

What's Love Got To Do With It?

YOUR HEART'S AFLUTTER WITH THE THRILL OF ROMANCE. BUT WILL THIS RELATIONSHIP STAND THE TEST OF TIME? EXPERTS OFFER A FEW CLUES TO LOOK FOR BEFORE YOU SAY "I DO."

BY JEANNE BOYER

Ah, romance—the thrill of being with that special someone, flirting and falling in love. Rings and promises are exchanged, and then the happily ever after begins. Now click off the movie and return to real life, where dreams of romance often collide with squabbles about money, sex, and mothers-in-law. Some marriages survive the ups and downs, despite differences and disappointments. Others don't. It's easy to see why some marriages break up—she wanted kids, he didn't; she fell in love with her boss, while he was on the computer ogling other women. Other times it comes as a surprise when a couple raises a family and gives no outward signs of discord, yet splits as the youngest child heads for college. Is there any way to predict which marriages will last and which will not?

There certainly is, according to romance researchers. Relationship experts John and Julie Gottman are Washington academic researchers who have studied love and marriage for decades. They say they can predict with a high degree of accuracy which couples they observe will eventually divorce. Contempt toward the other partner—expressed in sarcasm and insults—is the number one indicator that a couple will divorce, the Gottmans

say. Criticism, stonewalling, and defensiveness round out the top four qualities that sound alarm bells for these observers.

Therapists wish couples would choose better in the first place. "If we could get them before they are married" it would help decrease the number of troubled couples, says Randall Walker, director of Loma Linda University's counseling and family science clinic in Redlands. Prospective mates might realize that while they have strong feelings toward someone, "maybe this is not the best person for me" to marry.

People seeking to marry "should always look for similarity," says Kelly Campbell, Cal State San Bernardino psychology assistant professor. "The more you're matched on, the higher chance of success. The opposites attract theory only pertains to the beginning of a relationship." While opposites attract, the qualities that at first seem intriguing and different soon become irritating and discordant.

Birth order can also influence compatibility, says Catherine Salmon, a University of Redlands associate professor of psychology. Middle children make good mates because they are used to accommodating others and tend to avoid conflict, she says in her book, *The Secret Power of Middle Children*. Research shows the happiest couples are middleborns married to any other birth order, and firstborns married to lastborns.

"It's true that certain pairings may have happier marriages, but atypical pairings can be happy as well," she says. "I do think it can be helpful

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to understand the implications of birth order in dealing with a partner, resolving conflicts and so forth. Two first and two lasts can be tough if both are typical for their birth orders—two people who want to run the show or two people who both want to get their way but not have to deal with the responsibility side of things.”

However, middle children sometimes hesitate to confront problems, she notes, and may need to make extra efforts to resolve issues.

When it comes to problems, therapist Walker says money is often an issue, especially in today’s tough economy. Couples struggle to pay the bills and may criticize the partner’s spending habits or limited earnings. Unemployed men are more likely to be unhappy in their marriages and contemplate divorce, according to W. Bradford Wilcox at the University of Virginia.

You would think having enough money would make wives and husbands happier on the home front, but materialistic couples with plenty of money have more problems than couples who have modest incomes but are happy with what they have, according to a recent study by Utah’s

years before acknowledging they needed to leave, Walker says.

While money is often a source of discord, economic hard times actually lead to a decrease in the divorce rate. In many cases people decide they can’t afford to pay for a divorce and support two households when they have less money, and would lose even more if they sold their home to divide assets. That doesn’t mean the marriage is any happier; it may just be what the Japanese call *kateinai rikon*, a divorce within the household, where the spouses lead separate lives. However, in other cases hard times motivate a couple to work together to survive, according to National Marriage Project research at the University of Virginia. Both parties appreciate having a partner to share the demands of daily life. There’s less money for diversions like sports and shopping, so the couple may spend more time at home together because they can’t afford to go out.

This may more closely resemble a concept of marriage from earlier centuries, where it was important to find a helpmate rather than face

are 21 may be a different person at 42. He or she may want to travel more, party less, change careers or adopt a child. Activities you once shared may have lost their appeal. In marriage, “my assumption is we’re always changing,” Walker says, “and I would hope we could change together.”

Women’s health expert Dr. Christiane Northrup says at midlife, marriages change or they end. Hormonal shifts mean women are more outspoken about their own needs and less willing to tolerate unsatisfactory relationships. Both spouses may be concerned about unmet needs and decide they want to fulfill their goals before it’s too late.

Midlife is also when children usually leave home and parents have to adjust their own relationship, Walker says. “They have to relate to each other again as adults” rather than as parents.

Sometimes there’s very little left. What seems like a sudden split to outside observers may actually be the result of long-simmering resentments and diverging interests. Or one person may have met someone who seems far more sat-

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Brigham Young University. Research showed that couples who say money is not important to them score about 10 to 15 percent better on marriage stability and other measures of relationship quality than couples where one or both are materialistic.

“Couples where both spouses are materialistic were worse off on nearly every measure we looked at,” says Jason Carroll, a BYU professor of family life and lead author of the study. “There is a pervasive pattern of eroding communication, poor conflict resolution and low responsiveness to each other.”

As big-spending bride and reality show star Kim Kardashian confessed after her 72-day marriage ended, “I got caught up with the hoopla.” Kardashian took a lot of heat for her lavish nuptial and subsequent quickie divorce filing, but perhaps she was right to make a swift exit rather than stay in a doomed relationship.

“I know several people who told me they knew on their wedding day they had made a mistake” but struggled for several miserable

life alone. While there were love matches, there were also plenty of practical unions where a woman looked for a good provider and a man sought a bride with a generous dowry. Also, smaller towns and the difficulty of travel meant people accepted that they had a modest number of marital possibilities; today the Internet offers thousands of possible matches.

In recent years, expectations have shifted to emphasize the concept of a soulmate—someone who understands you and communicates intuitively, while fulfilling all your emotional needs.

Whoa! say relationship experts. Even if you consider your spouse your best friend, it’s also good to have interests outside the marriage. Don’t put pressure on your beloved to share every activity with the same enthusiasm you feel.

“Today people go into marriage with unrealistic expectations and find hard work,” Walker says. “Just that word soulmate is very telling—that whole concept of finding the person perfectly matched for you.”

Even someone who seems perfect when you

isfying and in sync than the longtime spouse.

Not all marriages are worth saving. Staying married isn’t a virtue if it means staying in a relationship that’s physically or emotionally abusive. And convincing yourself to stay in a profoundly unhappy marriage for the sake of the children may not be a good idea if the atmosphere at home is constantly ready to explode. Children whose stress hormones are elevated for long periods of time develop health problems and lead shorter lives, Walker says. While divorce is difficult for kids, living in a hostile environment may be worse.

Can an unraveling marriage be saved by counseling?

Sometimes it can, say experts, if couples seek therapy early enough and are strongly motivated to stay together. Often it means accepting a partner’s shortcomings and annoying habits, as well as examining one’s own behavior.

While couples may initially claim they can’t communicate, usually “it’s way beyond communication,” Walker says. Many clients are strug-

gling with personal issues that may manifest themselves in addictive behavior that includes using drugs, gambling or pornography. Walker sees clients whose parents also used drugs. "In a family disrupted by addiction, parents aren't able to teach how to have a healthy relationship." Their children may have trouble trusting others and don't know how to manage their emotions.

Problems like substance abuse, criminal behavior, and chronic infidelity may be more than one spouse can take. The death of a child is often so devastating that parents divorce. Even a spouse's health problems can be so stressful and contrary to expectations that the other partner leaves the marriage.

When a spouse becomes sick, often other needs are sacrificed because of the time, energy and money needed to care for someone. "My business took a 30 percent hit, and I had to choose what to take care of," says a Corona man whose wife became ill at the same time the recession hit. The Corona couple credit their love and commitment for keeping them together, even as their finances suffered.

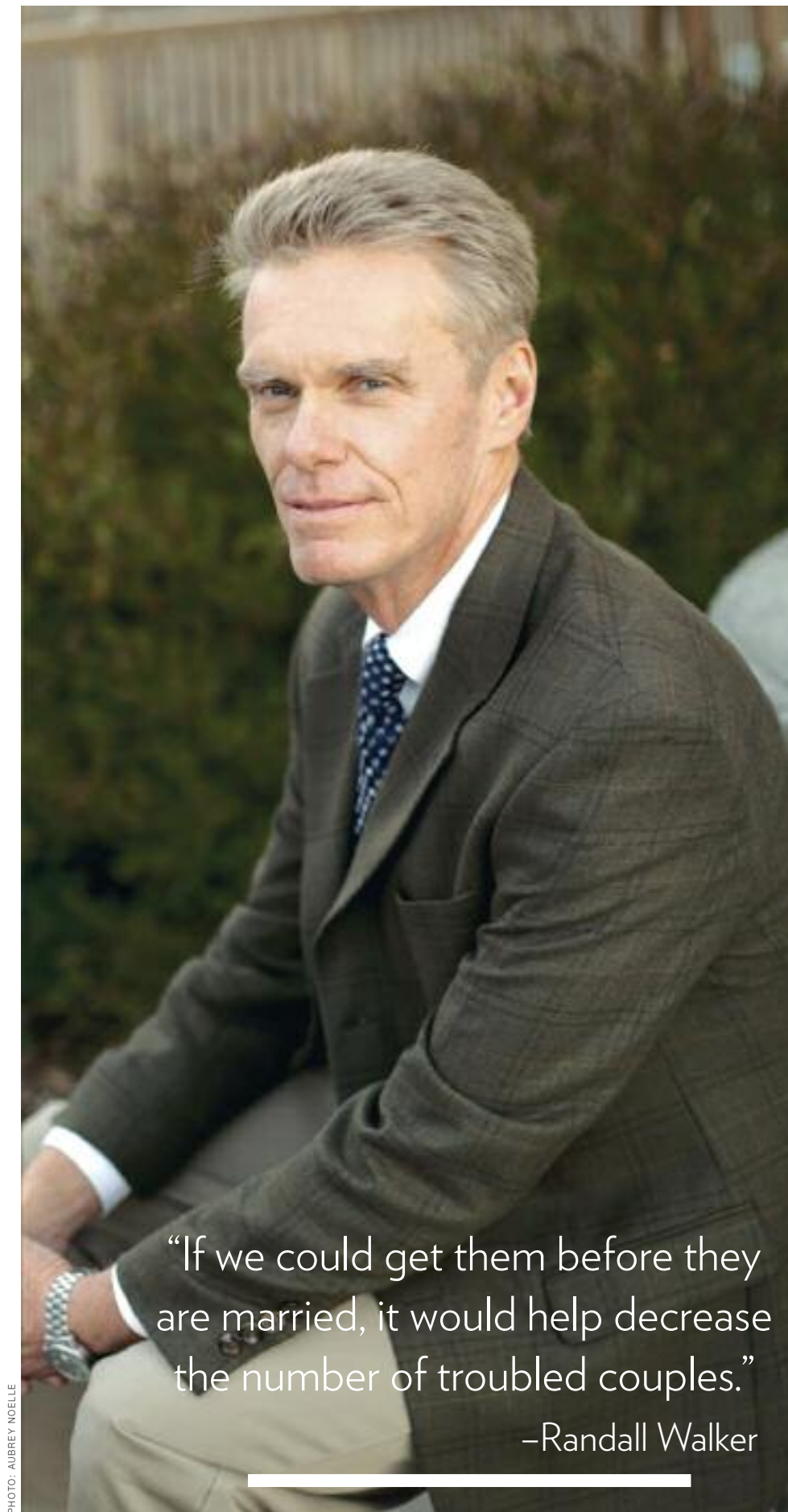
Alicia Taverner, a Rancho Cucamonga family and child therapist, says "Love and being in love is very important in marriage. In most successful marriages, partners are willing to do things differently, to look outside themselves, and to work on their marriage because they love their partner.

"I think some marriages don't work because either partner may have unresolved issues that they may need to work through, or the couple just isn't invested in working to change poor communication patterns and old habits of interaction."

Sam Hamburg has his own theory. The Chicago author of *Will Our Love Last?* has a Ph.D. and decades of counseling experience. "When marriages are in trouble, it's not necessarily because the partners lack communication skills." Nor is it about commitment. It's about compatibility within three major categories: Sexual attraction, practical (habits of daily living) and wavelength (values and interests). If a couple is only compatible in one category, it's unlikely the marriage will last, he says. Couples compatible in two categories can make a go of it if they are willing to accept what's missing and work around it. If the partners are compatible in all three categories, chances are good they will stay together.

Overall, it's hard to pinpoint a magic formula for marital success, Walker says. "If I've learned anything during the time I've been a therapist, it's that I know less today than when I started. I'm more realistic. Human relationships are so complex, there's no easy answer."

Mary Beth Adomaitis contributed to this article.



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