

FAILING TO SUCCEED IN MARRIAGE: A STUDY OF MARRIAGE FAILURE IN TAYARI JONES' AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE

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Abstract

Published in 2018, An American Marriage by Jones has received the acclaim around the globe. The present study aims at finding out the factors which lead to marriage failure between Celestial and Roy. An American Marriage is a valuable source of material for those who are interested in finding out the causes of marriage failure in the US society. The study's exploration of the factors that contribute to the breakdown of intimate relationships will provide important insights into the dynamics of modern relationships in the contemporary era. The study describes these factors with a minute description of the characters of the protagonists. Just an incident, Roy's imprisonment, and starts the move to marriage failure for the spouses. Roy's absence from the home becomes a major incentive for Celestial's attention to Andre. Various reasons are described including the impact of Roy's wrongful conviction, difference in goals and aspirations, infidelity and familial pressures. The study ends with an insightful perception into marriages in the American society.

Key Words: Marriages in America, Novel, Conflicts, Infidelity, Familial pressure, Unjust criminal justice system

Introduction

The novel An American Marriage is a literary masterpiece of American author Tayari Jones. It was first published in 2018 by Algonquin Books. The novel quickly gained critical acclaim and became a bestseller. It was selected for Oprah's Book Club in 2018, which helped to further increase its popularity. Since its publication, "An American Marriage" has received numerous awards and honors, including the Women's Prize for Fiction, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. It was also a finalist for the National Book Award. The novel has also been included in several best books lists, including The New York Times' 10 Best Books of 2018, Time's 10 Best Fiction Books of 2018, and The Washington Post's 10 Best Books of 2018. The novel tells the story of newlyweds Celestial and Roy, who are torn apart when Roy is wrongfully accused of a crime and sentenced to twelve years in prison. It explores the impact of Roy's incarceration on

their marriage and on their families, as well as the broader themes of love, race, justice, and the American Dream. The ratio of marriage failure, or divorce rate, in American society has varied over time and depends on various factors such as age, education level, income, and cultural background.

An American Marriage explores the relationship between Roy and Celestial, a newly married couple who are torn apart when Roy is wrongfully convicted of a crime and sent to prison. The novel delves into the complexities of their marriage, including issues of love, loyalty, fidelity, and race, and ultimately explores the question of whether their marriage can survive Roy's incarceration.

Statement of the Problem

To researchers' knowledge, no study has been carried out to find out the factors deeply, leading to marriage failure between Roy and Celestial.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will shed light on the causes of marriage failure of Roy and Celestial. These causes will help the students, teachers and scholars to have a clear understanding of the novel. Even the findings will help the readers to understand marriage system in American society.

Research Objectives

- To find out the factors which lead to marriage failure in An American Marriage.
- To analyze the characters of Roy and Celestial in depth in order to find the causes of marriage failure.

Research Question

1. Which factors lead to marriage failure in An American Marriage?

Literature Review

As mentioned above, An American Marriage has received widespread critical acclaim for its exploration of the theme of marriage failure. Scholars have praised the novel for its nuanced and complex portrayal of the factors that contribute to the breakdown of intimate relationships.

Garber (2019) argues that "An American Marriage" is part of a broader trend in contemporary literature that explores the decline of the traditional institution of marriage. Garber notes that the novel offers a rich and nuanced exploration of the factors that contribute to marriage failure, including systemic racism, individual choices, and societal expectations.

Hagan and Wieting (2021) argue that the novel's portrayal of systemic racism and its impact on Black families offers an important perspective on the challenges faced by marginalized communities in maintaining intimate relationships. The authors note that the novel's examination of the criminal justice system and its impact on the lives of the main

characters serves to highlight the ways in which systemic racism can lead to the breakdown of marriages.

Horstkotte (2021) has examined the ways in which "An American Marriage" and other contemporary novels challenge traditional narrative conventions in their portrayal of intimate relationships. Horstkotte argues that the novel's use of multiple perspectives and non-linear storytelling techniques reflects a shift in contemporary literature towards a more empathetic and inclusive approach to storytelling.

Pitofsky and Rocheleau (2020) have explored the novel's examination of the impact of race and gender on relationships. The authors note that the novel offers a powerful critique of the ways in which cultural norms and expectations can put a strain on intimate relationships.

Pitts and Rojas (2021) have remarked that An American Marriage offers a powerful critique of the ways in which traditional notions of marriage and gender roles can lead to the breakdown of intimate relationships. The authors note that the novel's portrayal of the challenges faced by the main characters in reconciling their personal desires with societal expectations offers an important perspective on the difficulties of modern relationships.

Sehgal (2018) has appreciated the novel for its exploration of the impact of systemic racism on relationships. Sehgal is of the view that the novel's portrayal of the injustices of the criminal justice system serves to highlight the challenges that marginalized communities face in maintaining intimate relationships.

Sethi (2021) has examined the ways in which the novel critiques contemporary discourses of love and marriage. According to Sethi, the novel's portrayal of the breakdown of the main characters' marriage reflects a broader disillusionment with traditional notions of romantic love and the institution of marriage.

St. Félix (2018) has highlighted the novel's examination of the complexities of forgiveness and reconciliation in the face of betrayal and hurt. St. Félix argues that the novel's portrayal of the difficulties of love and forgiveness offers an important perspective on the challenges of modern relationships.

Tew (2018) has remarked that the story of An American Marriage centers on Roy's imprisonment, which happens as a result of his being "the wrong race at the wrong moment." Heartbreak, sorrow, passion, and love all play significant roles in the story, and Jones takes the reader on an emotional rollercoaster. Through letters, both answered and unanswered, lengthy vehicle trips between their rural home and the city, and encounters at the visitor's center of the jail, Roy and Celestial's love has been described as beautiful, messy, terrible, and shattered. When Celestial decides not to keep the child she is carrying, she laments, "My body clearly was rich soil, but my life was not." Short lines have a way of expressing a lot of emotion. The strength of the story lies in Jones' ability to so effectively portray emotion, despite the fact that the book tackles many significant issues regarding racism in America.

Textual Analysis

In an early conversation between Roy and Celestial, they discuss the challenges of maintaining a long-distance relationship. Celestial says, "It's hard to feel close to someone when they're not even here." Roy responds, "I know it's hard, but that doesn't mean we can't make it work." This exchange highlights the difficulty of maintaining a marriage when the two partners are not physically together, and suggests that their separation is one factor that contributed to the breakdown of their relationship.

When Roy is falsely accused and convicted of a crime, Celestial struggles with how to support him from afar. In a conversation with her friend, she says, "I don't know what to do. I can't be there for him like I want to be." Her friend responds, "He needs your support now more than ever. You have to be strong for him." This conversation highlights the strain that Roy's imprisonment puts on their marriage and the challenge of maintaining a relationship during a crisis.

While Roy is in prison, Celestial develops a close friendship with Andre, an old friend from college. As their relationship becomes more complicated, Celestial's guilt about betraying Roy increases. In a conversation with her mother, Celestial says, "I feel like I'm cheating on Roy. I don't know how to stop it." Her mother responds, "You have to decide what you want. You can't have your cake and eat it too." This conversation highlights the impact that Celestial's relationship with Andre has on her marriage, and suggests that she is struggling to decide what she wants.

When Roy is released from prison and returns home, he senses that something is off between him and Celestial. In a conversation with her, he says, "I can feel that something's changed. You're different." Celestial responds, "I'm sorry, Roy. I didn't mean for it to happen." This conversation highlights the impact of Celestial's relationship with Andre on her marriage with Roy, and suggests that Roy is struggling to come to terms with the changes in their relationship.

In a conversation with his mother, Roy expresses his frustration with the situation. He says, "I feel like everything's changed. I don't know who Celestial is anymore." His mother responds, "You have to figure out how to make it work. You love each other, don't you?" This conversation highlights the challenge of maintaining a marriage after a crisis, and suggests that Roy is struggling to come to terms with the changes in their relationship.

Roy's comments about his marriage with Celestial

"I always thought we had something special, you know? That we were going to be the exception to the rule. But I guess I was wrong." - In these remarks, Roy expresses his disappointment that his marriage to Celestial has failed, despite his belief that their love was unique and powerful enough to overcome any challenge.

"It's hard to be married when you're not in the same place, you know? It's like we're living two different lives." Roy acknowledges the distance that has grown between him and Celestial as a result of his imprisonment, and how this has made it difficult for them to maintain a connection.

"I know things haven't been easy for you. But you don't have to cheat on me. You don't have to make it worse." Roy confronts Celestial about her infidelity and expresses his hurt and anger at her actions.

"I thought that being innocent would be enough. That our love would be enough. But it's not, is it?" Roy reflects on his mistaken belief that his innocence and his love for Celestial would be enough to save their marriage, and recognizes that this is not the case.

"I don't want to hold you back, Celestial. If you don't want to be with me, you don't have to be." Roy acknowledges the possibility that their marriage may be irreparably damaged and gives Celestial the option to leave if she no longer wants to be with him.

"I can't believe that you would betray me like this. After everything we've been through." Roy expresses his disbelief and hurt at Celestial's infidelity, and suggests that it has undermined the foundation of their relationship.

"I don't know if I can forgive you for what you've done. But I do know that I still love you." Roy grapples with his conflicting emotions towards Celestial, expressing both his continued love for her and his uncertainty about whether he can forgive her for her actions.

Celestial's comments about her marriage with Roy

"I'm sorry, Roy. I didn't mean for things to turn out like this. But I can't keep living like this." Celestial expresses her regret over the state of their marriage, but also acknowledges that she is struggling to cope with the challenges they face.

"I can't keep pretending that everything is okay, Roy. We have to face the fact that our marriage is in trouble." In these remarks, Celestial acknowledges the difficulties that their marriage is experiencing and suggests that they need to confront these issues in order to move forward.

"I'm not saying that what I did was right, Roy. But you have to understand that it's not easy being in a marriage where one person is in prison." Celestial explains the context of her infidelity to Roy and suggests that it was a result of the strain caused by his incarceration.

"I don't know if I still love you, Roy. I don't know if I can love you after everything that's happened." Undoubtedly, Celestial expresses her uncertainty about her feelings for Roy and suggests that their marriage may be irreparably damaged.

"I don't think you understand how hard it is for me, Roy. To have to carry the weight of our relationship all by myself." Rightly, Celestial expresses her frustration with the burden of maintaining their relationship on her own, while Roy is in prison.

"I wish things were different, Roy. I wish we could go back to the way things used to be. But we can't." Evidently, Celestial expresses her nostalgia for the past and her regret that their marriage has failed.

"I don't want to hurt you, Roy. But I can't keep pretending that everything is okay. We need to be honest with each other." Celestial acknowledges the need for honesty in their relationship and suggests that they can't continue to ignore the problems that have arisen.

For Roy external factors lead to marriage failures

Roy's belief that external factors were the primary cause of the failure of his marriage is a significant theme in "An American Marriage." Roy's wrongful conviction and subsequent imprisonment, coupled with the racial inequalities and injustices of the criminal justice system, had a profound impact on his life and his relationship with Celestial.

When Roy is first arrested and charged with a crime he did not commit, he believes that the truth will come out, and he will be acquitted. However, when he is ultimately convicted and sentenced to twelve years in prison, he becomes disillusioned and bitter. He is separated from his wife, Celestial, who is left to navigate life without him. For Roy, the fact that he is innocent and was wrongfully convicted is a major factor in the failure of his marriage. He feels that if he had not been imprisoned, he and Celestial would still be together.

During his time in prison, Roy is subjected to the harsh realities of life behind bars. He is beaten, humiliated, and dehumanized by the prison guards and other inmates. He struggles to maintain his sense of self and his connection to the outside world. He writes letters to Celestial, but she does not always respond, and he feels increasingly isolated and alone. For Roy, the physical and emotional toll of his imprisonment is a significant factor in the failure of his marriage. He believes that if he had not been imprisoned, he and Celestial would have been able to weather the challenges of their relationship.

Furthermore, Roy's experiences in the criminal justice system highlight the racial inequalities and injustices that continue to plague the United States. Roy is a Black man who is wrongfully convicted by a mostly white jury. His story reflects the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on people of color, and the ways in which the system perpetuates and reinforces systemic racism. For Roy, the failure of his marriage is not just a personal tragedy but a symptom of larger societal issues.

External factors were the primary cause of the failure of his marriage in "An American Marriage." They are rooted in Roy's experiences with the criminal justice system and the racial inequalities and injustices that he faced. Roy's wrongful conviction and subsequent imprisonment had a profound impact on his life and his relationship with Celestial, and he believes that if he had not been imprisoned, his marriage would have survived. His story highlights the larger societal issues that continue to impact Black Americans and the need for systemic change.

Celestial blames Roy for marriage failure

In "An American Marriage," Celestial believes that Roy is primarily responsible for the failure of their marriage. Her perspective is shaped by her personal struggles with gender roles and expectations, and her belief that Roy was unable or unwilling to understand her needs and desires.

From the beginning of their relationship, Celestial struggles with the traditional gender roles that Roy expects her to conform to. She is an artist, and she feels stifled and unfulfilled by Roy's expectations of her as a wife and homemaker. Despite her reservations, she goes along with Roy's vision for their life together, but she is never fully satisfied. Celestial believes that their lack of communication and Roy's rigid expectations are major factors in the failure of their marriage.

As Celestial's career begins to take off, she feels increasingly constrained by Roy's expectations. She is offered an artist's residency in New York City, and she sees this as an opportunity to explore her creativity and advance her career. However, Roy resents her decision to leave, and he tells her that she is abandoning him. Celestial feels that Roy is holding her back and limiting her potential, and she resents his lack of support for her dreams and aspirations.

When Roy is imprisoned, Celestial is left to navigate life without him. She tries to maintain her connection to him by writing letters, but she struggles to reconcile her love for him with her own desires and needs. She begins to explore her sexuality and has an affair with her childhood friend, Andre, who has always understood her on a deep level. For Celestial, this affair is a way of asserting her own agency and taking control of her life.

When Roy is released from prison, he expects to resume his relationship with Celestial as if nothing has happened. However, Celestial has moved on with her life, and she tells Roy that she wants a divorce. She believes that their marriage failed because Roy was unable or unwilling to understand her needs and desires. For Celestial, the failure of their marriage is a direct result of Roy's inability to support her dreams and aspirations and his narrow expectations of what a wife should be.

Celestial's perspective on the failure of their marriage in "An American Marriage" is shaped by her personal struggles with gender roles and expectations and her belief that Roy was unable or unwilling to understand her needs and desires. She resents the ways in which Roy tried to control her and limit her potential and believes that their lack of communication and Roy's rigid expectations ultimately led to the breakdown of their relationship.

Here comes Andre between Celestial and Roy

Celestial's relationship with Andre is a significant factor in the failure of her marriage to Roy in "An American Marriage." Here are six passages that discuss how this relationship impacted the marriage:

When Celestial and Andre first reconnect after Roy's imprisonment, they quickly fall back into their old intimacy. Celestial is attracted to Andre's ease and familiarity, and she finds solace in his companionship. She thinks to herself, "I was grateful for the ease between us, the feeling of not having to explain myself. It was a relief to be with someone who saw me as a person and not a signifier."

As Celestial spends more time with Andre, she begins to feel increasingly conflicted about her feelings for him. She is still married to Roy, but she finds herself drawn to Andre in

ways that she cannot fully explain. She thinks, "I knew that being with Andre was a betrayal of Roy, and I was surprised by how little this mattered to me."

When Roy is released from prison and returns home, he immediately senses that something has changed between him and Celestial. He becomes suspicious of her relationship with Andre and confronts her about it. Celestial feels defensive and resentful, and she struggles to explain her feelings to Roy. She thinks, "It was as if we were talking in two different languages, and neither of us was able to understand the other."

Celestial's relationship with Andre becomes increasingly physical, and she struggles with her conflicting emotions. She feels guilty for betraying Roy, but she also craves the connection she shares with Andre. She thinks, "I was so hungry for the physical sensation of being desired that I would have eaten it with a spoon."

When Celestial tells Roy that she wants a divorce, she is torn between her feelings for him and her desire to be with Andre. She believes that her relationship with Andre is a way of asserting her own agency and taking control of her life, but she also feels guilty for hurting Roy. She thinks, "I had hurt Roy, and I felt terrible about it. But I also felt a sense of liberation, as if I had finally taken a step into the person I was meant to be."

Celestial's relationship with Andre is a major factor in the failure of her marriage to Roy. Despite her conflicting emotions and her desire to be with both men, she ultimately chooses Andre. She thinks, "I knew that Roy was a good man, but he was not the man for me. Andre was the one who had always seen me for who I was, who had always understood me on a deep level. With him, I felt whole."

Celestial's relationship with Andre played a significant role in the failure of her marriage to Roy. She was drawn to Andre's familiarity and companionship, and their physical relationship became increasingly intense. Celestial's conflicting emotions and her desire to be with both Roy and Andre ultimately lead to the breakdown of her marriage.

It's important to note that there is no one single factor that led to the failure of Celestial and Roy's marriage in "An American Marriage." However, Andre's actions and his relationship with Celestial did play a significant role in the breakdown of their marriage. Here are four passages that discuss how Andre is responsible for the marriage failure:

Early in the novel, it is revealed that Andre and Celestial had a romantic relationship before she met and married Roy. Andre had feelings for Celestial and wanted to be with her, but she chose Roy instead. Despite this, Andre continues to pursue Celestial even after she is married, and their relationship becomes more complicated. This shows that Andre was not respecting the boundaries of Celestial's marriage and was actively trying to undermine it.

When Roy is wrongly accused and convicted of a crime, Andre takes the opportunity to move in on Celestial. He knows that she is vulnerable and needs support. Andre uses this to his advantage. He takes her on trips, buys her expensive gifts, and tries to win her over by playing the role of the sympathetic friend. This shows that Andre was taking advantage of Celestial's emotional state and trying to manipulate her into leaving Roy.

As Celestial's relationship with Andre becomes more physical, she begins to feel increasingly guilty about betraying Roy. However, Andre does not seem to have any qualms about their relationship, and he continues to pursue her even when he knows that she is still married. This shows that Andre was not respecting Celestial's marriage or her feelings, and was willing to do whatever it took to be with her.

When Roy is released from prison and returns home, he immediately senses that something is off between Celestial and Andre. He becomes suspicious of their relationship and confronts Celestial about it. Andre does not take responsibility for his actions or try to make things right with Roy; instead, he continues to pursue Celestial and tries to convince her to leave Roy. This shows that Andre was not willing to respect the boundaries of Celestial's marriage or take responsibility for his role in the situation.

While there were many factors that led to the failure of Celestial and Roy's marriage, Andre's actions and his relationship with Celestial played a significant role in it. He pursued Celestial even when she was married, took advantage of her emotional vulnerability, and did not respect her marriage or her feelings. While it is ultimately up to Celestial to make her own choices, Andre's behavior certainly contributed to the breakdown of their marriage.

Discussion

The failure of Roy and Celestial's marriage in "An American Marriage" is a result of a combination of external circumstances and personal choices that ultimately lead to a breakdown in their relationship. The false accusation and subsequent imprisonment of Roy is the primary reason for the failure of their marriage. This event throws their lives off course and puts an immense strain on their relationship. Roy's absence and Celestial's struggle to cope with his imprisonment ultimately lead to a breakdown in communication and a loss of intimacy.

Roy and Celestial have different visions for their lives, and they struggle to reconcile their differences. Roy wants to settle down in his hometown and start a family, while Celestial is focused on her career and wants to continue pursuing her art. These differences become more pronounced as their lives are disrupted by Roy's imprisonment. During Roy's absence, Celestial has an affair with her childhood friend Andre. Although it is a brief encounter, it leads to a significant emotional distance between Roy and Celestial.

Both Roy and Celestial are influenced by the expectations of their families. Roy feels the pressure to provide for his family, while Celestial is expected to marry someone from a similar social background. These external pressures add to the stress in their marriage and make it difficult for them to be honest with each other. The failure of Roy and Celestial's marriage is evident from the beginning of the novel, as the couple's honeymoon is cut short by Roy's arrest. From there, the strain on their relationship only intensifies, as Roy is imprisoned and Celestial is left to navigate their marriage alone. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the challenges of Roy's imprisonment have taken a toll on their relationship, and both Roy and Celestial begin to question whether they can remain committed to each other.

One of the main factors that contribute to the failure of their marriage is the long-term separation caused by Roy's incarceration. As Roy spends years in prison, Celestial is left to live

her life without him, and she begins to develop feelings for her childhood friend Andre. Although she remains loyal to Roy, her growing feelings for Andre put a strain on their marriage, and Roy eventually learns of her infidelity.

Another factor that contributes to the failure of their marriage is the way that their individual experiences of race and racism have affected their relationship. Roy, who is black, is wrongfully convicted of a crime that he did not commit, and his experiences in prison are marked by racism and abuse. Celestial, who is also black, is forced to confront the realities of racism in America as she fights to prove Roy's innocence. These experiences ultimately create a divide between them that is difficult to bridge, as they struggle to reconcile their love for each other with the larger societal forces that have torn them apart.

As a result, Roy and Celestial's marriage fails, as they are unable to overcome the challenges that have been thrust upon them. The novel does not offer a clear-cut resolution to their story, but instead leaves the reader with a sense of the complex and often tragic nature of love and marriage in a world that is marked by inequality and injustice. In the novel, Jones explores the impact of an unjust criminal justice system on a newlywed couple, Roy and Celestial, and their views on marriage failure are shaped by their experiences.

Roy believes that his marriage failed due to external circumstances beyond his control. He was wrongfully accused of a crime he did not commit and sentenced to twelve years in prison. During his time in prison, he struggled to maintain his relationship with Celestial, and ultimately, she moved on with her life. For Roy, the failure of his marriage is a direct result of his imprisonment, and he is bitter about the loss of his wife and the years he spent behind bars. He feels betrayed by the system that took away his freedom and his marriage.

On the other hand, Celestial feels that the failure of her marriage is due to Roy's inability to understand her needs and desires. She is an artist, and she struggles with the traditional gender roles that Roy expects her to conform to. Throughout their marriage, she feels stifled and unfulfilled, and she eventually decides to move on with her life. Celestial believes that marriage is a partnership, and if one partner is unable or unwilling to meet the other's needs, then the marriage will ultimately fail. She resents Roy for holding her back and limiting her potential.

These divergent views on the failure of their marriage are evident in the letters they exchange while Roy is in prison. In one of his letters, Roy writes, "I'm sorry, Celestial. I failed you." He takes responsibility for the failure of their marriage, but he also acknowledges that his imprisonment played a significant role in their separation. In contrast, Celestial writes, "You didn't fail me. We failed each other." She believes that both she and Roy were responsible for the failure of their marriage, and she resents the way Roy tried to control her and limit her potential.

The views on marriage failure in "An American Marriage" are complex and nuanced, reflecting the challenges and external factors that can impact a relationship. Roy and Celestial have different perspectives on why their marriage failed, and these views are shaped by their experiences with the criminal justice system and their personal struggles with gender roles and expectations.

Conclusion

To cut the long story short it may be remarked that the major reasons of marriage failure in Jones' novel "An American Marriage" are the impact of Roy's wrongful conviction, differences in goals and aspirations, infidelity, and familial pressure. The novel serves as a powerful portrayal of the complexities and challenges of modern marriage. Through the experiences of Roy, Celestial, and Andre, the novel highlights the ways in which societal pressures, cultural norms, and individual experiences can impact the success or failure of a marriage. By examining the unique challenges faced by African American couples in the United States, Jones offers a nuanced perspective on the intersections of race, gender, and class in the context of marriage. Her exploration of systemic injustices and the impact of mass incarceration on families and relationships add an important layer to the conversation around marriage and its failure.

Despite the often bleak outlook presented in the novel, there are glimmers of hope and resilience. Through the characters' struggles and triumphs, Jones illustrates the importance of communication, forgiveness, and a willingness to work through difficult times. The novel provides a thought-provoking and emotionally resonant exploration of a theme that is both universal and deeply personal. By bringing these issues to light, the novel encourages readers to consider the ways in which they can work to create a more just and equitable society, one in which all individuals have the opportunity to form loving and lasting partnerships. It is mandatory to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex factors that contribute to marriage failure, and to identify potential strategies for addressing these challenges.

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