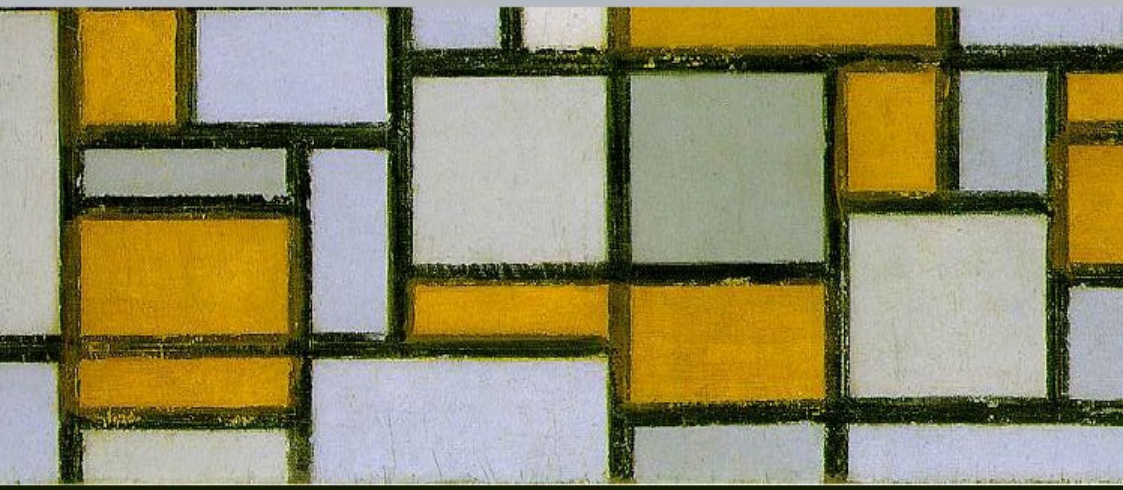
RICHARD A. GARDNER

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DIVORCE



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Psychological Aspects of Divorce

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Psychological Aspects of Divorce

Of the 2,146,000 marriages reported in the United States in 1969, one in three may reasonably be expected to end in divorce. This rather high proportion of failed marriages by no means represents a sudden collapse of the institution. According to Census Bureau figures, the divorce rate in the United States has been rising since the turn of the century. In 1890 the divorce rate was 5 per 1,000 total population. In 1946 the rate was 4.6—a peak that is explained by the wholesale dissolution of ill-considered "war marriages." After 1946 the divorce rate gradually decreased to a low of 2.1 in 1958. Since then the rate has been climbing steadily; figures for recent years are: 1966, 2.5; 1967, 2.6; and 1968, 2.9.

In 1969 there were 660,000 divorces—a figure that represents a rate of 3.3 per 1,000 total population. Since 2,146,000 marriages were reported during this year, the ratio of divorces to marriages is 660,000/2,146,000 or 1/3.25. This ratio is the basis for the prediction that one in three marriages will end in divorce.

This figure cannot, however, be considered an accurate projection. Since the number of reported marriages is increasing every year, there is no direct correspondence between 1969 marriages and 1969 divorces. The latter represent a chronological accumulation of failed marriages that began over a

wide range of previous years, any one of which had fewer total marriages than 1969. Therefore, the possibility of a 1969 marriage ending in divorce is probably greater than one in three.

The latest Census Bureau figures on the duration of marriages that ended in divorce are for the year 1967. The median duration was 7.1 years. The modal duration was between one and two years. Other generalizations regarding divorce may be drawn from the Census Bureau data. There is, for example, a greater risk of divorce for those who marry in their teens. The percentage of divorces involving children also appears to be increasing. In 1953, 45.5 percent of the divorces in the United States involved children; in 1958 the figure was 55.1 per cent; and in 1963 the percentage was 61.1. Apparently the belief that marriage should be maintained "for the sake of the children" is losing its force.

Within the United States there are significant regional variations in the divorce rate. In 1963 the rates were 0.9 per 1,000 total population in the Northeast, 2.2 in the North-Central states, 2.8 in the South, and 3.6 in the West. These regional differences are in part related to varying degrees of permissiveness in state laws regarding divorce that encourage what the Census Bureau calls "migratory divorces." In 1967, for example, the divorce rate in New York was 0.4 per 1,000 total population while Nevada had a rate of 22.3. The divorce rate in Nevada was thus 56 times the rate in New York.

Far from being a statement about the relative stability of marriages in the two states, the figure primarily expresses the fact that a great many New Yorkers were going to Nevada to obtain their divorces. In spite of migratory divorces, however, the West has had a higher rate of divorce than the East since the beginning of the century.

How do divorce rates in the United States compare with those of other countries? Although almost all countries report their annual divorce totals to the Statistical Office of the United Nations, which publishes them in the *Demographic Yearbook*, meaningful comparisons are difficult. A number of countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ireland, Malta, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, and until 1970, Italy, do not provide legal means for the dissolution of marriage.

Table 24-1.
Number of Divorce Decrees per 1,000 Population Granted under Civil Law in 1968

United States	2.91
U.S.S.R.	2.73
Southern Rhodesia	2.14
Hungary	2.07

Egypt	1.92
South Africa	1.72
East Germany	1.68
Czechoslovakia	1.49
Libya	1.41
Sweden	1.39
Austria	1.32
Bulgaria	1.16
Finland	1.15
Yugoslavia	1.02

Source: *Demographic Yearbook*, United Nations, New York, 1969, pp. 671-674.

Although Table 24-1 lists the countries with the highest divorce rates

for 1968, the order is somewhat selective. For example, the Falkland Islands reported a divorce rate of 2.50, which would make it third highest in the world. The population of the islands is so small, however, that only five divorces were necessary to achieve this rate. Factors other than population must be considered in comparing divorce rates between nations. Figures reported for Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, for example, include only the white population.

Psychosocial Factors in Marriage That Contribute to Divorce

If one marriage in three is doomed to failure, it is only to be expected that some would advance the opinion that monogamy is not congenial to man's basic personality structure. The ever rising divorce rate has led others to consider monogamy outmoded or dysfunctional in our highly mobile and specialized technological society.

In opposition to the preceding theorists, Kardiner has argued persuasively that man has tried practically every conceivable arrangement for marriage and childrearing and monogamy has proved to be the most effective, its deficiencies notwithstanding. It allows for the closest continuous contact between parent and child that all agree is essential if the child is to become a self-sufficient and contributing member of society.

In discussing alternative systems, such as the polyandrous Marquesan Islanders whom he studied intensively, Kardiner convinces the reader that the mother's incredibly complex interactions with her three to six husbands leave her but scant time for her children. Polygamous cultures, on the other hand, foster intense rivalries between the males that distract them from domestic involvements. A multiplicity of maternal or paternal figures confuses the child and lessens the likelihood of strong attachments.

Bettelheim confirms Kardiner's point in his recent study of children

raised in Israeli kibbutzim. Although describing an encouragingly low incidence of juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, and severe emotional disturbance, he nevertheless concluded that the child raised in a setting with diffused parental figures tends to be more detached in his interpersonal relationships than children raised in more conventional settings.

Given the reasonably durable nature of the monogamous relationship, what is there in the Western variety, and that found in the United States in particular, that causes disequilibrium and divorce?

When two people marry today, “love” is taken to be the primary and only acceptable reason. While secondary considerations such as physical attractiveness, similar interests, status, and money may be admitted, anyone who states that he is marrying without “being in love” is branded with pejorative labels. He is “materialistic,” “opportunistic,” “sick,” or “foolish.” As with other psychological phenomena in the human repertoire, cultural influences have played an important role in the formation, manifestation, importance, and meaning of love.

The romantic love that Westerners deem so necessary to marriage is a legacy of the early French Renaissance and the chivalric tradition. The ancients had sung the joys and struggles of love, but it was not until the thirteenth century that the concept of courtly love gained acceptance and

began to dictate such requirements and proofs of passion as the abdication of all selfish motives, complete fealty, and Platonic idealization of the beloved. Without entirely excluding sensuality, the new love placed great emphasis on purity and virtue. As Huizinga says, “Love now became the field where all moral and cultural perfection flowered.” Such a marital relationship was considered to be far superior to those arranged for mundane considerations by parents and overlords.

People marrying today are undoubtedly freer to explore the pagan possibilities of their bodies than their forefathers. Nevertheless, they still feel strongly that to get married there must be a spiritual bond, euphoric feelings, and at least a measurable degree of fidelity. Some part of these feelings must be attributed to novelty. Whatever the composite origin, they do not seem to endure in marriage with its inevitable restrictions, frustrations, and inescapable confrontations not only with the partner’s all too human defects but also with the simple realities of mundane cohabitation. In discussing these romantic expectations, Kubie condemns them for exacerbating the major neurotic elements in marriage that are “inflated and reinforced by the romantic Western tradition which rationalizes and beatifies a neurotic state of obsessional infatuation. ... It is an obsessional state which, like all obsessions, is in part driven by unconscious anger.” The disenchantment that accompanies the waning of romantic euphoria is frequently associated with divorce. “We are no longer in love” is probably the most common reason

given for divorce.

An adjunct of the chivalric inheritance is the notion propagated in our culture that marriage will increase one's personal happiness. In the extreme, as Ackerman describes it, "marriage is approached as a potential cure for whatever psychic ails a man may suffer." The failure of marriage to supply this elusive happiness plays an important role in divorce. This quest is a factor driving some from one marriage to another. Hunt believes that "the wide use of divorce today is not a sign of a diminished desire to be married, but of an increased desire to be happily married."

Our Western society places a premium on youth and beauty. Many men display their wives in accordance with Veblen's principle of conspicuous consumption. A marriage based *primarily* on such attraction cannot but falter with the inevitable changes brought about by the years.

In American society an ideal, "happy" marriage is considered to be one in which there is an interlocking of needs and mutual gratifications in the higher areas of functioning. "Togetherness" is extolled to such a degree that those who wish to look elsewhere for some of their important satisfactions (not necessarily sexual) may consider their marriage defective. In no other relationship are such demands made. The "togetherness" a couple feels in college, for example, where interests are not only shared but also similar, may

begin to evaporate when the husband begins to acquire the highly specialized skills necessary for success in our technological society. He can no longer communicate his major interests to his wife, and this breakdown in "togetherness" may contribute to the decision to divorce.

There can be little doubt that increased social mobility has contributed to a greater incidence of marriages between persons of different class and value systems. Montagu considers such marriages to be intrinsically unstable because they lack the stabilizing influence of a shared kinship group.

Perhaps reflecting the social relaxation of restrictions and prohibitions, religious strictures against divorce have been eased, and religious obligations and commitments no longer impede the dissolution of an unsatisfactory marriage.

While increased social equality for women has given them more power to extract themselves from a painful marriage, it has at the same time engendered professional interests that may conflict with their childbearing and homemaking desires and obligations. Some women dissolve their marriages in order to freely and unequivocally pursue their professional interests. Others remain married, but they are so guilt-ridden over role conflicts that their gratifications are markedly reduced.

Kubie suggests that one explanation for the increasing divorce rate may

be the increasing life span. Marriages have always been fraught with difficulty, but the participants died before their years of agony could culminate in divorce. With an increase in divorce in the middle and late years of life, younger people have now had more exposure to the divorce experience. They are, Kubie feels, more likely to emulate their predecessors and feel more free to divorce.

Last, but certainly not least important, are the individual neurotic factors that contribute to marital discord and disillusionment. Kubie considers the neurotic difficulties to arise primarily from the discrepancy between the partners' conscious and unconscious desires in the relationship. Examples are legion. One woman unconsciously wants a father in her husband, and her spouse unconsciously wants a mother, although each vociferously professes the desire for an egalitarian relationship. Frustration mounts as their underlying demands are not met. Another woman may basically relate best to a man who is dependent on her. All may go well in the early years of marriage when he relies on her efforts while he builds his career. Once he has established himself, there is no longer any realistic need for dependency, and the woman's neurotic necessity to perpetuate his anaclisis may cause divorce.

Ackerman emphasizes the factor of anxiety assuagement as a reason for getting married. The impotent man may marry a frigid woman to hide his

deficiency. If either partner becomes more desirous of sexual activity, the neurotic equilibrium is disrupted, and marital discord becomes manifest.

Unfortunately divorce is rarely a solution to the damage and frustration caused by neurotic interaction in marriage. As Bergler says, “Since the neurotic is unconsciously always on the lookout for his complementary type, the chances of finding happiness in the next marriage are exactly zero. . . . The second, third, and nth marriages are but repetitions of the previous experience.” Monahan concluded that second marriages are twice as likely to break up as first marriages, and that those who marry a third time are accepting an even greater risk. Specifically, if both spouses have been divorced two times or more, the probability of another failure is nearly five times greater than that for a first marriage.

The dire statistical projections of Bergler and Monahan are not open to dispute. Bernard, however, presents a more optimistic outlook by suggesting that most first marriages lead to divorce not so much from neurotic factors but because of normal maladjustments and inexperience. “The experience of an unhappy first marriage, although it may constitute a high tuition fee, may nevertheless serve as a valuable educational prerequisite to a successful second marriage.” Bernard does concur, however, with the finding that second marriages are 50 percent more likely to fail than first marriages. In Goode’s study of remarried mothers 87 percent described their second

marriages as much better than their first. Such statements cannot, however, be taken as satisfactory evidence of better second marriages. Having failed in one marriage, these mothers are less likely to admit failure in a second—even to themselves.

Despite encouraging signs, it appears that the same neurotic needs that drive a person into his first unfortunate marital relationship remain to influence his future attempts. As a psychiatrist I would like to believe that treatment can lessen the likelihood of divorce in subsequent marriages, but I have not been able to find any studies that satisfactorily confirm or deny the efficacy of therapy in this regard.

Consulting with Patients Contemplating Divorce

Since omniscience is a prerequisite for predicting whether a particular patient will be better off married or divorced, it behooves the therapist to maintain a strictly neutral position regarding the question.

Generally, when the question of divorce arises, the therapist's efforts should be directed toward clarifying the issues and alleviating pathological behavior so that the patient may make healthier and more prudent choices. In all events the decision to divorce must be the patient's. He must feel that he took the risk on his own, that no one but himself is to blame if his decision turns out to be an unfortunate one, and that there is no one else to thank if his choice proves to be a judicious one.

The experienced therapist who speaks proudly of never having had a divorce in his practice is probably pressuring some of his patients into remaining married when both partners would be better off divorced. The therapist with a high frequency of divorces should consider the possibility that he may be inappropriately encouraging divorce when a more conscientious effort at working through the difficulties might have been preferable. When a therapist applies such inadvisable pressures, his own marital history often plays a role. If his own divorce resulted in a significant improvement in his life, he may tend to overstress the values of separation. If his own marriage is gratifying, he may strongly encourage working through

when separation might be the more therapeutic course. And the therapist who has never been married, whatever his assets, is compromised in his ability to appreciate fully the problems and conflicts of marriage.

Therapeutic consultations regarding divorce fall into three major categories: (1) those in which a couple enters therapy with the express purpose of averting an impending divorce; (2) those in which a patient already in therapy finds himself facing a decision regarding divorce; and (3) those in which one partner only presents himself in order to forestall or work through the problems of an impending divorce.

I agree with Whitaker and Miller that the ideal counseling situation is one in which the marital partners are seen conjointly by a therapist who has had no previous therapeutic experience with either partner. These circumstances facilitate the impartiality that is vital to such counseling. Not only does conjoint therapy allow the therapist to hear both sides of the story; it also permits him to observe the interaction between the couple. Further, if the outcome of the consultations is maintenance of the marriage, then the partners have had an experience in mutual inquiry that should serve them in good stead in their future relationship. If they decide to divorce, their sessions should leave them clearer about their reasons for separation. What they have learned may even help each avoid another unsatisfactory marriage.

In working with such couples the therapist must side only with health, supporting healthy and appropriate positions and discouraging pathological and inappropriate behavior, regardless of who professes it. If he acts as a benevolent participant observer, there is less likelihood that either spouse will accuse him of favoring the other even though in any given session one may get more criticism than the other.

The therapist must resist either partner's attempts to use him as a tool in neurotic manipulations. The husband, for example, may try to enlist the therapist's support in influencing his wife to stay with the marriage when she is strongly inclined to terminate it. The wife may attempt to get the therapist to pressure her husband into drinking less or spending more time at home when he has little real motivation to do so.

Even if the therapist maintains the most careful neutrality, motives will be imputed to the therapist that are really the projections of his patients. The wife, for example, may believe that the decision to divorce was encouraged by the therapist because she needs support and agreement for such an independent step. The husband may consider the therapist's failure to condemn his infidelity as sanction.

When a couple seeks consultation to avert divorce, they often claim that they want to stay together "for the sake of the children," an attitude that has

both realistic and pathological elements. Studies suggest that *on the whole* there is less psychiatric disturbance in children from broken homes than in those from intact but unhappy homes. Nevertheless, one still cannot predict which will be the better situation for any given child. The realistic argument, therefore, that the spouses should remain together for the children is suspect; and I generally make it clear that one cannot know in advance whether or not the children will be better off.

Professions of concern for the children are often only rationalizations to buttress neurotic interactions. Sadomasochistic, overprotective, overdependent, symbiotic, or other pathological relationships may be serving as the basis of the marriage. The therapist should, insofar as it is possible, clarify these underlying issues for the couple while playing down the falsely benevolent considerations regarding the children's welfare.

Whitaker and Miller further recommend including the couple's parents and children in the consultations. I have done this occasionally and found it helpful. Information is often obtained that would not otherwise become available. Certain issues, however, are more justifiably discussed in the more intimate interviews with the couple alone.

Individual therapy with married patients presents special problems when the possibility of divorce arises. If therapeutic work with a married

patient is successful, his healthier adaptations may be most anxiety-provoking to his spouse. The latter may become frustrated attempting to maintain the pathological patterns of interaction. Sometimes the partner can form healthier patterns of relating, and the marriage may be continued along new lines. Often he cannot make these adjustments, and his only alternative is then to seek others who can provide him with the pathological gratifications that he craves. Therapy in such cases is, of course, instrumental in bringing about the divorce.

Even without healthier adaptations on the part of the patient in therapy, the intimacy that the therapist shares with the patient cannot help causing some feelings of alienation in the partner, and a marital schism may be widened as a result. In extreme cases the therapeutic relationship may precipitate divorce in a marriage that might otherwise have been realistically reconcilable.

The individual who presents himself for treatment because his spouse threatens divorce is a poor candidate for therapy. His motivation does not generally stem from an inner desire to change things within himself because of the personal pain his problems cause him. He comes, rather, with the hope of altering those aspects of his behavior that are alienating his spouse or with the intention of learning ways to manipulate his partner into staying.

Sometimes both partners are in therapy and one or both may refuse conjoint sessions because they would be in “foreign territory” with their spouse’s therapist. In such situations the couple is deprived of the benefits to be derived from the adjunctive joint sessions.

On occasion a patient may need the therapist’s meaningful involvement to make the divorce process more bearable. This need may, in fact, be a primary reason for entering therapy when separation impends, and it is particularly applicable to women who, in my experience, are more likely than men to institute divorce proceedings without being significantly involved with a third person. Sometimes a spouse who feels guilty about instituting the divorce may encourage treatment for the partner who is left behind in order to assuage his guilt over the “abandonment.” The same guilt-alleviating mechanism may be operative in the departing partner’s encouraging (either consciously or unconsciously) the remaining spouse to take a lover.

Therapeutic Implications of Divorce Litigation

In the United States most states adhere to the adversary system in divorce litigation. Divorce laws, therefore, are predicated upon concepts of guilt and innocence, punishment and restitution. The divorce is granted only when the complainant or petitioner has proven that he has been wronged or injured by the defendant or respondent. Acceptable grounds for divorce are narrowly defined and, depending on the state, include mental cruelty, adultery, abandonment, habitual drunkenness, and nonsupport. The law punishes the offending party by granting the divorce to the successful complainant. If the court finds both husband and wife guilty of marital wrongs, a divorce is usually denied. In actual practice, however, the attorneys negotiate a settlement that includes alimony, child support obligations, custody, and visitation privileges. Only a small percentage of divorce proceedings culminate in a contested trial.

Since the adversary system is antithetical in spirit to the mutually cooperative inquiry vital to successful joint therapy, such consultations are rarely successful once litigation has been instigated. The lawyer advises his client to withhold information that might endanger his legal position and to gather whatever data he can that might strengthen his case. Patients who are naive enough to think that anything therapeutically meaningful can be accomplished in such an atmosphere should not, in my opinion, be supported

in this delusion by the therapist. I only accept couples for conjoint therapy on the condition that therapy will continue only as long as neither partner instigates legal action.

When a spouse instigates legal proceedings, the intent may not always be clear and the motivation is often fragile. For these reasons the lawyer's usual practice of recommending reconciliation at his initial meeting with his prospective client may have untoward results. It may have taken the prospective client many years to take a healthy step toward divorce, and the lawyer's implied moral condemnation may serve to perpetuate a pathological situation. Others want to be told by an authoritative figure to work out their marital problems, and the lawyer's advice may help them proceed. Quite frequently the initial legal consultation is used by the spouse as a warning that the marriage has seriously deteriorated, and more constructive efforts on the part of both partners may result.

Once divorce litigation has begun, the woman, more usually, may try to involve the lawyer for other than legal reasons. This involvement, which doesn't necessarily include sex, may help the woman compensate for the loneliness and loss of self-esteem caused by the divorce. More pathologically she may be seeking a substitute neurotic tie to replace the one that is being severed. While every divorce lawyer has experience with these involvements, not all are aware of their psychological implications.

The therapist who must assume the role of King Solomon and offer recommendations about the custody of children is fortunate indeed when he meets parents who are genuinely seeking a solution that is best for the children. In practice, however, each parent usually pleads only his own cause, backed up by a lawyer who wants the psychiatrist's testimony only if it supports his client's case.

All too often custody discussions are distorted by exaggerated emotional claims by each parent—the child and his welfare are subordinated to the desire to wreak vengeance on the spouse by depriving him of a prized possession. Under such circumstances psychiatric evaluation is most difficult.

It is preferable, therefore, that custody consultations be conducted by one who has not been, and will not be, the therapist for any of the children involved. His decision cannot fail to alienate the parent who has "lost" the child in litigation, which, in turn, jeopardizes future therapy with the child. Any child's chances of being helped in therapy are markedly reduced if either of the parents is significantly hostile toward the therapist. The child senses his parent's antagonism toward his therapist (even when not overtly expressed) and is torn between the two—hardly a situation conducive to a good therapist-patient relationship. Divorced parents can have a good relationship with their child's therapist, but it is hardly possible if he has participated in the custody decision.

The Divorce Decision

Generally the decision to divorce takes months and years to mature, no matter how explosive the announcement itself may appear. The prospect of what divorce entails may be quite frightening, and it may safely be said that the divorce decision, tainted as it is by so many negative aspects, is much harder to arrive at than the original decision to marry. Inertia and the specters of loneliness and hardship plague both partners. Some may need a lover to help them bridge the gap. Ambivalent separations and reconciliations may be necessary, and the therapist must respect his patient's reactions, his need for desensitization and accommodation. Time itself can be very therapeutic, and it behooves the therapist not to pressure his patient into proceeding rapidly— even after the decision has been made and the divorce promises to be salutary.

Primarily because guilt is so pervasive at this point, the therapist is often asked "how to tell the children." I generally suggest that both parents together tell the children, describing the main issues in terms that are comprehensible to the child: "Mommy and Daddy don't love one another any more." "Daddy has had trouble drinking too much whiskey, and now Mommy is tired of his drinking and doesn't want to live with him any more." Withholding information is deleterious because it promotes an atmosphere of secrecy and dishonesty that the child senses and reacts to at a time when he

most needs a trusting relationship with his parents.

Specific details such as impotency, frigidity, and more extreme sexual problems need not be disclosed. The child may request information on such matters, and he may be told that just as he has certain matters that are private, so do his parents. The important thing is to encourage the parents to establish an atmosphere of open inquiry in which the child has the feeling that most of his questions will be answered. The child should, in fact, be encouraged to repeat his questions, for they are part of a process that is vital to his working through of the divorce.

Some parents hesitate to engage in open confrontations because they may get upset—a prospect they see as damaging to their children. On the contrary, such displays of emotion may be most salutary for they show the child acceptable ways to handle his own reactions. If parents aren't free enough to honestly express their emotional reactions, they can hardly expect their children to do so.

The Child's Psychological Reactions to Divorce

Since the divorce rate is highest in the first few years of marriage, the affected children tend to be young and, therefore, more vulnerable than older children to its deleterious effects. Bowlby's extensive review of the literature demonstrates that parental deprivation (especially maternal) is particularly conducive to the development of psychopathology and that the younger the child at the time of the abandonment the more severe the psychiatric disorder. Symptoms indicative of deprivation in the infant include loss of appetite, depression, lack of responsivity, and in the extreme, marasmus and death. In the older child, the reactions run the gamut of psychiatric disorders. It may be difficult to separate the effects of the divorce from those of the traumas and prolonged strains that have preceded it. The divorce can even be salutary for the child because it ends the years of bickering and misery that have contributed to his psychological disturbance.

When the child first learns about the divorce, he may respond with denial. Some children will react so calmly to the announcement of their parent's forthcoming departure that the parent may seriously question his child's affection and involvement. Even after the parent has left, and the child has been repeatedly and painstakingly told about the separation, he may quietly ask when the parent will return or why he hasn't yet come back. Or the child may intellectually accept the fact of the divorce but go through his

daily routines as if there were absolutely no change in his household. Such a child is repressing the inevitable emotional reactions that are evoked by the divorce, and his repression may be consciously or unconsciously sanctioned by the parents. Stoic advice such as “Be brave” and “Big boys and girls don’t cry” may bolster the child’s repression of his emotional reactions. The parents’ decision not to express their own feelings in front of the children is another way in which the denial and repression reactions can be fostered.

Encouraging the child to express his grief is a far healthier reaction. It allows a piecemeal desensitization to the trauma. Play is an excellent medium through which some children can work through their grief reactions—in or out of the therapeutic situation.

Children may also react to the divorce with symptoms of depression, withdrawal, apathy, insomnia, and anorexia. About one-third of the children of divorce studied by McDermott were depressed and many exhibited accident prone behavior, unconcern with their safety, and suicidal fantasies. The depression is not simply reactive in many cases. Hostility redirected from the parents to the child himself and the feelings of self-loathing that the child feels because of what he considers to be an abandonment may contribute to the depression. The depression generally lasts about six to eight weeks.

Some children regress in an attempt to get more attention in

compensation for that which has been lost. Overprotective parents and those who attempt to assuage the guilt they feel over the divorce by indulging the child may foster this adaptation.

Occasionally a child will run away from home—usually in an attempt to rejoin the departed parent. The enhanced attention that the act generates may also be a motivating factor. In addition, the hostile impulses that the child harbors toward the parents for the divorce can be gratified by his awareness of the worry and frustration that his absence causes them.

In working with such children it is important to help them accept their angry feelings so as to lessen the likelihood that it will be discharged through neurotic channels. It is also necessary to help them express their anger in constructive ways—ways that will help rectify the situations that are generating it.

Acting out the anger in an antisocial fashion is common. The divorce may leave the child weak and vulnerable, and he may gain compensatory power through his violent actions. Observing his parents to be so flagrantly hostile to one another and so insensitive to each other's feelings may contribute to the superego deficiency that permits guiltless acting out. It is not surprising then that a number of studies reveal a relationship between juvenile delinquency and divorce.

The child may feel guilty and consider the divorce to have been his fault. He may believe that the departing parent can no longer stand his "badness" or that he has been too much of a financial burden. Often comments that the parents may have made during their altercations may be taken by the child as verifications of these ideas. Such guilt is complex. It may be related to oedipal problems. The boy may feel that his father's departure was caused by his own conscious or unconscious wishes. Girls may experience similar guilt when it is the mother who leaves. The guilt reaction is often related to the child's desire to gain control over this chaotic event in his life. Control is implied in the notion, "It's my fault." The child may reason: "If they got divorced because I was bad, maybe they'll get married again if I'm good." The hostility the child feels toward the parents for having divorced may also contribute to his guilt feelings. Whatever the psychodynamics, to reassure the child that the divorce was not his fault is misguided; the fundamental issues that have brought about the guilt must be dealt with if it is to be alleviated.

On rare occasion the child may have contributed to the divorce. He may have been unwanted or he may suffer from a severe illness and the departing parent is unwilling to assume the burdens of his upbringing. Such children must be helped to appreciate that the real defect lies less within them and more with the parent who has left.

Anger is an inevitable reaction and it may be handled by a variety of

mechanisms. Denial of it is common. The child has already lost one parent; he fears doing anything that might alienate the other. Some direct their anger toward the parent with whom they live, since the absent parent is not so readily available. Often the person who first instigated the divorce becomes the primary target—no matter how justified the initiation of divorce proceedings may have been. Other children have temper tantrums. Some may utilize compulsive rituals for the symbolic discharge of hostility; others project their anger and then see themselves as innocently suffering at the hands of malevolent figures. Nightmares are a common manifestation of the repressed hostility. Some handle their anger through reaction formation: they become excessively concerned for the welfare of one or both parents and fear that they will be sick, injured, or killed. Some harbor the notion that their angry thoughts may harm the parent, and this produces guilt and fear.

Parental duplicity, often well-intentioned, may complicate the child's life. He may become confused over contradictions between what his parents say about their affection for him and how they act toward him. Father, he is told, still loves him although he never visits or sends support money. Mother is said to love him, yet she spends many nights and weekends away with strange men. His parents may adhere to the dictum that they should not speak unfavorably of one another to the child —lest his respect for the criticized parent be compromised. Here again confusion is engendered: the child can only ask, "If he was so perfect, why did you divorce him?" Such

parental dishonesty (no matter how well-intentioned) can only create in the child distrust of his parents and confusion about what love is.

The child must be helped to perceive his parents as accurately as possible—as people with both assets and liabilities. This will lessen the likelihood that he will have unrealistic goals in his own marriage, and it will increase his chances of more realistic expectations from all people whom he encounters. In addition, he must be helped to appreciate that if there are deficiencies in the affection of one or both parents for him, this does not mean that he is unlovable. It means only that there is something wrong with a parent who cannot love his own child; and there is no reason why the child cannot obtain the love of others both in the present and future.

Many factors may contribute to the feelings of inadequacy that children of divorce almost invariably suffer. The child may consider the "abandonment" as proof that he is unworthy. He may feel that the parent with whom he has been left is as equally worthy of rejection as himself, further deepening his insecurity. The divorce produces a basic feeling of the instability of human relationships. If one parent can leave him, what is to stop the second from doing so as well? If his mother and father (whom he once considered to be omnipotent) cannot solve their problems, the world must be a shaky place indeed. If his mother, for example, can get rid of his father so easily, what is to stop her from getting rid of him with equal impunity? The

parent with whom the child lives may attempt to make the child a confidant or force him to participate in decisions that he is ill-equipped to make. Although some children rise to the occasion and assume a maturity beyond their years, most become even more insecure as they observe themselves incapable of meeting the demands made upon them—demands that they may feel they should be capable of meeting. The parent with whom the child lives may become increasingly resentful of the child because of the greater responsibilities and restrictions placed upon him. This parent, in addition, may displace hostility toward the absent ex-spouse onto the child. Being the object of such hostility increases the child's feelings of worthlessness.

Some children develop severe separation anxieties. As mentioned above, having lost one parent they fear the other will leave as well. When the separation anxiety becomes severe (such as when a school phobia develops), other factors such as unconscious hostility and death wishes are usually operating. The child needs to be constantly by the side of his parent to be reassured that his death wishes have not been realized. Such anxieties over hostility may contribute to the formation of other phobic symptoms such as exaggerated fear of dogs, injections, or heights.

After death the absent parent is usually idealized; after divorce there may be an opposite tendency to devalue the parent who is no longer in the household. In either case exaggerations distort the child's view of his parent,

and healthy identification is thereby impaired. The child of divorced parents has fewer opportunities to use reality testing to correct the misconceptions he may have about his absent parent. He may devalue the parent who has gone in order to protect himself from the painful feelings of having been abandoned. It is as if he were saying to himself: “No great loss. He wasn’t such a good person anyway.” Although he may derive some specious solace from this defense mechanism, its utilization deprives him of a model for emulation, identification, and superego formation. Excessive idealization is also common. Often it serves as reaction formation to the feelings of hate and detestation the child has toward the parent who has left. To admit these feelings might expose the child to guilt and self-loathing. Such idealization also hinders the formation of valid identifications.

Children whose parents are divorced are quite prone to the development of oedipal difficulties. The child may try to take over the role of the absent parent—especially when the child is the same sex as the departed parent. Such an adaptation may be encouraged by a seductive parent. The child, however, is seldom mature enough to assume the awesome responsibilities inherent in this attempt, and it may therefore entail significant anxiety. Such parental seduction need not serve sexual purposes. A mother, by getting her son to act like his departed father, may more readily justify the use of him as a scapegoat upon whom she can vent the rage she feels toward her former husband.'" A female child, sensing her mother’s

continuing attachment to the absent father, may assume a male identity in order to insure her mother's affection. A male child, without a father to identify with, may also develop homosexual tendencies. These and other pathological oedipal resolutions are discussed by Mahler and Neubauer.

In some communities the child of divorced parents may be stigmatized. But even when this does not occur, he invariably feels different. Others live with two parents while he lives with only one. He may become ashamed to bring other children home and may even try to conceal the divorce from his friends. Hiding the fact of the divorce produces a continual fear of disclosure that only increases his difficulties. This duplicity also adds to the child's feelings of low self-regard. Children in nonbroken homes may feel threatened by the divorce of their neighbor and may reject the child of divorce. Or they may obsessively question the child about the details of his parents' divorce because the acquisition of such facts can be anxiety-alleviating to them.

If the divorced parents are still fighting, the child may take advantage of their discord and try to play one against the other for his own gain. He may recognize that by fomenting their conflict, he is sustaining their relationship. Although the interaction is malevolent, it is better, as he sees it, than no relationship between them at all.

Some children become obsessed with effecting a reconciliation, and they

may persist in this futile endeavor for years. When this occurs it usually reflects a failure by the child to obtain substitute relationships to compensate for the loss of the parent. This capacity, which is vital to the child's healthy adjustment to the divorce, reaches its extreme form when the child uses peers as parental surrogates. Freud and Burlingham described this phenomena with English war orphans in World War II It is an adaptation that is a true testament to the adaptability of the human psyche.

Rarely the child's reaction to the divorce is so severe that he exhibits psychotic decompensation—manifested by vague wandering, severe regression, detachment, and soiling. The child who reacts in this manner, however, has probably suffered from significant psychopathology prior to the separation, and the divorce was probably the precipitating trauma.

With divorce practical problems arise that may not necessarily be related to any pathological processes in the child. He may come to view his visiting father as the "good guy" whose main purpose is to provide entertainment and his mother as "mean" because she always seems to be the one imposing restrictions on him. Because the child has already been traumatized, the parent may be hesitant to apply reasonable restrictions. The visitations may become a chore for both the father and child as each feels compelled to live up to the full allowance of time together as stipulated in the divorce contract. Actually both would be far better off if all would agree to a

more flexible schedule in which the child could choose to skip an occasional visit, or to shorten the visit, or to bring a friend. Also it is not necessary that all siblings visit simultaneously. These arrangements can diminish the pressures on both the child and the visiting parent and insure more gratifying experiences on visitation days.

If the mother works, the child may exhibit angry and depressive reactions—especially if she has never worked before. Such absences can impose upon the child new jobs and responsibilities that he may resent, particularly if he must forego recreational activities that his peers have time to enjoy. These responsibilities can be maturing and ego-enhancing. Some children rise to the occasion, and the sense of mastery and accomplishment that they may enjoy from their new-found obligations can be salutary. Others, however, regress in the face of these new duties.

The parents' dating may arouse in the child reactions such as confusion, jealousy, anger, or denial. He may, on the one hand, try to get rid of each new date for fear that his privileged position with the parent with whom he lives will be jeopardized. On the other hand, he may approach each new date with a question about his marital intentions—much to the embarrassment of all adults concerned. A common reaction involves displacing the hostility that the child feels toward the absent parent onto the date. On the positive side a new date, or friend of the parent, is a potential stepparent and—proverbial

stepparent hostility notwithstanding—can provide the child with a meaningful substitute relationship for the lost parent. The child who is jealous of his parent's new relationship should be reminded that the stepparent may once again make his home complete and provide him with vital gratifications. In addition, he should be told that if his divorced parent is happier through the new marital tie, he, too, will benefit through the happier state his parent is in. I have discussed these and some of the other more practical problems that children of divorce must deal with in a book written specifically to be read by children—either alone or along with a parent.

Most children whose parents divorce are not in need of therapy. Although it is a traumatic experience, judicious and humane handling should enable most children to adjust adequately enough to avoid therapeutic intervention. Those who do require therapy, in my opinion, generally have had problems before and the divorce has served merely as a precipitating event. Westman's study reveals that those in treatment came primarily from homes in which there was a pathological postdivorce interaction or where there was total abandonment. On occasion a parent may bring the child to the therapist—not so much because he believes the child to be in need of treatment (although he may rationalize the necessity), but because he feels very guilty over his having left the child. By placing him in the hands of a therapist he hopes to lessen his guilt and insure that no further damage will be done. Putting the child in "good hands" also serves the parent's purpose of

getting someone else to undo the psychological damage that he has done—either in reality or in fantasy.

Although many of the specific recommendations made in this chapter may be helpful, time itself is a potent healer—the child does not seem to be able to dwell long on calamities. One of the dangers, however, that the divorce holds for the child is that he will generalize from his experiences with his parents and when older will eschew marriage entirely because his view of the marital state is one of unpredictability, unreliability, and intense psychic trauma. Another danger is that he will reproduce in his own marriage the same pathological interactions that his parents have exhibited.

Postdivorce Pathological Interaction between Parents

Many couples, following the issuance of the divorce decree, remain bound together in neurotic ties that may persist for a lifetime. Even the remarriage of one or both may not break this pathological tie. The continuance of the malevolent relationship may become the primary obsession of each parent and have its toll on the children as well as subsequent spouses. About half of the 425 divorcees studied by Goode either wished to punish or remarry their former husbands. Most therapists agree that the ideal to be attained is that the divorce be able to relate to the former spouse without significant neurotic involvement in those areas that still require mutual cooperation. Generally this involves the children, but on occasion professional and social contacts may also be necessary.

The one who has been left often considers the rejection a severe insult to his self-esteem. He or she may press for reunion, not so much out of love but in the misguided attempt to repair the ego defect that the abandonment has caused.

Each may become excessively involved with the child of the opposite sex, who may come to symbolize the absent spouse. Oversolicitous attitudes, indulgence, seductivity, and overprotection are manifestations of this adaptation, which may be a feeble attempt to gain love in compensation for that which has been lost. The parents may vie with one another to gain the

preference of the child. (This is not only an attempt to make up for the feelings of being unloved that the divorce may have engendered but has hostile implications as well.)

The children may be used in many other ways as pawns in the parental conflict. The mother may express her hostility toward the father by refusing to let him see the children despite his legal right to do so. (He may then have to resort to litigation in order to see them—at no small expenditure of time, money, and energy.) Or, more passive-aggressively, she may structure the children's preparations for his visit in a way that frequently results in their being late. She may "forget" what day it is and not have them home when the father arrives to pick them up. The father may express his hostility by withholding funds, not showing up for the children after the mother has planned her day around their absence, or returning them at other than the arranged for times. The father may withhold support or alimony payments—often forcing his ex-wife into expensive and time-consuming litigation. In such cases the courts may be used as the weapons with which the parents continue their battles.

The child may be used as an informer to acquire information for parental neurotic gratification, or for the purpose of litigation. Such a child is placed in a terrible bind. Cooperating with his parents in these maneuvers produces guilt over his disloyalty. By refusing to "spy" and be a "tattletale,"

the child risks rejection at a time when he is extremely vulnerable. Worst of all, even the parent who encourages him to provide information cannot but distrust him—because he has already proven himself an informer.

The child may have to endure for years the parents' derogation of each other. Valid criticisms of one parent by the other can help the child gain a more accurate picture of his parents that can serve him well in the formation of future relationships. More often, however, he is exposed to diatribes, seething rage, and criticisms of such distortion that he becomes confused and his relationship with the vilified parent is undermined.

Vituperation and vengeance may become the way of life. There are women who claim they will not remarry because to do so would result in their having to give up the gratification they derive from knowing how much of a burden the alimony payments are to their former husbands. This is really another way of saying that the gratifications of the malevolent involvement with the former husband are more meaningful than a possibly more benevolent relationship with another man.

The therapist who treats a divorced person involved in such a tragic and wasteful struggle does his patient a great service indeed if he can help bring about its cessation. He must be aware that his patient's perception of the former spouse may be distorted; he should not take at face value all the

criticisms that are presented to him; and he must try to help his patient look into his own contributions to the maintenance of the malevolent relationship. Some divorced patients try to elicit the pity of others as they bemoan their fates. The recitation of woes may, in fact, become their primary mode of relating. The therapist does his patient a disservice if he gets caught up in pitying his patient's plight rather than encouraging more constructive adaptations. The patient may have to be encouraged to consciously restrain himself from vengeful acts not only for the sake of the children but as a step toward extracting himself from the conflict. He must be helped to see that the mature and ultimately the most beneficial response to provocation is not necessarily retaliation. When father doesn't send support and alimony, mother need not retaliate by withholding the children from visitation. She may do her children and herself a greater service by earning her own money and resigning herself to the fact the funds will not be forthcoming. She may then be poorer, but she will not be expending her energies in futile endeavors or allowing herself to be tantalized.

The parent must be helped to appreciate that the most effective defense against the ex-spouse's vilification of him to the child is not to react in kind, or to point out the absurdities in each of the criticisms, but rather to exhibit behavior that appropriately engenders genuine respect and admiration in the child. Trying to present a perfect image to the child is also an ineffective way of countering the former spouse's slanderous remarks. Admitting one's

weaknesses, when appropriate, is the more courageous course and is more likely to enhance the child's respect. Treatment of such patients also involves helping them come to terms with their new way of life, and the new kinds of relationships they will have to form— both with their former friends as well as their new-found ones.

Psychological Problems of the Divorced Mother

The divorced woman, feeling that she has been a failure as a wife, may try to compensate by proving herself a supercompetent mother. She may become overprotective of her children, and they may become the main focus of her life. Such involvement may also provide her with a rationalization for removing herself from adults. Hostility toward her ex-husband may be displaced onto her children, especially the male child whose rejection may even result in his being sent to a foster home or boarding school. Or the children may become more nonspecific scapegoats for the resentments and frustrations her new situation engenders in her.

For the first time in her life she may have to take a job. Guilt over exposing the children to further parental deprivation is common, and the frustrations of this added burden produce even further resentment and unhappiness.

The divorcee is usually faced with many sexual difficulties. Many men see her as easy prey, and wives may be threatened that she will be a lure to their husbands. Dating may present her with many difficulties. What will be the effects on her children of their seeing each new date? Will it raise up and then dash their hopes for her remarriage? If a man friend sleeps over, how will this affect her children and her reputation in the neighborhood? In some eases having a man sleep over may provide a litigious and vengeful ex-

husband with grounds for having her declared unfit as a mother and thereby deprived of the custody of her children. Some may hide their dating from their children in order to protect themselves from the hostility that dating causes in the youngsters. Others may use the children's hostility as a rationalization for not dating at all.

Her whole way of life and her concept of herself must be altered. With her married friends she may feel out of place—like a "fifth wheel." She may now find herself more comfortable with divorced men and women. Forming new relationships and altering her whole *modus vivendi* in the middle of her life is a difficult task indeed.

Psychological Problems of the Divorced Father

The father, too, usually has to adjust to a whole new way of life. His may be the lonelier existence. His separation from his children may be particularly painful and guilt-evoking. The divorce may bring home to him for the first time just how important his children were to him. He may get feelings that he is superfluous to them. He is now deprived of involving himself in many important decisions regarding his own children: schooling, medical care, and others that are vital to the child's welfare. He can only see his children by appointment under strict regulations defined in the divorce decree.

The visitations often present problems. Some fathers indulge the children in order to assuage the guilt they feel over having left them. Others do this to compete with their ex-spouses for the children's affection. The father may be hesitant to discipline appropriately lest the child become even more resentful. The days spent together are often contrived—fun and entertainment become forced and are considered to be the only acceptable activities on the agenda. Such fathers would do far better for themselves and their children if they would try to spend the day more naturally, combining both the usual day-to-day activities and the recreational ones. Relating to the child in activities that are *mutually* meaningful can be salutary. Many fathers primarily take the child's wishes into consideration when planning the visitation. The resentment they thereby feel when engaging in an activity that

is boring or only tolerated cannot but be felt by the child, and so he is robbed of the enjoyment. Some fathers concentrate on spectator entertainment as a way of avoiding more directly relating to the child. Some will bring the child along on business while deluding himself into thinking that he is involving himself in a meaningful way. Most often the child is bored and resentful, but may fear expressing his feelings. Some are ashamed to bring their children to their new dwelling because it may compare so unfavorably with the old. When remarried the visitation with the children often is resented by the new wife, and the father may be placed in a difficult bind.

The father with custody may feel quite resentful of his extra responsibilities and vent his hostility on the child. The father who uses the child as a weapon against his former wife, or who withholds the child's support payments in an ongoing postdivorce battle, may compromise his feelings of self-worth—vengeful gratifications notwithstanding.

Concluding Comments

The question of prevention of divorce cannot be discussed without prior consideration of the whole issue of marriage: how satisfactory an arrangement it really is and how suited it is to men's and women's personality structures. Now, as in the past, we are experimenting with new arrangements. Perhaps the whole concept will be discarded, and then, of course, this discussion of divorce will be of only historical interest to future readers. If Kardiner is correct in believing that humankind has already experimented many times over with all possible arrangements and monogamy still proves itself to be most consistent with his needs, then changes will certainly have to be made if the institution is to be improved or, as some might say, salvaged.

The trend among young people today to live with one another prior to marriage may ultimately play a role in lessening the divorce rate. The element of unfamiliarity that contributes to many divorces is thereby obviated. Greater sexual freedom, increasing availability of abortion, and lessened stigma over unwed motherhood may also lessen the number of poor marital relationships that will end in divorce. Young people today profess more vociferously than their predecessors concern with basic reality elements in society. "Tell it like it is" has become their byword. If, indeed, this trend proves to bring people into closer contact with reality, it may play a role in

lessening man's predilection to utilize the kinds of denial and excessive euphoric fantasy formation seen in romantic love and to hold unrealistic expectations about others. Such developments, if they come to pass, may also increase the likelihood of more satisfactory marriages. It is to be hoped that education, and the beneficial effects that psychiatric understanding will ultimately provide society, may also be conducive to happiness in human interaction—be it in the married or nonmarried state.

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