

Preface: Panic in Evanston

- Big Idea: diverse forces have increasingly freighted marriage in America over time, piling so much expectation and responsibility on this one relationship that it threatens to buckle under the strain
- Poverty makes marital success difficult, and building a successful marriage would be easier if America had more family-friendly policies like paid parental leave and affordable child care

PART ONE: Marriage Today

Chapter 1: Temperamental but Thrilling

“Life is a test and you pass if you can be true to yourself”

- Perhaps the most significant change in marriage over time has been its conquest by love

America’s Two Great Marital Transitions

- America has witnessed three major eras of marriage: pragmatic, love-based, and self-expressive
- The first, which extended from the colonial period until around 1850, had a **pragmatic** emphasis in which marriage was primarily oriented toward helping spouses meet their basic economic and survival needs
 - People looked to marriage, and the broader familial alliances linked to it, to help them achieve physical and psychological security
- The astounding pace of economic development during the second Industrial Revolution eased the everyday struggle to meet basic survival needs, which reduced people’s dependence on marriage to achieve basic subsistence
 - During the second era, from around 1850 until around 1965, marriages had a **love-based** emphasis that placed a premium on helping spouses meet their love and intimacy needs
 - These changes yielded a new social structure in which men spent much of their time in the predominately male world of paid employment and women spent much of their time in the predominately female world of domestic family life
 - As it became easier to meet their most basic economic and safety needs as a single person, Americans increasingly looked to marriage for love and romantic passion

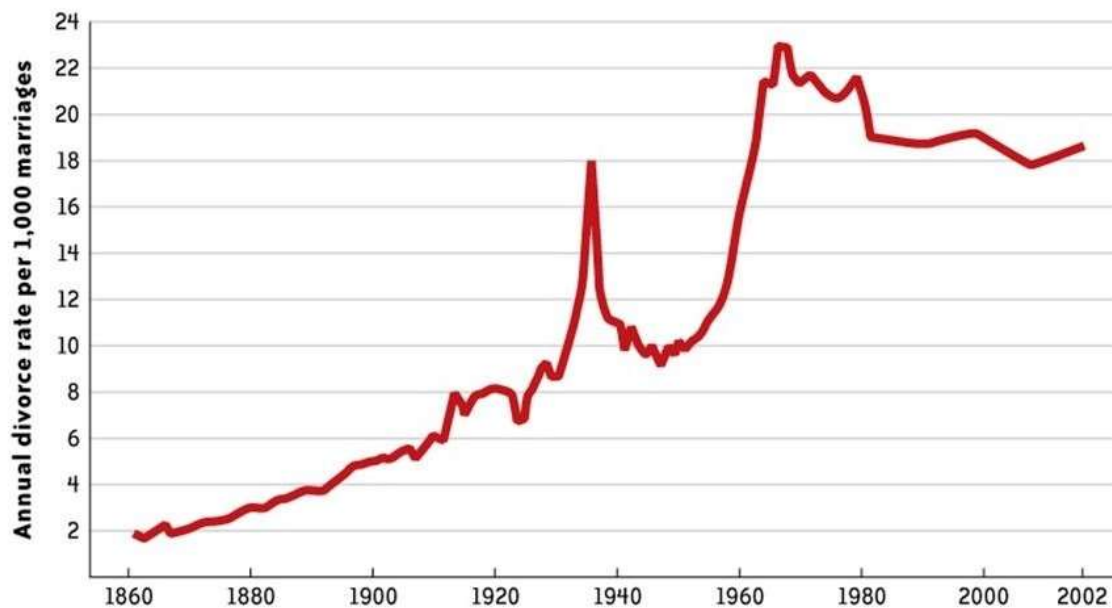
The Authenticity Transition

- The birth control pill became widely available in 1961, helping to launch the sexual revolution
- The trend toward increasingly cerebral lives, especially among the college educated, dovetailed with the countercultural revolution to launch Americans on voyages of self-discovery and personal growth



- During the third era, from around 1965 to today, marriage has a **self-expressive** emphasis that places a premium on spouses helping each other meet their authenticity and personal-growth needs
 - According to the sociologist Robert Bellah, a self-expressive relationship “is created by full sharing of authentic feelings,” and love “becomes the mutual exploration of infinitely rich, complex, and exciting selves.”
- The divorce rate skyrocketed between 1965 and 1980, largely due to the rise of the self-expressive marriage. See following picture:

U.S. Divorce Rate Over the Past Century



Echoes of Abraham Maslow

- The historical changes in American marriage – from the pragmatic to the love-based to the self-expressive eras – exhibit striking parallels to the psychologists Abraham Maslow’s famous hierarchy of needs
- The primary functions of marriage revolved around the fulfilment of lower needs during the pragmatic era, middle needs during the love-based era, and higher needs during the self-expressive era



CATEGORY OF NEED	SPECIFIC EXAMPLES	MOUNT MASLOW
Self-actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-expression • Personal growth • Autonomy • Spontaneity • Veridical self-assessment 	
Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem • Self-respect • Sense of mastery • Prestige • Respect from others 	
Belonging and love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love others • Be loved by others • Trust others • Sexual intimacy • Belong to a group 	
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic safety • A sense of control • Predictability • Psychological safety • Physical safety 	
Physiological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunger • Thirst • Warmth • Sleep • Respiration 	

Mount Maslow

- This Maslow analogy drives home that the major change over time is not an overall increase in how much Americans expect from their marriage (more versus less), but rather a dramatic shift in the substance of their expectations (from lower to higher altitudes).
- In contrast to our predecessors, who looked to their marriage to help them survive, we look to our marriage to meet our needs for passion and intimacy and to facilitate our voyages of self-discovery and personal growth
- As we will soon see, success at these higher altitudes requires the investment of significant time and energy in the marriage

The Michelangelo Effect

- The *Michelangelo* effect refers to the process through which partners sculpt each other in ways that elicit each person's authentic self

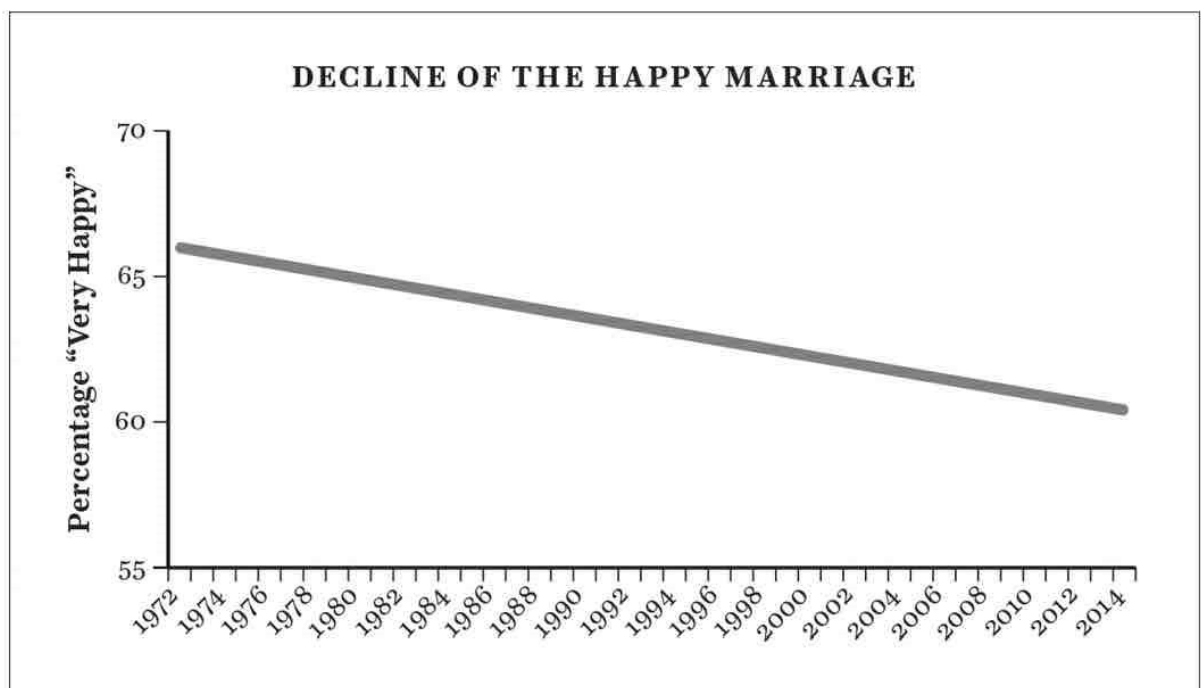


Our Winnowed Social Networks

- Americans hold an ideology of marriage, one that gives the marital bond extreme priority and consequently, blinds us to how important other types of relationships are
- Indeed, relative to Americans who are unmarried, those who are married are much less involved with friends and other relatives
- Married people are far less likely than never-married people to see their parents, siblings, neighbors, and friends regularly; previously married people are intermediate
- Given this social withdrawal, successful pursuit of our authentic self-goals depends on our spouse much more today than in the past

All or Nothing

- As we have increasingly sidelined our other friends and relatives, we have expanded our spouse's responsibility for helping us fulfill our deepest emotional and psychological needs
- In a cruel cultural twist, just as we have increasingly looked to our marriage to help us fulfill higher-level needs, we have decreasingly invested the time and energy required for the marriage to meet these expectations



- The extent to which marital quality is an important predictor of life happiness was almost twice as strong in the 2000s as it was circa 1980
- **Marriage, in short, has tilted toward an all-or-nothing state. As its primary functions have ascended Maslow's hierarchy, and as we have spent less time with our spouse, it has become more difficult for our marriage to live up to our expectations, which means that more of us wind up feeling disappointed. At the same time, as the nature of our marital expectations has changed, the benefits of fulfilling those expectations are larger than ever. Consequently, even as the average marriage is getting worse, the best marriages are getting better.**



From Cabernet to Pinot

- Marriage in America has changed from an institution approximating Cabernet to an institution approximating Pinot (at least in terms of characterization of wine grapes). Relative to marriages in earlier eras, marriages today require much greater dedication and nurturance, a change that has placed an ever-larger proportion of marriages at risk of stagnation and dissolution.
 - American marriage today is temperamental, but those spouses who nurture it can build something thrilling

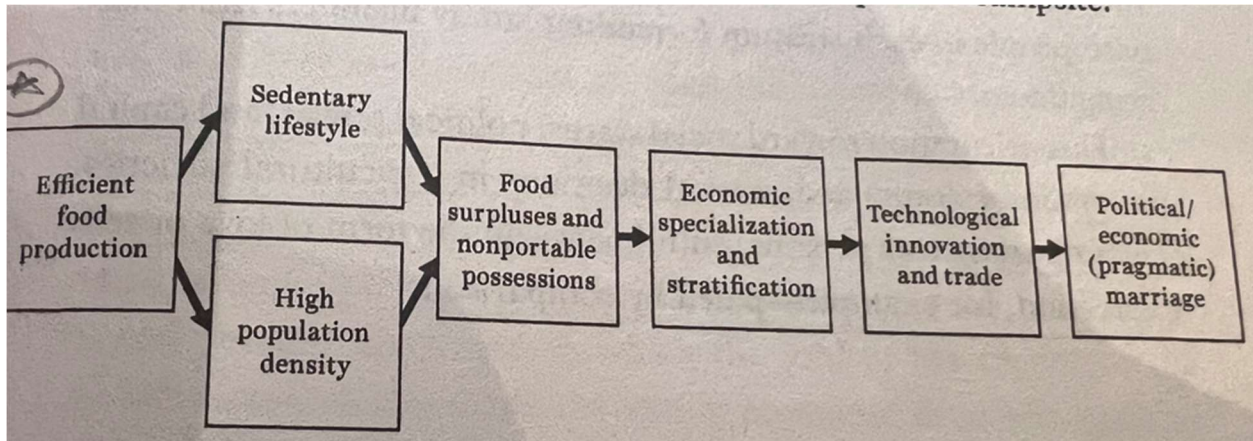
PART TWO: Historical Perspective

Chapter 2: The Pragmatic Marriage

The Cultural Animal

- The best example of the pragmatic marriage is Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd
- Culture is our most distinctive evolved strategy for survival and reproduction
- Cultural evolution, which is especially beneficial in rapidly changing environments, affords the flexibility required to produce large behavioral changes in the absence of genetic evolution
- But cultural flexibility means that human mating tendencies, including the role of marriage in governing social and reproductive life, can adapt rapidly to changing environmental circumstances, such as those linked to industrialization and urbanization

From Hunter-Gatherer to Agricultural Societies



- This orientation toward social status, political power, and capital preservation dominated marital decisions in agricultural societies. **The importance of personal fulfillment – in the form of love or self-expression, for example – paled by comparison**

Western European Marriage during the Renaissance

- Married couples were expected to be self-sufficient



- Young men had to establish some level of financial independence – through farming or working a trade – before getting married, after which the couple was expected to provide for themselves and their children
- A harmonious, well-functioning marriage was a business necessity as well as a personal pleasure

The Colonial Era

- During the colonial era, in contrast, each family was a largely self-sufficient social and economic system.
 - Family members produced the food and shelter required for their survival
 - They protected themselves from assault and their property from theft and damage
 - They sewed the clothing, built the furniture, and made the soap and candles
 - They educated their children and tended to their sick and infirm
- Given these responsibilities, it was a great economic and physical challenge to live alone.
 - Nearly all men and women in New England married, with most rapidly remarrying if their spouse died
- The basic societal and political unit was the household, not the individual.
- When colonists married, they were committing themselves to the family, even when doing so undermined their personal happiness
- Colonists viewed marriage as a pragmatic arrangement revolving round basic economic and political considerations, including those necessary for survival and sustenance.

Political and Familial Revolution

- Democratic marriage characterizes the new American marital ideal purported to accord equal status to the husband and the wife around the mid-1830s.
- Men should inhabit the public sphere, participating in, and excelling at, domains like politics, commerce, and law
- Women should inhabit the private sphere, participating in, and excelling at, domains like child-rearing, domestic work, and religious education
- In contrast to the patriarchal view, the separate-spheres view was not that women are inferior to men, but rather they possess an elevated moral purity that is crucial for promoting societal well-being and child development

An Ideal Ahead of Its Time

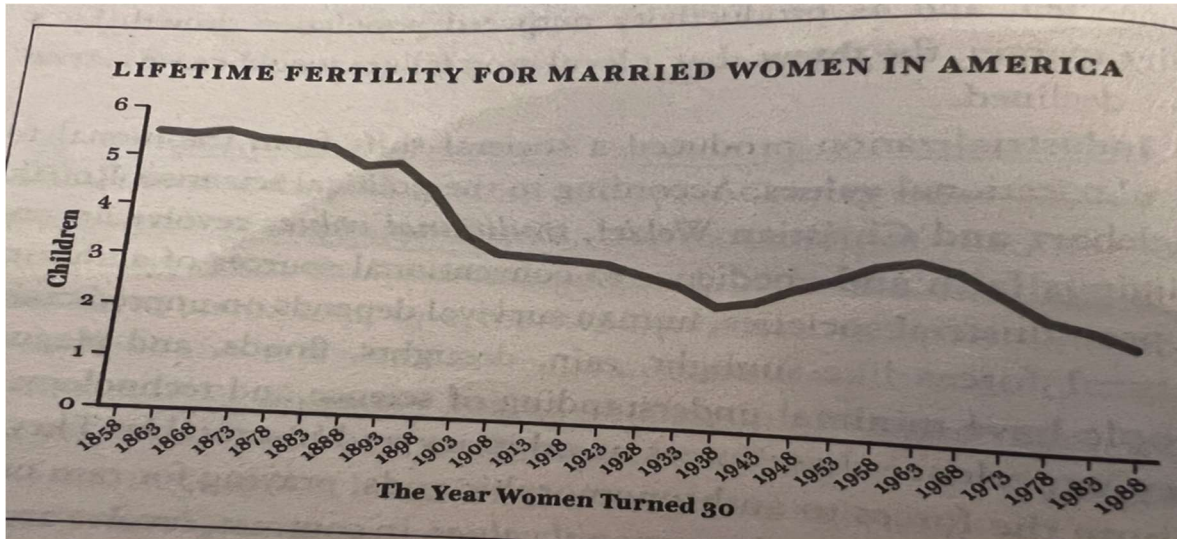
- The older view that wives and husbands were work mates gave way to the idea that they were soul mate

Chapter 3: From Pragmatism to Love

- Industrialization set the stage for love's triumph – ultimately producing the breadwinner-homemaker, love-based marriage immortalized in 1950s sitcoms – by radically altering America's economy and social structure
- Industrialization produced a societal shift from traditional to secular-rational values
 - Traditional values revolve around religious faith and obedience to conventional sources of authority



- Secular-rational values, in contrast, revolve around rational science and technological progress
- People increasingly treat God as expendable
- With industrialization and urbanization came a sharp decline in the average number of children born per women, which meant that households became less populated



- There are several reasons for this reduction in family size, but perhaps the most important is that the intergenerational wealth flow reversed
 - On a pragmatic-era family farm, children made significant contributions to the household economy – serving as a courier, collecting eggs, churning butter, plowing, harvesting, and so forth
 - Even in the industrial era, before laws were passed to protect them from abusive work practices, many children continued to provide net economic value for the household by working in factories or mines
 - Eventually, however, the expenses linked to raising children exceeded the economic yield that children contributed to the household, sometimes by a large margin
 - As children became a source of economic burden, rather than economic benefit, parents had fewer of them

The Love-Based Marriage

- **Industrialization served as midwife to the love-based marriage. As the nation became wealthier, Americans (especially those in middle and upper classes) experienced a sharp decline in concerns about their physiological and safety needs**
- As industrialization led more Americans to experience chronic satisfaction of their lower-altitude needs, the love and belonging needs towards the middle of Mount Maslow rose in motivational priority
- As the social forces that had long served as the foundation for marriage – religious adherence, laws, traditions – lost influence, love-based considerations became more important, and pragmatic considerations less so



A Haven in A Heartless World

- This emphasis on love and separate spheres caused Americans to view the nuclear family less in terms of a little monarchy and more in terms of a “haven in a heartless world.”
- **Industrialization had dismantled the agrarian and artisanal family structures of the pragmatic era, replacing them with a structure in which husbands and wives were physically separated for most waking hours, except on Sundays.**

Passion and Sex

- In the second half of the 1800s, more and more young people wanted to experience strong romantic passion for their partner before deciding to marry
- Social commentators increasingly argued that high-quality sex was a requirement for a successful marriage
- So yes, spouses needed to cherish each other, but they also needed to pleasure each other

Separate Spheres: From Ideology to Reality

- Wives became homemakers rather than housekeepers – a housekeeper performs taskwork that could be outsourced (by a hired maid, for example), but a homemaker serves as the moral and emotional center of family life
- The homemaker’s labor came to be viewed in symbolic rather than economic terms

The Apotheosis of the Love-Based Marriage

- Following the Great Depression and World War II – sixteen years of uninterrupted turmoil – traditional family values were ascendant
 - Seeking stability, men and women doubled down on the ideology of separate spheres, and many women became homemakers with gusto
- Americans viewed the love-based, breadwinner-homemaker marriage model in “end of history” terms
- Large numbers of families were able to make ends meet on the back of a single wage earner
- The G.I. Bill helped to elevate millions of families to the middle-class, but it also made women especially economically dependent on men
- Given the conservative cultural zeitgeist and these sorts of policies, it is not surprising that most women sought fulfillment through domestic life, nor that 60 percent of women who enrolled in colleges or universities left without graduating – either to get married or out of fear that a college degree would hurt their marriage prospects
- In a real sense, though, the middle-class breadwinner-homemaker family structure was the opposite of traditional – it was instead a highly atypical marriage model that endured for an eyeblink of historical time

Five Challenges of the Love-Based Marriage

- Strong adherence to them left many spouses unfulfilled in the breadwinner-homemaker structure



- In fairness, the love-based, breadwinner-homemaker marriage did crucial work in breaking down the most destructive elements of the pragmatic marriage ideal, elements like strict patriarchy and a lack of respect for individual autonomy
 - But it possessed a handful of inherent problems that hampered the pursuit of the highest levels of marital fulfillment
- 1. Women's Economic Dependence
 - The most obvious issue is that women forced economic dependence on their husband made it difficult to achieve a marriage between equals
- 2. The Social Isolation of the Nuclear Family
 - Industrialization weakened traditional social ties as City dwellers tended to be much less strongly bonded to their immediate neighbors, who were typically strangers or casual acquaintances, than they would have been, a generation earlier, when their neighbors were extended family members or other residents of their small community
 - Suburbanization exacerbated this trend
 - Mothers were especially vulnerable because they lacked daily social interaction with coworkers
 - The love-based marital ideal, and the image of home life that came with it, strengthened the spousal bond at the expense of women's broader social networks
- 3. Lack of True Insight into One's Spouse
 - The breadwinner-homemaker structure of the love-based marriage made it particularly difficult for a husband and a wife to have deep insight into each other's lives and experiences
 - Spouses' daily lives overlapped less than ever, a trend that made it challenging to achieve true intimacy
 - This separateness revealed an inherent contradiction of the love-based marriage: two of its defining features – separate spheres and togetherness – are virtually incompatible
 - In retrospect, it seems bizarre that people sought to build an institution that separated husbands and wives more than ever before while simultaneously expecting them to serve as each other's primary source of intimacy and emotional support
 - Spouses just didn't have enough insight into each other's daily triumphs and tribulations
 - All of these factors make it difficult to live up to the togetherness ideal of the love-based marriage
- 4. Stunted Psychological Development
 - There was broad consensus about what sort of family life was optimal and that family life stifled individuality and authenticity
 - Midcentury Americans had lost their inner compass, seeking popularity rather than respect
 - This approval motive fostered materialistic tendencies in which Americans prioritized the consumption of prestigious goods to impress others
 - Many 1950s wives could simply purchase goods like clothes and processed foods, but as homes got larger, wives found themselves doing as much housework as in the past, despite the advent of domestic time-savers like the washing machine
 - Existential stultification wasn't the only insidious problem of the 1950s marriage.



- Another problem was psychological atrophy
 - The separate-spheres doctrine cleaved the human psyche in half, with women's assertiveness and men's nurturance shriveling through neglect
 - Wives were afraid to ask themselves the silent question – "Is this all?"
 - Through rigid socialization, boys in the 1950s were molded to be assertive but not nurturant – to become the sort of independent, stoic, self-assured, and unemotional man exemplified by the Marlboro Man
 - Girls were molded to be nurturant but not assertive – to become the sort of warm, cooperative, docile, and unaggressive woman exemplified by ads depicting the ideal housewife
 - Women were bombarded with the message that their value to society had little to do with their cerebral or economic contributions
 - The scholarly consensus today is that, at their essence, men, too, have nurturant needs and women, too, have strong assertive needs
5. The Often-Insubordinate Sex Drive
- Indeed, the idea that the hottest sex happens when emotional intimacy is strongest is predicated on a valid but oversimplified understanding of sexual desire
 - Most of us will get turned on at night by the very same thing that we will demonstrate against during the day
 - In other words, although it is true that emotional intimacy and intimate communication are crucial ingredients in achieving long-term sexual fulfillment within marriage, it is also true that sexual desire is frequently insubordinate to our moral and sociopolitical preferences for kindness, egalitarianism, and respect
 - **Sustaining desire in marriage requires the reconciliation of our deep-seated craving for safety and security and our deep-seated craving for mystery and adventure**
 - "Fire needs air; desire needs space"
 - With this insight in mind, we can see why it is so hard to sustain sexual desire in long-term relationships
 - On one hand, feeling close to our spouse helps us become comfortable with the extreme physical intimacy that sex requires, and communicating openly about our sexual needs is essential for sexual fulfillment
 - On the other hand, it is tricky to reconcile the desire for predictability and familiarity with the desire for surprise and novelty – to reconcile the selfless caregiving that's appropriate when our spouse is emotionally vulnerable with the raw craving that is appropriate when our spouse wants to be ravished
 - As a declining proportion of American marriages consisted of people who were raised during the Great Depression and then endured World War II, the yearning for stability and security lost some of its intensity, and people became less willing to endure an unfulfilling marriage
 - Consequently, just as the love-based, breadwinner-homemaker marriage reached full strength, it shattered

Chapter 4: From Love to Self-Expression

- Ending a relationship due to insufficient love would have seemed absurd in the pragmatic era



- This idea became increasingly palatable in the love-based era
- Spouses must now understand each other deeply, provide each other with sensitive support during difficult times, and help each other savor the good times.
 - Ideally, they will also have lots of hot sex

Intellectual Roots

- These priorities emerged in part from an intellectual foundation that resides at the intersection of philosophy and psychology – one that emphasizes the nature of selfhood, especially the role of the self in helping people build meaningful lives in an era when religion plays a diminished role
- **As these ideas gained currency, Americans increasingly looked to their marriage not only for love, but also for a sense of authenticity and meaning**
- People who succeed in both developing their own value system and living in accord with it (that is, people who live authentically) can build lives that are deeply fulfilling, even if there is no objective truth undergirding their value system
- People who succeed in developing, and living in accord with, a significant, purposeful, and coherent meaning system are buffered against existential angst

Humanism and the Expression of Self

- The psychodynamic and behaviorist approaches had little in common, but they converged in support of the view that people are largely buffered about by psychological forces beyond their control and against the view that people are inherently oriented toward personal growth
- According to Roger's humanistic perspective, in contrast, people are inherently good, and driven toward personal growth.
 - If they enjoy a supportive social milieu, they will construct creative, productive, meaningful lives filled with love and purpose.
 - They will discover, and live in accord with the authentic self-received additional support in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which peaks with the need for self-actualization
- One theme within humanistic psychology is that the successful pursuit of self-actualization, the pyramid's peak, depends on our relationships with significant others

Post industrialization

- Postindustrial economies are built on service industries
- Economic value predominately derives from the accumulation of knowledge in innovative ways
- Larger proportions of the workforce deal with symbols, information, and people
- **Successful decision-making requires insightful analysis and sophisticated social skills – the ability to develop and implement good ideas in a complex social environment**
- The transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy produces a shift from survival to self-expressive values, including an emphasis on individual autonomy and free choice
- The moral righteousness of achieving authenticity has powerful implications for marriage
 - If you are not fulfilled by your marriage, you have to justify staying in it, because of the tremendous cultural pressure to be good to one's self



The Self-Expressive Marriage

- We continue to view our marriage as a central locus of love and passion, and we continue to view our home as a haven in a heartless world, but, for more and more of us, a marriage that achieves those things without also promoting self-expression is insufficient
- All of us have many possible selves, but most of them are inferior variations of our authentic or best self; we are looking for a spouse who elicits that version of ourselves

The Grand Gender Convergence

- Of the many advances in society and the economy in the last century, the converging roles of men and women are among the grandest
- A narrowing has occurred between men and women in labor force participation, paid hours of work, hours of work at home, life-time labor force experience, occupations, college majors, and education
- By and large, today's men and women inhabit a single sphere
- As second factor facilitating the convergence of gender roles was the emergence of the postindustrial economy
 - As work depended less on physical strength and more on cognitive and social skills, labor force participation became less masculine
- The "corporate family" which consists of family farms, artisanship, and the like, was dominant from 1800 to 1950, but the dual-earner family had supplanted it by 2000
- **In the twenty-first century, marriages characterized by greater gender equality – greater parity in earning, housework, and parenting – are more satisfying, more sexually fulfilling and at lower risk of divorce**

An Institution in Flux

- In recent decades, marriage has become decreasingly characterized by obligation and strict rules and increasingly characterized by flexibility and personal choice
- This decline is driven primarily by people with less education. Americans who marry are doing so at older ages

Marriage as Capstone

- Growing swaths of the populace view marriage as something that should come after one has already established economic independence, learned from several serious relationships, and experienced a prolonged cohabitation with one's potential spouse
- "First comes love, then comes marriage"
- Among Americans with at least a college degree, divorce rates have plunged and marital quality is on the rise
- Among those without a high school degree, divorce rates have continued rising, and marriage quality is on the decline

Five Challenges of the Self-Expressive Marriage

1. The Elusive Self



- Our spouse must understand our psychological constitution, recognize the opportunities and pitfalls dictated by the circumstances we're confronting right now, accurately assess his or her support skills and domain-relevant expertise, take account of the current emotional tenor in the marriage, and so forth
 - To achieve optimal communication in the self-expressive era, and to support each other effectively, we need to develop deep insight into our own and our spouse's psychological experiences – needs, goals, anxieties, frustrations – and to harmonize our behaviors with them
 - To achieve long-term stability and success, we must remain compatible over time, even as we grow and change
2. The Porcupine's Dilemma
- Spouses must navigate the porcupine's dilemma – the desire to achieve deep intimacy while remaining invulnerable to pain
 - Navigating this terrain is especially challenging for spouses who are prone to emotional insecurity
 - Because they fear rejection, such individuals tend to prioritize self-protection over relationship enhancement
 - They underestimate how much their partner loves them, which makes them wary of being vulnerable in the relationship – wary of feeling as if they need their partner or as if their partner has the power to hurt them
3. The Struggle for Balance
- Americans today struggle to build and sustain a balance life – one characterized by fulfillment in both professional and personal domains – and the arrival of children makes this struggle even more difficult
 - The existence of a supportive and competent spouse is not sufficient – the two spouses must achieve strong coordination across a complex and extensive range of tasks
 - Gender-based defaults within marriage are much weaker today
 - The relative lack of role differentiation in today's marriages means that spouses must engage in extensive and frequent communication and coordination
4. The Inexorable Rise in Demands for Sexual Fulfillment
- Infrequent or unsatisfying sex is increasingly viewed as an indication that one's marriage is flawed, perhaps even rotten
 - Sex is a measure of the health of your relationship – an unbiased barometer of how much you desire your partner and how much he or she still desires you
 - This unbiased barometer point is crucial – the reason such physiological reactions are emotionally so erotic is that they signal a kind of approval that lies utterly beyond rational manipulation
 - Erections and lubrication simply cannot be effected by willpower and are therefore particularly true and honest indices of interest
 - In the self-expressive era, when we believe that frequent and mutually orgasmic sex is an essential component of a healthy marriage, difficulties becoming physiologically aroused at the right moments accrue great significance
 - More than ever before, spouses view such difficulties as evidence of profound incompatibility
5. Me's Continued Stunted Psychological Development



- **Woman's adoption of assertive qualities has been stronger than men's adoption of nurturant qualities, a gender difference that is especially large among the less educated**
- Men have proved remarkably unable to adapt
- Men's relatively slow embrace of nurturant qualities – and, consequently, their struggle to adapt to an economy increasingly oriented toward the caring professions – has many causes, but a major one derives from long-standing definitions of masculinity

New Opportunities and the Ascent of Marriage

- These challenges of the self-expressive era – the elusiveness of the expressive self, the porcupine's dilemma, the struggle for balance, the increasing demands for sexual fulfillment, and men sustained stunted psychological development – have made it more difficult than in the past to sustain a happy marriage
- **Psychologically androgynous individuals have high emotional intelligence, and they are especially effective at adjusting their behavior to address the demands of a particular situation**
- Today's husbands and wives are not only more psychologically androgynous (both assertive and nurturant), but also much more psychologically similar to each other

PART THREE: The All-or-Nothing Marriage

Chapter 5: Personal Fulfillment and Marital Commitment: The Détente

- We have grown as individuals and in the process we have grown together
- This humanistic emphasis on personal growth is what infuses the self-expressive marriage with so much power

Centuries of Chicken Little; And Then, Suddenly, the Sky Fell

- A new emphasis on personal rights and liberties trounced the long-standing emphasis on respect for tradition and marital commitment, and a cultural reorientation altered the nature of sexual and family relations
- Marriage was demoted from its perch as the defining event of early adulthood and became an increasingly operational life choice

Happiness versus Meaning

- The more likely explanation is that many Americans in the self-expressive era have adopted a deeper approach to "personal fulfillment"
- The adoption of the new approach, which focuses less on happiness than on meaning, removes much of the adversarial relationship between personal fulfillment and marital commitment
- Happiness and meaning are linked – people who tend to experience high levels of happiness also tend to experience high levels of meaning
 - But two constructs are distinct, and scholars have investigated the correlates of each



- Participants who felt that their lives were easy or pleasurable tended to experience greater happiness, but not more meaning
- **In contrast, participants who tended to think a lot about the future, or who exhibited strong tendencies to be a giver, tended to experience greater meaning, but they were less happy**

Happiness, Meaning, and Marriage

- The idea is largely correct if personal fulfillment is defined as happiness – as a high pleasure to pain ratio
- But the idea is largely incorrect if personal fulfillment is defined as meaning – as a high purpose to insignificance ratio, or a process of striving for excellence in domains that are linked to one’s authentic self
- To simplify the discussion, we can talk about two variations of “self-based” marriage: a happiness-based model and a meaning-based model

HAPPINESS-BASED MODEL	MEANING-BASED MODEL
Emphasis on pleasure	Emphasis on meaning
Pursuit of self-esteem	Pursuit of self-expression
Belief that sustaining a happy marriage should not require extensive endurance or forbearance	Belief that sustaining a happy marriage can require extensive endurance or forbearance
Marital and personal fulfillment tend to be incompatible in the long run	Marital and personal fulfillment tend to be compatible in the long run

- In the happiness-based model, individuals look to their marriage to promote their hedonic well-being (a high pleasure to pain ratio) and to feel good about themselves (high self-esteem).
- In the meaning-based model, in contrast, individuals look to their marriage to promote their eudaimonic well-being (their successful pursuit of meaning by excelling in self-relevant domains) and their personal growth (high self-expression)

The Self-Expressive Marriage’s Evil Twin

- The American dream is both fabulously expensive and generally affordable
- In the 1960s, a surge in something more psychologically nourishing – the pursuit of a meaning life – began to complement the empty calories of consumerism
- Self-expressive values promote a new moral authority in which human autonomy is sacrosanct

The New Equilibrium

- Perhaps the distinction between the meaning-based and the happiness-based model of marriage can help explain not only why the institution of marriage almost shattered in the 1960s and 1970s, but also why it then largely recovered
- The real test of a relationship arises when circumstances are not so congenial – when partners encounter dilemmas involving conflicted interaction, incompatible preferences, extra relationship temptation, or experience of betrayal
- **People who are highly committed to their relationship exhibit self-delusions that serve to reinforce that commitment**



- We tend to perceive our relationship and the world in a way that biases us toward sustaining commitment over time
- It is precisely when things get difficult that many of us redouble our efforts to strengthen our relationship, either by engaging in effortful relationship-maintenance activities or by recalibrating our expectations
 - We work hard to make our marriage strong, in part because doing so helps us become the best version of ourselves
- Goal: focus on building a meaningful life that balances personal fulfillment and marital commitment

Chapter 6: Marriage at the Summit

The “Freighted Marriage” Perspective versus the “All-Or-Nothing Marriage” Perspective

- The idea is that Americans have come to ask much more of our marriage vis-à-vis higher-altitude needs inked to self-discovery and personal growth (where providing sufficient “oxygenation” is crucial) while simultaneously asking much less vis-à-vis lower-altitude needs linked to safety and security
- The all-or-nothing marriage perspective suggests that the major change has less to do with how much we are asking of our marriage than with what we are asking of it
- The freighted marriage perspective and the all-or-nothing marriage perspective align in the view that Americans are asking more of their marriages regarding higher-altitude needs
 - As we have seen, we are much more likely today than in the past to require that our spouse be our close friend, perhaps even our best friend, and to hold the belief that “having a healthy, exciting sex life is virtually a prerequisite for a happy, satisfying marriage.”
- Where the freighted marriage perspective and the all-or-nothing marriage perspective diverge is at the lower altitudes
- There is still significant inequality between the earnings of men and women, but the proportion of women who can make ends meet independently has surged since 1900, and especially since the 1960s, significantly reducing women’s economic dependence on marriage
- Technological advances that make housework less onerous – dishwashers, washing machines, microwaves, power drills – have also de-freighted marriage
- Americans do considerably less housework than they used to. Meanwhile, during the same time, the fertility rate declined by about half – from a recent high of 3.65 children per women in 1960 to a low of 1.74 in 1976 before stabilizing at around 2.0
- Marriage has also become de-freighted through a surge in socially acceptable alternatives for fulfilling sexual and lifestyle needs
 - In short, for both men and women, it’s much easier to achieve a measure of sexual fulfillment outside marriage today that it was in the past
- As the stigma of divorce has declined, fewer people feel compelled to remain in a dissatisfying marriage just to be a respected member of the community
- **Yes, today’s Americans are asking more of our marriage regarding higher-altitude need fulfillment, but we are asking less regarding lower-altitude need fulfillment**



- Regardless of the details, life is getting faster, straining our psychological band with – the brainpower available to focus on the task at hand

Time Crunch

- American women (4.0 hours/day) and men (2.5 hours/day) spend considerable time engaged in unpaid domestic work like cleaning, cooking, and child care
- Highly educated Americans are especially likely to adopt a concerted cultivation approach to childhood, in which parents facilitate their children’s development via organized activities, language training, and active school involvement
- Considering these recent parenting and work trends, is it any surprise that spouses are spending less time alone together than they did in the past?
- Between 1975 and 2003, spouses without children at home endured a 30% decline in spousal time on weekends and a 17% decline on weekend days
- Spouses with children at home endured a 40% decline on weekdays but experienced no change on the weekend days
- **Spouses spent much less time alone together in 2003 than in 1975**
- Spouses are spending less time alone together in the 21st century than in the late 20th century, and the time they spend together (including with other people) is less focused on meals and more focused on television and parenting
- Spouses simply do not pursue enough daily activities together

Stress

- There is a crucial circumstantial case that spousal time in the average marriage is, if anything, of lower quality than it was in the past
- Americans’ elevated stress levels result in part from the increasing difficulty of achieving work-life balance

Mental Fragmentation

- Meanwhile, we are living in the information age, processing massively more information than during any period of human history
- **Remember: “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention”**
- We find ourselves chronically interrupted, multitasking, or both, which makes us feel scattered and fragmented, especially as we increasingly mainline technology into every aspect of our lives
- Yet that activity splitters the experience on time into thousands of little pieces – time confetti
- Scientific investigations confirm that little disruptions impair our ability to sustain attention
- Mental fragmentation afflicts women (especially mothers) more than men
 - Even as women have increasingly pursued careers over the past two generations, they have not been able to relinquish enough responsibility at home to offset the time and energy those careers require
- Women and men alike are at risk for living in a state that the philosopher Martin Heidegger calls forfeiture – a lack of self-insight resulting from living busy, distracted lives

Bandwidth for Two? The Suffocated Marriage and the Spouse’s Dilemma



- The imbalance created by our tendency to ask our marriage to fulfill our highest-altitude needs despite our limited investment in the marriage is exacerbated by the fact that marriage is a symmetrical arrangement in which each spouse is responsible for the other
- **But to the extent that our partner's needs make us feel pressured to relinquish the pursuit of our own goals, we may experience frustration and dissatisfaction.**
- Biggest issue in modern day marriage: Both spouses want to be taken care of at the end of the day, and neither of them have enough energy to take care of the other
- Esther Perel: "We come to one person, and we basically are asking them to give us what once an entire village used to provide.
- **That we are looking to our marriage to fulfill all these high-altitude needs while investing less time and energy in our relationship has produced an oxygenation deficit – our marriage lacks the resources to give us everything that we are asking of it**
- Parenthood drives forward a "happiness penalty" in America because of our lack of family-friendly employment policies
- The quality of the average marriage in America is in decline. We have already consider one major reason for this trend – that more of us are experiencing a disconnect between:
 - (1) The higher-altitude needs we seek to fulfill through our marriage and
 - (2) Our marriage's ability to fulfill those needs
- As noted by the psychologist Carl Rogers, a life characterized by the pursuit of self-discovery and self-expression is the opposite of one characterized by complacency.
 - It involves giving oneself over to insatiable hunger and yearning rather than allowing oneself to feel fulfilled and contented
- Pursuing a marriage at the summit requires that we supply the requisite oxygen
- Few of us can live at the summit full-time, so the ability to let go of summit aspirations – at least for a while – is a hallmark of most of today's best marriages
- **Spouses in the best marriages can keep marital disappointment at bay by modulating their expectations to align with what the marriage can realistically provide**
 - A great danger of the self-expressive era is that an inflexible, myopic focus on the top of Mount Maslow produces painful disappointment during periods when the marriage falls short of those expectations
 - The best marriages can enjoy exquisite connection at the highest altitudes, but also to lower their expectations as the circumstances dictate

Chapter 7: For Richer or Poorer

Common Ground

- **On virtually all relevant dimensions – life expectancy, physical safety, running water, medical care, waste disposal – today's Americans are far better off than their status-matched peers from the past**
- Today, most people in rich countries have grown up taking it for granted that they will not starve

Social Class

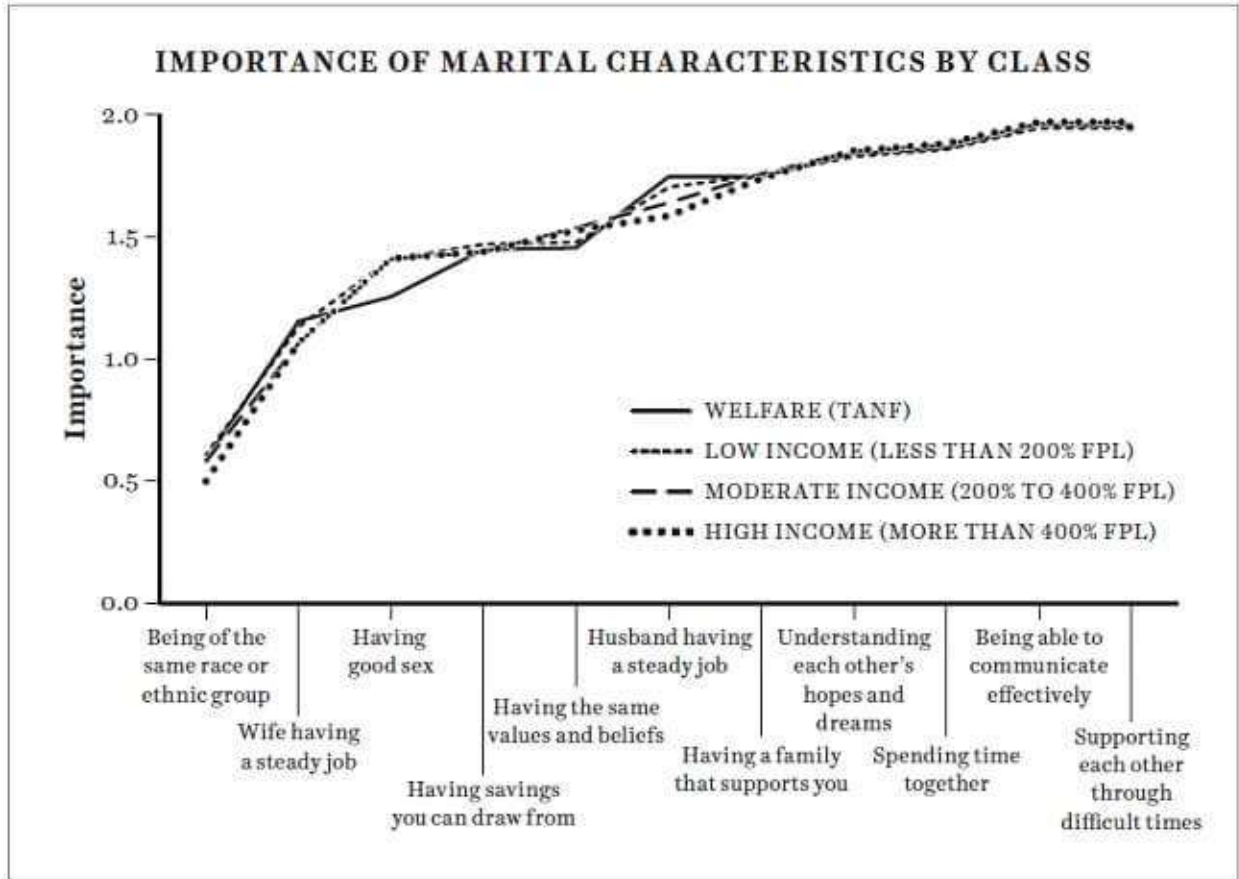


- With the rise of social media and on-demand entertainment options, Americans' cultural experience is less shared than in the past
- The extent to which such trends will undermine a shared American identity, including a shared understanding of the functions of marriage, in the coming decades is unknown
- The middle class of the American labor market has been hollowed out creating an hourglass economy in which Americans with college and postgraduate degrees are getting wealthier, while those without a college education are getting poorer
- Less obviously, marital trends are exacerbating inequality
 - Wealthier Americans are more likely to marry than poorer Americans are – further concentrating the salutary outcomes linked to marriage among the wealthier – and people who do marry are increasingly doing so within their own socioeconomic stratum

Where American Marriage is in Crisis

- The magnitude of the inequality in marriage is understated because lower-class Americans are less likely to marry in the first place
 - Marriages that remain intact tend to be less fulfilling among the lower class than the middle or upper class
- Divorce risk is much greater for lower-class than higher-class Americans, but also that this disparity has grown since around 1980
- Marriage is in crisis among the lower class
- Importance of marital characteristics by Class:





Two Supported Hypotheses

- Lower class Americans are much likelier than higher-class Americans to endure a pernicious strain of stress that undermines feelings of safety and security
- They lack a financial cushion as well and because of this, challenging events such as a car breakdown or a torn ligament, wreak particular havoc – unemployment, eviction, even destitution
- Poverty influences marital and other outcomes independent of any effects of inherent genetic or cognitive attributes

Higher-Class Marriages

- It's the time squeeze to be a great partner, professional, be in shape and have a great marriage

PART FOUR: Toward Stronger Marriages

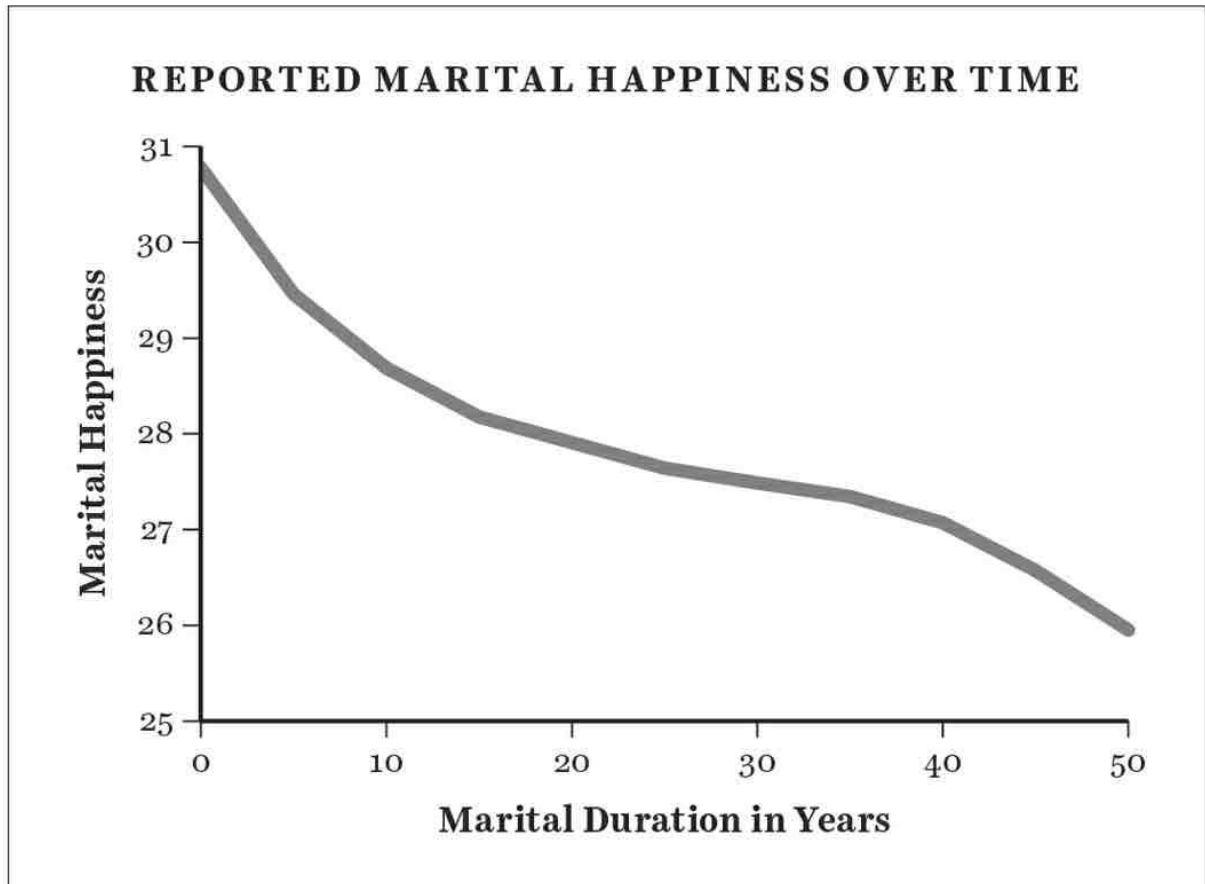
Chapter 8: For Better or Worse

- Building a successful long-term marriage is hard
- Building a happy marriage requires that spouses successfully navigate a dense thicket of challenges and opportunities, frequently without a good map of the route ahead



The Sooner, The Better

- Left to their own devices, most relationships become less fulfilling over time



- Just because two partners are compatible now does not mean they will be compatible forever, given changing goals, skills, preferences, obligations, and so forth

Supply and Demand

- At its core, the all-or-nothing theory of marriage is a supply-and-demand model: Are the two of us investing enough resources – and the right kinds of resources – to meet the needs we are seeking to fulfill through the marriage?
- Three types of strategies for improving marriage:
 1. Try to get more mileage out of our available resources
 2. Invest additional resources in pursuit of large rewards at the summit
 3. Recalibrate expectations to stave off disappointment

Chapter 9: Love hacking

- To rescue a long-term relationship from complacency and boredom, we should try to locate the good and the beautiful beneath the layers of habit and routine.



- Love-hacking involves a deliberate effort to see the beautiful underneath the anger and disappointment and boredom – to look with appreciative new eyes
- Either two parents figure out how to come back together and have some kind of refreshed marriage after that insulated, self-propelled procreation frenzy, or the do not
- Getting to this new phase however requires that we keep our marriage from capsizing during that phase

Making External, Temporary Attributions for Negative Partner Behaviors

- The tendency to misperceive benign motivation as malignant can trigger an escalating cycle of conflict and negativity
- If we are confident that our partner is, by and large, a decent person who wants to do well by us, there is a strong argument that we should seek to make attributions that give him or her the benefit of the doubt
- **If I start feeling frustrated or angry about something my spouse did (or did not do), then I will take a few seconds to consider other explanations for his or her behavior**

Adopting a Growth Mindset

- **People with strong destiny beliefs think that partners either are or are not meant to be**
 - **They view conflict and other relationship difficulties as indicators that they may simply be incompatible with their partner**
- **People with strong growth beliefs, in contrast, think that partners can cultivate a high-quality relationship by working and growing together**
- The science is clear that holding strong destiny beliefs is perilous
- The issue is that people who believe in romantic destiny tend to become unhappy quickly when relationships go through challenging times
- Epic failure is part of being human, and it is part of being married
- And that's part of what marriage means, sometimes hating this other person but staying together because you promised you would
- A successful relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities

Cultivating Gratitude

- In the long-run, people who experience elevated levels of gratitude also experience stronger relationship commitment and are less likely to break up
- **All of us can find a few minutes per week – to think about ways in which our spouse has invested in our marriage**
 - **Doing so has the potential not only to bolster our gratitude and relationship commitment, but also to increase our overall happiness**
- **Given the primacy of the marital bond in America today, many of us will be uncomfortable acknowledging that we simply are not able or willing right now to invest significant additional time and psychological energy to improve the relationship. This discomfort is misguided**

Chapter 10: Going All In

Surviving versus Thriving



- How can spouses build a marriage that does not strive, but thrives?
- Maya Angelou: “My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style. Surviving is important. Thriving is elegant.”
- Individuals thrive when they are able to cope successfully with adversities, not only by being buffered from potentially severe consequences of adversity when it arises, but also by emerging from the experience as a stronger or more knowledgeable person
- Individuals thrive when they are able to fully participate in opportunities for fulfillment and personal growth through work, play, socializing, learning, discovery, creating, pursuing hobbies, and making meaningful contribution to community and society

Creating Time

- A prerequisite for thriving through marriage is that we dedicate sufficient time and attention to the relationship
- Many of us wind up treating quality time with our spouse as a luxury to be enjoyed when all the necessities of life have been addressed – if that ever happens
- Most of us overestimate how much we work, and the overestimates are particularly large among people who claim to work the most
 - But many of us could care out a least some of the time for that purpose
- We need to continue to find dedicated time in our daily lives for our spouses
 - Spouses who spend more time together engaged in actual conversation tend to be happier than those who spend less
 - Spouses who pursue more leisure activities together – including outdoor activities, sports, card games, and travel – are at reduced risk of divorce
- Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity

Nourishing the Self-Expressive Marriage

- I reject the romantic idea that love is a magical event that the fates mysteriously bestow upon us
- People think that to love is simple, but that to find the right object to love – or to be loved by – is difficult
- Fromm, in contrast favors the idea that love – which he defines in terms of care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge – is a skill that we must cultivate
- The first step to take is to become aware that love is an art, just as living is an art
 - If we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, say music, painting, carpentry, or the art of medicine or engineering

Communication

- Four particularly damaging behaviors are:
 - Criticism: characterizing the conflict in terms of a fundamental flaw in our spouse
 - Defensiveness: counterattacking rather than engaging with our spouse’s concern
 - Contempt: engaging in insulting, mocking, or hostile behavior



- Stonewalling (clamming up when our partner raises a concern)
- In general, it is beneficial for each partner to try to respond generously when the other behaves badly, as doing so avoids the escalating cycles of negative reciprocity characteristic of unhealthy relationships
- Some people like to process the relationship regularly, whereas others prefer to take the general goodness of the relationship as an article of faith without doing deep emotional work to unpack every disagreement or miscommunication

Responsiveness

- Understanding involves comprehending the partner's core self (needs, desires, strengths, weaknesses)
- Validation involves respect for or valuing of the partner's view of the self
- Caring involves expressing affection, warmth, and concern for the partner's well-being
- Indeed, to the extent that we are responsive when our spouse is upset, he or she is likely to feel happier, more relaxed, and more closely connected to us – and to sleep better at night
- People tend to be happier in marriages in which the spouses' social networks overlap a lot rather than a little
- Self-expansion theory – suggests that people have a fundamental motivation to expand the self (to grow) and that a central pathway through which they do so is by engaging in new and stimulating activities with their romantic partner

Sex and Romance

- Sustaining a mutually fulfilling sex life is hard
- **Sexual desire tends to decrease as relationship duration increases, but lack of novelty is not the only cause**
 - As we have seen, another major factor involves shifting registers between the mundane and the sexy
- Alain de Botton:
“The qualities demanded of us when we have sex stand in sharp opposition to those we employ in conducting the majority of our other, daily activities. Marriage tends to involve – if not immediately, then within a few years – the running of a household and the raising of children, tasks that often feel akin to the administration of a small business and that draw upon many of the same bureaucratic and procedural skills, including time-management, self-discipline, the exercising of authority and the imposition of rules upon recalcitrant others ... Sex, with its contrary emphasis on expansiveness, imagination, playfulness, and a loss of control, must by its very nature interrupt this routine of regulation and self-restraint.”
- **As the years pass, even those of us for whom the sex is mutually pleasurable tend to have diminished desire and less frequent sex**
- Rules of thumb, such as “have sex nightly,” regardless of immediate desire may provide a better guide to behavior than momentary feelings
 - For many couples, having sex every night is overkill
 - Although more frequent sex is generally linked to greater relationship satisfaction, once per week seems sufficient; more sex than that appears to have no additional benefit



- Because our spontaneous desire for sex declines as the novelty of the relationship fades, and because life is busy and tiring, many of us fail to initiate sex even when doing so would have been physically pleasurable and emotionally connective – even when we would have been glad, we had time so
 - We settle for activities like channel surfing or reading, that take less initiative but also are much less beneficial for the relationship and much less fun
- There are two internal transitions that must occur before you can think about entering an erotic space: Professional → Partner, then Partner → Lover
 - Eroticism at home requires active engagement and willful intent; it does not just happen
 - It requires that you create your own demarcation between pragmatism and pleasure and that you cultivate a space where a sense of intrigue and curiosity can emerge
- We should strive to be good, giving, and game when it comes to our sexuality within our marriage
 - Good – means being sexually skilled
 - Giving – means being sexually generous, ensuring that we are giving every bit as much time and pleasure to our partner as he or she is giving to us
 - Game – means being up for anything within reason

In Praise of Slow Cooking

- If you want to reap these benefits, you have to make your relationship a priority in your life
- When we invest heavily in our marriage, spending the time and psychological energy to develop and sustain a deep connection, we can achieve something magnificent
- Our marriage can provide a level of profound happiness, serenity, and richness of the inner life that would have been virtually out of reach in the past

Chapter 11: Recalibrating

- “I have often described my goal as fostering the good enough marriage”
- The pursuit of great often stresses people out and causes more conflict and disappointment than it resolves
- Problems with American culture:
 - Settling is a dirty word
 - We look for excellence rather than adequacy
 - We look for good-as-hell rather than good enough
- But even those of us seeking to develop a terrific marriage recognize that expecting sixty years of unmitigated bliss is a tall order
- **The tendency of contemporary Americans to place so much responsibility for our social and psychological fulfillment on one relationship turns the marriage into something of a crucible**
- Rather than expecting one person to meet all your needs, you might ask a spouse to meet a few, and you would be encouraged to get other needs met in other ways or with other people or in some combination
- The optimal relationship emerges when two fully functioning people seek to experience the world together rather than when two partially developed people look to each other to become whole



- Having an independent personality is a predictor of low relationship quality on average
- We should diversify our social portfolio and look to satisfy some of our social needs outside of the marriage
 - Having a robust social network is a surprisingly strong predictor not only of psychological health, but also of physical health, including longevity

Recalibrating The Sexual Component of Marriage

- The sexual component of marriage adds an additional dimension of pleasure but also a level of complexity that can unravel an otherwise strong marriage
 - It is unlikely that our sexual cravings and preferences will align precisely with our spouse's
 - In almost all marriages, one person wants sex more frequently than the other, an asymmetry that can change direction from one year to the next
 - Is it any wonder that sex is a major area of conflict in American marriages?
 - We all should be looking for solutions that take some of the pressure off the marriage and to help mitigate feelings of sexual disappointment
- Having satisfying sex with our spouse is, under most circumstances, more appealing than having satisfying sex with ourselves
 - Masturbation will not quell the feeling of rejection, but it can make the sexual deprivation more bearable, thereby reducing the urgency and intensity of the disappointment
 - Masturbation can serve another important function in marriage – it can allow us to indulge in those elements of our sexual desires that we would rather not bring into the conjugal bed
 - Many of us will be wary of bringing sordid sorts of sex play into our relationship with the person who is also our primary source of emotional support and the coparent of our children
 - Morality aside, masturbation can take some of the sexual pressure off the marriage
- Two principles I find fascinating from the philosophy underlying consensual nonmonogamy
 - One person should not be expected to meet all the needs of their partners
 - Anticipating the sexual attraction for one's partner will exist, unwaveringly, over the course of a given relationship is unrealistic
- **“Too many people start off in relationships by putting the moral emphasis in the wrong place, smugly mocking the urge to stray as if it were something disgusting and unthinkable, observes Alain de Botton. But in truth, it is the ability to stay that is both wonderful and worthy of honor, though it is too often simply taken for granted and deemed the normal state of affairs... Spouses who remain faithful to each other should recognize the scale of the sacrifice they are making for their love and for their children, and should feel proud of their valor.”**
 - If we elect to adopt a monogamy norm in our own marriage, we should probably appreciate the magnitude of that commitment. We should consider either what other things we are willing to forgo in our marriage or what additional investments we are willing to make for the arrangement to be fulfilling, perhaps including efforts to keep our bodies fit and, in some cases, to have sex even when we would rather not.



Descending Mount Maslow

- One promising means of improving a marriage is to ask for less from it
- Having high expectations regarding our marriage's ability to fulfill our higher-altitude needs is beneficial when it can do so, but harmful when it can not
- It seems that spouses with high expectations regarding higher-altitude need fulfillment have especially fulfilling marriages if the relationship functions smoothly, but especially unfulfilling marriages if it does not
- There is no shame in pursuing the "good-enough marriage" proposed by John Gottman
- If we fulfill many of our needs elsewhere, perhaps we can focus on building a marriage in which each of us works to appreciate the other's preferences and priorities, one that lacks pizzazz but serves as a peaceful, loving place for our grandchildren to wake up on Christmas morning

Chapter 12: The Marital Buffet

