

The effects of unresolved conflict on the longevity of a marital relationship



Longitudinal studies on the early years of marriage report that marital satisfaction declines and conflict increases within the first 6 years of marriage, with the greatest drop occurring in the first 2 years. (Huston & Houts, 2001) While commitment and communication are major things that contribute to this decline; it is not everything. Research has found another critical variable in the course of marital satisfaction is the occurrence of conflict. Conflict is inevitable in any intimate relationship.

How it affects satisfaction depends on the extent to which couples engage in conflict or withdraw from it. There are usually short-term negative effects to engaging in conflict, but there are also long-term positive effects. If conflict is not openly addressed, but avoided, many issues can be left unresolved. This will further, fuel feelings of resentment and anger. Another major issue is when spouses bring unresolved conflict into their marriage from the past, there is reported a low marital satisfaction. Often, these couples lack the motivation and necessary skill to engage in the kinds of relationship maintenance behaviors that cultivate high levels of contentment.

For example, these couples often struggle with accommodating the other during conflict, managing jealousy, and being willing to sacrifice. Thus, unresolved conflict has a major impact on the longevity of a marriage. According to the December 2009 statistics from the US Census Bureau, there are about 2. million married people in the United States (Wood, L, 2010).

That number is not small; it shows how important marriage is in our society. God designed the marriage to be an expression of deep and pleasurable intimacy revealing the unity that exists within; thus, an extension of God

Himself. Although, it??? s God??? s idea for marriage to be a happy harmony between husband and wife, that is not always the case. When two separate individuals get together, conflict at some point in time, is bound to manifest.

Conflict, left unresolved, can have treacherous effects on the longevity of a marriage relationship; either it will destroy God??? s plan or end the marriage altogether. It??? s not only the little things, left unresolved, that bring disaster, but it??? s the past hurts that travel into present day relationships, which bring chaos. A better understanding of unresolved conflicts, its origin, types, consequences, and solutions will better equip married couples to find peace and harmony in pursuing a stable home with long term success in their relationship. So, what is unresolved conflict? How does past projection affect a current day marriage? How do the little things left unresolved wreak havoc on the longevity of a relationship? And finally, how can a couple learn to quickly and properly resolve conflict? Unresolved Conflict Defined Every marriage faces conflict at some point. Actually, conflict is inevitable in any relationship no matter how educated or amiable the individual partners are.

Conflict handled properly can create a strong and flourishing marriage. The danger occurs when conflict is left unresolved. According to the dictionary, unresolved conflict is defined as when an issue is not brought to a conclusion or goes unsettled (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/unresolved>). Conflicts often consist of, but are not limited to oppositions, differences, struggles, battles or disagreements within a relationship.

For example, common disagreements can range from which religious upbringing the children will be raised with to whether or not to squeeze a toothpaste tube from the bottom or middle. Conflicts that go unresolved, whether brought into the marriage from past experiences or the ??? everyday little things??? in a present day marriage can have substantial negative effects on the longevity of the marriage. Projection Relationships are more intricate than people think; especially, relationships within marriage. Often, these relationships are influenced by a person??? s negative past experiences, which if not dealt with, can bring needless conflict into a marriage (Smith, W. , 2007). The positive experiences often create feelings of love, trust, and security, while the egative ones create the opposite (Smith, W.

, 2007). When an individual does not resolve past negative experiences, they will travel with him or her into future relationships. Sigmund Freud, best known for his theories on the unconscious mind, a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of conscious awareness, believed unresolved conflict continues to influence future behavior and experience, even though one may be unaware of the underlying influences (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud).

Thus, Freud introduced what Psychologists today call, ??? Psychological Projection Theory. ??? According to Freud??? s theory, projection is a defense mechanism where a person unconsciously denies attitudes, thoughts, and emotions, which are then ascribed to the outside world, such as to the weather, a tool, or to other people (Smith, W. , 2007). Projection reduces anxiety by allowing the expression of the unwanted unconscious impulses or <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-unresolved-conflict-on-the-longevity-of-a-marital-relationship/>

desires without letting the conscious mind recognize them (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection).

In other words, it is the behavior in which one blames others or circumstances for their wrong attitude or conduct actually caused by their own past experiences but without realizing it. An example of this behavior, might be blaming another for self-failure (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection).

The mind may avoid the discomfort of consciously admitting personal faults by keeping those feelings unconscious, and redirect their libidinal satisfaction by attaching, or “projecting,” those same faults onto another (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection). Another example of projection is a girl who gets stood up by her high school prom date and never resolves the anger and disappointment associated with the episode (K, 2008). In the future, in an entirely different situation, if her date is running late, she will speculate and fear she is being stood up even if that is not a reasonable expectation (K, 2008).

Because of the conditioning of her past experience she can unfairly and easily jump to this conclusion in the present circumstance. This behavior is another form of projecting. Therefore, projection of past experiences can have extremely negative effects on the longevity of a present day marriage. When an individual brings past fears, worries, jealousies, wounds, and hurts into the relationship, it will create unnecessary and unfair conflict.

Eventually, the projected negative emotions brought in from the past cannot be ignored or tolerated and will wear the other partner down.

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Imagine a girl whose father constantly verbally tore her down without giving her much needed affirmation and security. If the girl never deals with the affects of the emotional abuse, she will enter into marriage affected with a low self-esteem and other emotional problems. This will cause her to lack good communication skills, which has been proven to make a strong marriage. Additionally, her fears and low self-esteem will be projected onto her husband, who in return will not understand why she is treating him in such a way. As a result, he will experience needless hurt. This conflict can cause him to leave the relationship all together or create a very unhappy relationship.

Understanding projection helps to identify one major source of conflicts in marriage. Unresolved Conflict In Present Day Marriage Often, people think it??? s the “ big” things such as infidelity and abuse in a relationship that cause divorce; however, most marriages end due to the unresolved conflicts about everyday things (Past Hostilities Can Ruin Your Marriage, 2010). Everyday conflicts, left unresolved, can wreak major havoc on the longevity of a marriage. The following article, ??? Past Hostilities Can Ruin Your Marriage,??? provided by Competent Counseling Solutions.

om paints a picture for us of the affects that unresolved conflict has within a marriage. The article is about a married couple named Pam and Rex. Pam said she could receive correction from anyone except her husband. During our counseling session she asked why was it possible for her to receive an admonition from her friend Betty, but be unwilling to receive any kind of advice or correction from her husband Rex.

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She said, It amazes me and somewhat baffles me. Betty can tell me anything negative about my life and it rarely bothers me. She has spoken some very difficult things into my life and I listen, thank her, and try to respond by changing. But when Rex says anything that I perceive as negative, condescending, or corrective, I fly off the handle at him and sometimes I won't talk to him for a day or two. Why is this? The reason Pam can receive correction from Betty and not from her husband is because there are no outstanding, unresolved conflicts between her and Betty.

If they have ever been on the outs, they have been able to work through it. But there have been so many hurts, big and small, between Pam and Rex that the accumulative effect of her disappointments has left her bitter and angry. Pam noted how when they go out to eat that they usually eat in silence, but when someone from the church shows up they both become chatty Cathy. The reason they can talk so freely with others is because there are no unresolved past hostilities between them and their church buddies. But when their buddies leave, they sit in silence again. Their way of resolving their problems is to be distracted.

They will go shopping, go to the movies, travel, or invite friends over to their home. Rex also has his work while Pam has her friends. They can coexist in harmony most of the time; at least until they have to work through something. Their home has become like the dirty carpet illustration. It has gradually changed colors over a period of years and it would have gone unnoticed, but someone moved the couch. Rather than dealing with each piece of dirt as it happened, they rarely dealt with anything in the right kind of way.

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Now, after many years of not dealing biblically with their problems, their marriage is seemingly soiled beyond hope (Past Hostilities Can Ruin Your Marriage, 2010). As you can see from this great article, unresolved conflict has tremendous negative impact. It directly affects each individual. Often, the two spouses have deep rooted bitterness and un-forgiveness, which causes what is commonly known as ??? marital drifting.

??? Marital drifting is when a couple??? s attention strays from the intimate relationship to something else. This can cause major hindrances in establishing oneness in the marriage. Walls are built, which create emotional distance and block real companionship. Eventually, couples begin to feel like strangers in their wn home. Although, it??? s normal in all long-term marriages to experience some relationship drift; it??? s best to resolve the drift quickly.

The passion for one another will fade as the responsibilities and burdens of everyday life replace the love and pleasure a relationship invites. The less enjoyment and play within the marital relationship, the greater the chance for divorce or an affair. Conflict resolution must become an art in the home to avoid the accumulation of resentment and hurts that can act as an emotional wedge of separation in the relationship. Unresolved conflicts in the home left unchecked can be destructive after slow but sure erosion takes place in the fabric of unity between spouses, but these challenges not only affect the husband and wife when in many cases there are children in the home. Unresolved Conflict Affects Family & Children Unresolved conflict in the marriage relationship not only affects the people involved, but can have a larger impact on the children by injuring the family stability in the home. <https://assignbuster.com/the-effects-of-unresolved-conflict-on-the-longevity-of-a-marital-relationship/>

Family research is clear about the system wide effects of destructive marital conflict.

First, negative conflict between the parents lessens the family's group of friends and creates more loneliness (Jones 1992). Second, conflict between the parents tends to both change the mood of household interactions and also to shift the parents' attention to the negative behaviors of their children (Jouriles and Farris 1992). For example, inter-parental conflict leads to fathers issuing confusing and threatening commands to their sons (Jouriles and Farris 1992). Third, parental conflict has direct negative impacts on the children (Comstock and Strzyzewski 1990).

Conflict between parents predicts the ultimate well-being of the children, with more conflict associated with maladaptive behavior on the part of the kids (Dunn and Tucker 1993; Garber 1991; Grych and Fincham 1990; Jouriles, Bourg, and Farris 1991). For example, children of overtly conflicting parents see conflict as aggressive and have behavior problems and lower academic performance (Buehler et al. 1994). Families with delinquent teenagers are found to be more defensive and less supportive than families without delinquents (Prager 1991).

Finally, the effects of destructive conflict patterns suggests that "ongoing conflict at home has a greater impact on adolescent distress and symptoms than does parental divorce" (Jaycox and Repetti 1993, 344). Furthermore, it isn't just the people who call one another names who have relationship difficulties deriving from conflict. It has been clearly demonstrated that "couples who never engage in conflict are at long-term risk" (McGonagle,

Kessler, and Gotlib 1993, 398). There is evidence that parents who either avoid conflict or engage in negative cycles of mutual damage directly influence the children's subsequent lives.

For instance, if your parents avoided conflict, you may be at risk of unhealthy romantic relationships (Martin 1990). A modest relationship exists between mothers who avoid conflict and their daughters' marital satisfaction (VanLeer 1992). On the other end of the continuum, children who are exposed to harsh discipline practices at home (which coincide with a negative and hostile relationship between the parents) are more at risk for aggression, hyperactivity, and internalizing by withdrawing, having somatic complaints, and experiencing depressive symptoms (Jaycox and Repetti 1993). The family effects also reach beyond the immediate environment.

One study demonstrated that children from high-conflict homes had much stronger negative reactions while watching a video of angry adults than children from low-conflict homes (El-Sheikh 1994). Children's own favorableness toward marriage is directly affected by the conflict between their parents. If their parents have frequent conflict, the children have a much less favorable attitude toward marriage (Jennings, Salts, and Smith 1991). A child's general feelings of self-worth are directly affected by inter-parental conflict (Garber 1991).

Finally, it has been fairly well demonstrated that parental conflict has long-term effects on children regardless of family structure (Garber 1991). This means that it isn't primarily the question of whether parents??? divorce or not that affects the kids but it is the level of conflict present in either the

intact family or the restructured family that impacts the children.

References http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection <http://www.articleworld.org/Marriage#ixzz10e8gVSYZ> <http://www.biblenews1.com/marriage/marriags.htm>