

Applying The Relationship Grid™ in Couples' Therapy

By: Clare Mézes, MSc, RP, RMFT, RST, RLT

Cheryl Richardson, author, writes, “If you are tired of the same old dance, get ready to learn a few new steps--real steps--the ones that will make a difference in your life and the lives of those you love.”

Effective tools and skills to help couples achieve healthy and intimate relationships, using Relational Life Therapy™, are described in *The New Rules of Marriage: What You Need to Make Love Work*, (Terry Real, 2007). Relational Life Therapy is an approach to couples' therapy that includes

taking sides, focusing on grandiosity and shame, finding leverage so that clients listen to information about how they impact one another, naming the difficult truth in clients' lives, and judiciously sharing some of our own truth as therapists as a way of being a real person.

Real developed a diagnostic tool, called The Relationship Grid™ (Grid) (Diagram 1).

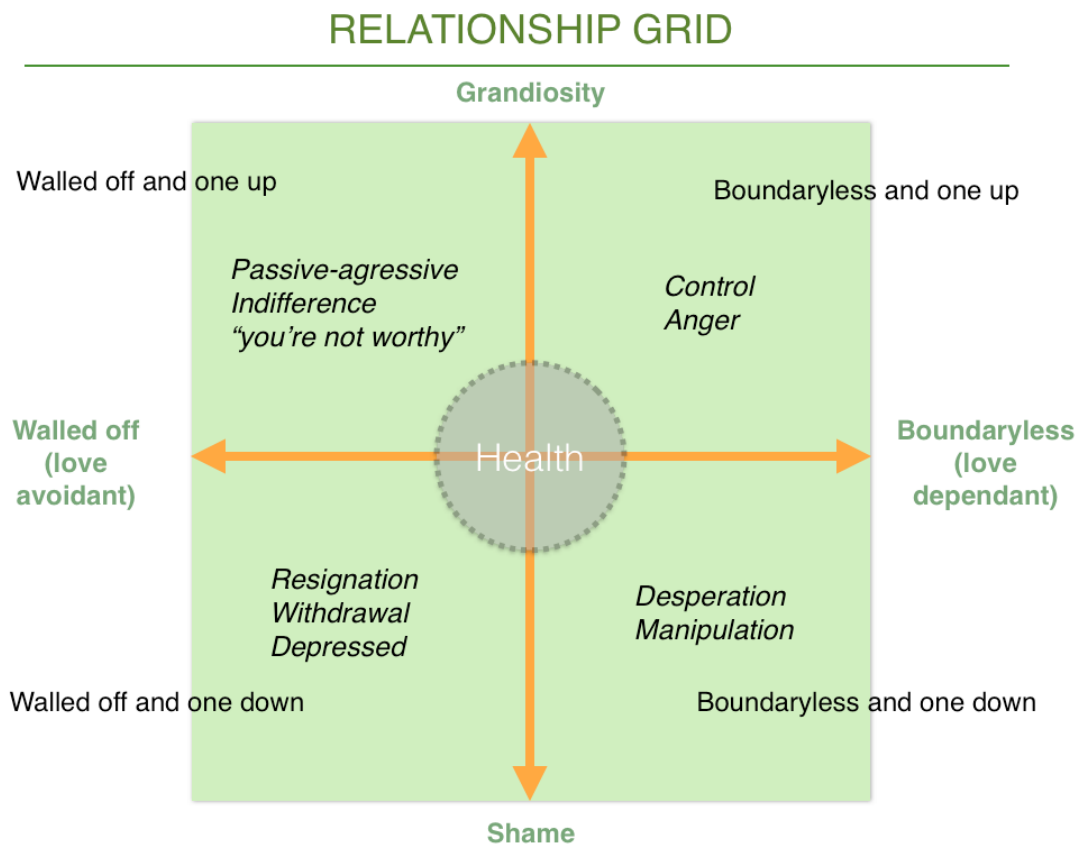


Diagram 1: The Relationship Grid™ (Terry Real).

The Grid is most helpful when assessing a couple's dynamic at the worst of times. It gets to the root of the each partner's worst behaviours, and helps pinpoint what changes need to be made to shift to a healthy, more moderate relationship. It is a visual tool, describing how the couple interacts with one another, and how their dynamics work for and against them. The Grid is prescriptive in showing the couple how to make changes in their interactions, in order to connect in a more meaningful way.

The Grid is basically a cross, divided into four quadrants. Boundaries are the horizontal axis, self-esteem is the vertical axis, and health is in the middle. A person can be boundaryless or walled off, one up (grandiose) or one down (shame-filled). When put together, the four quadrants are: one up and boundaryless, one down and boundaryless, one up and walled off, and one down and walled off. If a person is on the boundaryless side, then the person is a love addict or love dependant. If a person is primarily behind walls, then the person is love avoidant.

Here are some questions a therapist might ask when assessing whether someone is love dependant or love avoidant:

“Is he/she one-up, one-down, or centered?”
“Does he/she feel deflated and shame-filled, or inflated and grandiose?”

“How is his/her containing boundary?”
“Is he/she uncontained, letting too much out, or walled off, letting nothing out?”

“How is his/her protective boundary?”
“Is he/she too porous, or not open enough?”

The attached Grid uses adjectives in each of the four quadrants to describe behaviours used at the worst of times. In couples' therapy, partners can learn to place themselves, and each other, in the appropriate position. They will then see what they need to do to come to the centre and be more moderate in relationship to one another.

As an example, if one partner is in a shame state, he/she must bring themselves up into health. If the other partner is being grandiose, he/she must breathe themselves down into health. If one partner is boundaryless, he/she needs to pause, and reset their boundary. If the other partner is walled off, he/she needs to pause and get back into engagement. These skills are not difficult, but require practice.

When each partner is in a place closer to health, then it becomes easier to understand family of origin dynamics, resolve conflicts, grieve past issues, enhance sexual connection, become more emotionally intimate and learn effective communication skills.

Clare Mézes has a private practice in North York, Toronto and Thornhill, ON. She is a Registered Psychotherapist, Registered Marriage and Family Therapist, a Clinical Fellow with OAMFT/AAMFT, a Registered Sex Therapist and Certified Relational Life Therapist. She has an uncanny ability to get to the heart of issues giving individuals and couples the tools they need to optimize the full potential of their relationships.

clare.mezes@relationshipsforlife.ca
www.relationshipsforlife.ca

416-512-6989