**Why do people get divorced?**

Gottman offers research to support two main reasons and times for divorce:

* 5-7 years due to high conflict
* 10-12 years due to loss of intimacy and connection

But why does this happen? Wallerstein offers that divorce is passed down from divorcing parents to their children:

* Among adult children of divorced parents, only 60% marry, with 50% marrying before age 25 and most marrying people they had known only a short-time.
* 40% of them eventually divorce (in other words, only 36% of children of divorce are happily married). Among adult children from intact families, 80% marry, and 9% of them divorce (in other words, 73% of children of intact families are happily married).
* Among the adult children of divorced parents that never marry, half are women. Among the adult children from intact families that never marry, one-third are women.

Amato supports this, and attributes the transmission to personal problems in spouses:

* Personal problems (self-report of being easy to get angry, hurt, or jealous; showing poor money-management skills; having had an affair) were twice as likely in marriages in which both partners' parents had divorced compared to marriages in which neither partners' parents had divorced
* Adding personal problems into the prediction equation took 39% and 55% of the variance away from parental divorce in one and both partners, reducing history of parental divorce to non-significance when seen in one partner
* personal problems predicted divorce 4-12 years in the future, so high ratings of personal problems do not appear to be short-term reactions to a deteriorating marriage.

Further, this seemed more pronounced in shorter marriages:

* in marriages 0-4 years old, chances of divorce increased 87% if wives had a history of parental divorce, 620% if both partners did
* in marriages 5-10 years old, chances of divorce increased 41% if wives had a history of parental divorce, 160% if both partners did
* in marriage 11+ years old, history of parental divorce was not a significant predictor of divorce

**So how do we help "Hope" triumph over "Experience"?**

"Everybody knows" divorce happens because:

* **Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus**... Well... If this were so, the divorce rate would be 100% for heterosexual couples.
* **No Quid Pro Quo**... Well... Quid Pro Quo means basically "You do this for me, and I'll do this for you." Applied to marriage if means that marriage is a behavioral exchange; if your partner does enough good things for you, you will do the same number of good things back. It is true that unhappy couples don't engage in this kind of behavioral exchange... but neither do happy couples either.
* **Unrealistic Expectations**... Well... Low and high expectation couples are just as likely to be happily as unhappily married, and there's some research to support that married people engage in a good bit of cognitive dissonance ("I'm still married, so I must be at least a little happy").
* **Failure to Resolve Key Problems**...Well... most big couple issues (69%) don't get solved in happy marriages, they get managed through compromise and negotiation.
* **Men Having Affairs**... Well...
	+ 20-25% of married men report infidelity at least once.
	+ couples therapists report 50% of their caseload is in therapy due to infidelity (AAMFT).
	+ Pittman and Wagers offer that 90% of first-time divorces have involved infidelity, mostly during the last year of the marriage, and it often was hidden throughout the divorce process.
	+ 20-25% of mediation groups say an affair was *a* reason, but *the* reason given by 80% is deterioration of intimacy.
	+ in the 1970's, 70% of men and 40% of women had affairs, but modern studies show men and women under 45 were equal. One study at a Boston hospital showed through bloodtyping that 30% of the named fathers of babies born there were not biologically related to the child.
	+ another 20% of couples have "emotional affairs" or infidelity where there is no sexual contact (so no adultery), but a disruption in the emotional intimacy of the couple (internet affairs go here).

Pittman and Wagers also offer that there are three kinds of affairs:

* + **accidental** – these are unplanned, with the consequences given little thought; it's more of a friendship that develops into more because of what's missing in the main relationship
	+ **philandering** – these entail steady changes in partners by one spouse, who is likely angry about the marriage, sees the other spouse as controlling, and is likely hostile toward the spouse
	+ **romantic affair** – these people "fall in love" to escape marital and life problems; it may signal more of a crisis in the couple's life-cycle than in the marriage itself

These finding support that intimacy and support in the relationship are more the issue than sex with someone else.

**Research Supported Reasons for Divorce**

* **Communication**

From a classical perspective, the rise in divorce means one's own failed relationships, as well as one's parents' failed relationships, are more important in those Bowenian Family Genograms. Similarly, attitudes about why relationships form, how relationships are supposed to work, what their chances are for success, and what signals "bad times" are all more important to explore.

Gottman offers a number of ideas on how to improve communication in couples, the goal of which is to decrease conflict by preventing it. He notes the active listening (e.g., "What I heard you say is…") is absent in the "disasters" of marriage, but also in the "masters" of marriage. Likewise, most couples don't remember that stuff in arguments anyway. Instead, work on:

* + softened startups
	+ bids and turning (1x / 3 mins)
	+ rituals for connection
	+ accepting influence
* **Conflict Management**

Gottman offers few key concepts to managing conflict, the goal of which is to decrease the negative impact of conflict.

* + The Emotional Bank Account
	+ DPA - Diffuse Physiological Arousal
	+ The Four Horsemen
		- **Criticism** ("What kind of person are you?") -- change this to complaint without criticism. Women may be more prone to this, based on men's affect during the non-conflicted interactions
		- **Defensiveness** ("Well what about what you did?") -- change this to taking responsibility
		- **Contempt** (righteous indignation, superiority claims) -- eliminate and replace with culture of positive appreciation
		- **Stonewalling** (shutting down, associated with high physiological arousal and efforts to self-sooth with thoughts like "I can't believe she's saying this!") -- teach self-soothing and give 20-30 minutes time outs. This may be the key to preventing relapse, and men may be far more at risk to be stonewallers, as conflict stirs more physiological arousal
* **Sex and Intimacy**

This is often hard for them (and us) to talk about. Gottman offers this will sort of fix itself if you help improve the overall intimacy in the relationship. However, I still find all that Master's and Johnson stuff very useful, especially with anxious couples for whom rejected bids for sexual intimacy become a big hurt. There are the traditional questions like:

* + what makes you feel sexually close?
	+ what frequency and quality of closeness, intimacy, and sex do you want?
	+ what's romance? What do you have to do to get it?

And the modern questions like:

* + have you talked about videos, books, the internet, etc…?
	+ what's the split up of work in the home? Do you both feel you are "equal partners" in the home?

Keep in mind that a 1998 study (10 years old) by Michael et al found only 22% of men and 18% of women age 18 to 24 had abstained from sex before marriage. Thus, a variety of sexual experiences before marriage are very likely to have an impact on sex during marriage.