Instructor’s Manual for

ACTION METHODS IN COUPLES THERAPY WITH DANIEL J. WIENER, PHD

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Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video, you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during and after the video.

2. FACILITATE DISCUSSION
Pause the video at different points to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions to the concepts presented. The Discussion Questions section provides ideas about key points that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. ENCOURAGE SHARING OF OPINIONS
Encourage viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What are viewers’ impressions of what works and does not work in the sessions? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes; it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

4. CONDUCT A ROLE-PLAY
The Role-Plays section guides you through exercises you can assign to your students in the classroom or training session.

5. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings from Related Websites, Videos, and Further Reading prior to or after viewing.

6. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER
See suggestions in the Reaction Paper section.
Perspective on Videos and the Personality of the Therapist

Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists may feel put on the spot to offer a good demonstration, and clients can be self-conscious in front of a camera. Therapists often move more quickly than they would in everyday practice to demonstrate a particular technique. Despite these factors, therapists and clients on video can engage in a realistic session that conveys a wealth of information not contained in books or therapy transcripts: body language, tone of voice, facial expression, rhythm of the interaction, quality of the alliance—all aspects of the therapeutic relationship that are unique to an interpersonal encounter.

Psychotherapy is an intensely private matter. Unlike the training in other professions, students and practitioners rarely have an opportunity to see their mentors at work. But watching therapy on video is the next best thing.

One more note: The personal style of therapists is often as important as their techniques and theories. Therapists are usually drawn to approaches that mesh well with their own personality. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, students and trainees must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fits their own personal style and the needs of their clients.
Rehearsals for Growth Couples Therapy*

Rehearsals for Growth (RfG), developed in 1985 by Daniel J. Wiener, PhD, is a distinctive Drama Therapy approach that is primarily used to improve interpersonal relationships. RfG’s improvisational methods can be used both as assessment tools and as interventions that offer new possibilities to alter habitual relationship dynamics. RfG Couples Therapy combines verbal couple therapy techniques, drawn from virtually any approach, with various improv enactments that will be described below.

RfG provides therapists with a powerful resource to address three broad tasks in the successful therapy of relationships: (1) changing dysfunctional yet stable transactional patterns; (2) broadening the range of displayed social identities and expressive behaviors that clients present to others; and (3) altering the affective climate during therapy sessions. RfG is not in itself a comprehensive method of therapy but rather an approach that provides tools for enhancing the effectiveness of therapy.

The key insight that led to the creation of RfG is that competent stage-improvisation shares a number of characteristics with good interpersonal relationship functioning. These include: attentiveness to others’ words and actions; flexibility in both initiating and accepting others’ directions and suggestions; and validation of another’s reality. In addition to those benefits common to all action methods, such as broadening sensory, emotive, and movement expressiveness, the therapeutic advantages of RfG may be summarized as follows:

1. Encouraging novelty and playfulness

RfG games involve pretense and are clearly marked as non-real adventures. They shift the context of therapeutic reality to a more playful and fantastic mode, thus lessening fear of “real-life” consequences of change and empowering exploratory behavior. They also provide opportunities for clients to access playfulness (which is unavailable to many adults and even some children) within a safe, nonjudgmental context, to “face fear through fun.”
2. Experiencing spontaneity and taking risks
Effective improvisation requires that players give up their conception/expectation/script concerning what is expected, to be there and to attend to what is happening here and now, both intra- and interpersonally. The major obstacle to being fully present in the moment is the overriding tendency of the human mind to prepare for the future. Because improv places people “on the spot” to respond spontaneously without knowing what will come next, the mind interprets the situation as dangerous; the improviser feels anxious and at risk of failing. When clients are encouraged successfully to overcome the risks of failing and looking foolish by improvising playfully, they awaken to an enjoyable and expanded use of self.

3. Building and expanding interpersonal trust
RfG exercises are constructed so that their tasks can be accomplished only when players put aside their willfulness, defensiveness, and competitiveness in order to attend fully and receptively to their partner(s). Because of the previously noted sense of being “on the edge” of danger when improvising, people who improvise together share an adventure which provides a social bonding experience that results in enjoyment, friendship, and trust for further adventuring.

4. Co-creating new realities with others
RfG games provide opportunities for clients to “stretch themselves” by incorporating other roles into their social identities and to rehearse possible roles by enacting them dramatically. RfG therapists use improv with clients to explore less familiar choices than the ones habitually made in their lives. Such dramatic role rehearsals also provide relationship partners with the opportunity to “try on” complementary identities in scenes that bring forth novel patterns of interaction. In this way, established relationships can be expanded safely beyond their existing, habitual limits. RfG games also can be used to promote the “re-storying” and performance of individual and relationship narratives. Improv does not constitute an escape from reality but rather permission to create and explore new realities, to experience imagined truth as present truth.
5. Developing flexibility in life

Improv promotes an adaptive stance for dealing with change. As life circumstances are ceaselessly changing and our capability to foretell the future is highly limited, flexibility is a virtue that can be cultivated through improvisational practice. Among the benefits of such practice are: confidence in facing the unknown, greater appreciation of the present moment, and heightened powers of observation.

**Intervention in RfG Couples Therapy**

A RfG Couples Therapy session typically consists of the following phases, which are described in more detail below:

1. Verbal therapy, leading up to the therapist proposing an enactment. If accepted...

2. The couple and the therapist move to another area of the office (the “stage”) and are directed by the therapist in the enactment. At the enactment’s conclusion...

3. Clients and therapist return to their original seating. The therapist “de-roles” the couple when necessary and leads a discussion, called the Post-Enactment Processing. This may lead back to (1) or directly to (2), when a repeated or different enactment is offered.

After the initial consultation and assessment phase of therapy, the RfG couples therapist presents offers of enactments as opportunities to try something new or learn in a different way. Therapists should offer these without expectation that the client will accept; play is always voluntary, so there should be no pressure or persuasion. Even when therapists plan in advance to offer clients a specific technique, it is important that they be inwardly receptive to their own spirit of adventure, novelty and fun, both for the reasons that they themselves can better improvise when the unexpected happens, and that this attitude is conducive to consequence-free experimentation rather than to evaluated performance.
Once they have accepted the offer to enact, they are then invited to move from their seating to a stage area, a space set aside for enactment, where they are designated “players.” The characters they take up in RfG games are put on and taken off on stage to maintain the segregation of the “player” and the client.

During enactments, the therapist functions in the several roles of: theatrical director, side-coach, in-scene or offstage commentator, audience, and, occasionally, another actor (usually in a minor role). These functions are activated in order to encourage and support clients to enter and remain in the “playspace,” stay in character, advance the scene’s action, and fulfill initial instructions.

*Displacement scenes* are dramatic enactments designed to: (1) replicate an existing dynamic of a relationship (primarily to heighten awareness of habitual transactional patterns); (2) reverse roles or positions in order to heighten empathy for the other partner; and (3) offer roles that encourage exploratory choices that go beyond familiar ones, including ones that expand clients’ emotional range. The therapist’s calibration of the degree of displacement to be offered is guided by the need to make the scene’s conditions or setting unfamiliar enough so that clients do not revert to playing themselves in overly familiar circumstances, yet sufficiently relevant emotionally and dynamically to engage clients with their therapeutic issues. Displacement scenes are often staged in sequences, sometimes with repeated variations, to alter their outcome, affect, or power dynamics; they are often key enactments that provide breakthroughs that lead to changes in dysfunctional patterns of behavior, affect, and cognition.

**Uses of Post-Enactment Processing:** The period of discussion after the enactment is called Post-Enactment Processing. During this phase, the therapist initially asks open-ended questions that focus the clients’ attention toward their experience of the recently completed enactment. Follow-up questions may draw attention to unmentioned features noticed by the therapist, invite comparisons to client expectations and evoke connections to outside life experiences with the partner or with others. Unlike the therapist in conventional
talk-only therapy, who relies solely on a secondhand processing of outside life material as described by clients, the RfG therapist who has observed the just-completed interaction of the couple in an enactment possesses firsthand knowledge of what occurred.

**Repeated enactments with coaching:** Following the post-enactment processing, the therapist may wish the couple to experience that same, now-more-familiar enactment without the distraction of attending closely to unfamiliar instructions, or offer a variation to bring out some feature that was not emphasized during the initial enactment. Sometimes, roles are reversed or a premise is changed.

If the initial enactment was perceived as unsuccessful or emotionally disagreeable, the therapist might offer an analysis of what might be changed in order to create a more positive outcome. When in-role as audience, the therapist is nearly always generous and supportive, encouraging clients to learn from whatever happened. Should one or both clients refuse to try again, the therapist will respect this decision and move on without blame or defensiveness. When the enactment was a success in the eyes of the clients, the therapist will give them the credit and may suggest the couple use the enactment as homework between sessions. In such cases, the next session usually begins as a post-enactment processing on what occurred when the couple tried the enactment at home.

Therapists wishing to use RfG are advised first to gain personal experience with improvisational enactment and to learn the rudiments of systemic therapy. Drama therapists who are comfortable with an active and collaborative style of working with relationship systems and who are open to examining continually their own use of self will likely find themselves successful in applying RfG.

Case Summary and Commentary by Daniel J. Wiener, PhD*

The video is a simulation that closely follows the published case study that follows:

Tony and Sarah, married six years, lived with their biological daughter, age four, and two other daughters, ages 10 and 12, from Sarah’s previous marriage of nine years. Sarah, who had initiated therapy, was worried over Tony’s recently increased emotional distance and suspicious of his recent preoccupation with health (he had increased the frequency of his visits to a health club). Tony’s father had had a stroke seven months earlier; when Tony reported being anxious over his own health, Sarah invalidated Tony’s health concerns as “overblown.” In their families of origin, Tony (41) was an only child with an over-close mother and a distant father; Sarah (38), the eldest of three sisters, had witnessed her mother’s divorce of her unfaithful father when she was eight. Significantly, Sarah’s middle sister, married 14 years, had separated from her husband two months earlier over his affair, replicating the pattern in their parents’ marriage.

It was clear from the start that their marriage was a complementary fit—at our initial session, Tony presented as expressive and hearty, while Sarah appeared restrained and more intellectual. Tony was impulsive, starting a lot of projects without completing them; Sarah, by contrast, was focused and detail oriented. Tony was outcome driven; Sarah, more process oriented. The initial affective climate was strained but respectful; both Tony and Sarah took pains to avoid giving the other offense. Their exhibited emotional range appeared curtailed, with not much humor, a few warning glances, and distant, closed-off body postures and no touching while seated on the office couch. In their accommodation to me as their therapist, Sarah, though responsive to questions about herself, appeared chiefly motivated to remind me of my function to keep Tony on task in revealing himself fully; Tony seemed only mildly interested in the therapy process and was initially more aloof, “going along with” therapy just for Sarah’s sake. He didn’t volunteer information except when an opportunity
presented itself to joke with me at Sarah’s expense.

Although Tony and Sarah quarreled frequently in my presence during the first three sessions, their process lacked vitality, seeming routine. I noted how Sarah’s sharp, critical tone was predictably followed by Tony’s soft, resigned tone, while on the content level Sarah’s direct questions were regularly met by Tony’s short, non-volunteering-of-additional-information answers. Based mainly on these predictably co-regulated exchanges (in vocal dynamics and content), I classified Tony and Sarah nearer the “rigid” end of the “operating rules and boundaries” spectrum.

**Action phase after consultation**

Following an involved discussion in the third session of each partner’s dissatisfactions with the other’s cooperation across a range of practical issues, I proposed the exercise “Mirrors,” both to learn more about how their partnership functioned non-verbally and to warm them up to further enactment.

The couple did well, looking attentively into each other’s eyes and moving in accordance with the mirroring instructions. Mirrors, being simple to understand and requiring a very modest level of skill, reliably produces a success experience that can be built upon in more demanding exercises and games.

In light of the high degree of predictability to the emotional exchanges observed between Sarah and Tony, I next proposed that they play Line Repetition (a.k.a. “You Will, I Won’t” [in Wiener, 1994]). The results of this enactment and its subsequent processing made two important things clearer: first, the couple’s emotional co-regulation was fairly strong, with constricted affective range--less rigid couples display greater variety of tone, loudness and flexibility of intentions (e.g., demanding, pleading, seducing); second, they were locked into mutual projections which prevented each from reading the actual intentions and motivations of the other. Although undertaken for purposes of assessment, what was revealed by this exercise became
an intervention whereby Sarah and Tony each experienced a shift in their understanding of their own and each other’s position regarding personal power and interpersonal influence.

In the next session, I devoted half of the time to repeating “You Will, I Won’t” with them, now presenting this exercise as an opportunity to discover how they could playfully try out interesting variations. Accordingly, I coached them by calling out such ongoing stage instructions as “Louder!” “Softer!” and, “Be seductive!” By coaching them, I took responsibility for the stance they took, lessening their inhibitions about “owning” these positions. Shifting the affective climate toward pleasurable excitement, even temporarily, acts to instill hope and counter the demoralization with which couples enter therapy. Such shifts do more for the progress of therapy than does the verbal processing of substantive issues without affective change.

In the next session, wishing to explore the extent of competitive impulses in their relationship, I introduced Tony and Sarah to “Tug of War,” an exercise that appears to be a competition between its players. In response to their experience of this exercise the first time, I offered a variation in which they were instructed to make the contest look convincing by closely watching each other and making the rope behave realistically, and Tony was instructed to win within 30 seconds. In contrast to the first variation, this one makes it clear that the exercise is not a contest but a performance that requires coordination of effort between partners to be convincing. This time, there was a palpable connection between Tony and Sarah.

Given Tony’s aversion to displeasing Sarah, I decided to offer the couple a displacement scene to explore alternative choices. I invited Tony to play “Mr. Wilkins,” a customer trying to return a defective toy to Sarah, who was to play “Ms. Coles,” a clerk working at the Customer Service Desk of a department store. By the end of the scene, Tony was smiling, but Sarah looked upset.

I asked Sarah if she was upset at Tony or only at the character he played. It is important, post-enactment, to indicate to clients that they
are no longer in-role. We explored what came up for her during the scene, and I suggested an alternative scene where Tony’s character came home to his daughter after trying to return a defective doll he had bought her for a present. This scene was offered in order to have the clients explore potential tenderness rather than inevitable conflict. In the ensuing discussion, both Tony and Sarah reported that the tenderness and protectiveness of Wilkins and Amanda’s trust in her daddy had felt particularly welcome. I then asked Sarah to reflect again on her feelings toward Tony’s character during the first scene. “Well, it’s really different. I didn’t like being on the receiving end of that, but now I see he was just trying to do right by Amanda,” she said.

In subsequent sessions, we returned repeatedly to these two scenes, which provided rich insight-inducing experiences. These enactments appeared to have induced a greater degree of openness between Tony and Sarah, who had both become more emotionally expressive in sessions and, by later report, at home.

From my point of view, both were now more practiced in validating each other’s reality through co-creating these scenes as well as sharing the adventure of fictionalizing together. It was also apparent that Tony and Sarah’s emotional expressivity in my presence had expanded. Both seemed less careful and more open in a way that suggested they were now occasionally interacting more spontaneously. However, we had not addressed the core issue of Sarah’s fear that Tony might be having an affair. I decided to offer another enactment to detoxify that issue.

Once again, I proposed a scene in a complaint department, but this time with Sarah as the customer without a sales receipt for the defective merchandise. The added premise here was for Sarah’s character to attempt to seduce Tony’s, a married clerk, to get him to bend the rules for her benefit. This is an example of creating high-stakes enactments collaboratively with clients. I pointed out that they might become self-conscious enacting a seduction scene in front of me, so there should be some agreement as to how far to enact any seduction. I left the room to give them privacy for this discussion of
limiting physical contact in my presence. While therapists are often privy to intimate details of their client couples’ relationships, it is important to strengthen the boundary around their intimacy so that they experience their connection as deeper than either has with the therapist.

After the enactment, Tony expressed that he wanted the passionate woman he had married to show up more often and that she fully satisfied him; he had no interest in an affair. Ending the session early, I gave them the assignment that they each do some journaling concerning the issues that had surfaced, sharing any writings with one another on a voluntary basis. I also suggested that, if they wished, they could play another version of this last scene at home, unrestrained by my presence. Insights are often triggered by displacement scene enactments, and can be articulated during the post-enactment process; clinical experience shows that their value increases when slowly absorbed through reflection, rather than by the “piling on” of immediate further enactments.

When Tony and Sarah came to the following week’s session, it was apparent that they had achieved a breakthrough. Not only had they made love at Sarah’s initiative (in which she had reprised her role as “Janice”) but they had transformed the beginning of a fight over Tony’s visit to his health club into a post-workout “date” which they had both enjoyed considerably and were now planning to schedule regularly. Therapy ended two sessions later; in a follow-up call four months later, I learned that they were still doing well.

Reaction Paper for Classes and Training

Video: Action Methods in Couples Therapy with Daniel J. Wiener, PhD

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the facilitator.
- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards. Respond to each question below.
- **Length and Style:** 2 to 4 pages double-spaced. Be concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief paper that you write soon after watching the video—we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about using action methods in couples therapy? What stands out to you about how Wiener works?

2. **What I found most helpful:** As a therapist, what was most beneficial to you about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work? What challenged you to think about something in a new way?

3. **What does not make sense:** What principles/techniques/interventions did not make sense to you? Did anything push your buttons or bring about a sense of resistance in you, or just not fit with your own style of working?

4. **How I would do it differently:** What might you have done differently from Wiener in the sessions highlighted in the video? Be specific about what different approaches, interventions, and techniques you might have applied.

6. **Other questions/reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the video? Other comments, thoughts, or feelings?
Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading

Web Resources
Daniel J. Wiener’s Rehearsals for Growth website
   www.rehearsalsforgrowth.com
National Association of Drama Therapy
   www.nadt.org
Selected books in Drama Therapy, compiled by Adam Blatner, MD
   www.blatner.com/adam/level2/drmrxbkprc.htm

Related Videos Available at
www.psychotherapy.net
Art Therapy Has Many Faces, with Judith Rubin
Creative Healing in Mental Health: Art & Drama in Assessment & Therapy, with Judith Rubin and Eleanor Irwin
The Zerka T. Moreno Psychodrama Series, with Zerka Moreno
Moreno Movies—4-DVD Series
Healing Childhood Abuse and Trauma through Psychodrama, with Tian Dayton
Emotionally Focused Therapy in Action, with Sue Johnson

Recommended Readings


Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors, and facilitators may use some or all of these discussion questions, depending on what aspects of the video are most relevant to the audience.

INTRODUCTION

1. **Improv**: Do you have any experience with theater improvisation in or out of therapy? If so, what kinds of experiences have you had with improv that you would consider therapeutic or healing? How do you feel about incorporating drama therapy techniques into your work with clients?

2. **For risk-takers only**: Do you agree with Wiener that the techniques he demonstrated can be offered only to people who feel relatively comfortable or secure and are willing to take risks in order to grow? Which of your clients (past and present) can you see these techniques working well for? With what types of clients do you think this approach would not be effective?

SESSION

3. **Suspicion**: What did you think of how Wiener addressed Sarah’s concerns that Tony was having an affair? Would you have been more direct in trying to find out whether Tony was actually hiding something? Why or why not? Did you find yourself also suspicious of Tony? What might you have done differently to address Sarah’s concerns about Tony’s possible infidelity?

4. **Her idea**: It is common for one spouse (in this case, Tony) to come to couples therapy because the other spouse initiated it, as opposed to coming up with the idea on his or her own. Can you talk about a couple you’ve worked with where this dynamic was at play and what challenges came up for you around this? Do you think Tony ended up engaging in the therapy as much as Sarah did? What do you think Wiener did that facilitated active participation by both members of the couple? What are some of your strategies for engaging the more reluctant member of a couple?
5. **Transitions**: One of the skills Wiener demonstrated in this video involves transitioning from talk therapy to using the action methods. What did you think of how he introduced the Rehearsals for Growth methods to this couple? What did you like and dislike about the way he moved between the enactments and the post-enactment processing discussions? If you integrate drama therapy methods or other expressive arts methods into your sessions, what has and hasn’t worked for you in introducing the methods and/or transitioning between different modes of relating?

6. **Arguing in session**: What did you think of Wiener’s intervention with the couple when they were arguing, when he asked, “How does this usually end?” What are some ways you intervene when couples argue in your office? Couples therapists differ on how beneficial it is to let couples argue at length in session. What are your thoughts on this topic? How long do you tend to let your client couples argue before you intervene?

7. **Mirrors**: What did you think of the mirrors exercise? What did you think was helpful about this exercise? Can you see yourself incorporating this exercise into your work with couples? Why or why not? Is there anything that stood out to you about how Wiener facilitated this exercise?

8. **Post-Enactment Processing**: What did you think of the way Wiener facilitated the discussions after the enactments? Were there any questions he asked or observations he made that you thought were particularly effective or ineffective? Is there anything you would have asked or pointed out to this couple that Wiener omitted?

9. **Assessment**: Do you think the enactments, as demonstrated by Wiener, are a useful way to assess a couple’s relational dynamics? Why or why not? Were there any assessments that Wiener made after any of the enactments or discussions with which you disagreed? What were some things you observed about this couple that Wiener didn’t mention? What are some of the ways you assess a couple’s relational dynamics?

10. **Setting up conflict**: Wiener told the couple that the “Line Repetition” exercise set them up to be in conflict, and that
unless they were comfortable being in conflict with each other, it was bound to bring up unpleasant feelings. What do you think the benefits and dangers are of introducing an exercise that is likely to bring up negative feelings between partners? Do you think doing the exercise again, the second time scripted, helped the couple achieve emotional distance and perspective from their conflict, as was Wiener’s intention?

11. **Tug of War:** Wiener stated that one of the purposes of the “Tug of War” exercise was to explore the extent of competitive impulses in the couple’s relationship. Why do you think this was an important dynamic to explore for this particular couple? What did you like and dislike about the way Wiener facilitated this exploration? What are some of the ways you help your couple clients explore the competitive impulses in their relationships?

12. **Anger:** How did you react when Tony’s mood shifted rapidly to anger during the Tug of War 2 Post-Enactment Processing, as he listened to Sarah talk about her father? What did you like or dislike about the way Wiener intervened? How might you have intervened differently? What are some of your favorite ways of intervening when couples become angry with each other in your office?

13. **Homework:** Wiener encouraged the couple to try some of the exercises at home. Do you tend to assign homework to your clients? Why or why not? Do most of them actually do the homework assigned? How do you tend to respond when they don’t?

14. **It’s not helping:** Session 2 ended with the couple seeming quite connected after having a playful session with the Poet’s Corner enactment, but when they came in for Session 3, Sarah reported that she didn’t think the sessions were making much of a difference in their relationship. How did you react to this? What did you think of how Wiener handled this? How have you responded to clients when they report that they don’t think the therapy is actually having an impact?

15. **Displacement scenes:** What did you think of the displacement scene Wiener chose for this couple, involving a defective toy, a clerk, a dissatisfied customer, and a store policy that requires a
receipt for returns? If you were their therapist, would you also have set up a scene that explored conflict? Why or why not?

16. Seduction: In response to the conversation about Sarah and Tony’s stalled sex life, Wiener suggested a seduction scene to give them another experience of their relational possibilities. Why do you think he gave Sarah, as opposed to Tony, the role of the seductive customer? What do you think of that decision? If you were to come up with a displacement scene to give this couple another experience of their relational possibilities, what scene would you create?

17. Privacy: What do you think of Wiener’s statement that couples therapists “should limit their inquiry about their client’s intimate life details so the couple always maintains some core privacy in their relationship”? Do you agree with him, or do you think it’s important for clients to talk about all the details of their intimate lives in therapy? Would you have also left the room, like Wiener did, to allow the couple to negotiate their limits before participating in the seduction scene? Why or why not?

CONCLUSION

18. Success: Dr. Wiener stated that in the two subsequent sessions, Sarah and Tony reported that they made love for the first time in a long time, Sarah’s suspicion of Tony’s infidelity dissipated, and that they were doing well four months later. Were you surprised or skeptical at all about this outcome? What do you think the key factors were that contributed to the success of this couples therapy? Can you talk about one of your couples therapy successes? What factors do you think contributed to the success of the case you described?

19. Therapeutic alliance: How would you describe the therapeutic alliance between Wiener and this couple? With Sarah in particular? With Tony in particular? What specific interactions in the session do you think contributed to or detracted from the strength of the therapeutic alliance with each of the partners?

20. The model: What are your overall thoughts about Wiener’s approach to couples therapy and the Rehearsals for Growth
methods? What aspects of his approach can you see yourself incorporating into your work? Are there some components of this approach that seem incompatible with how you work? What in particular would you do differently from Wiener?

21. **Personal reaction:** How would you feel about having Wiener as your therapist? Do you think you would enjoy and benefit from participating in the Rehearsals for Growth methods? Do you think Wiener could build a solid therapeutic alliance with you? Would he be effective with you? Why or why not?
Role-Plays

After watching the video and reviewing the introductory chapter titled *Rehearsals for Growth Couples Therapy* in this manual, assign groups to role-play a couples therapy session utilizing the Rehearsals for Growth methods and approach described in the video. Organize participants into groups of three, consisting of one psychotherapist and one couple. If time permits, rotate so each person has a chance to play the role of therapist. The point here is not to try to resolve the couple’s issues, but to use this role-play as an opportunity to experiment with some of the methods presented in the video, primarily the enactments and the Post-Enactment Processing. Remind students that they will get more out of the experience if they approach the role-plays with a playful spirit, rather than focusing too much on doing it “right.” This applies to those playing therapists as well as those playing clients.

**Instructions for Role-Players:**

One person will start out as the therapist and the other two people will role-play a couple, and then they will rotate roles. Before the session starts, have each couple dyad meet alone for a few minutes to come up with the presenting problem they will be working on and their roles in it. Invite each couple to co-create the details of their relationship, such as how long they have been together, strengths of the relationship, and typical challenges they face as a couple. While it will be helpful if the couple has some of these details worked out before the session, participants need not worry too much about the details of their relationship; the focus here should be more on giving the therapist an opportunity to practice facilitating the *Enactments* and *Post-Enactment Processing* and for each person to have a firsthand experience of the methods as a client.

When enacting the therapist role, remember to be encouraging exploration, rather than critical of any deviations from the instructions.

A note on space: If there is enough room, it is important to keep the
“stage” and the processing space separate. Ideally, triads will be able to set up three chairs in one section of the room for processing, and designate a separate stage area for the enactments.

Enactments

After briefly connecting with the couple and finding out about their presenting problem, the therapist should offer the couple the opportunity to try something new through one of the enactments listed below. Therapists should offer these without expectation that the clients will accept, though for the sake of this role-play clients should accept. Therapists should explain to clients that it’s not a performance that will be evaluated but a safe place to experiment.

Therapists should then invite the couple to move from their seating to a stage area (a space set aside for enactments), where they are designated “players.” The characters they take up in the games are put on and taken off on stage to maintain the segregation of the “player” and the client. During enactments, therapists should encourage and support clients to enter and remain in the “playspace,” stay in role, and fulfill the initial instructions.

The following are instructions for three enactments that were demonstrated in the video that therapists can choose from:

**Mirrors:** Invite players to stand facing one another at a distance of about five feet, looking into each other’s eyes without speaking. One, designated as Leader, begins to move slowly from the waist up and the other, as Follower, mirrors the Leader’s action until “change” is called by the therapist (after about 30 seconds); they then switch roles. “Change” is called twice more by the therapist and then they are instructed to give up leading and following and move simultaneously (“mutuality”). Care should be taken by the Leader to move slowly and in such a way that the Follower can keep up and be able to maintain the mirror. The therapist should tell players to take care of their own bodies and limit their range of motion to what is safe for themselves.

**Line Repetition:** Invite players to “face off” in dialogue, assigning one player the task of repeating the phrase, “You will,” and the other player the task of responding with, “I won’t.” After about six repetitions, stop them and invite them to switch lines and repeat the exercise. As
the therapist/director, invite each person to vary how he or she says the line, by calling out instructions such as, “With more intensity,” “Seductively,” or “As if you’re entitled.” Other lines that may be attempted include: (a) “I want it”/ “You can’t have it;” (b) “Help me” / “I can’t,” and “Yes!” / “Maybe.”

**Tug of War:** Invite players to face one another, three to six feet apart, with some room behind each of them. Tell them that there is an imaginary rope on the ground between them and that, on the therapist’s signal, they are to pick up the rope and have a tug of war with their partner. The players need to treat the rope as a reality of their interaction; one’s hauling in rope implies the other’s being pulled toward the center. Blocking often takes the form of a “rubber rope” which is seen as stretching or going slack when the players are inattentive. As with “Mirrors,” therapists should attend to the players’ physical safety by reminding them to take care of their bodies, remove any high-heeled shoes and to leave a few feet of open space behind them for backing up.

**Post-Enactment Processing**

After the enactment, therapists should invite the couple back to the sitting area and “de-role” the clients by stating explicitly that they are no longer “players.” Then, facilitate the Post-Enactment Processing. Initially, ask open-ended questions that focus the clients’ attention toward their experience of the recently completed enactment, such as, “What are your observations about that experience?” Follow-up questions may draw attention to unmentioned features noticed by the therapist, invite comparisons to client expectations, and evoke connections to outside life experiences with the partner or with others.

**Group Discussion**

After the role-plays, have the groups come together to discuss their experiences. Invite the clients to talk about what it was like to participate in the enactments. How did this kind of session feel different from traditional talk therapy? How was it to be a “player”? What did clients like and dislike about the way the therapist related with them? What did they like and dislike about the enactments? How
was it to enter and leave the “stage”? What did they think of the post-enactment processing time? Then, invite the therapists to talk about their experiences: How did it feel to conduct a therapy session using these action methods? What was it like to facilitate the enactments and the post-enactment processing discussion? How was it to introduce the enactments and make the transition to the processing? Did they find the Rehearsals for Growth methods useful? Finally, open up a general discussion of the strengths and the challenges in using Rehearsals for Growth methods in couples therapy.

**Alternative Option**

An alternative is to do this role-play in front of the whole group with one therapist and one couple client; the rest of the group can observe, acting as the advising team to the therapist. Before the end of the session, have the therapist take a break, get feedback from the observation team, and bring it back into the session with the couple. Other observers might jump in if the therapist gets stuck. Follow up with a discussion on what participants learned about using Rehearsals for Growth methods in couples therapy.
Complete Transcript of 
*Action Methods in Couples Therapy with Daniel J. Wiener, PhD*

**Charlotte Ramseur:** Hello, my name is Charlotte Ramseur, and I am a licensed marriage and family therapist. I am also an assistant professor in the Central Connecticut State University Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Here with me today is Dr. Daniel Wiener. Dr. Wiener is a registered drama therapist. He is also a licensed psychologist and marriage and family therapist, and he has taught for many years in the same graduate marriage and family therapy program. How are you, Dr. Wiener?

**Daniel Wiener:** I’m great. I’m very glad that you are here today with me.

**Ramseur:** I would like to start by asking, what is Rehearsals for Growth?

**Wiener:** It is a way of using improvisational theater techniques in relationship therapy. It also has some additional uses for education and for social skills training, but the main use that Rehearsals for Growth is applied to is using it in therapy.

And it uses, as I say, improvisational theater games, which are adapted for the purposes of therapy rather than performance.

**Ramseur:** Okay. What is improvisation?

**Wiener:** Essentially, improvisation is any activity in which the use of the past and of the knowledge of your past and your steering toward a known future has been set aside in order to be fully in the moment.

So ordinary social conversation is frequently an improvisation, because people are not necessarily scripted to say certain things, or to necessarily arrive at a certain place in the conversation.

One thing I guess that might be helpful to add to that is that improvisation, because it robs you of your sense of the future, of knowing where you are going, can be kind of daunting—can be scary
for people. And as a result, these techniques really only can be offered to people who feel relatively comfortable or secure, and are willing to take the chance on becoming a little bit less comfortable and less secure in order to learn something or in order to grow.

In a small way, that is really what happens in therapy. We invite clients to move out of the familiar into the unknown, or into at least the less explored, for the purposes of developing and growing.

**Ramseur:** In terms of the case that you are presenting, could you tell me more about the case and what it entails?

**Wiener:** Yeah. This is a case in which two people came to me as a couple, a married couple. I think they had been married something like six or seven years. They had a four-year-old daughter, and also living with them were a 10- and 12-year-old daughter from the wife’s previous marriage.

The wife’s name is Sarah. The husband’s name is Tony. Tony is maybe three years older than Sarah. I think they are both around 40.

The presenting issue or problem, although it wasn’t stated quite as directly initially, was that Sarah suspected Tony of having an affair. He had recently begun taking considerable amounts of time frequently during the week to go to a gym, and she was suspicious of his disappearances, or his absences from the family life. And she suspected an affair, but didn’t quite come right out and accuse him.

And Tony, for his part, maintained that it was really just for health reasons—that he had become more concerned about his health. A little bit more family history made both of their concerns, their sensitivities, more sensible. In Sarah’s case, she came from a family where her father had been unfaithful to her mother, which had led to the parents separating and divorcing in her childhood.

Two months or so prior to therapy, or, I’m sorry, six months prior to therapy, Sarah’s younger sister had also separated from her husband over an affair. So clearly she was sensitized to the issue that infidelity and the aftermath of infidelity—the consequences were about to be visited on their household.
Tony, for his part, had recently become more anxious about his health. His father, who had been, I think, in decent health going along, had suffered a stroke and was somewhat incapacitated because of it. And his anxiety corresponds very much to that event. So his going to the gym made perfect sense. But either of them couldn’t completely empathize with the anxieties that were stirred up in the other.

So they came into therapy. Their relationship was not—prior to the gym issue and the suspicion about infidelity, their relationship was sort of okay but not wonderful. I think that there were other irritations which were certainly present in the marriage, some of which had actually shown up in the case as we will see it. But their presenting problem clearly was this whole issue around Sarah’s suspicions about Tony’s actions in going to the gym.

Okay. Well, as they say, let’s watch.

Ramseur: Okay.

DAY 1

Wiener: Welcome.

Sarah: Hi.

Wiener: I’m Dr. Dan Wiener.

Sarah: Sarah.

Wiener: Sarah, good to meet you.

Sarah: Nice to meet you.

Tony: Hi, I’m Tony.

Wiener: Hi. Please have a seat.

Tony: Thanks.

Wiener: Okay. I believe I heard from you, Sarah, I think we discussed briefly your concerns and what it is that you are coming here for. Perhaps you can say it again, or give me more details as to what brings you here and what you think I can do for you.

Sarah: Sure. Well, Tony seems to be fairly distant lately, and he’s going
to the gym excessively, in my opinion. I think it’s taking up a lot of our time together as far as a family. I think there are other issues going on that he seems not to want to talk about. And at this point, I really think it is causing a big block in our relationship, and I’m not able to discuss it with him at this point, or he is not willing to share.

**Wiener:** Tony, are you comfortable coming here today, or is this something that you would rather not have done? How would that be for you?

**Tony:** I’m doing it because Sarah said that she thinks it is a good idea. I want to make sure that I am addressing her needs if she really feels it is important to do this. So I will keep an open mind.

**Wiener:** What do you make of what Sarah’s concern is here? What does this mean to you?

**Tony:** I don’t think there is a lot of basis to it. I mean, she is worried about me going to the gym. So I want to—

**Wiener:** Is it you are going to the gym, or you are not being where you otherwise are or were?

**Tony:** Well I have increased the number of times I go to the gym in recent months, because I felt I needed to. I felt I wanted to keep myself healthier.

**Wiener:** And for you, why is that not a satisfactory explanation?

**Sarah:** Well, yeah, you can keep yourself healthy, but to go to the extremes of going to the gym an hour and a half each day, taking into the time that—we have so little time together as a family. And you come home, and he has to shower and change. By that time, the kids are in bed. And the expectations of waiting on dinner—it’s just not, I don’t know. It’s not a good family lifestyle.

And I support him going to the gym if it is just in a reasonable amount of time, but there is something else that’s there, that’s—

**Wiener:** There is a difference—I can tell you how it comes across to me, is there is a difference between, “I don’t like it that Tony is spending so much time in the gym”—where you accept that that is what he is doing—“because it interferes with family priorities or other
things,” and, “I don’t really know whether he is leveling with me or is telling me everything.” The two of them have a very different feel to them, and probably different implications.

**Sarah:** Well, I don’t think he is leveling with me. I do think that there is something going on. And I don’t know if he is trying to impress somebody. I mean, if I was fine with it before, then he is not trying to impress me. And when he comes back home, he is just not really sharing of what is going on. He seems closed off.

**Tony:** It’s not about you this time. This is something I need to do for me. You know why.

**Wiener:** One of the things I wanted to tell you also, since this is your first time meeting with me, is that in addition to the kind of work that we are doing now, which is basically conversation with us sitting here, I also do something else which I call Rehearsals for Growth, which uses dramatic enactments, which is actually playing other characters and sometimes moving and doing unusual things, as part of a way of both discovering what actually functions in your relationship and what doesn’t function so well, and also giving you an opportunity to find out other ways of being with each other.

**[00:10]**

It’s a little hard to explain this without actually doing some of it, so as we go along I may be introducing or inviting you to try out certain exercise that you are always welcome to not do—I want to make it clear.

So can you give me an example of kind of one of the things that has been irritating you or that has been a problem? It doesn’t have to be a huge one. It doesn’t have to be epic.

**Sarah:** Well, this past weekend we had plans to go out. We were going to just take a nice family drive and everything. So I arranged to have the kids set up to do this, and we had it all planned out. We were going to leave by twelve, just take a drive, and there actually was a new restaurant we were going to try out.

And I’m getting everyone ready and I go look for Tony and there he is in his garage, working. It’s his little escape where he likes to work out
on his things and he likes to build things. And I’m like, “Aren’t you ready to go?” And he is like, “Well, no, I just started this project.”

And he starts things and then he never finishes it. And so here we are. We were supposed to leave at twelve, and by the time he goes and finishes up and gets changed, it’s almost quarter to one. The kids are hungry, they are cranky. And this is just one of the examples of, you know, we had arranged to have this plan. So, yeah, that was just something that—

Wiener: You are giving me very expressive looks here, Tony. What’s that for you?

Tony: Because I am trying not to jump in and cut her off. But, you know, we specifically talked about this before, too. And I told her that, “How much time do I have?” and she told me, “You’ve got an hour or so.” I obviously underestimated how much time it was going to take to do what I wanted to do, but I thought I would have time. So I went out there to start something. You know, you get these impulses. I had a creative urge, and I just wanted to get it done. And so I went out there, I started this up. I lost track of time. It’s an honest mistake. I wasn’t wearing a watch. I don’t usually where any jewelry in the garage because it will get messed up. But anyway, so I went out there to try to start this up, and I figured I could get it done, or at least I could get it to a breaking point. And then she came out, and it wasn’t. She wasn’t as controlled as she made it sound. It was more like a little bit of an explosion. But I didn’t think that I had done anything that was that drastic. It wasn’t like, “We are going to miss a plane.” It wasn’t like, “The house is on fire.” And all of a sudden I feel like I have the wrath of God pouring down on me or something. So I stopped as easily as I could without causing a problem for myself later, without causing a fire. And I went and got changed, got cleaned up and got changed. It wasn’t that much time passed. I mean, the kids would be okay.

Wiener: So I noticed you are shaking your head as Tony is describing his experience.

Sarah: Yeah, well, “the wrath of God” was a little dramatic. But the point being is that here we are, we had the set plan, and it is not his
priority. It is not his priority to make this set. He starts things, he
never finishes it.

Tony: I was close enough.

Sarah: I’m sorry, I don’t see an hour away being close enough.

Wiener Commentary: In asking for a problem, I observed that and how
Sarah and Tony each “block,” that is, invalidate the other’s meaning
of the events recounted. Specifically, Sarah faults Tony for being selfish
and inconsiderate by leaving the children waiting. Tony defends himself
as making an “honest mistake” and faults Sarah for overreacting—his
“wrath of God” comment.

Wiener: How does this usually end at home, if the two of you are in
some kind of quarrel about this sort of thing? How does it usually
end? You may have different answers, so let me ask you first.

Tony: Typically, what I will do is realize it is not going any further,
and sort of, “All right,” and move on. Just sort of say, “Okay, I can’t
compete. I’m just going to go on. I have other things that are more
enjoyable to do with my time.”

Wiener: How would you describe that?

Sarah: I would describe it that he just shuts himself off and he walks
away. There is no resolution. We don’t finish our conversation and get
to a point where we can move on.

[00:15]

Tony: It doesn’t get resolved. It keeps going. And it’s like a serial. It just
keeps going and going.

Sarah: Well the thing is, if you stayed and we could have a resolution
about it, and maybe an understanding, then it would finish. But if
you just walk away, you shut down, there is no conclusion. And this is
getting more and more.

Wiener: It leaves you feeling how?

Sarah: I feel like I can’t complete anything with him. I can’t complete
my feelings with him or get to a point, and it makes me feel like he is
just shutting me out.
Wiener: And what feelings are you left with after you decide it is not going anywhere and you walk away?

Tony: Well, I figure we will continue it later, so I can just stop for now. If I feel like I have spent a lot of energy—and it takes a lot out of me to go through this a lot—if I spent my energy doing that, then okay. I would rather do something positive with my time.

Wiener Commentary: I further note that Tony and Sarah differ in how each partner wants to resolve the issue. Sarah wants to have it out, and feels shut out by Tony’s refusal to talk further about it. Tony, by contrast, feels it is acceptable not to strive for closure.

Both partners show tension. The affective climate has soured after they have given their separate accounts.

Wiener: This sort of thing, we can go on discussing it, but there is something I would like to try along the lines of what I was describing before. So what we do in Rehearsals for Growth is we have—this is really a more conventional therapy situation, where we are talking, and I am sitting here, typically, and you guys are on the couch. And then, when we do any kind of enactments, I use the other end of the office and have you come over there. And when you are there, you are free to explore what it is like to not necessarily be yourself. Sometimes I will be actually assigning you a character to play that is not you. At other times, I will simply ask you to do something which is perhaps different or unusual, to see what that is like.

This does two things. It gives me information about how you interact with each other, and it also gives you a sense of what it is like to interact with each other in a way that might be different from what you are used to. So the first thing I would like to invite you to try is what I call a mirroring exercise.

MIRRORS EXERCISE

Wiener: So in this exercise, one person is the leader and the other person is the follower, okay? And the roles will switch. I will call the word, “Switch,” and at that point, the leader will become the follower and the follower will become the leader. And the role of the leader is to initiate continuous movement. So you move, not kind of sudden,
Abrupt movement like that, but movement where you are flowing. The movement is slow but flowing. It keeps going. Okay?

And the leader starts it, and the role of the follower is to look into the eyes of the leader, and without changing your focus, to just out of the corners of your eyes to move with whatever it is that the leader is doing, as a mirror image. Imagine for the moment that there would be a mirror between the two of you—it would be what your own mirror image would be doing.

So if you, for example, to start out as the leader, Sarah, if you raise your right arm, okay, raise your right arm. Right arm. That’s it. You would be on this side. Exactly. So you are really doing your left arm, but you are not thinking right or left. You are just simply doing what the mirror would do.

Tony: And if she leans forward, I lean forward.

Wiener: You will lean forward. Now, try to move in such a way that you are able to maintain eye contact with each other throughout it. Also, I should add that there is no talking during this. The idea is to remain visually focused on one another’s eyes, and you will be able to see well enough what the other person is doing, if you are the follower, out of the corners of your eyes. Okay?

So, to begin with, we will ask you to start as the leader. Okay?

Sarah: Okay.

Wiener: So I will just say, “Begin,” and start by looking at each other and begin.

Wiener Commentary: Mirrors is easy to explain and undemanding to perform. The first Rehearsals for Growth enactment introduced to a couple should be relatively easy so they will have a success experience with enactment.

The premises of Mirrors are ones of cooperation, alignment with the other, and turns taking regarding leadership—all qualities that promote good relationship functioning.

Wiener: Okay. And switch.
Okay, now switch once more so that once again, Sarah, you are the leader.

What I am going to ask you to do when I say the word “mutual” in a moment or two, is for the two of you to move together without there being a leader or a follower.

Okay, so, “mutual.”

**Wiener Commentary:** I give the “mutual” instruction as a way of assessing the couple’s reaction to a next-to-impossible instruction, one that they are unlikely to succeed at, at least for very long.

**Wiener:** Okay. And stop. Great. Okay, that looked very good from where I was.

**MIRRORS—POST-ENACTMENT PROCESS (P.E.P.)**

**Wiener:** Good, okay, so how was that for each of you? Tony, how was that mirrors exercise for you?

**Tony:** It was interesting. It was kind of fun. I mean, it took a little more concentration than I expected, but it wasn’t an uncomfortable thing to do.

**Wiener:** Okay, it sounds as though you might have expected it to be a bit more, either difficult, or what?

**Tony:** Yeah, probably was expecting something more challenging, more taxing.

**Wiener:** Okay. And what was your experience with that, Sarah?

**Sarah:** At first, I wasn’t sure what to expect, and it did kind of flow fairly easily, so that was nice.

**Wiener:** A couple of questions. One is, did you have a preference for leading or following? And I will, again, ask you, Tony.

**Tony:** I think I liked leading better.

**Wiener:** And why would that be?

**Tony:** I think I just—with my own initiative, I felt like I had better control over it when I was guiding. And it felt good for her to be picking up on it and going along. It seemed to flow better for me.
Wiener: I see. And in your case was there a preference?

Sarah: Either way seemed fine. It was okay to lead, and following was about the same.

Wiener: One other thing about leading is that you don’t have to really be so attentive to what the other person is doing, because it is their job to keep up with you.

Tony: Right.

Wiener: I was also going to ask about the mutuality. Did that work for you? Did you get into the flow of feeling like you were moving simultaneously or not?

Tony: Not completely. Not for me. I mean it was a little bit of a—that is where I felt like it was more concentration. It didn’t flow as much. I was really trying to keep the whole thing—maybe because it is new. It is just something that I hadn’t done before. But it didn’t flow as easily for me as when we were doing the mirroring, whether I was following or leading.

Wiener: Anything to add about your experience with the mutuality?

Sarah: Well, I felt that he was actually leading a little bit more than allowing it to be a mutual thing. I kind of sensed that a little bit.

Wiener Commentary: Tony and Sarah did not seem upset that Tony had actually led, which shows that they are not so overanxious about getting it right.

Wiener: Did this remind you in any way of anything going on in your relationship? Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn’t. But it is useful to at least ask if there were any associations, or any resonance to times that you have had something, a similar feeling or similar dynamic occur between you. Any of those?

Tony: Well, maybe on a gentler level. This sort of reminded me, when she was leading, it almost felt like I just give in, just follow what she is doing. It is kind of like when she says, “Don’t do this so much. This is the plan, we need to go along with this. This is what we have set up.” But as I said, gentler. This wasn’t like I felt like I was being pulled into it. I felt more like just go along with it, relinquish control. Don’t try to
go against the tide.

**Wiener:** The next one I’d like to try with you is a bit different. It’s called line repetition, and it’s going to involve you actually reciting scripted dialogue. So you’ll have to learn your lines. And the lines simply are one line. One of you will say, “You will,” and the other one will say, “I won’t.” Okay? Let’s go over here and I’ll give you more specific instructions, okay?

**LINE REPETITION**

[00:25]

**Wiener Commentary:** The rationale for line repetition is to offer a controlled experience of oppositional interaction, but one where the interaction becomes seen as a performance that shifts clients’ experience toward other possibilities in the way they interact emotionally. In other words, pretense in play teaches clients to achieve emotional distance and perspective from their conflict. This is the principle of displacement in action. Note that I use the “scripted” to further reinforce and frame the enactment as a theatrical performance.

**Wiener:** So the dialogue is scripted in the sense that you very simply say, “You will.” And your line is, “I won’t.” Okay? And you are just going to say that over and over again, but changing the inflection and the gestures that go with that. So we are going to start by having you begin with “You will.”

Okay, go ahead.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.
Tony: I won’t.
Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.

Wiener: Great. Okay. Let’s stop here. Okay, good. We want increasing intensity.
Sarah: Oh, okay.

Wiener: So we are going to do it again from that point, okay? So begin.

Wiener Commentary: Their first attempt at line repetition showed little variety in their delivery. Clients frequently don’t enact the exercise in precisely the way the therapist intended.

Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.
Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.
Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.
Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.
Sarah: You will.
Tony: I won’t.

Wiener: Good, okay, let’s stop right there. Okay, now we are going to reverse it, and we are going to have you be doing the “You will,” and you are taking the line, “I won’t.” Okay?

Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.

Wiener: Good, okay, let’s stop there. And now let’s go back and process what just happened.

**LINE REPLICATION—POST-ENACTMENT PROCESS (P.E.P.)**

Wiener: Observations about the overall experience of that?
Tony: I think when I was saying, “You will,” I got a little bit more irritated than I would have liked to. It almost started seeming realistic, like I am butting my head against a wall, and I don’t see why there should be resistance. But when I was doing the “I won’t” piece, it didn’t feel so bad.

Wiener: It looked to me like you were almost going to change the line to, “Okay, I will,” or something like that.
Tony: I suppose out of practice. I have had to do that too many times.

Wiener: And what was your experience?
Sarah: The first one seemed okay. As far as the second one, I didn’t really appreciate his aggression.

Wiener: You were uncomfortable with it? Or did you get mad at it, or what was happening?
Sarah: I kind of just turned it off. Yeah, I don’t think it is necessary to get that aggressive. And it kind of annoyed me.

Wiener: Did this have the feel of—I think you made reference to it, so maybe you have already at least partly answered that. But did this feel
like a familiar place that the two of you get to?

**Tony:** Yeah, I can see some familiarities, some sort of shadows of familiarity to some of the confrontations we will have.

**Wiener:** Okay. So there was a different tone that came into it. I think both of you sounded like you were getting a little bit serious or maybe unhappy? I couldn’t tell for sure, but it seemed like it was something kind of consequential going on there beneath it.

[00:30]

**Tony:** Yeah, it wasn’t nearly as fun as the last one.

**Wiener:** Oh, no, yeah. Well, this one sets you up to be in conflict with each other. So unless you are okay with having conflict, it is going to have unpleasant vibes. I might ask you to do it, but to exaggerate one of these things, knowing that it is just in fun. Okay? Would you like to try that? I mean, you don’t have to. I’m just saying if it is unpleasant and you don’t want to go there, don’t. But if you would like to try it, we can give it a shot.

**Tony:** Your call.

**Sarah:** If it is going to make things better, I mean—

**Wiener:** Well, okay, but which line are you more interested in playing there in a different way? Because the emphasis is trying out to doing it differently, not just to do it more.

**Sarah:** So you mean do the same exercise but saying it—

**Wiener:** The same exercise, but with the intention to get to a particular result.

**LINE REPETITION 2**

**Wiener:** And if you need help, if you feel like you are weakening or you don’t know that you can do it, I can support you in that. If you don’t need me, just wave your hand and I will come in.

**Sarah:** If I need you?

**Wiener:** If you need me, I’m sorry. That’s right.

**Sarah:** Okay.
Wiener: Okay.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.
Sarah: I won’t.
Tony: You will.

Wiener: Okay, back to the couch.

LINE REPETITION 2—POST-ENACTMENT PROCESS (P.E.P.)

Wiener: Again, what was that like?

Sarah: Well, I felt better as far as I felt like I confronted it. Before I was sort of ready just to—would like to walk away a little bit. But confronting it more in the play sense felt a little bit better.

Wiener: Okay. What was different—how did you experience Sarah differently this time?

Tony: It was more reflective of how I was coming across to her. So if I brought it on to a level 5, say, she came back with level 5. If I went up to level 7, she came back with level 7. It seemed more matching.

Wiener: Yeah. So by the way, that’s the kind of thing that we can use these enactments for—not just to find out how you normally do it,
but in this case to explore what it is like to try it out differently. And because it is just an exercise, if you don’t like it you don’t have to do it in real life. If you do find something that you do like or want to explore or try out, you could apply it. So it gives you that flexibility.

**Wiener Commentary:** Here I make the important point for the first time that they control the way they play their conflict, and can choose what they wish to keep or discard from the alternatives they enact.

Also, another thing I just wanted to ask about, since obviously this was all constructed and staged as opposed to it coming out of your own feelings rising from your interaction with each other in everyday life, you have the freedom to not be taken so seriously. In other words, you didn’t have to be menaced that she was actually going to be defying you, because you knew it was part of what she had planned to do and what was already agreed upon there.

But yet the experience, even though it was staged, had enough resonance or reality for you to get some feel of what it is like to go to a different place, or at least to push the envelope. It’s not a totally different place, but it is going farther than you usually go.

So that is the kind of thing that we can do more of, and in fact, some of the other enactments will take us there. So at this point, actually, there is another one which sort of comes right out of this, which also involves conflict, which is called the tug of war.

Now you know what a tug of war is, right?

**Tony:** Sure.

**Wiener:** The only difference between the exercise we are going to do here and a real tug of war is that there is no rope. So it is a tug of war with an imaginary rope, not a real rope. Okay? So, once again, come up here and we will give that one a try.

**TUG OF WAR**

**Wiener:** Tug of war is an exercise that appears to be a competition between its players. I offered it to explore the extent of competitive impulses in Tony and Sarah’s relationship and how they play out dynamically issues of winning and losing.
I will instruct you this way. This time I would like you to stand a little bit farther apart. I know we don’t have a lot of room in this office. Okay, that’s probably good, because you want to be able to back up a little bit, too. So you have to give yourselves enough room for that. So maybe even come a little bit more this way so you have a little bit more room. Great.

[00:35]

Okay, so the exercise is a tug of war with an imaginary rope. And we will start out by imagining that there is a rope on the ground which stretches running between both of your feet that you are going to pick up on my signal, and when I tell you to get ready and go, you position yourself to actually struggle, to actually exert what looks like physical force, okay?

So now pick up the rope. And get yourselves ready. And wait for my signal. I will be giving you a count of three. 1. 2. 3. Go!

Okay, so Tony, notice that she is actually pulling on that rope. She is putting a lot of exertion, so respond to that.

**Wiener Commentary:** “Blocking” in tug of war often takes the form of a rubber rope, which is seen as the imaginary rope is stretching or going slack when the players are inattentive or choose not to accept the physical offers of the other.

**Wiener:** Okay. So let’s find out what happened. Let’s go back and check it out.

**Wiener Commentary:** We saw that blocking in the first tug of war, where Sarah, almost off-balance as she leaned forward, kept taking in rope instead of being pulled over, and in the second tug of war, where I coach Tony to respond to Sarah’s exertions instead of persisting in holding his position.

**TUG OF WAR—P.E.P.**

**Wiener:** This game may look like a tug of war, but actually it is about co-creating the illusion of there being a real rope, because the two of you have to be moving to make the rope look real. Both of you can’t be hauling it in at the same time. Then it looks like taffy. Right? So actually the two of you are cooperating, even though there is a focus
or a given assumption that it is about winning and losing, which is what came out emotionally for the two of you in what we have been talking about, processing.

So this is very good. I think we are going to work a little bit more with this at our next session. And this is all the time that we have for today, so we will see you next week. Will next Monday at 4 o’clock work for both of you?

Tony: I think so.

Sarah: Yeah.

Wiener: Then I will see you then.

Sarah: Okay. Thank you.

Tony: Thanks.

DAY 2

Wiener: Anything that came up for you from last time? After all, you are somewhat new to therapy and also to the way that I work. Anything come up?

Sarah: You know, I guess I was thinking that the interesting thing from the exercise that I didn’t really think Tony felt was that he wanted to be more of a leader, that he took that position.

Wiener: Oh, you mean from the mirrors exercise?

Sarah: Yeah. That one.

Tony: Yeah. And something else I noticed that I don’t think I really clued into was that I think sometimes Sarah would feel threatened, like maybe emotionally or physically threatened by me, with going through the “You will, I won’t, you will, I won’t” exercise. And I never imagined that I would come across that way. And I think I even said it last time, that when I was doing that I was getting more exasperated, more irritated than I thought I would, simply because it was running up against an unmoving force and that was getting frustrating. It got beyond what I thought I would do. And I think that she felt threatened by it, and I thought that’s an uncomfortable place to be. So I noticed that.
Wiener: Were you aware of that at the time, or is that the thought that happened to you later?

Tony: I was aware of it almost when we sat back down. I thought, “That’s not really characteristic of me to lose composure to that degree.” So I think I was a little concerned that I had that in me and that it would come out against her.

Wiener: Okay. And was there anything that came up for you about, in the aftermath of those exercises?

Sarah: I kind of felt a little off, again, with that whole anger. And I just like to kind of dismiss it, which I didn’t really think about before.

Wiener: Are you saying you are not comfortable with even pretending to be angry, or how is that for you?

Sarah: I guess it is something that I guess I have to allow myself to be. I have my own judgments on it. So I think that was interesting.

Wiener: Yeah. Well, see, when you talk about things, or when you only talk about things, you can usually adjust the comfort level with more control over it. When you are actually doing things, we surprise ourselves more frequently.

Sarah: Right.

[00:40]

Wiener: A colleague of mine says the body in action doesn’t lie. And it is true because you discover through action things that were not known, or that were sometimes, in fact, being misdirected in your own thinking. So that’s kind of what happens in some of these exercises. And it is actually part of the method, because we are working with making changes, which, when you think about it, is what therapy really is for. So it’s not inappropriate to do that. It is just at times risky or scary.

So my goal is to keep things safe for you guys. And one reason that I put such on emphasis on only doing what you are willing to do is because it wouldn’t be safe if you felt that you were pushed, rushed, forced, or otherwise not doing it willingly. So I just want to remind you that anything we do going forward from here is operating
according to this same rule. So it is really okay to say no.

I was noticing, thinking back on what we did last time, when you were working with the exercise, the “You will, I won’t,” It felt to me as though there as a ceiling or a limit that you were putting on how expressively determined or angry you were willing to show yourself to be. And your comment earlier seems to be referencing the same thing. Do you want to say more about your take on that?

Sarah: I guess maybe it is just I think there is a certain amount, a certain way it should be. So going beyond that maybe is also uncomfortable, too.

Wiener: Right. Okay. Because I would like to try it again, and encourage you to see if you are willing to go farther than you went.

Wiener Commentary: Since I wanted more information regarding the couple’s capacity for broader emotional range, I coached them in a variation of line repetition. Their performances here demonstrated their capacity for broader emotional range and became an intervention whereby Sarah and Tony visited together some new emotional landscapes in their relationship.

One benefit of this expanded emotional range in “Rehearsals of Growth” is that couples can more readily get beyond habitual emotive sequences in their everyday lives and keep things stable and predictable but stuck.

**LINE REPETITION 3**

Wiener: Okay, so you already have experienced what we did last time with the line repetition, the “You will, I won’t.” Remember that? We may do a couple variations this time. And one of them is that I am going to be doing some coaching of the particular intention or mood or other instruction that will tell you how to play it in that moment, rather than leave it totally up to you. Okay?

So, again, we are going to have you start off with the “You will.” And your line is, “I won’t.” So we will use that one. And after every few of them, I’m going to give you an instruction as to how to do it. In other words, I might say, for example, “Sound angry,” or, “Be determined.” or something like that.
So let’s give it a shot, okay?

Tony: Okay.

Wiener: We will start you off without any instructions. Just define your own levels with it.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Wiener: Okay, so stop for a moment. Great.

So this time you are more intense. Go for greater intensity. It doesn’t mean loud, but it means more intense. Okay? Go.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Wiener: Stop. Good. It’s a joke. It’s very light, offhand. Okay?

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Sarah: You will.

Tony: I won’t.

Wiener: Okay, entitled. You are more entitled to the stance or the
position you are taking.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Wiener:** Okay, seductive.

**[00:45]**

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Sarah:** You will.

**Tony:** I won’t.

**Wiener:** Great.

**LINE REPETITION 3—P.E.P.**

**Wiener:** Great. So how was that for you guys?

**Tony:** That was fun.

**Sarah:** Yeah, that was kind of enjoyable.

**Wiener:** Yeah. Well, you are smiling. It can’t be all bad.

**Sarah:** Not too terrible.

**Wiener:** When I said that I enjoyed it, that was not because I set this up for my amusement but because I actually do participate in a sense of being there with you guys. And I think you are probably aware of my presence, not just because I was coaching you, but because I am actually here with you in doing this.
So there is an element in all of these exercises—it comes out of theater—which essentially is about performance. We are rarely doing things just by and for ourselves. We really are performing it with others. How much do you guys, apart from coming here and doing these weird things, how much do you guys play with each other?

**Tony:** We have children. We don’t have to play with each other.

**Wiener:** Well, that’s true that you have an outlet or an opportunity to play given that you have children, but my question had to do with whether you also include and invite each other.

**Tony:** Not lately so much, I don’t think.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I was going to say I don’t—I think we’ve kind of left that out a little bit.

**Tony:** I don’t know. Did we grow away from it? I don’t know. There was more in the beginning, early on. Maybe that is natural.

**Sarah:** Sometimes you get so busy with your life and you have your set routines, and sometimes, maybe in a way, you take it for granted and you just—

**Tony:** Yeah. You forget where the playful part goes and you become all business. And then, if you have tensions it is like, okay, you have to address the negative things before you can go on and play. It almost seems like you are trying to play when there is something hanging out there. It doesn’t feel right. It’s like, “Oh, but there’s problems. What are you doing playing when there is work to be done?” sort of thing.

**Wiener:** Do you remember anybody saying that to you or giving you that as an attitude?

**Tony:** Oh, yeah.

**Wiener:** Yeah? Who would that have been?

**Tony:** It was a pretty common line by my mother when I was little.

**Wiener:** Your mom?

**Tony:** Oh yeah. She was very involved in that kind of stuff. “Keep your nose to the grindstone.” Maybe it is her generation but it was like, “You do the work before you play.”
**Wiener:** Do you think you would be disloyal to her if you were more playful with Sarah?

**Tony:** I don’t even think I would look at it from that perspective, that it had anything to do with her. It seems more like it is part of me.

**Wiener:** Yeah. Well, sometimes we carry around influences from our families of origin.

**Tony:** More than just in the gene pool, right?

**Wiener:** Oh, yeah. So one of the things I wanted to do that also follows up on what we did last time—do you remember the tug of war that we did?

**Tony:** I won.

**Wiener:** There is another way we can do that, actually, now that you brought that up. There is another way we can do that. We can script the outcome, but still have it be interesting because it is in the way you do it. If you know the play “Hamlet,” you know that Hamlet dies in the fifth act. So you don’t go to the theater to find out what happened to Hamlet. It is how the play is done.

And that is kind of what we are looking for here. We are going to know the outcome, but the way that the two of you create the rope and the struggle that the two of you then co-create is what we are going to be going for here—the experience of that. Okay?

Willing to try it again with a known outcome?

**Tony:** Oh, okay. Sure.

**Wiener:** This time—I regret to tell you this time he is going to win. I decided that. I’m God. I decided.

**Sarah:** Oh, great.

**Tony:** You always wanted to meet God.

**Wiener:** Well, you had the experience of winning before.

**Sarah:** That’s true. I guess I should let him.

**Tony:** Let me? You have to work at it.

**Wiener:** Okay. Let’s come on up and we will give it a shot.
Wiener Commentary: In contrast to the first variation, this second, scripted-outcome tug of war variation, is not a contest centering on who wins, but a performance that requires cooperation and coordination of effort between the partners to be convincing.

TUG OF WAR 2

Wiener: Okay, so this time we are going to go with it. On my signal. Ready? Get yourself in position. Pick up your rope. All right. Here we go. 1. 2. 3. Go!

[00:50]

Sarah: Hi, nice to fall for you.

Tony: Fancy meeting you here.

Wiener: So you guys really fell for each other there.

Sarah: Yes.

Tony: Apparently.

Wiener: Yeah. Well, let’s come back to the couch and talk a little about what happened.

TUG OF WAR 2—P.E.P.

Wiener: Well, that was different. Frankly I didn’t expect that. What happened there?

Tony: I didn’t expect it either.

Sarah: Wow. Well, I just had to knock you over.

Tony: I had to win. So a welcomed end to perhaps a contentious match.

Wiener: Did you have any idea she was going to be—

Tony: No.

Wiener: No?

Tony: No.

Wiener: I mean, you went down, so that was all to you.

Tony: Yes, because I didn’t expect it.

Sarah: And he caught me, so that was very gentlemanly.
Tony: I couldn’t just stand aside and let you go.
Sarah: That was nice. I appreciate it.
Wiener: Because it wasn’t a real—we know that, it wasn’t a real rope. So you made a choice as to whether to go with him when he went down.
Sarah: Yeah.
Wiener: Was that something that you thought about before you actually did it?
Sarah: I didn’t think about it before, I just thought, “Oh, here we go.”
Tony: Teach me a lesson.
Sarah: No!
Wiener: Well let’s see, you look very pleased with yourself.
Sarah: I thought it was a lot of fun. It was certainly completely different from the first time.

Wiener Commentary: Notice that Sarah and Tony are now more positive, playful, and sitting physically closer. Embodying playfulness is a resource becoming more available in the quality of their relationship.

Wiener: Thinking back on that, what was—not only what was different about it, but what do you remember about the first time?
Sarah: The first time I felt that he kind of, in letting me win, he was more placating to a certain degree.
Wiener: And you didn’t like that?
Sarah: No. No. I didn’t appreciate it, really.
Wiener: And do you have any sense of what that reminded you of? Did it bring anything back into your memory? Were there associations to that? Who else might have put you on your guard or turned you off by being kind of too compliant or too going-along-with?
Sarah: I guess, now that I think about it, there is—my father used to do that.
Wiener: When would he do that?
Sarah: Well, more specifically, I guess there are times when we would sense that there was something wrong. My father was not faithful to my mother, and whenever we would question him about something, he would always be placating us. “No, no.”

Tony: Hold on. Are you trying to say that I do the same thing? That I’m like your father? Because if you look at it, it’s like, okay, I can either let you win, or I can win. One way or the other you are going to hit me with it. Like I can get nailed whether I do the right thing or the wrong thing. I try to do what is right at the moment, that I think is right. And then I’m going to pay some repercussion for it. And then I try to do it the opposite next time, and I pay a repercussion for it. I don’t get it. I mean how do I win?

Wiener Commentary: Again, the enactment leaves them with positive affect toward one another until Sarah brings up her father. Note both the rapid shift of mood when Sarah brings up her father’s deceptive behavior, and Tony’s reactivity to being compared with him.

Tony: You know you can’t lump me in the same category as your father. I don’t behave that way.

Sarah: I’m not saying that you behave that way. I’m just saying that at that point that was what I was feeling. You know?

Wiener: Sometimes it brings up for you that sometimes you are being damned if you do, damned if you don’t?

Tony: Exactly. Yeah. You know, it was okay, and then all of a sudden there is something negative about it, and I don’t—it sort of catches me off guard when everything seems to be going great, and then I am like, “Okay, what did I do wrong now?“

Wiener: So you weren’t—of course, during the enactment, that wasn’t what you were aware of.

Tony: No.

Wiener: But do you remember anything about what was happening the first time? Remember last week when we were doing it the first way, and Sarah was not happy with you for having let her win?

Tony: Yeah. Again, okay, what did I do wrong? I could either be the
bully or I could be the wimp. And one way or the other, I can be looked at as having done it wrong.

[00:55]

So where do I go? Where is my middle ground? Where is the win-win?

**Wiener:** Well, the question you raise about whether or not you are being seen or being experienced as being like her father, or in the moment that you are treating him as though he is your father, it is something to consider. It might turn out to have some validity in terms of how you experience things. I am not saying we have to settle it once and for all, and it may not be all the time the same way. But it could be there. It’s definitely what people do sometimes.

In fact, your reaction of feeling upset that you are damned if you do and damned if you don’t, the bully and the wimp, what you just got through saying—is that something which reminds you of where you have been earlier in life, before you met Sarah?

**Tony:** Well, I don’t see that specific situation. I mean, as a kid I had a very controlling household. I didn’t feel that I was really able to do my own thing. I was going to be done what I was told—that’s the way it was. No questions asked. Part of how my family just handled it. That’s the parenting pattern that they had.

**Wiener Commentary:** Tony’s reactivity against being cast as either the bully or the wimp—damned if you do, damned if you don’t—leads to a productive focus on family of origin patterns for both Tony and Sarah, demonstrating how enactment can activate pattern awareness.

There is another technique that I would like to invite you to try in which—in a way it is a little bit similar to what you were doing when you were doing the one-word-at-a-time story, but it is more an introduction to being in a game rather than an exercise. And in a game, you take on characters. You actually play a character that is not you, that is known to be different from who you are. You have a choice to think of yourself that way during an exercise. You could say, for example, while doing a tug of war, “I am being so-and-so,” but without any instructions to really take on that role, that’s not something which is imposed or given to you, whereas it is in a game.
In a game, the intention is to see what happens when you play a character who is not you. So the one I had in mind is called “Poet’s Corner.” It’s a weird kind of name but it goes kind of like this. I will explain it to you, and you can decide if this is something that you are up for at this time.

The game of “Poet’s Corner” that I was starting to describe is one in which we have two people who are going to be onstage, which—guess what—is you guys. I will be your audience. And we are at a performance, sort of a poetry reading. And at a poetry reading, we are going to have one person be the person who introduces the poet to the audience, and the person who is introducing it also is going to translate for the poet, because the poet is a person who comes from a different culture or a different planet and who doesn’t speak English.

You with me so far? It’s getting weirder, right?

Sarah: Yeah.

Wiener: Okay, so the poet is going to speak in gibberish. Do you speak gibberish?

Sarah: No.

Wiener: Well, what gibberish is, it is nonsense speech that sounds as though it really is a language. So let’s just try that out and see if we can—

Tony: Kind of like Chinese?

Wiener: Whatever. But the point is it is not a real language. It is simply a made-up bunch of varied syllables that sound language-like.

Tony: Okay.

Wiener: But emotional inflection still comes through, despite the fact that the content is not intelligible. Okay, so if I say to you, for example, “Bushta bay koola pa na?” and you might say—you don’t have a clue. But see what happens if you just try to speak in syllables back, using something that you feel is connected to the emotional invitation that I gave you.

Tony: Remember how you used to talk to Kara a couple of years ago?

Sarah: You mean like baby talk kind of thing, yeah.
Tony: That would work.

Wiener: Well, we are going to try it with you, too, so you are in this conversation also, Tony.

Tony: I thought I would be the other one, the one that speaks English.

Wiener: Well, we haven’t decided that yet. But I am interested to see if both of you can speak gibberish. After all, the translator has to understand gibberish, or pretend to.

Tony: They didn’t offer that in school so I never took it, but okay.

Wiener: So, [gibberish]

Tony: [Gibberish]

Wiener: [Gibberish]

Tony: [Gibberish]

Wiener: [Gibberish]

Sarah: Tink tonk.

Wiener: [Gibberish]

Sarah: That’s my language. Tink tonk.

Wiener: Good. Okay. So I think Tony is pretty fluent in it.

Sarah: Yeah, my gibberish skills are not quite as up to—

Wiener: Right. So I am thinking maybe you can be the translator.

Sarah: Oh, thank god.

Wiener: And you can be the poet.

Tony: Do you have any gibberish poetry I could read?

Wiener: I think you are just going to have to wing it. Frankly, I think the last copy of your book was already sold, so you are going to have to—

Tony: And it wasn’t even on this planet.

Wiener: I know. But maybe the royalties will still come to you.

Tony: But not in US dollars, so it is useless.

Wiener: Maybe soon.
Tony: Better get it right, otherwise I am going to have to make you repeat it.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Wiener: You will.

Tony: Yes.

Sarah: I won’t.

Tony: You will.

Wiener: All right. So what I am going to do is invite you once again to come on stage and we are going to set this up as “Poet’s Corner.” Come with me.

Wiener Commentary: About a third of clients are blocked when trying to speak gibberish for the first time. Fortunately, one partner—Tony in this case—could speak it.

POET’S CORNER

Wiener: So I’m the audience, and this is a poetry reading. I’m in the audience, so you are directing your performance to me. And you are going to introduce first yourself as the MC or the person who is bringing the speaker to the audience, and you are going to then say who it is that you are going to be having—

Sarah: I can create—

Wiener: Absolutely. Make up a name for this poet and inform the audience that they are going to be hearing your translation of his poem. And then bring him on, welcome him, and you might even talk to him a little bit in gibberish, which you understand and he understands, but none of the rest of us do. And then he begins the poem. You cue him to begin the poem. And every line or two, you stop and give her a chance to translate for you. And also, rather than just stand there with your hands in your pockets, you might choose to be more dramatic and to really act out the poem to some extent.

Tony: Okay.

Sarah: No pressure.

Wiener: No pressure. Absolutely none.
Sarah: It will be brilliant.
Tony: It’s not the Gong Show.
Sarah: Yes, okay.

Wiener: So, whenever you are ready.

Sarah: Well, thank you very much for coming to our lovely poetry reading. We have today our excellent poet from Tahiti. And I will be translating because that is what I do. So, thank you. Thank you.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Tonk tonk.
Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Tink tonk.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Oh, we have just kind of had a little interchange because I know you don’t understand us. So whenever he is ready, he will be giving his presentation.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Tink.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: When the beautiful sun rises and sets, we smile.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: And then the ocean waves back and forth.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Oh, and back again.

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: There are little dolphins—

Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: Yes, there are little dolphins that go, “Meenie meenie monnie moe.”
Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: And then the sharks go, “Wonga wonga wonga wonga.”
Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: “Wonga wonga.”
Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: And then the sun sets and all of the dolphins and sharks go home.
Tony: [Gibberish]
Sarah: The end.

Wiener Commentary: Both Tony and Sarah did well. I was especially gratified to see Sarah take so well to the translator role. Although this couple appears very skilled, enactment of this game often goes well since cooperation and attentiveness to one another are the only essential skills needed for a credible performance.

Tony and Sarah return to the couch pleased with their performance. In Rehearsals for Growth, this is the most important criterion of successful improvising and a good indicator of improved relationship functioning.

POET’S CORNER—P.E.P.

[01:05]
Wiener: I didn’t know you were so playful. I mean, not that I am totally surprised, but I didn’t see the extent of your playfulness until now.

Tony: With three kids all under teen years, you have to be playful. Especially the little four-year-old with the attention span of a goldfish. You got to keep things lively and playful.

Wiener: Sure. So how did you experience the playing off of each other, the cooperation or—?

Tony: I thought it was fun to be sort of connected in this, where I could make any noise I wanted and see what she was going to do with it. And then if it sounded too conventional I could say, “Well let’s try and make it not so conventional, let’s throw something else out there.”
Wiener: Well, you had a story—at times it seems you had a story in mind with the gestures and everything, but I don’t know if the initial idea came from her translation or if it just got more particular or specific once she started talking about the—

Tony: Well, I was sort of thinking about “There was a Lady from Nantucket,” but, no, we didn’t want to go there. And then I sort of just played off, when she said Tahiti and then started talking about the islands of Tahiti and I thought, “Okay, we will go with something along—see what she does with Tahiti.”

Wiener: So you played off of each other in the sense that—what we call “accepted one another’s offers.” You validated the choices that the other one was making in the course of going back and forth. And you were each doing it for the other, which is what made it great and made it work.

Tony: Helps to have read all of those kids’ books.

Wiener: Were you feeling more challenged to kind of get the intent of his poem?

Sarah: Well, I was taking what he was giving and then just putting on a—trying to make it fit with what was before. But it was surprisingly fun.

Wiener: Yeah. Well as I say, it worked from where I sat. It worked beautifully because the two of you were enjoying one another’s performances, and you were fitting what you did to what the other person had just done, so there was contribution by both of you. You picked up on what the other person did. Probably the most important one is the fact that you were having fun with it.

Was there anything about the way that you felt about your partner, about each other, about the contribution that they were making, which is related to the way that you interact with each other, either the same or by contrast?

Tony: I felt like we had the right roles for each other, where I could sort of be out there, like whatever happened to grasp into my mind I could go with. And she could take it and turn it into something tangible and real, and something that was ordered out of the little
chaos that I threw out there. It sort of seemed to fit. I would just make something up and she would take it and formulate it.

**Wiener:** Okay. So there is some correspondence between the process that took place in the Poet’s Corner and what happens elsewhere in your marriage? Is that what you are saying?

**Tony:** Yeah. Again, our personalities sort of complement each other in that way, I think, because I will be a little bit more—I don’t want to say flighty, but a little bit more out there when I want to—impulsive, and she will be more grounded. And we sort of gravitated into those roles doing that little exercise, where I could just go out there and make up whatever I wanted to make up, and she was grounded, you know? English. Here is the structure. Here is how it comes out. This is what it means. It seemed to be a bit of a parallel.

**Wiener:** I’m making a connection between the mirrors exercise, where you expressed a preference for being the leader when you didn’t have to follow her, be the one who had to kind of fit what was going on with your partner.

**Tony:** Pinocchio without the strings.

**Wiener:** And you were okay with being in the role of being the interpreter/translator person?

**Sarah:** Yeah. I guess it is because it was, even though I was interpreting, I felt it was still a 50/50 kind of thing. Obviously, it wasn’t the most comfortable thing, but it was enjoyable.

**Tony:** We would do that again at home, too.

**Sarah:** We’ll practice.

**Wiener:** Right. Anything about the feeling of trust that you had that you could work with in the last game we did, that you could work with what he gave you?

**Sarah:** Well, I think it was more just allowing myself just to forget everything and know that he is going to—yeah, I guess it is trust. Knowing he is going to give me stuff to work with. And that was nice as far as to just see him like a partner.
[01:10]  
**Wiener:** Right. And is that different from the way you have been seeing him recently?  

**Sarah:** I guess, yes. I mean, I think there is built-up resentments of things I felt were unresolved and issues that I had. I didn’t see him as much as a partner—more as someone that was just starting to walk away. You know, there is all those other things.  

**Wiener:** Okay, so we did a lot today. And I invite you to be playful, like we were talking about, to continue it. Next time I probably will introduce you to some other stuff which will use some of the games playing, the idea of being a character other than yourself, and we will pick it up from there.  

So in the meanwhile, feel free to practice any of the games that you have found to be interesting or enjoyable with each other. And if you want to try them with your kids, that’s allowed, too.  

**DAY 3**  

**Wiener:** So let me find out a little bit how it has been going lately since last time we were together.  

**Sarah:** Honestly, I don’t really see that much of a difference. I mean, yes, it is enjoyable to come here and to play the games, but he’s still going to the gym and I still sense that there is a distance between us, and I’m not really sure how that is affecting anything at this point.  

**Wiener:** Yes. And Tony, what about for you?  

**Tony:** Yeah, I feel like when we are here there tends to be a little bit better connection. We go home, we will go through some of the games together or with the kids, and that is fun. It’s enjoyable. But it seems that we are in the pattern, and we sort of lapse back to the pattern. I still get the feeling that there is a bit of tension. There is some stress. I’d just as soon stay out of—not feed the fires, so to speak.  

**Wiener:** So what I am hearing there is that the same dynamic is continuing in your life at home—that you become more shut down or withdrawn when you feel her suspicion on you, and you become more suspicious when you feel he is withdrawn. Does that describe it?
Sarah: Yes.

Wiener: Did I explain about displacement scenes to you? Did I talk about that before?

Tony: I don’t remember. Is that one of the things we already did?

Wiener: No. Actually, displacement scenes are scenes where—first of all, they are games. That is to say you are in character as somebody other than yourself. And the purpose is to have you experience your dynamic with some remove from the way that you normally are. So rather than have—we might have you, for example, do something that would be sort of realistic but being a different person, or at least not doing something that you would be ordinarily doing in your everyday lives.

Both of those allow for some distance from what normally happens. That is kind of where I am thinking we are going to go next here. And I was thinking that when the two of you have fights, they probably feel pretty familiar in a sense that you know somewhere in the back of your mind that, “We have been here before.” It doesn’t stop you from playing it out the same way, but there is some corner of your brain in which you are thinking, “Been here, done that.”

And the one I was thinking of has to do with conflict. I was thinking of setting up a scene in which we have a complaint department in a store. In department stores, they have clerks who are assigned to handle customers’ problems with the merchandise or the service they have been receiving. And in this particular scene that I was picturing, you would be coming back with a defective object. It would be a doll, a toy, and we would use this as the object to be returned. And you would be the clerk who would be receiving the customer. And the store policy—this is kind of an important part of it—requires him to have a receipt in order for any returns or exchanges to take place. The stated policy on a sign which is actually in the complaint department is that he has to have a receipt. No returns without a receipt.

[01:15]

You don’t have your receipt. But you are going to make a very vigorous case that you are entitled to return this defective doll.
**Wiener Commentary:** I set up this scene to get the couple to explore conflict while displaced further from their every day relationship than they had been in Line Repetition.

**DISPLACEMENT SCENE 1**

**Tony:** Hi, I’d like to return this doll because it is defective.

**Sarah:** Oh, I’m very sorry, sir. Do you have the receipt for it, please?

**Tony:** I don’t. However, it is clearly defective. I bought it here a week ago. And thinking that it was going to be okay, I threw the receipt out, but I did buy it here. I’m a loyal customer and I just would like to exchange it for one that is not broken.

**Sarah:** We appreciate your loyalty, sir, but I’m very sorry. Unfortunately, we are not able to accept this return because you do not have the receipt. I apologize.

**Tony:** But why not? I bought it here. You can see, it even has your price sticker on it. This is the store price sticker.

**Sarah:** Well, sir, I understand that. But our policy clearly states that we cannot accept exchanges unless there is receipt. There is a sign right here that says that. It’s very clear that it is just—that’s our policy.

**Tony:** Don’t you want to keep the customer happy? I’m not happy.

**Sarah:** We certainly do—

**Tony:** I’m not happy. I mean look at this defective doll. It has no head. It has this thing sticking out. It’s flat.

**Sarah:** Well I understand that, sir, and unfortunately we—

**Tony:** It’s from your store.

**Sarah:** Yes, I understand that, sir, and I really apologize, but we cannot accept it because there is no receipt.

**Tony:** Try to step out of your role here and don’t be so mean and rude, and just try to help your customer out. All I need is a little bit of assistance with this.

**Sarah:** Well, excuse me, sir. You don’t need to raise your voice.

**Tony:** I need a new doll for my granddaughter.
Sarah: I understand that sir, but unfortunately, that is our policy. And I’m just doing my—

Tony: I don’t like your policy. I’m the customer. Without the customer, you guys don’t exist, and I just want this exchanged. Do you have a manager I can speak with, please?

Sarah: I’m very sorry, sir, but he is at lunch at this moment. And I do apologize, but unfortunately, there is nothing I can do. If you want to return it at a future time—

Tony: There is something you can do. Look at this doll. It is broken. You can exchange it. I will just bring another one up here. Give me the new one, and I will go out and you can just—

Sarah: Sir, I have to insist. I am very sorry, but we cannot accept—

Tony: When does your manager come back?

Sarah: Not until 4:30, sir.

Tony: So I have to come all the way back to the store just for this? Because you won’t just help me out here.

Sarah: Sir, it is not my intention to not help you.

Tony: I’m a kind human being. You want to be rude to me and be like this.

Sarah: Excuse me, sir, I don’t mean to be rude. This is just our policy and it is clearly—

Tony: Your policy is rude. So 4:30. Now I have to wait till 4:30 and I can come back and talk to him?

Sarah: Yes, sir, I am very sorry, sir.

Tony: All right, I will come back to talk to him. Tell him that your policy is dumb and their people are rude and I will get this taken care of then. I’m the customer and the customer is always right.

Wiener: I think we will stop here. Good.

Wiener Commentary: This scene allows Tony license to explore playing a character who responds to frustration with verbal aggression, while Sarah appears constrained by her self-image of remaining polite under provocation. She has played her character as herself.
DISPLACEMENT SCENE 1—P.E.P.

Wiener: So you look pretty upset.

Sarah: Yeah. I just don’t see why he had to be so mean.

Tony: Me be so mean?

Sarah: Yeah, there was no need. You were really rude.

Tony: I was supposed to be mean. You were supposed to be rude and I was supposed to—I mean, that was the whole interaction.

Wiener: So you took it that it was not just his character that was mean, but it was really Tony that was being mean?

Sarah: Yes. I had never seen him that way.

Tony: I’m not like that normally. We were playing roles, right?

Wiener: So you felt that you were in the role of Miss Cole, being kind of assailed by this customer, right? You kind of didn’t like that. It was uncomfortable for you?

Sarah: Yes.

Wiener: So actually you took on the role of being Miss Cole very thoroughly. You really got into it. Because if it felt at the time that it really wasn’t you, that this was simply happening to somebody else, it wouldn’t have the intensity of that experience. And in your case, you were playing Wilkins rather—

Tony: Yeah, I was just doing something that I wouldn’t normally do.

Wiener: So this happens when—the reactions that you are both having here are where we kind of contaminate or carry over the feelings from our real life into the roles that we are playing, which is one reason to set these up—so that you learn to find the distance from them and not be as solidly reacting as though it is happening to you.

So if you were to look at it as though Miss Cole over there was really the recipient of it rather than it being Sarah, it would be different. Could you imagine for a minute that you have something to say to an imaginary Miss Cole over there about how she looked to you? If you had been sitting where you are now, and you were talking to the character Miss Cole over there?
[01:20]

Sarah: I sort of admire the fact that she stuck to her guns.

Wiener: You can tell her, “I sort of admire that you—”

Sarah: I admire the fact that you stuck to your guns and didn’t let this rude person change her mind. Yeah.

Wiener: “I wouldn’t want your job.” Right? Notice that you are feeling better now? That’s because you just reinforced that you are over here and Miss Cole is still back over there. Miss Cole didn’t go with you back onto the couch there.

Wiener Commentary: Sarah is upset at Tony’s, not his character Wilkins’, rudeness. Since she played herself in the role of Miss Cole, she believed Tony was doing the same when playing Wilkins. For her, there was insufficient displacement in this scene, accounting for her reactivity. I accomplished Sarah’s de-roling from Miss Cole by having her, as herself, talk to the character of Miss Cole, imagined as being onstage where she was standing during the enactment. Her feeling better showed that she had now distanced from her onstage role.

Wiener: How about the choice that you made there, Tony, in terms of playing Wilkins the way that you did? Any observations about that?

Tony: I think what I was feeling is that I had a legitimate—

Wiener: You mean Wilkins had?

Tony: Wilkins, yeah. As Wilkins, I had a legitimate reason for doing what I was doing. And I didn’t think that there was any need to stop me from doing it. And so then I meet the brick wall and I thought, “This doesn’t go according to plan.”

Wiener: What’s different about the way Tony would handle the situation if it were Tony going into a complaint department with defective merchandise?

Tony: Well, I probably would have been a little bit more cooperative as opposed to just trying to force my way through.

I would have asked if there is another way to get—obviously I wanted to get the merchandise exchanged, but I would ask, “Okay, what can I do? Because this isn’t going to work for me and I did buy it here.”
Wiener: So one of the things which you gave yourself permission to do when you took up the role was to explore what it would be like to try to be more forceful or to be more, “I’m just going to get what I want and I don’t care about your feelings” kind of thing.

Tony: Right. I typically will not be that confrontational.

Wiener: Right. So not everything that we try out is desirable behavior when you are taking up roles, but part of the point of doing it is not to learn or rehearse the behaviors that we display in those enactments, but rather to explore the limits or to stretch the range.

Remember when we were doing the line repetition, the “You will, I won’t” thing? It is not that you would necessarily go there in a real encounter with the other person. But if you know that you have all that other range, it gives you different possibilities. And that is what is being played out here. So you are not Wilkins—that is why we give you different names. That’s why you are not Wilkins and you are not Miss Cole.

And I thought both of you got to a different place. I was very pleased that both of you got to a different place than you normally go to. And that is really the point of it. It is to experience difference. It is not better. This is not rehearsing good behavior. This is rehearsing bad behavior, which it is safe to rehearse because nobody gets hurt.

So I would like to try a different scene that will bring out probably some different aspects of your repertoire, your range of possibilities. And in this scene, we can actually go with something derived from what we just did. In this scene, you are going to play the fictional daughter of Wilkins. And you are, I would say, about maybe four or five years old. So can you come up with a name for who your character would be?

Tony: Do you want to use a regular daughter?

Wiener: No. Don’t use the names of your actual daughters just as you didn’t use your own names here.

Tony: Mandy.

Sarah: Amanda.
Tony: Amanda.

Wiener: Good. Okay. And you are still Wilkins in this scene, and you are coming back home. You actually have not been successful in getting the well-functioning doll exchanged. But you are coming back to meet with Amanda. And Amanda is going to be in the house, and she is going to be eager to see her daddy and hopeful that she is going to get the right doll. Okay?

Wiener Commentary: *I set up this father-daughter displacement scene in part to offer them an opportunity for displaying nurturance and protection.*

DISPLACEMENT SCENE 2
[01:25]

Sarah: Daddy, did you get my dolly? Oh!

Tony: Well, hold on, hold on.

Sarah: I love my dolly and I love that you gave it to me for my birthday. Yay!

Tony: I’m so glad you love that dolly.

Sarah: So where is it, where is it? Where is it, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy?

Tony: Well, it’s on its way. I don’t have it quite yet.

Sarah: What do you mean you don’t have it? What happened, Daddy?

Tony: Well, let me tell you. It’s a special story.

Sarah: Daddy?

Tony: Hold on. When I went to where they have the dollies, and I took that broken one back—remember the one that scared you—and I took it to where you can get it back, well, there was a little problem, because there is supposed to be a nice man in there that says, “Here is the dolly that she wants.” But there was a monster in there. And you know how much you like monsters. I didn’t think you would want a dolly from a monster.

Sarah: Daddy, where is my dolly? Daddy?
Tony: It’s coming back later because—
Sarah: Daddy, where is my dolly?

Tony: I had to talk to them and say, “When is the monster going to be gone?” Because they have to have them chase out the monster, and then they are going to bring in the nice man. I can go back later today. Don’t worry. Don’t panic.

Sarah: Daddy, I want really my dolly. I really want my dolly. I thought you were going to bring my dolly and I really thought that you would come and bring my dolly and now I don’t know where my dolly is, Daddy. And you said there is a monster and I don’t know—

Tony: No, no, no. They have to chase away the monster. I’m keeping you here, safe, away from that monster. But the dolly is going to come later this afternoon. And I can go back. You will have it today. You will have it before dinner.

Sarah: Before dinner, Daddy?

Tony: Before dinner.

Sarah: Really, you promise? You promise me? You promise me, you promise me?

Tony: Yes. She is going to be here. Everything is going to be fine. Before you go to sleep you can kiss the dolly goodnight, and she will be able to give you sweet dreams and everything else. It is going to be fine. Don’t worry about it. It’s okay. Don’t worry.

Wiener: Great. Okay. Let’s go back to the couch.

Wiener Commentary: Both seem pleased with their mutual performance. Tony was pleased that he had skillfully handled the situation, and Sarah was pleased at allowing herself, in character, to be comforted.

DISPLACEMENT SCENE 2—P.E.P.

Wiener: What was it like to be the daddy to this adoring and eager five-year-old?

Tony: Well, it was at first, of course, a bit of a challenge because there were expectations, and anxiety that you have to try and secure. And
having had practice with young girls in the family it was like, “Okay, this is a familiar situation,” but it felt good to me to actually feel like I could control it, and I could bring comfort, and I could say what needed to be said with some confidence that things are going to be okay, and that she eventually believed in me, and let go of the anxiety and said, “Okay, well, maybe it feels better to just trust Daddy.”

**Wiener:** So did it feel to you as though he was, as you said earlier, different? Did it feel that there was something else that you got from playing Amanda to his—

**Sarah:** Yeah. Well, it was nice to let him comfort me. It was nice to have that different role, and it was nice that he was taking that on. I guess I just realized that I don’t really do that that much in our own relationship, whereas I can just let him sometimes be there to comfort me, and don’t always have to be—

**Wiener:** Right, which is an example, if we compare it or contrast it, really, with what you were both doing in the previous scene. That would be something to not carry over into your life outside. But this might be something that you will want to draw on and you will want to use.

So we have choices. When we have more options, we have choices. Just like we can go into a store, we don’t have to buy everything that is in there. We can just selectively choose what we want.

So I think that one of the things about the scenes is that it gives you more of a sense of your own possibilities, your own range of possibilities. And also because it is not just your individual choices—it is also what happens when the two of you co-create a reality together.

**Wiener Commentary:** I again make the point that we can choose selectively from what responses emerge during enactments, keeping the useful and discarding the undesirable.

**Wiener:** Which brings me to something else, which is that I recall when we were first meeting that things hadn’t been going so great in your sex life, and that had happened about the time that Tony started going to the gym, and that you found that to be something that lowered your own sense of trust and happiness with it.
Sarah: Yeah.

Wiener: And I take it that things have not improved too much in that department since then?

Tony: Well, no. The feeling of stress is still there. The tension is still there. So it sort of acts as a divider.

Wiener: Right. So have you been having any sex since a few weeks ago when we started?

Tony: I guess not.

Sarah: Wait a minute.

Wiener: You guess not.

Sarah: Excuse me? In my memory we didn’t. I don’t know what you have been doing.

Tony: Well, I usually rely on you and your lists. Was it on our list recently?

[01:30]

Sarah: All right there, bud.

Tony: Okay, okay. Be vulnerable Amanda again. I like that better.

Wiener Commentary: Note Sarah is joking about Tony’s comment on their sex life, in contrast to her attitude toward Tony’s possible infidelity at the beginning of therapy.

Wiener: One of the things we might try is another scene. And we could again go back to the complaint department, but this time what I was thinking is that you would be the customer returning the defective merchandise, and you would be the clerk. And once again, the customer doesn’t have the receipt. But this time your chosen tactic is to try to be seductive—using honey rather than vinegar.

Wiener Commentary: This seduction scene was chosen to give them yet a different experience of their relational possibilities—one that was relevant to, though displaced from, their stalled sex life.

Wiener: What I was thinking would be that perhaps the two of you could have a discussion. And I would not be here for it. I’m going to
leave the room, because I want to give you guys some privacy about this. It is important for you to feel that you are going to work out and negotiate with one another for how far you want to go or how far you don’t want to go, in terms of playing out the seduction in the scene. Okay? Because I will be here for watching the scene, but not for your negotiation about how far you want to go.

*Wiener Commentary:* *By having the couple negotiate privately what to script into their seduction, they lose some of the in-the-moment discovery of improv, but they gain the safety of controlling the outcome of what gets enacted.*

*Wiener:* That’s partly because I think that you guys should have some control over that. It’s a trade-off. On the one hand, there would be more discovery in the moment of what would happen if you allowed yourself to find out how far the scene would go just by playing it out. On the other hand, there would be a little bit uncertainty and nervousness, self-consciousness, and insecurity that might be at issue here. So I think it would be better to at least decide to some extent, or maybe set some limits on that. Okay?

So are you clear on what you are going to discuss? And you can just call out. I will just be in the waiting room out there, and you can just call and let me know that you have already decided. Okay? We will try it after you call me back in.

*Tony:* All right.

*Wiener:* Okay.

*Wiener Commentary:* *I strongly believe that couples therapists should respect the intimacy and privacy of client couples. They should limit their inquiry about their clients’ intimate life details so the couple always maintains some core privacy in their relationship.*

**DISPLACEMENT SCENE 3**

*Sarah:* Hi, I would like to return this doll. I’m sorry, it’s not really functioning well.

*Tony:* Oh, was there a problem with it?

*Sarah:* Yeah, it’s defective. See, it’s—
Tony: Defective. Okay. Have you got a receipt?
Sarah: Oh, I’m so sorry. I don’t have it.
Tony: Well, company policy is that we need a receipt.
Sarah: Do you work out?
Tony: From time to time.
Sarah: I mean, I can’t help but be really impressed.
Tony: Um, OK.
Sarah: I thought I saw you at the gym.
Tony: What gym?
Sarah: Oh, you don’t go to a gym? It’s natural?
Tony: I don’t think so.
Sarah: Wow. You are very, very, very handsome, sir. What’s your name?
Tony: Mr. Smith.
Sarah: Oh, Mr. Smith. So, Mr. Smith, would you mind please terribly just taking the doll and exchanging it for me?
Tony: Well it is sort of against company policy to—
Sarah: Wow, you have beautiful hair. I just love how that curls right there.
Tony: Really?
Sarah: Yes, it’s really quite lovely.
Tony: You don’t have a receipt?
Sarah: Oh, I know. It’s so terrible of me. And I don’t have a receipt and I know how terrible that looks. And maybe we could—we could talk about this later, you think?
Tony: Like, what do you mean?
Sarah: After you exchange the doll, we can talk about the policy and how we could change it together? Maybe?
Tony: Well, maybe we can do lunch?
Sarah: I would love that, to do lunch.
Tony: You think it’s okay?
Sarah: I think that would be fantastic.
Tony: And then we can deal with the doll. I can lose the receipt myself.
Sarah: Oh, that would be so wonderful. Really, you think so?
Tony: Sure. I can do lunch.
Sarah: That would be terrific.
Tony: All right. You want to go now?
Sarah: Should we? I think we should just exchange the doll and then we could—that would be—that’s great. And on the way we can—

[01:35]
Wiener: Okay, great. Okay, let’s sit down again and process that one.

**Wiener Commentary:** The scene showed Sarah emerging as highly expressive and enjoying the seductress role, having set aside her initial concern about being seen as slutty. When such performances are self-endorsed, they serve as warm-ups to action in real life.

**DISPLACEMENT SCENE 3—P.E.P.**
Wiener: Wow. So did that go according to plan in terms of how far you guys had agreed to go?
Tony: Pretty close, yeah.
Sarah: Yeah, kind of winged it.

**Wiener Commentary:** Note the physical closeness now between Sarah and Tony, with his arm around her shoulder.

How are you doing with this right now? How is it feeling?
Tony: It’s feeling like we should go take a lunch break.
Wiener: I see.
Sarah: Yeah. Initially I wasn’t sure maybe how I would be perceived, if I was going to be a little slutty or thought of as slutty. And then it was just more fun to kind of play.
Tony: I didn’t think you were slutty.

Sarah: Oh, that’s nice.

Wiener: Were there any choices made there that surprised you or that were outside of what you expected from the way that you had discussed it beforehand?

Tony: I don’t think I resisted as much as I expected I would have, or that I was thinking beforehand that I would have. I was thinking I might be a little bit more of an obstacle—make her work a little bit harder for it. But I didn’t expect her to get in as close as she did. “Ah, okay, well, this is working.”

Sarah: Yeah, but you wouldn’t fall for it so easily, right?

Tony: No, typically no.

Sarah: Typically?

Tony: Typically, because typically it wouldn’t be you. This time it was you, so it was much easier to fall into a pattern of, “Okay, this is where I want to go.” Because it is you, remember? I’m looking at you, and you may have been playing Jenny or whatever the character was, but I was thinking, “Okay, this is the woman that I am connected to. So I will put up token resistance but I will let this go.”

Sarah: Because it was me?

Tony: Because it was you.

Wiener Commentary: When Sarah puts a challenge to Tony by asking him to agree that he wouldn’t fall so easily for another woman, Tony almost gets himself in trouble by saying he wouldn’t typically, but escapes by explaining that he knew it was really Sarah who was seducing him. Sarah appears willing to accept this.

Tony: If it had been him doing that, I wouldn’t have given in.

Wiener: I would have needed a receipt.

Tony: Yeah, you would have needed two receipts. So you don’t have to worry about that.

Wiener: Okay, so once again, this is the kind of experience that you guys went through in that enactment, could be something that you
can take with you. The affection of the seduction, the interest could be something that is part of your life outside of here, you know?

**Tony:** It’s opened up some new ideas.

**Wiener:** Well, when we see about how things went next week, I guess I will ask that question. So, same time?

**Tony:** Sure. Sounds good to me.

**Sarah:** Sounds great.

**Wiener:** And we will see you guys next week.

**Sarah:** Okay, thank you.

**WRAP-UP**

**Ramseur:** Just finished looking at the footage. Very interesting. How did the case turn out?

**Wiener:** Well, after that last session, the seduction scene, the displacement scene, when they came in the next week they were kind of grinning a little bit, and it turns out that they had actually made love for the first time in a while. Sarah had taken the initiative. She had sort of reprised her role as the seductress, which they both apparently enjoyed, and they seemed to be very happy with that.

In the session after that which turned out, I believe, to be our last session, they had worked it out so that some of the time, Sarah could arrange her schedule so that after Tony went to the gym they actually had a meeting. They could actually grab a cup of coffee or whatever, which made Sarah feel more included. The suspicion at this point seemed to dissipate, and they were very content with it.

I followed them up with a phone call perhaps four months later or so, and everything was fine. So that is the last I have heard from them.
Video Credits

Daniel J. Wiener, PhD, LMFT, RDT/BCT as himself
Charlotte Ramseur, LMFT as herself
Gabbi Mendelsohn as Sarah
Roy Donnelly as Tony

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Produced By
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About the Contributors

VIDEO PARTICIPANTS

Charlotte Ramseur, MFT, is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice, as well as an adjunct professor at Central Connecticut State University, where she teaches in the Graduate Marriage and Family Therapy Program. She is a Rehearsals for Growth Certified Therapist and the co-author of a chapter entitled “Rehearsals for Growth Applied to Substance Abuse Groups” in Action Therapy with Families and Groups, edited by Daniel J. Wiener and Linda K. Oxford. She also leads interactive groups for various populations on topics such as team building, stress relief, conflict resolution, and anger management.

Daniel J. Wiener, PhD, MFT, is a Professor at Central Connecticut State University, where he teaches in the Graduate Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Licensed both as a Psychologist and a Marriage and Family Therapist, he is also a Certified Group Psychotherapist, a Registered Drama Therapist, and a Board Certified Trainer of Drama Therapy. He has 35 years experience in academic teaching, psychotherapy practice, postgraduate clinical training, and organizational consulting. He is the founder of Rehearsals for Growth™ (RfG) and offers RfG training to clinicians, educators and lay-people both nationally and internationally. He is the author/editor of several books and articles, including Rehearsals for Growth and Beyond Talk Therapy.

MANUAL AUTHORS

Ali Miller, MA, MFT, is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA. She works with individuals and couples and facilitates therapy groups for women. You can learn more about her practice at www.AliMillerMFT.com.

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Family Therapy/ Family Systems  REBT
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PTSD
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Suicidality
Trauma
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