Relationship Science Online

Therapeutic Approaches: Demand-Withdrawal

Therapeutic Approaches

- **For demand-withdrawal** (Baucom et al., 2010; Epstein & Baucom, 2003)
  - Get partners to become aware of the pattern, and that it becomes more extreme and escalates during a conversation and over time
  - Determine why this interaction pattern occurs:
    - *May reflect differences in levels of comfort and desires for intimacy and engagement* (Prager, 1995)
    - *Typical style of dealing with stress, with one person routinely confronting and addressing difficulties directly, and the other withdrawing and distancing himself or herself from the stressor* (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)
    - *Alternatively, this pattern can reflect a difference in the two partners' desires to change a given situation, or a power differential*
      - *The less powerful person needs to approach the more powerful individual one to effect change; reflects a difference in the two individuals' comfort in expressing, or ability to express, themselves verbally* (Baucom & Epstein, 1990)

Therapeutic Approaches

- **For demand-withdrawal** (Baucom et al., 2010; Epstein & Baucom, 2003)
  - Guidelines for couple interactions that include alternatives
    - *Mutual discussion and problem-solving*
    - *The person who typically demands shouldn't overwhelm their partner*
    - *The withdrawing partner should be encouraged to respond*
  - Dealing with cognitions and emotions with a focus on attachment insecurity
  - Enhancing emotional awareness and expression for the withdrawing partner through:
    - *A safe environment for the expression of emotions*
    - *Empathic listening (coaching the partner to be an empathic listener)*
    - *Have client describe emotions in detail (therapist can hint at emotional content not previously expressed)*

Therapeutic Approaches

- **Across therapeutic approaches, clients are encouraged to take responsibility and action** (e.g., Epstein & Baucom, 2003; Halford, 2011)
  - Couples need to take responsibility for their communication patterns
  - An approach to this is for couples to engage in self-evaluation and to develop a communication self change plan
  - See Halford (2011) resources

