**Perceptions of Marriage Among Japanese and American University Students**

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**Abstract**

In recent years, the marriage rate in both the United States and Japan has been in decline. Background research indicated that young adults in both countries are choosing not to get married in order to preserve their own personal freedom. In a survey, I investigated why the marriage rate in both countries was decreasing, what influences university students’ decision whether or not to marry, and what they expect from marriage should they want to marry. Results indicated that a strong majority of students in both countries want to get married at some point in their life, and they expect their marriage to be a joint effort with all marital roles shared equally. I also discovered that the most important factors in a marriage for both Japanese and American surveyed university students were efficient communication and trust in one another. Additionally, an interesting result that I learned was that both Japanese and American university students thought that a couple should live together prior to marriage.

**1. Significance of the Study**

Research has indicated that the marriage rate in both America and Japan is decreasing. When I studied abroad in japan I heard that there were distinct gender roles when it came to marriage. Men worked long hours and women stayed home to take care of the home and children. I wish to see how these perceived gender roles compare to current university students’ perceptions of marriage, whether or not they want to get married, and what they expect from marriage if they do.

**2. Research Questions**

First I would like to know, what are some contributing factors that influence university students’ decision whether or not to get married? secondly, what are the expectations of Japanese and American men and women that do want to get married? To answer these questions, I did extensive background research on the subjects, and then created both an English and Japanese survey to test the research results that I found.

**3. Background Research**

3.1. Outline of the Background of Research

 In this background research I will talk about reasons behind Japan and America’s declining marriage rates, and the factors that influence someone’s decision of whether or not they want to get married. For instance, attractive qualities in potential spouses, and the main reasons for getting married.

3.2. America and Japan’s marriage rate, rate of unmarried, and divorce rate.

Current marriage rates in both Japan and the United States have been the lowest they’ve ever been in both of the nation’s histories. Between 1980 and 2010, the rate of unmarried in Japan have increased significantly as well. For men it’s has increased by about twenty percent, and for women the it has increased by around forty percent. As for divorce, the rate has declined for Americans and increased for Japanese. I believe however that the rates of divorce for Americans were bound to go down due to the declining marriage rate. There will be less divorces if there are less marriages to divorce from.

3.3. Social Implications for the Decline in Marriage

 According to Sakai, with more equal rights for women, came more opportunity for university education and employment after graduation. Because of this, many women aimed to start a career after college and didn’t want to fall into a traditional life of housewife if they got married. Men on the other hand found women’s newfound independence and self respect intimidating. They also thought that relationships were too messy and tiring, getting in the way of personal space and independence.

3.4. Proprietary Relationships

 Duffy suggests that “The Japanese have managed to distill each part of a human relationship into a buyable package; with dating marriage, and eventually babies falling by the wayside.” There are a number of alternatives to relationships that you can pay for. Two of the most prominent are host and hostess clubs, and Enjou-Kosai, which translates to “compensated dating”. In host and hostess clubs, attractive young men and women are paid to give their undivided attention to their clients. This usually involves casual conversation and flirting and some clients spend the equivalent of upwards of fifty-thousand U.S. dollars a month on the service. Enjou-Kousai is the practice in which usually older men pay young women to go on dates with them. The young women are paid in a number of ways ranging from money to cars. According to Thollar, most of the time, the encounters are non-sexual, and is a more personal form of a hostess club.

3.5 the top four reasons for marriage

 According to the National Survey for Marriage and Childbirth, the Japanese’s top four reasons for marriage are peace of mind, having children, convenience of lifestyle, and living with the person that they love. According to the Pew Research Center, the four biggest reasons for marriage are love, making a lifelong commitment, companionship, and having children.

3.6 Expectations in Marriage: Personality and Life After Marriage

According to Kaneko and Ueda, when looking for a potential spouse, research showed that men prefer more relaxed, nurturing women, and women prefer more disciplined, driven men. In terms of life after marriage, Traditionally men worked to provide for the family while women took care of the household and managed money. However, because modern women have started to work as well as taking care of the household, it is expected of men to provide more help and support when it comes to household and family tasks, in hopes of a more equal relationship in marriage.

**4. The Study**

4.1. Research Method

For my research I sent out both and English and Japanese survey. For the survey I got 66 university student respondents. For the Japanese survey I received results from 10 men, and 19 women, and for American surveys I received results from 23 men and 14 women.

**5. Results**

5.1. Research Question 1 Summary Findings

The results of research question 1 showed that the strong majority of both American and Japanese university students said that they wanted to get married at some point in their life, with the main reason for both countries being for love, having children, and peace of mind. There were a very minimal number of respondents that said that they didn’t want to get married. Of the ones that did, the main reason behind their decision was for the purpose of maintaining personal, sexual and economic freedom. Regardless of whether or not they wanted to get married, the strong majority of respondents had said their parents relationship had affected their views of marriage.

5.2. Research Question 2 Summary Findings

 Results from my survey showed that the ideal age to get married among current university students in both Japan and the United States is 27-29. Respondents also said that in general, a couple should be together for about one to two years before the get married. The majority of men in both countries and all of the women respondents had said that they would marry someone older than them with the mean age being 1-6 years. On the other hand, all of the male respondents and the majority of female respondents said that they would marry someone older than them with the mean age for men being 1-6 years, and 4-10 years for women. When it came to the division of roles in the marriage, the strong majority of both men and women had said that of both countries had said that they didn’t have any set roles in mind, and said that they wanted their marriage to be as equal as possible. Finally, when asked what factors are most important in a marriage, The strong majority of both American and Japanese men and women had said that effective communication and trust are the most important factors in a marriage.

**6. Conclusion**

6.1. Conclusion and Discussion

Even though my background research had said that the marriage rate in both Japan and the United States was declining, the strong majority of both American and Japanese men and women said that they wanted to get married at some point in their lives. The main reasons were love, children, and peace of mind while the reasons of those that did not want to get married was for the sake of personal, sexual and financial freedom. When it came to roles in marriage, the majority of respondents had said that they wanted a marriage to be as equal as possible. The overall attitude towards marriage from all the respondents was similar between both countries which honestly surprised me. This could be related to the fact that most of the Japanese respondents are or were exchange students in the U.S. and the ideals stuck with them.

6.2. Limitations of the Study

 This study cannot be generalized due to the fact that the amount of respondents was so small. Also, for both countries there were an uneven amount of male and female respondents. For a future study, I would try to increase the number of respondents, especially respondents that didn’t want to get married. I would also like to survey in greater detail more factors that influence marriage among university students and possibly explore more alternatives to marriage like cohabitation.

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