

Calamity



(Google Image Search: "broken heart")

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Divorce has seemingly become more prevalent in recent times. Statistically, however, the divorce rate has actually been decreasing over the past twenty years in the United States (Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 14). Why do many people think that it is on the rise? What this could be specifically attributed to is uncertain and can be very complicated. Whether it be the loosening focus on religious beliefs and upbringings, revisions of laws, differences in media portrayal, shifts in society's standards, developments in gender roles, or changes in individual values and goals; marriages seem to be less likely to stay the course and have a happy ending, when in all actuality, their permanence is improving.

Before looking into why divorce seems to be on the rise, it is important to reflect on some of the key reasons that divorce happens in the first place. Understanding these causes can provide insight as to how changes in laws and modern practices have lowered the divorce rate. One of the many events that can lead to divorce is a couple moving into a home together and subsequently discovering crucial deficiencies in one another's standards. These differences can cause a great deal of strife and pressure in a fledgling marriage. Another purpose is financial issues that arise from variation in opinion, the inability to secure enough money, and goals contrary to one another. Finances are a leading cause of the dissolution of marriages. In fact, low income is listed as one of the top ten risk factors for divorce within the first ten years of marriage (Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 42). Another cause worth noting is gender roles. In some instances, one partner feels a sense of control and superiority over the other and may treat them unfairly. This is especially frequent in single income households. This behavior and sense of dominance was

more frequently seen in men at a time when women's rights had not yet advanced to their current state. Now that women are much more independent, they are less likely to remain in unsatisfying marriages (10). Finally, marrying at too young an age increases the risk for divorce. Clarke-Stewart and Brentano indicate that, "... women who are younger than eighteen when they marry have twice the risk of a failed marriage as women who are twenty-five years or older when they marry" (36).

One of the possible areas of reason that divorce seems to be more noticeable could be outer controls such as religion and law. As laws surrounding divorce loosen, religious entities may be increasing in sensitivity and have more outrageous attitudes. This can cause more focus on the matter and an increased presence in conversation and news. Roman Catholic Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, Archbishop of San Francisco, spoke on the matter saying that among other things, no-fault divorce has eroded the basic concepts of marriage (Schmalz par. 13). No-fault divorce constitutes the principle that a couple can file for divorce with no regard to the innocence or guilt of either party (Vlosky 317). Laws governing the dissolution of marriage have definitely become more lenient throughout the years. Following the introduction of no-fault divorce laws in 1969, Clarke-Stewart and Brentano report that, "the number of divorces rose to an all-time high of just over five divorces for every thousand people in the United States in 1979-81" (13). This number has since dwindled. More recent studies show that no-fault laws have had a positive effect on state divorce rates (Vlosky 318).

The media's portrayal of divorce and society's views on the matter, could also add to the supposed increase. While some facets of the media portray single, divorced parents in a positive

manner, there are still many people that hold an exceedingly negative view of failed marriages. As Barbara Kingsolver puts it, "... it's harder somehow to shrug off the Family-of-Dolls Family Values crew when they judge ... that divorced people, blended families, gay families, and single parents are failures" (305). Many people today maintain this opinion, and this can increase the negative attention that divorce garners. When it is talked about and highlighted, it can seem to be a lot more common than it actually is. A divorced marriage is not referred to as finished but as "failed" (306).

Finally, inner controls such as gender roles and individual goals evolving can affect divorce rates, and therefore the perception that dissolution is on the rise. Changing roles in gender, such as by women becoming empowered and gaining equality in the workforce, can change the inner workings of marriages. This is seen happening in Brazil where Cynthia Gorney records Brazilian Andriara Petterle saying, "We've found that for many young women, their first priority now is their education. The second is their profession. And the third is children and a stable relationship" (par. 25). Women have changed their priorities in accordance with being able to sustain themselves. Marriage is not at the top of the list, and the ability to break a bad marriage in favor of something better, is much easier. Kingsolver echoes the change in women's expectations from servitude to independence (307).

The causes for divorce are very diverse, as are the reasons it attracts so much attention. From inexperience, financial issues, gender roles, and many other reasons, divorce is a sobering reality worth noting. Modern declines in divorce rates could be attributed to marriage at a later age, cohabitation prior to wedlock, and priorities for women being more geared towards

independence. While the general belief is that dissolution of marriage is steadily climbing, this is statistically false. It is high time that misinformation stops being spread and that people who sling divorce propaganda be put in their place. Falsely inflating divorce as an out-of-control calamity neglects the fact that married couples today are enjoying their stays in matrimony and with greater success than before.

Works Cited

- Clarke-Stewart, Allison and Cornelia Brentano. *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*. Boulder, Colorado: NetLibrary, 2007. Web. 29 Oct. 2013.
- Gorney, Cynthia. "Machisma." *National Geographic Magazine*. Sep. 2011. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. "Stone Soup." *The McGraw-Hill Reader*. 11th ed. Gilbert H. Muller. n.p.: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2011. 305-310. Print.
- Schmalz, Valerie. "Archbishop: Educating Young Key to Future of Marriage." *Catholic San Francisco*. 18 Oct. 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.
- Vlosky, Denese Ashbaugh and Pamela A. Monroe. "The Effective Dates of No-Fault Divorce Laws in the 50 States." *Family Relations*. Vol. 51, No. 4, *Families and the Law*. National Council on Family Relations, 2002. 317-324. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.

Annotated Bibliography

Clarke-Stewart, Allison and Cornelia Brentano. *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*. Boulder, Colorado: NetLibrary, 2007. Web. 29 Oct. 2013.

Allison Clarke-Stewart along with Cornelia Brentano wrote this book and it was first published in 2006. The eBook edition was released in 2007. This work was focused solely on divorce and was a great resource, as the authors used a wide array of statistical data and delved into the history of American divorce as it changed throughout the years. The book goes further into the topic of divorce and looks at causes as well as the effects it has on individuals involved and children. Readers should find this source to be fairly extensive in its look at divorce. This was most useful for my essay because of the fact that it was well researched and provided a concise overview of the divorce rates in America.

Gorney, Cynthia. "Machisma." *National Geographic Magazine*. Sep. 2011. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.

Taken from an article on the *National Geographic* website, this primarily focused on the phenomenon of birth rate decline in Brazil and other countries. The author of this article also touched on women's equality and changes in family planning goals, which is why it was useful in my essay.

Kingsolver, Barbara. "Stone Soup." *The McGraw-Hill Reader*. 11th ed. Gilbert H. Muller. n.p.: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2011. 305-310. Print.

Kingsolver wrote a very personal piece revolving around her life and standpoint as a divorced, single mother. Readers can find information directly from the perspective of a divorced parent. The way that society views divorce negatively was provided first-hand through the eyes of the author.

Schmalz, Valerie. "Archbishop: Educating Young Key to Future of Marriage." *Catholic San Francisco*. 18 Oct. 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.

This article is taken from the *Catholic San Francisco* magazine and was republished online. It was of particular interest for the reader, as it provides a modern and up to date view inside the mind of a powerful, current religious figure in the United States. The Archbishop clearly sets out the way that the Catholic church believes family values and marriage should be. This plays directly into how legions of people in our country feel, and the negativity of acting outside of the church's discretion can result in a great deal of publicity.

Vlosky, Denese Ashbaugh and Pamela A. Monroe. "The Effective Dates of No-Fault Divorce Laws in the 50 States." *Family Relations*. Vol. 51, No. 4, *Families and the Law*. National Council on Family Relations, 2002. 317-324. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.

The studies contained within this selection are very useful for understanding a timeline of no-fault divorce laws being introduced state by state. The authors of this article have reviewed many studies that attempted to foresee the impact of no-fault laws on family life in the United States. Readers that would wish to delve deeper into the data of each study may find them listed in this source. This was incorporated to explain what no-fault laws permit and to be able to say definitively that the impact has lessened over the years.

Essay Outline

Thesis: Whether it be the loosening focus on religious beliefs and upbringings, revisions of laws, differences in media portrayal, shifts in society's standards, developments in gender roles, or changes in individual values and goals; marriages seem to be less likely to stay the course and have a happy ending, when in all actuality, their permanence is improving.

Introductory paragraph:

Introduce essay and ask questions to engage the reader. Contains thesis statement.

Paragraph one:

A look at some key reasons that divorce actually occurs. Use reasons that can be related to the rest of the essay.

Paragraph two:

Outer controls. Explain reasons that divorce could be perceived to be higher in modern times. Law and Religion.

Paragraph three:

Media portrayal. Cover the general consensus that society has and how it could affect discussions amongst people. Negative attention can make divorce seem more common than it actually is.

Paragraph four:

Inner controls. Changed gender roles and individual goals. Covers women having a place in the workforce and therefore having more options.

Closing paragraph:

Sum up all topics and evidences once again. End with a statement about why people should learn the truth rather than spreading the word that divorce is on the rise (which is what I thought at the beginning of this paper).