

Introduction  
practices. some of  
these changes have



## **Introduction**

Marriage and family are arguably the two institutes which form the fundamental building blocks of every human society.

Sudha asserts that marriage is a basic and universal social institute that facilitates proper progeny and helps to have life long companionship and family life (198). It is through the institute of marriage that the continuity of a nation through the children is guaranteed and for this reason, marriage has been regarded with high esteem in our nation. The government has come up with benefits and other incentives aimed at benefiting married couples. However, there has been a notable change in marriage in our society over the course of the last few decades. Most of these changes have been as a result of advancements in the society as well as changing practices. Some of these changes have been monumental and have threatened the very stability of the institute while others have had little effect. This paper will set out to articulate the changes that characterize marriage in our modern society.

This shall be done by highlighting the differences in past trends and modern trends in marriage. The factors that are responsible for these changes shall also be reviewed and the plausible future of the marriage institute in the USA predicted.

## **Changes in Marriage**

One of the most notable changes in marriages in the American setting is with regard to divorce rates. Ruggel states that marital dissolutions have increased dramatically over the last century and while only 5% of marriages

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entered into in 1987 ended in divorce, a phenomenal 50% of marriages entered into in 1967 are forecasted to end up in divorce (455). This dramatic rise in divorce rates has been blamed on a number of factors most notably of which are the increases in the earning power of women in the USA. A research by Ruggles on the rise in divorce and separation cases in the US revealed that in districts that had more women than men working there was a higher likelihood of divorce and separation occurring (464). Another trend that has become evident is the rise in premarital cohabitation. Cohabitation is whereby couple live together and have a joint economic and emotional relationship but without the legalization of their union.

Reinhold notes that as of the year 2002, studies revealed that more than 50% of women aged 19-44 in the US had ever cohabited in their lives(3). At the onset of the 20th century, cohabitation was rare and the society to a large extent did not approve of it. The rise in premarital cohabitation has mainly been as a result of acceptance of the same by a majority of the American population. Reinhold reveals that when cohabitation first emerged in the USA, it was mainly practiced by the less educated members of the society but that with time, the practice has extended to incorporate the American middle class(5).

As such, this trend has become a precursor to marriage or in some cases a substitute for the same with couples preferring to not formalize their unions despite the numerous benefits that being in a marriage might bring. The gender roles that characterized marriages in the past years have changed and at over time, both sexes have come to adopt less traditional gender roles. The participation of women in the larger society was restricted and <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-practices-some-of-these-changes-have/>

women were generally socialized to accept marriage and the subsequent family duties as the ultimate goals in their lives. In the past, the man was the sole bread winner and the woman's role was mostly confined to taking care of the family. In modern times, this has changed and women have been afforded new opportunities in the society which has made them self-reliant. Sudha notes that women (especially in urban settings) are encouraged to get an education, engage in employment and even pursue politics all the while attending to the activities concerning marriage and family (198). While education and employment have resulted in a shift in marriage due to the changing gender roles, Goldstein and Kenney note that women continue to marry or join the marriage institute at the same high rates as in the past years (506) and as such, gender roles have only affected the roles of each party in the marriage and not the popularity of the institution.

Goldstein and Kenney note that there has been a recent decline in period marriage rates in industrial societies as the number of marriages per annum have fallen dramatically (507). Studies reveal that while the annual rate of marriage among women in the United States remained at about 150 per thousand in the 1960s, it fell to 110 per thousand in the mid 1970s and further fell to 100 per thousand by 1980 (Goldstein and Kenney 508). This delay in marriage has meant that couples are getting married at an older age and therefore starting up families later than in earlier days.

The reasons for this are mostly the changes in society which have resulted in greater focus on the education of women. While in the past women were socialized to look at marriage as their ultimate goal, women now spend more time building careers and marriage therefore takes second place. A huge <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-practices-some-of-these-changes-have/>

change in the marriage institute in America has been the recognition of same sex unions. While marriage has traditionally been prescribed as a union between heterosexuals, there has been a shift towards giving marriage rights to homosexual couples. This change has been brought about by the prevalence of homosexuality in the society and the widespread acceptance of gay relations. While at the onset of the last century homosexuality was shunned and even criminalized, the 1960s saw many states making laws that decriminalized same-sex conduct and abolished discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Volokh 106). Gathering from this momentum, gay activists have been calling for the legalizing of gay marriages and the affording of gay couples the same rights and benefits as their heterosexual counterparts.

One of the factors that differentiate the United States from most other countries is its racial diversity. This is because the US citizenry is made up of a number of varying races ranging from Caucasians to Asians. Marriage is one of the institutes which have experienced changes as a result of this racial diversity. A report by the CNN indicates that interracial marriages have continued to rise since mid 1980s and are at an all time high (Chen). These results are reinforced by Pollard and O'Hare who note that " between 1970 and 1998, the number of interracial couples surged from 300, 000 to 1. 4 million" (12). This is different from the pre 1960s where interracial marriages were rare. Racist marriage legislations put in place after slavery and the Civil War dictated that marriage was not a right of US citizens and therefore validated the constitutionality of racist bans of marriage.

Post 1960 saw a change in this as this racist law was abolished and interracial marriages became acceptable.

## **Reason for Changes**

While the essence of marriage (companionship and family continuity) still remain in today's society, the standards at which this once prestigious institution is held has changed significantly. The question that is left wanting is: what has led to the dramatic change as regarding to how people in today's society view marriage? Well, change as a matter of fact is inevitable and as people pursue their dreams and ambitions, sacrifices have to be made and compromises negotiated so as to meet the demands of today's society. According to Reinhold, cultural erosion has contributed greatly to the changes in today's society (14). Not only has this erosion affected marriage, but it has also affected religion and the morality of the human race. As mentioned earlier, religion and cultural beliefs played a pivotal role in the survival and continual growth of communities. These cultural norms and beliefs acted as laws which governed and stipulated the roles that each gender had to play in society. Nonconformity was severely punished.

As such, marriage was perceived as a religious rite of passage and each person in the bond had to respect the institution and do their part without fail. However, as generations go by, the value of culture reduces. Today, only a few people follow their culture or believe in what they represented.

Consequently, the value attached to marriage has decreased significantly.

For example, before, fornication was viewed as a serious offence and the perpetrators would face serious consequences and would bring shame to

people from their communities; especially their families. In today's society,  
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the role of sex has changed and the act is no longer confined to the married couples as it was in the earlier days (Reinhold 16). Whereas, sex was formally a sacred practice between married couples primarily for the purpose of procreation, today, it has lost its meaning and value to the extent that one woman can have multiple sex partners without fear or worry. In this regard, marriage has changed because the women were originally supposed to remain faithfully married to one man until death.

In addition, globalization has been documented as one of the leading reasons as to why marriage has changed (Chen). Chen states that as people from different localities go beyond their geographic boundaries in search of greener pastures, they end up adopting the mannerisms that they are exposed to in the host nations. As such, marriage is no longer instituted to people of the same clans as it was earlier on. Interracial and intertribal marriages are rife in today's society and this is all due to globalization. As the cost of living escalates, people have been forced to join together so as to meet their daily needs.

As such, financial constraints have also led to a change in marriages today. Many have argued that marriage in today's society is no longer a matter of love and companionship but is more of a contract or business agreement. In the earlier decades, women had no choice/say in matters regarding to their marriage partners. However, this has changed significantly. Today, financial stability plays a pivotal role in the selection process of a marriage partner. Most women and men would rather marry a partner that is financially sound than a partner who is living a hand to mouth lifestyle. What is most surprising is that love plays a small role in most marriages today.

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All that is required is having a mutual understanding between the partners. They state their expectations before hand and if an agreement is reached, then the couple can wed. This would explain why the divorce rates are high in the world today. According to Ruggles, many marriages especially among the younger generations do not reach the ten year mark (462). Some of the contributing factors to this state of affairs include but are not limited to: financial constraints, unfaithfulness, lack of commitment (inability to fully meet one's responsibilities) and conflicts among the spouses (Ruggles 459).

Divorce was never an option in most communities in the past. However this changed due to laws which were instituted making divorce a viable option to people in difficult marriages. Sudha states that dialogue used to be used as a tool to resolve marital issues (46).

People had no choice but to come to an agreement. In so doing, the children grew up in a family where both parents were present. This union acted as an example through which the children grew to respect and follow even after getting married. However, today, parents no longer concentrate on imparting family values to their children. In some cases, parents argue and fight in the presence of their children making marriage look like a bad thing.

In addition, dialogue no longer suffices since divorce is an easier option. As a result, whenever the children become of age and get married, they have this predetermined mentality of marriage. They end up divorcing because that is what they learned during their childhood. The media has also contributed to the change in marriages today. Divorce has risen significantly partly due to its popularization by the media (Ruggles 456). In addition, movies and music



aired in various media outlets. This forms of entertainment most often bring to light infidelity, “ gold digging” (marriage for financial reasons), and domestic violence as the main characteristics of marriage.

In America alone, nearly 90% of the citizenry is exposed to this negative media in one way or the other. Over exposure to such publicity leads to a situation where everyone raises or lowers the expectations of marriage. As such, many people do not marry the person they are betrothed to but that imaginary personality that they have constructed under the influence of the media.

## **Conclusion**

Marriage is no longer as strong an institution as it used to be. Instead of bringing pride and respect to the married couples, it has in the recent past, been a source of shame and regrets to many. The various factors that have led to the change in how we perceive marriage have been highlighted. How marriage was in the past compared to today, has also been discussed. However, marriage still plays a pivotal role to the lives of many people. As such, individuals should try and make sure that they marry for the right reasons and to the right person.

In so doing, marriage will restore its former glory as a hub for love and prosperity even to the generations to come.

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