

Role of marriage in society



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Culture is defined as the dynamic system of rules established by groups (Matsumoto & Juang, p. 10). Marriage is one of the norms established by people, which reflect attitude, beliefs and behaviors. Marriage is an interpersonal relationship with communal or religious acknowledgment which is often created as an agreement. Marriage is rooted effectually in almost every society except where common law partners are recognized. It is the bond that exclusively consents a sexual relationship, especially in collectivist countries where sex before marriage is considered a sin, likewise some societies, especially collectivist countries also require official approval of religious or civil body. Across cultures, the anatomies of ancestral standards are different. Beliefs of what comprises a family are based on culture, dynamics, assets, and ethics. In many cultures, extended family which includes married couples staying in the home of their parents is a form of showing love and respect for example in Pakistan; marriage is also basis for having children in those societies. Since issues like fornication and having children outside of marriage is considered taboo so to grow a family in collectivist cultures getting married is must. Our attributions, interpersonal and romantic relationships and group behaviors are all influenced by the culture we live in thus resulting in the attitudes we have towards a specific actions we take.

Support gap, depression and illness including marital satisfaction, communication pattern and attitudes towards marriage, they all differ across cultures and will be discussed. Attitude towards marriage being the most important one, because the whole idea of relationship relies on the individual's perspective and preferences. It depends on the individual to see

it as a social foundation which administer structure, support, growth and stability or see it as an economic arrangement or as a part of religious institution. The western society might pay more importance to love whereas collectivist cultures might see as an obligatory and as a religious foundation to have family.

Spousal Social Support:

Social support for women is greatly reduced in machismo cultures (Matsumoto & Juang, p. 198). The conformity and obedience are expected by women and is related to traditional gender roles that females and males have occupied; with male traditionally being “ in power”. Such differences result in loss of support especially in cultures where women tend to get married at a young age; since getting married at an early age is a form of economic survival it is also seen as a way to guard the female gender and to administer some adherence in settings where society is under pressure for example India. The support a married couple gets from their significant partner is substantial, because support from outside the marriage does not compensate for the lack of spousal support (Xu & Burleson). Belle (1982) termed “ support gap hypothesis” which is that women receive less support from their husband compared to men even though the study Belle did was in 1980 and it has been almost a decade, the study done by Xu and Burleson indicates that “ social change in sex role relations” has not changed. The different kinds of support received are emotional support, esteem support, network support, tangible support and informational support. Research indicates that men are less comfortable and less skilled in discussing distressed emotional state (Burda & Vaux 1987; Saurer & Eisler, 1990;

Trost, Collins & Embree, 1994). In Cross Cultural comparison of social support, Mortneson (1999) found that members of the American individualistic cultures viewed seeking of social support as more appropriate means of coping with problems than did members of the Chinese collectivist cultures. American individualists also rated the provision of emotional support as more appropriate form of emotional support than did Chinese Collectivists.

Study done by Xu and Burleson, included 100 native born Americans and 102 native born Chinese; 45% of the sample were between 18-24 yrs of age and not exceeding 33 years. All participants were recently married i. e. not more than 5 years. The study tried to obtain desired and experienced levels of spousal support for the five types of social support (emotional, esteem, network, informational and tangible). Participants also responded to demographic questions that provided information on age, sex, race, national origin, length of time they had known their spouse and the time they have been married. The results indicated a vast difference between Chinese support system vs. American support system; Chinese men reported getting more esteem and network support from their spouse than Chinese women versus American women who experienced higher level of support from their spouse than did men. Sex differences were found amongst Chinese and American women, both face a support gap but Chinese women face an additional gap with respect to network support. The results provided Cross-cultural corroboration for the existence of support gaps, i. e. the less network support for Chinese wives that is because Chinese wives were reliant on their husbands for social contacts outside their home.

Chinese also reported in getting more information support than did Americans, which could arise from Individualism-Collectivism; a cultural factor. Americans view intimate relationship in terms of personal affect changes whereas Chinese in terms of connection with community. American men reported getting low level of spousal support than Chinese men that is because in traditional value system, wives have an obligation to support the egos and social connections of their husbands and husbands have lesser responsibility. Results indicate that marriage remains more influenced by traditional values among Chinese men than Americans.

Depression and Illness including Marital Satisfaction across Cultures

In collectivist societies, marriage is the central reality of a woman's life and the blue print on which her life depends. Epidemiological studies confirm the special vulnerability of women, especially married women, in South Asia (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). High rates of domestic violence (Jejeebhoy, 1998); female illiteracy, malnutrition, anemia and maternal mortality are major public health problems (Buckshee, 1997). Psychiatric epidemiological studies consistently identify high rates of depression and other neurotic illnesses in women and the gender ratio of these disorders on the subcontinent is higher than the gender ratio in the West (Mumford et al., 1996). Among married women in Pakistan, especially among newly married women, attempted suicide (Khan & Reza, 1998) and death rates from murder and suicide are higher than in are higher than in many other societies and are usually associated with in-law conflicts, especially dowry disputes (Kumar, 2004). Smaller scale studies of mental health and illness

have found that a variety of disorders such as depression and post-partum depression were strongly associated with marital problems, particularly maltreatment by husband or in-laws (Patel et al., 2002; Ulrich, 1987).

Women immigrants report higher rates of depression and dysphoria than Native American women (Karasz, 2005).

A study of traditional South Asian immigrant women and white European American women found that European American women viewed depressive symptoms as the result of personality structures shaped by childhood experiences, or by patho-physiological processes such as serotonin deficiency or hormonal imbalance. South Asian women, by contrast, viewed depressive illness as a normal emotional reaction to severe situational stress, especially marital distress, and to the vulnerabilities associated with women's gender roles (Karasz, 2005). The present study by Karasz examines how women understand the link of marital family problems and a wide range of health problems by examining their conceptual representations of the causal relationship between marriage roles, health and illness. Using qualitative methods and a model of illness representation from health psychology literature, 35 traditional South Asian immigrant women living in New York City were interviewed. Results indicated that problems associated with marriage roles, including marital and marital family conflict, domestic overwork and isolation were viewed as extremely serious and were associated conceptually with a variety of health problems. In another study done by Qadir, De Silva, Prince and Khan, tested the applicability of marital satisfaction scales developed in the West for use in Pakistan. The results indicate that, contrary to cultural beliefs regarding marriage, most women

expressed the need to be satisfied within marriage, which was found to be extremely low because of variety of reasons such as living in an extended family background and low spousal support.

Communication Patterns

Rehman and Munroe did a study and used cross-cultural methodology to examine the demand-withdraw pattern of marital communication. In Western countries, women make more demands, whereas men are more likely to withdraw. This advanced marital structure hypothesis suggests that this pattern can be altered by gender roles and beliefs, particularly in traditional marriages (Rehman & Munroe, 2006). To test such hypotheses, the authors conducted an observational study of marital communication across very different cultures, with varying levels of patriarchy (i. e., 50 White American couples, 52 Pakistani couples in Pakistan, and 48 immigrant Pakistani couples in America). A questionnaire was used to gather demographic information, such as age and education.

The Short Marital Adjustment Test (SMAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959); a standard measure of marital adjustment with well-established psychometric properties was the measure of marital satisfaction level. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979); was used to screen out violent couples. Modified General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000); only the immigrant couples completed this measure of acculturation to U. S. culture. Unable to find acculturation measures designed for The Desired Changes Questionnaire; the DCQ was used to choose topics for each couple to discuss during their marital interactions. Twenty areas are listed (e. g., " Get together with my friends"). 3 For each area, spouses rated how much they

wanted their partner to change (1- no change; 7- much more); they then listed at least two additional issues on which they wanted partner change and rank ordered their three most important issues. Each couple was also asked to discuss for 7.5 minutes, which were later coded.

Across cultures, demand-withdraw communication was related to marital distress, extending previous findings to new groups. The results for demanding behaviors showed that Pakistani wives were significantly more likely to engage in unassertive demands than were American wives, whereas American wives were significantly more likely to use aggressive demands than were Pakistani wives. In addition, among Pakistani and immigrant couples, husbands were significantly more likely than were wives to use aggressive demands, whereas American wives were significantly more likely to use aggressive demands than were American husbands. There was a trend for American husbands to be more likely to withdraw than their wives. In contrast, in the Pakistani group, wives were significantly more likely to withdraw than were husbands. In addition, Pakistani and immigrant wives were significantly more likely to withdraw than were American wives, whereas American husbands were significantly more likely to withdraw than were Pakistani husbands. Pakistani and immigrant wives showed increased withdrawal and made more unassertive demands, whereas Pakistani and immigrant husbands withdrew less and made more aggressive demands.

Attitudes towards Marriage

Attitude is one of the definitions in Jung's Chapter XI of Psychological Types. Jung's description of attitude is a "readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain way" (Jung, [1921] 1971: par. 687). One of the types of attitudes

Jung describes is, rational attitude, which is “reason as an attitude” (Jung, [1921] 1971: par. 785). Rational attitude is subdivided into thinking and feeling and irrational is subdivided into sensing and intuition. Attitude towards marriage involves, “readiness to act in a certain way”, whether you are capable of considering it rationally or irrationally. Why an individual chooses to get married? (voluntarily and involuntarily) differs across cultures. In collectivist cultures, it is seen as the only way of having family, fornication is not only considered a sin but also an individual can be severely punished which can lead to his/her death; some countries also have laws protecting it for example Saudi Arabia.

Higgins, Zheng, Liu and Sun did a study to compare the attitude towards marriage amongst people living in China (collective culture) and United Kingdom (individualistic culture). The British sample consisted of 338 students and the Chinese sample consisted of 505 students. A questionnaire was devised by Chinese and English researchers working together. Respondent cultural differences in response style were noted (Higgins, Zheng, Liu & Sun, 2002). According to Triandis, Brislin, and Hui (1988), people who belong to collectivist, group-oriented societies are more likely to value harmony, face-saving, modesty, and moderation and this may manifest itself in neutral answers to attitude scales. Respondents were asked for their opinion using a 5-point Likert scale. In this study, students were asked for their general attitude to sex before marriage. A total of 46.3% of Chinese men and 41.2% of Chinese women gave neutral answers, a higher percentage of Chinese female students (46.9%) were against sex before marriage than were Chinese male students (29.9%). The next statements

concerned the connection between premarital sex and marriage. Most British students (85. 2% men, 91. 3% women) disagreed with “ A couple who have had sexual intercourse before marriage ought to marry each other,” whereas only a few Chinese (12. 9% men, 11. 4% women) disagreed.

The belief that sex is designed for marriage is still firmly held by many Chinese people and exerts a strong influence on their attitudes (Higgins, Zheng, Liu & Sun, 2002). When asked about their willingness to marry a partner who had had sex with somebody else, over half of the British respondents (54. 0% men, 50. 6% women) did not seem to worry about their partners' previous sexual experience whereas their Chinese counterparts (34. 0% men, 36. 5% women) appeared to be less agreeable to the idea. 87. 1% male and female 94. 3% students were against freedom to have lovers within marriage. This attitude was also prevalent among the Chinese sample, with 65. 6% of men and 72. 5% of women against extramarital lovers, this study showed that these “ male-superior norms” still exist in the U. K. sample but are more prominent in the Chinese sample (Higgins, Zheng, Liu & Sun, 2002). Culture exerts a strong influence on people's attitudes to love, marriage, and sex. People from a more traditional society (e. g. China) have more consensus about the gender roles of men and women; adhere more to traditional morality and values; and are less “ open” about sexual freedom (Higgins, Zheng, Liu & Sun, 2002).

Hojat, Shapurian, Shafeyhain and Parsi conducted a study amongst 160 Iranian immigrants in the US in 2000. The immigrants were between 20 -50 years of age, questionnaires were given which included 25 questions regarding attitude towards marriage and relationship. Results showed that

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Iranian immigrant men were more likely than female partners to view premarital sex, marriage and family from a traditional point of view.

Another interesting study done by Wiesel and Krenawi consisted of 150 participants of different cultural backgrounds i. e. 29 were Druze, 32 were Muslims and 33 were Christians; 44 were women and 50 were men with a mean age of 34. The questionnaires were designed to reveal attitudes toward love, the marriage expectation scale, potency scale, which will reveal the control of things, and mate selection scale which revealed how the person took initiative in getting married (love or arranged). Results indicated Muslims saw love as less important for marital quality than did Druze and Christians, Muslims more than other groups correlated independent decision making with marital quality, attitude toward love and marital quality were weakly correlated among Muslims, the necessity to beget off spring and unity between families were high amongst Muslims than other groups suggesting what might keep the families together in the absence of love. The results also suggested that arranged marriages are negatively associated with marital satisfaction and low level of marital satisfaction was related with low level of education.

Discussion

Through a variety of perceptions, one develops an exclusive analogue of what marriage is; and the ancillary ideals concerning marriage. My mother always said that “ successful marriage depends on two things: finding the right person and being the right person”. Since I am a Muslim, I will give several quotations from Quran; which I support as my belief and my idea of a perfect family and what a perfect husband and wife should be like. Though I

must admit with time, I have come to realize that to be perfect; one must have to sacrifice a lot and since marriage is a two way street one has to give a lot in order to get anything. In Islam, marriage is treated as 'half-faith'. "When a servant of Allah marries, he has completed half of his religious obligations, and he must fear Allah in order to complete the second half" (al-Baihaqi). Prophet Muhammad has also said, " Marriage is part of my *Sunnah, whoever runs away from my path is not from among us". Husbands and wives are compared as garments to each other (al-Qur'an 2: 187) Marriage gives tranquility (al-Qur'an 30: 21) of mind in the spouses. Allah has prescribed marriage as the only way for conjugal relationship and family life in human society (al-Qur'an 2: 221, 5: 5, 24: 33).

With enough being said of the significance of marriage in Islam, it's a shame to see that Muslim women face higher suicidal rate than men in Pakistan (Khan & Reza, 1998). Most marriages in Pakistan are "arranged" by parents and other elders of family, with the woman having little or no say in the selection of her partner. Premarital meetings between couples are rare. Many couples meet each other for the first time on their wedding night. Newly married couples share the house with the groom's family, having little time or space of their own. Once married, a woman is under increasing pressure from her in-laws as well as her own family to have children as soon as possible, preferably in the first year. If for some reason the woman cannot have children, the threat of divorce or the husband taking on a second wife (allowed in Islam) is not uncommon. The divorce rate in Pakistan is quite low 0.3 per 1000 population (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1996, p. 686) but this does not reflect the true state of marriages. There is considerable stigma to

divorce, especially for the woman. In addition, few women work outside their homes or have jobs that give them economic independence. Because most of the South Asian and Middle Eastern countries give high power to men, the spousal support is something that men living in these countries expect from women. Being a housewife, taking care of kids and most of all thinking of women as inferior is something common amongst these men. Because the families live together, there is not privacy, which gives rise to poor communication amongst married couples.

My marriage was an arranged, it wasn't that my parents didn't ask me of my approval; or if I didn't get a chance to talk to my husband, before getting married, that is something that a women in Islam has the right to do and people; who are uneducated living in impoverished societies, deprive women of these right which gives rise to many social and marital problems. I must admit though, that living in an extended joined family, gave my husband and me little or no time for us, our life was going around in circles to which I always thought was no ending. But, being educated and having a liberal thinking we always made sure there was at least if not all, some privacy left, some matters that only me and my husband would discuss behind closed doors. While doing research for this paper, I sadly have to confess that women living in Asian or Middle eastern countries do suffer more, which didn't come to me as a surprise because I've lived in Pakistan and have seen it all, but my question and concern was who will ever put a stop to all this nonsense?. Sadly, women is a victim in these countries but women are also who are perpetuating these hatred and violence in the household. A woman can take many forms, she can be a daughter, a mother in law, a sister in law,

a wife, an aunt etc. most importantly she is the one who raises a child to be the kind of person she wants to see him as; unfortunately in countries like Pakistan and India, it is the woman (mother in law) who forces their child to be stern and harsh to their wives, I think its because of the fact that they cant stand the undivided attention of their sons or maybe they think keeping a women under control will only bring out the best for their sons. Who will ever think of these women who are ignored?