

THE
FRAUD
OF THE RINGS

By the same author, published by LPS publishing:

Buchanan's Dictionary of Quotations for Conservatives (for when only the right quotation will do)
(2010)

Harriet Harman Drove me to France
(2010)

Two Men in a Car (a businessman, a chauffeur, and their holidays in France)
(2008)

Guitar Gods in Beds. (Bedfordshire: a heavenly county)
(2008)

By the same author, published by Kogan Page:

Profitable Buying Strategies: How to Cut Procurement Costs and Buy Your Way to Higher Profits
(Kogan Page, 2008)

THE
FRAUD
OF THE RINGS

mike buchanan

lps publishing

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to realism

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks must go to the authors and publishers of the splendid works that I cite in this book. I should make it clear that not one of the authors makes the central thesis of this book: that most adults in the developed world in the modern era are unsuited to the institution of marriage as it is currently structured, based upon a traditional and religious paradigm. That thesis is mine alone.

My thanks to the cover designer Mr D, and to the staff at the printer, especially the ever-patient Mr M.

My thanks to the diligent Ms W, my copy editor and proofreader, for finding so many flaws in my flawless manuscript.

My thanks to the people who gave me their views about the institution of marriage, their own marriages, and the marriages of people they know and have known.

A particularly warm ‘thank you’ to the politician who is the very personification of political correctness in the United Kingdom today, for the material she provided for this book: the unfortunately energetic Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP, Minister for Women and Equality. I was sure she would have interesting views on a number of the issues covered by this book, so I wrote to her, requesting a meeting. A copy of the letter is in appendix two. Unfortunately, she declined to meet, so we shall never know her take on my exploration of marriage in the modern era.

I’m grateful to (divorced) Mr W, the finance director of a company in the United Kingdom, for the wonderful title *The Fraud of the Rings*. Never again shall I comment on accountants’ lack of a sense of humour.

My final thanks go to a good friend and business associate in Yorkshire who, having suggested I write a book about the subject of unhappiness in marriage, then gave me a good deal of his time and advice over the period it took to write. Mr X, will you *please* stop earning so much money as a business consultant, and start devoting yourself to your writing. You’d be happier, if a little poorer. But then *we* would be a little richer.

INTRODUCTION

When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part.

(George Bernard Shaw, Preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma*)

Welcome to *The Fraud of the Rings*. I should start by making a point about the scope of the book, which is limited to the institution of marriage in the increasingly individualistic and secular societies of the developed world. I know nothing about the institution of marriage in the developing world, nor indeed in tightly-knit communities linked to individual religions in the developed world, and it follows that I have nothing to say about them. I do not intend to cause offence to people of traditional religious persuasions, nor indeed to anyone else. I do recognise that any attempt at reviewing the institution of marriage will cause offence in certain quarters, but it needs to be done. The divorce statistics demand that it be done.

Isn't it about time we were more honest and admitted what has been blindingly obvious for so many years? That in the developed world in the modern era, marriage is a source of unhappiness – rather than happiness – for many people. Maybe even *most* people. And isn't it also about time we considered whether the issue of personal unhappiness might largely explain the ever-rising divorce rates, rather than the loss of 'traditional values'? If so, it follows that we should make a more serious effort to understand the issues of unhappiness in marriage and what causes so many marriages to be unhappy or to fail altogether. This book represents the outcome of my own efforts to understand the issues.

We live in challenging times. Never has the divorce rate been higher – and it's still rising – despite an ever-growing army of marriage guidance and relationship counsellors and therapists, and countless articles and publications offering advice on marriage and other intimate relationships.

Views about the institution of marriage come from 'relationship experts', social commentators, journalists, book writers, politicians, clerics, and organisations with *vested interests* in our marrying and staying married, sometimes with utter disregard for our personal happiness.

We tend to accept their implied message without challenging it. The message is that the institution of marriage *in its traditional form* remains suitable for the majority of adults in the developed world, and that the majority of adults can expect to find happiness and even joy in it. It follows that people who find themselves unhappy in their marriages must be *flawed*. I believe this cruel message, albeit erroneous – as we shall discover – only adds to the misery of countless unhappily married people, and people who have been unhappily married.

For some years over 50% of new marriages in the developed world, where divorce is freely available and there is no major stigma attached to it, have ended in divorce. Or are predicted to do so in the fullness of time. Around 50% of the marriages that do not end in divorce are broadly unhappy. Most people are literally deluded when they marry with any degree of confidence that they will have long and happy marriages. That's the marriage delusion, which I've termed 'the fraud of the rings'.

Some people are clearly 'comfortable' in the married state, while others report themselves uncomfortable, sometimes severely so. In my mid-forties I married for the second time, to a kind and loving woman of a similar age. Her happy first marriage – of over 25 years' duration – had ended with her husband's death. The length of her first marriage helped me believe I might make more of a success of my second marriage than my first. How wrong I was. How *deluded*.

In 2007 the marriage failed, after only three years, for reasons wholly connected with me and not with my wife, and I resolved to understand the problems I had with the institution. For some time it was only a personal quest and I could not then have imagined that I would eventually write a book about marriage.

In my customary introverted manner I turned to books (written by 'relationship experts' this time) to deliver the insights I was seeking. But a problem soon emerged. While I couldn't readily fault what I was reading, much of the material didn't seem very relevant to me or *my* unhappiness. A frequent piece of advice – particularly from female writers – was to *communicate* more about emotions with a partner. That didn't help. I had been unhappy in my marriages but I didn't know *why*. I had nothing to communicate.

After reading a number of these books, I started to realise that the majority of the writers were unlike me in at least two important regards: they were female and extraverted – they clearly derived great pleasure from intimate relationships. And they were often religious, too, which I'm not. The general thrust of their arguments appeared to be that they themselves had enjoyed lengthy and happy marriages, and they attributed this to certain things they did (or didn't do) in their marriages, such as the ways in which they resolved conflict. And the 'ways' would be outlined in the book. The inference seemed to be that if you followed the writers' advice, happiness would surely follow.

My sceptical mind simply *had* to challenge that inference, by testing its logic in another context. Let's imagine that a world record-holding Olympic athlete wrote a book relating in detail how he'd trained on the way to getting a world record. In the book he led the reader to infer that all he or she had to do to achieve their own world record was to adopt the same training regime. The reader would surely regard the inference as absurd, knowing that he or she almost certainly didn't have the physical 'right stuff' to start with.

But what's less obvious is that we might not have the personality type, the temperament, nor the mental and emotional 'right stuff' to improve our relationships through reading books written by 'relationship experts'. And this might explain why those books sell in such high numbers, and the divorce rate keeps on rising anyway. Maybe the same phenomenon accounts for the growth in diet book sales in parallel with the growth of waistlines across the developed world.

I wasn't getting very far trying to understand my unhappiness in my marriages. Then I had a stroke of luck. A business associate was driving past my home town, and had a little time to kill before a meeting. We met for lunch. I outlined the struggle I was experiencing in trying to understand my unhappiness with marriage, whereupon he had a good idea. He said:

You've been improving major organisations' annual profits by millions of pounds every year, for over 25 years. You do it by analysing and then solving some of their most challenging problems. Here's an idea. Why not apply sound analytical approaches to help you understand the source or

sources of your unhappiness? You might then also discover a range of reasons behind why other people are unhappy in *their* marriages.

Imagine that the government, knowing the negative impacts of marital unhappiness and the high and rising divorce rate, is determined to reduce marital unhappiness and thereby reverse the divorce rate trend. It has charged a number of organisations with making recommendations, and one of them has commissioned you to conduct a two-year-long study. Take your usual professional and disciplined approach and deliver a book at the end, along with recommendations. Oh, and the organisation *demand*s that you tell them the facts as they appear to you. The people there don't want their feelings spared, and they're not easily shocked. They'll be perfectly happy for you to report something which differs from 'received wisdom' on the subject.

His advice made sense, and I felt that I'd soon know whether or not this was a worthwhile project. In the event it took only a day or two before I had persuaded myself that the project *did* merit serious attention. My work over the course of two years led me to a thesis which I believe to have structural integrity. And when I interviewed people who were unhappily married, or who had been unhappily married but were now divorced or widowed, the thesis appeared to explain a great deal of their marital unhappiness – although not, of course, all of it.

My central thesis is that there are three *marriage risk factors*, each of which may contribute to the likelihood that an individual will struggle to find happiness in marriage. The *more* of the factors an individual has, the *lower* the prospect of he or she being happily married. The factors are:

- Introversion (about 54% of men and 47% of women are introverted)
- Being of the male gender (50% of marriage partners)
- Not holding strong traditional religious convictions *in common with a spouse* (over 93% of British adults)

The first two risk factors are beyond the power of the individual to change. And the risk factors may or may not manifest themselves quite *independently* of the quality of relationship with a partner. As for the third risk factor, even moderately well-educated people in the developed world in the modern era would generally not be prepared – for reasons of intellectual integrity, if nothing else – to *genuinely* adopt the religion of

their spouse for the sake of marital harmony. In my second marriage I had all three risk factors, my wife had one (she was religious, I wasn't).

To the best of my knowledge, no other writer has put forward this thesis. And I'm certainly no 'relationship expert'. So why has no one suggested this thesis before? I believe the answers include social conditioning, psychological defence mechanisms, religious beliefs, political correctness, an army of (mainly female and extravert) marriage guidance and relationship counsellors, and (mainly female and extravert) writers of books and articles about marriage and relationships.

I came to understand that one of the leading causes of unhappiness in marriage is the unrealistic expectation that marriage *will* reliably deliver happiness. It follows that reduced expectations of happiness in marriage should improve happiness. Strange but true.

One of my motivations for writing this book was to give readers the information they need to help them assess their personal aptitude for marriage, and to help them also predict the likely long-term compatibility of their partners and themselves. Or at least direct the reader to the most appropriate resources, which explains why this book contains extracts from so many other books, over 30 others in fact. I could have simply written material along the lines of 'A recent American study concluded that . . .' but I felt strongly that the reader interested in particular topics should know where to go for further information. All the books are worth reading. I should know, as I bought and read them all.

I should like to see couples who are considering marriage replace their optimism with realism. And given how many people suffer from the marriage delusion, I believe the state should help assess whether couples are adequately prepared for marriage, and refuse them wedding licences when they are not. The key to reducing the divorce rate surely lies in reducing the number of marriages with little prospect of success.

We return to the personality trait of introversion, which I believe to be an important risk factor. This book covers the topic at length, because it's widely misunderstood and popularly deemed a 'negative' trait in the more extraverted societies of the developed world.

People can't change their personality traits – they're born with them and they'll die with them – and it makes no sense to encourage introverts to 'work harder' at their marriages. You would as helpfully exhort them to

fly by flapping their arms, and when they fail, tell them it's because they're not making enough of an effort. 'Come on, faster! FASTER!!!'

Even when the two partners in a marriage each have the *personal aptitude* for a happy marriage, there remains the issue of *mutual compatibility*. This was less of a problem at the time marriage developed – thousands of years ago – when most people would not expect to live many years longer after they had reared their children. A 30-year-old would have been a village elder. But now we are told we could – we *should* – have happy and sexually active marriages of 50 years' duration or more. It's not natural, and it's not reasonable. Not for the vast majority of us, anyway.

The children of divorced couples are more likely to divorce than the children of couples who remain together. I wondered if there might be a genetic component to the likelihood that an individual will divorce, and discovered that there is.

There are a number of important yet largely 'missing voices' in the popular literature on long-term relationships and marriage. They include:

- People who find marriage difficult – many are cowed by society effectively telling them they are flawed. They're not
- Men with traditionally male characteristics – many of the books written by men are more sympathetic to female than to male perspectives
- Introverts – but we're starting to value ourselves, at long last

The final chapter explores the future of marriage. It starts with the premise that the institution of marriage should be adapted to suit the increasingly individualistic and secular-minded people of the developed world, rather than those people adapt to traditional marriage. The chapter offers a number of recommendations, including the introduction of a second form of marriage contract, of a fixed term.

The idea of a fixed-term marriage contract emerged from what I knew to work well in the business world. But it turned out not to be an original idea as it had already been proposed by others, including John Cleese in 2008. And in 2007 by Dr Gabriele Pauli, a German politician who had posed for a magazine as a dominatrix. You couldn't make it up.

THE FRAUD OF THE RINGS AND
THE ISSUES UNDERMINING
MODERN MARRIAGE

Strange to say what delight we married people have to see these poor fools decoyed into our condition.

(Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 25 December 1665)

MARRIAGE AND TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

Those who talk most about the blessings of marriage and the constancy of its vows are the very ones who declare that if the chain were broken and the prisoners were left free to choose, the whole social fabric would fly asunder. You can't have the argument both ways. If the prisoner is happy, why lock him in? If he isn't, why pretend that he is?

(George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*)

THE DIFFERENT NATURES
OF MEN AND WOMEN

Hogamus, Higamous,
Man is polygamous.
Higamus, Hogamous,
Woman monogamous.

(William James, *Oxford Book of Marriage*)

PERSONALITY TYPES, INTROVERSION
AND EXTRAVERSION, GENETICS,
ADULTERY

I try my best to be just like I am,
But everybody wants you to be just like them.

(Bob Dylan, *Maggie's Farm*)

LOVE, LUST, SEX, FANTASY,
GENDER RANCOUR, ROMANTIC FICTION

Oh, life is a glorious cycle of song,
A medley of extemporanea;
And love is a thing that can never go wrong;
And I am Marie of Roumania.

(Dorothy Parker, *Comment*)

READINESS FOR MARRIAGE,
COMPATIBILITY, MARITAL DISHARMONY,
DEPRESSION AND PERSISTENCE,
PREDICTING OUTCOMES

For the first time since sudden love had thrown them into each other's arms, she had found herself beginning to wonder if her Blair was quite the godlike superman she had supposed. There even flashed through her mind a sinister speculation as to whether, when you came right down to it, he wasn't something of a pill.

(PG Wodehouse, *Hot Water*)

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

I suppose true sexual equality will come when a general called Anthea is found having an unwise lunch with a young, unreliable model from Spain.

(John Mortimer, *The Spectator*, 26 March 1994)

RELIGION

I've a definite sense of spirituality. I want Brooklyn to be christened, but don't know into what religion yet.

(David Beckham, *Daily Mail*, 5 September 2002)

THE LAW RELATING TO MARRIAGE AND
DIVORCE IN ENGLAND AND WALES,
ASSET DIVISION IN DIVORCE
SETTLEMENTS

I don't think I'll get married again. I'll just find a woman I don't like and give her a house.

(Rod Stewart)

THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE

In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted.

(Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*)

APPENDIX 1

THE LETTER TO
THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF RELATE

APPENDIX 2

THE LETTER TO THE RT HON HARRIET HARMAN QC MP

The Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC
Member of Parliament for Camberwell and Peckham, Deputy Leader of
the Labour Party, Labour Party Chair, Minister for Women and Equality,
Leader of the House of Commons, and The Lord Privy Seal
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

26 April 2009

Dear Ms Harman,

APPENDIX 3

THE SEEKERS: A CASE STUDY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

APPENDIX 4

PERSONALITY TYPES AND THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR®

APPENDIX 5

QUOTATIONS ABOUT LOVE, SEX, MARRIAGE . . .

(Sorted alphabetically by the surname of the speaker or the writer, or by the title of a show.)

‘Passion, sexual passion, may lead to marriage, but cannot sustain marriage. The purpose of marriage is the raising of children, for which patience, not passion, is the necessary foundation.’

Edward Abbey

‘Marriage, in life, is like a duel in the midst of a battle.’

Edmond About

‘Mrs Merton’ to Debbie McGee: ‘But what first, Debbie, attracted you to millionaire Paul Daniels?’

Caroline Aherne, *The Mrs Merton Show*

‘Sex without love is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go it’s one of the best.’

‘My wife was an immature woman . . . I would be home in the bathroom, taking a bath, and my wife would walk in whenever she felt like it and sink my boats.’

Woody Allen, ‘I Had a Rough Marriage’

‘Alcestis had exercised a mysterious attraction and then an unmysterious repulsion on two former husbands, the second of whom had to resort to fatal coronary disease to get away from her.’

Kingsley Amis

‘After a while marriage is a sibling relationship, marked by occasional, rather regrettable, episodes of incest.’

Martin Amis

Lady Astor: If you were my husband, Winston, I’d put poison in your tea.

Winston Churchill: If you were my wife, Nancy, I’d drink it.

‘I married beneath me. All women do.’

Nancy, Lady Astor

‘There is not one in a hundred of either sex who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it *is* so; and I feel that it *must* be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves.’

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*

‘Whatever you do, keep clear of thin women. They’re trouble.’

Alan Ayckbourn, *A Small Family Business*

‘Spouses are impediments to great enterprises.’

Francis Bacon

‘Marriage must incessantly contend with a monster that devours everything: familiarity.’

Honoré de Balzac

‘I thought I told you to wait in the car.’

Tallulah Bankhead, greeting an ex-lover after several years

‘Love is just a system for getting someone to call you darling after sex.’

Julian Barnes, *Talking It Over*

‘You may marry the man of your dreams, ladies, but 14 years later you’re married to a couch that burps.’

‘Husbands think we should know where everything is – like the uterus is a tracking device. He asks me, “Roseanne, do we have any Cheetos left?” Like he can’t go over to that sofa cushion and lift it himself.’

‘My husband complained to me. He said, “I can’t remember when we last had sex.” And I said, “Well I can, and that’s why we ain’t doing it.”’

Roseanne Barr

‘Love . . . the delightful interval between meeting a beautiful girl and discovering that she looks like a haddock.’

John Barrymore

‘People keep asking me if I’ll marry again. It’s as if after you’ve had one car crash you want another.’

Stephanie Beacham

‘My notion of a wife at forty is that a man should be able to change her, like a bank note, for two twenties.’

Warren Beatty

‘The big difference between sex for money and sex for free is that sex for money usually costs a lot less.’

Brendan Behan

‘Never marry a man who hates his mother, because he’ll end up hating you.’

Jill Bennett

‘People shop for a bathing suit with more care than they do for a husband or wife. The rules are the same. Look for something you’ll feel comfortable wearing. Allow for room to grow.’

Erma Bombeck

‘It is ridiculous to think you can spend your entire life with just one person. Three is about the right number. Yes, I imagine three husbands would do it.’

Clare Boothe Luce

‘It is so far from being natural for a man and woman to live in a state of marriage, that we find all the motives which they have for remaining in that connection, and the restraints which civilised society imposes to prevent separation, are hardly sufficient to keep them together.’

James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

‘Love is an obsessive delusion that is cured by marriage.’

Dr Karl Bowman

‘Marriage is the most advanced form of warfare in the modern world.’

‘The whole point of marriage is to stop you getting anywhere near real life. You think it’s a great struggle with the mystery of being. It’s more like being smothered in warm cocoa. There’s sex, but it’s not what you think. Marvellous, for the first fortnight. Then every Wednesday. If there isn’t a good late-night concert on the Third. Meanwhile you become a biological

functionary. An agent of the great female womb, spawning away, dumping its goods in your lap for succour. Daddy, daddy, we're here, and we're expensive.'

Malcolm Bradbury

'People marry for a variety of reasons, and with varying results; but to marry for love is to invite inevitable tragedy.'

James Branch Cabell

'I love it when my period comes round. I can really be *myself* again.'

'My ex-boyfriend came round last night which was a bit weird, because I didn't even know he was in a coma.'

Jo Brand

'Sex, on the whole, was meant to be short, nasty and brutish. If what you want is cuddling, you should buy a puppy.'

Julie Burchill, *Sex and Sensibility*

'I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury.'

George Burns

'It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs Carlyle marry one another and so make only two people miserable instead of four.'

Samuel Butler, letter of 21 November 1884

Cliff Clavin: How's married life treating ya? Quite a change, huh?

Frasier Crane: Well, Lilith and I did live together for a year before we wed, so other than the fact that I now see it stretching endlessly before me until I die rotting in the grave, there's no real difference.

John Ratzenberger and **Kelsey Grammar**, *Cheers*

'It's only adultery if you get caught!'

Thunderin' Paul Carrington

'You know what the difference is between a wife and a terrorist? You can negotiate with a terrorist.'

Frank Carson

'If variety is the spice of life, marriage is the big can of leftover Spam.'

Johnny Carson

Sam Malone: You know . . . you know I always wanted to pop you one? Maybe this is my lucky day, huh?
Diane Chambers: You disgust me. I hate you.
Sam: Are you as turned on as I am?
Diane: More.
Ted Danson and Shelley Long, *Cheers*

‘The trouble with some women is that they get all excited about nothing – and then marry him.’

Cher

‘The pleasure is momentary, the position ridiculous, and the expense damnable.’

Lord Chesterfield on sex

‘Marriage is an adventure, like going to war.’

GK Chesterton

‘Many a man has fallen in love with a girl in a light so dim he would not have chosen a suit by it.’

Maurice Chevalier

‘My wife and I were married in a toilet. It was a marriage of convenience.’

Tommy Cooper

‘That married couples can live together day after day is a miracle the Vatican has overlooked.’

Bill Cosby

‘I’ve sometimes thought of marrying, and then I’ve thought again.’

Noel Coward

‘My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.’

‘When it comes to sex, at my age I like threesomes. In case one of us dies.’

‘We sleep in separate rooms, we have dinner apart, we take separate vacations – we’re doing everything we can to keep our marriage together.’

Rodney Dangerfield

'I'd marry again if I found a man who had 15 million dollars and would sign over half of it to me before the marriage, and guarantee that he'd be dead within a year.'

'I should never have married, but I didn't want to live without a man. Brought up to respect the conventions, love had to end in marriage. I'm afraid it did.'

Bette Davis

'My wife is a sex object. Every time I ask for sex, she objects.'

'Last year my wife ran off with the fellow next door and I must admit, I still miss him.'

Les Dawson

'The difficulty with marriage is that we fall in love with a personality, but must live with a character.'

Peter Devries

'The feminist movement seems to have beaten the manners out of men, but I didn't see them put up a lot of resistance.'

Clarissa Dickson Wright, *Mail on Sunday*, 24 September 2000

'I have always thought that every woman should marry, and no man.'

Lothair

'It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being.'

Benjamin Disraeli

'I've married a few people I shouldn't have, but haven't we all?'

Mamie van Doren

'Any intelligent woman who reads the marriage contract, and then goes into it, deserves all the consequences.'

Isadora Duncan

'They say marriages are made in heaven, but so are thunder and lightning.'

Clint Eastwood

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