



Articles

Separation and Loss: A Study on the Impact of Divorce

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Abstract

This article emerged starting of a search that had as aimed to understand the feelings that emerge in men and women when they lose marital bond. It was carried under a qualitative basis and counted on the participation of three men and four women, all divorced. The tool used was the semi-structured interview and the collected data was submitted to the Thematic Content Analysis. This analysis led to the conception of two categories: the emerging emotions and feelings in the loss context due to the divorce and the repercussions of such loss about the personal identity. The results indicated that searching and establishing a new affective bond was a strategy used by the participants involved in the study, in order to strengthen and support the resignification of their personal identity. The majority of the interviewees earned such resignification by becoming independent and capable of developing their own potentialities. About the feelings and emotions lived through the critical period of separation; they ranged from “happiness and peace” to “failure and sadness”.

Keywords: marital bond, separation, marital identity, marriage

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Divorce is a relating theme in contemporary times, approached by various fields – legal, social, psychological, economic – since its incidence accompanies the changes that new forms of conjugal currently have. Therefore the individuals experiencing marital untying present significant individual changes, which allow a new meaning to their individual identities. However, reaching this stage can be a slow and contentious process. It is even possible that some people do not reach this stage of inner subjectivity that promotes the meeting with them, becoming thus unable to severance of marital identities constructed in marriage.

In this context, the unlink is a process that is influenced by various psychosocial variables, installing tensions in modes of life of the separate subjects. However, to speak in loss of the marital bond, we must first report to the marriage. Whereas the transformations of contemporary, with regard to the requirement of equality between the sexes, the need for preservation of individual liberty among peers, and the coexistence of redistribution of power between the roles of man and woman, we agree with [Gomes and Paiva \(2003\)](#), when they view marriage today, linked to a notion of reciprocal, transformation, flexibility in relation to new and different, providing a space for interpersonal development and creativity.

Continuing in the same line of reasoning, [Féres-Carneiro and Diniz Neto \(2010\)](#) state that the marital relationship begins with the creation of a common territory in which they begin to be shared experiences that produce patterns

of social interaction significant for the couple, relativized by the experience of psychosocial construction of each individual. To these joint experiments, these authors call marital identity. We understand how [Féres-Carneiro \(2003\)](#), that marital identity is constructed through interactions established between the spouses.

In this context, based on the marriage of passionate love, being together is no longer sure of the durability of the union, so widespread in other times. This reality highlights the possibility of divorce, and refers to the spouse's searches conjugality that supply their feelings of emptiness and loneliness. Thus, men and women seek partners in order to be happy and put their hope, longing to find, in many times in their romantic relationships, satisfaction hitherto not achieved ([Paiva, 2009](#)). In addition, that results in most cases, in separations from dissatisfaction generated by the non-realization of the idealized marital quality. In the separation process, marital identity is slowly crumbling, leading the spouses to a redefinition of their individual identities ([Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010](#)).

Typically, the separation occurs in stages. [Matarazzo \(1992\)](#) features six stages: 1) the emotional divorce, when there is an emotional remoteness, revealing feelings such as anxiety, sadness, guilt and detachment; 2) physical separation, when the proximity and physical contact are intolerable, generating feelings of rejection and even hatred; 3) geographical separation; when in fact there is a change of residence; 4) family separation, the relatives are informed that the relationship has reached a moment of weakness and that the only way out is divorce; 5) social separation when the permanence of friendship is shattered and some friends are removed from the social environment, seeking for freedom, bringing with them new friendships; 6) legal separation, when the couple determines the division of assets, custody of children – at this time can be a process of revenge and denial, or there may be a friendly and conciliatory break. These steps may occur in non-sequenced or more than one of them simultaneously, with each couple in a singular process.

By separating the individual can open a new path, a chance to resume their activities way, be they emotional, professional or social; and, with these opportunities come along understanding of being alone in this new process of searching for new significations. Step by step, the dissolution of marital identity will promote a redefinition of the identities of the individual partners. Individual identity in this context follows what Singly quoted by [Féres-Carneiro \(1998\)](#), appointing as the possibility of the individual constitute itself as an autonomous, satisfying their needs for growth and development under optimal and individualistic contexts that stimulate the realization of their projects and desires. In other words, this process arise significant individual changes, which allow the encounter with oneself.

It is this quest for new projects that inserts the newly divorced in new and different social, economic and emotional contexts, we wish to emphasize. Based on the scenario presented, the present study aimed to understand the feelings that emerge in men and women when divorce, lose the marital bond; as also to ascertain the impact of separation on redefinition of individual identity.

Method

This research presents the characteristic exploratory and descriptive, whereas the proposed objective followed the design of qualitative research.

Attendees

Three men and four divorced women, sex, age, religion, education and various socioeconomic backgrounds, all residing in the same city. To preserve confidentiality of documents and identities of each participant, their real names were replaced with fictional names. The inclusion criterion was to have at least two years divorced.

The number of participants was determined by saturation, meaning that this number was considered closed when new interviews began to show an amount of repetitions in content (Turato, 2003). The criterion for selection of the participants was purposeful type, also called an intentional or deliberate.

The study was submitted to the Ethics Committee on Research with humans, the University who welcomed the project, Process No. 172.323. Only after their approval, the researcher went to call them to participate in the research. From the first contact with the participants, were marked dates and times convenient for the interview. That day, when the person invited to participate accepted, was signed the Statement of Informed Consent.

Instrument

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview with open questions concerning emotions and more frequent feelings in divorce, as well as questions relating to the impact of separation in their lives, allowing the verification of the resumption of individual identity.

The interviews were individual and conducted in a proper environment and convenient to the interviewee. They were recorded – with the permission of the participant – having an average duration of 40 minutes. The data collected after the interviews were analysed based on three basic procedures constituting the Thematic Content Analysis. The first is called pre-analysis, involving a brief reading of the collected interviews. The second is called exploratory, seeks to explore the material, content encoding and adding the thematic units. The third, called the treatment of the results, is characterized by the development of interpretations and syntheses.

The definition of thematic units was prepared in advance, depending on the objectives of this research. Was elected two units, namely: 1. Emotions and more frequent feelings; 2. Impact of separation on the redefinition of individual identity.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

Emotions and Frequent Feelings

A striking aspect of the process of separation between the former spouses is the possibility of developing a symptom of grief, where feelings of disappointment and heartbreak are present, making this moment a traumatic event that promotes emotional destabilization. This data is a source of difficulty in the study subjects, both in terms of talking about feelings experienced after separation; as to express the pain and sorrow that involves loving untying. For example, at the beginning of the interviews appeared expressions such as: "is reviving talk about it"; "this matter is still painful."

The interviewees' statements showed feelings of jealousy mixed with the shame of being separated; depression accompanied by apathy and isolation; sense of dislocation and difficulties to face the new civil context:

I was jealous at times, I was ashamed at other times as well (Marcelo, engineer, 31 years old, divorced for nine years).

Feelings of depression of being isolated and not wanting to go to work anymore. I spent a week without going to work (John, teacher, 28 years, divorced for two years).

I kind of lost, I think I got trauma, a trauma in my life (Priscilla, seller, 49 years old, divorced for five years).

Even after two years and five months, the sadness still. There is still a disappointment, hurt, wounded. The trauma exists, but gets lighter (Ana, nutritionist, 30 years, divorced for two years).

However, in some situations, the feelings that come with the rupture are freedom, happiness and relief. Consider talking to other interviewees:

Freedom, ah! Was the best feeling I've never been so happy in my life than in those early years of separation, God! (Jacqueline, university professor, 47 years old, divorced for 10 years).

Then I went to have freedom, is the right word, freedom to do what I wanted: to dance, play! That's when I started playing, going out. After I divorced him I was to be happy! I was really happy to be! (Renata, housewife, 58 years, divorced for 10 years).

Despite expressions of pleasure contained in these statements, [Porchat \(1992\)](#) warns us that even experiencing these feelings contrary to pain and suffering, nobody gets immune to a marital separation. There are conflicting and opposing vibrations between relief and despair; breaching is always a situation of pain and emotional affectation, regardless of who takes the initiative or who only suffers the action of untying. Jacqueline, for example, in the continuation of the interview tells us that, despite having taken the initiative to divorce, is currently unable to establish a more lasting bond because it fears experiencing the failure of the marriage again. As Renata, lived a marriage marked by her husband's infidelity and embarrassment of seeing him making use of alcohol what results in her feeling of freedom after divorce. However, today, Renata not allows her new relationships for fear of repeating "mistakes of the previous relationship" (Sic).

In summary, in the separation process all the feelings and emotions are experienced intense and confrontational way. They vary according to the roles assumed during the divorce, create difficulties in performing daily activities and promote emotional instability.

Impact of Separation on the Redefinition of Individual Identity

From the departure of a marriage, there is an exit that [Bucher-Maluschke \(2003\)](#) calls "we married" for the resumption of individual identity – a subjective process, which presents significant individual changes. This recovery is not linear; it is loaded with internal tensions that interfere in the ways of social, economic and psychological actions of newly divorced. The interferences that separation brought social life experienced by respondents were, at first, as unpleasant, triggering feelings of displacement:

The first outputs, you feel like a duck out of water, you were already used to having that person next to you (Ana).

I went back to my parents' house where I felt better (John).

I felt lost and at the same time, having to find me, I cannot explain, it is really deep, it's too difficult and complicated (Priscilla).

The feeling of displacement may be stronger for some people and, in turn, trigger compensatory excesses that lead to loss of the reference point indicating to them the way forward:

I had a great social change after separation. I began spending every day with the staff of the university to have a beer and do what is not worthy (Marcelo).

In this Marcelo' speech fragment is visible his escape mechanism in relation to love loss.

Anton (2005) states that the subject realize that is not the target of the affections of another, suffers an intense sense of loss that resembles brought by death. In the interviews was observed the presence of this feeling reported by Anton, reaching hinder the process of redefinition of personal identity:

Today I feel alone, extremely depressed, I miss a company, but I do not dare to relate to anyone (Jacqueline).

We believe that after the deconstruction of 'we marriage' there is an internal reorganization that configures the reconstruction of individual identity. It is the search for new projects, which inserts the newly divorced in new and different social, economic and emotional contexts, that we wish to emphasize now:

After the divorce I started doing my friendships, I began to take courses, cookery and confectionery. But I did well was when I started making money, because before I depended of him (Renata).

In the professional did not change, but rather the social, I already have links friendships, I already feel good about going out alone (Ana).

After we broke up, the first thing I wanted to do was put an end in everything. To give you an idea, on a Saturday I sold a car and a bike that I had, because I did more walking, everything that reminded me that I was married, I wanted to give an end (John).

Some participants needed to rebound financially to be able to attain individual reframing:

So I went through difficulties for not having an education and had to start all the professional life, I was homeless, lived by rent too complicated, I suffered more so by not having a structure (Priscilla).

In the financial I have not difficulties because I've already kept the house financially. Financial impacts came later on account of wage flattening because I started paying pension to him (Jacqueline).

Jacqueline's speech goes against what the literature says. By having a better salary than the ex-husband is that she assumes the post-divorce pension.

Finally, in the final phase of redefinition of individual identity, interviewees speak for themselves with a significant improvement in self-esteem, leading them to the feeling of freedom for new bindings:

That's when I joined the gym to work out. I wanted to lose that belly, I no longer wanted that belly, I was not 78 years old, I wanted to get muscle mass, I went to an academy (Carlos).

Six months later I had a lot more health, was practicing sports, much slimmer, much higher self-esteem (Marcelo).

And recently, I'm dating again, and my life is in this way, I do not know if I can be alone, I think I must have someone talking and saying something (John).

The new affective investment to John has been responsible for the rescue of the meaning of his life.

The absence or presence of a professional psychology to support this transition phase was highlighted by respondents. Let's look at some of the speech:

When I talk about this subject, I see I did not look for any professional. This search might have helped me; I think it was something to be solved (Ana).

Today I'm another person; I learned a lot from the psychologists who helped me at this stage (Carlos).

Final Considerations

As stated earlier, this research aimed to understand the feelings that emerge in men and women when, divorce, lose the marital bond; as also to ascertain the impact of separation on redefinition of individual identity.

Considered to have achieved these goals in time we realize that the feelings and emotions – both positive and the negative – are present in the interviews. Among the positives are the feelings of freedom, happiness and peace. However, the negative evidence of feelings of inadequacy, jealousy and anger mixed with sadness and failure, confirming the literature on the subject.

We also found that the presence of a loving family support contributes to face the moment of marriage breakdown, becoming one of the strategies used for the redefinition of individual identity. On this point, we observe that the search and the establishment of a new affective bond was a strategy employed by the subjects to serve in support of this "reframing". Most respondents won the redefinition of their individual identity, managing to become autonomous and able to develop their individuality. All experienced the process of subjectivation, which promoted contact with them and, from that, succeeded in winning individual, significant changes, marital deconstructing identities and opportunity to the emergence of individual potential. They created existential projects capable of contributing to the uniqueness, growth and maturation of themselves, and being with the other. The respondents moved from dependency to emotional and financial independence, which led them to respect, respecting others and develop in interaction processes.

This study advances on previous research and offers new contributions to knowledge currently available on the subject. In this sense, singular and important factor in our study was the care of one of the interviewees with the former spouse, leading to the residence of the former couple in the same house after divorce. In this case, the former spouses have passed through the stages of family, social and legal separation. However, for economic reasons, they kept their houses under one roof, i.e. not implemented the geographical separation. Since the literature has not addressed for this agreement between divorced, we leave it as a suggestion that the formation of this new family arrangement can guide the new research.

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Competing Interests

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