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15 Signs You'll Get Divorced

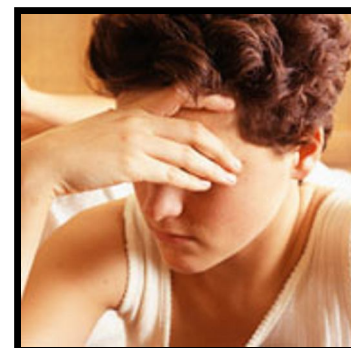
 by *Anneli Rufus*

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Do you have daughters but not sons? How about a kid with ADHD? Did you smile in your yearbook photo? Anneli Rufus on the strange ways science can predict a marriage's success.

1. If you're a woman who got married before the age of eighteen, your marriage faces a 48 percent likelihood of divorce within ten years.

Age matters. Study after study shows that the younger the married couple, the riskier the bond. The risk drops to 40 percent for women who married at age eighteen or nineteen, drops further to 29 percent for women who married at age 20 to 24, and drops even further to 24 percent for women who married at age 25 or older.



David De Lossy / Getty Images

Matthew Bramlett and Mosher, William (2000): First marriage dissolution, divorce, and remarriage: United States, Department of Health and Human Services/National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Data*, 23, 7-8.

2. If you're a woman who wants a child—either a first child or an additional child—much more strongly than your spouse does, your marriage is more than twice as likely to end in divorce as the marriages of couples who agree on how much they do or don't want a child.

"One of the patterns we consistently see is that women tend to be more discontented in relationships than men are," says Stephanie Coontz, Director of Research and Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families, "and women are the ones who tend to initiate separations and divorces." Here's one reason why.

Rebecca Kippen et al. (2009): What's love got to do with it? Homogamy and dyadic approaches to understanding marital instability. Paper delivered at the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics Survey Research Conference.

3. If you have two sons, you face a 36.9 percent likelihood of divorce, but if you have two daughters, the likelihood rises to 43.1 percent.

- [Anneli Rufus: Will You Ever Have a Baby?](#)

- [Anneli Rufus: 15 Ways to Predict Divorce](#)

These findings by Columbia University economist Kristin Mammen echo other studies linking the births of girls with elevated divorce rates. A bright spot in Mammen's research, however, is that after parents divorce, child-support payments show no gender disparity—girls receive no less child support than boys.

Kristin Mammen (2008): The effects of children's gender on divorce and child support. Paper presented at the American Economic

Association's annual meeting.

4. If you're a man with high basal testosterone, you're 43 percent more likely to get divorced than men with low testosterone levels.

"This is something that evolutionary psychologists and everyday people should take account of," says Coontz. "Hypermasculinity is neither an evolutionary benefit nor an adaptive trait, especially nowadays, when the best predictor of a successful marriage is not the specialization into two separate roles"—stereotypically male and stereotypically female—"but rather a convergence and a sharing of roles."

Mazur, Allan. Lanham, MD: *Biosociology of Dominance and Deference*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, p. 125.

5. If your child has been diagnosed with ADHD, you are 22.7 percent more likely to divorce before that child turns eight years old than parents of a child without ADHD.

"ADHD is a very challenging diagnosis," says *The Complete Divorce Handbook* author Brette Sember, "and raising a child with this disorder is expensive, stressful, and emotionally consuming. It's definitely going to put a huge stress on a marriage."

Brian Wymbs and Pelham, William (2008). Rate and predictors of divorce among parents of youth with ADHD. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76 (5), 735-744.

6. If you are currently married but have cohabited with a lover other than your current spouse, you are slightly more than twice as likely to divorce than someone who has never cohabited.

The same study by Ohio State University sociologists that produced this result also found that even those who cohabit only with their future spouses "are still 83 percent more likely to experience a marital disruption relative to those that did not cohabit prior to marriage." Cohabitation statistics are hot buttons, used by some pundits to decry premarital sex and "shacking up." A widely quoted 2003 study by Western Washington University sociologist Jay Teachman found that women who cohabit with anyone besides their future husbands face a raised divorce risk ranging from 55 to 166 percent, but that those who cohabit only with their future husbands face no elevated risk at all.

Anna M. Cunningham (2007): Premarital cohabitation and marital disruption across time: [new results](#) from the NSFH 3, paper delivered at the Population Association of America 2007 annual meeting.

7. If you didn't smile for photographs early in life, your marriage is five times more likely to end in divorce than if you smiled intensely in early photographs.

Two tests, the first involving college yearbook photos and the second involving miscellaneous photos taken during participants' youths, yielded this finding. "People who are optimistic—and that's what smiles tend to show in childhood—find it easier to get along with people," including the people they're married to, asserts Coontz, who is also the author of *Marriage: A History*. Optimistic types "also find it easier to put up with periods in life that might be difficult." Nonetheless, she warns: "Optimism is certainly not going to protect you from everything, so it's no guarantee."

Hertenstein, Matthew et al. (2009): Smile intensity in photographs predicts divorce later in life,

8. If your child has died after the twentieth week of pregnancy, during labor, or soon after labor, you are 40 percent more likely to divorce than if you had not lost a child.

Few catastrophes throw relationships into chaos like the death of a child. Distraught parents blame each other, says Susan Pease Gadoua, author of *Stronger Day by Day: Reflections for Healing and Rebuilding After Divorce*. When

a child dies right before or after being born, "the woman who was carrying the child often gets told that she should have 'taken better care' of the child. What's really happening is that these couples haven't dealt adequately with their grief and they can't form a bond anymore because this huge ball of grief is standing in the way like a barricade."

Katherine Gold et al. (2010). Marriage and cohabitation outcomes after pregnancy loss. *Pediatrics*, 125 (5).

9. If you're a woman who has recently been diagnosed with cancer or multiple sclerosis, your marriage is six times more likely to end in divorce than if your husband had been diagnosed with those diseases instead.

A study of "partner abandonment" revealed that husbands are six times more likely to leave sick wives than wives are to leave sick husbands. "Men have a much harder time being caretakers than women do," Sember observes. "Men find it hard to juggle that kind of responsibility, particularly if the wife has always been the one to fill that role." Moreover, "often women are more able to take time off from work to care for an ill spouse than men are."

MJ Glantz et al. (2009). Gender disparity in the rate of partner abandonment in patients with serious medical illness. *Cancer*, 115 (22).

10. If you're a Caucasian woman and you're separated from your spouse, there's a 98 percent chance that you'll be divorced within six years of that separation; if you're a Hispanic woman, the likelihood is 80 percent; if you're an African-American woman, the likelihood is 72 percent.

This doesn't surprise Coontz. "Unfortunately, women tend to let their anger and disappointment build up for too long before expressing it. They hint at what's bothering them rather than being direct. By the time they're mad enough to separate, something has died." This gloomy news about separations, Coontz says, "tells women to be very direct about what they want and need to change, and tells men to listen to them."

Matthew Bramlett and Mosher, William (2000): First marriage dissolution, divorce, and remarriage: United States, Department of Health and Human Services/National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Data*, 23, 7-8.

11. If you're a dancer or choreographer, you face a 43.05 percent likelihood of divorce, compared with mathematicians, who face a 19.15 percent likelihood, and animal trainers, who face a 22.5 percent likelihood.

Radford University industrial psychologist Michael Aamodt devised a formula for calculating the probabilities of marital success and failure based on the career of one of the spouses. "The Internet is rife with statements regarding occupations with high divorce and suicide rates," says Aamodt, "but most of these statements are not based on research." The study also found that massage therapists face a 38.22 percent likelihood of divorce, dentists face a slim 7.75 percent likelihood, and bellhops face a 28.43 percent likelihood.

Shawn McCoy and Aamodt, Michael (2010): A comparison of law-enforcement divorce rates with those of other occupations. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 25 (1), 1-16.

12. If you're a farmer or rancher, you face only a 7.63 percent likelihood of divorce, joined by other low-risk occupations such as nuclear engineers, who face a 7.29 percent likelihood, and optometrists, who face a mere 4.01 percent likelihood.

In the Radford University study calculating divorce probabilities associated with occupations, the absolute safest marriages are those of agricultural engineers, who face a minuscule 1.78 percent chance of divorce. "Though occupational differences in divorce rates can result in some interesting discussions and theories," says Aamodt, "the differences are most likely due to such non-occupational factors as age, race, income, and personality rather than

the occupation itself."

Shawn McCoy and Aamodt, Michael (2010): A comparison of law-enforcement divorce rates with those of other occupations. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 25 (1), 1-16.

13. If either you or your spouse have suffered a brain injury, your marriage faces a 17 percent chance of ending in divorce.

This is encouraging news, considering the high divorce rates associated with illness and other traumatic events. It's not an eventuality that anyone wants to contemplate, but the researchers conclude, "The rate of divorce after brain injury may, in fact, be much lower than divorce rates for the general population."

Jeff Kreutzer et al. (2010). The truth about divorce after brain injury. *The Challenge*, Winter 2010.

14. If you're an African-American woman, your first marriage has a 47 percent likelihood of ending in divorce within ten years; for Hispanic women, the likelihood is 34 percent; for Caucasian women, it's 32 percent; for Asian women, it's 20 percent.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services study that produced these findings, one-fifth of first marriages end within five years and one-third end within ten years, across the board.

Matthew Bramlett and Mosher, William (2000): First marriage dissolution, divorce, and remarriage: United States, Department of Health and Human Services/National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Data*, 23, 7-8.

15. If you're a woman serving actively in the military, your marriage is 250 percent more likely to end in divorce than that of a man serving actively in the military.

A Rand Corporation study found that while 6.6 percent of military women's marriages dissolved, only 2.6 percent of military men's did. In every branch of the service and consistently over time, "rates of marital dissolution are substantially higher for women than for men," write the study's authors, who speculate that perhaps "the military selects for women whose marriages would be at increased risk regardless of their service."

Benjamin Karney and Crown, John (2007). Families under stress: an assessment of data, theory, and research on marriage and divorce in the military, *Rand Corporation monograph* prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense/National Defense Research Institute.

Anneli Rufus is the author of many books, including [Party of One: The Loners' Manifesto](#) and the Nautilus Award-winning [Stuck: Why We Don't \(or Won't\) Move On](#), and the coauthor of still more, including [Weird Europe](#) and [The Scavengers' Manifesto](#). Her books have been translated into numerous languages, including Chinese and Latvian. In 2006, she won a Society of Professional Journalists award for criticism.

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