

Analysing Psychic equilibrium for married relationship: A new approach to marital Counselling

Sumit Chauhan

Ast. Director-Directorate of Innovation & Technology Transfer (DITT)
Amity University, Noida, India

Dr Mamta Mohan

Professor, Amity International Business School,
Amity University, India

Ms. Monica Bhatia

AVP-Times Network, India

Abstract

An analysis of psychic equilibrium provides a novel way to approach the marital counselling work. In the paper the marital relationship was specifically analysed with the help of theory of dual comparison with known others. Segregating the conflicting dimension is the first and foremost important step identified in this new approach. We have proposed few important and easy to approach steps for the conflicting dimension. The approach named as APOC. (Avoid –Participate- Own- Celebrate) provide very practical steps to improve the relationship quality between the married couples by constructively manoeuvring the conflicting dimension's direction and intensity.

Key Words: *psychic Equilibrium, Marital Counselling, Conflicting dimensions, Relationship Quality.*

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

Disclosures

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or Not-for-profit sectors.

All authors of this manuscript confirm our contribution to this research in a significant way and also that we have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of interest: None.

Theory of Dual Comparison

1. Introduction:

This paper is a humble attempt, specifically written to provide a simpler and more objective way to counsellors to analyse the relationship problem/conflicts between partners sharing emotional attachment between them. The participation of people/partners who are either having affairs or no intention of spending efforts on the relationship can

also be analysed with this kind of approach. This new approach is based on The Dual Theory of Comparison written by Sumit Chauhan, Dr Mamta Mohan and Dr Manish Chauhan. (S Chauhan, M Chauhan & M Mohan, 2019; Chauhan, 2020). In the next section a brief of the theory is discussed, the focus remains on the explanation of the theory for comparison process defined for “known others” category (highlighting married/close relationships).

1.1 Theory of Dual Comparison:

Theory of Dual comparison supports the dual nature of the social comparison process. That is; whenever we meet anyone (either known other or Unknown other) we perform a 1st level of comparison, which quickly provide us with the much needed supply of self enhancement, without spending much cognitive energy. This need of self enhancement was linked to our hominids, having two major works to perform namely; to find food and to find a mating partner (Bodenhausen & Hugenberg, 2008). Self enhancement

has been proven to be a deciding factor in one’s performance as humans. (Sedikides, Skowronski & Gartner, 2011, Lynn and colleagues, 2014).

self enhancement or self-improvement. Encountering involuntary social information first triggers level 1 and an additional novel social information triggers level 2.

The theory introduces a second stage, which is more conscious in nature and have an end-product of either

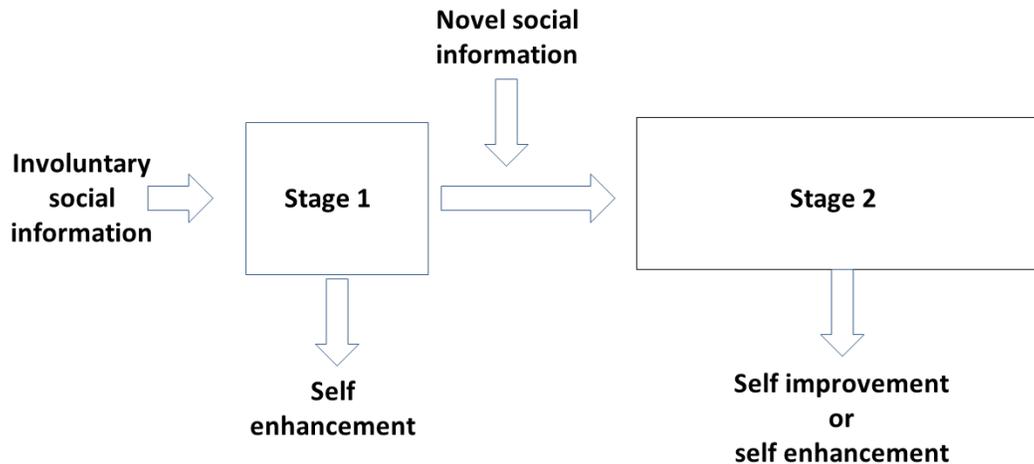


Figure 1. Outline of the Dual comparison Model.

1.2 Comparison with Known Others:

To attain the positive self enhancement from the first level of the social comparison, one tries to compare with another person on a dimension, which is usually strong in his repository. This is called Dimension switch. This phenomenon is critical when the comparison is happening with unknown others. In such cases, the dimensions which are visually available take priority. The dynamics with known others become different as our regular interactions makes the dimension switch seems unlikely. Psychic equilibrium is defined as the critical equilibrium which is maintained between two partners, where they identify non conflicting dimensions in other partner as better and give him/her a supply of self enhancement. In return the other partner will reciprocate with authorizing some other non-conflicting dimension, providing the requisite dose of self enhancement. (Beach and Tesser, 1995 and Pinkus et al. 2008). This to and fro of self

enhancement is the key to a meaningful and healthy relationship.

2. Arranged Vs. Love Marriage

The variable that we are interested in is the “Time” that the partners have got initially, to interact and build the psychic equilibrium between them. This time becomes very important parameter, when this new approach is concerned. This specific time provides the initial window for the partners to analyse each other’s dimension repositories. The complete process can be seen in Fig 2.

2.1 Explanation through an Example: Kapil is an IT engineer from Uttarakhand (North Indian Hilly State). Average build, he met Khushi, also an IT engineer in Bangalore, she hails from MP. They both work for the same IT Company in a same team. As their interaction starts to mature, they both have realised that they have formed a psychic equilibrium among themselves. (See fig. 3).

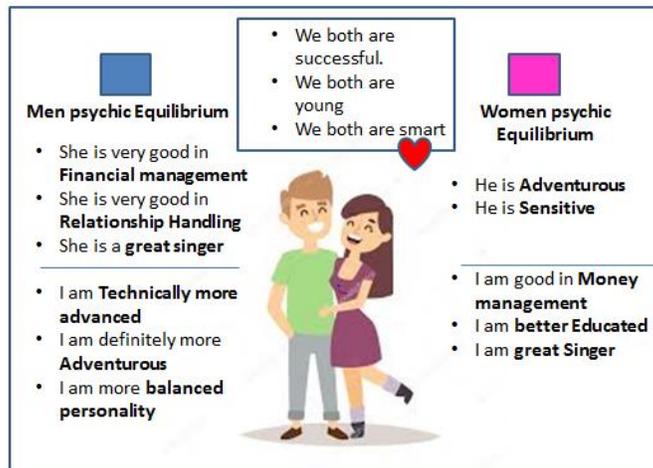


Figure 3: Equilibrium in early days of Romantic Relationship

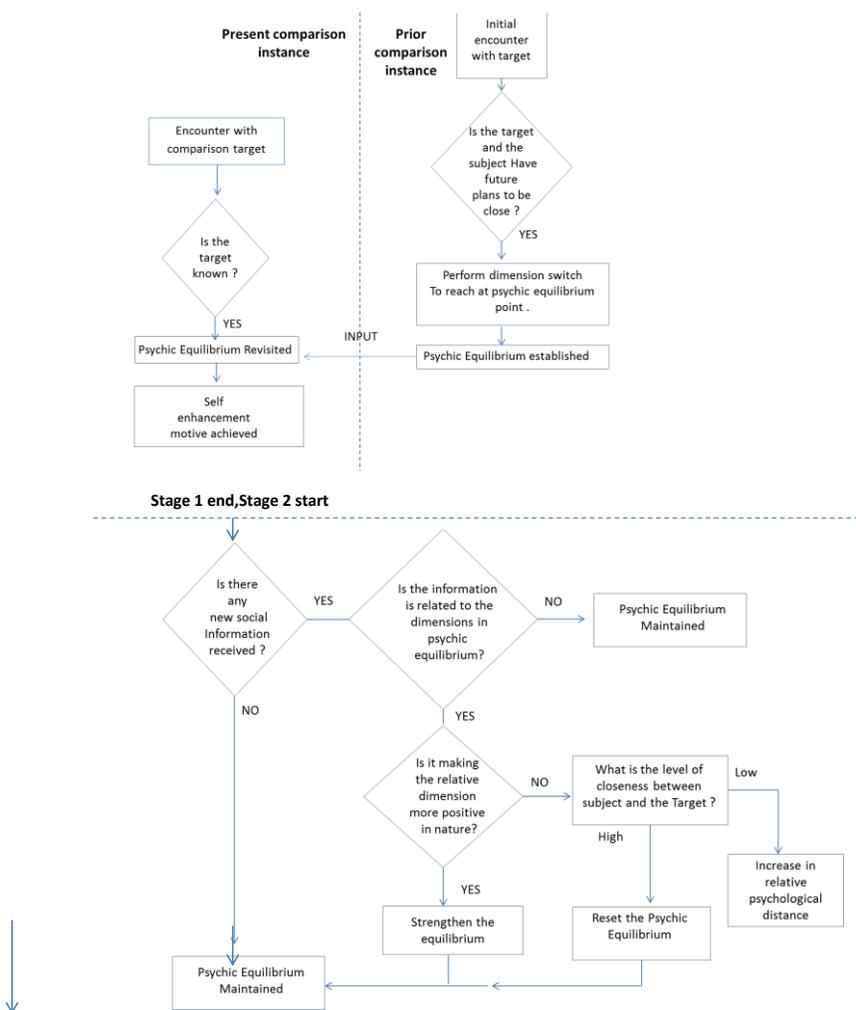


Figure 5. Complete comparison process with known targets.

Figure 2: The Dual Comparison Process with known other

There are some dimensions, which the couple usually shares in their respective dimension repository. These shared dimensions can co-exist, but the dynamics change as the age of the marriage progresses.

2.2 Type of Dimensions

Some categorization of the dimensions will help us to understand this peculiar case of married relationship in better light. Since these dimensions are developed for gaining self enhancement, hence the quantum of self enhancement provided can be good a place to start the discussion. To some extent, the relative importance of the dimension is very subjective and it changes from person to person. But the influence of the cultures and

subcultures in terms of what it treats as important (for example Money, status etc.) profoundly impacts the relative value of the various dimensions. Hofstede cultural dimension Theory (Hofstede, Geert, 1980; Hofstede, Geert, and Michael H. Bond, 1984) mentioned such dimensions , which would impact an individual greatly, living in the that respective culture.

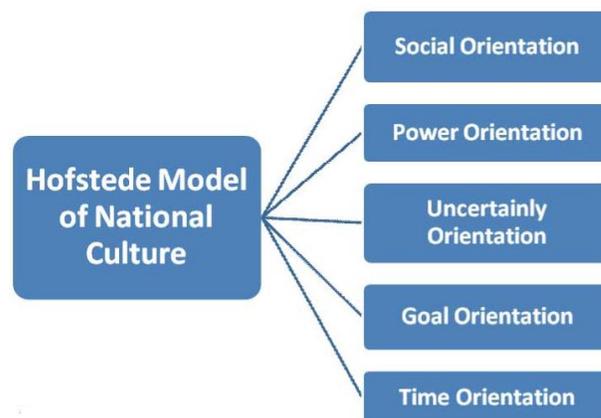


Fig 4: Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

2.3 Social Dimensions:

The quality of handling money in a better way and being proactive in terms of investment is considered as a big self-enhancer for individuals in married

relationship. Similarly, Gender biases also provide a base for a dimension, where being a man is enough to feel the superiority over the female counterpart. In India some very evident dimensions (from social settings) are- (See table 1)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Geographical heritage</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>House/other possessions</i>	<i>Car</i>
<i>Successful</i>	<i>Looks</i>	<i>Money</i>	<i>Facebook friends/Off line – Social Circle</i>	<i>Influential Contacts</i>
<i>Rural/Urban</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Life style</i>	<i>Caste and Subcaste</i>

Table 1: Social Dimensions

Similarly Personal dimensions can be defined as the Dimensions, which are unique to an individual and can have either Visuals or Latent quality. (See table 2).

Type	Examples				
Visual	Hair	Colour of the skin	Height	Fitness	Figure
Latent	Intelligence	Creativity	Spiritual advancement	Special Talent	Hobby

Table 2: Visual and Latent Dimensions

2.4 Categorization of the dimensions:

We can categorize various dimensions in an Individual on the basis of Quantum of Self –enhancement provided by them. We can classify the dimensions as, Namely; Core dimensions, Peripheral Dimensions and

Temporary dimensions. The relative importances of these dimensions are increase as we move from Core to Temporary dimensions.

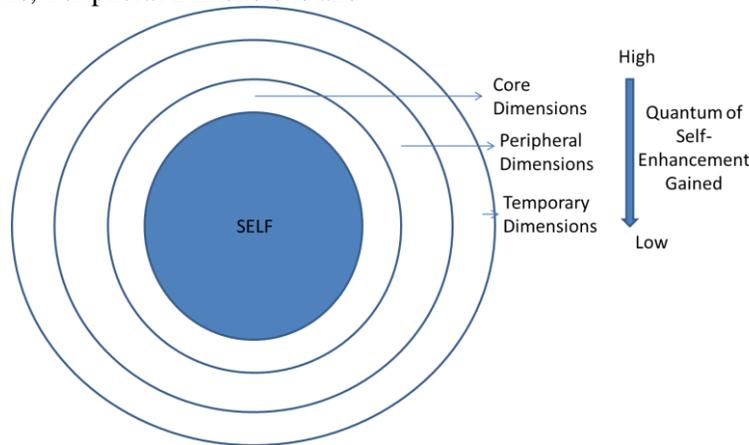


Figure 5: Layers of Dimensions

3. Evolving Psychic Equilibrium with marriage age:

In the specific case of the married couples, the dynamics of the equilibrium keeps on changing, gradually as the relationship (in this case; Marriage) will grow with time. (Niehuis, S., Reifman, A., Feng, D., & Huston, T. L., 2016). As the age of the relationship increases, couples receive more and more information and the equilibrium set at the courtship period may look completely different than the equilibrium after 10 years of marriage.

3.1 Courtship Period dynamics: Tradition of having courtship period before marriage is prevalent in many cultures around the world. This important time period is categorized by formation of the initial psychic equilibrium. Now there are few peculiar characteristics of this equilibrium namely; Co-existing motive and an

emotional bond between the partners. There are lot of dimensions in which the partners do not judge very critically and they prefer to bask in the glory of the other partner’s strong dimensions. For example, a better education or a better job/salary of a partner is a positive for the other partner. Similarly looks, as a dimension can also be shared within the relationship. We can presume comfortably that the focus during initial period of interaction is to identify some basic dimensions in our own dimension repository and build equilibrium around those dimensions. The equilibrium thus formed is not a very strong one. Usually built around personal dimensions (Both Visual and Latent), this state receives a good reality check and as the committed relationship starts and you start living physically with your partner, a lot more dimensions surface in partners that are critical to be included in the equilibrium list for a smooth relationship progress.

3.2 Change in equilibrium with age of the marriage
 Let us consider a case study of a couple with 8 years of the marriage. When Mira and Shikhar married after

8 months of Courtship time their equilibrium looks like this:

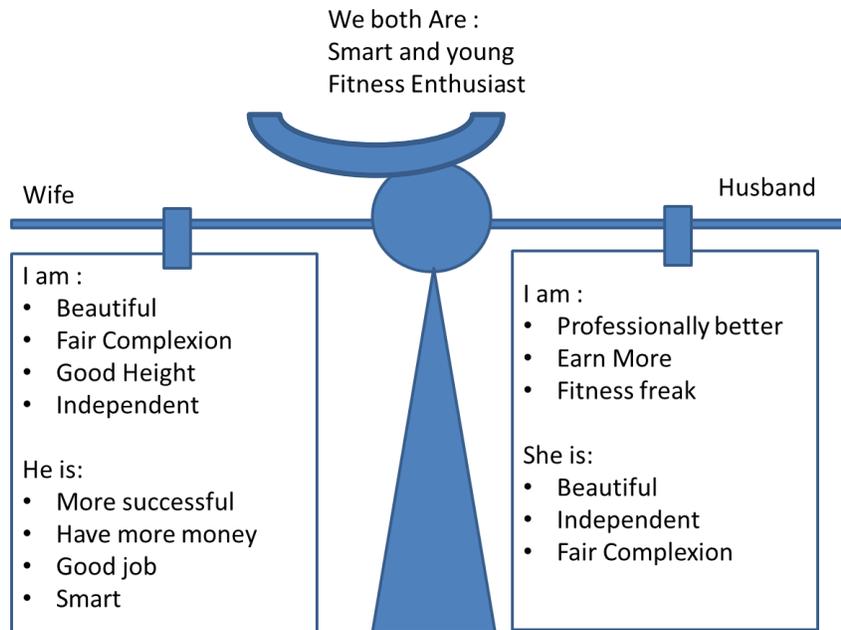


Figure 6: Equilibrium after courtship period Figure 5: Equilibrium after courtship period

3.3 After Four Year of Marital Relationship:

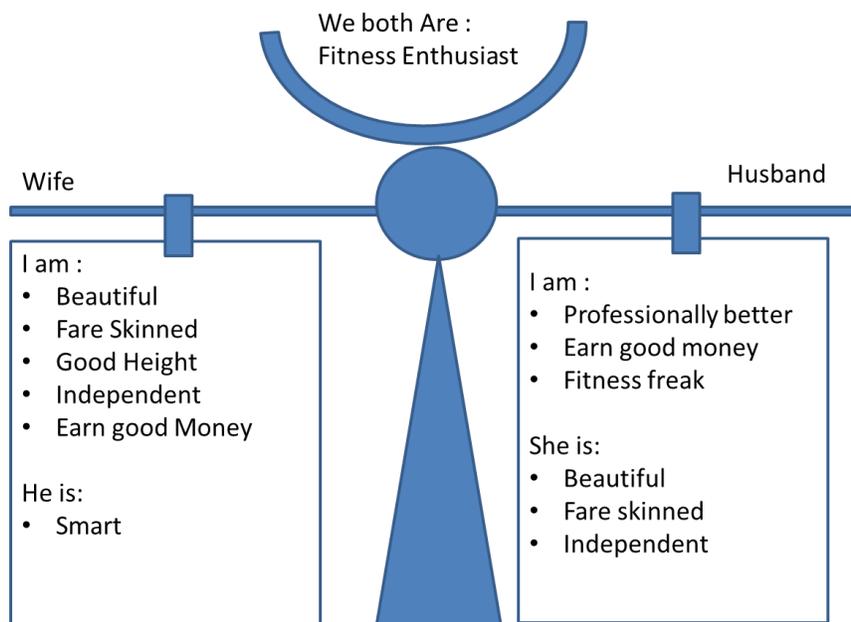


Figure 7: Equilibrium after 4 year of marriage

Notice that the dimension “Earning Good Money” is now present in both partners’ dimension repository.

Such dimensions are called Conflicting dimensions. This also highlights a potential problematic area in the

relationship and if not handled properly, can lead to a broken relationship. Lot of changes can occur with time on various dimensions which becomes overt with age and experience with the other partner

3.4 After 08 Years of marital relationship

In This case, after 8 years of marriage, both partners have forgotten about the fitness dimension. The dimension of money/career and success becomes more evident with the time. In such cases couples have lot of argument over many things, but the core conflicting dimension is the reason for the disturbance in the equilibrium.

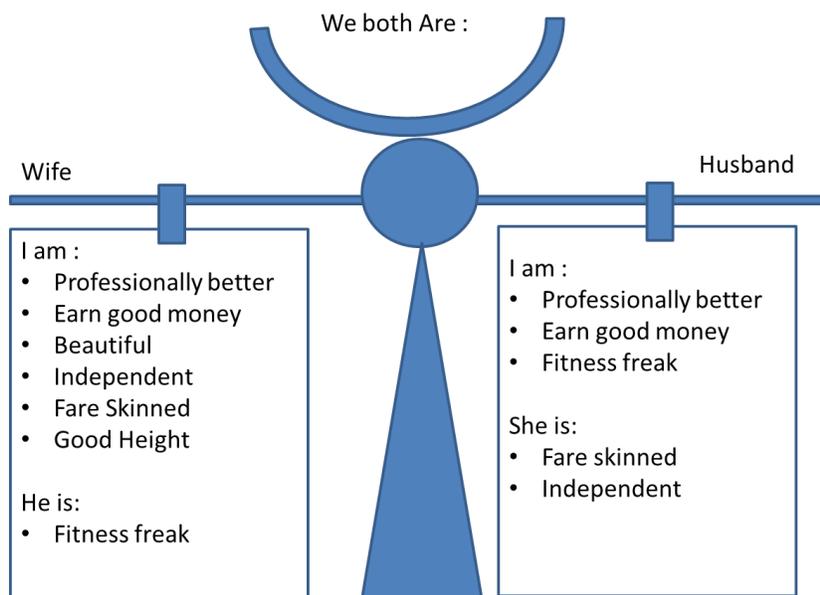


Figure 8: Equilibrium after 08 years of married life

4. Identifying Adjusted and Conflicting Dimensions

Identification of the conflicting dimension is the most critical part of this approach. This identification is meant to be done in any one cross section of the relationship, preferably the latest one. The reason for focus on cross section approach is the constant change of the dimension dynamics within the psychic equilibrium of the partners. At the starting of the relationship, a particular dimension like “FANCY JOB” may not be conflicting in nature for the other partner, but as time progresses, the same dimension becomes the root cause of the relationship gone sour (Niehuis, S., Reifman, A., Feng, D., & Huston, T. L. 2016). Hence we should study the dimensions (weather conflicting or adjusted) and understand the psychic equilibrium maintained by the two partners, by keeping the present situation in mind.

Finding someone’s dimension repositories is comparatively an easy job, we can have a questionnaire approach along with a one-to-one

interview, to see through the person’s personality and identify the equilibrium dimensions, both adjusted and conflicting. For example, to understand “Better in handling Money” dimension in a typical married relationship, we can ask following questions first (to both the partners, individually):

- Do you think of yourself as a Money expert?
- Who pays the utility bills at home?
- Who handles the investment decisions in your household?

Followed by an individual interaction, the basic dimensions can be understood very clearly from very simple questions. Once we have the Questionnaire responses and the individual meeting done, we can assess the psychic equilibrium for the adjusted and conflicting dimensions. There can be a case with more than one or many conflicting dimensions within the equilibrium of the partners. But Even with one identified conflicting dimension, the work can be initialized.

Handling Conflicting Dimension in a relationship

Once you have the conflicting dimension identified, consider it as a work well done. As this dimension analysis and subsequent discussions with partners, can have a healing effect on the relationship quality.

APOC Approach

Consider a situation, in which the psychic equilibrium in the relationship of a married couple has “MONEY” as the conflicting dimension. We need to understand first that what it means.

At a deeper level, having conflicting dimension of money in a relationship points towards the fact that both partners want the other one to give him/her the dose of self enhancement by recognizing this particular dimension as better in them. MONEY as a dimension is very critical to deal with, as in committed relationships; both partners have to take decisions related to money on daily basis. You cannot ignore the financial management of the house. Problems or dissatisfaction starts when both partners cannot take the other one as superior in money handling. Now, this conflict becomes the base of the further escalation of tension and stress in the relationship. The partners without understanding the basic of the conflict, brings on the negative emotions to other things also and slowly you realise that the relationship is not providing you that kind of self enhancement that you look for from your partner. It has a direct effect on the self-esteem and self-respect portfolio of the individual. The response to such a situation can have many distinct reactions, the major reactions are:

Depression

If the supply of self enhancement from a close relationship is diminishing, the person may not be able to take the requisite self-enhancement from other sources too (assumption), he and she may plunge down to depression. Depression represents the one extreme end of the scale of reactions. Whereas the other extreme involves re-building of the psychic equilibrium by adopting following strategies:

1. **Avoid:** Leave the dimension and accept the superiority of the partner and in turn focus on developing another dimension, which provides equivalent self enhancement as replacement. This will give you a sense of balance. A

classic example of this dimension switch is the GENDER in India. Males, usually consider themselves superior as compared to the females, due to old prevailing traditions. A woman coming from a gender neutral environment (before marriage) to a much stricter patriarchal house may be forced to adopt and accept the dimension of GENDER of his husband. And in case she is not comfortable in this aspect, she may experience disturbance in the health of the married relationship. We have seen a lot of marriages in which the family background related to gender neutral practices are different and after marriage the couples are never able to settle down in the relationship. The old tradition of marrying in similar caste, does prove to be a beneficial study as the environment of both the houses remains similar in major practices, hence a girl coming from same community may understand this better that males are better, as she has seen the same in her house. (I support Gender-Neutrality, by the way). The right way is to snatch any one dimension from your spouse repository and make it even.

2. People differ in the amount of self-enhancement; they require in order functioning smoothly. Some individuals are satisfied with small self enhancement and are termed as very adjusting in nature. Whereas, the person with high requirement of self enhancement are seen as narcissist. These both are extreme ends to the same construct, based on the requirement or the urge to gain self enhancement through stamping their authority over other partner.

Hence, if you feel that leaving the conflicting dimension is out of question and you do not want to devoid yourself from the opportunity of gaining self enhancement from conflicting dimension (MONEY in our example). The immediate stress which will develop in the relationship needs a passage to pass out. The next strategy is PARTICIPATE.

Participate:

When it is clear that both partners cannot leave the conflicting dimension, then it is time to participate equally towards the dimension. This is easier said than done, as in some dimensions this seems to be a common sense solution, but it becomes simply impossible in some specific dimensions. For example as far as money is concerned, the PARTICIPATIVE solution would be to handle the individual finances separately. This is easier when both the partners are working, but becomes impossible when one of them is not working.

Own:

This is opposite to AVOID where you are very sure that the dimension in question is absolutely necessary for your equilibrium and it becomes critical that you continue to get the self-enhancement from that. This happens when the individuals have very limited dimensions in his/her Dimension repository. For example, if you are married to a company CEO, then you must not neglect the career success dimension and proactively give self enhancement through various modes like publically praising him/her.

At times when in a close relationship, someone uses this strategy and start providing excess self enhancement to the other partner, the receiving partner becomes obliged and often try to compensate out of guilt.

Celebrate:

It is somewhat unlikely that in a case of conflict, couples will go for CELEBRATE.

But, nevertheless it does works in favour of both. “Basking in Glory” of your partner’s success. While maintaining the similar respect for yourself too. Two surgeons can be married! In such cases it might be the case that both of them are ambitious in their career. This problem can be peculiar in the cases when both the partners share the same profession like in our case being surgeons.

Suppose they (being ambitious) recognize the “PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS” as their main conflicting dimension. Now if there is no possibility of other strategies (AVOID, PARTICIPATE or OWN) then the right way is to CELEBRATE each other’s success (Cialdini, 1994). Give self enhancement often and receive that more often is the key for both, and

you will see that the differences start diminishing down and the trickling of the anger from the conflicting dimensions stops to flow which used to affect other parts of the married relationship, improving the overall emotional attachment.

Conclusion:

The flexibility of the participant condition, whether they are having affair, or are not willing anymore to invest energy in the relationship, does not impact the working of this method to some extent. We (Counsellors) can analyse their individual dimensions and psychic equilibrium separately and then can work out the strategy along with the partners for conflicting dimension specifically. This method is also flexible in terms of location. We encourage the use of outdoor spaces like going on a trek for 5-6 days along with the partner and discuss the conflicting dimension in detail with them (as their defences will be down during such activities).

4 Reference

- S Chauhan, M Chauhan & M Mohan (2019). The Theory of Dual comparison. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(1), 1010-1033. DIP:18.01.116/20190701, DOI:10.25215/0701.116.
- Chauhan S. (2020) Brief of “The Theory of Dual comparison”. *J Psychiatry Psychol Res*, 4(4): 414-417.
- Bodenhausen, G. V., & Hugenberg, K. (2009). Attention, perception, and social cognition. In F. Starck, & J. Förster (Eds.), *Social cognition: The basis of human interaction* (pp. 1-22). New York: Psychology Press.
- Niehuis, S., Reifman, A., Feng, D., & Huston, T. L. 2016. Courtship Progression Rate and Declines in Expressed Affection Early in Marriage: A Test of the Disillusionment Model. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37(8), 1074–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X14540159>.
- Cialdini, R. B. (1994). Interpersonal influence. In S. Shavitt & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Persuasion: Psychological insights and perspectives* (pp.

- 195-217). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Beach, S. R. H., & Tesser, A. (1995). Self-esteem and the extended self-evaluation maintenance model: The self in social context. In M. Kernis (Ed.), *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem* (pp. 145- 170). New York: Plenum.
 - Pinkus, R. T., Lockwood, P., Schimmack, U., & Fournier, M. A. (2008). For better and for worse: Everyday social comparisons between romantic partners. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1180–1201. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1180>
 - Sedikides, C., & Skowronski, J. J. (2000). On the evolutionary functions of the symbolic self: The emergence of self-evaluation motives. In A. Tesser, R. Felson and J. Suls (Eds). *Psychological perspectives on self and identity* (pp. 91-117). Washington, DC: APA Books.
 - Lynn, C.D., Pipitone, R.N., & Keenan, J.P. (2014). To thine own self be true: Self-deceptive enhancement and self-awareness influences on mating success. *Evolutionary Behavioural Sciences*, 8(2), 109-122. <https://doi:10.1037/h0097255>.
 - Hofstede, Geert. *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology 5. Beverly Hills CA: SAGE, 1980a.
 - Hofstede, Geert, and Michael H. Bond. "Hofstede's Culture Dimensions: An Independent Validation Using Rokeach's Value Survey." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 15.4 (December 1984): 417–433. DOI: 10.1177/0022002184015004003