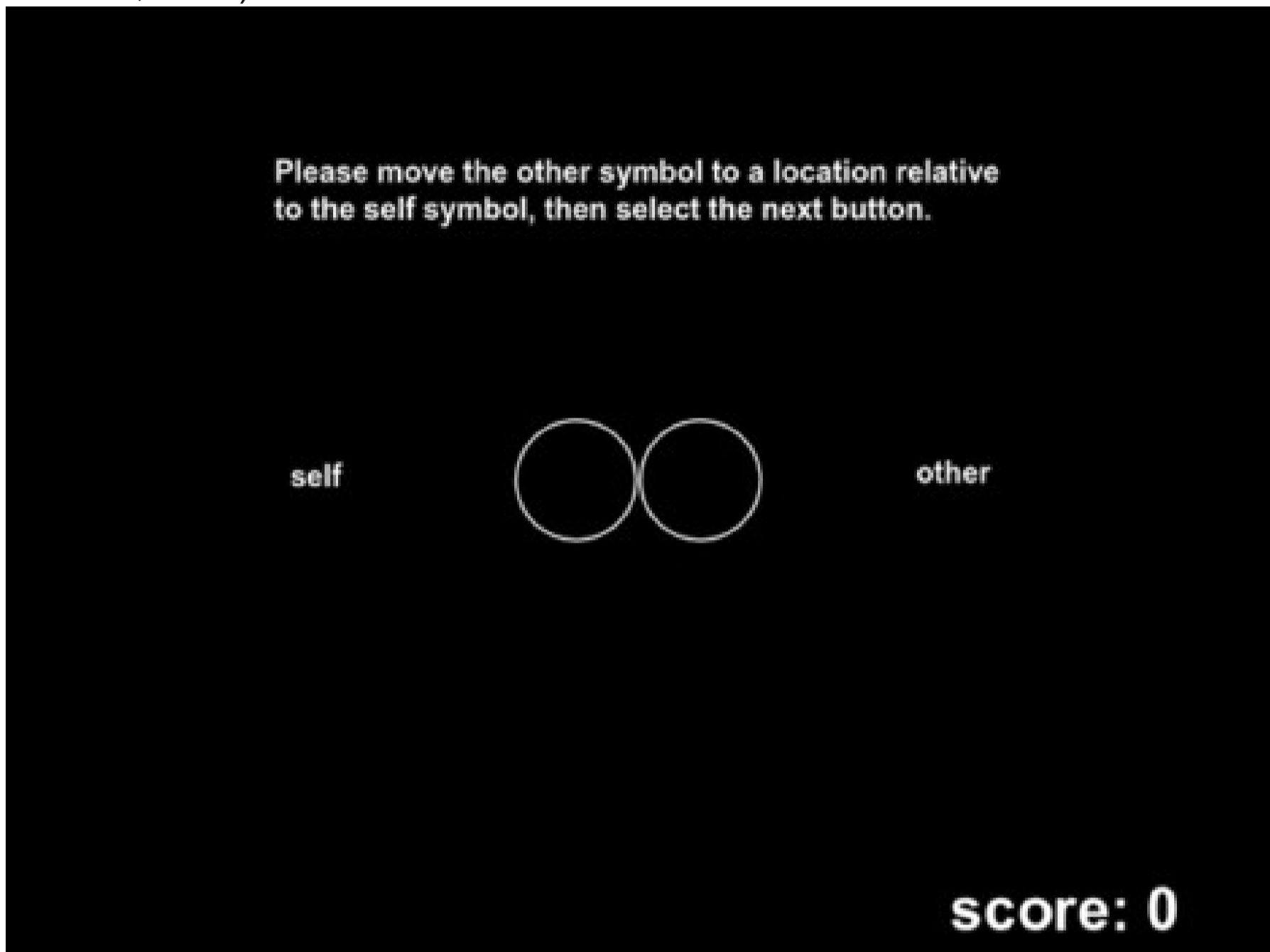


bad

partner

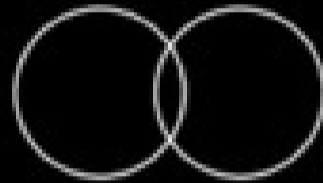
broken

Screenshots of the IOS adapted for online use (Le, Moss & Mashek, 2017) follow:



Please move the other symbol to a location relative to the self symbol, then select the next button.

self

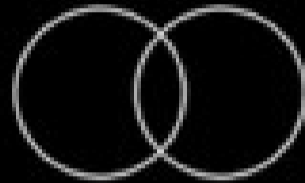


other

score: 1.67

Please move the other symbol to a location relative to the self symbol, then select the next button.

self

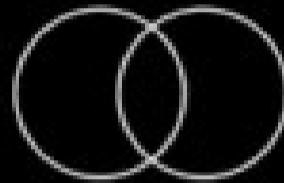


other

score: 2.58

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self

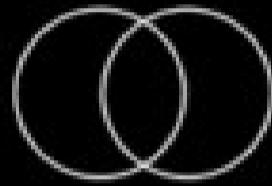


other

score: 3.42

Please move the other symbol to a location relative to the self symbol, then select the next button.

self

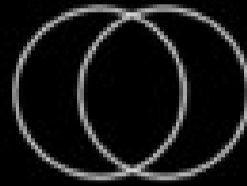


other

score: 4.17

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self

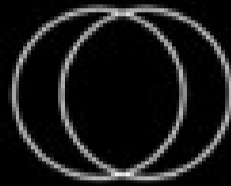


other

score: 5.25

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self

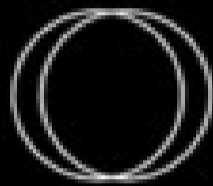


other

score: 6.08

Please move the other symbol to a location relative to the self symbol, then select the next button.

self

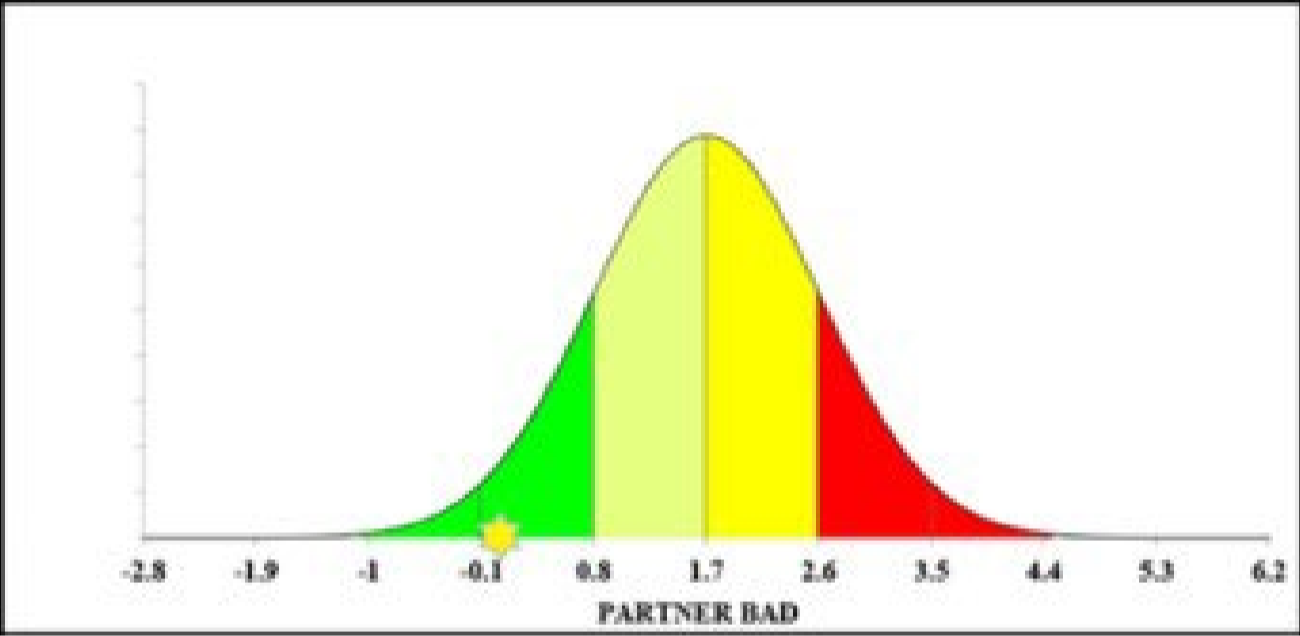
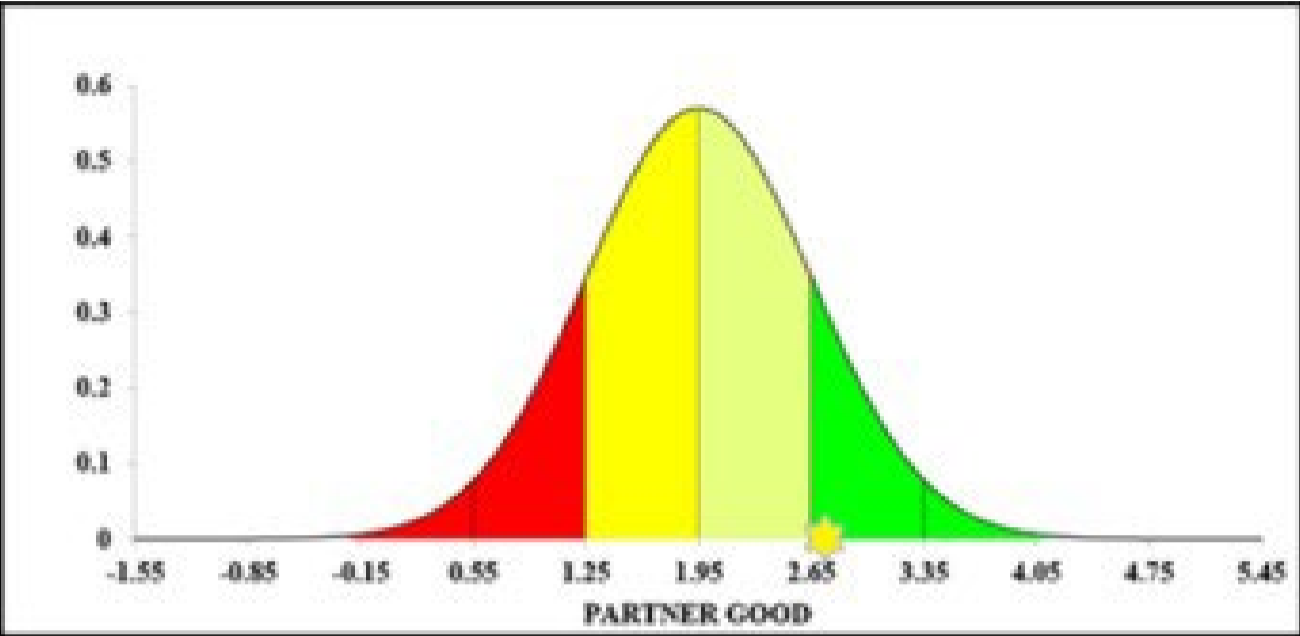


other

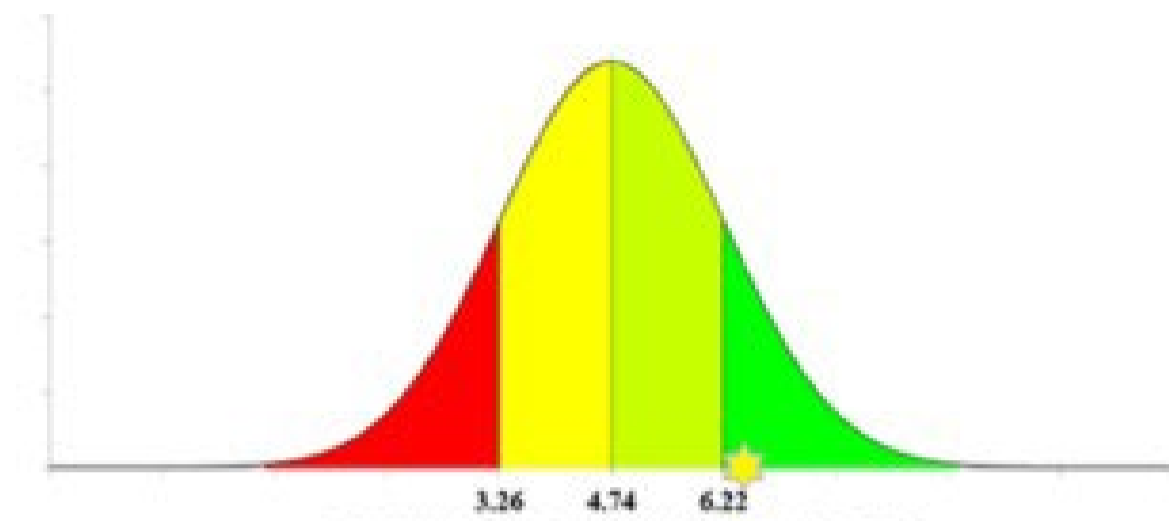
score: 7

Scoring is aided by software-created graphs and diagrams (see screenshots below) which visually display scores using statistical techniques like normal distributions and standard deviations (see Aklam, 2003).

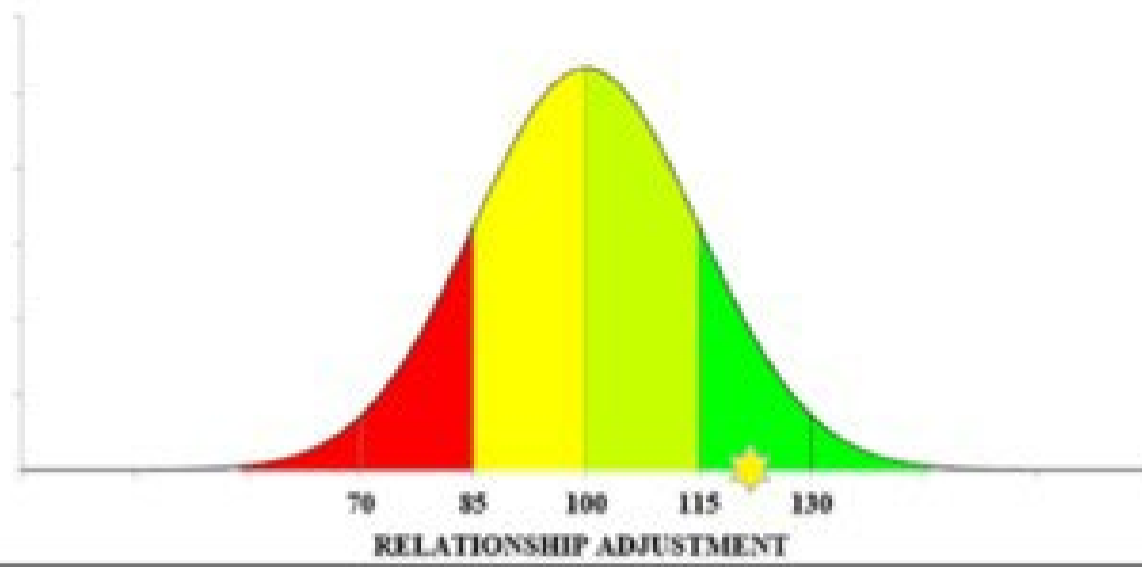
Recommendations for scores clustering within the highly positive range (green) usually encourage the person to identify what is working and do more of the same. For scores clustering within the above or below average range (yellow and light green), self-help activities, facilitated or on one's own, are recommended. For those clustering in the highly negative range (red), professional consultation is suggested.

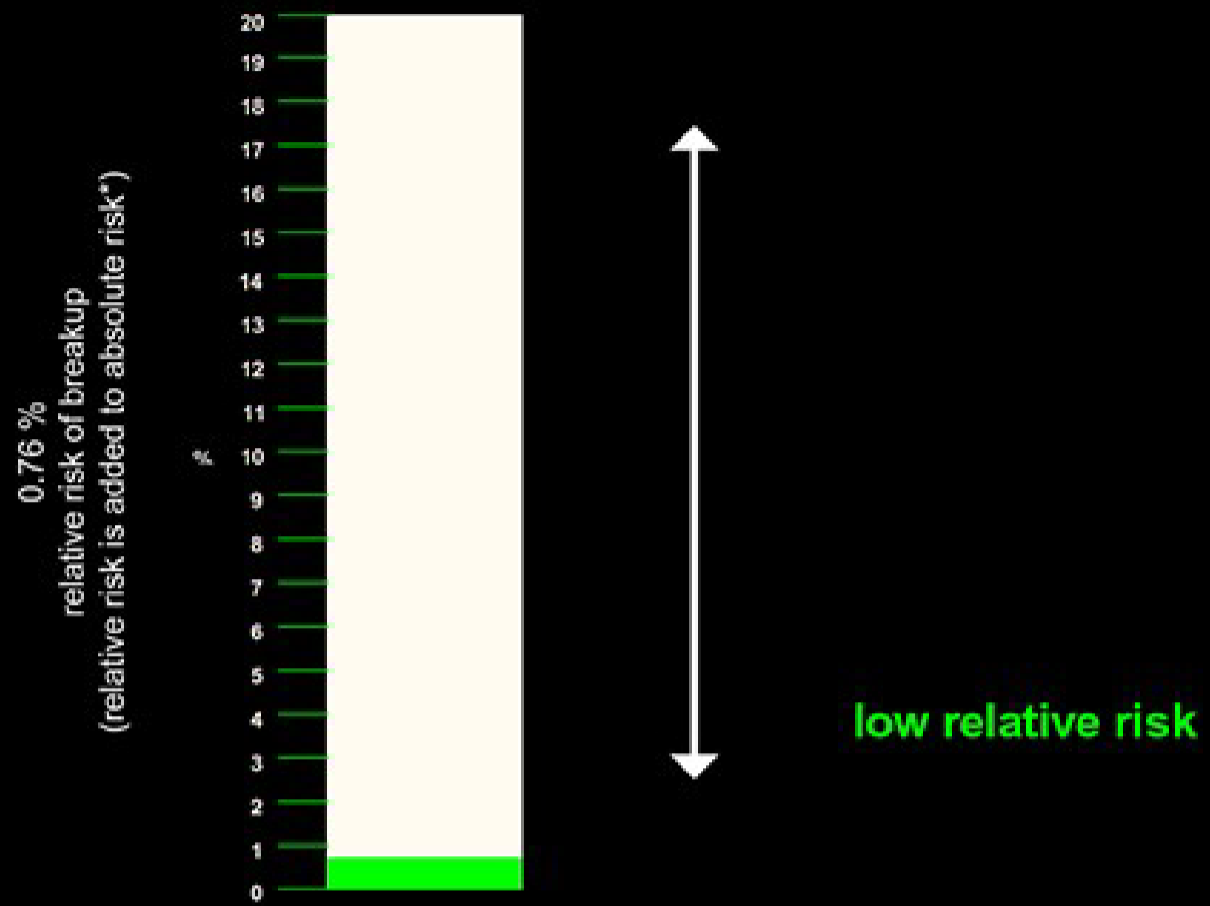


(scoring based on broader sample)



INCLUSION OF OTHER IN SELF SCALE (IOS)



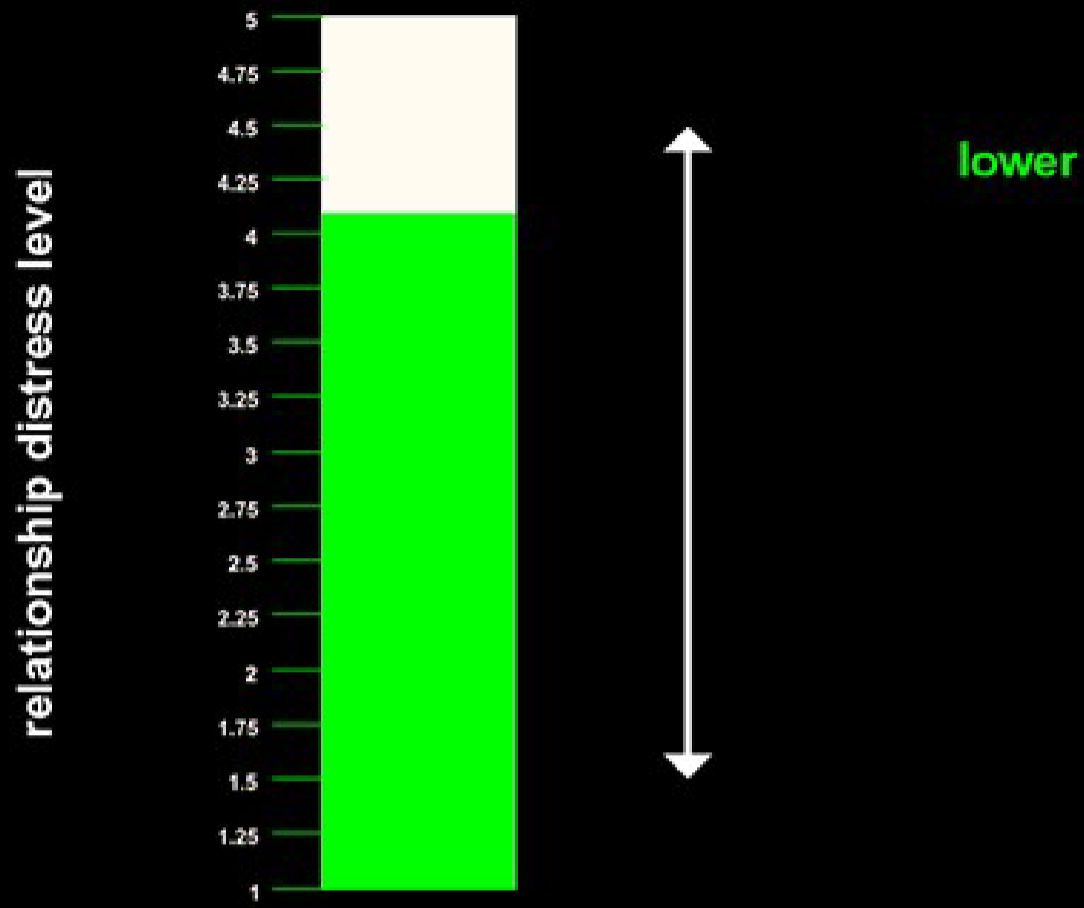


*For example, if absolute risk for couple breakup in a sample population (Norway, USA, etc.) is 45% and the survey shows a relative risk of 14.25%, this is added, so total risk of breakup becomes 59.25%.)

next

RS scoring

RAS*
FEMALE



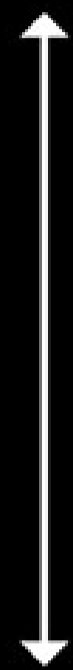
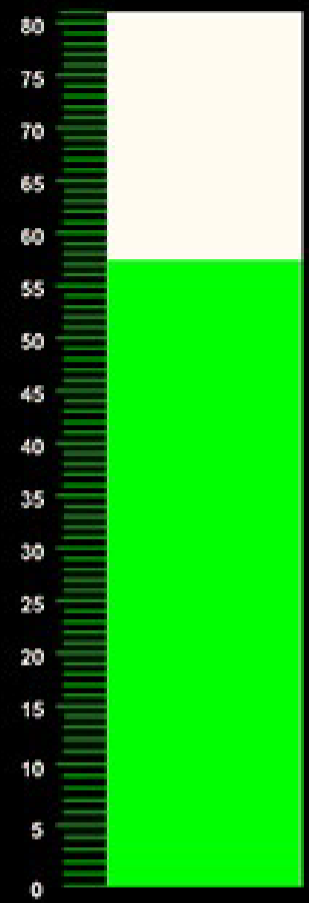
*The Relationship Assessment Scale measures a partner's perception of distress about their relationship, with distress level related to relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction.)

next

RAS Scoring

CSI*

relationship satisfaction level



higher

next

*The Couple Satisfaction Index measures relationship satisfaction.

CSI Scoring

In the screenshots above, results for all 6 surveys agree and cluster within the highly positive (green) range.

- Consistent score results between Partner-GNAT's 2 sub-scores (P1 and P2) increase confidence in Partner-GNAT validity.
- Consistent score results between the surveys (Partner-GNAT P1 and P2, PMAT, IOS, RS, RAS and CSI) increase confidence in their validity.
- The wider the scatter, the more suspect the validity.

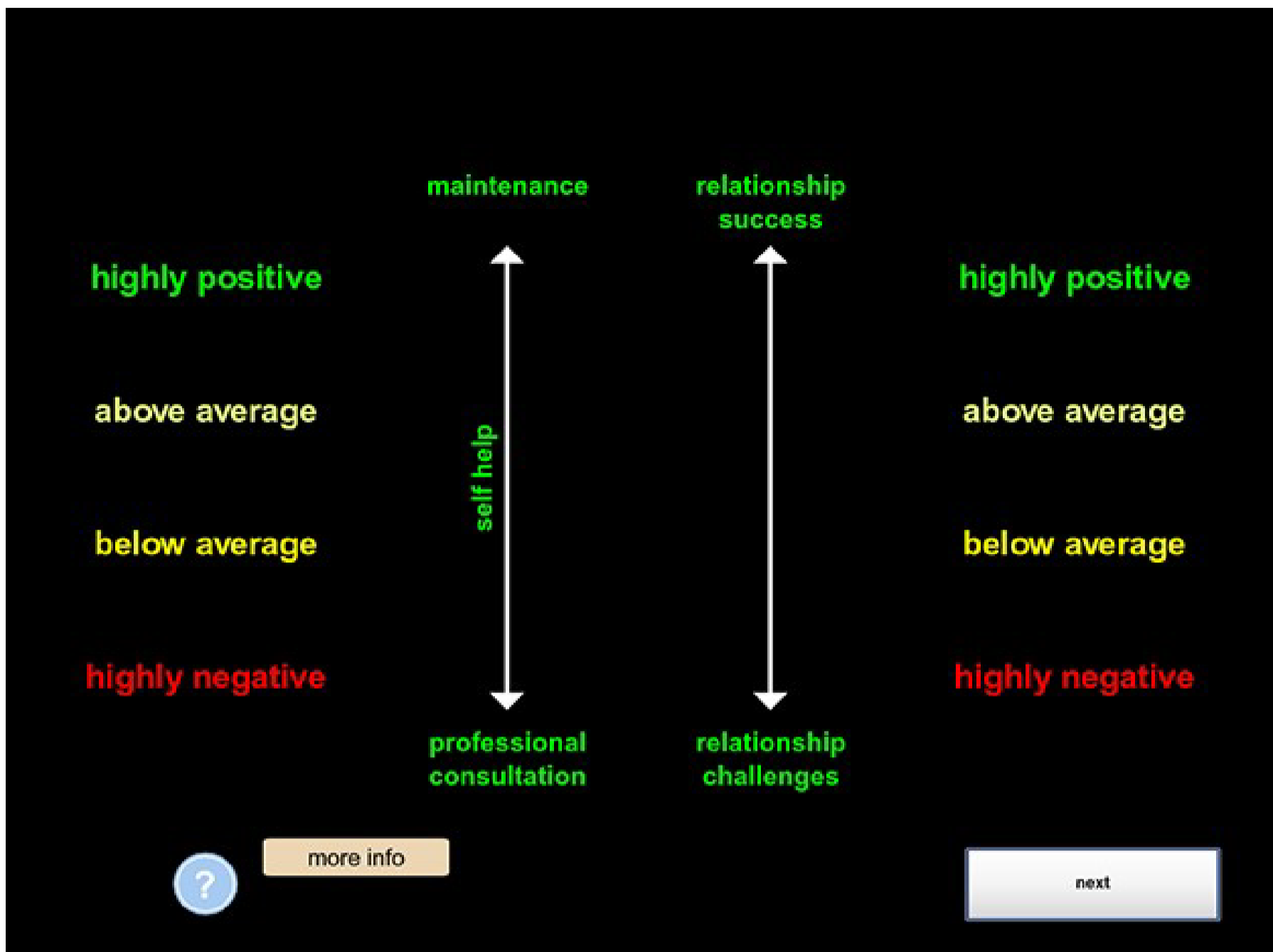


next

Consistency

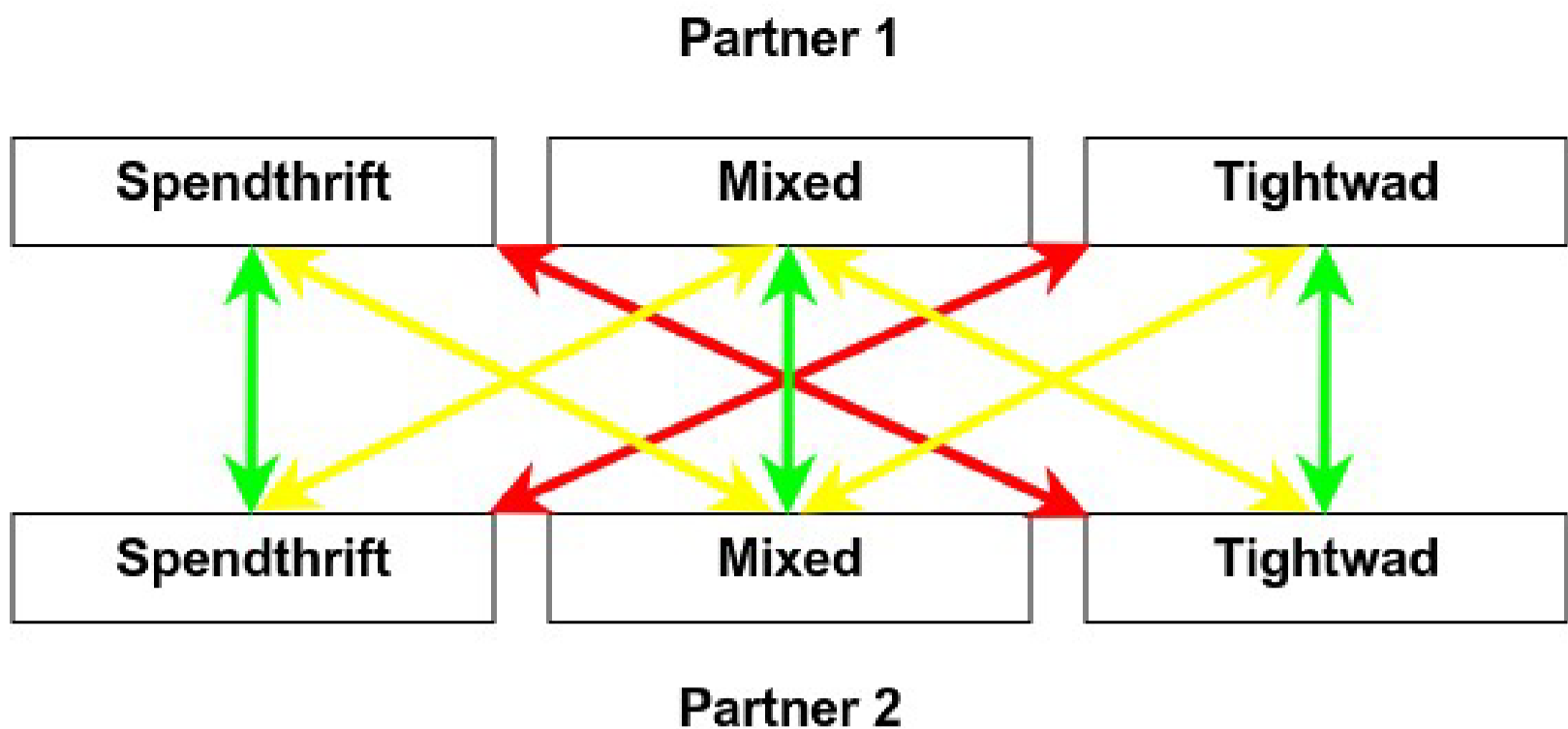
Sometimes there is less agreement between survey results reducing their validity.

Suggestions based on survey results follow:



Additional evidence-based survey instruments are available online to validate results and identify areas for help. One is based on measuring a person's experience of emotional pain when paying for an item or service. Those who, when paying, experience emotional pain at the higher end of a continuum are categorized as "tightwads," and those at the other end are categorized as "spendthrifts," thus the survey's name: Spendthrift-Tightwad (ST-TW) Scale (Scott, Cryder & Lowenstein, 2008).

Scott and colleagues (Scott, Small & Finkle, 2011) applied this [scale](#) to marital relationships. Their research shows that while opposites attract by choosing complimentary traits, when it comes to a couple's spending habits, choosing a partner with opposite habits leads to tension and conflict, a cause of divorce.



As illustrated above, two partners with similar spending habits have the least conflict (green), two with dissimilar habits, the most conflict (red), and some conflict (yellow) in-between.

The Spendthrift-Tightwad Scale is a brief, self-administered survey consisting of three questions. As an additional validator for the Partner-GNAT, a person would take the test for themselves and, by changing the survey items from “you” to “your spouse,” would take it for their partner. If additional couple (self- or facilitated self-) help is indicated, both partners could take the survey, use it to discuss their spending choices, work on financial strains and ways to reduce these. Knuckey (2003) has written a self-help book addressing couple finances.

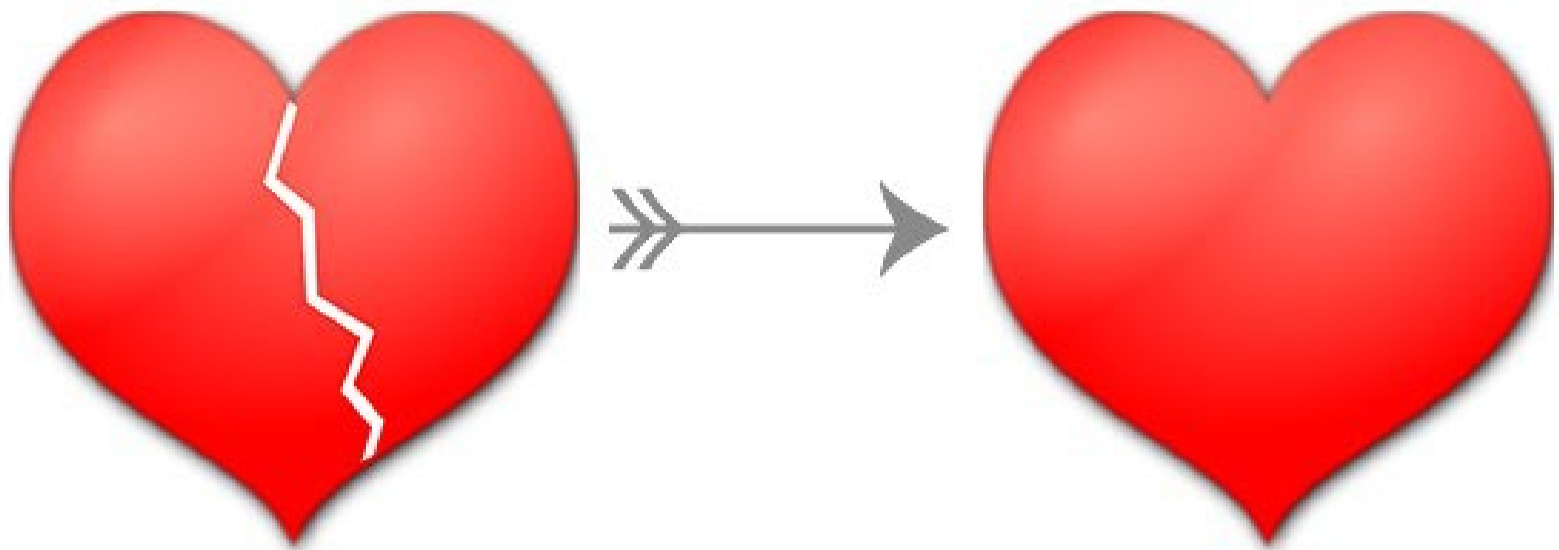
Keeping up to date on marriage research helps people weigh the pro’s and con’s of options they are considering. Some may be ambivalent about marrying or maintaining a single, unmarried lifestyle by choice. It would be useful for them to know that recent research on the protective effects of marriage casts doubt on the traditional view that marriage improves the health of partners (DePaulo, 2017; Kalmijn, 2017). Based on a 16-year (1999-2014) study of Swiss households, Kalmijn suggests “that marriage is primarily linked to a more positive evaluation of one’s life rather than to better health.”

For decades, couple counselors and clergy have mentioned that the health protection afforded by marriage is a benefit. Along with social and religious reasons, health protection has supported the decision to marry rather than choose an unmarried, single lifestyle. However, this conclusion was based on research that didn’t include divorced people in their samples.

According to the study: “The impact of ‘loss’ (divorce) is about three times stronger than the impact of ‘gain’ (marriage entry), and the effects of gain are often very small.” Divorce can be emotionally and financially devastating, a negative health effect, which if included in research sampling negates positive benefits. Kalmijn’s study is based on a full sample.

While the study has limitations on generalizability to an American population (its sample population was drawn from Switzerland), it places opting for a single life on a more equal footing with marriage than previously thought. DePaulo (2017), an advocate for the single lifestyle, suggests that this lets people “pursue the life paths that suit us best.”

Relationship Solutions



Marital Tensions

Counseling couples over the years has provided distinctive insights into those relationships that work and those headed for divorce:

When dating, people try to choose mates with compatible values and attitudes (Luo & Klohnen, 2005).

When married, compatible personality styles predict staying together (Luo & Klohnen, 2005).

There are no absolutes; exceptions rule.

Partners whose goodwill toward each other outweighs ill-will often survive and thrive.

Partners cataloging and collecting grievances are more likely to split up.

When one or both spouses have consulted lawyers, the odds for a break-up are increased.

Many couples go for counseling help too late.

The overriding rule in violence-prone situations is to assure safety before all else.

Treatment of significant mental illness and chemical dependency must be prioritized, and urgent measures used, if possible, to temporarily hold a marriage together.

Divorce and staying together while constantly arguing are both difficult for the kids.

Partners who can negotiate their differences and move towards each other's values and personality styles, over time, do well.

John Gottman, Ph.D. (1999) and his colleagues have studied marriage scientifically, coming up with comprehensive measures for success and failure. Afforded the chance to view a couple's interaction in their "love" lab, they claim to be able to predict a couple's likelihood to divorce with over 90% accuracy.

In the absence of live couple interaction and observation, we have developed a series of questions to measure some of these relationship variables identified by Gottman. No predictive claims can be made for the likelihood of marital success or failure based on the answers. However, the scores can highlight areas needing attention and point you toward self-help resources to counteract these using first order change.

Handling Disagreements

Gottman and Silver (1999) describe a number of negative interactions that when present predict marital tension and increase the likelihood of divorce. To determine how you handle differences, please answer the following:

When you and your partner disagree,

(1) do either of you regularly start out harshly?

(2) do you often feel criticized or criticize your partner?

(3) do you often express or feel contempt and disgust?

- (4) do you repeatedly feel defensive and blamed or experience your partner as defensive?
- (5) do you regularly tune out and turn away or experience your partner doing this?
- (6) do you often feel overwhelmed by your partner's responses and attacks?
- (7) do you often physically experience this as overwhelming tension?
- (8) do you regularly fail to de-escalate these disagreements, getting the discussion back on a productive track?
- (9) do you repeatedly recall and mention negative events involving your partner while minimizing happy and ones?

Answer Key

If you've answered "yes" to any of the following, please read more about the issue identified in italics and try using exercises recommended by Gottman and Silver in *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide* from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert.

- (1) A "yes" here identifies "start up" problems when you disagree.
- (2) A "yes" here identifies one of Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "criticism."
- (3) A "yes" here identifies the second of Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "contempt."
- (4) A "yes" here identifies the third of Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "defensiveness."
- (5) A "yes" here identifies the fourth of Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "stonewalling."
- (6) A "yes" here identifies "flooding" problems when you disagree.
- (7) A "yes" here identifies "body language" problems when you disagree.

(8) A “yes” here identifies “failed repair attempts” when you disagree.

(9) A “yes” here identifies “bad memories” when you disagree.

Strengthening Marriages

(1) Each partner’s state of mind will be critical to achieving results. So, the exercise cannot be scheduled but begins by mutual agreement between you and your partner when both of you feel ready.

(2) A minimum of an hour of uninterrupted time will be needed. Interruptions, whether to answer the phone or attend to other tasks, will reduce effectiveness.

(3) You and your partner will need to agree to put aside current problems and tensions for the duration of the exercise.

(4) Don’t start the exercise if you or your partner are in a bad mood, experiencing distressing emotions. Wait until these pass.

(5) When ready, begin by recalling and sharing (1) your first meeting, (2) courtship, (3) the love and attraction you felt for each other at the beginning of your relationship. Share generously. Rather than disagree over recollections, allow for each other’s perceptions. Begin with “I” (as in “I thought you were the ...”) rather than “you,” taking clear responsibility for your perceptions. Check-up: if you are not yet in the right mood or find it difficult to recall and share many positive memories, consider stopping for now. Label this as “not being the right time or mood,” not as failure. Agree to return to the exercise when the time and mood are right.

(6) Building on a foundation of positive memories of the love and attraction that brought you together, share dreams and possibilities for the relationship’s future.

Be open and accepting of each other’s points of view. There is no right or wrong. Each partner is entitled to their perception. People often attempt to find a partner similar themselves. They achieve varying success at this, and, in the final analysis, opposites often attract. Once coupled, relationship harmony is predicted more by having compatible personality styles than compatible attitudes and values. Partners able to move toward each other, accommodating to different styles succeed more often. Accepting some unchangeable differences adds to success.

(7) If the preceding steps have created a positive mood, begun to rekindle love and attraction and the sharing of dreams and possibilities, you have taken a significant step forward. You now know these are possible and can be summoned again. Cooperating and finding solutions flows naturally from this harmonious state. Repeat this exercise several times until you feel satisfied with the improvements achieved. Results usually take time to appear and consolidate. If these are insufficient or you feel dissatisfied for any reason, consider consulting with a professional.

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Scott, R. I., Cryder, C. E. & Lowenstein, G. (2008). Tightwads and Spendthrifts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (6), 767-782.

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Resources

Partner-GNAT

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/user/pimh/index.jsp>

<https://www.courses.rochester.edu/surveys/funk/>

Spendthrift-Tightwad Scale

<http://apps.olin.wustl.edu/faculty/cryder/TightwadSpendthriftScale.pdf>

Couples

<https://www.gottman.com/couples/>

<https://www.therapistlocator.net/> (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/family-marital> (Psychology Today)

Author

Stephen G. Wartel is the author of the Partner-GNAT Guide. He earned his master's degree in social work (MSW) in 1976, is licensed as a clinical social worker in New York (LCSW) and credentialed by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as a diplomate in clinical social work (DCSW). He completed a 3-year postgraduate training program in couple and family therapy at the Ackerman Institute for the Family (1984).

Mr. Wartel has authored 2 articles in the professional journal, Families in Society and served as a consulting editor for the journal. In 2011, a co-authored article appeared in the journal, Social Work in Public Health.

His experience has included clinical practice and supervision, leadership for behavioral health and social services programs, delivering training courses, developing eLearning materials and facilitating self-help to promote learning and health.