

Analysis of the reasons for the decline in the marriage rate and fertility rate among women

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Abstract:

In recent years, there has been a significant decline in marriage and fertility rates around the world, probably because women are more independent and reluctant to get involved in marriage and pregnancy. Therefore, this article delves into three reasons women are reluctant to marry. From the standpoint of gender mismatch in modern society, fewer men meet women's needs, creating a mismatch between demand and supply. From the perspective of the contemporary working environment, the improvement of women's intelligence makes women put more experience into work, and marriage and childbirth may ruin women's careers. At the same time, sexual harassment in the workplace makes women resentful of men and reluctant to get married. From the perspective of social and cultural influences, the traditional conservative ideas of the past still exist in modern society, which has caused an imbalance in the gender division of labor and made women rebellious. Therefore, women may be reluctant to marry because it becomes a prudent issue and needs to be carefully considered before making a decision.

Keywords: Female; Marriage and Fertility Rates; Gender Mismatch; Employment; Architecture.

1. Introduction

The worldwide marriage and birth rates have dramatically dropped over the past decade. Countries such as South Korea even have a total fertility rate below 0.9, indicating that each woman in this country has given less than one kid in their lifetime (Cho K, 2021). One possible explanation is women's indisposition to engage in marriage and pregnancy. Recent research conducted by four British universities reported that women are 58% less likely to get married, consistent with every 15-point increase in IQ, whereas the probability of a man getting married rises by 35% with the same IQ increase. This essay will explore the reasons behind women's reluctance to marry from three perspectives: 1) gender mismatching in modern society, 2) the modern working environment, and 3) social-cultural influence.

2. Gender Mismatching in Modern Society

Since marriage is a long-term relationship with reproductive purposes between males and females, it is essential to explore women's disinclination for marriage from the perspective of evolutionary theory. Evolutionary psychologists argue that humans, also known as "homo sapiens", evolve to better adapt to the environment (Barber, 1995). Therefore, as the bearers of children, women should be

more concerned about whether their partners can pass down the genes that can be successfully adapted to the modern world. According to the vintage sex selection theory proposed by Darwin (1871), the criteria for the fittest trait for women should include superior features, such as healthy physicality, attractive appearance, and affluent economic conditions. However, in a modern society where the wealth gap has peaked, it is difficult for an ordinary working-class man to meet such requirements due to a lack of material resources. Even upper-middle-class men may not fit most women's "husband material" standards. For instance, in China, male programmers have the highest salary rate among most jobs (Han et al., 2021). However, these programmers are more likely to work 12-hour shifts, which leads to significant physical problems such as obesity. As suggested by Myers et al. (2020), chronic work stress, such as night shifts, can lead to a sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise, so they are more prone to the risk of being overweight. Furthermore, unhealthy working shifts can cause neurophysiological impairments, which would further cause mental tension, unstable emotions, and even a higher rate of cardiovascular disease (Belcher et al., 2015). Unarguably, some mental illnesses like depression are a byproduct of this working style. Night-shift workers are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, despite their high salaries and better education, IT employees' poor

physical and mental conditions could increase the likelihood of being rejected by women, as they are considered not able to provide fit genes. Meanwhile, women would never consider a long-term relationship with a man who is of lower socio-economic status.

As mentioned, we might have a conclusion that women are more “picky” in marriage, which seems “unfair” to men. However, following parental investment theory (Trivers et al., 1972), women invest more in the next generation than their male partners. Thus, females may need more time and resources to bear and nurture their children. Still, the pressures of modern work and their own career dreams force women to put a lot of effort into their work, especially those who do not need the support of men but rely on their high intelligence. Since marriages usually lead to pregnancy and the cultivation of children, which are time-consuming, they affect women’s chances of promotion and salary increase (Folke & Rickne, 2020). Many women of prime reproductive age have never considered marriage and pregnancy because these are essentially in conflict with their optimum working age. These females often miss the best time when they realize they want to have children. Furthermore, for women who are concerned about physical attractiveness, pregnancy may also result in a decline in their physical health and body shape (Lee et al., 2012). In a nutshell, women are naturally inclined to care for their children and invest in their upbringing, so working women are prone to be selective when considering severe relationships with the plan of having children.

3. The Modern Working Environment

When women have higher intelligence, their employment rate will also increase accordingly. In the past two decades, more than 307 million women have entered the workforce. Even in less developed regions like Latin America and the Caribbean, the female employment rate was 51.5 percent in 2018, significantly higher than the global average (Verick, 2014). However, many private companies do not provide their female employees with sufficient paid leave, such as maternity and marriage (Hideg et al., 2018). Therefore, women with high intelligence often devalue marriage and childbearing due to concerns about potential career disruption. Even when companies demonstrate a commitment to gender equity in the promotion and protection of women’s fundamental rights, female employees remain cautious about marriage and childbearing. For example, Folke and Rickne (2020) showed a significant increase in divorces, consistent with women’s career conditions. Women who were promoted to higher management positions exhibit higher divorce

rates, especially among couples with traditional values. Men in traditional families tend to want their status higher than their wives because it fulfills their self-esteem, which is reinforced by a patriarchal mindset (Reid, 2018).

Moreover, women employees are more likely to be targets of both direct and indirect assault in the workplace. One type of assault is sexual harassment, which can typically occur in the workplace in both developed and developing countries (Yie & Ping, 2021). Karami et al. (2019) reported that male employees might make jokes about women’s secondary sexual appearance, such as chest sizes. Still, women employees are often afraid to express dissent and remain silent. This phenomenon can be attributed to male dominance and the incongruence with the framework of masculine culture at the workplace. As proof, Plester (2015) demonstrated that men in New Zealand organizations, including the finance, law, energy, and IT industries, normally ridiculed their gay colleagues for lacking masculinity. Such jokes would cause detrimental effects on victims’ mental and physical well-being in the workplace (Hommelhoff et al., 2024). Another type of assault is more explicit and involves body contact. The statistics in 2010 showed that there were 40613 cases of crime head assault to outrage modesty of women employees in India, and in the following five years, the number of cases directly doubled (Bhat et al., 2007). Such incidents will cause female victims to develop a pattern of repulsion toward men, fearing male actions such as persistent sexual harassment in the workplace or prolonged bullying in the family. These experiences lead women to unconsciously or consciously distance themselves from men, thereby resulting in an unwillingness to marry.

4. Socio-cultural Influence

Finally, the current socio-cultural environment discourages women from engaging in married life. Modern society is still driven by two ideologies: traditional conservatism and post-modern liberalism (Sauerheber et al., 2020). The former was developed in agricultural societies, where women were often regarded as a household resource for reproduction and child-rearing due to their lack of physical strength in farming. This notion has persisted to the present day, which leads to a gender division of labor that is incompatible with the current era of industrialization. For example, in such gender schema, women are believed to study humanities rather than science because humanities are usually considered “low-stress” subjects by lay-people, which enables women to spend more time and energy on childbirth and family chores (Trusz, 2020). On the contrary, men are believed to study science because it brings more significant pressure and tedious work. This

comparison implies that modern society still unwittingly considers men as the backbone of the family, which complies with traditional values. However, such a tendency will arouse confusion and self-doubt for females in the scientific industry. In modern society, many women who work in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) often have high intelligence (Berkowitz & Stern, 2018), which goes against the gender schema forged by society and thus may bring about some self-perceived frustration. It can cause a hostile attitude towards the gender schema. According to Lebel (2017), frustration can gradually become a negative emotion that will further trigger a fight and flight response from adrenaline and cortisol. As society and their family reinforce issues of marriage and child-rearing for women, these adverse effects are frequently reminded, contributing to aversive conditioning (Schachtman et al., 2016). Whenever women think about the negative impacts of marriage and childbirth issues, they would naturally show a repulsive attitude. Therefore, the more women achieve greatness in STEM, the more likely they are to forgo marriage and childbearing.

In addition, from a pure social influence perspective, the excessive emphasis on traditional women's gender roles may result in outcomes counter to the desired ones. Propaganda promotes the ideology that women should take care of their husbands and children to fit the virtuous and complete "women" identities of wives and mothers in their families. However, excessive advocacy of such views fails to help women achieve such goals and causes a rebellious attitude, referred to as the "boomerang effect" (Zhao, 2017). The boomerang effect is a social psychological phenomenon that indicates the expected outcome is opposite to the actual outcome when people engage in certain behaviors. In other words, the more forceful persuasion is conducted to a person, the more offensive the person becomes. In this context, society and families that urge marriage by presenting "facts" and "reasoning" may provoke impatience and rebellious behavior instead. Hence, this coercive persuasion would make women dislike marriage, and it is not surprising that such communication strategies are counterproductive.

5. Alternative Explanation?

Although women with high education and career plans show little interest in marriage and children, there are still brilliant women with diverse age ranges choosing marriage. As proof, since 1990, the marriage rate of middle-aged women in the United States has gradually risen to 75%, increasing by 2% to 9% until 2019 (Brown et al., 2022). Modern women have a severe and dedicated atti-

tude toward education and careers that are time-demanding. Many women only choose marriage after obtaining a higher degree and a stable income, so the current unwillingness to marry reported by intelligent women can be attributed to the fact that women's marriage has become a more prudent issue instead of rejecting marriage. As such, the current phenomenon could be explained by women's wait-and-see stage of marriage rather than the sole opposition against it. However, as the current data explicitly reported that women are still in a state of distaste to get married, it requires more empirical research to prove the claim of marriage delay.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, as women's intelligence has flourished, they have gained more job opportunities and no longer rely on men to survive, thus becoming more independent. The increase in women's intelligence has led to decreased marriage rates. Therefore, this essay discussed three aspects that underlie women's unwillingness to get married. First, according to the theory of evolutionary selection, women tend to choose men with higher status and better physical fitness for marriage. However, only a few people meet these standards. Secondly, women's increased intelligence has led to an increase in the importance they place on their work. Still, some private companies are reluctant to provide maternity leave, which will make women worry about career interruptions due to marriage. And they are more likely to be attacked, such as sexual harassment from male colleagues. Finally, there is a divergence between conservative and modern liberal views on marriage and childbirth. In the past, women were often forced into the responsibility of marriage and childbearing, and this would maintain their rebellious mentality. Hence, modern women judge marriage with an attitude of avoidance or disgust, consolidated over time.

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