

Why do people get married? consider historical, social and geographical factors



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Why do people get married? Consider historical, social and geographical variation in answering this question.

The reasons why people get married have changed dramatically over the last few centuries. There has been debate over whether marriage as an institution is still relevant within contemporary western societies. This is due to the large percentage of divorces each year and non-marital pregnancies (Manning and Smock, 2005) and this has changed the traditional family structure. However, although the marriage rate is decreasing as the years go by, there were 239, 020 marriages between heterosexual couples in 2015 (ONS, 2015) which shows that there still is a large proportion of people that do get married and this essay will explore those reasons. This essay will consider why people get married from historical view of the changing from an institutionalised marriage to a companionate marriage to the individualised marriage. It will then follow on to discuss the social reasoning in why people get married focusing on the wedding culture and the importance of marriage to same sex couples and discussing the differences of why people get married in different locations. The essay will then discuss whether marriage as an institution is relevant in reference to divorce and cohabitation trends and research.

Marriage used to be viewed as the symbol of entry into adulthood and respectability; it was necessary to activate property rights, legal standing, public roles and social status (Coontz, 2004). Traditional marriage organised people's places in the economic and political hierarchy of society. It was not for an individual's benefit, it was a way of raising capital, constructing political alliances and organising the division of labour (Coontz, 2004). For <https://assignbuster.com/why-do-people-get-married-consider-historical-social-and-geographical-factors/>

the people in the propertied classes marriage was the main way of consolidating wealth as when the upper-class people married dowry, bride wealth or tribute was put into the man's possession. The dowry was important for the man within marriage as it was often the biggest transactions of money, goods or land they would acquire (Coontz, 2004). In the lower classes, marriage was still seen as important as it was still an economic and political transaction but in a different way. It was seen as a way to combine land and other resources to help with the labour on their farm.

The companionate marriage developed within the 20th century, there was an emphasis on emotional satisfaction and romantic love that intensified early in the century (Cherlin, 2004). Within this era, marriage still remained the only socially acceptable way to have a sexual relationship and to raise children in the US, Canada and Europe (Cherlin, 2004). Burgess and Loche (1945) discussed the rise of the companionate marriage and suggested it was the increase of the breadwinner and home maker marriage that was predominant in the 1950s. Husbands and wives within the companionate marriage adhered to the expectation there was an expectation that they have to be each other's friends and lovers. This was unheard of within the institutional marriages of the previous era. Women were brought up to see marriage as their main aim in life, their duty to work and serve their husbands, their children (Gittins, 1985). Bernard (1973) suggested that the needs and expectations that men bring to a marriage are very different compared to women. A woman's reasons to why she wanted to get married may had been because she could not support herself or she did not want to

live with her parents anymore. Contrasting with the reason of men's motivation of seeking marriage it could be because of sexual fulfilment or status (Gittins, 1985).

The transition of the companionate marriage to the individualised marriage began in the 1960s and developed further within the 1970s. This was seen as when more women were joining the labour force, getting more education and initiating divorces (Kamen, 2000). Within this era there was a focus on young women being able to have more agency within their lives, they have more choices about their sexual behaviours and principles; they had more freedom to tailor their family according to their personal preferences (Kamen, 2000). The reasons to why women marry have changed as they have more power and higher expectations, young women enter marriage for very different reasons compared to the previous era. This could be due to women being able to financial support themselves so they have higher expectations; the proportion of women working to support their families doubled in the past twenty years from 19% in 1980 to 46% in 2000 (Virginia Slims Poll, 2000). Evidence to support this can be seen through Cancian's (1987) study of the changing themes within American magazine articles offering marital advice in every decade between 1900 to 1979. The research found three key themes that characterised beliefs about the individualistic marriage; first was self-development, roles within marriage should be flexible and negotiable and communication and openness in confronting problems are essential. From this research it can be suggested that there is a focus on a more egalitarian approach and a focus on happiness, it shows the changes between the previous eras expectation of marriage and this era.

Weddings are often a big part of why people get married and should be considered within this argument. Baker (1990) notes that the wedding ceremony is seen as a 'rite of passage' to adult status. Within Currie's (2009) research found that peoples reasons to marry over cohabitating were; it is a ritual, symbol, the wedding signifies commitment and shared love. This perception of ritual is important as weddings symbolise family ties, as legally the wedding acknowledges the couple as husband and wife and publicly, it links the new couple to an extended network of kin relations (Currie, 2009). Previously, weddings were an event where two families joined an alliance, however within the 21st century weddings have become an important symbol of personal achievement and shows the couples self-development (Cherlin, 2004). The development of the wedding culture and the increase of consumerism is a reason why people are getting married. This can be related to the romanticism of weddings and marriage within the companionate era of marriage, and the media coverage of weddings have played a key role in developing a popular wedding consumer culture (Boden, 2001). Weddings are viewed as a cultural event or performance which generates its meaning primarily through consumption, which counter balances any belief that the wedding as a necessary social rite of passage (Boden, 2001). Weddings have moved away from the original meaning and the pressure often of getting married and having a wedding is shown through the experiences of lower income women; as Edin and Kefalas (2005) showed that poorer women delay marriage because they cannot afford the wedding they want.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the reasons why same sex couples get married as due this was a great social change within UK society.

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Previously, same sex couples were able to have civil partnerships in 2004 and then were able to get married in 2014. There were 6,493 same sex marriages in 2015 (ONS, 2015) and this is expected to increase as those statistics were from the following year that same sex marriage was introduced. Same sex couples have different reasonings to heterosexual couples to get married, as it is heavily focused on love and friendship within contemporary western societies (Karmen, 2000). However, with same sex couples, although there is mention of love and happiness, there is bigger emphasis on the legal equality within research. As within Lannuttis' (2005) research although within the USA is relevant to our understanding of why same sex couples wanted to get married. They found the participants reasons for wanting to get married was focused on legal equality which meant increased security for LGBT families and legal protection within family decisions. The research found the participants believe that the legal recognition of same sex marriage allows heterosexual and same sex couples to be viewed similarly as they have similar rights. Further research showed that same sex couples wanted to get married because they want the recognition from their families that is automatically given to their heterosexual brothers and sisters (Shipman and Smart, 2004). The couples within the research wanted the respect and acknowledgement given couples and same sex couples may get married for different reasons.

It is important to consider geographical differences when looking at reasons to why people get married. Considering the patterns within the USA, although fewer Americans are marrying than during peak years of marriage within the companionate marriage era, nearly 90% will eventually marry

(Goldstein and Kennedy, 2001). A survey of high school seniors that has been conducted annually since 1976, shows no decline in the importance of marriage (Thornton and Young DeMarco, 2001). The percentage of young women who responded that they expect to marry has remained constant at roughly 80% and has increased from 71% to 78% for young men. The constant level of expectation of marriage with women and then the increase amongst men has shown that marriage is important and relevant amongst people within contemporary western societies. There are similar views within the Netherlands as although unmarried cohabitation is popular and has been increasing since the 1960s and it has become a legally and socially accepted alternative to marriage (Poortman and Mills, 2012). However, individuals see cohabitation as a step before marriage. In 2008, more than 70% of cohabiters aged 18 to 29 intended to marry their partner in the near future. These changes within different societies and communities is therefore showing that although people are cohabitating and divorcing, marriage is still rated highly amongst individuals. Marriage within Turkish communities, although does not have a large emphasis on cohabitation their reasoning behind marriage is changing. As research found in Turkish communities, traditionally marriages have been arranged with a high percentage of consanguineous (Fowers et al, 2008). However, in recent years there has been an increasing proportion of the population have been selecting their marriages due to the reasons expressed within western societies such as love and happiness.

It can be considered that due to the increase within the divorce rates (ONS, 2016) and the higher levels of cohabitation (Seltzer, 2004) that academics

have questioned whether marriage is relevant institution within contemporary western societies. Within contemporary societies, marriage is not as dominant as it previously was, it is still important on a symbolic and personal level (Cherlin, 2004). This has been shown through the marriage trends in the UK (ONS, 2015) as a large majority of people are still getting married. However, there were 106, 959 divorces of opposite-sex couples in 2016, an increase of 5. 8% compared with 2015 (ONS, 2016). Cohabitation rates have increased as between 1996 and 2012 the number of heterosexual couples cohabitating increased from 1. 5 to 2. 9 million. Marriage has been changed from a family and community institution to focusing on the individual and their own choices which is often viewed as an achievement (Cherlin, 2004). These statistics show that marriage is not the only option for people within contemporary societies and it is not as relevant as it has been previous centuries.

In conclusion, this essay has shown the different ways why people get married. Firstly, looking at the historical changes within why people got married; previously marriage was more of an investment and an economic transaction and this moved on to companionate marriage where romance was emphasised (Coontz, 2004). However, gender roles within those marriages were criticised heavily as women gained more agency during the increase of the labour force (Kamen, 2000). The essay then explained individualised marriages which has been suggested where contemporary western societies are at now, where there is an emphasis on individual choice (Kamen, 2000). The essay then discussed social and cultural changes of the wedding consumerist culture and the changing meaning behind

weddings (Boden, 2011). Furthermore, the essay showed the difference in reasons why same sex couple get married in comparison to heterosexual couples, there was a focus on legal equality (Lannutti, 2005). Furthermore, the essay considered geographical differences, looking at Turkish communities to get a broader understanding of why people get married. Finally, discussing whether marriage is still an important institution due to the high levels of divorce and cohabitation. Marriage is no longer relevant as an institution, however it seems to be important amongst individuals which is why there is still a large emphasis on marriage. People get married for different reasons, and within the 21st century, it seems the focus on love and trust which is why people are prolonging marriage and cohabitating before marriage.

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