

# Psychoanalytic Psychology

## The Plan Formulation Method for Couples

Martina Rodomonti, Valeria Crisafulli, Silvia Mazzoni, John T. Curtis, and Francesco Gazzillo  
Online First Publication, May 9, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pap0000246>

### CITATION

Rodomonti, M., Crisafulli, V., Mazzoni, S., Curtis, J. T., & Gazzillo, F. (2019, May 9). The Plan Formulation Method for Couples. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pap0000246>

## The Plan Formulation Method for Couples

Martina Rodomonti, PhD  
Sapienza University of Rome

Valeria Crisafulli, PhD  
Control-Mastery Theory Italian Group, Rome, Italy

Silvia Mazzoni, PhD  
Sapienza University of Rome

John T. Curtis, PhD  
University of California, San Francisco

Francesco Gazzillo, PhD  
Sapienza University of Rome

This article proposes an adaptation to couple therapy of the Plan Formulation Method, an empirically validated and clinically useful assessment procedure for planning case-specific psychotherapy interventions. According to Control-Mastery Theory (CMT), individuals who seek psychotherapy have an unconscious plan, which comprises goals, obstructions, tests, traumas, and insights. The Plan Formulation Method was developed to reliably formulate individual psychotherapy cases. To apply this method to couples therapy, we have added two components: dysfunctional relationship patterns (vicious relational circles) and resources (virtuous relational circles). Each component will be explained with the help of a clinical case. We discuss the implication of the use of the Plan Formulation Method for couples and compare some of the tenets of CMT applied to couples with the main approaches to couple therapy.

*Keywords:* control-mastery theory, couple therapy, couple's plan, plan formulation method for couples

A recent survey (Norcross, Pfund, & Prochaska, 2013) of psychotherapists indicated that couple therapy is a therapeutic format that will likely reach maximum growth in the coming decades, surpassing individual, family, and group therapy (Gurman, Lebow, & Snyder, 2015). Several research studies attest to the efficacy of couple therapy (e.g., Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006; Snyder & Halford, 2012; Sprenkle, 2003) and show that this efficacy does not depend on the therapist's theoretical orientation (e.g., Davidson & Horvath, 1997; Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Pinsof & Wynne, 1995; Snyder et al., 2012; Wesley & Waring, 1996).

Despite the substantial equivalence of the efficacy of the main approaches to couple therapy, we think it useful to introduce an innovative model to the landscape of couple therapy: Control-

Mastery Theory (CMT; Gazzillo, 2016; Weiss, 1986, 1993), an integrative, cognitive-dynamic relational theory developed by Joseph Weiss (1986, 1993) and empirically validated by the San Francisco Psychotherapy Research Group over the last 40 years. Given its integrative nature, CMT could help to overcome the theoretical and clinical fragmentation of the field of couple therapy, promoting a model that integrates aspects of different approaches. Moreover, CMT has generated a corpus of empirical research studies that support its therapeutic indications (e.g., Bloomberg-Fretter, 2005; Fretter, 1995; Gassner, Sampson, Weiss, & Brumer, 1982; Horowitz, Sampson, Siegelman, Wolfson, & Weiss, 1975; Silberschatz, 2005, 2017; Silberschatz & Curtis, 1993; Silberschatz, Fretter, & Curtis, 1986; Silberschatz, Sampson, & Weiss, 1986; Weiss et al., 1986). However, the only applications of CMT to couple therapy are those of Dennis Zeitlin (1991), who has discussed the application of CMT to couple dynamics, and those of Steven Foreman (1996), who wrote a clinical paper on couple treatment based on CMT. However, these papers do not provide a tool for the clinical assessment of couples or for guiding interventions with couples.

The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by adapting the Plan Formulation Method (PFM; Curtis & Silberschatz, 1991, 2005; Curtis, Silberschatz, Sampson, & Weiss, 1994) to couple therapy. The PFM was developed to reliably formulate individual psychotherapy cases and has been applied to children (Foreman, 1989; Foreman, Gibbins, Grienberger, & Berry, 2000; Gibbins, 1989), adolescents, and adults of all ages, including geriatric cases (Curtis & Silberschatz, 1991), and to families (Bigalke, 2004) but never to couples.

---

Martina Rodomonti, PhD, Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome; Valeria Crisafulli, PhD, Control-Mastery Theory Italian Group, Rome, Italy; Silvia Mazzoni, PhD, Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome; John T. Curtis, PhD, School of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco; Francesco Gazzillo, PhD, Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Francesco Gazzillo, PhD, Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, via degli Apuli 1, 00185, Rome, Italy. E-mail: francesco.gazzillo@uniroma1.it