

# EFT-C

# Emotion-Focused Couples

# Therapy

50 Minutes  
conversation



## Rhonda Goldman

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Dr. Goldman's teaching activities include person-centered and experiential therapy, clinical interviewing, emotion-focused therapy, and therapy seminars. She is responsible for clinical, research and dissertation supervision. She has extensive experience as a workshop leader, teaching emotion-focused therapy.

**EFT - C**  
**Emotion-Focused**  
**Couples Therapy**

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## **Topics**

- 1. The challenges of EFT for couples**
- 2. How is EFT-C driven?**
- 3. What does EFT-C brings new to the field?**
- 4. How does EFT-C differentiates from Johnson's work?**
- 5. How difficult can be the training in EFT-C?**
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## Rhonda Goldman

December 2016

**Aníbal Henriques:** First of all thanks so much for having me and accepting this conversation. I'm very happy to be here with you having this opportunity for discussing one of the psychotherapy models that most inspire us in our clinical work and our training program. And I would like to start off declaring my admiration for yours and Les Greenberg effort on structuring such a difficult task helping couples in such a profound and transforming way as Emotion Focused Couples Therapy proposes and offers us. And also it can be so important for families stability, for families as providers of a safe base for healthy psychological developments. So it's so important. But in fact this is a very very challenging model once, you Rhonda on EFCT you have two people, not just one, feeling emotions and stimulating emotionally each other, and you have to look for underlying primary emotions, behind the secondary emotions that are showing up. And you have to have a radar for emotions and for cycles and for markers. This is somehow a daunting and gigantic task.

**Rhonda Goldman:** Hmm hmm.

AH: But very very welcome, because it's so important. So you have to be very active, you have to be very skilled to perform this kind of work. You know that most psychotherapists

somehow fear couples work because it can be risky, so I would start asking you: ***would you say that doing couples therapy is more challenging or more difficult to train than individual EFT, for instance? Does it requires more training or more skilled therapists than individual?***

RG: Ok well it's a hard question to answer. I don't know if it requires more training, but it certainly requires a...I guess there's two tracks that I almost think of that both have to be present with EFT Couples and one is being able to identify the system in a sense, right? And being able to understand the cycle and to map the cycle. And the other is really to be able to work with the emotion and to, sort of, get underneath the emotion.

AH: Hmm mm.

RG: And that...so these are two competing skills that you need to bring together at the same time. I think working with couples is very different than working with individuals and it's important to say that. And I do think you need specific training with couples.

AH: Yes, hmm mm.

RG: I don't know that you need more training, I just think...

AH: It's more specific.

RG: It's more specific. And I think having a model and having an understanding of the system and how the two people are relating to one another and how they're interacting with each other and getting some kind of a sense of that pretty early in the process makes it much easier to manage the whole interaction with the couple, because it is more difficult in certain ways. It's more challenging, but in other ways it's more...it's very lively!

AH: Oh yes it is. It can be fun also.

RG: Yeah and I personally enjoy it. I think you have to, you have to enjoy it.

AH: You have to enjoy it, yes.

RG: You have to like having multiple stimuli and working with, you know...I mean it's very different than working with individuals. But yeah, with couples you have to like that kind of stimulation because you have to really be aware of both people pretty much at the same time.

AH: So you need a lot of EFT training first of all?

RG: Yes I think you do. I mean I think you need to make sure... you know, the way I learned Couples Therapy was...actually I learned EFT for individuals first and then I learned couples and some people do it in a different order. But, you know, once you have an understanding of the map and the system and the structure...I mean, I think then you're really just using your skills of working with emotions and deepening emotions and that's what actually requires the most training.

AH: The ability to read what? Underneath the secondary emotions? Or...

RG: Yes.

AH: That radar, the radar for...yes, because we have to master what is a maladaptive emotion. Because anger, for instance, it's so common in couples and it can be maladaptive, it can be adaptive, it can be secondary, it can be primary. You need a lot of emotion focused culture to...

RG: Yes, yes.

AH: To master all these readings of emotions.

RG: Right. Absolutely.

AH: Yes. But it's lively indeed. Couples can be very lively.

RG: Right.

AH: And also risky. You have to be, you have to know how to break, to stop them from interacting in those attack cycles so common...the anger...

RG: Right. And I mean, I think you know we have the five stage model and each of the stages has a number of steps within them. So there is...it is complex. But the first stage involves forming a relationship with the couple...

AH: The safest.

RG:...and validating each person and I think that is actually very important because if you're going to be able to work with these underlying emotions, I mean to do what you said. On the one hand de-escalate the cycle, which is what you do in the second stage. But not only that, once you have helped them de-escalate the cycle to get at the underlying emotions, which are the more primary maladaptive ones and then eventually the adaptive ones. In order to do all of that you do need to have a good relationship with both people and they have to trust you, right? To some degree...and so I think that's why we put that first.

AH: Of course, yes.

RG: And is not that, you know, it's first and then you just ignore it. It's first and then it remains something that you're always aware of, that you're always monitoring, that you're always, to some extent, falling back on. And you're always using, right? So you need to always have an awareness of what's the trust and do people feel like I'm, you know, making sense, do people feel like I'm helping them to get to the underlying emotions. If there's some kind of block, where is the block.

AH: Yes, Hmm mm.

RG: And is the block in the relationship, in the alliance. Ok, if it's not, it's more likely in the person themselves. But you have to always be aware of the relationship to, so...

## Part II

AH: Hmm mm. ***So in EFT is there always this complexity about how much there are stages to follow and phases to follow? Or do we just follow the primary emotional needs?*** Because you say that is a process oriented model, hum...you need to be sensitive and following the pain of the couple, or the pain of the individual, and navigating the markers. So in couples therapy we don't have to go through all the stages...It's not like that...

RG: Through the stages of what?

AH: Of phases you say the model offers, some stages of...

RG: Right.

AH: Yeah...but for the trainees, the trainees need to know about the stages and the phases, but we have to make them clear about this, that doing therapy is not going through the stages, is maybe more navigating the markers and navigating the pain?

RG: Hmm mm. Right, I mean, although I think ...well, ok...so EFT overall is a marker driven therapy, right? And by marker we mean attending to what the client is expressing and how they're expressing in the moment, right? And so that's true whether...and there's verbal aspects of that and there's nonverbal aspects of markers. And ... So that definition is true whether we're talking about the individual model or the couples model. But with the couples it does look quite different, right? I mean, we don't have...in the individual model we have a whole series of different tasks that can emerge at different times in the therapy, hum...and it looks very different. And this is where EFT Couples and EFT for individuals really, you know, separate. So with the couples it's really like, there's



a set of stages and...yes there is an order, there's a sequence to those stages, but you really are more like cycling through them, right? So you might go to stage one, which is the relationship stage, then stage two is de-escalating the cycle and reframing the cycle in terms of underlying feelings and needs...And looking a little bit at the historical origins of each partners particular maladaptive emotions and their contribution to the cycle. Stage three becomes more about getting to the underlying feelings and needs and stage four becomes more about restructuring these negative interactions. Stage five then is more about consolidating changes.

AH: Consolidating. Hmm mm.

RG: So that's a very quick kind of...so yeah, I mean, the marker then is...well, If I haven't sufficiently identified the cycle and what each person's role is and what they're doing in the cycle, hum, then it's pretty difficult to go forward with getting to the underlying feelings and needs. So this is inherently marker driven in a sense, but it's quite different than the way that EFT for individuals is marker driven. And similarly you can't restructure the interaction until the underlying, which is stage four, until underlying feelings and needs have been identified in each partner, right? So we do have a stance of 'if this then that' and that's marker driven in a sense but, it's by no means a sequential in the sense of you go through it and then that's over. You go back...it's cyclical going through the stages.

AH: It's cyclical, yes, it's cyclical yes yes.

### Part III

AH: ***What does EFT Emotion Focused Couples Therapy offers new to the field of couples therapy? There is a lot new in your model to the field isn't there?***

RG: Right, right.

AH: What would you say?

RG: So you're asking what's new, what's different about EFT Couples from other models?

AH: Other models, yes.

RG: Yeah. I mean, I think the focus on...well there's a couple of things...hum...So, the focus on emotion to such a strong degree and working with the underlying emotions. I think a number of models do inherently work with emotions or talk about it but they don't work as specifically with underlying, you know, they don't distinguish between primary emotions and secondary emotions...

AH: For instance...

RG: And they don't...there isn't such a science for working with the underlying emotions, right? I mean, so we have to find maladaptive emotions and kind of classify the different types of them and then look at what's inherent in each of them and how to find, how to help people transform maladaptive emotions into more adaptive emotions. That's quite different. It's because it's a model of emotion and working with emotion and helping people regulate emotions. So I don't know if other people...There are other pieces though...so first of all in the recent book that I wrote with Les Greenberg we talked about...hum...we've advanced the Emotion Focused Couples Model in a sense of defining both attachment and Identity as core .. two fundamental processes.

AH: You mean the 2008 APA book.

RG: Yeah.

AH: Hmm mm. Yes you talk about three major motivations, the attachment, identity and attraction?

RG: Yeah, yeah. Where attachment and identity are more fundamental than attraction, but attraction it's seen as different than attachment, right?

AH: Of course, yes.

RG: And so attachment is, hum...Basically fear is the maladaptive emotion at the base of attachment and shame is the maladaptive emotion that is at the basis of identity. And really in EFT Couples you're working with both shame and fear. Those are...I mean, to make a very very broad generalization, I think those are the, sort of, major emotions that you're working with most...

AH: In Couples Therapy?

RG: And perhaps, also, the third one being sadness related to lonely abandonment...

AH: Yes.

RG: And that's probably more again in the Attachment dimension. But yeah, so those are two major dimensions, but they're seen as separate, different but related processes....And attraction is an important dimension because it's part of what brings people together and even perhaps part of what we help people to remember about when things get difficult, but it's not seen as core as attachment and identity. You're working most with attachment and identity.

## Part IV

AH: I have to ask you this also about the distinctive features of Emotion Focused Couples Therapy because there's another model that came from an older student, Phd student of Les, the Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy of Susan Johnson. That's also a very distinctive model for couples nowadays. ***How does EFT Couples differentiate from the work of Susan Johnson in your perspective?***

RG: Right. So, you know, Greenberg and Johnson in 1988 wrote the original book Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy and that's the same model. I mean, it comes from the same place, right? It originated from ...

AH: Of course.

RG: So it's important. I think that everybody needs to understand that. And then, though, after that, Susan Johnson developed Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy more with a stronger focus on attachment.

AH: Yes. Hmm mm. On that dimension.

RG: That dimension. And without focusing as much on the identity processes. When we then wrote the book in 2008 we developed the identity process as a separate process from attachment. Off course identity is formed in attachment relationships and so it's important to say that. And we're really...I was working with both now, with the model that we've developed. It really represents a development in a specific direction and it means that we're seeing both the attachment dimension and the identity dimension. And identity then brings up different issues, right? So often more related to validation,

more related to self-esteem and working more with power, because power is an important aspect of couples relationships as well. The other part, the other implication of that in terms of what it means for the work is that...and this has to do with... when Les originally developed the model with Sue they were very focused on the couples. After that Les came back to York University and focused more on individual, the EFT for individual. Then came back to the couples. And that meant that he...and I was a part of that, because I worked with him in that period, developed a lot the EFT for individual model and I think now the EFT for individuals model has really been integrated into the EFT for Couples, right? So we're working with both couples relational processes and individual processes in the therapy. And when you're talking about identity related processes, often these more individual processes...So we work with individuals within the context of couples. And so, for example, self-soothing becomes an important issue and, you know, we're really balancing self-soothing with other soothing and in couples you're doing, you're working with both I believe. But if you're working with couples on a (?) turn basis then I think you are also going to probably be looking at self-soothing as well as other soothing. Couples are...partners are always able to meet each other's needs and individuals need to be able to develop their own abilities to self-soothe in lieu of their partners being able to soothe. So that becomes important as well. And if I can self-soothe then I'm much more able to accept the soothing from my partner. So I think there's a balancing process that we are focused on with this particular model.

## Part V

AH: So interesting, yes. Coming again to the training, because we are going to meet in Lisbon and we are going to train for two days. ***What do you think it's the most difficult part of this model for trainees? Is there any more difficult part? Identifying markers? The radar for emotions and reading the emotions? The cycles..***

RG: I think the most challenging part is working with the emotion, working with the underlying emotions. Being able to differentiate...

AH: Secondary from primary...

RG: Secondary from primary...But not just that. But being able to deepen primary emotions so that you can...because with primary emotions, particularly with couples, you know, you're working with each partner primary maladaptive emotions that are underlying the cycles and then you're working to transform them. But in order to transform them you have to be able to deepen and so you need to have a comfort with working with emotions, but also you need to develop an attunement to be able to differentiate and follow and track, from moment to moment, the different emotions in each partner.

## Part VI

AH: Hmm mm. You say also for the training that you probably recommend, strongly recommend a personal experience of the model or a personal therapy?

RG: Yeah I do.

AH: You do yes. And on what concerns the couples therapy training, do you see any relevance of being in a relationship or having some marital experience?

RG: I think it's good to have some relational experience and people generally had some relational experience when they come to training. They don't necessarily...

AH: Have a marital one.

RG: Yeah. But we...actually in the training we have people work with their own experiences and work with their couple, their own couple, right? Several. We ask them to script their partner. I mean, you use another person in the training, you don't bring your actual partner in, but you with another person in the training you script your couple.

AH: Interesting. You are going to invite our trainees to do some work on that.

RG: I'm going to invite them to do that.

AH: Good good. Great Rhonda. I think I'm not going to disturb you more. Just going to thank you so much for your time and shared wisdom. We will keep in touch and hopefully we will see you in Lisbon soon.

RG: Yes. I believe in the end of February.

AH: Yes. Thank you so much.

RG: Ok. Thank you.

AH: Thank you so much. We'll keep in touch. Bye









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