Mate Expulsion

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Marital Satisfaction

Marriage is considered a reproductive union where love is pursued between two individuals. It is seen in every culture around the world (Brown 1991; Buss 1985; Buss and Schmitt 1993; Epstein and Guttman 1984; Shackelford and Buss 1997; Vandenberg 1972). This marital union is a complex state where two individuals tend to share space and begin to have one common life. Also, couples that are satisfied tend to stay together. Shackelford and Buss (1997) report that marital satisfaction is an adaptive function designed to help individuals determine if their relationship is a long-term relationship that should continue. Several factors influence marital satisfaction. From an evolutionary perspective, mate value discrepancies, infidelity, personality attributes, some mate guarding tactics, and abuse affect marital satisfaction (Shackelford and Buss 1997). Also, men’s marital satisfaction is influenced by their partner’s attractiveness. Meltzer et al. (2014) report that men with attractive wives have higher marital satisfaction. When couples are dissatisfied, mate expulsion often occurs. For married couples, mate expulsion often takes the form of divorce. Divorce is largely universal, occurring in both industrialized and non-industrialized cultures (Betzig 1989; Marlowe 2010; Anderson et al. 2011). But, mate expulsion can also occur for non-married couples. That mate expulsion takes the form of a breakup since there is no union that has to be legally dissolved.

Frequency of Divorce and Breakups

Mate expulsion in the form of divorce in the USA occurs in 70% of marital relationships (Shackelford 2001). The divorce rate is so high because mate expulsion is adaptive. Mate expulsion allows a couple to end a relationship where the costs exceed the benefits and find a relationship with a different partner that provides more benefits than costs rather than worry about the reputational costs that may be associated with staying in a bad relationship and committing infidelity. This allows individuals to maximize their fitness (Shackelford and Buss 1997). There are sex differences in decisions to divorce also. Since women bear more biological costs in relationships and are choosier with respect to selecting mates (Bailey et al. 1994; Buss 2003), women are more likely to initiate a divorce (Brinig and Allen 2000).

Mate expulsion in non-marital relationships is also very common (Battaglia et al. 1998), and consistent with evolutionary theory, women are
more likely to initiate the mate expulsion (DeLecce and Weisfeld 2016).

Infidelity and Mate Expulsion

Jealousy within a couple can be a potent indicator of dissatisfaction with the relationship. Men tend to be jealous and worry about their partners committing sexual infidelity, while women tend to be jealous and worry about a partner’s commission of emotional infidelity (Buss et al. 1992). Not surprisingly, infidelity in married couples is a leading contributor to divorce (Amato and Previti 2003; Scott et al. 2013). This occurs because our evolved sex differences in mating and parental investment are evoked which leads to becoming distraught over different forms of infidelity (Buss et al. 1992; Tagler and Jeffers 2013).

Emotional and Sexual Infidelity

Since women are the choosier sex because they need a higher parental investment from men (Trivers 1972), women tend to seek men who are good financial providers, stable, and emotionally supportive (Buss 1989; Li et al. 2002). So, women are more upset over a partner’s commission of emotional infidelity (Wiederman and Kendall 1999) as a male’s emotional connection with another woman can lead to a loss of resources and stability from the said male partner (Shackelford et al. 2002).

Since men invest primarily at the genetic level and worry about paternity certainty (Trivers 1972), men are more upset by a partner’s commission of sexual infidelity. Female sexual infidelity can lead to a man being cuckolded and the maximization of another man’s fitness. A partner’s commission of these respective types of infidelity can lead to mate expulsion also.

Forgiveness, or Mate Expulsion

Depending on the type of infidelity committed by a partner, forgiveness or mate expulsion can occur. Since men are more upset by a partner’s commission of sexual infidelity, men find it more difficult to forgive their partner if their partner committed sexual infidelity and are more likely to expel their mate for committing sexual infidelity rather than for committing emotional infidelity. Because a partner’s commission of emotional infidelity is more upsetting to women, women find it harder to forgive a partner for committing emotional infidelity and are more likely to expel a mate if the mate committed emotional infidelity rather than if the mate committed sexual infidelity (Shackelford et al. 2002).

Access

Emotional and Sexual Access

Emotional and sexual access each play a role in mate selection. Men seek and desire female partners who are willing to have sex with them (Buss 1989; Buss and Schmitt 1993). Thus, Buckle et al. (1996) and Betzig (1989) report that men place a premium on a woman’s capacity to reproduce. Consistent with this, Shackelford and Buss (1997) report that competition among men for sexual access to reproductively valuable women is more intense than competition among women for reproductively valuable men. Therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, Sprecher and Cate (2004) report that men are less satisfied overall when their wives are sexually withholding. Similarly, Buss (1989) reports that men report the greatest anger and upset over women who accepted resources from them but did not provide sexual access in return. Consistent with this, Felmlee et al. (1990) report that sexual intimacy is a positive predictor of relationship steadiness. Further support for the importance of sexual access is the fact that marriages that involve successful reproduction are more likely to continue (Becker et al. 1977; Waite and Lilliard 1991), and some societies allow mate expulsion, that is, divorce, on the basis of a partner’s refusal to have sex (Betzig 1989).

Women typically desire a long-term commitment from a male partner, and commitment is a product of emotional involvement (Buss et al. 1992). So, women seek and desire men who are willing to share their feelings/show they care or are committed, i.e., they are emotionally accessible. Since sexual and emotional accessibility are
important for men and women, respectively, these factors should play a role in mate expulsion decisions.

Wade and Brown (2012), using scalar measures, found that women were most likely to expel their mates when their partner was emotionally inaccessible 90%, 80%, 70%, and 60% of the time, and men were more likely to expel their mates when their mates were sexually inaccessible 60% of the time. Similarly, Wade and Mogilski (2013) examined the role of sexual and emotional access in mate expulsion using conjoint analysis and report that men are most likely to expel a mate when there is a low level of sexual access and women are most likely to expel a mate when there is a low level of emotional access; and overall, sexual access is more important for men’s mate expulsion decisions than for women’s mate expulsion decisions and emotional access is more important for women’s mate expulsions decisions than for men’s mate expulsion decisions.

Sexual Conflict

Frequency of Sex and Sexual Satisfaction
Sexuality in personal relationships results from an underlying motivation to maximize the transmission of one’s genes to succeeding generations (Sprecher and Cate 2004). Thus, Americans consider sex an essential element of relational intimacy that is crucial for ensuring longevity (Michael et al. 1994; Rubin 1990). Thus, sexual intercourse is extremely important. Engaging in sexual intercourse has a significant and positive effect on relationship stability (Simpson 1987). Consequently, as Elliott and Umberson (2008) report, sexual activity in the context of long-term heterosexual relationships may be an important site of relationship vitality and conflict. Sexual frequency is also important. Call et al. (1995) report that a higher frequency of sex is associated with a happier marriage, and happier marriages are less likely to lead to mate expulsion. Furthermore, Sprecher and Cate (2004) report that large discrepancies between the desired and actual frequency of sex are associated with lower relationship satisfaction, and Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) report that this applies to all couples. Similarly, Hunt (1974), Laumann et al. (1994), and Trussell and Westoff (1980) report that couples who have a higher frequency of sex are more sexually satisfied. Thus, sexual satisfaction is also important. Sprecher and Cate (2004) point out that when individuals are satisfied sexually within their relationships, the relationships are more likely to be committed and to continue. Mate expulsion should be less likely when couples are sexually satisfied, i.e., when there is no sexual conflict.

Most individuals in committed relationships are sexually satisfied. Laumann et al. (1994) report that 88% of married respondents report being extremely physically pleased in their relationships. Similarly, Greeley (1991) reports that one third of respondents report a very great deal of satisfaction from their sexual relationships. Both dating and married couples who are sexually satisfied also report high levels of overall satisfaction with their relationships (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Byers et al. 1998; Cupach and Comstock 1990; Davies et al. 1999; Edwards and Booth 1994; Henderson-King and Veroff 1994; Sprecher 2002). Additionally, White and Keith (1990) report that sexual problems or dissatisfaction at one point in marriage are positively associated with the likelihood of divorce later. Similarly, Long et al. (1996) report that sexual conflict is negatively related to sexual and relationship satisfaction. Love, commitment, and the likelihood that a relationship will last are also positively associated with sexual satisfaction (Aron and Henkemeyer 1995; Grote and Frieze 1998; Pinney et al. 1987; Sprecher 2002; Sprecher et al. 1995; Sprecher and Regan 1998; Waite and Joyner 2001; Yela 2000). Not surprisingly, then, changes in sexual satisfaction lead to changes in relationship satisfaction (Sprecher and Cate 2004) which then can lead to mate expulsion.

References

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