

DIVORCE

Attribution Theory

Satisfied spouses **Dissatisfied spouses**

There are two assumptions researcher hold about the nature of attributions in marriage:

1. Attributions reflect an enduring, relatively trait like tendency that each spouse brings to the relationships
2. Attributions play a causal role in maintenance of marital satisfaction and the development of marital distress

“Spouses’ attributions appear to be a reaction to what they have learned from their ongoing experiences in the relationship, not a reflection of stable attributional tendencies.

Specifically, more maladaptive causal attributions early in the marriage predict steeper declines in satisfaction for both spouses, and more maladaptive responsibility attributions early in the marriage also predict steeper declines for wives.” (Karney & Bardbury, 2000, p306

“Top-down” versus “Bottom-up” processing

McNulty and Karney (1998) found that spouses who make maladaptive attributions for their partners’ behaviors are less able to maintain their global satisfaction when confronted with specific negative aspects of the relationship.

BUT In intact marriages, spouses could make increasingly maladaptive attributions for specific negative events without necessarily experiencing declines in their global satisfaction with the marriage.

ACROSS CULTURE CAUSES OF CONJUGAL DISSOLUTION

**(In order of their significance across
160 standard sample societies)**

INFIDELITY

INFERTILITY

PERSONALITY (Displeasingness)

ECONOMICS (Inadequate support)

IN-LAWS

ABSENCE (or desertion)

HEALTH

**RITUAL (Spouse is a sorcerer or witch, broken
taboos, bad omens)**

POLITICS

There are few postindustrial societies in this sample. Evidence shows that families with under school age children have lower probability of divorce). In the US, couples with no children divorce more often than couples with children.

Source: Laura Betzig, Current Anthropology, 1989