ANTICIPATION OF MARITAL DISSOLUTION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SPOUSAL INFIDELITY

Todd K. Shackelford
Florida Atlantic University
David M. Buss
The University of Texas at Austin

ABSTRACT

This study examined five sources of spousal and relationship costs that might facilitate heightened anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Three separate data sources were employed. Fist, 214 participants reported their satisfaction with the marriage and their anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Second, participants provided information on their spouse's personality and behaviors their spouse performed that upset them. Third, couples were interviewed by two interviewers, who subsequently provided independent ratings of each participant's personality, mate value, and attractiveness, as well as ratings of the quality of the couple's interaction. Greater anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse were reported by women higher in mate value than their husbands; women married to emotionally unstable men; men reporting lower marital satisfaction; and women in couples displaying greater conflict during the interview. Discussion locates results within an evolutionary psychological perspective and addresses methodological issues of this study.

KEY WORDS • evolutionary psychology • infidelity • marital dissolution

Infidelity may have no rival in disrupting a marriage. Cross-culturally, an actual or suspected sexual infidelity by a woman is the leading cause of wife battering and wife homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Anguish, depression, anger, and humiliation are among the emotional experiences of the partner

We thank the journal's reviewers for their many helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Address correspondence to Todd K. Shackelford, Florida Atlantic University, Department of Psychology, 2912 College Avenue, Davie FL 33314, USA. [email: tshackel@fau.edu]

of someone who has been unfaithful (Buunk & Van Driel, 1989; Lawson, 1988). Of the 43 causes of divorce compiled by Betzig (1989) in her ethnographic study of 160 cultures, a spouse's infidelity was the single most frequently cited cause.

Studies of divorce in western countries suggest that between 25 and 50 percent of divorcees cite a spouse's infidelity as the primary cause of the divorce (Kelly & Conley, 1987). Estimates of marital infidelity range from 26 to 70 percent for women and from 33 to 75 percent for men (Buss, 1994). The discrepancy between the ranges of estimates of divorce due to infidelity and estimates of infidelity suggests that although some marriages continue following a discovered infidelity, some marriages do not (Buunk, 1987).

The divorce process often enervates the psychological, emotional, and physiological health of the parting spouses (Kitson & Sussman, 1982). Despite the tremendous costs involved, many couples divorce following detection of infidelity. That so many couples *do* divorce following the revelation or discovery of infidelity attests to the perceived costs that accompany infidelity.

Given the prevalence of and costs associated with infidelity and with divorce, an important empirical issue is what differentiates couples who divorce from those who stay together following infidelity. Additionally, infidelity and dissolution as a consequence of infidelity are important issues from several theoretical perspectives. From an evolutionary psychological perspective (e.g. Buss, 1995), infidelity signals the diversion of important reproductive resources. From an equity theoretical perspective (e.g. Messick & Cook, 1983), infidelity may signal serious inequities in a relationship. From an investment model perspective (e.g. Rusbult, 1980), infidelity signals lack of commitment to a relationship.

It could be argued from each of these perspectives that the decision to divorce as a consequence of infidelity occasions a cost–benefit analysis by the betrayed partner in which the perceived costs and benefits of remaining married are weighed against those of divorce. The more costly a marriage is perceived to be, the less incentive the betrayed partner has to remain married to an adulterous spouse. This study tests this general proposal using a sample of recently married couples.

To assess the salience of infidelity as a potential cause of divorce, we developed an instrument in which each spouse estimates the probability that he or she would seek divorce if his or her partner engaged in the following activities: flirting with someone else, passionately kissing someone else, romantically dating someone else, having a one-night stand, a brief affair, and a serious affair. Following Buunk (1987), we assume that these types of infidelity reflect different degrees of spousal cost-infliction. A one-night stand, but not a passionate kiss, for example, places the betrayed partner at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease from the spouse's lover.

Anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity are clearly not assessments of actual divorces filed in response to spousal infidelity. We have no reason to suspect, however, that estimates of the likelihood of divorcing an unfaithful spouse will consistently underestimate or overestimate actual divorce in response to spousal infidelity. Participants making these estimations may strive to appear intolerant of a spouse's philanderings rather than someone the spouse can 'walk all over' and, at the same time, strive to appear forgiving, compassionate, and kind, the hallmarks of a desirable mate (Buss, 1989a). Additionally, several longitudinal studies of marriage (e.g. Gottman & Levenson, 1992) have documented that anticipated dissolution reliably predicts actual dissolution.

The use of newlywed rather than longer-married couples to study anticipated dissolution as a consequence of infidelity has several advantages. Divorce is most likely to occur in the first few years of marriage, for a variety of reasons, including infidelity (Betzig, 1989; Buss, 1994). Additionally, the early years of marriage are marked by a time of relational negotiation, wherein each partner seeks to establish what is acceptable and unacceptable intra-relationship and extra-relationship behavior (Veroff & Feld, 1970). As spouses successfully negotiate their marital expectations, conflict generated by the negotiation process diminishes, as does the likelihood of dissolution as a consequence of such conflict.

This study examines five sources of spousal and relationship costs that might facilitate increased estimates of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity: discrepancies in the attractiveness and mate value of the spouses; spousal personality; spousal sources of upset and irritation; marital dissatisfaction; and independent assessments of the couple's interaction quality. Here we present specific predictions about the relationships between these sources of costs and anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse.

Relative mate value refers to the relative desirability of the two partners on the 'mating market' (Buss, 1994). In the present study, two interviewers independently assessed each spouse's mate value and attractiveness. Where a discrepancy exists, we expect that the partner higher in relative value will provide higher likelihood estimates of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. The rationale for this prediction is that the more valuable partner incurs greater costs than the less valuable partner by marriage to the current spouse. These greater costs include opportunity costs associated with foregone mating arrangements with a more valuable partner (Buss, 1994; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

A second source of costs is related to a spouse's personality characteristics. The five-factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1981) proposes that five major dimensions capture the bulk of significant individual differences in personality. These dimensions are *extroversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *emotional stability*, and *openness/intellect*.

Men and women scoring low on agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness/intellect are especially likely to inflict a variety of costs on their spouses (e.g. Buss, 1991). Buss (1991) found that men and women married to spouses who display low agreeableness, low emotional stability, and low

openness/intellect complain that their spouses are condescending, jealous, possessive, dependent, neglectful, unreliable, unfaithful, sexualizing of others, abusive of alcohol, emotionally constricted, and self-centered.

If anticipated dissolution following infidelity occasions a cost–benefit analysis of remaining married to vs divorcing an unfaithful spouse, then men and women married to disagreeable, emotionally unstable people of low openness/intellect should anticipate greater likelihoods of divorce. This is expected because spouses displaying these undesirable personality characteristics are especially likely to inflict a variety of costs on their partners.

Spousal sources of upset provide relatively direct assessments of the costs inflicted by a spouse (Buss, 1989b). According to Buss's (1989b) strategic interference model, the degree of upset felt in response to a particular spousal behavior tracks the perceived severity of the costs inflicted by that behavior. We expect, therefore, that spousal sources of upset will positively covary with anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse.

Marital satisfaction may track the costs and benefits associated with a particular marriage (e.g. Shackelford & Buss, 1997). It could be argued from several theoretical perspectives (discussed here) that anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse will involve an assessment of the costs and benefits of the current marriage, weighed against the costs and benefits of divorce. Greater perceived costs and fewer perceived benefits should facilitate increased anticipations of divorcing an adulterous spouse. We therefore expect that men and women who are less satisfied with their marriage will anticipate greater likelihoods of divorcing an unfaithful spouse.

In addition to general marital satisfaction, assessments of sexual and emotional satisfaction were secured. These two facets may be crucial, because of the known links between a woman's emotional dissatisfaction and her likelihood of ending the relationship and a man's sexual dissatisfaction and his likelihood of ending the relationship (Betzig, 1989). A man may be especially likely to anticipate divorcing an unfaithful partner if he is sexually dissatisfied with the marriage. A woman, in contrast, may be especially likely to anticipate divorcing an unfaithful partner if she is emotionally dissatisfied with the marriage.

Two interviewers provided independent assessments of the quality of the interaction between spouses. We expect that spouses whose interactions manifest greater conflict will anticipate greater likelihoods of divorcing an unfaithful partner. This is expected insofar as the couple's interaction quality reflects the benefits and costs exchanged within the marriage (e.g. Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Spouses displaying greater conflict may exchange fewer benefits and more costs, relative to spouses displaying less conflict.

Method

Participants were 214 individuals, 107 men and 107 women, who had been married less than 1 year. Participant details were obtained from the public

records of marriage licenses issued within a large mid-western county. All couples married within a 6-month period were contacted by letter and invited to participate in this study. The majority of participants were Caucasian. The mean age of the wives was 25.52 years (SD = 4.06; range 18–36). The mean age of husbands was 26.79 (SD = 3.75, range 17–41). This was the first marriage for 96 percent of the sample. Ninety-six percent of couples had no children. Couples had been romantically involved for an average of 44 months (SD = 24.64; range 1 month–8 years). Two-thirds of couples had cohabited prior to marriage for an average of 1.26 years (SD = 1.8 years). Thirty-two percent of the sample reported that they were Protestant, 22 percent Catholic, about 4 percent Jewish, and 11 percent described their religion as 'Other'. Thirty-one percent of respondents reported no religious affiliation. The annual income of husbands ranged from $0 (unemployed) to $87,000, averaging $21,000 (SD = $12,000). The annual income of wives ranged from $0 (unemployed) to $68,000, averaging $16,400 (SD = $10,500). Husbands had completed an average of 16.47 years of education (SD = 2.71; range 11–23 years). Wives had completed an average of 15.99 years of education (SD = 2.94; range 7–25 years).

Participants participated in three separate waves of assessment. First, they received through the mail a battery of instruments to be completed at home in their spare time. This battery contained a self-report personality instrument assessing the five factors of personality (Goldberg, 1983).

Second, participants came to a laboratory testing session approximately 1 week after receiving the battery of self-report instruments. During this session, spouses were separated to preserve independence and to prevent contamination due to discussion (e.g. providing higher estimates of marital satisfaction in the partner's presence than might be provided in the partner's absence). During this session, participants completed the instrument in which they provided the probabilities that they would end their marriage following each of the six forms of spousal infidelity. Participants also reported on their partner's personality characteristics, and completed a marital satisfaction instrument and an index of spousal sources of upset and irritation.

Third, couples were interviewed toward the end of the testing session by one male and one female interviewer drawn from a rotating staff of 10 interviewers to secure independent information about each spouse's mate value, attractiveness, personality, and the quality of the couple's interaction. Participants were asked a standard set of questions about how they met, the nature of their relationship, sources of attraction, sources of conflict, and their similarities and differences. Immediately following the interview, the interviewers completed a standard instrument in which they recorded their perceptions of the couple's interaction quality, and the personality characteristics, mate value, and attractiveness of each participant. Confidentiality of all responses was assured. Not even the participant's spouse could obtain responses without written permission from the relevant partner.

Participants completed a 40-item personality instrument during the self-report phase of the study. This instrument consisted of 40 bipolar adjective scales, eight each for the following major personality dimensions (sample items in parentheses): *surgency* (dominant–submissive, bold–timid), *agreeableness* (selfless–selfish, warm–cold), *conscientiousness* (reliable–undependable, hard-working–lazy), *emotional stability* (secure–insecure, even-tempered–temperamental), and *openness/intellect* (curious–uncurious, intelligent–stupid). The

instructions were: 'Please read the following list of characteristics and circle the number that *best describes* you generally'. Each bipolar dimension was rated on a 7-point scale, with the high and low anchors positioned at opposite ends of the scale. Over the midpoint (4) of each scale was positioned the term 'neither'. The five personality dimensions were scored by summing the eight relevant rating scales for each dimension. This instrument is based on the factor loadings reported by Goldberg (1983). Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor were as follows: surgency, $\alpha = .77$; agreeableness, $\alpha = .62$; conscientiousness, $\alpha = .72$; emotional stability, $\alpha = .73$; and openness/intellect, $\alpha = .63$. Factor analyses of self-ratings, spouse-ratings, and interviewer-ratings employing this measure cleanly replicate the traditional 5-factor solution for all three data sources (see Botwin et al., 1997).

A parallel version of the Goldberg (1983) instrument was administered in a separate testing session to the spouses of each participant. The instructions were: 'Please read the following list of characteristics and circle the number which best describes *your partner* generally'. The five personality dimensions were scored by summing the relevant eight bipolar rating scales. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor were as follows: surgency, $\alpha = .74$; agreeableness, $\alpha = .77$; conscientiousness, $\alpha = .74$; emotional stability, $\alpha = .77$; and openness/intellect, $\alpha = .73$.

Each couple was interviewed by a pair of trained interviewers (male and female) drawn from a 10-member team. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, during which the couple was asked a standard set of questions, including: 'How did you meet?', 'What are the similarities and differences between you?', and 'What are the sources of conflict within your marriage?'.

Immediately following each interview, the two interviewers independently rated each participant on an observer-based version of the Goldberg (1983) instrument. As with self-reports and spouse-reports, the five personality dimensions were scored by summing the relevant eight bipolar rating scales. The two interviewer-ratings of participants' personality manifested significant agreement along each of the five dimensions ($r = .55$ for surgency; .43 for agreeableness; .56 for conscientiousness; .48 for emotional stability; and .51 for openness/intellect; all $ps < .001$, two-tailed), and were therefore standardized and summed with unit weighting to form five more reliable scores for each participant. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor for the composited interviewer-reports were as follows: surgency, $\alpha = .90$; agreeableness, $\alpha = .88$; conscientiousness, $\alpha = .88$; emotional stability, $\alpha = .83$; and openness/intellect, $\alpha = .92$.

Self-ratings, spouse-ratings, and aggregate interviewer-ratings were significantly correlated for each personality dimension (mean *r*s: surgency, .52; agreeableness, .24; conscientiousness, .51; emotional stability, .42; and openness/intellect, .31; all $ps < .001$, two-tailed), and were therefore standardized and summed with unit-weighting to create a composite score for each participant along each dimension. According to classical true score theory (e.g. Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), these total composite scores can be expected to be more valid than scores generated from any one of the individual data sources, because true score variance will cumulate, whereas the unique method variance associated with each individual data source will not cumulate. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor for the total composites were as follows: surgency, $\alpha = .90$; agreeableness, $\alpha = .88$; conscientiousness, $\alpha = .88$; emotional stability, $\alpha = .83$; and openness/intellect, $\alpha = .92$.

The Marital Satisfaction Survey (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) consisted of 31 questions assessing the respondent's satisfaction with various aspects of their marriage and their spouse. Three items were employed in this study. General marital satisfaction was assessed by the item: 'Thinking about things all together, how would you say you feel about your marriage?'. Sexual satisfaction was assessed by the item: 'How do you feel about your sexual relationship?'. Emotional satisfaction was assessed by the item: 'How do you feel about your spouse as a source of encouragement and reassurance?'. All three items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = unsatisfied and 7 = extremely satisfied). A composite marital satisfaction index was created by summing with unit weighting scores on the general, sexual, and emotional satisfaction items ($\alpha = .72$).

Two interviewers drawn from a 10-member team provided independent assessments of the husband's and wife's 'overall attractiveness as a potential mate (mate value to opposite sex)' on a scale where 1 = extremely low and 7 = extremely high. A mate value discrepancy variable was created by subtracting husband's from wife's interviewer-rated mate value. The two interviewer-assessments of mate value correlated $r = .53$ ($p < .001$, two-tailed) and were averaged to create a more reliable measure of mate value discrepancy. Interviewers also provided assessments of overall physical attractiveness for each spouse. Overall attractiveness was assessed on a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = overall unattractive and 7 = overall attractive. The two interviewer-assessments of overall attractiveness correlated $r = .64$ ($ps < .001$, two-tailed). An overall physical attractiveness discrepancy variable was created using the same strategy employed to create the mate value discrepancy variable.

During the laboratory testing session when the husband and wife were physically separated, participants completed an instrument entitled 'Sources of Irritation and Upset'. This instrument contained the following instructions: 'Below is a list of things that spouses sometimes do that irritate, annoy, anger, or upset each other. Please place an 'X' next to those acts your husband [wife] has performed *within the past year* that have irritated, annoyed, angered, or upset you'. Following these instructions were 147 acts or events, previously nominated by a separate panel (Buss, 1989b).

Factor analysis (Buss, 1989b) revealed 15 factors (sample acts in parentheses): *condescending* ('He treated me like I was stupid or inferior'), *jealous/possessive* ('She acted jealous'; 'She was too possessive of me'), *neglecting/rejecting* ('He would not spend enough time with me'), *abusive* ('He hit me'; 'He verbally abused me'), *unfaithful/dishonest* ('She had sex with another man'; 'She lied to me'), *inconsiderate* ('He did not help to clean up'), *physically self-absorbed* ('She fussed too much with her appearance'), *moody* ('He acted moody'), *sexually withholding* ('She refused to have sex with me'), *sexualizes others* ('He talked about how good-looking another woman was'), *abuses alcohol/emotionally constricted* ('She drank too much alcohol'; 'She hid all her emotions to act tough'), *disinterested* ('He did not take care of his appearance'), *insulting of partner's appearance* ('He told me I was ugly'), *sexually aggressive* ('He tried to force sex acts on me'), and *self-centered* ('She was self-centered').

Two interviewers drawn from a 10-member team independently assessed the quality of the couple's interaction during the interview. The assessments were recorded immediately following the interview. Interviewers provided ratings on 7-point Likert scales in response to the following probes: 'How much

conflict is there within the relationship?' (1 = little conflict, 7 = much conflict); 'How quarrelsome is the couple as a couple?' (1 = not very quarrelsome, 7 = very quarrelsome); 'How cooperative is the couple with each other?' (1 = not very cooperative, 7 = very cooperative); and 'How agreeable is the couple as a couple?' (1 = not very agreeable, 7 = very agreeable). The two interviewer assessments were significantly correlated for all four interaction quality variables (conflict, $r = .35$; quarrelsomeness, .39; cooperativeness, .27; and agreeableness, .38; all $ps < .001$, two-tailed), and were therefore standardized and summed to form more reliable composite indexes of couple conflict, quarrelsomeness, cooperativeness, and agreeableness.

During the testing session in which the spouses were separated from each other, each completed an instrument entitled 'Events with Others' (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). In addition to providing a series of other ratings, participants estimated the likelihood that they would end the marriage as a consequence of each of six types of spousal infidelity: flirting, passionately kissing, going on a romantic date, having a one-night stand, having a brief affair, and having a serious affair. Participants provided estimates on separate 11-point scales for each type of infidelity. The low end of the scale indicated 0 percent, the high end indicated 100 percent, with the scale marked off in 10 percent increments.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the reported *probabilities of ending the marriage in response to the six types of spousal infidelity.* The probabilities increased as a function of the seriousness of the extramarital involvement.

To determine whether the sexes differed in their estimates of anticipated

TABLE 1
Anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity (*M* and SD)

	Type of spousal infidelity					
	Flirt	Passionate kiss	Romantic date	One-night stand	Brief affair	Serious affair
Husband's anticipation of divorcing wife as a consequence of her infidelity ($n = 107$)	3.78 (9.75)	20.49 (29.89)	35.62 (35.25)	48.93 (38.91)	55.30 (39.09)	66.56 (37.46)
Wife's anticipation of divorcing husband as a consequence of his infidelity ($n = 107$)	2.50 (7.58)	21.60 (27.50)	37.32 (34.61)	49.20 (37.53)	57.75 (37.78)	69.03 (35.27)

Note. Means are average estimates of the probability of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Estimates were provided on 11-point scales anchored by 0 and 100 percent, presented in 10 percent increments (i.e. 0%, 10%, 20%).

dissolution following the various spousal infidelities, correlated-means *t*-tests were conducted for each of the variables. No significant sex differences were found (all $ps > .05$, two-tailed).

None of the correlations between men's anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife and attractiveness or mate value discrepancy reached statistical significance (all $ps > .05$, two-tailed). Women's anticipations of divorcing an adulterous husband, in contrast, consistently covaried with interviewer-rated mate value and attractiveness discrepancy. Women judged to be higher in relative mate value provided higher likelihood estimates of seeking divorce if their husband went on a date with another woman ($r = -.21$), or had a one-night stand ($-.19$; both $ps < .05$, two-tailed). Women judged to be more attractive than their husband provided higher likelihood estimates of seeking divorce if he went on a date with another woman ($r = -.26$), had a one-night stand ($-.24$), or a brief affair ($-.24$, $p < .01$; all *ps* two-tailed).

Correlations of anticipated dissolution following infidelity with spousal personality characteristics are shown in Table 2. The right panel of Table 2 shows that women married to men scoring low on emotional stability and openness/intellect reported higher probabilities that they would end the marriage if their husband had a one-night stand, brief affair, or serious affair. Women married to men scoring low on agreeableness and openness/intellect, respectively, reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their husband if he had a brief affair or went on a romantic date with another woman.

Husbands' anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse, in contrast, were only weakly related to spousal personality characteristics. The left panel of Table 2 shows that men married to women scoring low on emotional stability and openness/intellect, respectively, anticipated greater likelihoods of divorcing their partner if she kissed another man or flirted with another man.

To examine whether anticipated dissolution following infidelity might be related to own personality characteristics, men's and women's standings on the five personality factors were correlated with their own anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Two correlations reached statistical significance for women: women scoring lower on openness/intellect anticipated greater likelihoods of divorcing their husband if he had a one-night stand ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$) or serious affair ($-.23$, $p < .05$; both *ps* two-tailed).

Men's anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity were more strongly linked to their own personality characteristics. Men scoring lower on emotional stability reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their wife if she went on a romantic date with another man, had a one-night stand, brief affair, or serious affair (respective *rs* = $-.20$, $-.21$, $-.23$, $-.23$; all $ps < .05$, two-tailed). Men scoring lower on openness/intellect reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their wife if she flirted with another man, kissed another man, had a one-night stand or a serious affair (respective *rs* = $-.32$ ($p < .01$), $-.27$ ($p < .01$), $-.22$ ($p < .05$), $-.19$ ($p = .05$); all *ps* two-tailed).

Seven of the 15 *spousal sources of upset* were significantly and negatively related to men's or women's anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. Table 3 displays these correlations. The left panel of Table 3 reveals that men's anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife were most consistently related to their complaints that their wife was unfaithful and dishonest. These correlations were significant for the four more serious types of infidelity. Men who complained that their wife sexualized others reported higher probabilities that

TABLE 2
Correlations of anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity with spousal personality characteristics (107 men, 107 women)

	Husband's estimate that he would end marriage if Wife					Wife's estimate that she would end marriage if Husband				
Spousal personality characteristic	Flirts	Kisses	Has one-night stand	Has brief affair	Has serious affair	Flirts	Kisses	Dates	Has one-night stand	Has brief affair	Has serious affair
Sugency	−.16	−.17	−.08	.02	.00	−.10	−.10	.03	.15	.06	.07
Agreeableness	−.08	−.18	−.10	−.03	.02	.00	−.02	−.03	−.06	−.17	−.21*	−.23*
Conscientiousness	.06	.02	.11	.08	.06	.07	−.11	.05	.00	−.02	−.02	−.04
Emotional stability	−.08	−.24**	−.14	−.13	−.06	−.03	−.19	−.06	−.07	−.21*	−.25**	−.29**
Openness/intellect	−.33**	−.12	−.05	−.09	−.08	−.02	−.16	−.16	−.29**	−.26**	−.31**	−.33***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 3
Correlations of anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity with spousal sources of upset (107 men, 107 women)

	Husband's estimate that he would end marriage if Wife					Wife's estimate that he would end marriage if Husband				
Spousal source of upset	Flirts	Kisses	Dates	Has one-night stand	Has brief affair	Has serious affair	Flirts	Kisses	Dates	Has one-night stand	Has brief affair	Has serious affair
Jealous/possessive	−.02	−.05	.07	.12	.06	.06	.47***	.14	.16	.13	.11	.14
Unfaithful/dishonest	.02	.16	.20*	.28**	.22*	.25**	−.14	−.13	−.10	.01	.00	−.02
Inconsiderate	.09	.04	.05	.17	.10	.10	.26*	.21*	.25**	.24**	.19	.23*
Moody	.15	−.05	−.06	−.01	−.07	.00	.21*	.01	−.01	.07	.10	.13
Sexually withholding	.06	.05	.07	.07	.02	.07	.24*	.03	.02	.02	.03	.00
Sexualizes others	.31**	.11	.14	.23*	.14	.15	.07	−.09	.02	.01	.00	.03
Abuses alcohol/emotionally constricted	.19	.01	−.05	−.01	−.05	.04	.21*	.20*	.19	.29**	.30**	.28**

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

they would divorce her if she flirted with another man or had a one-night stand.

The right panel of Table 3 shows that women who complained that their husband was inconsiderate, abused alcohol, and was emotionally constricted, reported greater likelihoods that they would seek divorce if he flirted with another woman, passionately kissed another woman, or had a one-night stand or a serious affair. Women who complained that their husband was inconsiderate, and women who complained that their husband abused alcohol and was emotionally constricted, respectively, reported greater likelihoods of seeking divorce if he went on a date with another woman or had a brief affair. Women who complained that their husband was jealous and possessive, moody, and sexually withholding reported greater likelihoods of seeking divorce if he flirted with another woman.

None of the correlations between women's general, sexual, emotional, or composite *marital satisfaction* and women's estimates that they would divorce an unfaithful husband achieved statistical significance (all $ps > .05$, two-tailed). Paralleling the results for women, no significant correlations were obtained between men's general and sexual satisfaction and their anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife.

Men's emotional and composite marital satisfaction, however, displayed consistent relationships to their anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity. Men who reported lower emotional and composite satisfaction reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their wife if she kissed another man (respective $rs = -.20, -.20, p < .05$), went on a romantic date with another man ($-.25, -.25, p < .01$), or had a one-night stand ($-.19, -.20, p < .05$; all *ps* two-tailed).

None of the correlations between men's estimates of anticipated dissolution following infidelity and interviewer ratings of the *quality of the couple's interaction* achieved statistical significance (all $ps > .05$, two-tailed). Women's anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity, in contrast, was associated with interviewer ratings of the quality of the couple's interaction.

Women in couples who displayed more conflict during the interview reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their husband if he had a one-night stand ($r = .21$) or brief affair ($r = .24$; both $ps < .05$, two-tailed). Women in couples who displayed less cooperativeness, more quarrelsomeness, and less agreeableness, respectively, reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their husband if he had a one-night stand ($r = -.20$), brief affair ($r = -.22$), or serious affair ($r = -.19$; all $ps < .05$, two-tailed).

Discussion

Anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse may entail a cost–benefit analysis by the betrayed person in which the perceived costs and benefits of the marriage are weighed against the perceived costs and benefits of divorce. Greater perceived costs and fewer perceived benefits might facilitate heightened likelihood estimates of divorcing a spouse as a consequence of his or her infidelity.

This study examined five sources of spousal and relationship costs that might facilitate increased estimates of dissolution as a consequence of adultery. This discussion highlights the most important findings of this

study, and locates several of these findings within an evolutionary psychological perspective.

From an evolutionary psychological perspective, women of higher **mate value and attractiveness** than their husband may be devoting their reproductive capacity to men who provide them with fewer financial resources or lower quality genes than these women might have received from alternative mating arrangements (Buss, 1994). Accordingly, we predicted that relatively more valuable wives would report higher probabilities of divorcing an adulterous husband. This prediction was supported for the more serious types of husband infidelity, including having a one-night stand and a brief affair.

Men married to relatively less valuable and less attractive women, in contrast, did not provide consistently higher estimates that they would divorce their wife if she were unfaithful. The use of interviewer-assessments of women's mate value and attractiveness may have been inappropriate. Men married to women rated as relatively less attractive by the interviewers might perceive their wives to be equally or more attractive than the men perceive themselves to be. This speculation does not address, however, why men's, but not women's, perceptions of their spouse's mate value and attractiveness might deviate from independent parallel assessments.

Men and women displaying disagreeableness, emotional instability, and low openness/intellect are particularly likely to inflict a host of costs on their spouses. If anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse involve considerations of perceived costs already incurred by marriage to that person, then men and women married to disagreeable, emotionally unstable, and low openness/intellect people should report higher likelihoods of divorcing an adulterous partner.

We found support for this prediction for women's anticipation of seeking divorce in response to their husband's brief affair. Additionally, husbands' emotional stability and openness/intellect negatively covary with women's anticipations of divorcing their husband if he has a one-night stand or serious affair. Men's anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife, in contrast, are only weakly related to her emotional instability and low openness/intellect, and unrelated to her agreeableness. Men's *own* standings on agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness/intellect, however, are strongly predictive of their anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife.

The salience of men's personality for predicting both men's and women's anticipations of divorcing an adulterous spouse is consistent with the findings of research on marital stability, more generally (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For example, in a longitudinal study of 278 married couples, Kelly & Conley (1987) found that husband's neuroticism and impulsivity were the two best predictors of a composite measure of marital satisfaction and stability secured 50 years later.

According to Buss's (1989b) strategic interference model, **spousal sources of upset** represent relatively direct assessments of spousal cost-

infliction. Greater upset signals greater cost-infliction. If the perceived costs of marriage to the current spouse figure into the betrayed person's considerations of whether to divorce or remain married to an adulterous spouse, then spousal sources of upset should predict estimates of the likelihood of divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity.

Nearly half of the spousal sources of upset reported by men and women in this sample negatively covaried, as predicted, with likelihood estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. The most consistent predictor of higher likelihood estimates of divorcing an adulterous wife was a man's complaint that his wife had previously been unfaithful to him. The predictive importance of men's complaints about a wife's infidelity can be placed squarely within an evolutionary psychological perspective.

A spouse's unfaithfulness is likely to have imposed serious reproductive costs on ancestral men and women alike (Buss et al., 1992). Because of the asymmetry in certainty of genetic parentage, however, a wife's infidelity is potentially much more costly to her husband than is a husband's infidelity to his wife. The wife of a philandering man stands to lose some portion of his investment to another woman. Even if she loses the bulk of his investment, however, any children she bears are unquestionably her genetic progeny. The husband of an unfaithful wife stands to lose the entire reproductive capacity of his spouse, for at least one child-bearing cycle. Additionally, the unsuspecting cuckold risks investing years, even decades, of precious tangible and intangible resources in a rival's offspring.

The results suggest that a man married to an unfaithful wife may have issued an ultimatum to their partner upon discovery of her extramarital activities: 'If you ever cheat on me again, I will divorce you'. Given the potentially tremendous costs of a wife's infidelity, an important question is why some men offer their adulterous partner a second chance to demonstrate fidelity. These apparently more forgiving men might receive benefits from their wife, such as more frequent sexual access, that outweigh the potential costs of a wife's infidelity (Baker & Bellis, 1995).

If anticipations of seeking divorce as a consequence of a spousal infidelity involve taking stock of the benefits and costs of remaining married to and divorcing an adulterous partner, and if **marital satisfaction** negatively covaries with spousal cost-infliction, then lower marital satisfaction should predict higher likelihood estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. We found support for this prediction for men's, but not women's, likelihood estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse.

Previous research indicates that men are more likely to end a relationship when they are sexually dissatisfied with the relationship, whereas women are more likely to end a relationship when they are emotionally dissatisfied with the relationship. In the present sample, however, sexual and emotional dissatisfaction are unrelated to women's reports that they would divorce an unfaithful husband. Further, men's emotional but not sexual dissatisfaction predicts anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife. Failure to find the predicted sex differences in anticipated dissolution due to sexual vs emotional dissatisfaction might be due to the use of single

item measures of unknown reliability to assess sexual and emotional dissatisfaction.

An important question for future research is why men's, but not women's, marital dissatisfaction predicts anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. From an evolutionary psychological perspective, we might have expected results opposite to those obtained. Because a spouse's infidelity is potentially more reproductively costly for a man than for a woman, it might have been predicted that men's, relative to women's, anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse would be less predictable from feelings of marital dissatisfaction. The reproductive costs of cuckoldry are as certain and as devastating for the maritally satisfied man as they are for the maritally dissatisfied man. A man's reproductive resources, in contrast, can be partitioned between his wife and an extramarital lover. His wife's marital satisfaction might in part track the portion of his investment that she continues to receive. A woman's anticipation of divorcing an unfaithful husband, on this account, might vary with her marital satisfaction. Women married to unfaithful men might nevertheless express marital satisfaction, proportionate to the portion of her husband's investment she continues to receive. In light of the relative clarity of evolutionary psychological predictions regarding the sex-linked association between marital satisfaction and anticipated dissolution following spousal infidelity, future work should investigate the replicability of the findings of the current study.

Previous research suggests that a couple's **interaction quality** reflects the underlying costs and benefits exchanged within the marriage. Accordingly, we predicted that spouses displaying more conflict and less cooperativeness during the interview would provide higher likelihood estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. We found support for this prediction for women's, but not men's, anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse.

The results for women are consistent with more general research on the quality of couple interaction as a predictor of eventual divorce. Karney & Bradbury (1995) reviewed the results of 14 studies in which the quality of couple interaction during an interview was used to predict marital stability at a later time. Karney & Bradbury (1995) concluded that couples displaying greater conflict and less cooperativeness were more likely to divorce than were couples displaying less conflict and greater cooperativeness. Previous research has not identified which spouse may be more likely to seek divorce, or whether men and women are equally likely to seek divorce, in couples displaying more negative interactions. Future research might find that, consistent with results of the present study, women are more likely than men to seek divorce in couples displaying negative interactions.

A large body of research documents that women are more attuned to relationship perturbations than are men (reviewed in Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). The finding that women's, but not men's, anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse positively covary with interviewer judgements of relationship conflict is consistent with this research.

We assessed expectations of dissolution as a consequence of spousal infidelity, rather than actual divorces filed as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Developmental changes across the marital life span, such as the birth of children, may have important and unanticipated effects on the betrayed person's deliberations of whether to seek divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity.

We have no reason to suspect, however, that likelihood estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse will consistently underestimate or overestimate actual divorce as a consequence of spousal infidelity. Several results of the present study, such as the linkages between men's marital dissatisfaction and increased anticipation of dissolution following infidelity, mirror Buunk's (1987) findings regarding the conditions that promote *actual* dissolution as a consequence of *admitted* infidelity.

We acknowledge that we have greatly simplified the complexity of events and processes that accompany marital dissolution. Additionally, we recognize that infidelity is not the only cause of divorce. Other frequently cited reasons for divorce include infertility, physical abuse, and failure to provide expected financial resources (Betzig, 1989; Buss, 1994). This study represents but one step toward gaining a better understanding of the conditions and contexts under which infidelity might lead to marital dissolution.

The results of this study are consistent with the hypothesis that anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse involve a cost–benefit analysis by the betrayed partner in which the perceived costs and benefits of remaining married are weighed against those of divorce. An evolutionary psychological perspective provides a profitable interpretational framework for the results of this study. Many of these results are consistent with other perspectives, however, including equity theory and Rusbult's (1980) investment model of close relationships. Regardless of theoretical orientation, a critical direction for future research is determining whether the sources of spousal and relationship costs we have identified as important predictors of anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful spouse are similarly predictive of actual divorce filed as a consequence of a discovered infidelity.

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