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Threatening the Fabric of Our Society: Divorce in Modern Societies

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Threatening the Fabric of Our Society: Divorce in Modern Societies

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Dr. Alzola for providing me with the tools and knowledge needed to better understand marriage throughout the world.

Divorce is a prevalent occurrence within modern day society, with at least fifty percent of marriages ending in a divorce. Over time, society has learned to adjust and reconstruct the family life and how it operates. A child's upbringing is no longer the only contributing factor to the success of a society, as other institutions have started to play a larger role. More emphasis is placed elsewhere, such as education, which determines the achievements of an individual that, in turn, affect the success of a society. This does not deter from the fact that divorce is still considered to be a taboo, as it still has negative terms associated with it. A home that has gone through a divorce is known to be a "broken" home, with the "loss" of a spouse. Despite this negative view, as mentioned previously, over half of marriages end in a divorce. This can be due to the fact that divorce does not threaten the fabric of society. Divorce has become such a common situation within society that the effects are no longer as drastic as they once were. During a divorce, if there are any, the main concern is the well-being of the children. Before divorce became such a common factor, divorce negatively impacted the life of a child. Today, this is no longer the case, as society has learned how to interact with and incorporate divorced families. Society itself is also not as affected by a divorce because it contributes to a couple's definition of commitment. With the increase of societal acceptance of divorce, a couple may not define commitment to be as long term as it once was. Society has learned how to handle the impact that a divorce might have on the social structures that make up a community. Essentially, divorce is not a threat due to the fact that society considers it to be an option.

One of the main concerns of a divorced home is that the family structure has been broken. Within this home, children are socialized into expectations that a community has. With the breaking of the family structure, children are no longer able to learn these expectations. New representations of what a family is considered to be emerge, creating a fluid mix of ideals that challenge the hegemonic representations of the old ideal (Simpson 55). This correlates with the concept that the accepting of homosexual marriage threatens the structures of a marriage due to the fact that it goes against societal norms. These norms are taught in traditional, monogamous, heterosexual marriages and by allowing homosexuals to marry, it disrupts the teaching of these norms. It also questions the norms that are associated within that institution; such as with the acceptance of homosexual marriage, heterosexuality is no longer a norm. The same can be said for divorce; the societal norm of what is considered to be a "marriage" is ignored due to the fact that the couple has split up. According to this, divorce threatens social norms because they break the home in which these norms are taught. The children within these divorced homes are then perceived to not be able to integrate into society. Thus, anything that changes a social norm is perceived to be a threat to society. The reason in which cultures have taboos, such

as divorce, is to stop people from going against these norms. By preventing a divorce, a child is taught these norms and the structure of society remains the same. Yet, despite the fact that divorce is considered to be a taboo, it still occurs. The changing of societal norms being perceived as a threat is a deep sociological issue. An explanation to why half of all marriages end in a divorce can be due to the slow acceptance of the option of a divorce. This acceptance threatens society because it is changing the social norm that is associated with it. This explains why certain individuals view divorce as a “threat” against society. This can be seen with Egypt with the move from an Islamic law marriage towards a more Western ideal of marriage (Baron). Individuals who disagreed with this change perceived it to be a threat towards society, much like divorce. The migration towards a more Western marriage was changing a societal norm within Egypt, which is why it was considered to be a “threat”. Even the jargon used to explain why this new form of marriage was a threat is identical to the jargon used to describe why divorce is a threat. All in all, the change in a societal norm is not a threat to society as it is just a transition; individuals who fear this change do so because they do not accept the new norm that is associated with this transition.

It is well known that the impact of a divorce has a negative influence on the children within the home. Yet, with the “normalization” of divorce within a society, it has weakened the negative impact on children (Wolfinger 340). Throughout the years, parental divorce has fewer negative effects which can be contributed to the acceptance of divorce as an option. Over the last thirty years, the propensity for children of a divorce to end their own marriage declined approximately fifty percent (Wolfinger 340). Children are no longer impacted because divorce is no longer a rare occurrence. Society has learned how to adapt to the new family structures that are forming due to divorce. Therefore, as a result, the negative effects associated are able to be prevented. It has been seen that children of divorce are more inclined to cohabitate rather than marry, as a possible result of their parents’ divorce (Wolfinger 348). Though, this does not rule out marriage entirely, as cohabitation is not replacing marriage. Yet this cannot be considered a direct result of their parent’s divorce, as cohabitation amongst couples is on a rise; children of non-divorced parents are also seen cohabitating. Thus, it is more of a correlation without causation rather than a cause and effect. Divorce is not a threat to society because it is no longer a rare occurrence; society has learned from the past and adjusted to prevent these negative impacts. It has also been seen that family structure had a stronger impact on marital rates for people born in the 1940’s than for those born in later decades (Wolfinger 345). As the acceptance of divorce as an option increases, family structure decreases. Again, this does not mean that divorce is the cause. The gender roles within a family are slowly adapting towards a more modern ideal. Men are no longer seen as the sole breadwinners of a family, as women are also

balancing careers as well as a family. Men have also increased the amount of hours they contribute to housework. These gender roles within a marriage are slowly changing, which in turn affect the structure of a family. Thus, there are other contributing factors towards the negative effects that people believe to be caused by divorce. Divorce is not a threat to society because it is not the central cause of what people believe to be the negative effects that occur from a divorce.

Unbeknownst to many, society contributes to how a couple defines commitment; by defining a relationship as a committed one (Rosenblatt 81). The ways in which family and friends interact with one another affect how commitment is viewed, which explains why commitment can vary throughout individuals. A couple can either define commitment to be a lifetime together or a moment together. This diversity of defining commitment largely contributes to divorce rates. A couple can have two different views on what commitment is, which can then lead to arguments and possibly a divorce. With marriage, the ceremonies aid in the defining of commitment, as it solidifies the eternal union made between the couple. Yet with the rise of the acceptance of divorce as an option, the level of commitment is not as high as it once was. If a marriage does not work out, rather than working through the issue, a couple can opt for a divorce. With society's acceptance of this, marriage is not as permanent as it once was. The knowledge of this option allows for couples to no longer view commitment to be as eternal as their grandparents once perceived it to be. Divorce cannot be seen as a threat to society because society is accepting the option of a divorce in a marriage. Even though it is still considered to be taboo and is associated with negative terms, the statistics still show that half of marriages end in a divorce; which indicates that society is somewhat accepting divorce. Thus it cannot be a threat.

The impact that a divorce once had shook the foundation of a society; statistics showed the negative effects that a divorce had on children, the structure within a family, and societal norms. Yet this is no longer the case. Throughout the years, divorce has slowly become an option which was not the case at one point in time. Society has learned how to deal with divorce and adapt so that it no longer has such a negative impact. With this acceptance, individuals may perceive divorce to be a threat to society due to the fact that it is changing societal norms within a culture. Though this does not mean that it is truly threatening the fabrics of society; as the negative effects are not solely caused by divorce, considering that there are other contributing factors. Overall, society itself plays a role in the acceptance of a divorce. The ways in which family and friends interact with a couple define how commitment is perceived. This interaction allows for the option of a divorce if a marriage does not work out, which in turn allows for the

acceptance of divorce. With at least fifty percent of marriages ending in a divorce, it is simply not a threat to society.

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