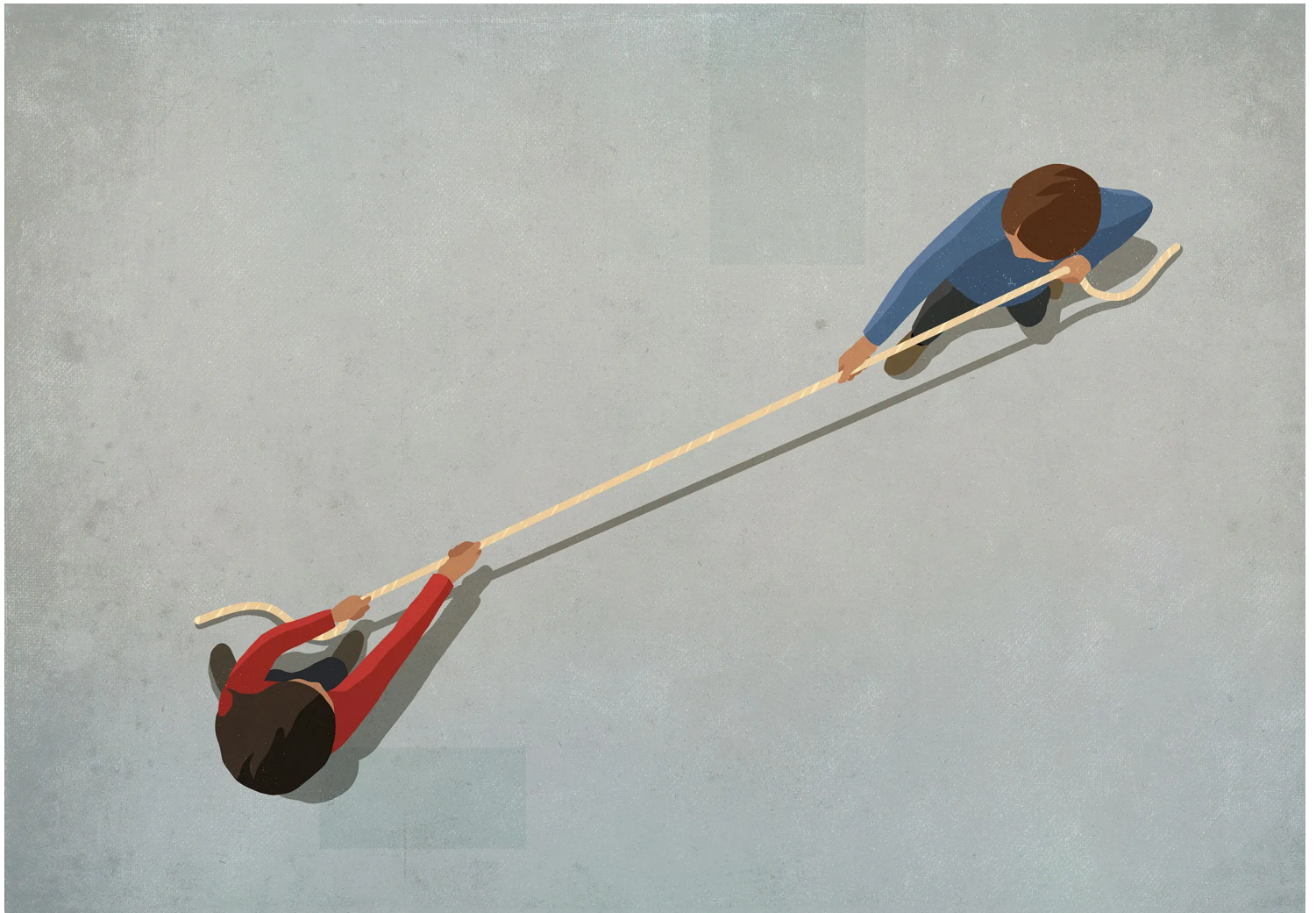


LIVING MARRIAGE

# You're Fighting With Your Partner All Wrong

6 MINUTE READ



Getty Images

---

**J**ulie and John Gottman are among the OGs of marriage therapy and research. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, one of John's early works, is among the bestselling marriage books of all time. And **the Gottman Institute**, which houses the research facility known as "The Love Lab," is considered the gold standard for relationship research. The Gottmans, who have been married to each other since 1987 (he's 81 and she's 72), have a new book, *Fight Right*, about how couples can learn to disagree in a loving way. TIME asked them to comment on some of the most common pieces of marriage advice. They didn't hold back.

### **If you fight with your partner, you're not meant for each other.**

**Julie Gottman:** That is pure, unadulterated myth. For one thing, people have different personalities and different lifestyle preferences, so when they live together, those are going to manifest. What we have found from our research about really successful couples is that they fight frequently. What they tend to do is go much deeper underneath the surface of a fight, asking questions of one another that are meaningful, that get down to core issues, perhaps background history that's gotten triggered in some way or if it conflicts with what we call an "ideal dream," the values that are most important to you and how you want to live those values and live those passions. When people slow down to ask questions of one another, they end up with greater connection and greater compassion from understanding their partner better.

---

---

## **Every marital argument has a solution; you just have to find it.**

**John Gottman:** Well, that's a myth, because 69% of all conflicts are not resolvable; they come from those personality differences. People tend to argue about the same issues over and over, and those issues don't have a solution. But the master couples find a way to accommodate those differences in personality—even to laugh about them—but find temporary solutions to the differences. It's not so much a matter of resolving the issue as learning to understand the differences and accept those differences, and maybe even be enriched by them in a relationship.

---

---

## **In every fight, one person is right and one person is wrong.**

**Julie:** That's the way people sabotage connection during a fight—by fighting to win, as opposed to fighting to understand. The purpose of a fight is to understand that person's perspective and where it comes from, to give it some empathy, validate it, understand it better, and then move towards a solution. If you turn it into a contest or a competition, then one person wins, and the other person feels resentment, feels upset, feels angry because they lost; it doesn't feel like a connection.

**Read More:** [\*Why Are So Many Notable Celebrity Couples Breaking Up?\*](#)

## **Men fight logically and women fight emotionally.**

**John:** When good research is done on men's interactions and women's interactions, men are every bit as emotional as women are. And women are every bit as rational as men. Even though there are some cultural norms that suggest that it's OK for men to get angry, but not OK for women; they should be much more nurturing and accepting and soothing. Men in their friendships with other men are just as emotional, just as rational as women are in their friendships with women. There really aren't these gigantic differences, especially in the area of problem solving, and rationality.

**John:** The myth that's inherent here is that if you're emotional, you can't be rational. But actually, modern neuroscience shows that you have to be emotional when you problem-solve, because otherwise, you really don't have the intuitive approach that is required to really solve the problems. Intuition is a big part of problem solving. Our emotions are really our internal GPS that give us our goals, our preferences, and our motivations. So if we're cut off from them, then we problem-solve without really having a goal. And that doesn't work. You need to know where you want to go.

**Read More:** *[Why Don't More Women Propose?](#)*

### **Anger is bad and should be avoided at all costs.**

**John:** In our longitudinal research, we found that women who are angry at their husbands and express their anger had less happy husbands than the women who did not express their anger. But when we followed them over time, their marriages got better, because their husbands learned how to accept influence from their wives. Women who suppressed their anger grew increasingly distant from their husbands, and that made the marriage much less happy.

### **Nobody can hurt you unless you let them.**

**Julie:** Wrong, wrong, wrong. Humans are pack animals. Who we are influences somebody else. And because we are pack animals, we depend on one another. We learn to trust each other and also to accept the humanity of the other person. What that means is to accept the times when they're not perfect, when they hurt us. It's our responsibility to raise an issue, that we've been hurt by something or that we disagree about something. But to say that "no matter what my partner says, it's not going to affect me?" It's impossible.

**John:** Especially if they use their contempt to form a coalition against you, within the family, they can hurt you directly, or indirectly.

### **Never go to bed angry.**

**Julie:** Of course we're going to go to bed angry. What happens if you have a fight late at night and then you realize you have no reserves left to really talk about it? What are you gonna do? You go to bed angry and hopefully get to sleep at a reasonable hour. And the next day when you're a little more refreshed, you talk about it.

**Julie:** That's a giant myth. Until you've talked about the impact of the fight, and how you felt during the fight, you don't know what you're apologizing for. And so the apology is meaningless. It's very important to explore what you perceived and what got triggered for you before you actually apologize. Because you know what you're apologizing for after that.

### **The pandemic was terrible for marriages.**

**Julie:** The happy couples, who went into quarantine in a good place, tended to get even closer. But the couples who were unhappy ended up in a very bad place. I saw that a lot of my clinical work. They fought more. They sometimes became domestically violent, and domestic violence rose during COVID-19, particularly among those couples. We also saw a tremendous amount of loneliness.

### **The key thing to do when fighting is to just stop and listen.**

**Julie:** Actually, yes, that is one of them. However, I think another very important key is just describe yourself, what you feel, what the situation is, and then what you need. And if your need has to do with not liking something, flip that on its head. What can replace the behavior that you feel negatively about, that will help your partner to shine in your eyes?

CONTACT US AT [LETTERS@TIME.COM](mailto:LETTERS@TIME.COM)

### **Buying Nvidia in 2024? Wall Street Legend Issues Urgent A.I. Stock Warning**

Chaikin Analytics | Sponsored