

# Marital Expectations: Do Newlywed Women Anticipate Infidelity or Divorce?

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## Introduction

Marriage has changed over time. In the past, people tended to marry for family, economic, or political reasons (Coontz, 2005). After the industrial revolution and with social changes such as women entering the workforce in greater numbers and the advent of contraceptive pills, women became freer to enter marriage for romantic love, rather than social or financial obligations (Pinsof, 2002). Furthermore, the rise of time-saving domestic consumer goods like dishwashers, and pre-prepared foods undercut men's dependence on women's housekeeping (Coontz, 2005). Both partners are now able to enter marriage for love-based reasons, which makes marriage more unstable because love-based commitment can easily fade, and requires the continual investment of couple members (Huston & Houts, 1998). In this paper, two competing commitment models are used to examine newlywed women's expectations of infidelity and divorce. This topic is important because the purpose of marriage, or reasons for committing to a relationship, have changed over time and it is important to understand whether commitment type is associated with infidelity and divorce expectations.

## Research Questions

- 1) What are women's expectations of infidelity and divorce, particularly in the first two years of marriage when satisfaction typically declines?
- 2) What specific components of the Investment Model and the Commitment Framework best predict women's expectations of infidelity and divorce?

## Method

**Target Population:** Newlywed women who

- 1) have been married two years or less
- 2) are in their first marriage
- 3) do not have children

## Recruitment:

Web sites (e.g., Craigslist.org) and listservs

## Online survey:

- Commitment (Investment Model Scale; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; and Commitment Framework; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999)
- Open-ended questions about infidelity and divorce expectations (Campbell, 2008)
- Demographic characteristics

## Participants

- 197 women
- Mean age = 27.3 years (SD = 4.5 yrs.)
- Mean amount time married = .86 years (SD = .69 yrs.)
- 85% European/White
- 95% heterosexual
- 94% at least some college
- 30% students
- 66% working full time
- 53% Christian
- 12% very religious
- Living in regions across U.S.

## Results

### Infidelity Expectations: Commitment Framework

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Personal Commitment	-.284	.137	-.302*
Moral Commitment	-.128	.060	-.172*
Structural Commitment	.027	.040	.053

Note. \* $p < 0.5$

### Infidelity Expectations: Investment Model

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Commitment Level	-.098	.253	-.035
Relationship Satisfaction	.193	.256	.106
Quality of Alternatives	.343	.133	.203*
Size of Investments	.261	.168	.133

Note. \* $p < 0.5$

### Divorce Expectations: Commitment Framework

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Personal Commitment	-.408	.162	-.312*
Moral Commitment	-.076	.070	-.073
Structural Commitment	-.041	.047	-.058

Note. \* $p < 0.5$

### Divorce Expectations: Investment Model

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Commitment Level	-.264	.298	-.069
Relationship Satisfaction	.594	.302	-.234*
Quality of Alternatives	.215	.156	.091
Size of Investments	.021	.198	.008

Note. \* $p < 0.5$

## Conclusions

Marriage has changed from being based on social or economic obligations to a personal choice based on love. This shift caused marriage to become more unstable. Findings from this study indicate that women are more likely to expect infidelity if they have low personal commitment, moral commitment, and perceive of many quality alternatives. Women are also more likely to expect divorce if they have lower personal commitment and lower relationship satisfaction. The biggest predictor of infidelity and divorce expectations was personal commitment. These findings support the idea that marriage is based on personal fulfillment, and that once love and satisfaction fade, infidelity and divorce are considered viable options. The information gleaned from this study can be used by clinicians to help couples make informed decisions about marriage, and thereby reduce marital instability.

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