

Bill and Melinda Gates' breakup after 27 years has us reeling. Why do we care so much?

By Jenna Ryu May 7, 2021

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*Bill and Melinda Gates announced they would be ending their 27-year marriage on Monday.
Ted S. Warren, AP*

Bill and Melinda Gates were the philanthropic power couple that took the world by storm. Together, the Microsoft co-founder and his wife built the world's [largest charitable foundation](#) — all while raising three children.

Their union seemed perfect, and their marriage stood the test of time as it neared the three-decade mark, a rare feat in the world of A-list couples. So when they announced their split on Twitter this week, many were shocked, even heartbroken. People reflected on their own marriages and wondered how they could make it work if the Gates could not. Collectively, we found we cared about the split — a lot.

"Literally shaking and crying about Bill and Melinda Gates divorcing," tweeted @Aiden_CDN. "Heartbreaking!! Why are the lovely Gates divorcing???" added @itigerroar.

"They always seemed like a united front," explains Carmelia Ray, a celebrity matchmaker and relationship expert. "They were philanthropic together, traveled together and supported each other through all these years."

That's in sharp contrast with other recent celebrity splits like Kim Kardashian and Kanye West or Jennifer Lopez and Alex Rodriguez. In those instances, onlookers saw the writing on the wall. The Gates' relationship seemed ideal.

"We've never seen a hiccup in their marriage. To the public, they were this epitome of an idealistic and perfect power couple," Ray adds. "There wasn't any infidelity we were aware of, any drama, so to us, they seemed perfectly happy and content."

Peter Walzer, a [celebrity divorce lawyer](#) in Los Angeles of [top family law firm](#) Walzer Melcher, says the Gates were widely admired, making the news of their split even more devastating.

"They've been involved in all the hot issues. They donated almost two billion to COVID research. They're very big in the climate change world and in curing AIDS. They've made a generous commitment to giving away their wealth for the common good," he says. "So people often saw these two as angels, and how could angels get divorced?"

Their divorce shattered their image of perfection.

"In reality, they were great people and great role models, but of course they're human like all of us."

The Gates' split have some looking inward, wondering how they can make their own marriages survive when one with all the resources in the world failed.

Pandemic break-ups aren't uncommon. The stresses of quarantine boredom, lack of escape from each other, conflicts over the kids, conflicts over chores, lack of exercise have forced many couples to reconsider how they feel about their partners. America's divorce rate has reached nearly fifty percent.

"People who were on the fence about breaking up are splitting during the pandemic, because they feel their life is passing," says Michaela Boehm, a relationship and intimacy expert, who adds that "gray divorces," or marriages ending after twenty-five to thirty-five years, are rising.

"It's been a year into the pandemic, and many are thinking, 'Wow. Life is passing. I'm not that young anymore, and this isn't an optimal situation.'"

Boehm says it's normal to become invested in public figures' "seemingly perfect" relationships.

"We live in an aspirational culture. People often feel personally attached to celebrities or billionaires and their love lives, because they idolize or aspire to be those people," she says. "So when they have a rough time or break up, it throws your dream into question."

Though some may be feeling downtrodden by the breakup, [top family law attorney](#) Peter M. Walzer says it's key to remember the Gates' are only human.

"We project our goals on other people and assume the Gates can do (make a relationship work) because they're rich and we think they're better than us," he says. "But in reality, money doesn't buy happiness."