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. First, 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 marital 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, 1001 College Avenue, Boca Raton, FL 33431-3504. E-mail: tshacke@fau.edu

of someone who has been unfriendly (Bush & Van Drun, 1989; Jawor, 1988). Of the ten causes of divorce compiled by Heclo (1989) in her ethnographic study of 760 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 divorces cite a spouse's infidelity as the primary cause of the divorce (Kesner & Booth, 1985). Estimates of marital infidelity range from 28 to 70 percent for women and from 33 to 75 percent for men (Batt, 1994). The discrepancy between the rates of estimated divorce due to infidelity and estimates of infidelity suggests that although some marriages continue following a discovered infidelity, some marriages do not (Bush, 1987).

The divorce process often conveys the psychological, emotional, and physiological pain of the parting spouses (Kilson & Susman, 1983). Despite the tremendous costs 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 cost associated with infidelity and with divorce, an empirical basis for what differentiates couples who divorce from those who stay together following infidelity. Additionally, infidelity and divorce is a controversial issue in infidelity are important issues from several theoretical perspectives. From an evolutionary psychological perspective (e.g., Buunk, 1993), infidelity signals the disengagement of important reproductive resources. From an equity theoretical perspective (e.g., Mestick-Cook, 1983), infidelity may signal serious inequities in a relationship. From an investment model perspective (e.g., Axball, 1983), infidelity signals lack of commitment in a relationship.

It could be argued from each of these perspectives that the decision to divorce as a consequence of infidelity occurs 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 negative the betrayed partner has to remain married to an adulterous spouse. This study tests this general proposal using a sample of couples.

To assess the validity of infidelity as a possible 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, propositioning someone else (not a spouse), having a one-night stand, a brief affair, and a serious affair. Following Buunk (1987), we assume that these types of infidelity affect different degrees of spousal cost-satisfaction. 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 assessment of actual divorces filed in response to spousal infidelity. We have no reason to believe, however, that estimates of the likelihood of divorcing an unfaithful spouse will consist of underestimating or overestimating actual divorce in response to spousal infidelity. Participants making these estimations may arrive to appear inconsistent of a spouse's philandering rather than someone the spouse can 'walk all over' and, at the same time, strive to appear forgiving, compassionate, and kind. the hallmark of a societally main (Buss, 1989a). Additionally, several longitudinal studies of marriage (e.g., Gottman & Levinson, 1963) have documented that anticipated dissolution reliably predicts actual dissolution.

The use of newlywed rather than long-married couples to study anticipated dissolution as a consequence of infidelity has several advantages. Divorce is more likely to occur in the first five years of marriage, for a variety of reasons, including infidelity (Buss, 1989a; Fuss, 1994). Additionally, the early years of marriage are marked by a time of relational negotiation, whereas each partner seeks to reestablish what is acceptable and unacceptable intra-partnership and extra-partnership behaviors (Voysey & Field, 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 spouse, spousal personality, spousal source of upper and inferior, marital dissatisfaction, and independent accountants of the couple's interaction quality. Here we present specific predictions about the relationships between these sources of costs and anticipated divorces of an unfaithful spouse.

Relative mate value refers to the relative desirability of the two partners in 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 mate 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 foregoing mating arrangements with a more valuable partner (Buunk, 1994; Buunk & Buss, 1993).

A second source of costs is related to a spouse's personality characteristics. The five-factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1983) specifies that five major dimensions capture the ~80% of significant individual differences in personality. These dimensions are: Neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Men and women scoring low on agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness are especially likely to select a variety of costs on their spouses (e.g., Buss, 1991). Buss (1991) found that men and women interpreted to spouses who display low agreeableness, low emotional stability, and low conscientiousness as less likely to seek divorce upon discovering their spouse's infidelity. The same could be true for men and women interpreting their spouse's infidelity as a threat to their own attractiveness and mate value. Relational dissatisfaction refers to the extent that the couple's relationship is satisfying and fulfilling. The more relationship dissatisfaction a couple experiences, the more likely the couple is to divorce because of a spouse's infidelity. The relationship satisfaction index (Buunk, 1994) was used to measure relationship satisfaction. The index is based on the assumption that the more a couple's relationship is satisfying and fulfilling, the more likely the couple is to divorce because of a spouse's infidelity.
Background.

It is estimated that approximately 20% of couples who divorce do so within 1 year of marriage. This rate is significantly higher than the national average, which is 50% for all marriages. The reasons for this high rate of divorce are varied and complex, but they include factors such as financial stress, communication difficulties, and compatibility issues.

Purpose.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to early divorce in newly married couples. Specifically, we aim to explore the role of marital satisfaction and its relationship with the likelihood of divorce.

Methodology.

This study employed a correlational design, using a sample of 100 newly married couples. The participants were recruited through a local newspaper and were required to have been married for less than 1 year. The couples were assessed using a battery of questionnaires that measured marital satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution skills. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

Results.

The results showed that marital satisfaction was a significant predictor of the likelihood of divorce. Couples who reported low levels of marital satisfaction were more likely to divorce within the first year of marriage. Furthermore, the results indicated that communication difficulties and conflict resolution skills were also important factors in the development of marital dissatisfaction.

Conclusion.

Our findings highlight the importance of strong communication and conflict resolution skills as well as high levels of marital satisfaction in the maintenance of a healthy marriage. Couples who are aware of these factors and work to improve them may be able to reduce the risk of early divorce.

References.


conflict is there within the relationship? (1 = little conflict, 10 = much conflict); How well-qualified is the couple as a family? (1 = very well-qualified, 7 = very unqualified); How cooperative is the couple with each other? (1 = not very cooperative, 7 = very cooperative); How agreeable is the couple as a family? (1 = not very agreeable, 7 = very agreeable). The two interviewer-rated variables were significantly correlated for all four interrater reliability studies (conflict: r = .32, discrepancies: .39, cooperation: -.37, and agreement: .32; all p-values < .01), and they were therefore standardized and summed to form more reliable composite measures of couple conflict, discrepancies, cooperation, and agreement.

During the testing session in which the tapes were separated from each other, each was coded using an instrument evolved at the University of Oregon (Hurt & Shackelford, 1979). In addition to providing a series of other ratings, participants estimated the likelihood that the couple would end the marriage in a divorce. For each trial, the observers were asked to rate their perception of the likelihood of divorce and to assign a score from 0 to 100 for each tape. The mean rating for each tape was calculated and used as the dependent variable in the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect for divorce likelihood, F(3, 96) = 4.72, p < .01. The results indicated that the couple that was rated as having the highest likelihood of divorce was the one that was most similar to the participants' perceptions of ideal families. The couple that was rated as having the least likelihood of divorce was the one that was most different from the participants' perceptions of ideal families.

To determine whether the views differed in their estimates of anticipated marital divorce, Table I shows the means and standard deviations for the expected probabilities of ending the marriage as a function of the type of marital status. Table I shows that the ratings for each stimulus were significantly different from each other. The ratings for the divorced families were significantly lower than the ratings for the married families, F(1, 32) = 44.40, p < .01. The ratings for the married families were significantly higher than the ratings for the remarried families, F(1, 32) = 44.40, p < .01.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of marital status</th>
<th>Divorced (M = 53.5, SD = 26.0)</th>
<th>Married (M = 75.9, SD = 15.2)</th>
<th>Remarried (M = 62.1, SD = 21.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband's expectations of divorcing with a spouse as a consequence of being infidel (less than 6 months)</td>
<td>3.96 (24.9)</td>
<td>56.62 (49.0)</td>
<td>55.51 (66.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife's expectations of divorcing with a spouse as a consequence of being infidel (less than 6 months)</td>
<td>3.96 (24.9)</td>
<td>56.62 (49.0)</td>
<td>55.51 (66.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband's expectations of divorcing with a spouse as a consequence of being infidel (more than 6 months)</td>
<td>2.49 (24.4)</td>
<td>57.37 (49.0)</td>
<td>57.75 (68.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife's expectations of divorcing with a spouse as a consequence of being infidel (more than 6 months)</td>
<td>2.49 (24.4)</td>
<td>57.37 (49.0)</td>
<td>57.75 (68.0)</td>
</tr>
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Note: All values are average estimates of the probability of seeking divorce in response to the issues of fidelity. All values were provided on a 10-point scale anchored by 0 and 10 and presented in 10 average increments (i.e., 10% of the total scale length).
they would divorce her if she flitted with another man or had a one-night stand.

The right panel of Table 3 shows that women who complained that their husbands were insensitive, abusive, alcoholic, and were emotionally unstable, reported greater likelihoods that they would seek divorce if they were flitted with another woman, possessively Jealous another man, or had a one-night stand of a Serious-affair. Women who complained that their husbands were insensitive, and women who complained that their husbands were alcoholic and were emotionally unstable, respectively, reported greater likelihoods of seeking divorce if they were flitted with another woman or had a one-night stand.

TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothetical situation</th>
<th>Divorce rate</th>
<th>Jealousy of another woman</th>
<th>Possessive jealousy of another man</th>
<th>One-night stand</th>
<th>Serious affair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husbands insensitive</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands alcoholic</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands emotionally unstable</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The correlations between women's estimates of anticipated dissolution following infidelity and interviewer ratings of the quality of the couple's interaction achieved statistical significance (all p < 0.05, two-tailed). Women's anticipated dissolution following 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 husbands if the husband had a one-night stand (r = 0.25; p < 0.05, two-tailed). Women in marriages who displayed less cooperation, more quarrelnesses, and less agreement, respectively, reported higher probabilities that they would divorce their husbands if they had a one-night stand (r = 0.20), brief affair (r = 0.25), or serious affair (r = 0.22), or personal affair (r = 0.20, all p < 0.05, 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 lower 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 cues that might facilitate incorrect estimates of dissolution as a consequence of infidelity. This discussion highlights the most important findings of the
From an evolutionary psychological perspective, women of higher birth value and attractiveness than their husband may be deviating from reproductive capacity to men who provide them with fewer financial resources or lower quality genes that these women might have received from alternative mating partners (Buss, 1994). Accordingly, we predicted that relatively more valuable wives would report higher probabilities of deviating on unfaithful spouses. This prediction was supported for the most serious types of husband infidelity, including having a one-night stand and a brief affair.

Men married to relatively less valuable and less attractive wives, in contrast, did not provide consistently higher estimates that they would deviate from their wife if she were unfaithful. The use of interview-verbal methods of women's mate value and attractiveness may have been inappropriate. Men married to women rated as relatively less attractive or less mateable may have perceived their wives' mate value and attractiveness might deviate from independent parallel assessments.

Men and women displaying disagreement, emotional instability, and low openness/intelligence are particularly likely to inflict a host of costs on their spouses if anticipations of deviating on unfaithful spouse involve considerations of perceived costs already incurred by infidelity in that person, their own and women married to disagreeable, emotionally unstable, and lower openness/intelligence people should report higher likelihoods of deviating on 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 instability and openness/intelligence negatively affect women's anticipations of divorcing their husband if he has a one-night stand or serious affair. Men's anticipations of deviating on unfaithful wife, in contrast, are negatively associated to her emotional instability and lower openness/intelligence, and unrelated to her agreeableness. Men's own standing on agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness/intelligence, however, are strongly positively associated with their anticipations of divorcing an unfaithful wife.

The absence of men's personality for predicting both men and women's anticipations of deviating an adulterous spouse is consistent with the findings of research on marital stability, more generally (Kenny & Brimbury, 1985). For example, in a longitudinal study of 278 married couples, Kelly & Czepiel (1985) found that husband's neuroticism and impulsiveness were the two personality traits that were correlated with marital instability and stability, 50 years later.

According to Fox's (1988) strategic interference model, sexual sources of upset represent relatively direct investments of several costs—infidelity. Greater upset signals greater non-inflation. If the perceived cost of marriage to the core spouse figure into the hierarchy of his consideration of whether to divorce or remain married to an adulterous spouse, then sexual sources of upset should predict estimates of the likelihood of divorcing as a consequence of spousal infidelity.

Nearly half of the spatial sources of upset reported by men and women in this sample were negatively correlated, as predicted, with likelihood-estimates of divorcing an unfaithful spouse. The most consistent predictor of higher likelihood estimations of divorcing an adulterous wife was the 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 an unfaithful man and woman 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 to the 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 obviously 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 unexpected out-of-wedlock birth parturition events, too, decades, of precipitous tangible and intangible resources in a civil offering.

The results suggest that a man married to an unfaithful wife may have existed in their partner upon discovery of her extramarital activities: "If you cheat on me again, I will divorce you. Giving 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 emotional costs of a wife's infidelity (Bates & Bolles, 1995).

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

Pre-post research indicates that men are more likely to find 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 spouse. Failure to find the predicted sex differences in anticipatory dissolution due to sexual non-congruence/interference might be due to the use of sing-
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 predictor anticipations of divorcing an unsatisfied spouse. From an evolutionary psychological perspective, we might have expected results opposite to those obtained. Because a spouse's infidelity is potentially more adaptively costly for a man than for a woman, we hypothesized that men's, but not women's, anticipations of divorcing an unsatisfied spouse would be less predictable from feelings of marital dissatisfaction. The reproductive costs of cuckoldry are severe, and it is more costly for the sexually satisfied man than for the sexually dissatisfied woman. A man's reproductive strategies, in contrast, are partially mediated between his wife and extramarital lover. His wife's marital satisfaction might partially predict the portion of his investment she continues to receive. A woman's anticipation of divorcing an unsatisfied husband on this account, might vary with her marital satisfaction. Women married to unsatisfied men might nevertheless express marital dissatisfaction, p-optimal to the pursuit of her husband's investment she continues to receive. In light of the relative clarity of evolutionary psychological predictions regarding the sex-linked selection of marital satisfaction and anticipated dissipation-how showing sexual infidelity in the future work should address the replicability of the findings of the current study.

Previous research suggests that a couple's interaction quality reflects the underlying costs and benefit exchanged within the marriage. Accordingly, we predicted that spouses displaying more conflict and less cooperation during the interview would provide higher likelihood estimates of divorcing an unsatisfied spouse. We found support for this prediction in men's, but not women's, anticipations of divorcing an unsatisfied 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 a marital interview was used to predict marital stability at a base time. Karney & Bradbury (1995) concluded that couples displaying greater conflict and less cooperation were more likely to divorce than couples displaying less conflict and greater cooperation. However, previous research has not identified which spouses are more likely to seek divorce, or whether men and women are equally likely to seek divorce, couples displaying more negative interactions. Future research might find that, consistent with results of the present study, women are more likely to anticipate divorce than men are to anticipate divorce to 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, 1985). The finding that women's, but not men's, anticipations of divorcing an unsatisfied spouse positively correlate with interviewer judgments of relationship conflict is consistent with this research.

**REFERENCES**


