

Binghamton University

The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB)

Human Development Faculty Scholarship

Human Development

Winter 1-31-2021

Common reasons for divorce

Suany A. Canales

scanale1@binghamton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/hdev_fac



Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), [Counseling Psychology Commons](#), [Experimental Analysis of Behavior Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Canales Suany. (2021)."Reasons for Divorce".

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Human Development at The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Development Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Abstract

Marriage, a commitment between two individuals who share feelings and believe their connection to be long-term--- is common to terminate in the form of divorce. Justifications for such an act have been previously studied and found to be due to a plethora of reasons. In this essay, the five common reasons of unappreciation, jealousy, sexual rejection, infidelity and abuse were highlighted. Additionally, experiences and memories of one can majorly affect behavior and point of view towards their partner. Through the analysis of this research, I have concluded that the success of a marriage all boils down to the act of reciprocating communication and satisfaction. In the case that one of these two variables is absent, the marriage begins to lose value and causes partners to question their union.

Keywords: Divorce, Unappreciation, Jealousy, Sexual rejection, Infidelity, Abuse, Social Exchange Theory, Attachment styles

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

Intimate relationships, flourishments of formal and situational associations in which interdependence, personalness, closeness and sexual desire collectively develop *romance*. This special and unique connection for centuries has been confirmed with the act of a marriage; wherein the event announces a union between two lovers. Or at least that is what society defines it as, nevertheless it is common for arrangements to take place. Once married, the couple must trust, rely on and invest time with one another--to not only celebrate triumphs but also work together to overcome challenges. Despite the compromises that come along, "Anyone over 40 years old has a high chance of having married at least once" (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.179) making marriage a quite common pact to undergo in one's lifetime. Concurrent to such rates, for a mixture of reasons breaking a marriage is not unusual. According to divorce lawyers, in the United States, "the divorce rate per 1000 married women is 16.9" and "Almost 50 percent of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce or separation (Wilkinson and Finkbeiner, 2020). Following such statistics, it raises the question of: which specific factors occur and lead individuals to part ways and file for divorce? Compiling information from the text "Intimate relationships" and other works, I have been able to identify five common reasons for couples to divorce. Justifications of it could range from feeling underappreciated or neglected, jealousy, sexual rejection, infidelity and abuse (verbal and physical). Focusing on the topics below, it is important to note that there exists numerous subtopics and additional reasons for divorce to come about.

Despite marriage being advertised and framed by society to bring joy, it can also carry not so glorious emotions. Within the commitment not everyone understands the responsibilities that come along, yet still opt to initiate it with unrealistic expectations. But when they get debunked and arguments come about, it paves the path into divorce. To avoid such uncertainty

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

and confusion on navigating the married life, some families practice arranged or religiously affiliated marriages that offer support and preparations to educate the couple. Such pre-marriage activities include counseling sessions that in a correlational data from an Oklahoman survey revealed “taking a class on relationship skills was positively correlated with marital satisfaction and negatively correlated with risk of divorce” (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006, as cited in Karney & Bradbury 2014, p.58). In other words, receiving information before committing is a key feature that should be more introduced in American marriage culture as it brings up successful results. Alike, studies have also found that in marriage the “local culture is important as it can bring about changes in the behaviors of its males and females” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.146). This may root from culture teaching proper expectations and principles while setting examples in overall life, in this case being marriage.

As couples grow older, they become more comfortable with one another, meaning within their intimate relationships it is easy to bring out the absolute best and worst in both. At the same time, satisfaction no longer revolves around love, instead-- it turns into quality, status, and overall well-being. This well-being fluctuates in the relationship as when they approach marriage, “it increases but as they approach divorce it decreases” (Karney & Bradbury 2014, p.21). Intertwined to such comfortability, appreciation is vital to be reciprocal. If there is no confidence, satisfaction, and communication--the initial unconditional love or “spark” fades, thus paving a path for divorce. To explain this deterioration, sociologist George Homans’ Social Exchange Theory delineates “social relationships as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties based on the concept of rewards, punishments and resources” (Homans, 1958, p.10 as cited in Rosenbaum, T. 2009). Other interpretations have evaluated it as “satisfaction within a relationship where partners compare their perceived outcomes to a certain standard of what they

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

think they deserve” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959 as cited in Karney & Bradbury 2014, p.107). During intimate relationships, if one does not obtain either variables (rewards and costs) the relation lacks excitement and thoughts of being in a “meaningless marriage” arise: making a certain party feel ignored and no longer valued. By incorporating rewards and costs (in the forms of material, time, and service) the relationship can hold active and content---which is vital for a healthy dyadic connection. Specifically, such variables enhance satisfaction while feeding the notion of having made the correct decision of committing to one another. According to the US Department of Health 2001 Statistics, positive behavior between young couples helps maintain happiness and “declines their likelihood of divorce as they grow in age together” (p.1). Once an individual measures their marriage’s rewards and costs “it is more likely for doubt to arise negative or positive interactions” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.114). This is because attention has now been detached from the concept of love and dives into the business-like mentality of what will “I obtain or have to give up.” Particularly, when unhappy couples consciously adopt this theory, communication lacks and inner thoughts overflow thus “confirming present fears and distress within the relationship” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.114). Hiding feelings alludes a loss of interest and appreciation thus guiding “relationships to either deteriorate, dissolve or grow and develop as a consequence of an unfolding social exchange process” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.104). Coming back to commitment and intertwining appreciation, individuals often have the misconception where marriage will fill an internal slot of misery and bring them happiness. On the contrary marriage requires costs of serving the other and not just receiving therefore, if a “needy” individual does not receive comfort as a “reward” they will begin to feel neglected. Regarding this point, psychotherapist Katherine Woodward Thomas claims “the first step toward finding love is learning to love yourself” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.34). If self-love is not

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

present, one may not have the necessary means to *give* love. Thinking about it, how can one give what they do not have? Having an internal conflict such as self-appreciation affects even partners, as the relationship changes away from the “puppy stage” and into reality. In turn, this produces difficulty in reciprocating love and guides the idea of divorce.

Like self-love, infancy and its experiences matter in marriage. The average individual may not think of these factors of their past, but indeed they contribute to intimate relationships in the form of jealousy. Multiple studies have attributed the treatment and attention one receives from their caregivers to shape which attachment type they align with, and carry in adulthood. Better known, this explains the “Attachment theory” where the four styles of: secure, dismissive-avoidant, anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant aid in predicting one’s behaviour. But no matter what style an individual mirrors, the insecurities and fears they once developed are carried into their relationships. Often they expressed in a subconscious manner, until one attempts to resolve their issues. Amid, being securely attached has been identified as the ideal as it includes being “relatively low on both anxiety and avoidance dimensions” (Bradni, 2019, p.13) thus channeling a higher confidence and an easier time with trusting and maintaining long-lasting intimate relationships. With properly identifying and reflecting a secure style one is sure to enjoy marriage more, communicate effectively even when there is conflict or worry: making the relationship comfortable. This result has been also found to be consistent across American, Asian, European, and Latin American countries; as “the quality of the couple’s communication is key component in a relationship to bring satisfaction” (Christensen, Eldridge, CattaPreta, Lim, & Santagata, 2006 as cited in Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.125). In other words, communication is a universal trait that has little dependence and variation from culture to culture. Which suggests that within interracial marriages there are no extreme differences from

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

one's values to the other. "Expression and disclosures provide a valuable window into how relationships deepen and how they are maintained" (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.239). With establishing the grand importance of verbal connection, it only occurs successfully and in accordance with the attachment style individuals bring-- hence the positive or negative experience one has. In the case that one reflects another style, there is a higher likelihood of drawing attention to the mistakes their partners have or make overall dissatisfaction. In doing so, it aids the insecure to further fabricate bad images of their partner thus hindering additional lighthearted moments to occur. The insecure also "tend to feel inadequate and jealous as they constantly seek evidence of loyalty" (Bradni, 2019, p.13). Having such unsure and fearful thoughts jointly with dissatisfaction and comparison "correlates between how content partners are and how likely they are to stay together over time" (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.107). Collectively, jealousy blooms from one's suppression of internal struggles and needs (built from attachment) not getting fulfilled, besides a "longing" feeling for how the relationship used to operate versus its present form. Under the same realm of jealousy, financials and work life could also play a role in how one perceives their spouses. For example, if a secured partner has a higher wage and a more warming social life with coworkers than the other, the other (who is insecure) may see themselves as less successful and pleased with their life stance thus constructing envy and resentment towards their partner. Using this hypothetical, it accurately mirrors a common real life scenario where insecure, dismissive-avoidant, anxious-preoccupied or children of divorce "manage and infiltrate their own emotions and needs into their intimate relationships decades later" (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.26). Particularly for children of divorce, memories of having viewed and lived through their parent's arguments toils came about and generate internal barriers where trust and reliance are uneasy to expose. Connected, studies

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

have revealed that “Children whose parents were unhappy in marriage are likely themselves to go on to form relatively unhappy marriages” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p. 227) thus proving how childhood experiences do matter as they portray examples, but also creates traumas. Notably, the style of attachment one reflects should not be confused with the strength of love one has towards their significant other; instead, it just affects perception and treatment. As jealousy unfolds, couples begin to question their marriages, wherein some may be contemplating it earlier than others. It has been found that despite their attachment “women tend to be the first to call for divorce” due to being the ‘last in and first out whereas men are first in and out last’ in any intimate relationship (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.161) translating into the belief that when it comes to divorce, reactions vary by gender. Focusing on the leading idea of attachment, interpretations regarding failed relationships also have been found to vary by style. “Secure individuals interpret it as a lack of chemistry whereas, the insecure explain the same event as further evidence that he or she is unlovable and unlikely to have fulfilling relationships in the future” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p. 97). To the insecure, having a background of doubt over a multitude of situations--gravitates them to “feeling inadequate and jealous as they constantly seek evidence of disloyalty (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, as cited in Bradni, 2019, p.13) in addition to being “more agitated when discussing problems with their partners” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.100). In truth and as previously mentioned, attachment and one’s background is vital to how their marriage will play out: which explains why one reacts in an obnoxiously jealous way over “simple matters.” Such side effects are rooted from bigger (and internalized) problems that are only revealed in situations over finances, types of social lives each has and their overall unhappiness with life--leading into conflict and the path of divorce.

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

What converts interpersonal relationships and launches an intimate one, is the involvement or potential of romantic and erotic behavior. Such feelings allow the existing “spark” of desire to activate. Generally, in marriages and (romantic) intimate relationships, sex is key to how individuals can physically connect and share deeper more bosom moments. But as much as it has been identified to be necessary, slight research has been conducted on rejection of sex within marriages (Kim 2020, p.1477). Such few findings have proven that longer marriages (in years) tend to decline in sexual activity, as living together creates a routine and makes sex be more available. In other words, relationships grow to become monotonous and shift away from their thrilling mode. In a two-month Canadian study 2-year-old+ couples completed daily surveys aided in the discovery of “sexual rejection delivered in positive ways such as communicating affection or showing caring concern versus deliverance in negative ways of criticism and stillness” (Kim 2020, p.1478) deliberately impacted appeasement within the relationship (from the rejected individual’s point of view). This is to say that decline in activity is not the main variable for divorce, instead it is *how* one rejects their partner. As divulged, the wane for sex and ultimate rejection are familiar in marriages; but it grows to be problematic and ushers divorce when one party does not deliver the message as they intend. Having a difference in opinions and viewpoints makes enthusiasm for the relationship lower and concern regarding the change rise. Along, this “rejected” individual begins to build negative thoughts about their partner and further questions their status in the relationship. Moreover, that same individual may live with heavy discontent and worry about the future of their sex-life, that they seek outside sources to fulfill their desires. Briefly, the process of couples getting a divorce rooting from sexual rejection starts by questioning the relationship, to disappointment for rejection into finally

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

seeking other options. In such an “exploratory” phase, it means looking for a third person thus causing infidelity.

Becoming romantically or sexually active with a third party classifies as infidelity, it fails to keep the respect once promised (in the beginning of relationship or wedding). Fincham and Way’s (2017) study has found an underlying reason for this breakdown as a “decreased excitement and satisfaction within the primary relationship” (p. 71) thus motivating seeking the outside option of another woman or man. Hand in hand with infidelity is sex life, it has been noted that long term couples after two years of marriage experience a feeling of boredom and build a more routine guided life, thus deteriorating the relationship. Accordingly, “cohabitation before marriage, number of days at work, one working while the other stays home: all have been associated with an increased infidelity” (Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.71-72). Such a disloyalty is not rare, “in the United States 13.3 percent of currently married people reported having had extramarital sex (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001, as cited in Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p. 254) making infidelity a common reason for divorce. From this, the question of whether men or women are more prone to cheat arises; unfortunately, this topic is of controversy as findings disagree with one another. Within their differences in opinion, both sides do assimilate when it comes to infidelity’s reasons varying between sexes. “Men’s infidelity is motivated by sex than by desire for emotional closeness. While for women, it is more likely to fall in love with their extramarital partner (Glass & Wright, 1985, 1992, as cited in Bradbury & Karney, 2014, p.160). Cooperatively, they reveal that when men and women pursue intimate relationships they do so for different motives: men’s is sex and women’s is emotional security. By this, it is evident that the commodity of “love” varies just as the thought of betrayal does: “Men are more likely to experience jealousy when their partners are sexually unfaithful compared to when they have

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

been emotionally unfaithful. For women, the opposite pattern holds (Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996; Edlund et al., 2006, as cited in Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.141). Refocusing on gender and infidelity, it has also been discovered that “men are better able to separate love from sexual activity, have greater desire and willingness to engage in infidelity” (Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.71) alluding the slightly higher numbers and probability for men to cheat more than women. Within the controversy of who is more susceptible, demographic variables have pointed to “African Americans engaging in infidelity at higher rates” (Fincham & May, 2017, p.73). Namely, such correlation points to adultery being more likely in certain groups more than others by the variables of age, race, education, and income. Translating into the idea that minorities might be at larger risks to commit infidelity than their more stable (in wealth and status etc.) counterparts. In Kreager, Felson, Warner and Wenger’s (2013) study the correlation was further confirmed that indeed “educated women tend to have more stable marriages than uneducated women”. Aside from such data, infidelity is difficult to overcome for any couple as the valuable element of trust was destroyed and betrayal was enacted. Hence, why only “some intimate relationships survive a partner’s infidelity, but most do not” (Betzig, 1989 as cited in Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.365). Having an affair is a common cause for divorce as it makes the relationship “spiral downward while outstripping a couple’s ability to cope” (Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.419) but to move forward, forgiveness must occur and be fed by active communication slowly delivering trust back. Furthermore, “infidelity causes marital dissolution in over 160 countries and has been causally linked to domestic violence” (Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.70).

Recall the beginning of this essay where marriage was said to be a commitment that included joyous and challenging times to be normal? Well, there is a limit to how “challenging”

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

it is, in the United States and many other parts of the world both men and women face more than small and temporary disagreements with their partners. Such individuals experience misery and tribulations within their *abusive* marriages. Many individuals under such situations do not know the violation that is occurring but do feel discontent and dissatisfied with life. According to the National Domestic Hotline, the word abuse better known as domestic violence is “a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship” it can be reflected in the forms of physical and verbal. In fact, verbal aggression is an alternative to physical aggression wherein one does not have to be a victim of beating to qualify for abuse-- mental distortion is also maltreatment (psychological). Such violent aftereffects do not have to be bruises but could affect and reveal feelings of anxiety, depression, or even suicidal thoughts.

In the United States, it is common for women to be the victim and males to be the abuser. “According to a 2000 survey by the U.S. Department of Justice, 4.8 million women and 2.9 million men are physically assaulted or raped by their intimate partners each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000 as cited in Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.19). But recently, studies have revealed men to also get abused at similar rates. Being in an unhappy relationship that includes violence creates the opposite of desire to remain beside the partner, instead it increases the need to leave. Uniformly, one may think victims are the first to file for divorce but unfortunately, some do not leave as they are afraid and feel threatened by a pool of outcomes. Specifically, the fear of becoming homeless when he/she does not earn enough to support themselves. Kreager’s study of resources and divorce correlated that “women who earn a high proportion of the total family income, are more likely to get divorced from the first abusive act” (p.578). Abusive and broken relationships have been attributed to “accumulated and repressed behaviors and interpretations,

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

that build up over time and eventually are released in a physically aggressive incident” (Stets, 1990, p.502). Therapy sessions for such couples have “observed that they often complain about the quality of their communication, arguing too much, or about the presence of conflicts that seem to come up again and again without being resolved.” (Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p.113). As a result, they become distressed over their future as a couple and “tend to not only be more negative in general but also demonstrate a greater tendency when responding to each other’s negativity with more negativity” (Smith, Vivian, & O’Leary, 1990 as cited in Bradbury & Kendery, 2014, p. 117), better known as negative reciprocity. To treat the accumulated feelings and avoid aggression, it is recommended venting to them (to the partner) verbally soon after concerns emerge; known as the catharsis theory of aggression (Berkowitz (1962) and Buss (1961) as cited in Stets, 1990, p.502). From occurrence patterns and testimonies of divorced people, it has been confirmed that “Verbal aggression is positively related to physical aggression” (Stets, 1990, p.501) meaning that for abuse to come about, smaller underestimated occurrences take place until the (verbal and physical) hostile behavior emerges. Such *small disagreements* channel into “daily and ordinary ones, particularly involving jealousy, rejection, and criticism escalating into aggressive episodes. In an interview style study on divorced Philadelphian women, 129 were asked to list the acts of violence they had experienced during the marriage and 59% claimed their reasons for leaving were to abuse. With participants mostly being mothers, the motivation to leave was their children as “seeing violence was harming their emotional well-being” (Kurz, 1996, p.68). Re-introducing the topic of jealousy, abuse has been found to also root from ‘highly dependent, jealous married men involved in less stable marriages, who get very threatened when their wives threaten to leave them” (Kurz, 1996, p.77). As explained, abuse is common and sure to lead couples into separation-- at the same time, it is the

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

most dangerous cause to divorce as sometimes ex-partners may be in denial to the decision; this is because “partners tend to blame the other rather than themselves for the divorce” (Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen & Markman, 2013, p.3)

In closing, the thought of divorce roots from a variety of reasons wherein “the most common “final straw” justifications are infidelity and domestic violence” (Scott et al., p.4). By analyzing the acts of unappreciation, jealousy, sexual rejection, infidelity and abuse it can be said that maintaining a well-structured marriage is challenging. And it is only through proper communication, understanding, respect and care that satisfaction and excitement can consistently keep the “spark.” In addition, it is noteworthy to say that over the course of the intimate relationship many events occur in the form of “external stressors” such as children, finances, and gender norms among more, which potentially set back the marriage. But if appropriately and effectively dealt with, such forces could bring couples closer.

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

References

- Bradbury, T. N. & Karney, B. R. (2014). *Intimate Relationships*. New York, NY, Norton & Company.
- Bradni, R. A. (2019). *The effects of attachment styles and sexual fantasy on adults' satisfaction with their intimate relationship: A path analysis* (Order No. 13813726). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2211415319). Retrieved from <http://proxy.binghamton.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.binghamton.edu/dissertations-theses/effects-attachment-styles-sexual-fantasy-on/docview/2211415319/se-2?accountid=14168>.
- Divorces and divorce rates, United States. (1981). U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service, National Center for Health Statistics.
- Divorce Statistics and Facts: What Affects Divorce Rates in the U.S.? (2020, August 12). Retrieved January 25, 2021, from <http://www.wf-lawyers.com/divorce-statistics-and-facts/#.kur>
- Fincham, Frank D, and Ross W May. "Infidelity in Romantic Relationships." *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 13, 2017, pp. 70–74., doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.008.
- Kim, M. (2020). When Tonight Is Not the Night: Sexual Rejection Behaviors and Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 46(10), 1476–1490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167220907469>.
- Kreager, D. A., Felson, R. B., Warner, C., & Wenger, M. R. (2013). Women's education, marital violence, and divorce: A social exchange perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(3), 565-581. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.binghamton.edu/10.1111/jomf.12018>

COMMON REASONS FOR DIVORCE

- Kurz, D. (1996). Separation, Divorce, and Woman Abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 2(1), 63–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801296002001004>.
- Rosenbaum, T. (2009). Applying theories of social exchange and symbolic interaction in the treatment of unconsummated marriage/relationship. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, 24(1), 38–46. <https://doi-org.proxy.binghamton.edu/10.1080/14681990902718096>
- Scott, S. B., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Allen, E. S., & Markman, H. J. (2013). Reasons for Divorce and Recollections of Premarital Intervention: Implications for Improving Relationship Education. *Couple & family psychology*, 2(2), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032025>
- Stets, J. (1990). Verbal and Physical Aggression in Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 52(2), 501-514. doi:10.2307/353043.
- Understand Relationship Abuse. (2020, October 22). Retrieved January 20, 2021, from <https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/understand-relationship-abuse/>