

Home > Journal > Social Sciences & Humanities > PSYCH

[Indexing](#) [View Papers](#) [Aims & Scope](#) [Editorial Board](#) [Guideline](#) [Article Processing Charges](#)

PSYCH > Vol.3 No.9, September 2012

OPEN ACCESS

How Do I Regret Thee? Let Me Count My Alternatives: Regret and Decision Making in Intimate Relationships

PDF (Size: 171KB) PP. 657-665 DOI : 10.4236/psych.2012.39100

Author(s)

Richard E. Mattson, Ana M. Franco-Watkins, Karlene Cunningham

ABSTRACT

It is unsurprising when dissatisfied couples separate, but happy couples also dissolve their relationship. A hypothesized precursor to such outcomes is the availability of a better alternative partner. The current study examined regret over one's current partner selection as the possible mechanism by which better alternatives leads to partner switching in otherwise happy unions. An undergraduate sample (N = 94) was administered several questionnaires; which included measures of partner regret, relationship satisfaction, the availability of more attractive alternative partners, and the probability of switching to an alternative in the future. For relatively satisfied individuals, the presence of a better alternative elicited regrets about their currently selected partner that, in turn, predicted greater hypothetical intentions to partner switch. Less satisfied individuals also endorsed partner regret, but irrespective of whether a current alternative was actually available. Only relatively satisfied individuals without more attractive alternatives endorsed low partner regret and, subsequently, greater intentions to remain in their current relationship.

KEYWORDS

Regret; Intimate Relationships; Decision Making; Social Exchange; Attractive Alternatives; Relationship Satisfaction

Cite this paper

Mattson, R. , Franco-Watkins, A. & Cunningham, K. (2012). How Do I Regret Thee? Let Me Count My Alternatives: Regret and Decision Making in Intimate Relationships. *Psychology*, 3, 657-665. doi: 10.4236/psych.2012.39100.

References

- [1] Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173
- [2] Bell, D. E. (1982). Regret in decision making under uncertainty. *Operations Research*, 30, 931-981. doi:10.1287/opre.30.5.961
- [3] Boninger, D. S., Gleicher, F., & Strathman, A. (1994). Counterfactual thinking: From what might have been to what might be. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 297-307. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.67.2.297
- [4] Brehaut, J. C., O' Connor, A. M., Wood, T. J., Hack, T. F., Siminoff, L., Gordon, E., & Feldman-Stewart, D. (2003). Validation of a decision regret scale. *Medical Decision Making*, 23, 281-292. doi:10.1177/0272989X03256005
- [5] Cochran, W. G. (1965). The planning of observational studies of human populations (with discussion). *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A*, 128, 134-155.
- [6] Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [7] Connolly, T., & Butler, D. (2006). Regret in economic psychological theories of choices. *Journal of*

- [Open Special Issues](#)
- [Published Special Issues](#)
- [Special Issues Guideline](#)

[PSYCH Subscription](#)

[Most popular papers in PSYCH](#)

[About PSYCH News](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Recommend to Peers](#)

[Recommend to Library](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Downloads: 271,999

Visits: 599,926

[Sponsors, Associates, and Links >>](#)

- [8] De Bondt, W. F. M., & Thaler, R. H. (1994). Financial decision-making in markets and firms: A behavioral perspective. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.
- [9] Fletcher, G. J. O., Simpson, J. A., Thomas, G., & Giles, L. (1999). Ideals in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 72-89. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.72
- [10] Fossett, M. A., & Kiecolt, K. J. (1991). A methodological review of the sex ratio: Alternatives for comparative research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53, 941-957. doi:10.2307/352999
- [11] Funk, J. L., & Rogge, R. D. (2007). Testing the ruler with item response theory: Increasing precision of measurement for relationship satisfaction with the couples satisfaction index. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21, 572-583. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.21.4.572
- [12] Furman, W., & Shaffer, L. (2003). The role of romantic relationships in adolescent development. In P. Florsheim (Ed.), *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications* (pp. 3-22). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- [13] Gilovich, T., & Medvec, V. H. (1995). The experience of regret: What, when, and why. *Psychological Review*, 102, 379-395. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.102.2.379
- [14] Gonzaga, G. C., Haselton, M. G., Smurda, J., Davies, M., & Poore, J. C. (2008). Love, desire, and the suppression of thoughts of romantic alternatives. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29, 119-126. doi:10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2007.11.003
- [15] Inman, J., Dyer, J. S., & Jia, J. (1997). A generalized utility model of disappointment and regret effects on post-choice valuation. *Marketing Science*, 16, 97-111. doi:10.1287/mksc.16.2.97
- [16] Inman, J., & Zeelenberg, M. (2002). Regret in repeat purchase versus switching decisions: The attenuating role of decision justifiability. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 116-128. doi:10.1086/339925
- [17] Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3-34. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3
- [18] Ku, G. (2008). Learning to de-escalate: The effects of regret in escalation of commitment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Making Processes*, 105, 221-232. doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2007.08.002
- [19] Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the investment model. *Personal Relationships*, 10, 37-57. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00035
- [20] Levinger, G. (1965). Marital cohesiveness and dissolution: An integrative review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 27, 19-28. doi:10.2307/349801
- [21] Maner, J. K., Rouby, D. A., & Gonzaga, G. C. (2008). Automatic inattention to attractive alternatives: the evolved psychology of relationship maintenance. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29, 343-349. doi:10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2008.04.003
- [22] Markman, K. D., Gavanski, I., Sherman, S. J., & McMullen, M. N. (1993). The mental simulation of better and worse possible worlds. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 29, 87-109. doi:10.1006/jesp.1993.1005
- [23] McNulty, J. K., & Karney, B. R. (2002). Expectancy confirmation in appraisals of marital interactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 764-775. doi:10.1177/0146167202289006
- [24] Mellers, B. A., Schwartz, A., Ho, K., & Ritov, I. (1997). Decision affect theory: Emotional reactions to the outcomes of risky options. *Psychological Science*, 8, 423-429. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00455.x
- [25] Miller, R. S. (1997). Inattentive and contented: Relationship commitment and attention to alternatives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 758-766. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.4.758
- [26] Peters, E., V?stfj?ll, D., G?rling, T., & Slovic, P. (2006). Affect and decision making: A "hot" topic. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 19, 79-85. doi:10.1002/bdm.528
- [27] Preacher, K. J., Rucker, D. D., & Hayes, A. F. (2007). Addressing moderated mediation hypotheses:

- [28] Previti, D., & Amato, P. R. (2003). Why stay married? Rewards, barriers, and marital stability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 561- 573. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00561.x
- [29] Ritov, I., & Baron, J. (1995). Outcome knowledge, regret, and omission bias. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 64, 119-127. doi: 10.1006/obhd.1995.1094
- [30] Roese, N. J., Pennington, G., Coleman, J., Janicki, M., Li., N, Kenrick, D. T. (2006). Sex differences in regret: All for love or some for lust? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 770-780. doi:10.1177/0146167206286709
- [31] Roese, N. J., & Summerville, A. (2005). What we regret most... and why. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 1273-1285. doi:10.1177/0146167205274693
- [32] Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 357- 391. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x
- [33] Sanna, L. J. and Turley, K. J. (1996). Antecedents to spontaneous counterfactual thinking: Effects of expectancy violation and outcome valence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 906-919. doi:10.1177/0146167296229005
- [34] Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyubomirsky, S., White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Maximizing versus satisficing: Happiness is a matter of choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 1178-1197. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.5.1178
- [35] Simpson, J. A., Gangestad, S. W., & Lerma, M. (1990). Perception of physical attractiveness: Mechanisms involved in the maintenance of romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1192-1201. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.59.6.1192
- [36] South, S. J., Trent, K., & Shen, Y. (2001). Changing partners: Toward a macrostructural-opportunity theory of marital dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 743-754. doi:10.1111/j.1741-