Every year in the United States alone,

2,077,000 couples make a legal and spiritual decision

to spend the rest of their lives together --

(Laughter)

And not to have sex with anyone else.

Ever.

He buys a ring, she buys a dress.

They go shopping for all sorts of things.

She takes him to Arthur Murray for ballroom-dancing lessons.

And the big day comes.

And they'll stand before God and family

and some guy her dad once did business with,

and they'll vow that nothing --

not abject poverty,

not life-threatening illness,

not complete and utter misery --

will ever put the tiniest damper on their eternal love and devotion.

(Laughter)

These optimistic young bastards promise to honor and cherish each other

through hot flashes and midlife crises

and a cumulative 50-pound weight gain,

until that far-off day, when one of them is finally able to rest in peace.

(Laughter)

You know, because they can't hear the snoring anymore.

And then they'll get stupid drunk

and smash cake in each other's faces and do the Macarena.

And we'll be there,

showering them with towels and toasters and drinking their free booze

and throwing birdseed at them every single time ...

even though we know, statistically,

half of them will be divorced within a decade.

(Laughter)

Of course, the other half won't, right?

They'll keep forgetting anniversaries

and arguing about where to spend holidays

and debating --

(Laughter)

Which way the toilet paper should come off of the roll.

And some of them will even still be enjoying each other's company

when neither of them can chew solid food anymore.

And researchers want to know why.

I mean, look -- it doesn't take a double-blind, placebo-controlled study

to figure out what makes a marriage not work:

disrespect, boredom,

too much time on Facebook,

having sex with other people.

But you can have the exact opposite of all of those things --

respect, excitement,

a broken Internet connection,

mind-numbing monogamy --

and the thing still can go to hell in a handbasket.

So, what's going on when it doesn't?

What do the folks who make it all the way to side-by-side burial plots

have in common?

What are they doing right?

What can we learn from them?

And if you're still happily sleeping solo,

why should you stop what you're doing and make it your life's work

to find that one special person

that you can annoy for the rest of your life?

Well, researchers spend billions of your tax dollars

trying to figure that out.

They stalk blissful couples

and study their every move and mannerism.

And they try to pinpoint what it is that sets them apart

from their miserable neighbors and friends.

And it turns out, the success stories share a few similarities,

beyond that they don't have sex with other people.

For instance, in the happiest marriages,

the wife is thinner and better-looking

than the husband.

(Laughter)

Obvious. Right?

It's obvious that this leads to marital bliss,

because women -- we care a great deal about being thin and good-looking,

whereas men mostly care about sex,

ideally, with women who are thinner and better looking than they are.

The beauty of this research, though,

is that no one is suggesting that women have to be thin to be happy.

We just have to be thinner than our partners.

So instead of all that laborious dieting and exercising,

we just need to wait for them to get fat --

(Laughter)

Maybe bake a few pies.

This is good information to have, and it's not that complicated.

(Laughter)

Research also suggests

that the happiest couples are the ones that focus on the positives.

For example: the happy wife.

Instead of pointing out her husband's growing gut

or suggesting he go for a run,

she might say,

"Wow, honey, thank you for going out of your way

to make me relatively thinner."

(Laughter)

These are couples who can find good in any situation.

"Yeah, it was devastating when we lost everything in that fire.

But it's kind of nice sleeping out here under the stars.

And it's a good thing you've got all that body fat to keep us warm."

(Laughter)

One of my favorite studies found

that the more willing a husband is to do housework,

the more attractive his wife will find him.

Because we needed a study to tell us this.

(Laughter)

But here's what's going on here.

The more attractive she finds him, the more sex they have;

the more sex they have, the nicer he is to her;

the nicer he is to her,

the less she nags him about leaving wet towels on the bed,

and ultimately, they live happily ever after.

In other words, men, you might want to pick it up a notch

in the domestic department.

Here's an interesting one.

One study found that people who smile in childhood photographs

are less likely to get a divorce.

This is an actual study, and let me clarify:

the researchers were not looking at documented self-reports

of childhood happiness,

or even studying old journals.

The data were based entirely on whether people looked happy

in these early pictures.

Now, I don't know how old all of you are, but when I was a kid,

your parents took pictures with a special kind of camera

that held something called "film."

And, by God, film was expensive.

They didn't take 300 shots of you in that rapid-fire digital video mode

and then pick out the nicest, smiliest one for the Christmas card.

Oh, no.

They dressed you up, they lined you up,

and you smiled for the fucking camera like they told you to

or you could kiss your birthday party goodbye.

But still, I have a huge pile of fake happy childhood pictures

and I'm glad they make me less likely than some people to get a divorce.

So, what else can you do to safeguard your marriage?

Do not win an Oscar for best actress.

(Laughter)

I'm serious.

Bettie Davis, Joan Crawford, Halle Berry, Hilary Swank,

Sandra Bullock, Reese Witherspoon --

all of them single, soon after taking home that statue.

They actually call it the Oscar curse.

It is the marriage kiss of death and something that should be avoided.

And it's not just successfully starring in films that's dangerous.

It turns out, merely watching a romantic comedy

causes relationship satisfaction to plummet.

(Laughter)

Apparently, the bitter realization that maybe it could happen to us,

but it obviously hasn't and it probably never will,

makes our lives seem unbearably grim in comparison.

And theoretically,

I suppose if we opt for a film where someone gets brutally murdered

or dies in a fiery car crash,

we are more likely to walk out of that theater

feeling like we've got it pretty good.

(Laughter)

Drinking alcohol, it seems, is bad for your marriage.

Yeah.

I can't tell you anymore about that one

because I stopped reading it at the headline.

But here's a scary one: divorce is contagious.

That's right, when you have a close couple friend split up,

it increases your chances of getting a divorce by 75 percent.

Now, I have to say, I don't get this one at all.

My husband and I have watched quite a few friends divide their assets

and then struggle with being our age and single

in an age of sexting and Viagra and eHarmony.

And I'm thinking they've done more for my marriage

than a lifetime of therapy ever could.

So now you may be wondering: Why does anyone get married ever?

Well, the US federal government counts more than a thousand legal benefits

to being someone's spouse.

A list that includes visitation rights in jail,

but hopefully, you'll never need that one.

But beyond the profound federal perks,

married people make more money.

We're healthier, physically and emotionally.

We produce happier, more stable and more successful kids.

We have more sex than our supposedly swinging single friends,

believe it or not.

We even live longer,

which is a pretty compelling argument for marrying someone you like a lot

in the first place.

(Laughter)

Now, if you're not currently experiencing the joy of the joint tax return,

I can't tell you how to find a chore-loving person

of the approximately ideal size and attractiveness,

who prefers horror movies

and doesn't have a lot of friends hovering on the brink of divorce,

but I can only encourage you to try,

because the benefits, as I've pointed out,

are significant.

The bottom line is: whether you're in it or you're searching for it,

I believe marriage is an institution worth pursuing and protecting.

So I hope you'll use the information I've given you today

to weigh your personal strengths against your own risk factors.

For instance, in my marriage, I'd say I'm doing OK.

One the one hand,

I have a husband who's annoyingly lean and incredibly handsome.

So I'm obviously going to need fatten him up.

And like I said, we have those divorced friends

who may secretly or subconsciously be trying to break us up.

So we have to keep an eye on that.

And we do like a cocktail or two.

On the other hand,

I have the fake happy picture thing.

And also, my husband does a lot around the house,

and would happily never see another romantic comedy

as long as he lives.

So I've got all those things going for me.

But just in case,

I plan to work extra hard to not win an Oscar anytime soon.

And for the good of your relationships,

I would encourage you to do the same.

I'll see you at the bar.

(Laughter)