

Divorce Recovery Chart Integrates Perceived Disorder

Stanley Hagemeyer

Researchers have offered numerous theoretical models to describe the process of divorce recovery. Herrman applied Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief to the divorce recovery process. Wiseman and Krauss put forth similar descriptions with slight variations. These five steps may be described as, first, shock and denial; second, anger or guilt, a time of fixing blame; third, anxious bargaining to salvage some of what is being lost; fourth, depression and resignation; and finally, acceptance and renewal.

Salts divided several proposed systems into two basic kinds, that of emotional/affective dimensions, as described above, and those focusing more on behavior/event dimensions. Bohannon's is perhaps best known. His six stations of divorce, namely, the emotional, legal, economic, coparental, community, and psychic "divorces" describe a series of losses analyzed from an event/behavior perspective. Another in this category is Kessler's seven stages of divorce which approaches the process more as a series of tasks to perform.

Serious problems with each of these models become apparent. People frequently experience the stages or events in different orders and they often repeat in various combinations. Patterns appear and recur in a wide array of varieties. Some refer to them as cyclical, although the stages do not repeat neatly. The experience of seeming to be "going around in circles" adds an extra dimension of frustration and pain. I propose these familiar emotional stages appear repeatedly because they are in response to a predictable series of identifiable losses.

It seems to me that there is an interlocking dynamic between the two basic types of models which can help us understand the cyclical nature of these experiences. The emotional stages have often confused observers because we are observing at the same time a series of specific losses identifiable on quite a different plane. These losses represent the important psycho/social components of a marriage. They may occur one or more at a time, and they may occur either prior to the separation, during separation, or after the actual divorce decree. The emotional stages recur in response to the actual or threatened losses which are occurring. Each loss brings an emotional response. But different losses have variations in value to different individuals.

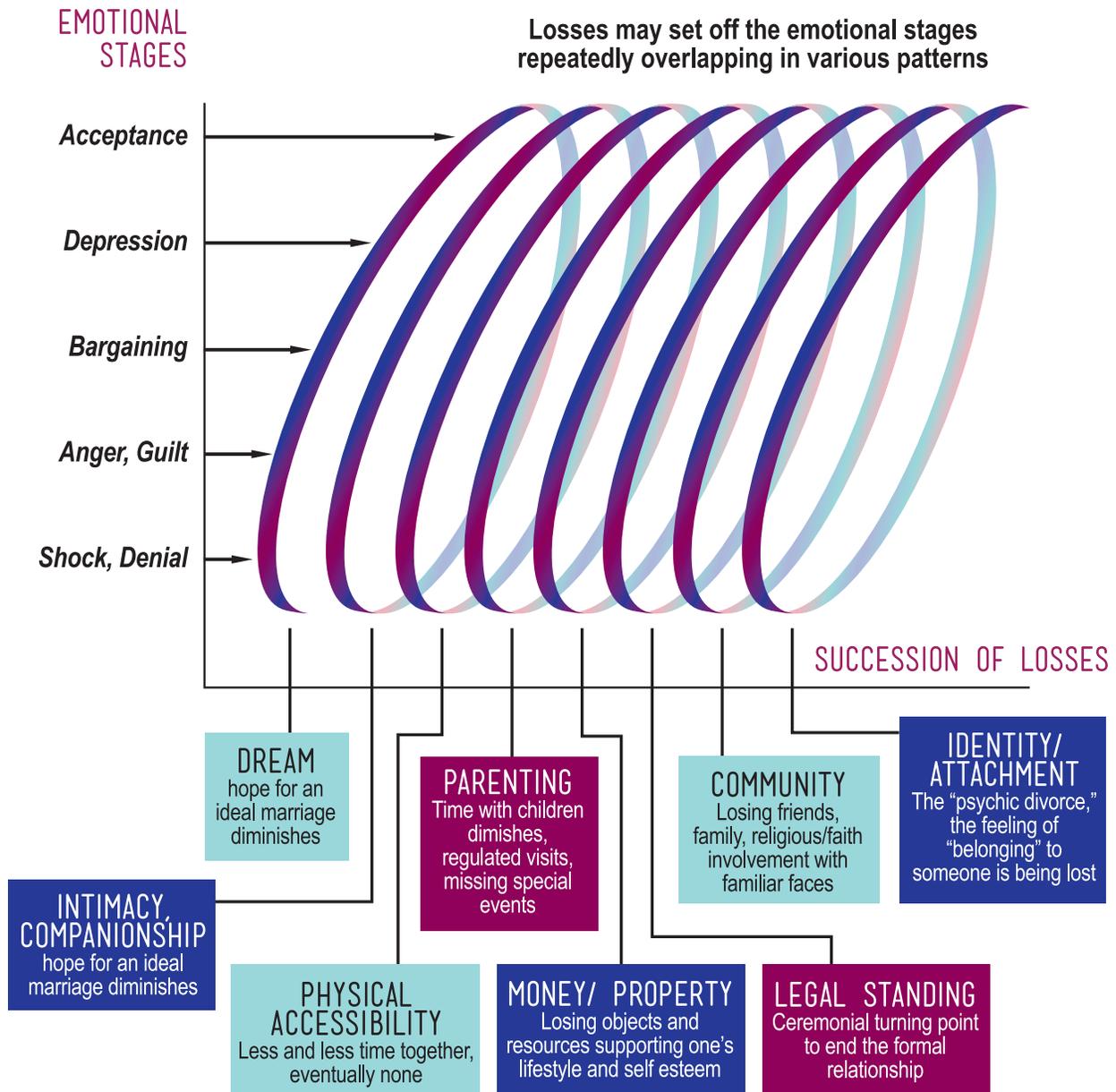
The depth of emotional response will likely be determined in part by the lost item's value in one's psychic make-up or the value placed upon it by a cognitive belief system. When each new loss is perceived, singly or in groups, it can set in motion a series of emotional stages which echo one after the other like waves upon water. Stages seem to repeat, but in confusing patterns of different intensity. A therapist may wish to consider Erikson's thematic theory of development, in discerning the varied meaning and intensity of an individual's experience as suggested by Smart.

In my one-page recovery chart, I offer a tool which can assist both counselor and client to grasp the broad picture. This visual can help a person see more clearly the road ahead. The Hagemeyer Divorce Recovery Chart is available for educational, counseling, or research purposes without charge, provided proper acknowledgment of its source is given.

The Hagemeyer Divorce Recovery Chart is also available for download without charge at <https://www.stanhagemeyer.com/publications-resources>. Its copyright is registered.

HAGEMEYER DIVORCE RECOVERY CHART

When a marriage deteriorates each component becoming lost can set off a wave of distress with familiar emotional stages of loss. The succession of losses creates overlapping patterns of reverberating emotions.



Any person's actual experience will be more irregular than the chart illustrates since individual values and development differ, causing more or less emotional response to each element lost. Thus, at one point a person may gain a sense of acceptance and resolution, but then experience new waves of conflicting emotions, creating a confusing array of overlapping feelings during one's progress toward recovery. The framework shown here may give a person perspective on the confusing, interacting emotions. Some counseling tools can help identify which losses are likely to create the most distress. Seeing the whole picture this way can help one navigate the recovery process with more confidence and contribute to one's personal growth.

© 1986 and 2018 Stanley Hagemeyer

Reference: Stanley Hagemeyer, "Making Sense of Divorce Grief," *Pastoral Psychology* (1986):237-50, Reprinted in *The Best of Theology*, Vol.1, 307-317

stanhagemeyer.com

References

Excerpted in part from Stanley Hagemeyer, "Making Sense of Divorce Grief," *Pastoral Psychology* (1986): 237-250. The Hagemeyer Divorce Recovery Chart is available for download without charge at <https://www.stanhagemeyer.com/publications-resources>.

Paul Bohannon, "The six stations of divorce," in *Divorce and After*, ed. Paul Bohannon (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 29-55.

E. H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), and *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International University Press, 1959).

S.J. Herrman, "Divorce: A grief process," *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* 12 (Spring 1974): 108-112.

Sheila Kessler, *The American Way of Divorce: Prescriptions for Change*, (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1975).

S. Kraus, "The crisis of divorce: growth promoting or pathogenic?" *Journal of Divorce* 3(2) (Winter 1979): 107-119.

E. Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, (New York: McMillan, 1969).

C.J. Salts, "Divorce process: Integration of theory," *Journal of Divorce* 2 (Spring 1979): 233-240.

Laura S. Smart, "An application of Erikson's theory to the recovery-from-divorce process," *Journal of Divorce* 1 (Fall 1977): 71.

R.S. Wiseman, "Crisis theory and the process of divorce," *Social Casework* 56(4) (1975): 205-212.