

Dr John Gottman's Contempt Study in Marriage and Likelihood of Divorce



In 1992, Dr. John Gottman worked with Kim Buehlman and Lynn Katz on a study involving interviewing 52 heterosexual married couples about their relationships. Through this study, these researchers found they were able to *predict with over 94% accuracy* which couples would separate or stay together three years later. The study focused on identifying destructive communication patterns, including contempt, as predictors of divorce.

Then in 1999, Dr. John Gottman, in collaboration with his colleague Sybil Carrère, conducted research examining factors that predict divorce. Their work, including studies involving newlyweds, led to the identification of *contempt as a powerful predictor of marital dissolution*. Contempt indicates a feeling of superiority, disdain, and even resentment. Gottman very aptly describes contempt as "*sulfuric acid for love*," highlighting its corrosive effect on relationships.

The Summary of their findings included:

Contempt as a Predictor: Gottman's research suggests that contempt, a form of negativity expressing disdain and superiority, is a significant predictor of divorce.

The Four Horsemen: Contempt is one of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," a term Gottman uses to describe four destructive communication patterns that predict divorce: Criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling.

Corrosive Effects: Contempt not only erodes the emotional connection between partners but also has negative health consequences for the recipient, potentially

impacting their immune system.

Harsh Startups: Discussions of conflict that begin with contempt or criticism, known as "harsh startups," are likely to lead to negative outcomes in the conversation and can predict divorce.

Contempt can be characterized by behaviors like:

- Sarcastic mimicking of others and hostile humor
- Belittling and using name-calling against others
- Minimalizing behaviors such as sneering, eye-rolling, and other dismissive body language cues
- Demonstrating an attitude of superiority and disgust for the other person
- The micro expression of contempt, which is an asymmetrical smile or smirk

Contempt was found to be a strong predictor of divorce. This is because it has a damaging impact on the emotional bond, communication patterns, and overall well-being and feelings of connectedness of the relationship.

Contempt in a relationship has also been tied to lower immune responses and greater susceptibility to infectious illnesses which draws a link between emotional health and physical health.

Overcoming Contempt:


Identifying and Addressing: Quickly recognizing the presence of contempt in interactions and actively working to eliminate it by addressing the triggering issue together is very important.

Building a Culture of Appreciation: Cultivating affection and admiration for your partner can help diminish contempt and promote respect and connection.

Seek Professional Help: Couples therapy and interventions based on the Gottman Method can provide couples with the tools and strategies to overcome contempt and rebuild a healthy relationship.

In conclusion, the research of Dr. Gottman and his colleagues highlights the corrosive nature of contempt in marital relationships and its significant impact on marital stability. Prioritizing addressing this negative communication pattern,

practicing gratitude, and fostering a culture of appreciation and respect are critical steps for couples seeking to build enduring and fulfilling relationships.



Disclaimer: This information is for educational purposes only. There is no diagnosis implied or offered. Always consult qualified professionals for specific help regarding these types of relationship matters.