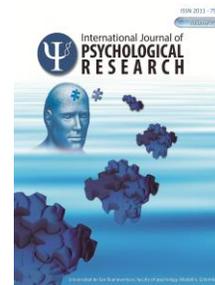




# Limitations of Evolutionary Theory in Explaining Marital Satisfaction and Stability of Couple Relationships

Limitaciones de la Teoría de la Evolución para Explicar la Satisfacción Marital y la Estabilidad en las relaciones de pareja



Review

Victoria Cabrera García <sup>a, \*</sup>, , and Viviana Aya Gómez <sup>a,</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Instituto de La Familia, Universidad de La Sabana, Chía, Colombia.

## ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

The explanation of marital satisfaction and stability in trajectories of couple relationships has been the central interest in different studies (Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999; Sabatelli & Ripoll, 2004; Schoebi, Karney & Bradbury, 2012). However, there are still several questions and unknown aspects surrounding the topic. Within this context, the present reflection seeks to analyze whether the principles of Evolutionary Theory suffice to explain three marital trajectories in terms of satisfaction and stability. With this in mind, we have included other explanations proposed by the Psychosocial Theory that Evolutionary Theory does not refer to in order to better understand mating behavior. Moreover, other factors that could account for satisfied and stable relationships were analyzed. Suggestions for future investigations include the analysis of other marital trajectories that may or may not end in separation or divorce but are not included in this article.

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### RESUMEN

El interés en explicar la satisfacción marital y la estabilidad en la trayectoria de parejas ha sido punto central en diferentes estudios (Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999; Sabatelli & Ripoll, 2004; Schoebi, Karney & Bradbury, 2012). Sin embargo, todavía hay varias preguntas y aspectos desconocidos sobre el tema. En este contexto, el presente artículo de reflexión pretende analizar si los principios de la teoría de la evolución son suficientes para explicar tres trayectorias maritales en términos de satisfacción y la estabilidad marital. Con este objetivo, se han incluido otras explicaciones propuestas desde la teoría psicosocial y que no son abordadas en la teoría de la evolución para entender las trayectorias maritales. Además, fueron analizados otros factores que podrían dinamizar las relaciones de pareja y pueden contribuir a la satisfacción y estabilidad de las mismas. Para futuras investigaciones se sugirió analizar otras trayectorias maritales que pueden terminar o no en la separación o el divorcio que no se incluyeron en este artículo.

### Palabras clave:

Teoría de la evolución, satisfacción marital, estabilidad marital, relación de pareja.

\* **Corresponding author:** Victoria Cabrera García, Instituto de La Familia, Universidad de La Sabana, Chía-Colombia.

Campus Universitario puente del Común km.7 autopista norte de Bogotá, Chía-Colombia. Tel: +57 1 861 55 55. Email address: [victoria.cabrera@unisabana.edu.co](mailto:victoria.cabrera@unisabana.edu.co)



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When two people marry, in some cases, they hope their marriage will last all their lives. Others believe their relationship will last as long as they love the other person. Also, there are people who condition their marital status to the satisfaction of their sexual needs and their requirements in terms of affection and protection (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000; Sabatelli & Ripoll, 2004). As Poma (2012) established, research findings illustrate that sexual intimacy is strongly related to marital satisfaction.

On the one hand, when people live together as couples, they may reassess their goals and wishes of remaining together and decide to end the relationship (McNulty & Karney, 2004). In other cases, the idea of continuing the relationship may persist for many years, as there may be powerful personal factors that motivate doing so and because there is a great deal of satisfaction derived from the relationship.

Among these circumstances, couples undergo different experiences that condition the course of their relationships. Empirical evidence on this topic shows that, through the years, each couple's relationship consolidates its own marital trajectory according to the members' experiences and personal characteristics, the interaction of the spouses, and their context (Carbonneau & Vallerand, 2013; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). A marital trajectory can be defined as the description of the course of a marital relationship that may or may not end in separation and divorce. The course of a relationship is determined by the continuous evolution of the satisfaction derived by the spouses over time. Thus, the stability of a marital relationship is demonstrated by the fact that it ends or remains intact (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Karney, Bradbury, & Johnson, 1999).

Some theories have proposed explanations regarding couple relationships and the partners' motivations for maintaining them. The Evolutionary Theory is one of them. Some psychological approaches have also analyzed the topic. More than a century ago, Charles Darwin proposed a revolutionary explanation regarding the mysteries of pairing (Darwin, 1871/2003). He became intrigued by the disconcerting ways in which animals had developed characteristics that seemed to interfere with their survival such as bright plumage and horns. The answer lies in the fact that these features led to individual sexual success and provided a competitive

advantage in acquiring a desirable partner and continuing the genetic lineage (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005).

In that sense, Darwin's theory of evolution explains pairing behaviors by identifying two decisive processes: the preference for a specific partner and the struggle for that partner. The application of these concepts to human beings began in the fields of Anthropology and Psychology (Buss, 1994; 2007). Evolutionary psychology, then, seeks to identify the underlying psychological mechanisms of evolution that explain not only the extraordinary flexibility of human behavior, but also the strategies for active pairing developed by men and women.

On one hand, an evolutionary approach proposes that in order to conserve the union, the individuals in the couple should be faithful, have children together, be well-to-do, friendly, generous, understanding, and they shouldn't sexually reject or neglect their partners (Buss, 2007). That is, in order to maintain a relationship, its members are expected to display desirable attitudes in their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, reflecting in that manner, the best possible version of themselves. On the other hand, contemporary behavioral tendencies indicate that those actions don't necessarily guarantee a lasting marriage.

Divorce data in different parts of the world show a similar situation. In Europe, according to the National Statistics Institutes, Spain and France reported 110.764 and 134.000 divorces in 2011 and 2010 respectively. In America, particularly the United States, one in four marriages ended in divorce in 2009; in Mexico, 16 percent of all married couples divorced in 2011; in Costa Rica 12.592 divorces were reported in 2011; in Brazil the divorce rate rose 0.4% and in Colombia, divorce rate has increased 26.2%, in the first semester of 2011, there were 6,889 cases, while in the same period in 2012, the number of couples who decided to end their marital union rose to 8,694.

Following the present line of thought, this text intends to analyze the following questions: how adequate are the basic principles of the Evolutionary Theory to explain the findings regarding lasting and highly stable couple relationships? What other factors come into play when predicting this marital event? Fincham, Stanley & Beach (2007) have studied additional factors that energize and transform the marital relationship and may contribute to maintaining it. This way, the authors explain how different, small movements may transform and invigorate the

marriage across time. Transformative change would be a discontinuous positive or negative change within an iterative process that might lead the couple to function differently from the way it had behaved previously. If the transformation is negative, the relationship might end in separation or divorce. On the other hand, if the transformation is positive, what may emerge is a more secure and confident way of relating to each other. As a consequence, the changes in the way the couple functions also transforms the relationship.

Based on the questions posed above, this paper will study the following aspects: first, how the postulates of the Evolutionary Theory explain two trajectories of relationships set forth in this document. Second, individual factors and factors related to the interaction in couple relationships that account for a satisfying and lasting trajectory from the psychosocial approach are presented in the third trajectory. Third, this work explains the way some transformative processes in couple relationships explain a stable trajectory. Additionally, other theories that have also studied marital relations will be presented. Finally, we suggested and discussed an integrative and holistic comprehension of the marital stability and longevity.

## 2. TRAJECTORIES IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

### 2.1. First trajectory

The initial satisfaction of a relationship diminishes in time, as the resources that each member should provide become depleted. The relationship might end when it is perceived that others might provide those resources (alternatives) and that there are no significant barriers to leaving the current relationship.

Some evolutionary explanations might be considered in order to clarify this trajectory. Buss (2007) posits that unless each member of a couple makes his or her respective contributions in order for the relationship to continue, he or she runs the risk of being abandoned. Additionally, the partner provides a model for comparison; in other words, the decision to conserve a partner or free oneself of him or her depends on the result of a comparison to others. If the man no longer provides social status, maturity, and financial resources (*resource acquisition in potential*, according to Buss, 1989), the woman may contemplate the option of other men (alternatives) and the same can happen if the woman loses her youthful appearance and is no longer physically attractive.

In a similar manner, the frequency of sexual relations decreases constantly as the relationship progresses; after a year of marriage, it has reduced to half of what it was during the first month. This occurs gradually. Men, after knowing their partners for just a week, still admit to the possibility of having sexual relations with a different partner. Women state that this is highly improbable (Buss, 2007). Considering alternative partners entails the possible occurrence of extramarital relations. This may end the relationship and affect its stability.

Fisher (2004), from his point of view, explains that the initial attraction becomes stronger and more intense as men and women become couples and raise their children as a team. The child then, becomes a *barrier* to leaving the relationship. However, as the child grows, many couples will start to look for new love interests and the child will no longer be a *significant barrier*. Many partners seek new romances because they are following an unconscious impulse to have more varied offspring.

It is highly probable that the trajectory of this relationship will end once different barriers, such as child rearing, are overcome, or when a new partner, one who provides the corresponding resources and satisfies the needs in the relationship, is found.

The trajectory of this couples relationship tends to be short because for its members, the evolutionary explanations weigh more than other possible factors that might be more important in other trajectories.

### 2.2. Second trajectory

Even if men and women don't provide more resources than the ones they offered at the beginning of the relationship, and the satisfaction has diminished, the couple remains together due to the existence of barriers such as the presence of children, financial dependence, or the absence of other possible partners.

According to Fisher (2004), human beings establish relationships only for as long as necessary in order to raise a child in infancy, that is, for about four years. Along that same line of thought, Lavner, Bradbury and Karney (2012) explain that couples display a high degree of satisfaction that can be seen in the first four years of the relationship. During that time, raising the child and the impossibility of supporting this process financially without a partner contribute to preserving the relationship. Parents should feed and hold the child in order to guarantee its survival and this is much easier with a full time partner

to help. Some people don't separate because they feel unable to raise a child without the aid of a partner.

In the same manner, women and men become less attractive physically as they age. Women also suffer physical deterioration as a result of pregnancy. Therefore, the possibilities of finding a partner in terms of physical conditions are lost, considering that the findings of Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson & Karney (2013) showed that a partner's physical attractiveness played a larger role in predicting husbands' satisfaction than predicting wives' satisfaction.

Buss (2007) explains that a biological preference inherited from the animal kingdom is the tendency to choose partners with balanced bodily proportions, this includes symmetry. It is not surprising that symmetrical men and women have more suitors to choose from. Another factor that produces attraction is the waist to hip proportion. Women whose waist circumference is 70% of their hip circumference tend to be more attractive and to have a greater *reproductive capacity* (Buss, 1989). Those who deviate from those proportions have more difficulties finding partners, getting pregnant, and tend to have more abortions.

Women are attracted to well-educated, ambitious, rich men, with high status and position that seem secure and able to solve their problems. After a first relationship and with one or more children, a man's financial possibilities have decreased and this is an obstacle to acquiring a partner.

Scientists sum it up in the following manner: men look for sexual objects; women look for successful objects (Buss, 2007, 1994; Fisher, Aron & Brown, 2006). When those conditions are reduced, the possibilities for pairing may be affected anew, thus it may be preferable to continue in the present relationship even if there is not a high degree of satisfaction.

This marital trajectory could be maintained longer than the first one; however, the individuals will feel unsatisfied because of the barriers that exist to leaving the relationship and the few possibilities there are for pairing. Nonetheless, it can end when the barriers are overcome or when possibilities emerge for finding a new partner.

Upon analysis of these two trajectories, evolutionary psychology explains that the human mind possesses a functional and structural design, a set of psychological mechanisms that have developed throughout the process of hominization as an instrument that provides us with adaptive answers to

problems such as the selection of a partner, family relationships, or cooperation. These psychological mechanisms condition, mainly, the social and cultural features that are revealed and transmitted in human societies (Cosmides & Tooby, 1989, 1992; Buss, 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, 2007). Satisfying mutual desires is the key to harmony between a man and a woman. Those who do so experience greater satisfaction in their relationship.

To summarize, multiplicity of desires may, perhaps, be the most powerful instrument to promote satisfaction in a relationship. This is possible thanks to the notable resources that each person provides, the benefits obtained by those who cooperate, and complex strategies for establishing beneficial alliances with others.

Thus, some marital trajectories could be explained by the Theory of Evolution. However, how can one explain trajectories that are longer, more enduring and satisfying, and yet don't comply with the standards of couple relationships posited by Evolutionary Theory? There must be other satisfying factors that maintain these relationships. Other disciplinary perspectives, such as psychosocial approaches could be used in order to explain factors that predict stable relationships that have not been already explained by Evolutionary Theory.

### 2.3. Third Trajectory

Some couples have ups and downs in the satisfaction with their relationship because of critical events throughout it. However, they continue together despite having overcome the barrier of child raising and having achieved independence from the nucleus of the family. The same thing happens with women who do not have an appearance with a symmetrical hip to waist ratio and who, due to the passing of time, do not have an attractive and youthful appearance to provide to the relationship. Besides, men after retirement may gradually have lost the social and work status they had at the beginning of the relationship. These couples remain together because they continue being satisfied with the relationship and they do not consider alternative pairing; that is, they are stable couples.

From a psychosocial perspective, the literature indicates that the experiences of a couple can produce different marital trajectories (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Stanley, Blumberg & Markman, 1999; Yoon & Lawrence, 2013).

These trajectories differ in their duration in time; some are longer than others. Events like the birth of the first child, moving to a different city or work-related difficulties may affect the course and length of each of these trajectories. Thus, according to Karney, Bradbury and Johnson (1999), marital trajectories fluctuate in time according to the degree of satisfaction that the couple experiences throughout these events. That is, the satisfaction with the relationship is associated to its stability in time.

From the psychosocial perspective, there are individual factors and others related the interaction between spouses that explain the satisfaction in this marital trajectory in a way that is not contemplated by Evolutionary Theory. Variables such as life history, personality, past experiences, and how emotions are managed (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), are factors that individuals bring to the marriage and affect its functioning in a positive or negative manner. Among them are the differentiation of self and the personality of each of the spouses.

#### 2.4. The differentiation of self.

According to Bowen (1978), it is defined with regard to the degree in which a person can balance a) emotional and intellectual functioning b) the need for intimacy (closeness), and autonomy in interpersonal relationships. In the case of the first aspect, the balance between *intellectual and emotional* functioning, the differentiation of self refers to the ability to distinguish between thoughts and feelings and choose to be guided by reason, not by emotions (Bowen, 1978; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The second aspect of differentiation defines individuals according to the degree of *fusion and distance* in their interpersonal relationships. People with a high level of differentiation maintain a level of autonomy in their intimate relationships and with ease establish intimacy willingly with others. On an interpersonal level, the differentiation of self refers to being able to experience intimacy while remaining independent of others (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Vargas & Ibáñez, 2008). People who are more differentiated, more easily adopt a personal position in their interpersonal relationships and maintain their own convictions when pressured by others. This characteristic of a high degree of differentiation has been directly associated with a high level of satisfaction in a relationship. Bowen (1978, 2004) posits that the presence of similar levels of differentiation between spouses contributes positively to marital satisfaction. That is, when both spouses are

independent and autonomous, they are less prone to react emotionally when confronted with difficulties, do not allow themselves to be carried away by negative emotions, and are not under anxiety; there are higher levels of satisfaction with the relationship and greater stability.

Another individual factor to consider that might contribute to the satisfaction and stability in relationships is the personality of the spouses.

#### 2.5. Spouses' Personalities.

There are 5 big personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 2007). According to Rodrigues, Hall and Fincham (2006) 1) Agreeableness is the tendency to be altruistic, trusting, spirited, warm, and generous. 2) Extraversion is the tendency to be optimistic, energetic, assertive, active, talkative, and friendly. 3) Conscientiousness is the tendency to be efficient, rigorous, resourceful, organized, ambitious, dutiful, and enterprising. 4) Openness to experience includes characteristics like an active imagination or creativity, the acceptance of intimate feelings, and a preference for variety. 5) Neuroticism is defined as the tendency to express negative feelings and experience emotional instability. (Donnellan, Conger & Bryant, 2004 and Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This final factor is related negatively and significantly to satisfaction in couple relationships. Persons with this kind of personality tend to have unstable relationships

Persons with high levels of conscientiousness show enough self-control to constructively manage the conflicts that inevitably emerge in a relationship. The presence of traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion are positively correlated to marital satisfaction and stability (Donnellan, Conger & Bryant, 2004).

On the other hand, the characteristics of the interactions between spouses are also important when explaining satisfaction in relationships. Both spouses participate in the expression of positive and negative interventions (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012).

Within daily marital interactions, behaviors that occur when conflicts arise and during activities shared by the spouses create opportunities for interaction that may strengthen or harm the relationship and generate opportunities for encounters amidst the stressful activities that each one needs to face in his or her daily activities.

#### 2.6. Conflict resolution styles.

A couple's skills and individual styles that contribute to the constructive communication of

conflict in a relationship are good predictors of marital satisfaction (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004). Kurdek (1994) has identified the following styles:

#### 2.6.1. *Positive Conflict Resolution Style:*

People focus on the problem and solve it constructively, trying to find acceptable alternatives for both spouses; they negotiate and mutually commit to making changes.

2.6.2. *Looking for Conflict:* A person explodes and loses control, attacking the partner with insults and insinuations, loses his or her temper, says things he or she does not mean.

2.6.3. *Isolation/avoidance:* The person puts up barriers to communication, closes off, refuses to talk and physically takes distance from the partner. He or she is silent for long periods of time, talks to other people who are outside the conversation, is distant and acts as if he or she is not interested in the conversation.

2.6.4. *Compliance:* It is directly related to attitudes like a person not feeling at ease with him or herself when his or her position is evident in a situation of conflict; he or she feels too submissive, does not defend his or her position, and feels little inclination to express it in the conflictive event.

Kurdek (1995) explains that marital discontent is related to the *seek–reject pattern* where the wife seeks and tries to maintain the conflict and the husband retreats and avoids that demand. Men, who generally use the isolation/avoidance strategy, tend to have lower marital satisfaction when their wives are not compliant. Gottman (1999) also found that certain behaviors have negative effects and contribute to discontent in a relationship. He calls them the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”, and they are: criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. When spouses have positive conflict resolution styles and avoid seeking conflict, criticism, defensiveness or stonewalling, they tend to have satisfactory and therefore more enduring marriages.

### 2.7. *Shared activities.*

Some research has explained the idea that satisfaction and marital stability are a result of spouses sharing activities during their free time. According to Crawford, Houts, Huston and George (2002), shared leisure activities are important because

they provide pleasure in married life. Couples that feel happy in their marriages tend to do things together, not just the things they like, but also, things they dislike. More than the fact that the activity provides pleasure to the couple or not, the core aspect includes sharing time together, resolving problems and being with the partner to do things she or he likes.

Just as individual factors and those related to interactions between spouses are important in the study of couple relationships, there are also different *transformative processes* in a marriage that can explain marital stability and longevity. These are not considered in Evolutionary Theory.

### 3. TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESSES THAT EXPLAIN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Some people who have been in a romantic relationship for many years, say; “You don’t usually love what you have” “You always want what you don’t have”. In order to counteract this way of thinking, some studies suggest that embracing these transformation processes energizes the relationships and thus, characterizes lasting marriages (Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007). Even if the spouses do not provide what they should, or the woman is no longer attractive or the man no longer provides financial resources or social status, as explained by the Evolutionary Theory, there are some factors that may be more significant in explaining the decision to remain in the relationship. These factors are called *transformative processes*; they energize the relationship and are meaningful motivators that focus on positive transformations rather than on simply increasing the changes in the relationship (Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007). This document will consider forgiveness, commitment, and sacrifice.

#### 3.1. *Forgiveness*

In close relationships, a person’s imperfections and mistakes may leave his or her partner hurt and injured. Facing these injuries may generate negative feelings such as anger, resentment, and disappointment. However, the variety of behaviors that lead to forgiveness may alleviate these difficulties in close relationships and contribute to satisfaction in the marriage. According to McCullough, Worthington and Rachal (1997) and Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, and Davila (2005), interpersonal forgiveness is defined as a series of motivational changes where a person seeks to a) reduce the impulse for retaliation against or the intent of offending the partner, b) reduce

the motivation for staying away from the partner, c) and increase the motivation for conciliation and good will towards the offender, despite his or her hurtful actions.

The study of forgiveness shows that it constitutes the primary way of maintaining a relationship (Braithwaite, Selby & Fincham, 2011; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Forgiveness in a couple's relationship contributes to keeping it stable through time. Being committed to the other person and the relationship is also a factor that may promote its stability.

### 3.2. Commitment

According to Buss (2007), the Evolutionary Theory explains that women are skeptic of men being truly able to commit. They underestimate a man's capacity for commitment to a monogamous relationship due to the fact that men pretend to be dedicated only as a strategy to have occasional sexual relations with other women. Men that pursue these occasional relationships often try to deceive women about their degree of commitment and social status. This interpretation of commitment does not result in lasting marital relationships. On the contrary, when a man considers other women as partners, this reflects his low level of commitment and may affect the permanence of the relationship. Other researchers on the topic explain that commitment may contribute to a more lasting relationship.

According to Anderson and Sabatelli (2007), commitment is reflected in the degree to which a person demonstrates the will to work for the relationship to continue. This good will is characterized by an increasing intimacy and an exclusive relationship that does not change over the years. As trust in the relationship grows, so does commitment to it. This suggests that people who experience a high level of commitment in a relationship feel a great deal of solidarity towards their partners and are determined to continue in that relationship. The commitment of both members of the couple is an important indicator that can contribute to maintaining the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1997; Karney, Bradbury & Johnson, 1999; Schoebi, Karney & Bradbury, 2012). When a person demonstrates the constant desire and will to maintain the relationship and overcome the adversities that occur throughout his or her lifetime, the possibility of remaining in the relationship increases as does its stability.

Sacrifice is another transformative process that energizes a relationship.

### 3.3. Sacrifice

Sacrifice is not an act in which people are very willing to make in a relationship nowadays. It is actually associated to unhappiness and discontent. Despite this, some studies show that people who are more willing to sacrifice themselves report a greater degree of satisfaction and persistence in relationships and, therefore, more stable unions (Brewer & Mead, 2008; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher & Cox, 1997; Whitton, Stanley & Markman, 2007). They also explain that sacrifice in close relationships is a determining factor for the healthy functioning of a couple.

According to Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher & Cox (1997), sacrifice is defined as the inclination to give up an immediate personal interest in order to contribute to the spouse's well-being or to the relationship. Sacrifice implies avoiding behaviors that the spouse considers undesirable (passive sacrifice) or promoting those that are desirable to him or her in some way (active sacrifice). There are people who tend to make both kinds of sacrifices.

As sacrifice may involve negative consequences such as opportunity costs or involve efforts that have negative consequences, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of sacrifice and cost. Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher and Cox (1997) explain this difference. Sacrifice refers to behavior that forgoes personal interest in order to promote the well-being of the relationship; while cost refers to the feeling that an event is unpleasant and harmful. Different events can be considered costly; however, many of them are not viewed as sacrifices because they do not benefit the relationship. Some costs are contempt, infidelity, insults. Contrary to this, sacrifice refers to a person's denial of an individual interest in favor of the relationship without incurring in any personal harm. This denial has no associated resentment and is experienced as a generous sacrifice; for example, helping a partner who is ill. Acts of sacrifice are known as *generous preferences*. In seeking the transformation of the relationship, personal preferences are denied in order to opt for broader preferences that benefit the spouses.

These and other desirable habits and processes may be the basis for lasting romantic relationships. Probably, none of them will maintain the initial romantic passion, but they result in more mature, satisfactory and stable relationships. It is

important, therefore, to analyze what constitutes a satisfactory and stable relationship.

Psychosocial research has consolidated certain theories that also explain some other social-cultural traits of couple relations.

#### 4. OTHER THEORIES THAT EXPLAIN MARITAL RELATIONS

The *Social Exchange Theory* (Levinger, 1976; Huston & Burgess, 1979) posits that when studying marital processes of several years, the stability or instability of couples is produced because the advantages (for example, emotional security and social status) outweigh the barriers to ending the marriage (social and religious restrictions, and financial expenses).

*Behavioral theories* about marriage, such as the *Social Exchange Theory* have their origins in the work of Thibaut and Kelly (1959). This theory is based on research on the behaviors that are exchanged in conflict resolution and has been guided by the premise that gratifying and positive behaviors improve the global evaluation of marriage whereas punitive or negative behaviors tend to affect said evaluation adversely. Through time, the accumulation of experiences during and after interaction influences the spouses' judgments regarding the quality of their marital relation (Bradbury & Fincham, 1991). When couples are satisfied, each satisfactory interaction increases their satisfaction with the relationship.

Bowlby's *Attachment Theory* (1969), explains the relationships between children and their first caregivers. Bowlby suggests that the nature of that first relationship is the internal model that the child has about close relationships and it influences the characteristics of his or her relationships all through his or her life. According to Bowlby (1979) a person's *internal working models* develop from his or her attachment styles which are established at early ages and guide the approaches to other relationships, for example, couple relationships. This influence initially affects the expectations a person has about the emotional availability of others. That is, the way a person related to his or her parents or caregivers will determine how he or she will relate to a partner in the future.

*Crisis Theory*, (Hill, 1949) explains how couples react to stressful events. These events might predict, during the course of the marriage, changes in marital satisfaction. The nature of the crisis and the

successful recuperation after the event are determined by the way the family views stressful events.

In the end, these theoretical perspectives of marital relations have significantly influenced the consolidation of robust postulates about the evolution and changes in marriage.

#### 5. AN INTEGRATIVE AND HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE MARITAL STABILITY AND LONGEVITY

According to Gottman and Levenson (1992), there are two key elements that determine marital trajectories: satisfaction and stability.

In order to achieve lasting love and relationships, Fisher (2004), from the perspective of the Evolutionary Theory, recommends establishing a selection of common interests and new and varied activities that satisfy the spouses. Variety stimulates the pleasure centers, favoring a climate of romance. These evolutionary postulates may be correct and may effectively contribute to satisfaction in the relationship; however, occasionally, they may be difficult to enact due to the intrusion of different circumstances (financial problems, an illness in the family), despite which the spouses remain together.

From a psychosocial perspective, Bradbury, Fincham and Beach (2000) and Stanley, Amato, Johnson and Markman, (2006) define marital satisfaction as the reflection of an evaluation that a spouse makes in which positive traits stand out and negative traits are almost non-existent. Different factors determine marital satisfaction in men and women. According to Karney and Bradbury (1995) these are: positive behaviors of the couple, homogamous personalities, and sexual satisfaction. On the other hand, for women, the first two are important, with contentment in the relationship coming third.

On the other hand, marital stability is a concept that indicates if a marriage remains intact or not. A stable marriage is one that ends with the natural death of one of the spouses. Therefore, an unstable marriage is one that ends by decision of one or both (Karney, Bradbury & Johnson, 1999, p. 483).

However, stability cannot be measured by the continuation of the relationship alone; it is also necessary to analyze the events that occur in time. In order to understand the changes in marriages through time, the balance between benefits and costs perceived in a relationship by men and women needs

to be considered. Relationships that are perceived as having many rewards and benefits are generally stable because the amount of benefits reduces the possibility of considering other alternatives (Previti & Amato, 2003; Sabatelli & Ripoll, 2004).

The access to individual factors and those associated to interaction that predict marital satisfaction, as well as the internalization of the tools of transformative processes of marriage constitute the basic resources that favor understanding of marital stability and enduring relationships. Psychosocial constructs or factors play a vital role in the development of new theories regarding marital relations which they transform understanding and translate into broader systems that go beyond evolutionary explanations.

Castro, L., Castro, L.C., Castro, M., and Toro (2009), in a more contemporary form of expression, affirm that Darwin believed it was possible to understand the culture and social organization of human populations, at least partially, from a naturalistic point of view; from the investigation of the psychobiological conditions that make man a social being, a cultural being. This influence has transcended the area of biology to influence others such a medicine, psychology, economics and sociology, providing them with temporal depth and a new and powerful heuristic. However, its conceptual approaches do not fully allow understanding of human phenomena.

Despite the vital role that psychosocial factors played in marital's stability and longevity explanation, an integrative and holistic comprehension does not ignore the contributions that men and women expect from their partner to feel satisfied in the relationship from the Evolutionary Theory. It is therefore undeniable that men are more satisfied in a relationship when their wives show the physical characteristics that make them look youthful and attractive. Similarly, women are satisfied with mature men who have sufficient resources to raise their children. While it is true, as claimed by some married people, that what is most satisfying about their partner is that he or she knows how to forgive, commit and resolve conflicts in a positive way, it is naive to deny that he/she is even more attractive when having the resources proposed in the Evolutionary Theory.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

From the literature reviewed above, it is clear that the consolidation of marital trajectories is a

multifaceted construct underpinned by the contributions of the postulates of both Evolutionary and Psychological Theories. Findings from literature converge to provide a better understanding of marital stability and longevity. An integrative and holistic comprehension of these phenomena increases our understanding of the linkage of the vital role of marital's satisfaction in the different trajectories.

Although diverse studies illustrate different marital trajectories and, from the perspective of Evolutionary Theory, have sought to explain the harmony between the sexes, none of these perspectives separately, offered a full understanding of marital stability.

Future research efforts should continue to consider other individual and interactional factors related to marital stability, and at the same time, other associated factors such as the extended family, work contexts, and cultural communities in which the ideas and norms regarding couple relationships may promote or hinder marital stability. This is why future studies should contemplate these other contexts that may positively or negatively affect the satisfaction and stability of couple relations.

This document explored approaches regarding marital stability. Even though Evolutionary Theory has contributed to the study of harmony between both sexes in couple relationships, it is evident that it does not provide tools to fully understand them. Even though the empirical evidence of daily life shows that men and women tend to show relationships in accordance with evolutionary postulates of pairing, the behavioral attachment and crisis theories with their social and cultural perspectives can offer a complementary explanation for the phenomena of pairing and marital stability.

In order to understand the relationships between men and women, the enigma of their similarities and differences about what each one wants out of a relationship should be resolved. The fact that both sexes have faced many similar problems throughout evolutionary history, such as the desire for the spouse's fidelity, the other's positive behaviors and to be treated well by the other person, may have moved them to share adaptive solutions. This may be a step towards the construction of harmony between sexes and stability in couple relationships.

Therefore, the conceptual bases of Evolutionism provide explanations for some, but not all, trajectories. Its contributions are crucial in understanding the pairing of human beings. Men are interested in young and attractive women, while

women are attracted to men who demonstrate maturity and an elevated financial and social status. Nonetheless, people are not determined by the roles and behaviors dictated by evolution. When these run out in relationships, due to the passage of time, other conditions may support the relationship and influence whether it disintegrates or not.

In contrast with this vision, there is another conceptual approach in which different mechanisms studied from a psychosocial perspective participate in the construction of marital satisfaction and stability. This perspective offers postulates that promise future long, stable and lasting trajectories, considering that in the way that the partner gets older, they are less able to provide evolutionary resources. As a result, it is expected that other resources gradually appear, such as serenity, maturity and commitment to the relationship. These resources are related to individual and interactional factors including personality, self differentiation, conflict resolution and shared activities. For example, while agreeableness and a positive conflict resolution style predict positive satisfaction and marital longevity, neurotic personality types and criticism or stonewalling in the face of conflict are factors that are noticeably present in unsatisfied partners.

In the same manner, another explanation for the decision of some couples to continue together may be found in transformative processes. These energize the relationship in the midst of critical situations such as sickness, death or the birth of a child. A committed spouse who can forgive infidelity or who makes sacrifices for his or her spouse and their relationship may significantly contribute to marital longevity and demonstrate the desire to continue in the relationship.

In order to avoid promoting polarity between evolutionary and social explanations of human behavior in couple relations, it is important to go beyond them in search of a more holistic view for understanding and explaining these relationships (Rose & Rose, 2000). The study of trajectories in couple relations from an evolutionary perspective is relatively new (Campbell & Ellis, 2005). Therefore, it is plausible to include other disciplinary perspectives, such as sociological, psychological, cultural, and philosophical, views, among others in order to better understand factors that predict longevity and stability in relationships. As a consequence, it would be interesting to propose a multidisciplinary approach in the explanation of marital trajectories.

Suggestions for future research consist in identifying the variables that explain other marital

trajectories in which people experience a low level of satisfaction and continue stable, and others that despite the high level of satisfaction that is perceived, end in divorce.

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