# How Marriage is changing in American Culture

## Introduction

Marriage is a legally recognized social contract between people of adult age who have consented to the permanence of their union. Marriage is an essential institution in most cultures across the globe. It gives rise to the concept of a family, which primarily involves a father, a mother, and children (Cherlin, 2004). Notably, marriage practices vary across the respective cultures. Every culture has its way of conducting the institution of marriage by their traditions and customs. Initially, the marriage institution in the American culture was sacred; it was the dream and expectation of the American society. Spouses were expected to marry before starting a family. However, recent surveys and studies have revealed a dramatic and negative variation in marriage in America over the last generation (Cherlin, 2004).

## Changes in Marriage

Numerous changes have taken place in the institution of marriage. These changes have affected the family unit and the society at large. These changes are but not limited to: Americans not marrying when they are young, cohabitation before marriage, most Americans are unmarried with children, higher divorce and separation rates, liberal marriages with different family structures and inequalities & fights in marriages (Tucker & Mitchell- Kernan, 1995). Initially, most Americans got married when they were young (still teenagers or early 20s). Nowadays most Americans are marrying at the age of thirty years while some get married in their forties.

In the previous generations, it was rare for unmarried couples to live together or share a household. Nowadays, it is a norm to see couples cohabiting together and spending time living together outside of marriage. Unmarried cohabitation is preceding marriage in most American societies (Carter, 2014). Currently, there are many unmarried couples with children in the community. In some instances, there is single parenthood whereby the child is either motherless or fatherless (Carter, 2014). Some of the cohabiting couples have children. The divorce rate in the American society is considerably high as compared to previous generations (Luscombe, 2010). There are inequalities in the marriage institution that further weakens the possibility of a stable marriage. It is possible to find marriages, where one partner is being exploited, abused or misused by the other partner and most likely has no redress.

## Causes of the Changes in Marriage

The financial challenges and low-income levels have had a drastic effect on the institution of marriage in the American culture. Over the last years, America has had economic challenges that might have affected the standard of livings of most citizens. Notably, this cause is rampant among African Americans (Cherlin, 1998). Most Americans find it irrational to embrace the institution of marriage if they are financially unstable. People need partners who can provide and be able to assist each other in meeting their needs in life. Therefore, many partners will postpone marriage until the time they have enough money. Cohabitation is sometimes as a result of financial challenges (Cherlin, 1998).

Some couples prefer to live together to cost share on their needs and bills but do not want to get married. They lack enough money to live alone and therefore chose to cohabit, and this leads to weakening of the concept of marriage. Low levels of education also contribute to the changes in the marriage institution. Couples who have little educational background tend to ignore the institution of marriage (Burton, 2011). They do not see the need of marriage as compared to couples who have an educational experience. Most American societies, especially African Americans have a poor educational background. Well-educated people understand the benefits of the institution of marriage and are committed to ensuring the marriage works (Carter, 2014).

Rising individualism has also led to changes in the marriage institution. Some Americans have a self-entitlement that they view marriage as a distraction (Burton, 2011). They view marriage as a source of instability in their lives and farfetched commitment to one or specific persons. Religion has a significant role in the marriage institution. Religious people live by the commandments and appreciate the concept of marriage. Currently, in the American culture people are less religious, and therefore their appreciation of institutions such as marriages has diminished (Luscombe, 2010).

## Consequences of the Changes in Marriage

These changes have adversely affected the individual persons, family units, and the society at large. These changes have led to a weaker marriage culture. The divorce rate has immensely increased in first marriages and subsequent marriages. The basic unit of a society, the family, is slowly diminishing (Tucker & Mitchell- Kernan, 1995). Children are living without one of their parents since one of their parents are partial cohabitees or absentees. Research has proven that as of 2008, 41% of babies were born to unmarried mothers (Luscombe, 2010). Children have to endure the discord between their unmarried parents.

## Conclusion

American marriage has evolved over the years. It has changed from a formal institution bound by societal norms to a more individualistic form of marriage based on self-development and personal fulfillment (Cherlin, 2004). Nevertheless, Americans still hope and believe in the institution of marriage; they hold it in high esteem and desire to be married in their lifetimes. A successful marriage brings happiness, respect, security, and suitable ways to raise children (Burton, 2011). It is imperative that the variations in marriage in the American culture over the last couple of years be noted and corrected. Americans have to strengthen the marriage culture, reduce divorces and other adverse consequences.

## Reference

Burton, C. (2011). *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33(2), 137-139. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416388

Carter, J. (2014). *5 Facts about Marriage in America. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission*. Retrieved 14 February 2018, from https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/5-facts-about-marriage-in-america

Cherlin, A. J. (1998). Marriage and Marital Dissolution among Black Americans. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 147-158.

Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 848-861.

Luscombe, B. (2010). *Who Needs Marriage? A Changing Institution*. Retrieved 14 February 2018, from http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2032116,00.html

Tucker, M., & Mitchell- Kernan, C. (Eds.). (1995). *Decline in Marriage Among African Americans, The: Causes, Consequences, and Policy Implications*. Russell Sage Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610445375