The Behavioral Cascade of Divorce Portrayed in *Hollywood Divorces* Novel by Jackie Collins

Eni Nur Aeni
English Department
Jenderal Soedirman University
Purwokerto, Indonesia
ensyaf@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at finding out a series of situation that lead up to divorce experienced by the characters in the novel. The analysis will be provided in the form of stages based on John Gottman’s behavioral cascade model of marital dissolution. This cascade, which consists of four stages, is started with a behavior which is called as “complain/criticize”, then followed by Defensiveness stage, contempt stage, and finally stonewalling stage. All those four stages will be used as the main theory to analyze the story of Hollywood divorces novel written by Jackie Collins. As this novel mainly tells about three female characters with their problem of husband-wife communication, which leads to their divorces, this study will also apply the ideas of feminism. By combining the Gottman’s scale and feminism, it is expected that the process of analyzing the divorce stages experienced by Shelby Cheney (a talented film artist), Lola Sanchez (A sexy, young Latina superstar), and Cat Harrison (a hot nineteen-year old writer/director with a wild-child past) will be easily revealed. The result of this study shows that the characters have different tendency in each stage of behavioral cascades. In Shelby’s case, each stage comes after the previous stages happened. Starts with a series of complaint of Linc’s drinking habit in their early marriage, completed with some defensiveness anytime Linc deceives his promise of quitting to drink, and then followed by her contempt to her husband due to his womanizing habit, and ended up with stone-walling executed by both Shelby and Linc because they jealous each other to their co-star in their movie. Lola’s case is different. She does not love her husband, Matt, from the beginning of their life. So, the very obvious stages that can be viewed are contempt and stone-walling. Although Matt tries hard to make everything better in their life, Lola keeps standing in distance from Matt and always thinks of getting divorce of him. For Cat Harrison’s case, the complain stage is not that significant. The defensiveness, contempt and stone-walling stages happened almost at the same time after she caught her lovely husband sleep with some other women.

KEYWORDS: divorce, behavior, stages, complaint, defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling
When people enter a marriage life, most of them expect to have a happy and long-lasting one. However, the facts sometimes happen on the other way. Many couples have to face the reality that they have to terminate their official engagement to their spouse. It happens due to some reasons. As a matter of fact, people bring their attitudes, past experiences, occupation, and education with them into marriage. Many of these factors appear to have an appreciable impact on the likelihood that a couple will get divorced or remain married (Segrin & Flora, 2005: 255). This phenomenon happens to anybody, including those who are involved in camera work in Hollywood. This novel, which was written by Jackie Collins (2003), told about the marriage life of three glamorous women - a beautiful movie artist, a sexy Latina superstar, as well as a young and power-hungry director - that have to be ended up having divorce.

The beautiful movie artist named Shelby Cheney got married to Linc Blackwood, a famous, macho movie star who was very addicted to alcohol and later cocaine. Furthermore, with his fame, wealth and all facilities owned by him, he frequently had nights out with guys and plenty of women who were always ready to willingly serve him. Regardless such habits, Shelby continued to put up with his infidelities, she always tried to forgive him, thinking that it all happened because of the tragic secret of his past. However, after being married to Linc for four years, Shelby started to have different outlook on their marriage, after a series of disloyalty and offensive endeavor addressed to her. She eventually started to think about divorce.

Another character, Lola Sanchez, a 24-year-old Latina superstar, was married to Matt Seel, a professional Tennis player. In point of fact, from the outset of their marriage, Lola Sanchez did not love him at all. She married him on the recommendation of her advisers to make her be in distance from her real love in life, Tony Alvarez, who was a brilliant movie director with a very bad drug habit that he
cannot seem to break. Lola even started to think about terminating their marriage life before they got married. She asked Matt to sign a prenuptial letter that was innocently signed by Matt. Ironically, it was not divorce that ended their marriage. It was Matt’s death that split them apart.

The other character was Cat Harrison, 19 years old. She was a talented movie director and writer. She got married to Jump Jagger, an Australian rock singer, when she was just 17 years old. At first, they had a very romantic and fabulous marriage life. Although both of them were busy with their own career, she always tried to be in touch with him via phone or by visiting each other to their work place. Until one day, Cat found Jump with another woman when she gave him a surprise visit on his music tour in Australia. From then on, Cat decided to say good bye to her marriage.

From the simple illustration of *Hollywood Divorce* novel, we can see that each character possesses different reasons of their decision to get divorced. Based on such state of affairs, this study will try to see marital interactions patterns experienced by those characters that lead to their marital dissolution. The pattern will be analyzed based on *Guttman scale* which is known as *behavioral cascade* model of divorce. This model is employed to find out which stage that actually leads to their divorce. It is because in fact, most of or even all of marriage couples have their own problems and dissatisfaction in their marriage life. For economic, family, moral, or personal reasons, many people who are in distressed marriages remain in the relationship instead of seeking divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and even, one study of over 1,000 couples found out that many couples are still able to overcome significant problems in marriage such as not being home often enough, drinking or using drugs, being too critical, or spending money foolishly (Amato & Rogers, 1997), and they can prevent themselves from divorce. In this novel, however, the characters fail to secure their
marriage due to a series of confrontations. Accordingly, this study is aimed at answering the problem statement of: what are the forms of behavioral cascades experienced by the three couples in the story? By answering the question, it is expected that it will reveal the reasons of divorce decision made by the characters.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

In line with the title of the novel which becomes the object of this research, *Hollywood Divorce*, written by Jackie Collins (2003), the main tool that is employed in this study is family communication theory which is focused on Divorce mater. The discussion is presented by analyzing the story of the novel to relate the findings with Gottman’s behavioral cascade of Divorce. The data are taken by analyzing the utterances, characters, etc. Feminism is also used to support the process of analyzing the novel. It is because the story is written by a female writer, and it tells about the interaction between husband and wife that represents male and female mater in a society.

Pam Morris (1993) defines feminism that it is a political perception which is based on two premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences. Such perception provides feminism with its double agenda: to provide the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender and then to change them. In accordance with Pam’s concept, this study will examine the male-female roles in family interaction, which is the smallest form of society, to find out the reason of their failure in preventing themselves from divorce. The findings then will be made to order with behavioral cascade of divorce which is started with complain/criticize stage.
Gottman (1999) said that all married people express their dissatisfaction to their spouses from time to time. However, people in marriage who are cascading toward divorce have a tendency to add a degree of insult or blame to their complaints. The next stage is *Defensiveness*. When people get defensive in marital interactions, they try to protect themselves from criticism and avoid blame. In so doing, they deny any responsibility for wrongdoing. According to Gotmann, defensiveness basically shuts down the process of conflict resolution. The third stage is *Contempt*. When people express contempt, they mock or insult their partner. In its extreme form, contempt is literally a sign of bitter put down and hatred toward the partner. The final stage in behavioral cascade is stonewalling. When people engage in stone walling, they show no signs of receiving messages from their partner. Stonewalling is a manifestation of emotional divestment from the marriage. People stonewall when they no longer care about the relationship to put forth the effort to engage in conflict, they have more or less given up on the relationship. If these negative patterns of interaction are not reversed in time, there is a point of no return, after which not much can be done to save the marriage (Gottman, 2000:217)

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The discussion is provided based on the stages in behavioral cascade of divorce of each couple, Shelby Cheney & Linc Blackwood, Lola Sanchez & Matt Seel, Cat Harrison & Jump Jagger

**Complain/Criticize**

**Shelby Cheney and Linc Blackwood**

In Shelby and Linc marriage life, they often complained to each other. At the outset they were able to manage all the things, providing that they tried to understand each other for they had the same occupational background as famous and rich movie
stars. Shelby’s most complaint was to Linc’s drinking habit. Linc often goy drunk in some unexpected situation, for example when they’re at Cannes festival to promote their movie, Linc wanted to have alcohol even when they were surrounded by cameras

“shit,” Linc mumbled under his breath, waving at the paparazzi while flashing his trademark grin. “I need a fuckin’ drink.”

“No you don’t,” Shelby managed to reply, as she smiled for the assorted cameras and TV crews lined up three deep, all shoving and struggling for the best shots (Collins, 2003: 2).

Linc’s drinking was a big bone of contention between them. He’d been in rehab twice. It hadn’t done him much good_ he was still a boozier whenever the mood took him. Linc even secretly take alcohol over and over again when Shelby was in absence of reminding him not to do so.

Grabbing a glass of wine from a passing waiter, Linc quickly swigged it down before Shelby noticed. Not that she was anywhere in sight, so he considered himself safe. (Collins, 2003:147)

It happened when they were attending a party held by Merrill Zandack, the head of Zandack’s Film, on his luxurious yacht. By the time Shelby caught up with Linc, he was drunk. Of course disappointment flooded over her, knowing that Linc had promised to her before that he would not get drunk in that party. When it happened, she had to spend the evening watching him to make sure he didn’t embarrass them both. Such situation frequently happened to them but Shelby still keep loving and forgiving him. To make mater worse, Linc also had a playboy habit. Linc was loud and boisterous, coming on to every woman in sight, grabbing and pawing (Collins, 2003: 60-61). Shelby tried to forgive all is dreadful deeds for she thought that nobody knew the real Linc except her. Nobody had any clue about his abusive childhood (Collins, 2003:4). In this stage, Shelby addressed her complaint a lot to Linc but still in a modest way.
Lola Sanchez and Matt Seel

In Lola & Matt’s case the complaint was intentionally done by Lola because in fact, she didn’t love Matt from the beginning of their marriage. Lola married Matt just to preserve her public image as a super star of the millennium who had a permanent couple (Collins, 2003:10). In reality, she was really in love with Tony Alvarez, but she didn’t get blessing either from her family or from her advisors. It is because Tony was badly connected to drugs. Matt became her target of insult as the expression of her disappointment of having no approval to be formally engaged to Tony. Lola often complained about Matt’s nonexistence of job after he decided to quit his job as a professional tennis player and preferred to be always beside Lola wherever she went (Collins, 2003:10/167). She often criticized Matt in a really rude way:

“*We don’t seem to be getting along so good, do we Matt?*”

“I think we get along fine.” (Matt replied)

*It’s just that now we’re married, you don’t do anything. And if you want the truth- it bugs me!”* (Collins, 2003:166)

Instead of being hurt by Lola’s sarcasm, Matt kept staying beside her, trying to convince her that everything went well.

Cat Harrison and Jump Jagger

In Cat and Jump’s case, the slight complaint that sometimes happened to them was just their business that occasionally forced them to be in distance. Cat always tried to reach him by phone when she was in England, while Jump was in Australia, “*Cat had an urge to call Jump, find out how his tour was going*” (Collins, 2003:57) but there was no answer from Jump. When finally she could get through to Jump in Australia, she addressed her complaint by saying “*I have been desperate to speak to you, what’s going on? You’re never in your room*” (Collins, 2003:143). Here she used the word
“desperate” and “never” to emphasize on her complaint. Those words are regularly
used in complain stage (Segrin & Flora, 2005; 258)

Defensiveness

The defensive stage came out as the answer to complaints or criticisms, in this
section the defensiveness are shown in various ways.

Shelby Cheney & Linc Blackwood

Answering Shelby’s complaint about his drinking habit, Linc always kept
giving her a promise that he would stop doing so, but it was noticeably difficult for
him to fulfill his promise. Instead he kept thinking that “he couldn’t figure out why she
objected to his drinking. It wasn’t as if he got falling-down drunk or anything, although
he had to admit that there had times he’d blanked out and couldn’t remember what
he’d done. Hey, the bottom line was he could control his drinking. It was no big deal
(Collins, 2003:147-148). The form of Linc’s defensiveness shows that he tried to send
a message to Shelby that “he didn’t do anything wrong” with his drinking habit, which
is one of the features in defensiveness stage (Segrin & Flora, 2005:259).

Lola Sanchez & Matt Seel

Anytime Lola criticized Matt about his being jobless in an insulting way, Matt
always assured her that he was writing a screen play, and also planning to take acting
class (Collins, 2003;10). Matt stubbornly refused Lola’s blame on his lack of activity
by saying “I told you, “He said firmly. “I gave up tennis because I’m writing a
screenplay and planning on being an actor. Give me time and I’ll surprise you. You’ll
see. (Collins, 2003:167). Here Matt tried to send “that’s not fair” message to Lola
about her blame. And even he persuaded Lola to put him in one of her movies to make
them have equal position.
Cat Harrison & Jump Jagger

To reply cat’s complaint about his absence of either contacting her or answering her call, Jump provided a defensive excuse of having time difference between London and Australia which is quiet significant, and also the tight schedule of his music performance. He showed that when he answered Cat’s call at midnight in Australia

“You sound out of it.”

You’d be freaking out of it if you were woken up in the middle of the night,” he grumbled (Collins, 2003: 143)

The way Jump answered Cat’s phone is like whining, which is sometimes coupled with defensiveness. According to Gottman (1994) Whining has an “innocent victim” posture behind it. If a spouse will not accept responsibility of any wrongdoing and puts up his or her guard, perhaps with a bit of whining added in for good measure, it easy to see how conflict discussions will get nowhere.

Contempt

Shelby Cheney and Linc Blackwood

One of the apparent forms of contempt stage in Shelby & Linc’s interaction is when a magazine informed the result of interview with Shelby Cheney, but the news was quite annoying for both Shelby and Linc. The journalist wrote that Shelby said if Linc was an underrated actor which actually she didn’t say so to the journalist. Shelby was always tried to support and love Linc in any occasion, but Linc never gave much thought to her needs (Collins, 2003:313). That’s why when he got furious at her, Shelby couldn’t stand saying something in a contemptuous manner “the truth is, you ARE underrated, “she said, following him.”YOU should be doing different things. (Collins, 2003:169). Her communication sends the message to Linc that “you are
stupid” or ‘You are incompetent”. Her contempt unintentionally made Linc feel insulted, and told her that he used to be greater actor than she was. It is fairly obvious that by this stage on the cascade, they feel and behave so viciously toward each other that they are creating irreparable damage to their marriage

**Lola Sanchez and Matt Seel**

Lola frequently showed contemptuous deeds to Matt as she did not have any attention to him. Her contempt was expressed both directly and indirectly. One of her direct contempts was when she called him “idiot”. It happened when mat was telling her about their dinner with Merril Zandack.

“The two of you seemed pretty cozy tonight” Matt said accusingly……..

“Cozy, huh?” Lola said

“doing tequila shots, sucking limes,” matt continued sulkily. “while I sat there like an idiot.”

“you said it,”

“Huh?”

“that you’re an idiot.” (Collins, 2003:71)

The way Lola stressed the “Idiot” word was so mocking to him.

In another occasion, Lola also mocked him when she received another dinner invitation from Merril. She refused to have Matt with her in that dinner. “It’s all business.” She said. “besides, Merril didn’t invite you……. nobody forced you to come here,” Lola pointed out. You could’ve stayed in LA”. (Collins, 2003:111). Here, Lola communicated her contempt using both her words and her gesture. It is in line with the concept of contempt by Gottman that contempt is also communicated through particular facial expression and also body languages.
Cat Harrison and Jump Jagger

The *contempt* stage of Cat and Jump’s marriage happened almost as the same time as *defensiveness* and *Stonewalling*. It all suddenly happened when Cat gave a surprise visit to Australia. Her feeling was immediately filled with contempt when she found out that he was with his ex girlfriend during his stay in Australia (Collins, 2003: 187). It’s even worse when he tried to tell her that it was not him who came to the girl, instead it was the girls who came throwing themselves to him all the time (p:195). Instead of trusting and forgiving him, Cat convinced herself to terminate their marital engagement.

Stone Walling

This is the last stage of the cascade that lead marriage couple to their end of nuptials life.

Shelby Cheney and Linc Blackwood

The stage started when Linc got furiously jealous with her because Shelby was caught in journalist’s camera when she was having dinner with Pete, a stunt director in her movie project who also was her ex-boyfriend. At that time Shelby was also furious for she’d read e news about Linc’s hot kiss with Lola Sanchez. That scene was actually intentionally prepared by Lola as the form of her revenge to Linc. From then on they never got a good interaction anymore. Linc was back to his drinking and womanizing habit and even to make mater worse he also consumed cocaine. Shelby could not forgive him anymore although she still had love for him, moreover she had Linc’s baby inside her womb (Collins, 2003: 542)

Lola Sanchez and Matt Seel

Unlike the other two characters, Lola’s stage is a kind of backward stream. After experiencing a very bad contempt from the beginning of her marriage, Lola
started to think about having a better life with Matt. It happened after her sister was almost died because of an unintentional gun-shot which was actually pointed at Tony Alvarez. However, the fortune was not in her side, when she really tried hard to be good with Matt she still could not take her mind off from Tony Alvarez. This made Matt furious and tried to kill Tony with gun. They got involved in lethal fight and they were killed in that fight (Collins, 2003: 585)

**Cat Harrison and Jump Jagger**

As has been mentioned before, Cat’s stages of contempt and stonewalling came almost at the same time. After her visit to Australia, cat found out that actually Jump had bed affairs with other girls (Collins, 2003:357/385) the one in Australia was not the only one. From then on, she was never willing to be in touch with Jump although he kept asking for her forgiveness and kept coming to her work scene just to make sure that he could still fix his marriage with Cat, but Cat’s heart was already impaired (p: 316/332).

**CONCLUSION**

The three characters experienced different streams of the behavioral cascade of divorce. The one who chronologically had the stages is Shelby Cheney. She experienced all the stages until finally she decided to get divorced. Lola Sanchez had a counterclockwise flow of the cascade stages. She experienced a truly bad marriage life in the beginning, but then started to heal it up after having a dangerous incident that happened to her and her sister. Unfortunately, when she was trying to fix her marriage with Matt, he’d died in a fighting with Tony Alvarez. Cat Harrison could be the one who had the shortest stage of the cascade. She made a quick decision to terminate her marriage just after she caught her husband sleeping with another woman.
The discussion proofed that all the characters experienced the behavioral cascade toward divorce, although it was not in the same stream.

REFERENCES