

CHAPTER 13

A Case of Couples Therapy: A Control-Based Approach

THE GOAL of our control-based approach to couples therapy is two-fold: to help each individual gain a healthy sense of control; and to examine thematic control issues in the dyadic relationship—power and decision making; conflict management; change versus acceptance of the partner (the modes of control and their interaction)—to ensure that these control issues are being handled in as healthy a way as possible.

Couples generally fight about specific content areas: childrearing, housework, money, social activities, communication patterns, and sex. The thematic area of control provides a context for issues, and is a central matrix in these content areas of concern. Our approach helps couples address specific content control issues within an area as well as recognize how the thematic context of control can be understood across areas.

The following case provides an example of how we work with couples to meet these two goals. The chapter is divided into three sections: the presenting problem, control profiles, the story, and dynamics; control-based individual therapeutic interventions; and control-based couples interventions.

David and Ginger, both in their early 50s, had been married for 23 years. They requested therapy because of constant bickering that was causing a major deterioration in their marriage. They were seen together for 17 sessions over a 5-month period, and each was seen separately for 4 sessions.

PRESENTING PROBLEM, CONTROL PROFILES, STORIES, AND DYNAMICS

David was an engineer with a senior managerial position at a large aerospace company; Ginger was a housewife who had taken primary responsibility for raising their three children, now aged 17 to 21. Both acknowledged

that he was the leader in the relationship; he was the major decision maker in sexual, financial, and other dimensions. Ginger had graduated from college and worked as a nurse for 2 years while David finished his graduate work. Then she had devoted the past 21 years to childrearing, while David had continued to rise successfully in his profession.

PRESENTING PROBLEM

When asked why they came to therapy, David sat silent, glowering. Ginger sat silent, looking at her folded hands. Finally, Ginger began by saying she was feeling sluggish and often sad, and thought it was probably precipitated by her last son's preparing to leave for college: "I guess the classic empty nest syndrome." David responded: "All she does is mope around the house now. It was her idea to come. I'm not even sure why I'm here."

THERAPIST: Ginger, is there anything else?

GINGER: David is always angry. Now he's angry at my tiredness.

DAVID: Look, I may have a bit of a temper. But she does nothing but watch soaps all day. I work 60 to 70 hours a week, and I'm the one who should be tired. I'm under a lot of stress now with downsizing; the pressure is on at the company to do more with less. I'm losing some of my best people, and I'm having to run faster than ever just to ensure that my job is safe. She gives me no comfort. She should be happy to see me when I get home. We've always had a traditional marriage. I've been the breadwinner, and she's had dinner ready. Some people may think that's outdated, but so be it; it's worked for us. Now I come home to her just lying around. That laziness has got to stop.

GINGER: (*Beginning to be tearful*)

DAVID: See, just like that. I ask for comfort, and she cries. (*He hands her a handkerchief*)

GINGER: (*Wiping the tears*) Of course I'm crying. I say I'm feeling sad and you start getting angry again. You say you want comfort, but you give none. All you do is whine and complain about how I'm not doing enough. And then every time I try to do something, you put me down and criticize me as incompetent, or tell me it's taking away from you and the family.

CONTROL PROFILES

Both clients had an overall sense of control score that was quite low and in the at-risk area. But from there, their control profiles were both gender-

typed and the actual opposite of each other. David had high Quadrant 1, positive assertive, and high Quadrant 3, overcontrol, scale scores, but was very low on Quadrant 2, positive yielding, and moderately low on Quadrant 4, negative yielding. Ginger, on the other hand, had quite low assertive scores (Quadrants 1 and 3) and was very high on both positive yielding (Quadrant 2) and too-little control (Quadrant 4). David's desire for control was in the at-risk area as too high; Ginger's in the at-risk area as too low. He gained a sense of control primarily from self as agent and his other-as-agent score was in the at-risk area; she gained a sense of control primarily from others, and her self-as-agent score was in the at-risk area.

CONTROL STORY AND DYNAMICS: DAVID

David said his family was a high-achieving family in which both parents worked and neither showed much emotion or affection, although they gave him every educational opportunity. He felt his mom wasn't around enough and knew he wanted to marry someone who would be more available for his children.

He showed many of the behavioral signs of the classic Type A personality, including forced, rapid speech, interrupting, and visible facial tension. He admitted that he had a high need for achievement and a strong need to control the world in an active, assertive manner. "My job is to tell others what to do. I don't want anyone telling me what to do." This often led him to feeling aggressive (Quadrant 3) or sometimes to fall into a dark hole funk (Quadrant 4). "I live in a professional world where I am responsible for always making sure things are in control: Everything has to be in order. So I don't like it when I can't control things, or when there is chaos at home. I hate ambiguity. And I don't want to feel like anyone or anything is dominating me. I'm a perfectionist—I'll admit it and I'm proud of it. I guess I feel that if I'm perfect, I'll be happy. But in my line of work, you'd better be perfect. Peoples' lives are at stake."

David swam and ran for exercise. "If I lose discipline, if I give in to certain things, I feel like I'm not good. I have to have some sort of discipline. It's been my life." He also noted that he liked the order and power of the police and would like to spend time going on sheriff's patrol as a volunteer to help clean up society. He owned a gun for protection.

CONTROL STORY AND DYNAMICS: GINGER

Assertiveness in her family was always a win/lose situation. If her father fought back against the domineering mother, fights escalated until both

were exhausted. Her older sister, who did talk back, was constantly being punished. "She'd always get more attention at dinner because she had more problems. I wouldn't feel included, but I didn't really want the negative attention, either. Crying, my way of handling fights, was seen as self-pity, being a baby. I was careful and pleasing, I never felt safe with my family and didn't express myself or ask for anything. I cried a lot, had nightmares, wet the bed frequently."

Her mom was very beautiful—bustly, curvaceous—and also very controlling: "I always worried about my own femininity—no one could compete with her. I respected dad for not responding to mom's outbursts. We let mom be the uncontested power. Mom always was trying to control me: 'Do you need that desert?' 'You shouldn't chew gum in public.' I was sick often as a child, and I became a people pleaser to try to win affection, to fill a void. In my family, if you didn't play by the rules, there was a battle. Mom made the rules, you followed them. You always had to agree with mom. If you didn't, the consequence was her rage. The messages were 'don't be self-centered,' 'don't have an opinion,' 'don't be an individual,' 'don't put forth your needs,' 'don't disagree.' Family loyalty and cohesiveness is everything. My father was distant. It was almost like men were foreigners. I wanted to hug him, but didn't. I feared the awkward silences with him. I never told him my problems. Why should I tell him my concerns and hurt him? I also feared that he would reject me if I did."

Ginger noted that she feared setting limits on others first because she didn't feel she had a right to do so, and second, because she didn't trust herself or her opinions enough to believe they might be correct or of value.

SELF-OBSERVATION

During the first few weeks, David observed what angered or stressed him in general (Quadrant 3); Ginger monitored when she felt passive and sad in general (Quadrant 4). Both monitored when bickering occurred between them (a clash of negative control styles), as well as situations and times when they felt the relationship was in control and felt harmonious.

David's Observations

David learned from his personal self-observation that his anger and stress were often related to antecedent conditions that he couldn't control, such as hassles like losing his pen or being forced to wait on the phone.

Many of his feelings of being angry and out of control were directly related to Ginger: her passivity, unassertiveness, and lack of initiative, such as forgetting to call the plumbers to fix a leak, not planning some meals, not feeding him well enough or looking out for his needs, not organizing an ac-

tivity for them on the weekend, and not keeping the house totally clean. "She's like living with a limp, wet noodle. She withdraws into herself, her soaps, or the children and almost disappears. She also is way too emotional, always complaining. She should learn to control herself more, have more discipline. Her crying is out of control."

David recognized that he hated disorganization, clutter, and unexpected events, all of which made him feel out of control. For example, Ginger scheduled workmen in the house during his afternoon off without telling him; or one weekend afternoon she fell asleep in the den. When he entered the den and saw her, he was angry at her both for her laziness and for causing him to be surprised by her presence in the den when he wasn't expecting it.

Finally, he felt out of control when Ginger acted assertively or seemed to have more power than he did. For example, several times she had asked him to do things: help with the dishes, pick up something at the market, pick up his shoes and paper from the living room. "I don't like it when she tells me to do anything. It makes me feel like an adolescent being scolded by my mom." Once during the early weeks, he became ill with the flu, and Ginger took care of him. He noted that when he is feeling sick, he becomes passive. When he feels better, he feels anger at his passivity and weakness, and also at her: "I want her to take care of me, and yet I get angry that she has too much power over me, especially when I'm vulnerable."

Finally, self-observation taught David that one of the potentially most stressful and out-of-control times for him was around meals. Because of his prior issues around weight (he had been 40 pounds overweight), he was always somewhat concerned he would lose control at meals. Therefore, he realized he unconsciously started to become tense as meal-time approached, wondering if he could maintain control. That tension created strong reactions at the least provocation: a napkin not in the right place, food not served exactly on time, his wife's noisy chewing.

Ginger's Observations

Ginger recognized that her sadness and feelings of passivity were related to when she felt that she was incompetent and couldn't exert any effective control in her life. "I saw lots of examples when I'd think of doing something, then feel unsure of myself, and do nothing. I used to be a gourmet cook. I'd see a recipe in the paper, and think about preparing an elegant meal for David, then I'd hear him complaining about some part of the meal, or telling me I'm incompetent, so I'd do nothing. Sometimes I just sat around and watched soaps all day. Part of me feels like I don't have the energy to do more. Another part of me feels like it won't be effective. He'll just get upset."

Ginger cited several examples when she did take initiative, as David said he wanted, and he still became upset. These occurred in small areas, like rearranging a flower vase—he didn't like where she had placed it—to setting up plans with another couple—he got angry because he didn't like the time, the place, or the other couple. "Once he was telling me how hard things have become at work, and I put my arm around him, and he just flinched and pushed my arm away. He told me he doesn't like being touched unless he initiates it. It's like he has to be in complete control, to have everything his own way. Unless I give in, everything becomes a power struggle. He can decide to spend \$200 on a dinner out, but gets angry at me if I spend \$50 on shoes for our daughter or make a half-hour phone call to our sons at college."

GOAL SETTING

Both acknowledged that the current situation was a no-win one. Both were feeling out of control, not getting their needs for affection met. Either they tried to reestablish control through active means—Quadrants 1 and 3—or sank into a dark funk (David) or became a wet noodle (Ginger). There was no concept of Quadrant 2, positive yielding, and rarely were gentleness, receptivity, or caring expressed in the relationship.

Each established personal goals. Ginger wanted to be more assertive: reestablish interests of her own, be less people pleasing, become more active in the community, put forth her own point of view, be less fearful. David acknowledged that he needed to learn better control of his stress and anger.

In terms of goals as a couple, both agreed that they would like to see fewer control battles and power struggles and more soft time where they felt affectionate and safe with each other. Ginger said she wanted David's support for her efforts to take more active control in her life, not hearing that she was incompetent and wouldn't succeed. She also wanted better communication: "not his giving me orders, but talking to me, listening to me." She also wanted to be more involved in decisions, to feel more participatory regarding financial, sexual, and other choices in their life. David said he'd like Ginger to be more affectionate, especially in regard to his sexual initiatives.

MOTIVATION TO CHANGE AND SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

Both acknowledged that they had a high motivation to change. David commented, "I'm unwilling to continue to live with the amount of stress and

anger I've had these past years," and "I know I'll have a heart attack or quit my work unless I can overcome this stress. I also know that our relationship cannot continue like it is. I'm willing to work on changing me."

However, David felt there might be negative consequences if he succeeded in changing himself: He might not continue to be as wealthy or as prominent as he currently was professionally, and he might lose too much power in the home. If Ginger developed independent interests, he saw the danger of his feeling threatened and abandoned, too negative yielding passive and helpless (Quadrant 4). That would cause him to seek to reexert and reestablish his active control, and he could be angry and harsh in more areas than ever (Quadrant 3, overcontrol).

Ginger noted that she too was motivated to change: "Things simply can't go on as they are. We are both miserable individually, and as a couple." But she also had concerns about her ability to change. She recognized that historically she had controlled the world and gotten what she wanted "through people pleasing and submission . . . I've always waited" for other people to take the initiative. I fear that if I stand up and am assertive, I'll be abandoned. Look at the problems in my family. Look at what is happening to us now."

INDIVIDUAL CONTROL-BASED THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

Based on information from the Shapiro Control Inventory (SCI), from the initial sessions, and from the self-observation data, a therapeutic intervention plan was formulated that consisted of three interrelated parts. Two were individual tasks. As noted, David and Ginger were each seen four times individually. One session was for control history; the rest to develop and tailor an intervention for each to address. David was going to work on stress and anger management in general, reducing his Quadrant 3, overcontrolling, behavior, affect, and cognitions and increasing his Quadrant 2, more relaxed, trusting, and accepting, side. Ginger planned to decrease her Quadrant 4 behavior, affect, and cognitions, and to increase her Quadrant 1, assertive, mastery, side. In this section we discuss those individual interventions. The third part involved areas for them to jointly address where there were problematic control-related interactions.

DAVID'S INTERVENTIONS FOR STRESS AND ANGER MANAGEMENT

David's individual intervention focused on stress and anger management. He had recognized that in his quest for perfection, order, and control, he

was ending up increasingly isolated in his life. He realized that he was always finding fault, not just with Ginger, but with everyone in his life.

Recognizing Modes

His goal was to reduce his Quadrant 3, what he called his Atilla the Hun behavior; and also to help address the dark funk (Quadrant 4) he often fell into when stressed. The positive assertive mode image he liked was the creative times as an engineer, talking with colleagues, working on the draft board or computer, and designing and evolving new products. There was stress, but there was more excitement. The positive yielding image was a hard one for him to create, but eventually he chose part of the golf swing. "The pause at the top of the swing, and then the downward arc: When you just let go and let the club take over and trust your body. You don't have to do anything. You just have to let go and let the swing happen. If you try to do it, it all falls apart."

Stress/Anger Management

We practiced both diaphragmatic breathing and the body/mind scan. David saw how often he had judging, critical, and resentful thoughts. He recognized that when he was angry, it was often because someone had failed to fill the function he had directly or implicitly assigned him or her. Our task was to work on helping him learn to better control his thoughts and impulses by seeing that stress and anger feelings were cues that something was out of control. But, rather than focus on the external event initially and try to solve it, he would focus on himself and his out-of-control feelings. He learned to become suspicious of and not to react reflexively to feelings of being out of control, to recognize that sometimes his feelings were out of proportion to an event—telling him there was danger, when there was really no danger.

He saw that the way he maintained control was primarily through control over the external, rather than the internal. Therefore, he worked on recognizing his high judgmentalness of others and the resultant anger and stress he felt when others didn't meet his expectations. Then, rather than try to get them to change their inadequacies, he tried to turn inward and recenter himself. He saw that when he had calmed himself down, he could still deal with an external event and person, but with greater clarity and equanimity. He also sought to use disorder as a cue to work on his inner stress control rather than external environmental management.

David's intervention included using the antecedent stressors (daily hassles and the beeper) as cues for relaxation: deep, slow, abdominal breathing, both to manage stress and to cool off before speaking and flying into a rage. He added cognitions that he wasn't going to let events control him and get the best of him; that he had the ability to head off a situation internally be-

fore it got out of hand; that people do things that annoy us, but not *to* annoy us. He practiced control mode rehearsal: imagery self-modeling of anger-arousing situations, and seeing himself practicing breathing and relaxing before saying anything.

Assertive and Accepting Strategies

The second part of the intervention involved teaching him a variety of assertive strategies (rather than Quadrant 3 aggressive strategies—blowing up, flying off the handle; or Quadrant 4 withdrawing strategies—walking away and ending up in a dark funk—which were his normal style). This included learning to set boundaries and to state strongly and firmly his concerns.

The third aspect of the intervention involved teaching him self- and other acceptance. This included having him practice formal meditation, as well as daily cognitions. As in the case in Chapter 12 with Stephanie, in the early sessions, there was considerable resistance to self-acceptance, because David felt that he could only be loved for what he did. He agreed he could say the following cognition: "I want to try to love and accept myself just as I am." After several weeks of practice, this evolved to "I can love and accept myself just as I am," and finally, he felt increasingly able to say—and believe—"I love and accept myself just as I am." There was some emphasis on learning to shift aggression into appropriate assertiveness; however, most of the emphasis was on how to relax, let go control, and accept and enjoy more of the process of life.

A Dream

By his own admission, David was an action-oriented doer type of person, who had little inner life and never dreamed. However, in one session he related the following dream: "A large powerful man was picking up gum wrappers. He turned to me and says, 'You should be picking up these gum wrappers because you dropped them. I'm not going to pick them up for you anymore.' I picked them up. Then I went to the shooting range, but realized I'd lost my gun. I start to look through my financial portfolio and find that in a hotel I thought I owned I only have 40% ownership. I started to get dressed, but couldn't find the right clothes to wear. Nothing was in its right place."

As he related the dream, he laughed, saying "It doesn't seem too hard to interpret, even for a novice! My desire for control in business, my fear of disorder—things not in their right place." The powerful guy brought up fear for him: "He's trying to control me, and accuses me of dropping the gum wrappers (being wrong, creating disorder, putting things in chaos). I, as usual, always try to be the solution. I pick them up myself to try to regain

control. I guess I do have quite a bit of fear of losing control, and that's why I try to keep things in such tight control and discipline."

We discussed how from one perspective, losing his gun can be seen as a symbol of losing his power (Freudian phallicness): "I guess I fear if I become too nice, I'll lose too much money. Even the way I control others is through fear."

We discussed how there are many different approaches to dream interpretation. Certainly David's view made sense. Another way to understand dreams is that we are the creators of the dream, and therefore the dream can represent different sides of ourself. There is the part that feels passive and ordered around, the part that can be overcontrolling and intimidating. The part that picks up the gum wrappers is learning to yield, not always to have to be in control. He may be dealing in the dream with learning to recognize, trust, and work with the different parts of himself: how to be in control, but in an interconnected way, as a team rather than in a win/lose situation.

GINGER'S INTERVENTIONS: ASSERTIVE, MASTERY EXPERIENCES

Ginger's individual control-related intervention focused on helping her become more assertive and develop increased feelings of mastery.

Recognizing What She Wanted

One of the first tasks for Ginger was to help her recognize her desire for control. She realized she was so used to deferring to others that it was hard for her to know what she wanted or believed in. We worked on an exercise we called "not giving my eyes away." By this she was to not look outward to see what others expected or wanted of her, or to find the answer, but to look at her own vision to see what her preferences, beliefs, and views were. We began with small things: listing five preferences (e.g., types of ice cream, colors of dresses, favorite foods). At first she even found this difficult to do. We then moved on to other desires she had—with her children, activities she wanted to pursue, causes she cared about.

Increasing Activities

Part of her intervention was to find areas where she wanted to express herself, an opportunity for increasing her contacts with others and removing her from her isolated daily life. On the one hand, she did get involved in more activities, volunteer groups—especially the local museum, a bridge group, a gourmet cooking club, and a singing quartet. Initially, this was hard for her because she felt that going out and seeing others only showed

her how competent everyone else was, how miserable and alone she was, and how hard risk taking was for her.

Ginger's Modes of Control

Ginger saw that when confronted with newness, risk taking, anger, or stress, she either collapsed into the limp wet noodle (her Quadrant 4 image and most frequent response) or became a totem pole, which symbolized that part of her which froze up and became rigid, stubborn, and inflexible (Quadrant 3, self-image).

Her Quadrant 1 image was relatively easy for her to develop. She used to sing a lot, and still did in the shower or when alone. She had a more than adequate voice, and the image of her singing alone or with others was one that gave her a feeling of mastery and competence. Her Quadrant 2 positive yielding image was blood flowing through the human body. When asked how she developed that image, she said from her nursing student days. She was in awe at how miraculous the human body was, the way blood would course through and bring life to all parts of the body without any effort on our part. She said she wanted that blood to flow into the lifeless totem pole to give it grace and fluidity. She also saw the blood flowing as a healthy counterpoint to the inert, still, limp noodle.

Quadrant 1, Positive Assertiveness

Once Ginger was able to recognize what she wanted, we worked on her calmly stating her preferences. In our individual session, we used guided imagery and self-modeling techniques to have her image herself in different situations, acting in a calm, assertive fashion, speaking up for her rights.

She said it would be easiest to practice the assertive imagery technique with her daughter, and most difficult with her husband and mother. Within a week, she not only was able to image herself acting assertively, but had actually put the assertiveness training into effect with her daughter at home—asking her calmly but forcefully to please pick up her clothes from the living room and to help with the dishes. It worked both times. She reported that she was fearful (her abandonment theme), but also felt a sense of competence.

She wrote down on note cards several cognitions and practiced saying them throughout the day, particularly if she started to feel passive, helpless, victimized:

- Nobody can take advantage of me without my permission.
- It's okay to sometimes put my needs first. That gives me nurturance and makes me even more nurturing for others.
- It's okay for me to have preferences, set limits, and say no.

- I can be loved and accepted without being a people pleaser.
- I can be loved even if I disagree with others.

CONTROL-BASED RELATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

This section examines control issues specific to Ginger and David's relationship: the modes of control from a dyadic perspective, the importance of the two positive modes of control in conflict management and communication, and control issues in sex and affection.

THE MODES OF CONTROL FROM A DYADIC PERSPECTIVE

Ginger and David recognized, based on their control histories, that it was in part their different mode styles that had attracted them to each other. David was the heroic rescuer, the fixer of problems—positive assertive, Quadrant 1. Ginger had admired and respected his take-charge style. David had basked in her affection, feeling competent and being allowed to lead.

Through their individual self-change projects, Ginger and David had seen how the different modes created different perspectives, sometimes seemingly at war with each other. We examined how these inner modes interacted not only intrapersonally but interpersonally in their dyadic relationship, creating some of the friction in their control dynamics.

For example, in many ways David's Quadrant 1, take-charge style was now causing problems for both Ginger and him. Quadrant 1 had sometimes evolved into overcontrol: a possessiveness, demanding that Ginger exist for him alone; a lack of reciprocity in communication patterns—he would interrupt, change the subject, and direct the conversation; and even a micro-managing of Ginger's life, trying to fix and control everything. He recognized how ubiquitous his Atilla the Hun had become and how Ginger's desire for more assertiveness was extremely threatening to that side of him. It challenged Atilla's basis of masculinity and phallicness to the very core. The more assertive she wanted to become, the more threatened and controlling he became to hang onto her.

He also learned to recognize why he was so angry and threatened by Ginger's passive side. In some ways, it was his fear of, and attempts to deny, his own negative passive side (the dark funk) that kept him acting in a Quadrant 3, overcontrolling, manner. He acknowledged that "I never want to let anyone see me as passive, dependent, without an answer to a problem. That's my job—professionally, and in our relationship." He was forced to recognize his great fear of dependency and being vulnerable, which he tried to hide behind anger and bravado. Therefore, although part

of him wants to be nurtured and taken care of, when he is, he fears he's too passive and losing his heroic masculine phallicness.

Ginger saw how she also had a complex relationship with David's assertive side. She admired his ability to solve problems and fix things, yet she realized that her passive side allowed her to avoid responsibility: "Oh, David will figure out what to do." By not putting forth her own desires, she didn't need to be accountable if there were problems. On the other hand, she often felt empty, without a core self, infantilized by David's positive assertive, take-charge style, and frightened by his powerful Atilla side, setting up a fear and anger dynamic. Often she found herself becoming most animated not in choosing something proactively, but in reacting to David, to show she was not passive.

Both saw that they would have to give up old control stories and beliefs to shift their mode interaction patterns. David would have to recognize that Ginger's new attempts at assertiveness and initiative were not an attempt to challenge his masculinity, but to help fill the emptiness and address the vulnerability she was feeling. Ginger, for her part, would need to take more responsibility for her choices and preferences, not giving David the double message "It's your job to fix it, *and* don't be so controlling."

The therapist said, "Each of you can push the other's buttons—it's like pushing an elevator button—causing an almost reflexive response. David can easily push Ginger's buttons by calling her passive or rigid. Ginger can push David's by telling him how overcontrolling he is. Once you recognize how these dynamics interact, you can see button pushing times as opportunities to learn about yourself. Ginger can say: 'Ah, there we go again, my passive side is becoming fearful,' or David can note, 'I feel my anger coming on. What is it in me that is reacting to how she is acting?' The internal state can become a cue to pause, practice diaphragmatic breathing, calm ourselves, and look more clearly at how we might want to act, to shift our behavior patterns."

THE TWO POSITIVE MODES OF CONTROL IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

David and Ginger practiced meditation and visual imagery techniques to learn to stay calm during problematic arguments, be relatively nondefensive to hear what the other person is saying (Quadrant 2, positive yielding), and speak in a way that states concerns in a clear, direct way (positive assertive, Quadrant 1) without demandingness and a hostile attack (Quadrant 3).

To help them maintain a sense of control during conflict, and to maximize harmony and a positive outcome, they were taught to blend positive assertive and yielding (Quadrants 1 and 2) skills and show how those two skills are critical for healthy communication. A therapist paraphrase of the two positive modes follow:

Quadrant 1, positive yielding: Each of you is trying to get your partner to change (Quadrant 1, positive assertive) to meet your needs. That is both fair and appropriate. Both of your goals are reasonable. What you can learn is that how you address any area (e.g., sexuality) can be applied to many other areas in your life when conflict arises, and you each have different perspectives.

Try to present your issue and concern in as nonthreatening a way as possible in order to end the power struggle aspect, and to put the conversation on a more focused content level.

Try to create a loving context. Recognize that change is never easy, either in oneself or one's spouse. Change is facilitated by feeling a context of trust in the basic foundation of the marriage.

Refrain from global statements and generalizations, such as David's "You're a passive limp wet noodle" or Ginger's "You're as angry and overcontrolling as my mother."

Refrain from overgeneralizations: "You are always trying to tell me what to do" and "You never think about my feelings."

Don't ask for global and trait change; rather, request change in a specific area: "I'd like it if you would listen to me when I am speaking to you."

Use the sandwich technique to maximize chances of success in sharing a concern you hope your partner might address. An adapted form of Homme's (1965) sandwich techniques (criticism in middle, surrounded by compliments) is as follows:

- Compliment (what you appreciate and admire)
- Your feelings (what's bothering you)
- What you need or want the other person to do (how you would like what's bothering you solved)
- Compliment.

Remember: The goal is neither to prove your partner wrong, nor to make yourself right. The goal is to communicate your desire in a way that maximizes your chances for getting what you want.

Quadrant 2, positive yielding. Try during the conflict to keep a loving, accepting context (Quadrant 2), and share positive feelings with your partner. Research shows nondistressed couples make positive statements in verbal conflict, whereas distressed ones don't.

Try hearing what your partner is saying to you without becoming defensive, interrupting, immediately challenging, or taking an adversarial view. Paraphrase it back so that your partner knows that he or she has understood. Intimacy and emotional sensitivity means giving up power and control enough to allow the other person a chance to share and also be open and receptive to listening and hearing (both Quadrant 2 skills).

Practice yielding to the wishes of the other as an exercise in self-discipline. Occasionally give in; let someone else win. This may feel unnatural, but all change and new skills initially feel unnatural—as when a child shifts from crawling to walking. So, too, with positive yielding.

We can ask for what we want, but need to remember that we can't really control the outcome. We need to accept no as well as yes. We can't make another person change. In some cases, we need to learn the lesson of acceptance—it may be that the only thing we can change about someone else is *our* attitude toward them, how we react. Sometimes our task is to replace resentment with love and forgiveness; to try to appreciate the other person for who

he or she is instead of who we think we can turn him or her into. This does not mean approving or pretending something never happened. But it does mean, when appropriate, forgiving and moving on. Sometimes you will find it is less important to have your way than to accommodate your partner. Within limits, we can each learn to lovingly accept aspects of the partner that we cannot control, as well as aspects of ourself.

Practice appreciating your loved one just as he or she is. Profound psychological healing can occur when two people join in mutual acceptance, learn to let go of attachments to changing the other, and accept the partner as he or she is.

SEX AND AFFECTION: ADDRESSING THEMATIC CONTROL ISSUES

The general principles of the modes of control, power, and conflict were applied to David and Ginger specifically in the areas of sex and affection. Sexuality had become an area where they were power struggling, and was fraught with control-related issues.

DAVID: I feel Ginger's withholding sex like a weapon to prove there is an area over which she has absolute control. To listen to her, you'd think she was totally submissive to a domineering husband who is constantly seeking intercourse. Actually I may be always asking because I so seldom receive. I'd say that she definitely wears the pants in the family regarding sexuality.

GINGER: I used to find it easy to have orgasm during intercourse. I just gave over control and enjoyed it. I really like the tactile. But now it feels like he is using sex as just another way to show he is in control and the boss. He has to say the time, the place, the position.

THERAPIST: So both of you feel that the other is using sexuality as a way to exert control? (*Both nod*) And that the other person has more power and control in this area? (*again nods*) Okay, in the best of all possible worlds, what would you like? How would you like to see lovemaking occur? Who should decide?

Ginger wanted more verbal sharing. She experienced David as a distant, intellectual person who doesn't like warm soft fuzzies. Seeking affection from him felt to Ginger like wrestling with her father. David wanted more nonverbal sexual intimacy, not just soft cuddles; "That feels like hugging my sister."

DAVID: I want her to take more initiative, not to be so passive.

GINGER: He says that, but sometimes when I initiate contact, or give him a soft touch, he glowers at me and withdraws. You may say you like me to take initiative, but you never act like it when I do.

THERAPIST: David, when Ginger touches you, or initiates contact, do you think she is doing so maliciously?

DAVID: No, she's trying to be nice and reach out, but it's true, if it's unexpected, I don't like it.

THERAPIST: So it sounds like you have some ambivalence. On the one hand, you say you want her to be less passive; on the other hand, you feel uncomfortable when you are not in control and taking the initiative.

DAVID: I admit I don't like it when she initiates contact. I don't know why that is, but I've always been like that. But now, if I initiate, she's not at all receptive. It's almost as if she is afraid to show any tenderness as a sign of weakness—the very thing she had been accusing me of.

GINGER: It feels so passive and vulnerable to just wait until he takes the initiative: where to have it, what position. He controls it all, and I feel out of control. When he hugs me, it sometimes feels like I'm not being hugged but being smothered.

THERAPIST: So you, Ginger, may be withholding from David because it feels so vulnerable to have everything dictated by him.

GINGER: Of course. I often feel trapped by him regarding having sex. Like he wants to have it on demand. I want to be able to say no and feel good about it. Sometimes, too, I feel used, like I've given up too much control when I just give in and am compliant, and that makes me angry at him and me.

THERAPIST: There can be a lot of feelings of vulnerability during sexuality and intimacy. We may be both literally and figuratively naked. David, Ginger's touch may be a way of showing caring, but it may access a side of you that feels like you are too vulnerable if you are not taking the initiative and in control. Ginger, it may be that now, when you're trying to be more assertive, it feels like you are falling back into old ways to just give in to David's initiative.

Both agreed that demanding and withdrawing were creating a standoff. We discussed the freedom reflex—how no one, man or woman, likes to be told what to do. When we are told, we often rebel and do the opposite. The task, then, was to find a way in which each could ask, in a positive assertive, Quadrant 1 way, for their needs, and the other could work on looking at his or her own freedom reflex and fear of loss of power at feeling told what to do. David acknowledged his high freedom reflex, which he was trying to work on. Ginger, too, recognized how she needed to be careful not to now become too overcontrolling, having too high a freedom reflex for fear of being taken advantage of. Her dynamic was "I've always been too passive,

but now I'm trying to be more assertive. Therefore, I'm much more on guard to see if others are taking advantage of me. Because I usually settle for so little, I need to make sure my needs are being met to protect myself and to keep from being pushed around. It's almost as if I fear that defenseless place so much, I have to act even tougher and more aggressive with him to show he won't be able to intimidate me. I'm afraid of falling back into old ways, and fear that by being accommodating, I'm really being passive and dependent."

We actually scripted and role-played different scenarios: first asking Ginger how David could approach her about making love in a way that wouldn't cause her to have a freedom reflex of feeling powerless and withdrawing. We asked David how Ginger could best approach him to comfort him, or approach him for her desire for cuddles. Ginger made subtle cues that she and David had agreed on (e.g., leaving a cookbook open on the dining room table), which let David know of her desire to take initiative, and helped him feel less caught off guard.

In the visualization and role-play sessions, if they began to get a tightening and freedom reflex, they were instructed just to notice the feelings of tension and breathe diaphragmatically, letting themselves observe yet relax.

We also worked on scenarios in which each had the permission to say no and the partner worked on receiving the no without feeling personally rejected. We discussed how we really can't ever control another person, and sometimes we have to accept the other person's no. Ginger realized that she would have to learn to negotiate with him, not see arguments as sparks in which she would withdraw or attack to keep from losing control and being taken advantage of.

David worked on feeling more relaxed and accepting when Ginger took the initiative, which he said he wanted. He also found that talking could provide him with some of the feelings of emotional intimacy he was seeking. And he worked on becoming more sensitive in his touch and caresses that weren't only intercourse directed.

Ginger felt closer to David from his verbal statements and caresses, and found herself more often desiring to make love.

They said they had even begun to practice some meditative breathing together. They would sit or lie next to each other, just listening to each other's breathing, sometimes in a rhythmic harmony; sometimes Ginger receiving and being filled by David's out breath, then filling him with her out breath, his in breath. During this meditative breathing, they also placed their hands on each other's hearts, feeling their heart beats, saying: "Breathing in: I am holding my precious friend, my beloved; breathing out: I share my love with my beloved."

SHIFT IN CONTROL PROFILES BY THE END OF THERAPY

Both desire-for-control scale scores moved into the normal range: His desire-for-control score decreased, and hers increased. For both, their positive assertive and yielding mode scale scores increased and their negative yielding, negative assertive overcontrol scale scores decreased.

Ginger's most dramatic changes were the decrease in negative yielding and increase in positive assertive, reflecting the primary focus of her interventions. She learned to be more assertive, to express her needs more clearly and directly, and developed areas of competence not dependent on anyone else. She shifted from blaming others and external circumstances for her problems to more self-responsibility. She learned that in putting forth her desire for control, she would have to deal with her own anxiety and David's potential anger. She also learned to hear the fear and sadness behind David's anger. "I can better set limits now, am more able to take risks without the paralyzing fear. I feel I can stand others not agreeing with me. I can stand up to my mom's and husband's anger, rather than trying to please, blame, or withdraw. I can yield with less fear of my passive side. I see yielding as life giving and nurturing blood flowing. I also feel that the rigid totem pole side of me is getting smaller."

She saw how her fear of having no identity and being a people pleaser often made her less, rather than more, affectionate and caretaking to David. "When one of my kids would cry, I'd of course go help. But when David wants something (which is really what his demands are—a cry in pain for something), I'd feel he was trying to control me like a baby to get attention and I'd not want to give him what he needed. As I feel more a sense of self, I feel more able to truly nurture him." She also took special care to assure David that her newly initiated activities were not meant to abandon him or withdraw from him, but to give herself a voice. She shared her fears of feeling abandoned and asked his support.

David's greatest mode increase was in positive yielding and the decrease in negative assertive. He realized he needed to learn trust to allow her the freedom to express herself, knowing her self-explorations were done within the context of a loving relationship, and that her competence in community, art, and fundraising did not diminish his competence and enhanced their union. He also learned that to share feelings of vulnerability and fear were not a sign of weakness, but of trust and relational openness. "Ginger is the leader in the relationship—roller skating ahead of me, taking care of me, stronger. I didn't want to see that. I wanted to believe I was always in control, and she was the dependent one who needed me. My belief that I should always know what to do in every situation is misplaced and was hurting both of us. It feels good that I have enough confidence to allow her to be a partner."

David saw that yielding voluntarily could come from inner strength, and that yielding through the Quadrant 2 golf swing was different from yielding unwillingly and grudgingly, out of exhaustion or fear—his dark funk. “For the first time I don’t expect or need to always have my own way. I find myself (to my great surprise) being so much more patient and accepting.” David began to listen more carefully, and to let go and trust Ginger’s independence, assuming, as in his golf swing, that such letting go would help, not hurt, him. He realized that his gruff, demanding Atilla side had kept his softer, more vulnerable side hidden. He learned to share with her his needs for attention and caring directly, with more vulnerability and softness.

RELATIONSHIP AS TEACHER OF CONTROL LESSONS

One of the most important lessons both said they felt they learned was that their relationship could be a teacher of control issues. They both saw that their complaints and criticisms tended to increase when one or the other personally felt out of control. Therefore, feeling out of control became a cue to learn about themselves and why they were bothered by an issue. They saw how their modes interacted, both problematically and harmoniously. They learned when they felt certain expectations were violated, and before lashing out or withdrawing, examined them: Were they critical for ego reasons, or for the good of the relationship?

From an egoic standpoint, each recognized that they wanted their own way. However, from a relational perspective, they saw how addressing power, conflict, and change issues was an opportunity for self-learning. Rather than only ask How can I get my way? they both practiced asking What can I learn from this about what my wants and needs are, where I am vulnerable? what my partners’ wants and needs are and where he or she is vulnerable? In this way, even power, conflict, and other control related issues in their relationship became opportunities for personal and relational learning and growth.

For example, when David felt passive and helpless as a result of Ginger’s actions, he could learn about his limits and fears of letting go of active control. When Ginger felt afraid of David’s strength, this was an opportunity for her to reexamine her own little-girl passive Quadrant 4 fears.

David realized that often when Ginger was sharing a concern with him, she was looking for a supportive response, to hear she was understood, to receive empathy. She didn’t want to be harshly or self-righteously judged. David learned that his immediate response of looking for a solution was often not the best initial response. After empathizing, paraphrasing, and letting her know she was understood, he could then ask, “Would it be worthwhile for us to discuss how we might work to solve this?”

In this way, Ginger was in control of choosing, if she wished, to move the issue to a problem-solving stage. Ginger had to recognize why she was sharing her concerns. Sometimes it was empathy, sometimes she wanted David's advice, because he was a good problem solver; and sometimes she felt if she accepted his advice, it would mean "I'm not competent to solve my own problem." She, therefore had to be clear on her own motivations.

If they felt an issue was critical to address in a positive assertive, change method, they found the guidelines of the Buddhist text *Vinaya Pitaka* helpful. These guidelines suggest that when someone is about to admonish another, he or she should realize five qualities. These qualities involve Quadrant 1, but are in a loving Quadrant 2 mode context and process:

In due season will I speak, not out of season. In truth will I speak, not in falsehood. Gently will I speak, not harshly. To the other person's profit will I speak, not to his loss. With kindly intent will I speak, not in anger.

If they didn't feel an issue was worth harboring or critical, David and Ginger let it go. In this way, they saw that receiving feedback from each other in a context of love is an invaluable gift. They both learned, gently and slowly, to give and receive criticism (seeking to create change in the other—Quadrant 1), but to do so within a context of love, caring, and acceptance, learning to see likes and dislikes within a context of unconditional love.

At difficult times, they were increasingly able to ask What is the lesson that we need to learn? At good times they were able to begin to see each other as a gift and blessing.

FOLLOW-UP

Six months later David called to come in for a booster anger/stress-management session, followed by a brief session with Ginger as well. Both acknowledged that they had seemed to rediscover a sense of fun with each other, and were beginning to enjoy the process of exploring new relational territory with each other.

They said they were still learning lessons. David noted that he was much more able and willing to meet her needs—to show her more small and consistent signs of affection, a quick call from work, a hug on the way out.

Ginger recognized that in conflict, when he closed off, she often panicked and became clingy, which made him withdraw more. She saw that she needed to learn to be strong enough to know that his withdrawal was his issue, not directed at her. As she became more independent and trusting of herself, she came to better accept him and allow him distance when he was in a bad mood. "I neither have to be his rescuer, blame myself, or condemn

him. "David is listening more, and often his advice is helpful. Rather than attacking him for trying to help me, I feel secure enough to thank and praise him for his strength and take-charge style."

They recognized that they were going into the second phase of their life, and the skills they had learned could help strengthen their relational foundation for the next phase. Both had learned to modify dysfunctional and automatic control beliefs and thoughts; there was better communication, more joint decision making, less useless bickering, and more acceptance of and better handling of conflict. Ginger noted that she had found her voice and was singing more, and David even admitted that his golf game had now improved slightly.