Relationship Science Online

The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse

The Four Horsemen

- **The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse** (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998): **A metaphor from the New Testament about conflict patterns that signal the end (the death) of a relationship**
  1. Criticism: Attack the character/personality of another – highlight the faults of another and/or our disapproval
     - *Part of a broader pattern known as "demand"*
  2. Contempt: Treating oneself as superior to another (or another as less of a person compared to oneself)
     - *Mocking, sarcasm, ridicule*
  3. Defensiveness: Attempts to protect against attacks on one's personhood/character.
     - *Deny responsibility, provide excuses, reverse blame, play the victim. (Often a response to criticism)*
  4. Stonewalling: The refusal to respond in conflict; one may also actively avoid or withdraw from a conflict discussion.
     - *Part of broader pattern known as withdrawal*
- **A number of these conflict patterns are part of a broader pattern referred to as negative reciprocity** (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998)