

Marriage should be abolished in favour of civil partnerships?

Marriage is defined as a sexual relationship between two individuals which is widely accepted in many societies (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). However, a civil partnership is defined as two individuals of the same sex in a relationship, which is formed when registered as civil partners (Great Britain Parliament, 2004). Individuals who enter a civil partnership have similar rights to heterosexual couples (Pawelski, 2006). Recent government proposals have been put forward to allow heterosexual couples the same rights to enter a civil partnership, ensuring all couples have the same choices in life (Equal Civil Partnerships, 2018). This may suggest, the increase in individualization over time has given way to wider choices within the family (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Likewise, Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) suggest, alongside a decrease in marriage and an increase in divorce, the characteristics of marriage have largely changed. Recent findings from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2018) suggest similar, in the UK during 2015 there were 239,020 marriages, the lowest on record. Correspondingly there were 106,959 divorces during 2016 an increase from 2015 (ONS, 2017). Consequently, Barlow *et al.* (2005) suggests, marriage has changed and is no longer seen as a necessary part of adult life for all grownups in society. Therefore, it could be argued that, contemporary changes within families reflect new gender norms, family types and acceptance within society by which changes in family values have allowed this to happen, with every family holding diverse norms and values (Mckie and Callan, 2012)

Divorce has become an increasing feature of many modern societies and is the norm for many adults (Macionis and Plummer, 2012). Consequently, divorce today is a lot easier to obtain and is legally recognised in the UK and in many countries (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). The underlying factors as to why individuals choose to divorce are changing traditional attitudes, rising levels of education and more personal choice (Cheal, 2008). Similarly, other factors include changing personal needs and the need for greater entitlement especially for individuals (Amato and Previti, 2003). The increase in married women's education may result in an increase in financial prospects including income and employment, suggesting women no longer need to depend upon their husbands and can survive independently without been trapped into a marriage due to lack of financial security (Cheal, 2008). This may suggest, some women no

longer see marriage as a necessary due to better economic prospects (Giddens and Sutton, 2017).

The increase in economic prospects for women would be challenged by Marxists theorists, according to Marxist Engles, the family encourages patriarchy through men's power over women due to men been the main breadwinner within the family, financial power is exercised over women due to women been solely responsible for childbearing and maintaining the home (Macionis and Plummer, 2012). Challengingly, Beck and Gernsheim (2014) propose, marriage is more based around individual choice; creating new opportunities for happiness, by every failed attempt of marriage can result into a happier attempt. This may imply, greater independence means women no longer need to marry for financial security (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). Therefore, it could be argued that marriage should be abolished in favour of civil partnership. In contrast, the increase in divorce may suggest, marriage is declining, however, Macionis and Plummer (2012) propose, adults choosing to remarry after divorce remains very popular in the UK, with many marriages being a second marriage. Therefore, it could be argued that, marriage remains a strong institution and should not be abolished in favour of civil partnership.

Moreover, Grunow, Schulz and Blossfeld (2012) suggest, the increase in women's position in the work force, would lead to an equal division of labour, however despite women entering employment, men's share of housework has not increased. Women are still expected to carry out a dual burden of housework and paid work (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). Therefore, regardless of women's employment, women are still responsible for most of the housework (Stutzer and Bruno, 2006). Furthermore, men benefit more within marriage due to women's increased participation in household maintenance (Monin and Clark, 2011). In agreement, feminist Wallaby (1990) takes forward the idea of patriarchy suggesting, women are oppressed through paid work, being paid less within employment and domestic work, being responsible for child rearing and housework (Warwick-Both, 2013). Therefore, it could be argued marriage should be abolished in favour of civil partnership.

Cohabitation has become increasingly popular in many western families over past decades; the increase in couples choosing to cohabit has challenged the institution of marriage, creating larger uncertainty around the importance of marriage (Harris and

Bernardi, 2015). Opposing this notion, functionalists' favour one family unit, that being the nuclear family (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). The nuclear family, often referred to as the traditional family made up of a married heterosexual couple with dependent children (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Functionalist Murdock (1949) suggests that, the family perform certain functions that meet society's needs, that being reproduction of the next generation, reproducing the future generation and socialising children into societies norms and values in order to achieve social cohesion. Likewise, functionalist Parsons suggests that, all societies' members must be socialised into social order (Macionis and Plumber, 2012). Consequently, by socialising individuals into society's norms allows moral consensus to take place, whereby all individuals within society share the same family values (Giddens and Sutton, 2017).

One of the main reasons for the increase in cohabitation is the increase in acceptance and changes of opinion within society (Barlow *et al.*, 2005). Whilst many individuals may see cohabitation as acceptable, Barlow *et al.* (2001) suggests that, different age groups hold notably different attitudes within society, with many young couples taking a more liberal view towards cohabitation and partnerships, whilst older generations take a more functionalist approach, favouring the tradition of marriage. However, marriage is still highly valued and seen as the ideal family type along with many cohabitants going on to marry at some point in their life (Barlow *et al.*, 2005). This may suggest, the institution of marriage is still strong.

Contrastingly, within today's society, the increase in family breakdown and greater individualisation has resulted in a society merely based upon diversity and uncertainty (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Society has now moved rapidly into a postmodern period, the increase in multicultural societies and increased acceptance of different groups within society suggests we no longer live in a modern society (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). In agreement Cheal (2008) states, family structures are much more open and undecided. Diversity is widely accepted within many families, something functionalists fail to recognize (Giddens and Sutton, 2017).

Moreover, Harris *et al.* (2017) states, the increase in divorce and the increase in couples choosing to cohabit has changed behaviours within many families, resulting in family breakdown. Consequently, divorce can have harmful effects on children's academic achievement, concentration, health and wellbeing (Fagan and

Churchill, 2012). Similarly, children raised in families made up of divorced parents are more likely to have lower academic achievement than children raised in families with two biological parents (Potter, 2010). In agreement, Tartari (2015) proposes, children raised in families with divorced parents are less likely to do well in education and are more likely to have lower results on tests. Alongside academic achievement, children's wellbeing is more likely to be affected due to divorce being a stressful period and requires children to adapt to changes in the family environment (Sun, 2001). Similarly, Fagan and Churchill (2012) suggest, children raised within family breakdown are more likely to hold negative attitudes of marriage which results in lack of commitment and trust in future relationships. In agreement, Bronfenbrenner (1996) states as the ecology of human development, changes in a child's environment can affect their life course. Similarly, culture can influence children's personal relationships in their own lives (Lindon, 2012). Due to the increase in divorce rates and the negative impact divorce can have upon children; it could be argued that marriage should be abolished in favour of civil partnership.

In contrast, Brown (2010) suggests, children raised by two biological parents are more likely to experience better educational outcomes and experience increase in support, by parents worrying about marital conflict leaves little room to spend time with their children. Likewise, children raised without two biological parents are more likely to experience weaker emotional bonds than those of traditional families (Amato, 2005). Children raised without married biological parents are also more likely to experience financial disadvantage, due to only one parent's income, resulting in lack of money to take part in activities therefore, experience disadvantage in comparison to children raised by married parents (Waldfogel, Craigie and Brooks-Gun, 2010). Moreover, children raised in married parent families often experience less economic stress in comparison to non-married couples (Manning and Lamb, 2003). Whilst it could be argued that marriage should not be abolished in favour of civil partnership due to increase in support and financial prospects marriage can provide for children. It is important to consider what Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004) state, most individuals within a civil partnership are within a stable and secure relationship as any other dominant family type.

According to Johnson (1986) divorce and marital separation leads largely to an increase in single parents. Single parent families are more likely to suffer financial

disadvantage due to been unable to afford basic clothing and material goods for children (Amato, 2005). Similarly, Dejean, McGeorge and Carlson (2012) state, single mothers often face negative societal views, being deemed as troubled, poor parents, shameful and seen as holding non-traditional beliefs. Furthermore, single mothers often face more stress, depression and experience less social support in comparison to women who are married (Cairney *et al.*, 2003). Whereas, married women often experience increased wellbeing due to increase in support and affection (Demo and Acock, 1996).

Due to the increase in families headed by single mothers, fatherless families often occur, as a result, children often loose contact with their fathers or spend infrequent time with them, contributing to social problems such as crime (Giddens and Sutton, 2018). In agreement with functionalists, the New Right believe, the nuclear family is essential for creating a stable society and behaviour, disapproving of other family types such as single parents due to social problems they create (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Therefore, due to the impact single parents and fatherless families have on children and society, it could be argued that marriage should not be abolished in favour of civil partnership. Opposingly, several women state, being a single parent has positively created more independence, greater self-esteem and motivation to succeed in employment and education (Baranowska-Rataj, Matysiak and Mynarska, 2014). Similarly, many women choose to raise a child independently without a partner by choice due to being more prosperous (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). Despite, divorce and separation, many fathers still support their children and remain present throughout their life even though they do not live in the same household (Giddens and Sutton, 2017). Overall, It is important to consider the children's rights, regardless of parental separation; children have the right to remain in contact with both parents, unless it is harmful to do so (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC), 2010). Therefore, whether parents are married, or divorced children are still able to remain in contact. (Department for Education (DfE), 2020a).

Moreover, Marks (2005) suggests, religious participation is often associated with higher commitment and value of marriage along with increased fulfilment and happiness within the family. Similarly, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) propose, the increase in religious commitment results in greater commitment within marriage. Opposingly, less religious individuals are more likely to experience family breakdown

due to lack of moral belief around marriage (Kimiko, 2009). The increase in religious belief can help increase social capital for vulnerable families, providing support and guidance on parenting and child rearing (Petts, 2012). In agreement, sociologist Durkheim suggests, religion helps promote social control and social cohesion ensuring all members of society share the same norms, values and cultural norms in relation to marriage and raising children (Macionis and Plummer, 2012). Every family holds different values, what one family deem acceptable maybe the complete opposite, in relation to living arrangements and divorce (Mckie and Callan, 2012). Likewise, within Muslim cultures, marriage at an early age is a core feature of family life, sex outside of a heterosexual marriage is seen as deviant, (Dhami and Sheikh, 2000). However, like Mckie and Callan (2012) propose, personal values affect what individuals deem as appropriate behaviour.

In conclusion, within modern society the institution of marriage has largely changed (Barlow *et al.*, 2005). The increase in divorce and decline in marriage over recent years (OFN, 2017; 2018) alongside the adverse effects divorce can have upon children could suggest, marriage should be abolished in favour of civil partnerships. Contrastingly, traditional attitudes, religious commitment and increase in financial prospects for children could suggest, marriage should not be abolished in favour of civil partnership. I personally believe it is a matter of personal choice, I believe due to the increase in diversity within society, individuals will always hold different attitudes towards marriage and civil partnership, there will never be one view of marriage or civil partnership which is important to recognise within a postmodern era.

2.193 excluding title

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