Till Divorce Us Do Part:
Is marriage still a necessity?

By Anna

Marriage has become a difficult topic. It is now synonymous with unnecessary expense, stress and, perhaps most poignantly, divorce. Yet, the recent news that Prince Harry will be marrying Meghan Markle on 19th May, has brought marriage into the forefront of everyone’s mind. Will the royal couple make this tradition relevant again? Or has marriage lost its significance?

Whilst there is great deal of controversy over whether marriage rates are decreasing; the most recent statistics from the Office for National Statistics show that in 2014, 3.1 million couples were choosing to cohabit. Perhaps the reason many couples choose to cohabit is the divorce rate: in 2016, over 107,000 divorces occurred in England and Wales.

Considering these statistics: who would want to get married?

One of the issues many cohabiting couples cite as their reason for not marrying is that of money. The average cost of a wedding in the UK is £33,884, with many couples choosing to spend tens of thousands more. This can, to some, feel like a frivolous waste of money – particularly considering the stress involved in the planning of the ‘best’ (see, most expensive) day of your life.

To a generation of renters, marriage is simply too expensive to be a priority.

In fact, it is estimated that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s wedding will cost £21 million. In a way, this is a symbol of what the wedding ceremony has become: not a representation of love; but an extravagance, a chance to show off to your family and friends.

Another big issue with marriage for modern couples is the sexism it connotes. The idea of the bride wearing a white dress to symbolise purity and being ‘given’ from her father to her new husband feels like something we would read about in history books.

Out of context, these things feel blatantly sexist, and yet as they are so ingrained into our culture, the patriarchal elements are often overlooked. However, as equality for women seems to be on the road to being reached (albeit small steps at a time), more and more couples are realising that this concept of treating women as a commodity is not something we should be dragging into 2018.

In fact, from a young age, girls are expected to imagine their dream wedding day. The implication seems to be that the aspiration of every young girl should be marrying her own Prince Charming.

Even as adults, unmarried women over the age of 35, are deemed ‘desperate’, or perhaps worse ‘not the marrying kind.’ This is a reflection of the damaging way in which we talk about marriage: unmarried men are bachelors and are considered to be ‘free of the constraints’ of marriage. In terms of unmarried women, the only words we have are archaic or derogatory. For example, spinster conjures up images of elderly, busybody women. These connotations are hardly comparable.

Obviously, whether or not to get married is something that is very difficult to specify. However, there are certainly things that need to change in the way we talk about and perform this ceremony.

Photograph from Time Magazine