

The Status of Marriage as an Institution in Modern Society

A Comparative Study of Japan and Norway with a Focus on Gender Equality

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*This paper is dedicated to
My Wonderful husband Toshi,
Who has taught me
the true meaning of love and marriage.*

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Introduction

In this paper, I want to look into how the different circumstances in the Japanese and Norwegian societies' conditions, in other words, how women in the respective countries organize their life and how this effects their view of marriage and their actual choice to marry or not. The vital influencing contextual aspects which I intend to look into are gender equality, political policy, economy, family organization, childcare, and media's angling. At first, I want to give a general explanation of the historical background and development after the Second World War and up till today, and then try to elucidate the actual present situation and developments. After looking into the issue on the macro level, I will furthermore on the micro level present analysis of qualitative narrative interviews with women from both Japan and Norway about the same topics. This is to give a real voice to women's situation in both countries. Then in the following chapter, in order to provide a theoretical framework of analysis of the situations, I will present sociological theories of how the process of modernization influences society and affects the prepossessed cultural and societal patterns. In this analysis I make use of Ulrich Beck's theories of reflexivity in explaining the processes of modernization and individualization of society. Further in the relation to this papers comparative dimension, I will with the use of these theories try to explain both the similarities as well as differences, but also focus on the mechanisms behind the diverging developments. Then last in the postscript, I will give my personal analysis and conclusion about the topic as I have been

able to grasp and understand the situation through my research and fieldwork.

1. Preface

To Marry or Not to Marry?

What is the constitution of marriage? What does it signify in the modern society today? Does it still represent the fundament of society? How does marriage affect women and men's lives, and what do they expect from marriage? Love and marriage has a strong connotation in the western world, but is this relationship as automatic and universal as westerners may think? Japan has an image of being a high-technological and modern country with strong influence from the west, but yet it is still a patriarchal traditional agricultural society deeply rooted in feudal times and with a strong gender separating tendency¹. Norway, which has been enlisted by the United Nations as the world's most gender equal country in 2005 and have had that position over the last five years, actually used to have a quite different social policy only a few decades ago. In fact Norway as well used to be a traditional agricultural based country as Japan and also had a patriarchal tradition with gender separating social norms based in conservative Christian cultural values². Right after the Second World War and up to the end of the 1960's the two countries' societies had very similar social conditions. However, through the modernization processes which occurred after the Second World War, the two countries have developed quite differently. While Norway has become transformed into a modern gender equal society with

¹ Kenneth B. Pyle, *"The making of moderen Japan"*, p168.D.C HeathComapny,University of Washington, 1978

² Gro Hageman, "100 års ensomhet", article series for National Bureau of Statistics, University of Oslo, 2001

strong emphasis on integration of the sexes, in Japan there are still conservative forces which are counteracting the women liberation and continuing to enhance the separation of the sexes. This tendency is thus causing a delay in the modernization process and places Japan as number 41 on the United Nations gender equality ranking³.

The modern societies in the world today are becoming increasingly more inter-correlated. Through this permeating globalization development, societies all over the world are influencing and being influenced by one another and creating a global reflexive modernistic culture⁴. The women liberation can be seen as one of the most revolutionary and pervasive transforming elements in the modern culture. Giving men and women the same rights and equal societal positions releases people from strictly traditional bounded lifestyle patterns. This new freedom naturally opens up for a diversity which affects and perforates all layers of society. How the present culture in the society reacts and adapts in the encounter of new global developments is essential in achieving a healthy and successful transition. Marriage has been a vital and foundational institution in the society⁵; however, through the process of modernization, this has changed its status and position.

The aim of this thesis is to look into how marriage has become affected by the modernization processes and the gender equality movement, and how women's lives have changed in correlation to these factors. I have chosen to

³ United Nations: Whitepaper on Welfare and Health, 2005

⁴ Ulrich Beck, *"Risk Society, towards a new modernity"*, p6, Sage Publications, London, 1992

compare the developments in Japan with the circumstances in my home country Norway. The main focus in this paper is on the situation in Japan as I have made most of my research and field work in Japan, nonetheless Norway represents a contextual background from which I compare and make my analysis.

2. Presentation of the Problems

A presentation of how Japan and Norway have developed since the Second World War, with a focus on the changes in social structures and the influential contextual elements. Continuously giving comparative measures, which elucidate how the two countries developed from a common starting point, in a dual tracked development of tradition and modernization towards present situation.

2.1 Historical Background

As mentioned in the preface, the gender relations in Japan and Norway in the past, the conditions in the two societies were not so different only half a century ago. In the 1960's, there was an equally low percentage of female workers. At that time, the gender role patterns in both countries were clearly separated; men worked outside the home and women worked at home as housewives taking care of children and other house chores. In the 1960's, the rate of working women were under 10% in both countries, today in Norway it has almost reached 70%⁶, meanwhile in Japan, the rate has only surpassed 50%⁷ with a few margins. Why and how the two countries developed so differently is an interesting question. The changes in the two societies over the last 40 years have been aggregated and influenced by

⁶ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005 annual report on labor; 68, 8% of the women are working while 76, 3% of the men.

⁷ Statistics Bureau Director-General for Policy Planning and Statistical Research and Training Institute; 2005 annual report on labor, March 2006

many factors. However the political policies which has been implemented over the last 40 years is to some extent diverging and has had a leading role in the two countries developments. Thus, it can be seen as the main factor behind the big difference between the two societies.

2.1.1 Japan; Rearrangements of the Traditional Structure in Modern Times.

After Japan lost in the Second World War, there was an extensive restructuring of Japanese state and society. The changes made after 1945 affected conceptions of womanhood including “ryosai kenbo”, the ideal concept of a woman meaning “Good wife, wise mother” and implied a set of expected obligations from women including filial piety, dedication to childcare, and loyalty to their husbands. After the war Japan was occupied by the United States from 1945 to 1950, and this occupation nurtured the transformation of Japan into a democratic state⁸. The new constitution which was founded on democratic ideology introduced by the Americans drastically revised the legal codes and granted Japanese women unprecedented political, economic, and civil rights. Until this revision, a traditional family system called the “IE” system which was a heritage from feudal times was dominating the social norms. This system placed great importance on the continuity of the family line where the man is seen as the leader of a household and the woman inferior to him and left women with

⁸Kathleen S. Uno “*Death of Good wife, wise mother*”, Dimensions of contemporary Japanese women and women’s issues in post World War Two Japan,p235 Garland Publishing, New York 1998

very limited rights⁹. As this system was discriminatory against women and incompatible with the democratic principles of the new constitution, it was therefore abolished. The new constitution now gave women a whole new set of rights which improved the women's position and status greatly. *"These included the rights to vote, to manage property while married, and to inherit part of a husband's estate, equality in employment, education, marriage and divorce, and freedom of residence"*¹⁰. In schools the old ethics curriculum emphasizing loyalty, filial piety, the family state, and "ryosai kenbo" was more or less excluded from the classrooms.

However in spite of these new laws, sudden drastic postwar changes and the fact that the term "ryosai kenbo" fell into disuse in 1945, the ideologies did not vanish and remained influential into the late 1980's. This was because the conservative ruling party LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) in combination with private companies continued to formulate politics which assumed that wifedom and motherhood was the cardinal elements in women's lives. *"Postwar patriarchy was trying to maintain and rearrange the situation according to traditional values. The government planned to make different use of social welfare and labor policies namely to maintain postwar patriarchy by using the unpaid labor of women"*¹¹.

After the Second World War there was a continuation which began in the prewar period where motherhood became the dominant image of women

⁹ Kanai Yoshio, *"Japan Asia Quarterly Review, Voices from the Japanese women's movement"*, p4, M.E Sharp, New York, 1996

¹⁰ *"Death of Good wife, wise mother"*, p235

¹¹ *"Voices from the Japanese women's movement"*, p7

despite the fact that the full-time mother only existed in the upper middle class, a small but influential segment of the population. In the postwar as the Japanese economy improved, the full-time mother/housewife increasingly became the norm not just for the upper middle-class, but for women in general. *“Women’s image as mother also contrasted sharply with the high and late postwar image of the Japanese male, a man in dark blue suite commuting by train to a company, an actor in the public world, rather than a father or husband in the private world of the home, totally separate spheres”*¹².

In the late 1950’s and beginning of the 1960’s, there was an ongoing discussion of the war’s legacy of social problems which included that the weakness of the postwar family resulted from the abolition of the legal framework of the “ie” family system. Some politicians still were against the political movement of modernization and democratization of Japan, but by the middle of the late 1960’s, as the “nuclearization” of the family progressed in accompanying Japan’s rapid economic growth, the calls for the restoration of the old family system subsided¹³. Instead the focus in the political as well as public debate was on the fragility of the nuclear family, and the social strains produced by high growth. There were directed critics towards capitalism and the side-effects of modernization”¹⁴. Under these circumstances which the politicians found to be highly critical, they propagated traditional values and urged the women to be more domestic and

¹² *“Death of Good wife, wise mother”*, p236

¹³ Emiko Ochiai, *“21 世紀家族へ” (Family towards the 21st century)*, p4, Yuhikaku. 1994

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p6

prioritize the family. *“State policies regarding labor, education, reproduction, and welfare ample evidence that politicians and bureaucrats did not entirely abandon the prewar belief that “women’s place is in the home”, nonetheless they modified their conception of female domesticity to fit with postwar economic realities¹⁵”.*

After the middle of 1960’s women’s main task went from doing reproductive and productive work at home to having the obligations of managing the households affairs while if necessary engage in part-time work without neglecting their domestic responsibilities. In the mid 1960’s the economy grew very fast and there was a growing shortage of workers, and in response to this the state promoted labor policies of full-time work for unmarried women and only part-time work for married women because of their family responsibilities. The report of the Japanese economic deliberative council emphasized on “reentry employment” and the use of a part-time system for women who used to work before they got married and left during childrearing and to get them to return to the labor force once their children had grown older. There were also laid restrictions on women’s working conditions which forbid women to work nightshift and work more than six hours of overtime per week. Furthermore there was made tax incentives which discouraged married women from full-time entry into the labor force.

“As long as wife earns less than 900.000 yen per year, her income is not taxed and her husband can still take advantage of the 570.000 yen spouse

¹⁵ *“Death of Good wife, wise mother”, p237*

deduction allowance. If her earnings surpass the limit, she will have to earn a lot more in order to offset the tax increase¹⁶.

2.1.2 Modern Family Model and Family Wage

In this period it was also implemented a concept of family wage. This system first appeared on the scene in the 19th century in West-European countries and was employed in the negotiations for wage increase by the labor unions. There was made demands for wages which made it possible for husbands to support their families on his income alone. This shows that the working-class in Europe at that time had accepted the modern gender specific division of labor and considered this lifestyle as the ideal model of living¹⁷. The modern gender roles were already realized in the middle-class. The working-class accepted these new standards because they were rooted in class above theirs and this lifestyle became status. Until the verge of the First World War, the concept of gender separation of labor had become accepted in all developed capitalism countries as a working-class ideal. The popularization of the concept of “family wage” firmly established the mechanisms of sexual division of labor and male dominance in the working-class family. This development also caused job segregation by gender in the labor market. *“Thus, not letting the wife get a job became “men’s duty” and assuming that “the woman’s place” is in the home the social standards of what is feminine and masculine came to be firmly rooted even*

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p237

¹⁷ “Japan Asia Quarterly Review”, p172

in the working-class¹⁸.

By the birth of the housewife the “modern family” model was constituted. The lifestyle of this family model then became the image of a better life and transcended class boundaries and was supported by the majority of the population. *“Entering the 20th century this family model was legitimized by the Japanese state in the preparations and establishment of the welfare state. This is the reason why the concept of a family wage continues to exert considerable influence even in contemporary society¹⁹”*. The demand for “family wage” was not aimed at strengthening the position of all workers and in result women were excluded from well paid jobs and the discourse that women’s place is in the home became widespread. The main victims of this development were unmarried women without a male partner to support them financially. *“Thus marriage became the most important life choice, career for women²⁰”*.

In Japan, the “family wage” concept has become so influential that it has come to direct the whole income structure. The income structure’s development corresponds with the development of the family’s life cycle and is firmly established as seniority based wage system. It also became natural that men earned more than women and had faster and more up-grading career advancement. The development of wages further also includes an allowance for the wife and children. *“Even though “family wage” is history in the Western countries, it is still firmly established in contemporary Japan*

¹⁸ *Ibid*,p172

¹⁹ *Ibid*,p174

²⁰ *Ibid*,p175

which is a fact that elucidates how Japan is still lingering on to the concept of gender division of labor²¹ ". The seniority based wage and lifelong employment, which has been the working pattern in Japan, in combination guarantee the stability of material life in accordance with the development of the lifecycle of the family. With the concept of men as the main income source in the family, this made treatment of women workers as a marginal workforce.

"Among the developing countries, the consciousness of gender norms that accept the standard of sexual division of labor is still extremely strong in Japan. The Japanese concept of "family wage" where men principally represent the sole income source in a family this creates the severe working conditions for men that lead to overwork and "karoshi", death from overwork. While on the other hand women in this situation become marginalized and end up with a very low social position. According to studies by the Washington Population Problem Research Center on the status of women on the world wide scale in 1985, Japan was ranked as 34 out of 99 countries. The low position in the ranking compared with other developed countries the unequal treatment of men and women in the working place highly accounts for this results²²".

While Norway and other developed countries realized that the concept of "family wage" no longer is nor should be the typical model, the foundation of "family wage" was strengthened in Japan. Japanese companies

²¹ *Ibid*,p175

²² *Ibid*,p176

recommended the “modern family” and collaborated in inducing the modern family model as they offered relatively high wages to their male workers and also gave them an inside-company welfare system, a service for the whole family.

2.1.3 EEOL; Equal Employment Opportunity Law, a Rearrangement of Traditional Structures

In 1972, the working women’s welfare law was implemented, emphasizing the need to support women for them to be able to harmonize their home and work responsibilities. This issue was notably not related to men’s life and working conditions.

*“Despite new, but reluctant encouragement of married women’s work outside the home, a vision of women as bearers of the nation’s manpower still formed important laws regulating reproduction”.*²³ State employment policies and corporate as well demonstrated the postwar persistence of “ryosai kenbo” at least before 1986 when a law for equal employment opportunity (EEOL) was implemented. The EEOL was supposed to give women and men the same rights regarding employment however in reality it only rearranged the old gender separating structures. It did make way for dual lifestyles for women, but on the other hand it also classified working women into two categories, Career women and ordinary assistants. This was because there was created a dual system of work, managerial and normal office work. The managerial work was higher positioned and better paid than ordinary office work, but

²³ *Ibid*,p238

demanded also more of the workers, especially longer working hours. The result of this was that men who were not expected to take care of family and children were placed in the managerial posts and women were placed in the ordinary office positions since they were not able to work as excessively as men because of their domestic responsibilities. Therefore the new structure of employment was just a rearrangement of the old conditions and meant that men still ended up being better paid and with a better career advancement than women.

Furthermore, opening up for the equality between the sexes in the working place, the law also took away the restrictions on female labor which meant that women could and would have to work nightshifts and longer hours of overtime. There was a discussion at the implementation of the law if women were to work as much as men or if a man's working hours should be cut down to the standard of women's condition. There was voices supporting the latter, however the final call fell on free regulations and opened up for excessive use of overtime²⁴. As the law came into force, the working hours became increasingly longer. This development paved the way for a working-life cycle among women which is called the M-shape curve. This means that women show a working peak in their 20's and then quit working when they get married or have children. This tendency creates a valley in the vocational curve. Women then show another peak in their 40's when they return to work. This cycle is shaped by the conditions which the Japanese family is

²⁴ From the discourse by Tohru Fukuda, the representative lawyer of the labor union in Japan, the dean of the association for the rights of workers in Japan.

involved in, and is especially influenced by the government's creation of a tax and pension scheme which is in favor of housewives. *“Japan postwar patriarchy is a system suitable to state and corporate society intervention into the life styles of both women and men and turning the men into corporate warriors and women into “professional housewives” and a reemploy-able labor force. In other words it is a corporate-centered patriarchy managed along the life cycle²⁵”.*

2.1.4 Women's Liberation; Housewife Feminism

However in spite of politicians' efforts to influence women to stay more traditional, women took another turn. In the 1970's increasingly more women showed an urge to have an education and a career of their own outside the home. This development then refueled the alert concerning the family in the political sphere, and phrases as “the dissolution of the family” and “family crisis” became standard vocabulary when discussing family issues in political circles. During the latter part of the 1970's, the government adopted “strengthening the foundation of the home” as a policy goal, and there was a constant indirect appeal to women to prioritize the family²⁶. The feminist movement which was emerging all over the western world in the end of the 1960's also reached Japan about the same time. However, even though the theoretical level of Japanese feminism was roughly the same as in the West, there was a huge gap between the theory

²⁵ Japan Asian Quarterly Review, p.8

²⁶ “21世紀家族へ”, p131-134

and the reality of the situation of women in Japan ²⁷ . *“The institutionalization of the modern family and the existence of the housewife kept women in their place. The modern family is the apparatus which dominates women under the surface. The “modern family” seemed to ground gender hierarchy in a natural order between men and women, thus rendering its power relationship less visible.”*²⁸ Therefore it has been more difficult for women who are part of a “modern family” to look critically at the concept of housewife or at the social system which has institutionalized and supported it. The women’s liberation in Japan, so called “*uman ribu*”, was influenced by the United States, but the theories were not simple importation²⁹. The movement can be divided into two a pre- and post- 1970 periods. The first women’s campaign focused mostly on the rights of female workers who were working actively at that time, but there was less enthusiasm about issues related to structure of sexual discrimination and suppression of women as a group. The latter campaign focused more on women as a gender itself and the positive aspects of being a woman. *“However as the society continued to be male-centered women made strategy of avoiding women’s issues in order to be able to work in this men’s world”*³⁰ In the 1980’s when Japan’s economy grew strong and the country even became to be seen as an economical superpower, “eco-feminism”, a new women’s movement emerged. This movement criticizes the Western

²⁷ *“Japan Asian Quarterly Review”*,p5

²⁸ *Ibid*, p9

²⁹ *“Perfectly Japanese”*, p65

³⁰ *“Japan Asian Quarterly Review”*, p25

modernization model and discussed about “Japanism”, emphasizing the Japanese traditions and national identity. Motherhood and women’s values were praised against the new role of women in the modern and industrial society. The debate did not achieve consensus in the feminist movement, but still it represented a voice of anti-women’s liberation which slowed down the process. The feminist movement was composed of both conservative as well as progressive groups, and the fact that there was a lack of coherence in the feminism movement can be seen as an explanation for the slow progress in the movement³¹. In the 1980’s the women’s movement failed to react sufficiently to the governments reactionary tendencies, such as the revision of taxation and welfare laws which promoted further division of labor. *“Consciousness concerning women’s rights such as independence and self-determination has not taken roots in Japan”*³². Japanese women failed to escape from their positions as housewives and merely tried to get their husbands involved in housework and childcare. Therefore since no radical change was achieved in society, such as equal labor rights for men and women or a social system which made it possible for women and men to work and live together, the gender separation was uphold.

In 1983, problems related to the family were the subject of the white paper protocol which is informally known as “white paper on the family”, and again the propaganda was directed towards women to make them return to the role as housewives. There was shown political propaganda commercials on

³¹ *Ibid*, p23

³² *Ibid*, p13

television where mothers who were working was badly presented implying that a women can not take properly care of her children if she is working full-time. An example of these efforts to prompt women to return to a domestic role is a short-movie where one first sees a boy sitting in a gloomy kitchen alone looking at his grade-card which shows only bad grades, then next scene the kitchen has bright light and the boy is sitting together with his mother and proudly presenting her his excellent grades.

2.2 Norway: In Transition to Modern Times, a Process of Gender Integration

The conditions in the Norwegian society as mentioned in the preface above used to be not so different from the situation seen in Japan. In fact, the two countries have several similar conditions. Norway was in recent history an agriculture based country with strong patriarchal traditions mainly influenced by conservative Christian values. In comparison to its neighboring countries, women in Norway were for a long time far less vocational active. Norway had become a democratic state already in 1814 with an accomplishment of full rights to vote for all men in 1898 and then also for women in 1913. However even though social democratic parties dominated the political scene in both Norway and Sweden in 1930's, the gender-politics were quite different. In comparison with Sweden, there was a more conservative opinion in Norway about married women's place in the labor market. In the years between 1910 and 1960 there was a fall in women's working rate in the whole period.

"After all considerations this is a reflection of the fact that the male

breadwinner norm has had a stronger position in Norway than in Sweden".³³

Sweden was a pioneer in gender equality and Swedish political reforms were often imported, but still adjusted to the Norwegian conditions. The labor party in Norway promoted a unilateral "housewife-politic". For instance from the end of the 1920's the party made restrictions on married women's right to work. In the period the unemployment was increasing and division of labor was chosen as a solution to this problem, which resulted in that married women became victims of this remedial action and were squeezed out of the labor market. They were already supported financially and the politicians meant that they took the jobs from those who really needed them. However, in the 1940's and 1950's when there was a great lack in the work force, the labor party still focused on one-sided gender separating politics far into the 1960's³⁴. Thus Norway was late in the process of recruiting married women to the work force.

"In 1970 the country was still on the jumbo place among the Nordic countries when it comes to vocational activity among married women".³⁵ In fact, at this time, there was no other country than Holland among the OECD-countries which had a lower employment of women than Norway.

2.2.1 Cultural Factors; Christian Conservatism

³³ Gro Hageman, Universitetet i Oslo.."100 års ensomhet" artikkelserie for Statistisk sentral byrå. 18.04.2005

³⁴ Norio Okazawa and Takayasu Okushima, "ノルウエ-の政治" (*Norwegian Politics*), p168, Waseda University. 2004

³⁵ "100 års ensomhet"

The reason why conservative family values strongly colored the Norwegian politics can be related to the fact that family based primary industries had a strong position in Norway. Further it has also taken longer time to build up a welfare state which is the condition that makes it easier to combine a paid job, housework, and taking care of children. *“However cultural conditions and political priorities based in conservative Christian values which have been stronger anchored in Norwegian society than Sweden, and that this has had a direct influence on political processes to a larger extent”*³⁶. Pietistic and strict ecclesiastical religiousness has in fact had a particular strong position in Norway. The Norwegian political agenda in first part of the postwar period supported the male breadwinner model and opposed to professional occupation among married women. Hence, until the end of 1960's Norwegian social democrats were as their Japanese counterparts in the Liberal Democratic Party also hesitant in acknowledging civil and democratic rights for women to the extent that this was in conflict with class interests or family considerations.

2.2.2 Women's Liberation; Political Reform and Social Revolution

Today Norway has one of the highest female representatives in the assembly, number two (2005) in the world after Sweden. However, Norwegian women have not always been as political active as they are today. Since 1913 women had the rights to vote, but until the 1960's their voting and especially their political representation was still quite low which reflected the fact that they

³⁶ *Ibid.*

were in general not so professionally and publicly active. In the first election in 1915, the female vote percentage was only 53.9%, 16.4 % lower than men. By the 1930's, it had passed 70%, but there was still a gap. Before the Second World War the female representatives were very rare. The year when the first woman was elected was 1921, and after this until 1945 there were only 15 female representatives³⁷. The reason why the number did not increase was mainly that there were very few women in leading positions. Furthermore, women's participation in regular professional work was low and they also had a lower educational level than men.

Then from the start of the 1970's women's way of living suddenly changed drastically. First, the shape of the family altered and new forms emerged. The family did not only constitute of married couples, but cohabitation and divorce, and single-parents increased. The number of working women rose rapidly, which was implemented by a massive development of the welfare system that was started in the middle of the 1960's. The work of housewives taking care of elderly and childcare was now released and established as services offered by the state as benefits of the welfare system. Thus there was developed a need for a new work force to fill the positions based in welfare system. Norway at the same time struck oil which was an incentive that caused an enormous growth in the economy in general as well. This development resulted in an increase in demand for workers which opened up the door for women to the labor market in other areas as well. Besides there was also an invention of all kinds of mechanical remedies which made

³⁷ “ノルウエ-の政治”.p168

housework less time consuming.

In spite of the new developments the traditional expectations of women to take responsibility of the home was still persistent, so working women ended up with double share of work. In the work place men still dominated and had most of the leading positions and earned high salaries while most women were still lower paid. It was not easy to both work and raise a family at the same time. Working mothers were especially victimized by labor regulations and the fact that the needed welfare benefits were insufficient. It was almost impossible for married woman to have the same career as men³⁸.

2.2.3 Affirmative Action; “Woman’s Coup D’etat”

The gender-role separating system was strongly disputed and criticized, and there were overt calls for equal rights for men and women. The critical voices grew stronger and a new, vital, and coherent women’s movement aggressively started to campaign for equal rights and improvement of women’s position in society as a whole³⁹. The former women’s movement mostly prioritized the making of equal opportunity policies while the new campaign focused on the actual conditions⁴⁰. The aim was not to improve the equal opportunity in the present circumstances, but to reform the society as a whole. They emphasized that the core of the problem was that the society was built on the norm that men rule over women both economically as well as status wise. First of all, their argumentation was that this reality must be

³⁸ *Ibid*,p168

³⁹ *Ibid*,p167

⁴⁰ *Ibid*,p170

amended to be able to make women freer, and to create a gender equal society. The new campaign had far more impact as it was just not raising an argument, but enforced the ideas through the demand of several concrete counter measures. For instance, demanded rights were as follows;

1) contraception and abortion, 2) to work and to be economically independent, 3) to get the same salary, 4) daycare for all children, 5) shorter working hours, and 6) childcare leave both for fathers as well as mothers.

The female representatives in the assembly in the middle of the 1970's were still fairly low and the women's movement realized that women could not expect men to make the policy women wanted. Therefore, in order to achieve all their demands it was necessary that women participated more in the decision making process. This acknowledgement stood behind the affirmative efforts which suddenly increased female representatives in the political sphere⁴¹.

The increase of women in politics and the changes which was achieved through their empowerment was so drastic that it can even be seen as a small revolution. One central factor which made these sudden changes possible was the implementation of a new election system which gave voters the right to change the succession of the candidates enlisted in the political party. This law was first implemented only by one small political party, the socialist left party⁴² in the election of the members within the political organization in 1974, and then the party also implemented it at the national

⁴¹ *Ibid*,p171

⁴² SV; "Sosialistisk Venstre Parti" in Norwegian.

election the succeeding year. Since this was a small party it did not have too great impact on the assembly's composition at that time. However, even though the policy was strongly criticized at first, it gradually became influential as the other parties also came to implement the policy as well.

Excessive appeal from the women's movement encouraged masses of women to cross out men's names which were on the top of the list and replace them with the names of the female candidates. In 1981 when the leading party, the labor party also implemented this policy at the election, the increase of women was so sudden and drastic that even the media called the women's movement's campaign at the election a "women's coup d'etat"⁴³. In 1969, the number of women in the assembly was not more than 9.3%, and in 1981, it had already reached 25.8% through excessively campaigning from the women's movement. The widespread implementation of this policy in the 1980's then caused an even more enormous increase in female representatives and in 1993 the percentage even passed 40% and has been high ever since.

In 1978 the "rights to equal opportunity law" was made and sexual discrimination was abolished by law which enhanced the equalization process even further. Gender equality "ombud" an institution which monitors and promotes gender equality was also established. In 1980's women started to peruse higher education and this development resulted in an increase of women in male dominating professions. Women also started to achieve higher posts in society and in 1981 Norway even installed the first female

⁴³ Mitsui Mariko, "男を消せ" (*Wipe out men!*), p96. Mainichishinbunsha, 1999

prime minister, Gro Harlem Bruntland. She was a representative of the labor party which is a social democratic party and she was a strong promoter of women's rights and a vital person in the women's liberation process. In 1986 when she was elected to her second period in office she chose almost 50% women in her cabinet, out of 18 members there were 10 men and 8 women. This became big news all over the world⁴⁴. When she was in office she made many concrete changes through excessively use of affirmative actions. For instance she got to implement another "quota policy" which says that each sex has to be represented at least 40% in every area in society. In 1989 when there was a change in political party the leading party which was a conservative based party still chose to keep up a as high representation of women in the cabinet. The representation of women has stabilized and is today one of the highest in the world. Women have not only become to be highly represented in numbers, but most of the leading parties have had female leaders. In 1993 the women represented more the 40% of the seats in the assembly, the fist female president of the parliament appeared, and tree of the prime minister candidates were women.

2.2.4 Family Policy

The women's movement especially emphasized the need to change the gender separated roles at home and demanded concrete counteractions to improve the situation. Their demands were eventually heard. One of the first concrete moves was the establishment of the childcare law in 1975, which

⁴⁴ "ノルウエ-の政治", p173

promised an excessive building of kindergartens over the next following ten years. Further, after women had achieved high representation in the assembly, series of family-policy reforms were implemented during the 1980's and 1990's. For instance, in 1993, it was established a childcare leave obligation for fathers called the "Papa Quota" policy. This policy both forced men as well as gave them the right to take childcare leave when becoming fathers⁴⁵. Furthermore, there was also made other efforts to change the environment into a place where women and men can be able to balance both work and family-life. One of the most important measures was cutting down the working hours and restricting the use of overtime. There has been established a supporting policy for single parents in order to make it possible for them to raise a family on their own. Since women's activity in the political sphere has become heightened and many women have come to possess high political positions, policies which are related to childcare and making work and family life easier to combine have become issues which have first priority on the political agenda.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p175

3. Present Situations

3.1 Japan and Norway; Limitations versus the Freedom of Choice causing Drastic Change and Natural Process

The diverging developments in the two societies have had a crucial effect on the relations between men and women and caused great differences in relations to gender roles. This has especially had great influence on the institution of marriage in the respective countries. When one merely looks at the statistics and numerical data, both countries show a decrease in the marriage rate and the average age when people get married is also equally rising⁴⁶. Therefore it may seem that the state of marriage is the same in Japan as in Norway. However, if one looks closer into the matter, how people actually live, one realizes that the situation is quite different. In Norway like in Japan, the average age for getting married is about 30 years old and is relatively high figure compared with other countries. Since this is not a new phenomenon in Norway as it is in Japan, it is perceived less dramatic. In Norway, the average marriage age has risen over quite some time as women had a breakthrough in social advancement already in the beginning of the 1970's and started to become excessively professionally active from the beginning of 1980's. The average age for getting married in 1961-1965 was 24.5 years, but in 1986-1989 it had risen to 27.4 years and, in 1996-2000 it

⁴⁶ Statistical data 2005; The average age for getting married for women is 31 years old in Norway and 29 years old in Japan.

was as high as 31.1 years.⁴⁷

On the other hand, in Japan, as the women's liberation has had a slower development, the tendency to get married late is a fairly new development. Only ten years ago, Japanese women were still expected to get married young and normatively before they have turned 25 years old. The average age in 1976 was 25.4 years old, and it had only gone up to 26.4 ten years later, and the age stayed stable all through the 1980's and into the beginning of the 1990's. In 2000, marital age in Japan reached 28.1, but this had then already been the average age in Norway for almost ten years. Over the last two decades, the pressure to get married within a certain age has been much greater in Japan. For instance, unmarried women over 25 years old were called "old Christmas cakes", with the reference to Christmas cakes that nobody wanted and were leftovers after Christmas-eve. *"Although the common perception of the last possible moment for marriage has risen to the age of thirty or even thirty-one (as in the phrase "New Year's woman", using December 31 as indicative of the last date possible for marriage), women in their late twenties, whatever their earlier interests and desires, are thinking of marriage, even as a temporary expedient to assuage advice columns and expert opinion, and see unmarried women in their mid-thirties as negative models"*⁴⁸. Even though the average marital age has risen and thus also the age when women are expected to marry, there is still a strong connotation that getting married has an age limitation.

⁴⁷ The Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

⁴⁸ "Perfectly Japanese", p137.

In Norway the development of postponing marriage has been a long and more natural process since the gender equalization policy of the society has been effective over the last 35 years. It has become natural for women to pursue higher education and to realize themselves professionally which naturally causes them to use more time on self-development. Thus they have not been victims of the same societal pressure to getting married within a certain age as Japanese women.

With the elevation of the average marital age, the birthrate in both countries has gone down. In Norway this fall has not been too substantial and has even recovered in the recent years. This is due to political efforts which have made it easier for women to have children at the same time as pursuing a professional career. In 1971-1975 the fertility rate in Norway was 2.243 during the next 10 years it fell down to 1.680, but has recovered again and surpassed 1.828 in 2004⁴⁹. Meanwhile in Japan, due to that the society is still struggling to adapt to the changes in women's life choices, the developments and changes are far more recent and dramatic. The birthrate in 1970 was 2.13, then fell to 1.75 in 1980, and has only continued to fall and surpassed the historical low 1.29 in 2003⁵⁰. The birthrate is continuing to drop. In 2005 the birthrate was even lower than the death rate which means that Japan has a negative population growth. If the fertility rate does not pick up soon, it has been estimated that the population will become one third

⁴⁹ The Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

⁵⁰ Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labor's statistics, 2004

of the size of today in 50 years time⁵¹.

3.1.1 Family Structure Norm as a Central Indicator.

Since the two countries have different history and cultural backgrounds, it is only natural that the developments have different origins and explanatory factors. For instance, the fact that people get married later in Norway is not only because people have a tendency to postpone starting a family. This is also a result of that the concept of family has changed. In Norway there is no longer an automatic relation between marriage and family, as many as 40% live together and raises a family without getting married, and there are also 10% of single-parent households⁵². Cohabitation and divorce which used to be socially unaccepted and marginally represented in the population has gradually become normalized. In the period 1961-1965, there were in average 2452 cases of divorce annually, ten years later this figure had doubled, and in 2004 there were 11045 cases. The divorce rate today is increasing and is estimated to be 46%, one of the highest in the world⁵³. The norm of the family used to be tied up to marriage and the concept of two people living together with their common children. However in the end of the 1960's when the women's liberation movement as well as the general liberal ideology was propagated in Europe, the diversification development of the family also emerged⁵⁴. The liberation movement was born through the

⁵¹ The Nikkei Weekly, "Population loss spurs new ideas", p18. March 6, 2006

⁵² Norwegian Gender Equality "Ombudet" (Likestillings Ombudet) 2004

⁵³ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

⁵⁴ "ノルウエの政治", p170

counter-reaction to the present strict society among the so called “68’s generation” who opposed to their own conformist upbringing. This movement propagated the individual’s free will and possibilities to shape their own lives. This campaign opposed to the former norms as well as the authorities, among these the church was highly criticized. In Norway there has been a state church for several hundred years. Further the ecclesial institution also has had a strict pietistic tradition which strongly influenced the concept of marriage for a long time. However, as the liberalization movement emerged the church’s position weakened and there was a gradual secularization of the society⁵⁵. Marriage and weddings used to be tied up to the church institution and Christian believes. Meanwhile statistics shows that use of the church at weddings has gradually decreased. There has been a fall of 10% of people getting married in church over the last ten years and an increase from 5496 to 7260 cases of civil marriages⁵⁶. Besides from this, there is an enormous increase of people who live together without being married.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Nina Østeby Sæther, “Selvrealisering Imperativet”, Utflukt p62-66. B-blad Oslo, 2004

⁵⁶ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

⁵⁷ Norwegian National bureau of Statistics; In 1977 there was 12% cohabitation in the age group 20-24, 5% in the age group 25-29. In 1988 this had increased to 34% in the first group and 24 % in the latter. In 1994 the figures show a slight fall in the first group, 31%, but a further increase in the latter group, 35%. The last statistical data from 2002 shows that the latter age group has surpassed the first age group, 39% and 35% which indicates that people who stay in cohabitation are increasing, meaning that the form of living has gained more acceptance as a way of organizing family life. National bureau of statistics 2005; More people live alone and today there are 38% one-persons households and among these 17% is single persons living alone with out children.

3.1.2 Japan; Resistance to Change and Persistent Homogeneous Condition

After the Second World War and up till today, Japan has gone through an amazing change. In the transition toward modernization, the society and people's way of living have been drastically reformed. This is especially concerning the family as an institution and the gender roles, which are both factors strongly related to marriage. In the book "21seiki kazoku e", the author Emiko Ochiai⁵⁸ gives an analysis of the development of the family in Japan in modern times with comparison to western countries and focuses on the development of what she calls "the Post-war family system". She opens her book with the question; "*What image does a Japanese family convey*", and describes the stereotypic family as consisting of a patriarchal autocratic husband, a quiet attentive wife, and 2 or 3 studious children. The father is a corporate slave, and the mother dedicates herself intensively to the home and the children's education.

In Japan, the family is a crucial social indicator and influence many aspects of Japanese peoples' lives, among which marriage is strongly linked in particularly. Therefore a reflection of the constitution of family gives a deeper understanding of the developments related to marriage. The traditional image of the Japanese family is a multi-generational household whose elderly members are valued and respected. This image is bound in the originally and unique social "ie" system which still influences Japanese people's ways of thinking and how they organize life in spite of the fact that it was abolished in 1945. Marriage and family is strongly related in most

⁵⁸ "21世紀家族へ", p2-10

societies, but in Japan, however, because of the “ie” tradition the ties are even tighter. Furthermore, there is also an established system of family register, “koseki”, which people are forced to register in when getting married. Married people have to be registered in the same family register thus forcing one in the couple to be incorporated into the other’s family⁵⁹.

It is optional whether people register in the woman’s or the man’s family name, however in 98% of the cases women take on the husbands name. In the 1990’s, there started to be made protests against this system, saying that it was discriminative against women. Women claimed to keep their maiden name even after getting married. *“The two-surname family is called “fufu bessei” and flaunts both traditions and law, as Japanese family law forces both parties to have the same last name...”Bessei” or “separate names” are a real hassle, as the employer may harass her, passport officials may deny her documents in her maiden name, and her health insurance may remain inaccessible in her husband’s family name”*⁶⁰. Due to difficulties with using different names when married, there are people who even get divorced on paper to be able to continue using their own name.

Ochiai point’s out that there are similarities as well as differences in the development of the western countries versus Japan. She argues that the changes in the Japanese family in general are not unique, but that the developments are fairly universal in the modern societies. Except from cultural specific elements, the characteristics of the family in Postwar Japan

⁵⁹ “Perfectly Japanese”, p91

⁶⁰ *Ibid*,p91

can also be seen in other modern nations, and are features which are accompanying the process of modernization. She concludes; “*The traditional Japanese family has been transformed into the nuclear family, an importation from the west which accompanied the process of modernization*”⁶¹.

In Ochiai's view; “*the unique form of the family in each society in the modern era is the result of subtle interactions among a number of factors, including difference in the speed of universal changes and the effects of the existing cultural substances*”⁶². She sees the modern family as an unavoidable product of the changes in modern times, especially the changes related to demographic conditions. Further she points out that people have a strong tendency to think that how things are arranged in their time is how it always has been. Therefore she asks; “What is a family”, and puts doubt to the conventional ideas in society of what a family is supposed to consist of⁶³. The concept of a family in Japan which has been the norm up to recently is a constellation where the father works to support the family and the mother is a fulltime housewife taking care of the children. However she elucidates that this is not historically immutable and underlines that it is merely one form which became established in the modern era. In modern times as the society has evolved and become more diverse, many optional family constitutions have come into existence. This diversification of the family has also naturally affected the meaning and concept of marriage she remarks.

⁶¹ “21 世紀家族へ”, p6

⁶² *Ibid*,p1

⁶³ *Ibid*,p92

However, even though Ochiai insists on that there is an illusion that the family in Japan is a constant and unequivocal constitution, there are still conditions which have stayed unchanged. Even today, the ties between marriage and family are still very strong which can be seen in the low percentage of cohabitation. Raising a family together without getting married is still socially unaccepted. Only 1.7% of all unmarried people live in cohabitation and looking at data on those who have had this experience in the past it only reaches 7%⁶⁴. Further there is also very few single-parent households⁶⁵. Hence, there is no real alternative to marriage when establishing a family. This can explain why the average marriage age in Japan is so high and the birthrate one of the lowest in the world.

3.2 Reasons for “Marry or Not to Marry”

In both Japan and Norway there is a noticeable increase of people who either postpone marriage or choose not to get married altogether. In relations to this development, there are both similar as well as diverging explanatory factors. Professor in sociology at Tokyo Gakugei University, Masahiro Yamada asks in his book “*Kekkon no shakaigaku*” (“the sociology of

⁶⁴ Masahiro Yamada, “結婚の社会学” (*Sociology of Marriage*), p15. Maruzen Kabushikigaisha, Japan 1996

⁶⁵ The Ministry of Welfare, Health, and Labor; The data from 1997 shows that in average for all age groups men who have had the experience of cohabitation is 3.1% and for women it is 3.0%. Men who at the moment live in cohabitation are 1.7% and the percentage is the same for women.

marriage”) , “*Why are there so many dashing women in their 30’s who does not marry and stay single? They have good taste, are kind and friendly, have many interests, and are not necessarily one-sided engaged in their jobs either, but still they do not marry*”⁶⁶. Yamada’s question is very popular theme and is widely discussed not only in the Japanese media, but also among people in general. Yamada points out that there are four common characteristics among single women and suggests that these factors explain why they stay single; 1) they have a profession, 2) the mother is a housewife, 3) Having parents who are tolerant towards dating and having a boyfriend, and 4) Having a boyfriend or think that one can always find him⁶⁷.

Detailed discourse of the explanatory factors is as follows;

1) They have a profession

When women get married they have to do housework, and if they have children they also have to engage in childcare. Even if a woman has a husband who understands the needs related to her job, she still has to do at least half of the chores Yamada points out. Further, looking at data on how much men help out at home, cooperative husbands are very few. Therefore, to women in their late 20’s and 30’s who are working professionals, housework and childcare become a burden and a disadvantage. This can explain why many chose to postpone marriage or not to get married at all, Yamada explains.

⁶⁶ “結婚の社会学”, p2

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p2-9

However, in relations to this explanatory factor, Norwegian women are in a quite different situation. Even though some women chose to postpone marriage, many chose to live in cohabitation instead. Many people have children without getting married and in 2005 almost half of the children born in Norway had parents who were not married⁶⁸. Thus when it comes to marriage and children being obstacles in women's careers, this is not as relevant in Norway as it is in the Japanese society. This is because the society has made the necessary institutions needed for women to be able to both have a family and a career at the same time. Thus, in Norway, women can establish a family even though they are professionally active. Due to this, it has been possible to keep a high birthrate even though Norwegian women's occupational participation has increased and has become one of the highest in the world.

2) The mother is a housewife

Yamada explains that the single women is largely represented in a new phenomenon called "parasite singles". This is a group of young and single people who live with their parents even after they start working. They live on their parents even though they have become economically independent. In the cases where the mother of these people is a housewife, they do very little share of housework. Thus they depend on their mother practically as well. According to a survey that Yamada has been in charge of; 78% of the women

⁶⁸ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics. 2005; 50% of children born in 2004, the parents were not married. Further in the cases where the children were firstborns more than 70% of the children's parents were not married.

in their twenties who live with their parents in the big cities help out very little at home and their parents do most of the house chores. This survey elucidates further that there is no big difference between the sexes, the men makes out 83% which is only 5% more than the women⁶⁹.

However, if a woman lives by herself and then get married after a while, it will not necessarily be a great difference having to cook or clean for two persons. In this case housework does not represent a barrier from getting married, but this group is also underrepresented. Meanwhile, “parasite singles” who are in majority, even though they get married a man who takes his share at home, the amount of housework will still increase compared to their former lifestyle. Thus, for these women, going from the luxury lifestyle of having most things taken care of by their parents seems like they do not want to let go of this “tengoku no chii”(heavenly status), Yamada argues⁷⁰.

In Norway there is a far stronger tradition of independence related to bringing up children and young people often move out as early as possible after they graduate from senior high school. Therefore the “parasite single” phenomenon as in Japan is not seen in Norway⁷¹. In addition, since it has also been normal for women to work since the end of the 1970’s, housewives are not common in Norway and thus the majority of the young adults today have professionally working mothers. Even though they may live at home they can not expect everything being done for them. There has been an

⁶⁹ “結婚の社会学”, p38-39

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p57

⁷¹ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, 2005; Out of a 4,495,945 population only 191,468 children above 18 years of age who still live with their parents.

increase in the average age for when people move away from home in Norway as well. However, since both parents work in most families and independence is both enhanced by parents as well as sought by young adults themselves, dependency on parents is not as common⁷².

As many young people in Norway live by themselves from a fairly young age they are used to doing housework as well as paying for their own living expenses. Therefore sharing the house chores and the living expenses with someone may seem as a practical and less demanding lifestyle and also more lucrative than single-life. This can explain, for instance, why so many young Norwegian people chose to live together without getting married.

3) Having parents who are tolerant towards dating and having a boyfriend

The third factor that Yamada points out is parent's stands towards dating and having boyfriends. If women are strictly brought up and have parents who are critical to romantic association before marriage, this can be a stressful element for the daughters especially if they still live at home. Today it is of course normal to date before marriage and many women have relationships behind their parents' backs. The sociologist, Chizuko Ueno says in her book "Kekkon Teikoku Onna no Wakaremichi (The Empire of Marriage Women's Dividing Path)" that marriage and sex used to be tied up to each other. Through the liberalization process of sexuality, which has been in motion since the 1970's, the taboo and limitations on sex have been weakened. Thus, the reason why many women today do not get married, is

⁷² "Selvrealisering Imperativet", p62-66.

that marriage and sex have been separated, and that they do not need to get married to have a sex-life⁷³. Nonetheless, some women still have strict parents and their opinions can cause some stress. *“When one is brought up in such a family there are many women who see marriage as a chance to obtain freedom to do what they want”*⁷⁴.

If women, on the other hand, have parents who are tolerant about dating and permit their daughters to sleep over outside the home, women can more easily have boyfriends and do not necessarily need to get married. *“This situation is more convenient than getting married. If one gets married when one does not want to spend time with one’s partner one has no choice but to do so. However if one lives with one’s parents on the other hand one can just stay at home with them if one wants to be alone”*⁷⁵.

Even though Yamada indicates that there are Japanese parents who are liberal in relations to dating, obviously it is more normal that parents raise their children strictly in Japan than in Norway and that conservative opinions are still prevailing in the Japanese society⁷⁶. Norwegian parents used to be strict in relations to ante-nuptial relations, but the norms of upbringing have greatly changed over the last 35 years since the liberalization movement was promoted in society from the beginning of the

⁷³ Sayoko Nobuta, Chizuko Ueno, “結婚帝国 女の岐れ道” (The Empire of Marriage Women’s Dividing Path), p35, Kohdansha, 2004

⁷⁴ “結婚の社会学”, p4

⁷⁵ Ibid., p5

⁷⁶ Ibid. p107; Yamada points out; “Even today especially in the districts there are quite a few junior-high and senior-high schools where dating is prohibited.”

1970's⁷⁷. Today it is highly accepted to live together without getting married. Due to high divorce rate in Norway, parents even may recommend their children to test out living together before getting married. Introducing girlfriends/boyfriends to parents and having a regular and close relationship with each others families is not unusual from young age and at an early stage of a relationship. Thus in Norway parents' opinions will not become a limiting factor on dating or pressure towards marriage.

4) Having a boyfriend or think that one can always find him

The last explanatory factor that Yamada presents in relations to women's tendency not to get married is the access of partners. He notes this as the most indispensable factor. If women have a boyfriend or think that they can easily get one, they tend to think that "*I can always get married anytime*" or "*I may meet someone better*", Yamada explains. Furthermore, the pressure towards getting married with the right man, a man who satisfies both the women's as well as their parent's wishes, causes them to postpone making a choice in case they meet someone better. Japanese women often take their parents' opinions about a partner seriously, and can turn men down even though they like them, if the parents do not agree⁷⁸. Women are also evaluated and given status according to their husbands, which makes them hesitate even further.

However, women who have not had boyfriends and do not believe that they

⁷⁷ "Selvrealisering Imperativet", Utflukt p62-66

⁷⁸ "結婚帝国 女の岐れ道", p44-45

will easily meet someone either, actually get married early. *“This is because these women, when they arrive at the appropriate age and finally get a boyfriend, think that “this is maybe the last chance” and even though there may have been problems in the relationship they still show a high marriage rate”*⁷⁹. These women also have high rate of “*omia*” which is an arranged introduction of eligible partners for marriage.

Panicking and impatience, which is, according to Yamada, characteristics in the women who are afraid of not being able to get married, may also be seen among Norwegian women. However, since marriage does not have an age limited connotation and also is no longer the only way of establishing a family, there is not the same pressure to getting married. People in Norway naturally want to find partners as well so difficulties with meeting someone may cause people to rush into a relation. Meanwhile, it is not always with the goal of getting married. In Norway in the past, there used to be traditions of introduction of potential partners in marriage, but this has been history for a long while. *“Before, we used to choose the neighboring boy, the person we grew up with”* says Kari Moxnes, professor in family-sociology at NTNU, Norwegian University of Sciences and technology. She explains that people meet their life partners later in life and that acquired status is more important than where people grew up. Today the most normal way of meeting a partner is through studies, work, or friends.⁸⁰ There are also

⁷⁹ “結婚の社会学”, p4

⁸⁰ Dagbladet, “Her sjekket vi hverandre opp”; p12-15; 13% off all married couples and 15% off single people met their partners at work. About the same percentage meets through studies. Besides from this most meet their partners through friends or out on the town.

services through the internet or other mediums which introduces people to one another. *“Even though most people are reluctant to admitting it, we look for our parents in the new partner. Security, independence and common ideals are often important in a long-term relationship. Thus meeting at work or through common friends can be good arenas. If we only are looking for a sex-partner, the excitement and the instant chemistry is very important. In this case nightclubs and internet can be the solution.”* ⁸¹

When it comes to “thinking that one can always get married” as a factor which causes women to postpone marriage, in Norway this is a highly plausible explanation since many people live together before getting married or chose cohabitation all together⁸². The reason why women chose to live in cohabitation in stead of getting married is that it is easier to get out of than marriage and thus is a more free form of living. So, to many women, it may seem as a good arrangement together with “Mr. right now” and that women wait with getting married until they feel sure that their partner is the one or when they eventually meet the longed for “Mr. right”⁸³.

07.23.2005

⁸¹ *Ibid*, Comments from sexologist Gro Isachsen

⁸² Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics: “Å gjete kongens harer”, a new report about statistics on cohabitation. Among the firstborn only one third had children with parents who are married. However whether one is born outside marriage or not highly depends on the number in the succession of siblings. It is most normal for firstborn to be born from unmarried parents. Seen from Japanese data Norway has a comparatively high rate of people who stay unmarried their whole life 6.6% women and 9.2 % men (1999). This can be explained in the high rate of couples who never marry and stay in cohabitation all their lives (55-59; 8%, 60-69 years; 5%, 70-79 years; 2%: data from 2002-2004)

⁸³ KK, “Finnerlønn”; Psychology spesialist Roger Hansen says that people tend to look

3.2.1 Staying Single; a Question of “Do Not Want to Get Married” or “Can Not Get Married”

Among the increasing segment of singles in the Japanese population, there is a highly privileged group of women. They live at home with their parents in the big cities, their mothers are housewives, they have a job that they can be proud of, and they are also free to spend carefree-time with their boyfriends. However lately they have started to feel some uneasiness about their life-style choice, Yamada indicates. *“The women are starting to doubt if this once so highly lucrative single-life is really what they were wishing for”*⁸⁴. Since the 1970’s, the average age for getting married has slowly but gradually risen and women in the end of their 20’s till late 30’s who are not married have started to become a noticeable, prominent group. There is an increase of both women and men in their 30’s who still are not married and this has been highly disputed in the media as well as among scholars. One argument is that the societal borders related to being single changed greatly from the beginning of 1990’s. In the 1980’s, the image of singles was cheerful and bright and the fact that one chose a lifestyle opposing to marriage was actually highly thought of and considered as positive, Yamada points out. *“This was a time when the feminism was prospering and it was a popular tendency to avoid marriage and protest against the present norms and distance oneself from the frames of the family”*⁸⁵. With the feminist

for “the one” and expects increasingly more from a partner. Thus people often dump much earlier than before. p68-69. Bonnier 03.2005

⁸⁴ “結婚の社会学”, p5

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p7

movement in the front there was an appeal to open up for diversity related to marriage and a rebellion among women against the male-centered family system. These women were seen as courageous and the frontiers of the present time. They expressed strong urges to realize themselves and to pursue a career, and the single-life was explicitly an active choice underlines Yamada.

*“At the time singles were positively presented in mass media as a group of people full of vigor and vitality. The free and fun single-life in the city where young unmarried people enjoy life and date freely became a popular topic both in books and mass media as a whole. The environment gradually changed to suite the singles’ lifestyle and there was for instance built more single’s-apartments and convenient stores”.*⁸⁶

The implementation of the equal employment opportunity law (EEOL) in 1986 also influenced this development and for a while career women increased and it had its climax at the end of 1980’s when the Japanese economic growth erupted⁸⁷. The prosperous times ended and were followed by a long depression from around 1990. With the deterioration of Japanese economy, the society became tougher, especially in the labor market. As the hardship of workers increased, the positive and lively image of single career-women and single-life faded. Now the single group was dominated by women who actually wanted to get married and who no longer chose the single-life actively. Women in their 20’s today, who have observed how the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,p8

⁸⁷ This is called “ the bubble economy”.

older generation of women has been struggling as career-women, thus see the independent single-life as less attractive. Increasing amount of younger girls express that they do not want to end up like the older unmarried women and show urges to get married young.

Furthermore, the new generation of independent unmarried women has been given the nametag “makeinu”, meaning the “loserdogs”. This label is taken from the title of the book “Makeinu no Tooboe” (“The howl of the loserdog”) written by Junko Sakai⁸⁸. Sakai is a writer in her late 30’s and a single-woman herself. In her book, she discusses about her choices not to get married and how she and other women who have made the same choices are perceived by society. The reference to losing is ironically meant from Sakai’s part, but it also represents her critical comment to the pressure “to get married” that society exhorts on women. She questions who is actually a loser among women, the single career-women who do not have a family or the married women who have to give up their jobs. Sakai is arguing that the society is making single women feel that they are losing out of something and making a wrong choice in life. However, women who have to give up their jobs and independence for marriage are the real “loserdogs”, she insists. *“From a “loserdogs” point of view, the “winnerdogs” throw away their pride and feelings of embarrassment for the sake of marriage”*⁸⁹. Sakai emphasizes that if people are happy in their life situation it is not important whether one is married or not. Meanwhile, as conservative structures are upheld, those

⁸⁸ Junko Sakai, “負け犬の遠吠え (The Howl of the Loser Dog)”, Kohdansha, Japan 2004

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p24

women who are breaking with the traditional patterns end up struggling both practically as well as mentally as they meet a lot of discrimination and prejudices.

In Norway, single-life is more accepted and there is exhausted little pressure on women to get married. In 2001 there were 11.9% women between 25-44 who lived alone compared with 9.9% in 1991. The figure is probably even higher as many students are registered in their parents' household and many people also omit from registering as single. The expression "single" came into use in the 1990's as a counter-reaction to the concept "enslig" meaning solitary, a concept which people thought was outdated and stigmatizing. The media in Norway, as in Japan, started depicting the single lifestyle in the 1980's, but is also still positively enhancing this phenomenon even today. TV-series and movies like "Friends", "Sex and the City" and "Bridget Jones' Diary" which reflect the life of unmarried people have become very popular and strengthened the single's culture⁹⁰. Many single women say that the choice to prioritize themselves and their own needs has been conscious and that this lifestyle has given them many exciting opportunities. *"They live alone, prioritize themselves and their career. Many among today's singles think that it is difficult to combine work and family-life".*⁹¹ Single-women express that they are not lonely and that they get the needed kinship and closeness from friends and family, and emphasizes the importance of their job in their feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction. They

⁹⁰ HENNE, "Singelliv 2005", p94-98. Bonniers July 2005

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p97

are inclined to get married and do not refuse having a family, but do not see it as inevitable and would only consider it if they meet “the one”, a man who will make it possible for them to continue working. The woman’s average age for when they have their first child has risen over the last few years. This can be explained by that women want to have a career before they start a family. Women with higher education have their first child when they are 31.6 years old. Further, among all women who have passed 40 years, 12.5% are childless. *“I don’t want to have a child just because my biological clock is ticking”*.⁹²

3.2.2 Men who Do not Get Married; the “Ineligible for Marriage” and the “Marriage Hesitant”

Since it became apparent that many unmarried people no longer chose to be single, the tone of the mass media also changed and there was an emphasis on the singles as people who “can not get married”, instead of “will not get married”. As single women increased, the difficulties in getting married among certain groups of men have become apparent. This is, for instance, male farmers, men in male dominated professions, and men with a “mother complex”. Men who want to marry, but have difficulties with doing so have been increasingly exposed in the media. In the March 2005, Yomiuri Weekly, a magazine about social issues in Japan, presented the article “Kekkon dekinai otokotachi” (“men who can not get married”), where interviews with

⁹² *Ibid*,p98

173 unmarried men and the phenomenon that they represent is analyzed⁹³. The article explains that there are many reasons why men can not get married, but that on the bottom line they are men who are not being chosen by women. These men are victims of the bipolarization of men into “moteru” (popular) and “motenai” (unpopular) groups. Among these men, many of them have never dated a woman and do not have the confidence or knowledge to do so either.

Men who seek advice for how to approach and behave in relations with women are increasing and there have even been established “bridegroom-schools” which teach men how to go on dates and improve their chances of finding a wife.

In Nagoya city, its government’s NPO was the first cooperate body to establish a so called “bridegroom-school”. This school gives courses where men can learn how to talk to women, how to dress, and where to take women on dates. These men’s common characteristic is that they have few chances to meet women in their everyday life. *“Through these courses, they are encouraged to broaden their social spheres. Many of the students, for instance, have started to join sports clubs and cooking classes in order to meet more women,”*⁹⁴ comments Mr. Ohashi, the director of the school.

⁹³ Yomiuri Weekly, “結婚できない男達 (The Men who can not Get Married)”, p10-17. Yomiuri Shinbun Honsha. 2005.3.20

⁹⁴ Yomiuri Weekly, “僕のを食べて! 料理男急増中” (Eat mine! Cooking men are increasing rapidly). 2005.8.15: This article writes about a great increase in unmarried men who join cooking classes and that this is often an attempt to improve their chances for getting married. Men who join these classes say that men who cook are popular among women. The article reports that recently men in their 20’s till middle of 30’s are increasing greatly and

As working women are increasing, naturally more and more women expect men to also cook and do housework. Women, still seek men with high salary, but the high education factor which used to be seen as important has lost its significance. *“Now women seek men who can cook and do housework instead”*, comments professor Masahiro Yamada to Yomiuri Weekly⁹⁵. He explains that the problem common among unpopular men is that they still seek women who are domestic, younger, and have lower income and education than themselves. Further, these men often have lower economical status and are too conscious of this as a draw-back, hence lose their confidence in interaction with women. *“If a man have no confidence and do not approach women actively, they will not find a partner,”* Yamada concludes.⁹⁶ Dating and marriage used to be arranged through family and colleagues, now this is not as common, so men have to be more active in their approach. This development has created the bipolarization of men who have a lot of experience with women and men who have no experience at all.

1) “Otaku” men who are unpopular

A big group of the men who are not popular with women is called “otaku”, meaning inside and reflects that they live isolated lives often having hobbies

more than half of them are unmarried. Among the participants there are also men who join “bridegroom-schools”. There is also increasingly being published cookbooks which are directed towards men.

As mentioned earlier, Masahiro Yamada is the sociologist in this field, and the author of “*結婚の社会学*” (See 64).

⁹⁵ Yomiuri Weekly, “結婚できない男達”, p12, 2005.8.15

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p13

like reading “manga” comics, playing video games and surfing the internet. These men’s lives are so separate from women and are often totally succumbed in their hobbies. They often dress in a similar way with cloths that are too big and not very fashionable, which signals their lack of communication skills. These men also express personally that they do not know how to communicate with women⁹⁷. The problem is that the unpopular men often do not associate with women at all. In many cases they have been going to only boys-schools and worked in male dominated workplaces, besides many of them also live with their parents. When they finally get the chance to meet women, they often get too eager and are not able to communicate naturally. Even though many of these men express that they would like to find a partner, a big group still lack motivation. They often think that they can use the marriage service companies or meeting-spots on the internet. Meanwhile, if men lack high income, high education, and an attractive appearance, it is very difficult to successfully find a partner in this way. The average rate of success of getting married through this kind of organization is only 7%⁹⁸.

2) “Neet” and “Fureeta”, men who do not have the economy for getting married

In Japan, even though women have become increasingly independent, they

⁹⁷ AERA, “電車男の持て男研究 (The Research about the Popularity of Densha-otoko)”, p14-19, Asahishinbunhonsa. 2005.06.27

⁹⁸ AERA, “電車男になりたい僕達 (We want to be a Densha-otoko)”, Takanobu Murahayashi. 2005.2.28.

still seek economical security from men. However, young men who have the expected economical level are decreasing. Further, there is also an increase of young men who do not plan for the future and just earn enough for their present everyday life. The rate of quitting one's job is very high among young men. These men fall into a group of so called "fureeta", deriving from "free arbeiter (free part-timer)", meaning people who work freelance taking on several jobs and not sticking to one job as a fulltime worker. These men have a low and not stable income which makes them ineligible as partners in marriage. The other group "neet" is an abbreviation taken from English meaning "Not in Education, Employment, or Training". These men do nothing, neither study nor work, and often live on their parents. These two groups are increasing and in September 2004 there were 850.000 "fureetas" and 520.000 "neets" in Japan. Young people are less willing to stay in one job for the rest of their life which has been the tradition in Japan. Today the level of stress at the working place is high and the condition is hard with long hours, thus many people seek to run away from this situation. Men, as they are still seen as the main breadwinners, the male "fureetas" and "neets" will have very hard times finding a partner for marriage⁹⁹.

3) "Bibiri-kei", men who do not want to marry

There are men who are single because they do not want to get married. This type of men is called "bibiri-kei", meaning "nervous type" and reflects their

⁹⁹AERA, "20代覆う心はニト (*The Heart of the 20's is NEET*)", p16-19. Asahishinbunhonsha, 2004.11.8

reluctance towards marriage. They do not want to make a commitment or see marriage as troublesome and lacking in merits. To avoid marriage they keep high ideals of women and always live with the expectation of meeting a better partner¹⁰⁰.

When it comes to Norwegian men and why unmarried men are increasing, there may be some similarities. First of all, there are also both popular and unpopular men. However, it is plausible to say that the bipolarization is not as drastic as in Japan. For instance, in Norway there are no gender separated schools, thus all men have experienced interaction with the opposite sex through their education. In general, there is less gender separating tendencies in society which makes it more normal for men and women to be friends and to socialize from an early age. With a more normalized interaction between the sexes, the men are also better trained at communicating with women. The average age when Norwegian men become sexually active is lower and they also have more sexual partners than Japanese men. This can be explained by a smaller gap between men's dating experiences and that they are generally in a closer contact with women¹⁰¹.

In Norway, there are also men who do not have a stable income and thus can be seen as "fureetas. However, since men are not expected to be the main breadwinner, lower economy itself is not a rational explanation for having

¹⁰⁰ Yomiuri Weekly, "結婚できない男達", p10-17, 2004.10.17

¹⁰¹ Durex International; According to Durex.'s international sex survey 2005, The average age of first sexual experience is 16.5 years old for Norwegian and 17.5 in Japan. Norwegians also have more sexual partners (12.1) than Japanese (10.2) which is higher than the globally average. (<http://www.durex.com/cm/gss2005Content.asp.int>)

problems with getting married. Women look for other aspects in men than money and status, so as long as men are independent, even though their economical state is low, they still have a chance. Men who fall into the “neet” category may have problems with finding a partner, but are insignificantly few.

However, when it comes to men being single because they are hesitant to get married, the marriage avoidance tendency can also be seen in Norway. Just as women, men also want to prioritize themselves and their career before starting a family. Further, since the average age for getting married is rising, the pressure towards marriage has got weaker. Besides, as cohabitation has become normalized, many men may see this as less definite and thus a safer arrangement than marriage. This freedom causes men, like women, to end up thinking “I may meet someone better”, and postpone to commit.

3.3 Mismatch of Expectations of Men and Women for Marriage

In Japan, the features men and women look for in a partner are different between each sexes and often a mismatch. Men see marriage as an event, meaning that they do not expect their life will change when getting married. *“Men want a partner who does not hinder them in their life course.”*¹⁰² Even though men who prefer that women also work are increasing, they still expect that women prioritize the family and take care of house chores.

On the other hand, for women, marriage has traditionally the meaning of “umare kawareru”, meaning rebirth. Women expect that their lives will

¹⁰² “結婚の社会学”,p49

change when they get married. *“Having to change their life, it is natural to want it to change for the better. If women can not improve their life by getting married, it is natural to think that it is better not to get married”*.¹⁰³ As women have become more independent, they expect men to be more cooperative at home. Nonetheless, they still prefer men with higher economy who can give them financial security.

3.3.1 Men’s Preferences in a Partner

The most significant feature that men prefer in women is “kawaii” which means cute. *“The real sense of the word is easy to control, thus someone who does not become an obstacle”*, argues Yamada. What men seek in women is called the “4 K”, which is “kawaii” (cute), “kaji ga suki” (like to do housework), “kashikoi” (bright), and “karui” (light). 1) Cute; as explained above this reflects being easy to control, 2) Liking housework; this indicates that a women would not demand that men help out, 3) Bright; this is related to being good at raising a family, and 4) light, this signifies being small and inferior. All these characteristics reflect being supportive and taking care of the home, thus not becoming an obstacle to the husband.

“Since men want to have the control, they often chose women who are younger and who have a lower educational and economical level”, concludes Yamada. Men are afraid of being controlled and forced to change their lives. This is why men avoid choosing women who are older and have a higher education and salary than themselves. *“Women with higher education*

¹⁰³ *Ibi*,p51

express that it is difficult for them to find a partner and that men lose interest when they find out that they have high education or salary".¹⁰⁴ Men often say that a woman with a higher educational level than themselves is too good for them, and that a woman with a normal status is enough. Only 15% of Japanese women take university degrees and so women with higher education are a minority.

In Norway, the female population's education level is very high, in fact, in the university 56% of the students are women¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, women are also starting to take over the high status occupations in medicine, law, and management.¹⁰⁶ As it is more normal for Norwegian women to have higher education, this becomes less a barrier in relations to men. Work and study are the most common arenas where couples meet. Since men and women are more equally positioned in society, it is only natural for them to seek partners who are equal to them. Thus status and professional ability can even be seen as preferable features.

3.3.2 Women's Preferences in Partner

"Love-marriage, and the romantic idea related to marriage has come to have prevalence in Japan, and in surveys people answer that they chose their

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*,p51

¹⁰⁵ Likestillingssentret; Minifacts on Gender 2005

¹⁰⁶ KK 2004. "De nye kvinne yrkene", p.85. Women have scooped higher education and are now entering the high status occupations. In journalism almost 60% of the students are women. In veterinarian studies 90% of the students who graduated in 2004 were women. More than half of the students in the faculty of law are women and about 60% of the medical students are women.

partners because of their personality"¹⁰⁷. However, this does not imply anything about the real motivation behind a relationship, since a personality match is the minimum criteria for getting married, concludes Yamada.

In Japan, a women's life standard depends greatly on their husband's economy. Even though career-women are increasing, they are still the minority in Japan. In a survey by the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Labor on unmarried women's opinion on marriage, 30% of the women wanted to continue to work and 60% preferred becoming housewives¹⁰⁸. Looking at the expectations that women have for a potential partner in marriage, economy is highly related factor. As mentioned earlier, women expect that their life will change when getting married. The criteria of marriage life that women have are based on their parents' economical power as well as on their own life standard before getting married. Therefore, in order to change their life for the better, they would have to get married a man who has a higher economy than their fathers or at least seeming to end up with a better economy in the future. *"To be sure that a partner will have an approvable economical level in the future, education and occupation are important factors"*¹⁰⁹.

Women's ideals in a man used to be called the "3H"¹¹⁰. In the 1980's when the

¹⁰⁷ "結婚の社会学",p47

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p37; Ministry of Welfare, Health and Labour's survey on single women's opinion on marriage. 1995

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*,p52

¹¹⁰ "3H" is explained in 3.2.3 (see p45). "3H" means "3 high". These factors are; high body height (over 170 cm), high salary (more than 10 million yen, about 70.000 euros), and high educational level.

Japanese economy was very strong, the expectations of men were irrationally high. There was an increase in women who did not want to get married if a man did not have these qualities. Today as the economy has gotten weaker and women have become increasingly more independent, the expected economical level in men has been lowered. The ideals of men have changed from the “3H” (high salary, high education, and high height), towards “3C” representing comfortable, communicative, and cooperative. Meanwhile, even though many women work they are often forced to work part-time, thus economically still dependant to a certain extent. *“Women who work part-time have a lower salary and status and are more or less still seen as housewives”*¹¹¹ Hence, women are strongly prone to be conscious of a man’s economical power when choosing a partner.

Generally the fathers are the basis of women’s evaluation, thus women’s expectations depend on the parents’ economical level¹¹². Since young women today have a tendency to postpone marriage they get an increasingly longer period of economical independence. The “parasite singles” who still live at home after they become vocational active and thus have low living expenses, have a very high living standard. In fact, today women in their 30’s represent one of the most economically powerful segments in the population¹¹³. It will be very difficult for these women to find a man who can improve or even sustain their luxurious living standards before marriage. The older the men are the more possible it is that they have obtained the desired economy.

¹¹¹ “21 世紀家族へ”, p.24

¹¹² *Ibid*,p53

¹¹³ Masahiro Yamada, *“Parasite singles”*, p10. Kabushikigaisha Chikumashobo, Japan 1999

“Young men however even though they have high education, this does not automatically lead to a good economy in the future. This can explain why women prefer men who are older than themselves”, argues Yamada. However, even though women in general prefer men who are older, there can also be seen an increase in women who chose younger men. This phenomenon is called “pet-boyfriend” and characterizes women who are dating men who are 7 years or younger than themselves. Women, who chose younger men, often have higher education and economical level. They say that they prefer these men because they are more supportive, easier to control, and make women feel younger¹¹⁴.

In Norway it is only natural for women to work and to be economically independent¹¹⁵. Further, as there has been made the needed arrangements for married women to be able to continue working they will not be forced to become dependant on their husbands.

Regarding expectations to life standards in a marriage, Norwegian women

¹¹⁴ Attiva,”27 歳過ぎたら, 年下の彼の魅力 (The Attractiveness of Younger Boyfriend from the Age of 27)”, p27-33.November 2003, Yomiuri Weekly, “35 歳からの結婚 (Marriage from 35 years)”, p10-19. 12.12.2004 Kouseiroudosho, Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare; in 2004 there were 20.000 couples who got married where the wife was older.

¹¹⁵ Likestillingssenteret; “Minifacts on gender equality 2005; The Norwegian women’s labour rate is 69, 0%; only 6, 6 % lower than the rate of men and is more or less kept constant through out their career.. In Japan on the other hand women’s labour rate is 48, 3% much lower than that of men which is 74.1%, 2003. Further many Japanese women also work part-time and this fact together causes a 40% gap in Japanese men and women’s earnings. National Bureau of Statistics, 2005; In Norway on the other hand even though 70% of the part-time workers are women, they do not as much lose their societal status and salary level just because they cut down on the working hours. Thus the gap between the salaries of the sexes is only 16%.

have a quite different viewpoint. As it is normally for people in Norway to live by themselves before getting married, they have higher living expenses and naturally also a weaker economy. Getting married or living with a partner, sharing the economical expenses will thus only improve their living standard. Economy is something married couples build up together and with time, and not a crucial factor in a partner. Since Norwegian women are gender equally conscious and want to have a career, the importance of supportiveness and understanding in a man is more emphasized. First of all, women seek love and a partner who matches their personality and interests and makes them feel that he is “Mr. Right”.

3.4 Influential Contextual Conditions

After the Second World War and up till today, Japan has gone through great structural changes and rapid economical growth. The question is what kind of changes and how profound it really was. *“The economy improved tremendously, but to be able to reach this achievement something had to give”*¹¹⁶. An economically based political agenda enhancing conservative gender roles are prevailing which shapes and conditions the society accordingly. However, in Norway where political policies promote gender equality and integration of the sexes, the circumstances are diverging. Women’s freedom of life choices in Japan and Norway are therefore quite different.

¹¹⁶ “21 世紀家族へ”,p15

“Have women always been housewives?”¹¹⁷

In Emiko Ochiai's book, she asks the very allusive question of whether the housewife role of women is a natural part of Japanese culture or not and rocks with a deeply ingrained misconception in Japan that women always have been housewives¹¹⁸. This question was aggregated in her after some neighboring women complained about being housewives. *“They complained about not being cut out to just staying at home and looking after children. They even said that they found themselves despising it, and that they felt like something was wrong with them since they were not able to fit this role which supposedly was natural to women”*¹¹⁹,

Women who choose to become housewives often say that they do not work because they do not need to, since the family can manage on the husband's salary alone. Looking at statistics it becomes apparent that the higher the salary of the husband is, the higher the rate of housewives is¹²⁰.

Women's actual choices at hand depend largely on the context. If one compares the curves showing women's labor force participation rate by age in Japan and Norway, the shape is very different. Japanese women's life choices are still far more limited and conditioned by the context than Norwegian women. A recent tendency in Japan is that women, who continue to work even after having children, eventually find themselves forced to give up their

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*,p11

¹¹⁸ See 2.1.1

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p12

¹²⁰ The Japanese Institute of Labor Research,; An analysis of the return of women with university degrees to the labor market, edited by Wakisaka Tomita, 2005

jobs when the children reaches elementary school-age¹²¹.

In Norway, it is only natural for women to continue working even when having children. Being a housewife is rare and almost non-existing at least in the consciousness of younger people. *“If you ask children in Norway today they will most probably not even know what a housewife is”*¹²². The idea of not working outside the home, but stay and take care of the house and children is passé and alienated to most Norwegian women. Taking care of children and the home is of course important, but is something women do on their free-time and in collaboration with a partner.

3.4.1 Gender Equality; Japan Turning Back the Clock on Gender Equality

Even though Japanese politicians have proclaimed to have gender equality on their political agenda, there have repeatedly been presented laws and propositions over the last 30 years, which prompt women to choose to become housewives or at least prioritize the family. A similar proposition was publicized as recently as April 2005 by LDP, the leading political party. LDP emitted a proposal to alter article no.24 in the Japanese constitution, which could limit individual freedom and weaken Japanese women’s rights¹²³.

Conservative values prevailing in society at large still pressure women to prioritize the family. Even though companies are abolished by law from

¹²¹ AERA, “育児時短勤務はわがまま (*The shorted hours for Childcare is selfish*)”, p32. 2005-11-17. Detail is explained in 3.4.1.

¹²² Ivar Frønes, Ragnhild Brusdal, “På sporet av den nye tid”; p 63. Fagbokforlaget, Bergen. 2000

¹²³ Japan Times, “Japan turning back the clock on gender equality”, p1 2005-05-10

sexually discriminating their workers, in reality many women are still being victimized. Furthermore, Japan has also kept up a taxation law which makes it more economical for a married couple if the wife stays at home or does not work more than very limited hours. Married men also get higher salary if their wives do not earn more than a certain amount of money. Thus, many married women are still pressured to give up their careers even though they have higher education and good careers.

People often still live with or close by their parents and get help from them in taking care of the children. However, with the gradually urbanization and centralization of the Japanese society, people increasingly live far from the grandparents. Since women and their mothers are expected to look after the children, the public childcare system is not well enough developed. In Japan there is only 20% childcare institutional coverage¹²⁴. It is also expensive and the hours are often too short to be of any real help for fulltime workers. Even though there are private institutions which are open until late and some even at nighttime, these are quite expensive and therefore often not affordable. As many people have to make use of expensive private childcare institutions, working becomes a dilemma between ideological versus economical issues, when almost all of the women's salary is being used to pay for the childcare services of their children.

Besides, though established childcare institutions have made it possible for women to continue working, these institutions are mostly for smaller

¹²⁴ Japanese Statistic Bureau, 2005 June.

children.¹²⁵ There is a childcare, nursing-leave law which is suppose to force companies to accept shortage in working hours for working mothers. However, this only applies to mothers with children up to 3 years old. After this age the policy is not an obligation. According to Ministry of Welfare, Health, and Labor's annual rapport in 2004; only 40% of the companies had policy related to shorter working hours for workers with small children. Among these, 70% had this policy for children up to 3 years old, 20% until school age, and 5% kept this right applicable for women with school aged children as well¹²⁶. Eventually, when children reach schooling age mothers are therefore often forced to cut down or quite work due to lack in childcare facilities and support at work.

AERA, a magazine which reports on social issues, in both the September 12th and November 17th 2005 additions, writes about the difficulties women in Japan have in combining work and raising children. People who become severely ill because of childcare related stress are drastically increasing, and one woman interviewed even got cancer. *"The new laws which are supposed to support working mothers are not really possible to make use of practically. In my working place, there is no understanding for the extra needs that working mothers have"*, she comments.¹²⁷ Even though she has small children, she was expected to do as much overtime-work as anyone else, and also often felt pressured to go drinking with colleges after work. At times, she

¹²⁵ AERA, "育児時短勤務はわがまま", p32. 2005-11-17.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p32.

¹²⁷ AERA, "仕事と育児の末癌に(The End of Work and Childcare is Cancer)", p30-31. 12.09.2005

worked as much as 20 hours a day. Although she could take out 1 year of childcare leave, it was not positively seen by her employer, and it was made clear to her that taking leave a second time would not be accepted. *“All the focus and emphasis on finding counteractions against the fall in the birthrate and the concerns expressed among the politicians are just empty words and not causing any effective change in people’s every day life”¹²⁸, she concludes.*

Owing to discrimination against women in the working place, devaluation of typical female oriented professions, and the fact that 72% of all part-time workers are women, there is a huge gap between women and men’s salaries. Even though Japan has one of the highest economical levels in the world, the gap is as vast as 40%¹²⁹. In the UN’s report of the 50 richest countries in the world, Norway had the highest GNP and was number 1 on gender equality as well. However, Japan which has the 9th highest GNP, falls down to number 41 on gender equality. This gap between the national economical level and women’s empowerment is the greatest among all of the countries enlisted. Data in this report, which elucidates Japan’s poor stands on gender equality, is looking at Argentina’s position. Argentina, which went nationally bankrupted in 2004 and is listed as number 34 on GNP, is still ranked as

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ “権利白書(White Paper on Rights)2006”, Fukuda Tohru, p.110; a report published for the Japanese labour union on the conditions of Japanese workers. In this report it is given a comparison of several countries on the base of reports from the UN and this shows that the gender equality conditions have deteriorated. Japan was listed as no.38 in 2004 and falls down to no.41 in the following year. Norway on the other hand has been ranked as no.1 the last five years. 2006.1.30. Kenrimondaikenkyukai.

number 21 on gender equality. Furthermore, looking at the same report over the last few years, it is also clear that the conditions in Japan actually have deteriorated.

Even though women are given the same rights to work, they are still expected to take most of the responsibility for the children. For instance, until 2005, the childcare leave for men was restricted to only one day off, the day when the child was born. The Japanese government prolonged the leave to 5 days in April 2005, but this became highly disputed, and shortly after it was emitted the politicians discussed whether it should be taken back. The 5 days leave still stand and Japanese men can actually take out a whole year of childcare leave. However taking more than 5 days is not a right thus it depends on the policy of the company whether it is possible or not. Further the leave is without pay, which makes it an economically difficult. Even though Japanese men have some rights related to parenthood, it is not an obligation and only 0.017% of men take out childcare leave. The very low usage of rights among Japanese men is both because of lack in consciousness related to childcare and the fact that many employers would not allow the male workers to take out childcare leave. It is also important to point out that even though Japanese women have the right to one year of childcare leave, this is, in most cases, poorly funded with only up to 30% payment of the ordinary salary or, in worst situation, not paid at all. Besides, when they return to work, they are not guaranteed to get their job back¹³⁰.

¹³⁰ Ministry of Health and Labour; The basic rights is to have 30% of the pay during the year when taking out childcare-leave. However women also have to pay taxes out of that

3.4.2 Norway; Gender Equality

What makes Norway number 1 in gender equality in the world is not just because of a favorable economical situation, but is, first of all, the result of political efforts. Gender equality is seen as “common sense” among people as well as in the labor market. It is only natural for Norwegian women to work and to continue to do so even after they have children. To be able to work while raising children, a highly developed childcare system is inevitable. In Norway, there is 85% daycare institutional coverage for children between 3-5 years old¹³¹. Further, Norwegian female workers are highly protected by law, and there is also “ombud”, an established institution which makes sure that the gender equality laws are being followed. It is only natural that Norwegian men also participate and take a more equal share of the responsibility at home. The statistics still do not show equal share of housework even in Norway, but compared with Japanese the Norwegian men have come much further towards an equal participation.

In Norway, workers are entitled to one year of childcare leave. They can

thus it is very little which women actually receive. Furthermore this basic right is only guaranteed for public workers often leaving women who work in private sector with no financial support at all. AERA, “育児休暇 これだけの厳しい現実 (*The Hard Reality of Childcare Leave*)”,p. 20-21. 10.03. 2005. The percentage of women who take out childcare-leave has increased 15% between 1999 and 2004 which shows a tendency that women want to continue working. However there are still many women who are not included in the statistics because they quite rather taking out the leave since the leave is poorly paid and they are not guaranteed their job back when they return to work.

¹³¹ Likestillings senteret, 2004’s Mini facts on gender equality: In the age group of children between 1-5 years old there is 69% institutional day-care coverage, between 2-4 years old 44% coverage, and on the overall age group of children of 3-5 years old 85% coverage.

either take out 52 weeks with a pay of 80% of their salary, or 42 weeks with full pay. As mentioned earlier, this right of childcare leave is not just for women, but can equally be taken out by men¹³². Further, there is also the “papa-quota” policy which makes it easier for men to take leave as well as forcing all men to take responsibility for their children. This law makes it easier for both women to get back to work sooner and to support men to become more attached to their children¹³³.

As men in general still earn more than women even in Norway, it can become an economical dilemma for some couples whether the man should take out more leave than the 4 compulsory weeks. It has been discussed among the politicians if to enlarge quota of father’s childcare leave into four months, but this is disputed as it can cause economical problems. However, even though the system in Norway is not impeccable, 93% of fathers take out childcare leave which is the highest figures in the world and a vital condition to achieve a gender equal and family friendly society¹³⁴.

3.4.3 Economy: the Crucial Conditioning Factor

The Japanese economy had a turning point in 1989, which is called “the burst of the bubble-economy”. Before the crack, Japan seemed as a very safe

¹³² Gender equality bureau, 2004

¹³³ The Gender Equality Act, Section 3a; “Affirmative action in favor of one of the sexes”. The Gender Equality Ombud, Act of June 14th 2002 No. 21

¹³⁴ Likestillingssenteret; 2004 Mini facts on gender equality. The figure is close to 100% as the last 7% is represented by men who take out from a few days and up to 2 weeks. Further, 77% of the men take out 4 weeks which is what they actually are obligated to, and 15% takes out more than 4 weeks.

and stable society. The unemployment rate was one of the lowest in the world and once people got employed it was often a lifetime occupation. Japanese people have had an image as a hard working people and the pressure towards working and living for the job has traditionally been very high. However, with the deterioration of the economy, many people were fired and it was no longer automatic that people would keep their jobs. This heightened the pressure even further and the level of stress and anxiety in the working market prone people to work excessively and to put in extra overtime¹³⁵. In many cases, the overtime is not paid for, which is so called “sabisu zangyou”, meaning service overtime. This is seen as an employee’s way of showing that she or he is dedicated and loyal to the job. People are often afraid of going home too early because of the negative message that this can represent, thus they stay on at work after the normal working hours and often until late at night¹³⁶. As a result, men’s time to interact with their wives and children becomes very limited. It is for instance not unusual for fathers to only spend time with their children on the week-ends. On week-days many men normally leave before their children wake up, and come home after their children has gone to bed. In these circumstances the time that married couples and families as a whole spend together becomes very limited. An increasing number of couples even live in a situation where they only meet and live under the same roof on the weekends, so called “shumatsukekkon” or “week-end marriage”.

¹³⁵ Yomiuri Weekly, “New 残業時代の過労 (The Overwork of The New Overtime Generation)”,p32-37 9.2 2005

¹³⁶ *Ibid*,p11

In Japan, the problem with overwork is so severe that people become hospitalized or even die from overwork, called “karoshi”¹³⁷. In the September 2005, Yomiuri Weekly, an article magazine, published a report about the increasing problem with overwork among Japanese workers¹³⁸. The title of the article is “The overwork-depression among the new overtime generation”, and it says that the new group of workers loaded with overwork in Japan today is people in their mid-thirties. It describes the present situation as being more severe and points out that this development is occurring in spite of the fact that the economy in Japan has improved. Even though the worst period of cut-down of employees has passed and left more space for the young remaining workers, as many middle-aged workers were dismissed in the cost down process¹³⁹, there is still a strong sense of nervousness. The economy has improved over the last couple of years and went up 4, 2% in 2005. In spite of the improvement, many workers are struggling with excessive work and overtime which leads to physical symptoms and lack of sleep, and in the worst cases suicide¹⁴⁰. Besides from overwork, many Japanese companies hold drinking-meetings, so called “nomikai” on a regular basis. In these conditions, the workers have no time left for other things than work. Many unmarried workers say that the reason why they have not married yet is that they do not even have time to find a partner.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*,p12,

¹³⁸ *Ibid*,p13

¹³⁹ Many Japanese Companies has been firing their employees in order to be more productive by cutting down the personnel cost.

¹⁴⁰ “Zenkoku 21” a hospital which deals with workers who have become ill because of work reports that the suicide related cases has gone up 2.4 times in 2004

The largest group of victims of overwork is workers in their 30's, which is the age when people get married normally and start a family. According to a report in June 2004 from "Roudou Seitai Kenkyuu-Kenshuu Ki", the governmental research institute for work measures-training organization (JILPT), people in their 30's had in average 37.7 hours of overwork, which is the most of all age groups. Further, out of these hours, as much as 20 hours were unpaid. The report continues by pointing out that in addition to the overwork that many workers put in at work, 34.1% of people in their 30's bring the work with them back home, which implies that the amount of service-overtime must be more. Professor Shitamura at Tokyo Medical University comments that the increase in the workload and stress related to work is caused by the change in the working style that has appeared over the last couple of decades. He points out that the prevalence of computers in office has taken away the separation of work and leisure. This has caused a situation of mobile-overtime where many people bring the work with them home.

"The majority of workers who consult him about problems with overwork are single people, and among them female workers are overwhelmingly many. Therefore, naturally there are few questions about sharing of housework and childcare. Since, the group of unmarried workers are in majority, it is difficult to stop the tendency of overwork, as the greater part of the workers only have themselves to think of" , comments professor Shitamura.

Though women may have had the motivation to work at first, the harsh situation causes many of them to choose to get married and to quit or cut

down on work.

For instance, one of the women I have interviewed for this thesis told me about her sister who had problems due to overwork. At first, she was very ambitious, but as she got promoted to a leading position she had to work late every day. The stress was so severe that she got burned-out. Eventually she decided to use marriage to escape the present situation in spite of that she had no boyfriend at the time. When she finally met someone who seemed suitable, she started pushing for marriage after only two months of dating. The boyfriend was reluctant at first, but eventually accepted it. Then when she had quit and started planning the wedding, suddenly the boyfriend broke of their engagement, and she was left alone and without a job.

As reflected in this case, working conditions influence people lives strongly, and is an essential factor regarding stands on marriage and lifestyle choices. Norway, as welfare oriented country, has established a system which functions as a safety-net for the population. For instance, the government has made various efforts to assure the equal opportunity of employment to all people. Thus, the unemployment rate has been kept low¹⁴¹. Furthermore, as part of the welfare system, people who end up unemployed receive 74% of their salary compared with 64% in Japan¹⁴². Workers are protected by law from exploitation and discrimination, and also have the security in the welfare system. Therefore, even when the economy deteriorated after the global economical crack in late 1980's, this did not so much negatively affect

¹⁴¹ "ノルウェーの政治", p82-85; 2002 the unemployment rate was approx.4.6%, the lowest among the OECD-countries. Japan in comparison, the rate was 5.5%

¹⁴² OECD Homepage(www.oecd.org)

people's work and life conditions as Japan.

What makes gender equality easier to achieve in Norway than in Japan is strongly related to the amount of hours that people work. In average Norwegians work only 37.5 hours per week and have highly restricted amount of overtime¹⁴³. Meanwhile, in Japan people work in average 47 hours per week and, due to less juridical regulations, often do excessive overtime. It is not unusual for Japanese to work 14 hours per day and the average daily amount of sleep is 6 hours¹⁴⁴. Norwegians normally work 7.5 hours per day and there is no "nomikai"¹⁴⁵ culture as in Japan. The balance of work and leisure time makes family and work possible to combine. Leisure time is seen as highly valuable by Norwegians. Many people prefer having more free-time than earning more money. There is a tendency to cut down on work among both women and men, especially workers with small children¹⁴⁶. In Norway workers have the rights to both flexible working hours and working less, therefore it is not a legal cause for dismissal. Furthermore, there is also a general acceptance among workers to cut down working hours, thus people do not have to worry about reprimands and boycotting from colleagues.

3.5 Sex-Life

In Japan, since 1998 the sales of condoms has dropped 20% and the usage of

¹⁴³ Likestillingscenteret; 2004 Minifacts about gender equality

¹⁴⁴ AERA, "かしく女の時代 (The Era of Continuing Women)", p16-21. 10.04.2004

¹⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, "nomikai" is meetings where workers drink together with their colleagues after working hours.

¹⁴⁶ The Gender Equality Ombud, Act of June 14th 2002

so called “love hotels¹⁴⁷” has also decreased with 30%¹⁴⁸. As stress and working hours have increased among workers, it has caused a rapid increase in couples who are sexless. The concept of sexless came into use in 2003 when the seriousness of sexual problems among married couples suddenly emerged into public awareness. This problem has been given great attention in the Japanese media, which adds to the already negative image of marriage life. There are several reasons for the development, but most people say that they do not have the time or energy to have sex. Many also blame their sexless-ness on being too occupied with childcare¹⁴⁹. Furthermore, couples with a good relation, but who are sexless are increasing rapidly. The problem of sexless has increased from 16% in 1997 to 32% in 2004. The sexless tendency is apparent in all age groups, even among workers in their 30’s. Men, who work more than 70 hours per week, often say that they do not even kiss or hug their wives¹⁵⁰.

“Sex-life of working women is also being influenced by hard working conditions, but not as severely as men. However, the anxiety of losing their

¹⁴⁷ “Love hotel” is accommodation commonly used even by married couples.

¹⁴⁸ AERA, “若者よセックスを嫌うな (Young Generation, Don’t Dislike Sex)”, p16-19. 2004.5.10.

¹⁴⁹ AERA, “セックスレス妻たちの逆襲 (The Revenge of Sexless Wives)”, p37-40. 2005.11.7.

¹⁵⁰ AERA, “仕事と Sex (Work and sex)”, p32-36. 2006.2.27, Yomiuri Weekly, “深刻セックスレスの夫婦胸中 (The Real Feeling of The Seriously sexless Couple)”, p10-19. 2005.6.19. The ministry of Welfare, Health and Labor’s report in 2004 about the falling birthrate, emphasized the increase of sexless among married couples as a major reason. In April 2004, it was made clear through a survey made by the ministry of welfare, health and labor and the Japanese family planning association, that the sexless rate among married couples is as high as 32%

job if they have children can cause women to fear having sex,” says Yuji Genda professor in social economics at Tokyo University.¹⁵¹

It used to be mainly a problem among women, but the new tendency is that it is dominantly the men who are sexually defecting¹⁵². There is a group of men, who even though they get aroused by other women, are not able to function with their own wives. They do not see them as romantic partners. Meanwhile, they often say that they still love their wives and do not want to divorce them. This is because the wives have changed and become less womanly. Besides, since the wives take care of all the house chores, they have become more like a mother-figure. This tendency among men is especially apparent in couples where the wives are housewives. *“The phenomenon is unique among Japanese men”*, comments Dr. Teruo Abe, at Abe Mental Clinic to Yomiuri Weekly¹⁵³. In contrast, women who do not want to have sex with their husbands, express that they do not love nor like them anymore. Among these women the divorce rate is fairly high¹⁵⁴.

“The relation between the couple changes from romantic love to love between blood related individuals” explains Dr. Abe. Many Japanese families sleep

¹⁵¹ AERA, “妻はいつから女でなくなるか (When does the Wife Stopping Being a Woman?)”, p28-32. 2005.2.7.

¹⁵² Yomiuri Weekly, “妻と夫のできない理由 (Why Husband and Wife can not Have a sex?)”, p10-19. 2004.10.31

¹⁵³ Yomiuri Weekly, “深刻セックスレス夫婦の胸中”, p12. 2005.6.19

¹⁵⁴ AERA, “セックスレスでも仲よし夫婦愛 (Sexless but Good Relations)”, p18-19. One may think that sexless married life is a big reason for getting a divorce, but sexless couples who have a good relation and do not think about divorcing are increasing. This article points out that the problem is when they want to have children or one the other are prone to infidelity. 2004.8.2.

together in the same room, a sleeping pattern called “kawa no ji”, meaning that the family members sleep next to each other like the three stroked Chinese character for river, “川”. Besides from this sleeping pattern, there are also people who make other arrangements. For instance, in a survey made by the magazine AERA, 16% of the subjects in their 30’s and 28% of the subjects in their 40’s answered that they sleep in separate bedrooms. This is often the case when the couples have small children and the women sleep together with them, or in couples where the husbands either leave early or arrive late from work. According to All Japan Bed Industry Association, since the 1990’s, the demand for twin-beds rather than double-beds have increased, and that the popularity of twin-beds is rising among young people especially. This development can be seen as related to the decreasing birth-rate and the increasing problem of sexless¹⁵⁵. Furthermore, in families where several generations live together in the same household, this seems to also have a negative effect on couple’s sex-life¹⁵⁶.

Couples who suddenly became sexless often report that this happened once they got married¹⁵⁷. In 90% of these cases, the problem is originated in the

¹⁵⁵ AERA, “夫婦の寝室 (*The Bedroom of Married Couples*)”, p72-73. 2005.10.31.

¹⁵⁶ AERA, “セクスレス夫の本音 (*The Real Thoughts of Sexless Husbands*)”, p34-38. Men who do not feel like having sex with their wives give several reasons for this, but often they say that it happened after the couple had children and that they worry that the children will hear them or just the fact that the children are in the same house make them lose the urge to have sex. Men who live in several generation households also report that living together with their parents or parents in law have negative impact on their sexual tension. 2005.10.31.

¹⁵⁷ AERA, “妻だけ否定 “Narita ED”夫達 (*Only Denail of the Wife Narita ED Husbands*)”, p42-44. 2005.07.04

men. This phenomenon is increasing and has come to be called “Narita ED” syndrome. This indicates men who get problems with their erection already during the honeymoon or after arriving at Narita airport¹⁵⁸ back from the honeymoon. The director of Japan’s Family Planning Association’s Clinic Dr. Kunio Kitamura points out that the tendency of sexless among newly wedded couples is rising. *“The problem of sexless is even more apparent among young couples. The problem of sexless is partly created by high stress level and excessive fatigue which can be seen among young workers”*, he explains¹⁵⁹. However, the lack of stamina is not the only reason for sexless-ness. Couples with this problem often have a regular and healthy sex-life before getting married, but after they get married the frequency suddenly decreases. Kazuko Kaneko, a psychologist at the Japan’s Red Cross Medical Clinic, explains that once couples start living together, the pressure to make use of time to have sex which they had when dating, is released and causes a fall in interest among the men. Furthermore, recently men often express that they do not like that women are actively taking initiative to having sex, and that they lose interest when their wives take the lead. *“There is even an increase in men who come to the Japan’s Red Cross Medical Clinic wondering why they have to have sex with their wives. They*

¹⁵⁸ Narita airport is Tokyo’s international airport and the largest airport in Japan.

¹⁵⁹ Nikkei Woman, “働く女性 400 人のセックス白書(*The White Paper of 400 Working Women*)”, p120-141. This article analyses the conditions of young women’s sex-life through distributing a survey to 400 working women. The general answer from these women is that they are not satisfied and that they want to have a better sex-life, but that they are too tired and sleepy and can not seem to find time to realize their wishes. 2005 March, Nikkeishinbunhonsha.

utter that they love their wives and ask if that is not enough”, Dr. Kaneko says to the magazine AERA¹⁶⁰

In Norway, sex is a popular discussion topic and the Norwegian society is very liberal related to sex¹⁶¹. The media focus greatly on sex, but from a more positively angle. Instead of only writing about problems, there are often give advice of how to obtain a more healthy and enjoyable sex-life. Besides, the problem of sexless is not as serious in Norway as in Japan¹⁶². The condom producing company Durex has over the last 9 years made a global survey on people’s sexual habits. The survey reports that Japanese people have the least frequent sexual activity of all of the 41 countries that have been surveyed. The age group 35 to 44 years old, which is the most active segment in other countries, is less active in Japan. On the question of content, 44% of the Norwegians say that they are satisfied, while only 24% of the Japanese answers the same. In other questions related to sexual activity, there is a

¹⁶⁰ AERA, “妻だけ否定 “Narita ED”夫達”, p44. 2005.07.04

¹⁶¹ Dagbladet.no (<http://www.dagbladet.no>); Norwegians have the most “one-night stands” in the world according to Durex international research on sexual behavior. 70% answers that they have had one-night stands; this is 26% more than the global average and 37% more than in Japan. Bente Træen, a professor at Oslo university comments to the newspaper Dagbladet that the present liberal views on sex is because Norway was christened quite late and thus religion has not had such a great influence on Norwegian people’s lives.

¹⁶² Durex Internatinal (<http://www.durex.com/cm/gss2005Content.asp.int>) 2005 Global Sex Survey; the biggest international survey on sexual habits and the research is sampled from 41 countries with 317.000 participants. The highest figures are from Greece with having sex 138 times per year, and the international average is 103 times per year. In this ranking Norway is average with 98 times while Japan is the lowest of all the countries with 45 times per year.

great gap between the Japanese and the Norwegian responses, which reflects the different conditions even further. For instance, does 16% of the Japanese say that they do not have a high sex drive in comparison with 6% of the Norwegians, and 13% Japanese express that their sex-life is monotonous, while only 7% Norwegians answer the same. The Norwegians' responses reflect that they are more open and active regarding sex. They find it easier to communicate their needs and would like to have sex more often than Japanese.

3.5.1 Infidelity and Divorce

Many men and also increasingly more women report having affairs and sexual relations outside the marriage.¹⁶³ As mentioned earlier, the problem of sexless is dominantly among men. Therefore, there are many married women who are unsatisfied. The voices of women who are suffering because of sexless-ness have erupted and become widely depicted in the media. Some women end up seeking a divorce. However, divorce is still not socially accepted and also difficult for women to obtain as they are often financially dependant on their husbands. The side-effect of women's dissatisfaction can be seen in a rise in women's infidelity rate. A new tendency is that women, who are unfaithful, do not see this as adultery. They call it "kongai ren-ai", meaning romantic love outside the marriage¹⁶⁴. Many still think that

¹⁶³ AERA, "妻達の性生活白書 (The White Paper of Wives Sex Lives)", p33-38. 2004.11.8.,AERA, "セックスレス妻達の本音", p69-73. 2004.11.15.

¹⁶⁴ Yomiuri Weekly, "いつまでも女でいたい (Always Want to be a Woman)", p104-105. 2005.07.03.

infidelity is not right, but in a survey made for Yomiuri Weekly, 30% says that it can not be helped if one falls in love with someone else. The women who oppose to infidelity say that it is not good for the children if it leads to breaking up a home. There is less focus on the adultery as an immoral action towards the husband. Women, who are not against infidelity, express that love for their husbands is not sure to last forever. Further, if their husbands do not love them and give them any attention, they still want to be seen as women. In these circumstances, a romantic relationship outside the marriage is more thinkable than a divorce. In the Yomiuri Weekly's survey, 20% of the respondents admitted to having an affair and in many cases with a married man, meaning double "outside-marriage love" infidelity. In 40% of the cases, women who have been unfaithful say that they met their lover through work. This makes the working place the most frequent location for meeting a lover. Since women have become more vocationally active, they have gotten more chances to meet other men. It is women who work outside the home and who are economically independent, rather than housewives who respond that they would actively seek a lover or who already have one. In the past, the majority of women who got married became housewives and mothers, and the ideal marriage situation was being financially supported by a wealthy husband. The obedient wife was seen as the ideal female behaviour in a marriage, and women also seemed satisfied with these circumstances, at least on the surface. However, Japanese women of 40 years and younger, who have received a gender equal education and are more professionally active than older generations of women, have a stronger wish

and request to be evaluated by their own vocational achievements. These women's active lifestyles generate higher expectations to marriage. This is reflected in the expressions of married women who want to continue to feel like women and have feelings of romance, and thus take on lovers¹⁶⁵.

Many women say that their husbands do not help out with house chores and childcare and that they are hardly at home. The average time that they talk to their husbands each day is less than thirty minutes and many say that their husbands do not understand them. When it comes to infidelity by the husbands, 80% says that they would think of a divorce, but more than half of the respondents still say that they would probably forgive them and that divorce would be too difficult to achieve¹⁶⁶.

In Norway, marriage is strongly bound to romance and feelings of love. Therefore, many people think that there are no reasons for staying together

¹⁶⁵ Yomiuri Weekly, "妻達の婚外恋愛時代 (*The Era of the Wives Outside Marriage Love*)", p10-19. Mayumi Futamatsu the director of "夫婦中と性の相談所 (Couple's Sex Life Consulting)" a webpage where people can ask for advice (<http://suzune.net/>) says that the new tendency is that women who ask for advice are no longer just women who are open about sex, but also ordinary women. She explains the increase in infidelity among women to be connected to enlargement of accessibility for women to meet men and also to hide their infidelity through the popularization of cellular phones and the internet. She also emphasizes that women who are unfaithful express less feelings of guilt than the men and that they justify their actions with saying that it is not infidelity, but an extramarital romance and that they really love their lovers. It used to be normal that people who were having affairs wish to remarry with their lovers. This is changing and among the women who have lovers only 32, 9% express that they want to divorce. This is because there is a strong tendency among women to want to protect the family structure as well as having a lover on the side argues Mayumi Futamatsu. 2004.9.12.

¹⁶⁶ AERA, "夫には恋はできない (*Can not Feel Romance for the Husband*)", p28-33. 2005.2.21

if a couple does not love each other. Further, sex is also seen as very important and natural part of marriage. Thus, Norwegians would not as easily accept a sexless marriage. However, the strong consciousness of sex can explain, for instance, why Norway has a high infidelity rate¹⁶⁷. According to Durex's international survey on sex, there is 41% infidelity¹⁶⁸ in Norway, compared with 26% in Japan. However, in spite of that the infidelity rate is high adultery is normally not tolerated among people¹⁶⁹. This can explain why the divorce rate is also high¹⁷⁰. Divorce is less stigmatized and it is also easier for Norwegian women to get a divorce since they are more economically independent. Thus, if women are unsatisfied in a marriage or cheated on by their husbands, it is rather plausible that this would lead to divorce. In Norway, in most cases it is the women who initiate getting a divorce.

Divorce has been highly socially unaccepted in Japan and people are still

¹⁶⁷ Durex International(<http://www.durex.com/cm/gss2005Content.asp.int>) 2005 Global Sex Survey; the biggest international survey on sexual habits and the research is sampled from 41 countries with 317.000 participants. According to this survey Norway has one of the highest rates of infidelity; 41% while Japan has 26%.

¹⁶⁸ This figure may seem too high and actually be a bit higher than the reality. Nonetheless, it gives an indication of that infidelity is not a minor phenomenon.

¹⁶⁹ Dagbladet.no, (<http://www.dagbladet.no>); Frode Thuen, professor in psychology believes that 70% of long-term relationships are victimized by infidelity. This does not mean that infidelity is highly accepted, but that infidelity often happens when the relationship has gone bad and people have already started looking for a new partner. When people feel that the relationship is not to be saved, because of a fear of ending up alone, they look for a new partner before ending the

¹⁷⁰ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics 2005; the divorce rate has continually risen and on the base of the prognosis over the last decade, it is estimated to reach 46%.

being stigmatized by being divorced. They are called “batsu ichi”, meaning “one cross out”. Especially for women it is difficult finding a new partner as divorced and their social status in itself can be the sole cause for being rejected by a partner. One unmarried Japanese woman among the interviewed subjects in my fieldwork, who had been married before, explained that she had had three serious relationships after her divorce. However, every time she told her boyfriends about her divorce, they all rejected her, saying that she was not “wife-material” since she was divorced. Even though divorce is negatively seen, the Japanese divorce rate has increased drastically over the last few years and had reached 25% in 2005¹⁷¹. There has been a rise particularly among young people and newly wedded couples. This phenomenon is called “Narita rikon”, which signifies couples who divorce shortly after getting married. As reflected in the expression “Narita”, which is the international airport in Tokyo and “rikon”, which means divorce, some couples even get divorced straight back from their honeymoon. This development can be explained by the fact that many Japanese couples spend too little time together before getting married¹⁷². This is first of all because it is not socially accepted to live together before getting married. Secondly, as Japanese in general are very busy, couples often only meet once a week, when going on dates and do not experience everyday life before getting married. Another group which is rising in the

¹⁷¹ Shimane University www.shimane-u.ac.jp: According to research made by a laboratory of regional statistics in Shimane university, the divorce rate is between 20-25%

¹⁷² AERA, “カップル宿命の育ち格差 (The Gaps in Couple’s Upbringing)”, p30-32. 1.23.2006

divorce statistics is middle-aged couples, so called “jukunen rikon”¹⁷³. This is particularly apparent in couples after the husband retires. The couples of this generation have in general not spent too much time together as the men often worked excessively while in labour. The wives have a high housewife-rate and often have sacrificed having a career for the family. Thus, when the man retires and suddenly spends much more time at home, but still do not help out more, the wife feels taken for granted and seek for a divorce.

The increasing divorce rate in Japan has damaged the image and belief in marriage even further and many unmarried people express that they are afraid of making the commitment. There can also be seen an increase in couples who make contracts when getting married¹⁷⁴. The content varies, but is often related to sharing of housework, sex, and infidelity. Infidelity is the most common issue and many couples agree on allowing checking of each other’s mobile phones. Some couples give a penalty in case of adultery, as for instance having to pay down the house loan alone. There are also people who have rules about sex, as for instance having to have sex the night before both have holidays, and after having a bath. Some decide that it is not allowed to gain more than 20 kilos. Others make detailed rules about ways of greeting each other, always having to say “good morning” and “good night” and kiss before parting.

¹⁷³ AERA, “熟年離婚前に二度勝ち婚 (Before Middle Age divorce A Second Winning Mariage)”, p57-59, 3.20 2006

¹⁷⁴ AERA, “夫婦愛ル-ルでリスク管理 (The Observation of Risk, Couple’s Love Rules)”, p36-38. 5.30.2005

In Norway, divorce has become very common. According to the development over the last few years, the divorce rate is estimated to be 46%¹⁷⁵. The most presented age group are people in their 30's to 40's, or couples who have been married 5-10 years. There is an increase in people who get divorced shortly after getting married. Meanwhile, this is often because the couples have been living together for a long time first and chose to get married when the situation is going bad, thinking that this will save the relationship. The divorce rate among middle-aged couples, however, is lower and more stable. In spite of the high divorce rate, people still believe in marriage and the new tendency is that people increasingly chose marriage instead of cohabitation.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics; Befolkningsstatistikk. Ekteskap og skilsmisser, 2005

¹⁷⁶ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistics, Anders Barstad, Samfunnsspeilet nr.5, 2000; "Kjaerligheten, fremdeles levende"; Marriage is still the most common frame of a love relationship and people who chose marriage instead of cohabitation are increasing.

4. Methodology

Women behind the figures: A set of narrative interviews of women who give a voice to the women in Norway and Japan and their opinion of marriage and actual marriage life situation.

Field work

To be able to grasp the real life situation and opinion among women, I found it to be crucial to hear the real voices of women on the micro level as well as analyze figures on the macro level. Therefore, I choose a narrative interview technique to obtain this goal¹⁷⁷. This technique is using a set of questions as a basis when interviewing and also letting the subjects discuss and talk about related issues, to give their story as well as answering the questions. This is to gain a broader insight that comprises the nuances of individual differences of opinion as well as the influential factors behind their responses. *“Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself.. However is not only relevant for the study of people’s life events, the methods are equally appropriate for studies of social movements, political change, and macro-level phenomena. Because storytelling “promotes empathy across different social locations”¹⁷⁸..”Study of personal narrative is a form of case-centered research building on the tradition of sociology. The approach*

¹⁷⁷ Chatherine Kohler Riessman, “Analysis of personal narratives”. Boston University, 2000
A paper which is appearing in Handbook of interviewing, edited by J.F Gubrium and J.A Holstein, Sage Publications 2001.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*,p4

illuminates the intersection of biography, history, and society."¹⁷⁹ The "personal" experiences that participants represent in their narrative marriages, for example give a great deal of indications about social and historical processes, contemporary beliefs about gender relations and pressures on marriage at the juncture in modern societies.

In my fieldwork, I have interviewed a small group of Japanese and Norwegian women and through their answers have come to obtain a more vivid and elusive picture of the state of things from women's perspective. I choose to interview women in their late 20's till beginning of their 40's. These women are in three different life situations and are therefore divided into 3 groups.

Group 1: Women, who are working, unmarried, and do not have children.

Group 2: Women who are working, married, but do not have children.

Group 3: Women, who are working, married, and have children.

In all, I interviewed 9 women from Norway and 9 from Japan, and have picked one representative of each group from both countries to be presented in the paper. In this chapter, I give an analysis of the interviews, while selected the subject's answers are presented in an appendix at the end.

In addition to the interviews, I have also discussed the same issues with many other women, both Japanese and Norwegian. It has been very interesting to observe how differently the Japanese and Norwegians women reacted to my questions. The Norwegian women's answers reflected a clear

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*,p5

homogeneous way of thinking. This is related to gender equality especially. They all automatically said that it is only natural for men and women to be fully equal. Their answers were prompt and without hesitation, taking it completely for granted. Meanwhile, among the Japanese women, the answers were more diverse. It was clear that some women demand gender equality and gave similar answers to the Norwegians. Some saw it as an ideal, but unrealistic, and some also expressed support for separated gender roles.

Further, in many of the cases, the Norwegian women found my questions very strange and meaningless. They could not imagine that there would be other answers than they gave me. In fact, in the interview sessions, the Norwegian subjects were puzzled by many of my questions and I had to explain to them why I asked these questions and that they actually reflected relevant issues for women in Japan.

The Japanese subjects, on the other hand, did not react to my questions and could relate to all of the issues that were touched. They also thought about it thoroughly before answering. The most controversial question was *“Do/did you want to work after you get/got married and have/had children?”*.

The Norwegian women all insisted on continuing to work. This was only natural to them and they could not even believe that Japanese women quit their job just because they got married, or even when having children. They were open to cutting down on the working load while the children are small, but becoming housewife was completely unthinkable and unacceptable to all of them.

While the Norwegian subjects responded spontaneously, the Japanese subjects took time to think before they answered. Furthermore their responses also differed from *“off course I want to work”* to a clear *“no”*, dismissing the thought of working while raising children completely. In most cases where the women expressed that they wanted to work, they added that it was too difficult to combine both having a career and a family and that they would most probably have to cut down on their job after all. Meanwhile, the women who wanted to become housewives said that they would have to work at least part-time because of economically circumstances.

Another question which divided the two nations was; *“Should men’s participation at home and the sharing of household chores and childcare be equal?”*. The Norwegian women all expressed that everything should be equally shared. They would simply not accept if their partners did not meet these expectations. They also insisted on a more equal sharing of the childcare-leave and emphasized that fathers are equally important to the children. While the Norwegian answers were unison, the Japanese showed more variety. Some women expressed that it should be equally shared and others insisted on that it was more natural for women to take care of children and household chores.

When I asked; *“What is the most important reason for getting married”*, both the Norwegian and the Japanese subjects’ answers were similar. However, while the Norwegian subjects gave love as the reason, the Japanese always explained that one also had to think of practical circumstances insisting on the importance of making sure that marriage gave economical security. This

aspect was completely denied as a reason for getting married by the Norwegian women, who said that they would provide their financial security by themselves. They emphasized thoroughly that what they seek in a partner is love and companionship.

Therefore, on the questions "*When would you consider a divorce?*", they also gave different answers than the Japanese. The Norwegian subjects saw for instance divorce as a natural result if there was no more love left in the marriage. Furthermore, they would not stay in a sexless marriage because they saw sexual relations as a vital aspect of marriage, as it is an important expression of love. They expressed non-acceptance of infidelity, and said that they would not forgive this on any terms and automatically seek for a divorce. This was because an act of infidelity reflected that the partner did not love and respect them anymore and that they saw no reason for staying together. The Japanese subjects, on the other hand, said that even though they thought that infidelity was wrong, they would still reconsider the marriage first before deciding to take out a divorce. They expressed more willingness to forgive and stay in the marriage even if the relation was sexless and had turned more platonic. This is because marriage does not only involve the married couple, but also includes children and the respective families. "Keeping together is important especially in consideration to the children," they explained. In relation to this, the Norwegian women expressed "it is actually better for the children to get divorced when the parents are not able to love each other and are not satisfied in the situation."

Comparing the answers of the interview subjects, it becomes apparent that

there is a clear national division in the responses. The Norwegian women express a homogeneous way of thinking which is strongly influenced by gender equality values. While the Japanese women's answers vary more, which reflect that there seem to be a change as well as preservation in the way of thinking among women in Japan. They do not as much take gender equality for granted, and some women still have traditionally rooted opinions.

However, even though the Japanese subjects express different ways of thinking, their responses also reflect that they are forced to live similar lives by the limitations in society. The women who would like to be housewives say that this is difficult to achieve because of economical conditions and that they would have to work part-time. While women who really want to work fulltime at the same time as raising a family will have difficulties to do so. The result is that both groups probably end up having to work part-time which is not well paid, gives fewer possibilities to develop a career, and a lower social status.

Even though the Japanese subjects in general gave a negative picture of marriage, they still supported the institution. The unmarried Japanese women expressed that they did not want to get married too late and that the ideal was to marry before turning 30 years old. The married women said that they wanted to stay married, but still express dissatisfaction in their life situation.

The Norwegian subjects' responses, on the other hand, were in general positive and optimistic towards marriage. The unmarried subjects expressed

that they wanted to get married, but that they are very relaxed and not in a hurry. The married women remarked that they sometimes feel pressured for time having difficulties of getting everything done. Nonetheless, they are still satisfied with their partners and their marriage life.

Analyzing the subjects' answers, it became obvious to me that the women from the two countries are highly influenced by the respective societal contexts. However, their opinions do not seem as deeply rooted in the different cultures as much as they are conditioned by differences in the factual conditions in the two societies.

5 .Theoretical Analysis

The issue of interest has been presented through a description of historical backgrounds, the present situations, and an analysis of interviews of women from both Japan and Norway. All through the previous four chapters, the great differences between the circumstances in the two countries has been brought into attention. To get a further understanding of the aspects which cause the diverging developments and to give the issue a theoretical framework, I apply the theories of reflexivity and risk by Ulrich Beck to analyze the two country's social contexts related to marriage.

Therefore, in this chapter, some sociological theories and key concepts are presented for the conclusive analysis given in the following chapter.

5.1 Transition to a New Modernity

What happens when societies are influenced by an external global culture, how does this affect the cultural and societal patterns? The society in the modern era has gone through excessive and rapid changes in a continuing and self-inducing process. In the analysis, I make use of Ulrich Beck's theories of reflexivity in explaining the processes of modernization and individualization of society. Further, in explaining the diverging developments in the Japanese and Norwegian society, I also focus on Beck's discourse on risk as an essential factor in shaping the process of modernity.

The women's liberation can be seen as one of the most revolutionary and pervasive transforming elements in the modern global culture. When men

and women are given the same rights, equal societal positions, and life possibilities, this releases people from strictly traditional bounded lifestyle patterns. The new freedom naturally opens up for a diversity which affects and perforates all layers of a society. In this paper, I am interested in the effect that these changes have had on marriage as an institution and women's life situations. How the present culture in a society reacts and adapts to the importation of new global developments is essential in achieving a healthy and successful transition. The key questions are "why Japan and Norway developed so differently" and "why the social problems that are emerging in Japan today are not as visible in Norway". The modern era has an image of being reuniting and creating a more homogenous global culture. However, as it can be seen from the comparison of the Japanese and Norwegian societies, the modernization does not influence all societies equally. *"To operate in a transformed political culture which is at the time localized, the world of the new post-traditional communitarians, engaged in a seemingly ecumenical though hopefully pluralist, process of globalization a new critical theory is needed"*¹⁸⁰.

5.1.1 Processes of Reflexivity

Ulrich Beck argues that, in order for societies to really evolve, modernization must be reflexive. This reflexivity penetrates all spheres of social life and affects people even on the micro level, thus forcing the individual to act

¹⁸⁰ Ulrich Beck, *"Risk Society, towards a new modernity"*, p9 Sage Publications, London 1992

reflexively¹⁸¹. *“Modernization involves not just structural change, but a changing relationship between social structures and social agents. When modernization reaches a certain level agents tend to become more individualized as the result of decreasing constraints by social structures. In effect structural change forces social actors to become progressively freer from structure. And for modernization to advance successfully, these agents must release themselves from structural constraints and actively shape the modernization process”*.¹⁸² The result of individualization opens up for a new freedom. People are forced to make decisions about life cycles and choices which used to be fixed and definite. In the past, marriage was seen as a sure thing in life, but people are now faced with having to decide whether to get married or not, whom to get married with, and also whether to have children or not.

Beck describes the process of modernity in 3 stages of social change; 1) Pre-modernity,

2) Simple modernity, and 3) Reflexive modernity. Modernity is seen as emerging along with the industrial society. However, there is also a contradiction of modernity in its structures, argues Beck. *“Industrial society never is and never was possible only as industrial society, but always as half industrial, half feudal society, whose feudal side is not a relic of tradition, but the product and foundation of industrial society”*.¹⁸³ Industrial society has been promoting traditional family morality and separated gender fates,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p2

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p3

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p90

underlines Beck. In Japan, the traditional family morality and the gender separation tendencies were introduced after the Second World War and became popularized first during the high economical growth era from 1955 to 1975. On the other hand, in Norway and most European countries, these structures were introduced much earlier, in the middle of the 19th century and reached its peak in the middle of the 20th century. Thus the modernization process and individualization has achieved far deeper changes. The gender separating tradition is declining and is today becoming marginalized in the western world¹⁸⁴. *“In spite of the occurring changes towards freedom of the individual the critical force in this process are the systematic constraints represented in the cultural heritage, unreflective idioms and society’s forms of patronage and institutional orientation”*. Through the theory of reflexive modernism, he explains the mechanism of the tension between “human indeterminacy” and the openness to “change of coherent identity”, at the same time as having the tendency to objectify and naturalize the institutional and cultural products.¹⁸⁵

Anthony Giddens has also given a similar discourse of the reflexivity of modernity which is bound to the evaluation of risk and trust, and how these factors reflexively affects people’s shaping of a self-identity in the late modernity¹⁸⁶. However, the concept of Giddens’s “reflexive modernity” is largely bound up to the debates on a very general and abstract social

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 2

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*,p4/6

¹⁸⁶ Anthony Giddens, *“Risiko og frihet”*, Fagbokforlaget Bergen 1992

theoretical level¹⁸⁷. In contradistinction, Ulrich Beck's theory is based on experiences on the micro level as a sociologist which he has analyzed and conceptualized into macro sociological theory of social change. Further, Giddens's theory, so called "double-hermeneutic" rejects structural functionalism and the notion of agency. While Beck, on the other hand, sees social change to be a learning process and emphasizes the role of rationality¹⁸⁸. The goal of this paper is to analyze the differences in the situation of people's lives in Japan and Norway, and to explain the reactions and behavior of individuals. Therefore, I found Beck's theories to be more applicable as the theoretical framework. His emphasis on the delicate balance between the contradiction of continuity and rupture within modernity, which is reflected in the antagonism between modernity and industrial society, and between industrial society and risk society, is particularly elucidating to the analysis. As looking at the two countries historical backgrounds and present conditions show a continuous inter-correlated and inter-changeable process of elements¹⁸⁹.

*"In relations to the processes of reflexivity it proceeds in a break within modernity which is freeing itself from the contours of the classical industrial society and forging the new form of industrial society, the risk society"*¹⁹⁰

The foundation of components of traditionalism integrated in the industrial society, the patterns of classes, the nuclear family, and professional work

¹⁸⁷ "Risk Society", p9

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p9

¹⁸⁹ See chapter 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*,p10

begin to crumble as the process of the reflexivity of modernization is emerging. In Japan, all through the post-Second World War period, in response to the changes in society, there has regularly been given alarms in the political sphere. Sending out propaganda, which indicated that the alternations of social structures was causing “crisis in the family” and eventually “the end of the family”¹⁹¹. In the West as well, in the 1960’s, the new social developments were predicted to destroy the existing social order and lead to the death of the family¹⁹². However, as radical as the changes may be they are not results of a crisis, but the success of modernization. *“Reflexive modernity does not mean less, but more modernity, a modernity radicalized against the paths and categories of the classical industrial setting”*, argues Beck.¹⁹³

As people become liberated from certain restrictions, they presume modes of living which is compatible with the industrial epoch. *“The shocks released by this sudden freedom constitute the side affects of “risk society” and differs in strength depending on the constitution and reaction of the environments”*¹⁹⁴. Meanwhile, the degree of freedom and contextual counter-reaction is an essential factor. The more structured and fixedly organized the society is, the fiercer is the resistance to change, explains Beck. A society, which is strongly founded on a system of coordinating factors, in which life and reflections of life are deeply rooted in the industrial modernity, is indisposed toward

¹⁹¹ “21 世紀家族へ”,p131-134

¹⁹² “På spor av den nye tid”, p14

¹⁹³ “Risk Society”,p11

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*p15

change. However, in contexts which are less strictly organized, reflexive modernity meets less resistance and the axes of gender, family, and occupation begins to tremble and new opportunities and hazards also come into existence.

Looking at Beck's descriptions of the conditions for successful transition of change, it becomes clear that, the Japanese society with its collectivism, fixed structures, and pervading conservatism is systematically structured to resist change. Thus, Japan fits with Beck's characteristics of the change-resistant type of society and these conditions reflects that the society only have reached the stage of simple modernity. Meanwhile, the Norwegian society, which has a strong focus on individuality, freedom, and liberalism, the reflexive processes are not hindered, but change is actively sought for the good of the individual. Thus, it reflects the type of society which is conditioned to change and these conditions reflect the level of reflexive modernity.

5.1.2 Risk

Together with the reflexive modernity, a new civilization which Beck calls the "risk society" emerges. The basic difference from the industrial society is that while it distributes goods, the "risk society" distributes dangers. Further, meanwhile industrial society is structured through social classes, risk society is individualized. The modern society, with its new scientific and industrial developments creates risks and hazards. *"Their spatial consequences are equally not amenable to limitation, as they cross national*

*borders”...“Risks are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and its globalization of doubt”.*¹⁹⁵ Through the liberalization of women’s lives, this opens up for a greater freedom of life choices which causes a more ambiguous and unpredictable social order. *“At the same time risks, risk perception and risk management in all sectors of society becomes a new source of conflict and social formation”*¹⁹⁶. In relation to marriage, the risk factor that it represents influences people’s choice of life course, whether to take the chance to get married or not.

Reflexively creating one’s own life may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced by modernization itself, argues Beck. Further, risk, strengthens the gap between classes as long as wealth, income, power or education can give safety from risks. The risk of becoming unemployed is for instance considerably higher for people with low education. The reflexive reaction to the new set of risks can result in two directions of action. Either it causes further autonomy or a return to the collective traditional system, explains Beck. In his theory he presents the welfare state in a society as a central variable for the success of reflexive modernity processes. *” In the welfare states of the west reflexive modernization dissolves the traditional parameters of industrial society”.*¹⁹⁷ The difference in welfare systems can therefore be seen as a central explanatory factor of the diverging developments in Japan and Norway.

Norway was ranked as the world’s best country to live in by the UN in 2005,

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*,p21

¹⁹⁶ “Risk Society”,p100

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*,p87

a position which has been standing over the last five years¹⁹⁸. This evaluation is closely related to the state of the welfare system. Due to that the system is highly developed, there is very little gap between rich and poor. Education in the public institutions are almost for free even on university level, and there is also established a scholarship and student-loan system for students. This has made education available to everyone, thus giving people from all social backgrounds the same possibilities. Furthermore, with the welfare system as a safety-net for the population, the feeling of risk is not as prevailing. For instance, as mentioned earlier there is very low unemployment and there is also given fairly high compensation for the loss of salary¹⁹⁹. In many aspects in life the welfare state is supporting people, such as extra funding to families with smaller children, inexpensive medical care, and public insurance for elderly.

Meanwhile, in Japan, the elements of insecurity and risk have been intensified by an unstable economy, insufficient welfare system, and lack of supportive structures. Since the state is not providing essential needs in people's lives, economy becomes an essential factor. For instance, is medical care expensive, making people dependant on having additional health insurances. Elementary schooling is provided by public institutions, but though these are for free, there is social pressure towards choosing private schools which are expensive. The competition of getting into the right

¹⁹⁸UN report on welfare 2005; Norway has been ranked as the best country to live in over the last five years, and also as the country in the world with highest gender equality and gender empowerment.

¹⁹⁹ See chapter 3.4.3

universities is fierce and has also lead to a development of “juku” meaning cram schools. Such after-school services exist even for small children, which has increased the expenses of bringing up children even further. Universities, even public ones are expensive and scholarships are not common.

As described earlier in chapter 3, economic trends have a correlating influence on the situation of marriage. When the economical growth was high in Japan, the marriage rate was high and people got married at an early age. However, when the Japanese economy was struck by a crisis in the late 1980's both the rate and the average marriage age rose. Money becomes a very crucial factor in people's choices at hand. It decides whether people can get an education or not. Furthermore, a highly relevant topic in Japan today is the care for elderly. The older segment of the population is increasing as the birthrate continues to fall. Taking care of the elderly used to be seen as the family's responsibility, meaning the women. However, as society becomes more and more urbanized, people often live far from their parents. The lack in institutional establishment makes society dependant on women's support, and thus women are continuously prompt to become caretakers. Therefore, as women get married later, single women with parents who are in the need of, or will need their care in the near future is increasing. This element can become an obstacle from getting married, as women worry about being able to both taking care of their parents as well as their own families²⁰⁰. Worrying about having the money and time for

²⁰⁰ AERA, “育児と介護の同時負担 (The Simultaneous Burden of Childcare and Elderly care)”, p36-38. 08.09.2004

marriage and children has caused people to become increasingly more hesitant about getting married.

The sense of risk in society cause women seek to secure themselves. Even though increasingly many women work and urge to become independent and obtain security on their own, there is also a growing tendency among women to long for the traditional life of the industrial society. Seeking security from marriage, women thus enhance the maintenance of separated gender roles²⁰¹. Further, in relations to marriage, or rather to say the end of marriage, divorce, changes have put women's security further at risk. The new divorce law forces women to manage economically by themselves. Therefore, if women who get divorced were housewives or only worked part-time and were financially dependant on their husbands during marriage-life, as many women are in Japan, divorce will mean a big economical crisis in their lives. *“Individual fate is increasingly determined in a new way by economic trends and by historical necessity for example by an economical crisis or boom, restricted admission to university and to the professions and the size of age*

²⁰¹ Decrease in women who work and increase in women who want to marry economically well and become housewives. The unemployment rate in Japan was kept very low and stable for a long time all during the high economic growth era, but started to rise as the economy hit a depression in the end of the 1980's. The unemployment rate was 2, 6 in 1985, ten years later in 1995 it had rose to 3, 2. In the beginning of the 21 century there was a lot of cut back in the labour market and in 2002 the unemployment rate reached a peak of 5,4. Statistics Bureau; Ministry of International Affairs and Communication, January 31. 2006. The economy has improved some over the last tree, four years and the employment rate has decreased some to 4,4 in 2005. However the anxious atmosphere of restoration is still very high. See chapter 3.4.3.

cohorts etc.."²⁰². The tendency to low economic status among women makes them in many cases trapped, and forced to stay in a marriage even though they are not satisfied. This inferiority of women has also brought through a phenomenon called "kateinai rikon", which means "divorce inside the home". This arrangement emerged in the 1980's when the economy collapsed and many people could not afford to establish a new separate household after getting a divorce. Even though people were divorced on paper they kept on living together in the same house²⁰³.

Since, it is becoming increasingly clearer that marriage no longer can be guaranteed for life, as the divorce rate is rising getting married becomes a risky choice²⁰⁴. "*Recent data show that it is no longer social status or lack of education, but divorce which is the trap-door through which women fall into the "new-poverty"*".²⁰⁵ In Norway, as women work and earn almost as much as men, they are far safer in their life situations. Further, the welfare system gives financial support for people who raise families, which makes it possible for even single parents to combine family and work. With these conditions,

²⁰² *Ibid*,p101

²⁰³ Merry Isaacs White, "*Perfectly Japanese*", p

²⁰⁴ Unemployment rate in 2005 was 1.780.000 for men and 1.160.000 for women.

The unemployment rate in Japan has large hidden figures since there is a high amount of women who have status as housewives. These women do not work outside the home, but they are still not registered as unemployed. However if they get a divorce suddenly both their civil, occupational, and economical status will change. Therefore the unemployment among women strictly seen from its numerical figures seem to be lower than that of men, but their situation is far more unsecured if their marriage breaks up as their previous occupational is unregistered and they will not be entitled to financial support. Statistics Bureau; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, January 31. 2006.

²⁰⁵ "*Risk Society*",p89

divorce will not cause the same level of crisis, which makes marriage a less dicey choice to Norwegian women²⁰⁶.

5.1.3 Transition of Civilization Structure; towards Individualization

In the past, both in the feudal as well as the preliminary industrial society, the affiliation was dictated along with one's class fate. "*One was born into one fixed life form from youth to old age*"²⁰⁷, explains Beck. Both big and small decisions were constraint up to one's class. What people ate, how and whom they lived with, what kind of work they did, and whom they were friends with, all aspects were destined by class. In the modern society, on the other hand, social transformation has set people free from class, stratification, family, and the gender status of men and women, which were fixed social forms of the industrial society. "*Individualization forms and conditions an existence which compels people to make themselves the center of their planning and conduct of life for the sake of their own survival*", argues Beck. People have to chose and change their own social identity and take the risk of their choices. Opening up for freedom of choice, individualization creates a variation and differentiation of lifestyles.

This opposes the thinking behind the traditional group categorization of society and pushes forward change. "*Results of shifts in the standard of*

²⁰⁶ In Norway as I have explained earlier the working rate of women is almost as high as the men and there is only a 16% gap between men and women's salaries in comparison to a 40% gap in Japan. Norwegian women continue to work even after having children and are more or less economically independent in a marriage.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p52

living, subculture and class identities have dissipated. Class distinctions based on status have lost their traditional support, and processes for the diversification and individualization of lifestyles have been set in motion”...“As a result the hierarchical model of social classes and stratification has increasingly been subverted”.²⁰⁸..“End of class society is not a big revolution it consists of a relentlessly progressing and collectively experienced progress of individualization and atomization in post-traditional societies”

However, paradoxically as the individualization precedes people become increasingly less self-sufficient, Beck points out. In this situation the welfare system represents a safety-net which lessens the risks in a society, and makes it possible for people to live more equally and freely with less class distinction ²⁰⁹ . Meanwhile, the lack of supporting structures causes anti-modernity within modernity, conserving both class and gender distinction. *“Today as there is a “detraditionalization” and weakening of structures in society people’s choices are seemingly freer, but decisions are still fundamentally dependant on external knowledge and contextual factors”.*²¹⁰

The reaction to changes induced by modernity is conditioned both by the

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*,p91/92

²⁰⁹ “ノルウェーの政治”. Norway has very little gap between people and the political ideology and agenda is to create a society without class distinctions. Justice, equality, and solidarity are highly respected values. For instance, is public schooling for free, even at university level, and there is a student scholarship/ loan system which makes it possible for anyone, from any type of family to obtain an education, p175

²¹⁰ “*Risk Society*”,p5

system as well as individuals in a society. The culture in Norway is to some extent individualistic orientated, but people are still conscious about the community and supporting the commonwealth by paying high taxes. The welfare system in return both supports the individual as well as the community, and avoids extreme inequalities and having to force women to give up their freedom. In Japan, the culture is traditionally more collectivistic oriented and expects and relies on people's voluntary inclination. Therefore, as people urge to live more individualistically and the development of the welfare system is not following the pace of the individualization process, the support system becomes insufficient and the inequalities increase. This is especially among women, as they are pressured to take responsibility for the care of the family.

“The modern society is strongly based on liberal economy and in a context of high material standard of living and an advanced social security system the people have been removed from class commitments and have to refer to themselves in planning their individual labor market biographies”²¹¹. Beck argues that entry into the labor market dissolves bindings anchored in the social structures. However, the mobility of individuals again, depends on the conditions of the welfare system as well as the labor market. In this relation, women are less mobile because of prevailing sexual discriminating structures.

Dissolving of class structures and increasing urbanization are central consequence of individualization which causes insecurity and risk. The

²¹¹ *Ibid*,p88

separation of the individual from family and neighbors, which has traditionally been people's support system. For instance when living apart from one's parents, this takes away important support in raising children. This often forces Japanese women to give up their careers or having a family. Individualization becomes a risk when people are solely dependant on their own fate in the labor market. Unemployment is a threat as people have become totally dependant on wages and consumption in all spheres of life. As mentioned earlier, money is a vital factor in almost all spheres of Japanese people's lives. It is a variable which decides whether people can get married or not, can afford to have children, give their children an education, and provide care for parents when they get old.

*“The spiral of individualization” is penetrating the whole society and occurs inside the family, the labor market, and the education system. Families become the scene of a continuous juggling of diverging multiple ambitions among occupational necessities, educational constraints, parental duties, and the monotony of housework. The type of negotiated family comes into being in which individuals of both genders enter into a more or less regulated exchange of emotional comfort, which is always cancelable*²¹². As long as the gender roles are separated and women keep themselves to the spheres of the home, men can live married life as it suits them. However, as women also seek to obtain a role outside the home, the process of individualization forces a structural change in how marriage life is being organized²¹³.

²¹² *“Risk Society”,p88*

²¹³ I will look further into the dilemma of the sexes in chapter 5.1.4 “The battle of the sexes”.

Beck testifies in “Risk Society”, that he personally has empirically verified through qualitative interviews the increase in individualism in society. In the interview sessions that I conducted as well, the subjects clearly expressed wishes for a life of their own and individual freedom. Nonetheless, this notion was far stronger and persistent among the Norwegian women than the Japanese. As mentioned in chapter four, the Norwegian women took it for granted that they would continue to work even after they got married. While, the Japanese women expressed a wish to work, but still expected that they eventually would have to change their lives²¹⁴.

In the course of individualization, expectations are aroused in the form of desire for a “life of one’s own”. This is in concerns of material, temporal, and spatial terms, and in structuring social relationships. However, these expectations face social and political resistance as long as the context is not ready for these changes. Beck’s focus on the importance of individual decisions may be true to a certain extent, but as long as there are class differences and gaps between the sexes, the individual’s decision is restricted by the conditions of reality. For instance, the shorter the education women have the earlier they are prone to get married²¹⁵. In Japan, the choice of education is still depending on class, based on economic power as well as life choice encouragement from the surroundings. In Norway, the same correlation between education and marital age can be seen. However, as the welfare system guarantees all people the privilege of getting an education,

²¹⁴ See; Responses from the interviews in the appendix.

²¹⁵ Chikako, Ogura “結婚の条件 (*The condition of Marriage*)”,p34, Asahi shinbunsha, 2003

the economical factor is not as much of a hindrance as the influences in people's surroundings. Furthermore, even though women get married young in Norway they still can make other choices in life, as the welfare system makes it possible to study and work at the same time as raising children.

Japanese women often have to make the choice of either having a family or a career. Women, who do not want to accept the traditional aspects of marriage and rather choose having a career, are increasing. Thus the growing urge among women to have a life of their own is reflected in their postponement of marriage or rejection of the institution all together. In Japan there is great boom of "jibunrashiku ikiru", meaning "living a way which reflects oneself". This strong sense of self-realization has become so dominating among young people that it has lead to several alarming phenomenon, at least in the eyes of the Japanese politicians. The most apparent consequence is the fall in the birthrate, which is the lowest ever in Japanese history²¹⁶. In reaction to this, instead of appropriating the conditions to fit with women's new ways of living, the Japanese politicians have tried to force women to return to a more domestic life choice. Propagating that young people, especially women are selfish and should think more about the community and not just about themselves. As Norwegian women are able to both have a career and raise a family at the same time, Norway has one of the highest birth rates in Europe in spite of having the world's highest female occupational participation.

²¹⁶ The birth rate is 1.29 and is so low that it surpassed the death-rate in December 2005.

5.1.4 Education; the Escalating Effect of Meritocracy

*“The postindustrial society is often called the knowledge society. The development is described as dominated by globalization, communication-technology, knowledge and education as basis for competence, and has a completely different vocationally orientation than the industrial society. The knowledge and competence society has come to put strong emphasis on the individual and personal style Ideals of individuality and uniqueness have become the general characteristics of the postindustrial society”*²¹⁷.

Through the restructuring of the society from an agriculturally based society to the industrial society, the development of an obligatory education system has caused people to choose and plan their own educational life course, explains Beck. With the establishment of society as a “knowledge society”, where people’s education and experiences becomes a variable of social position, this opens up for a spiral of escalating competition. *“Competition rests upon the interchangeability of qualifications and compels people to advertise the individuality and uniqueness of their work and own accomplishments. The growing pressure of competition leads to individualization among equals. In communities where shared background still exists it is dissolved in the acid bath of competition. It causes the isolation of individuals within homogenous social groups”*. In a working environment, where the competition is set free without regulations and protection of the individual, in an “all against all” situation, it is thus

²¹⁷ "På spor av den nye tiden", p17

difficult to get support from one's colleagues. For instance, in Japan, even though there have been implemented laws which give people the rights to take childcare leave or extra time off when they have small children, because of the high competition among workers, the colleagues often create an ambiance of disapproval, making it hard to use the rights.

The knowledge society has a complete different makeup and structural systems than the prior industrial society. This new institutional structure changes people's lives in many ways. For instance will the increasing level of education lead to that education inflates and becomes less valuable. Inflation creates the need for more education, and people end up spending more time on education. This in effect causes a naturally elevation of when people get married and start a family, and this development becomes even further prolonged, when working life and family life has not been made compatible.

*"The person becomes the producer of his or her own labor situation and also of the social biography. As schooling increases in duration traditional orientations and ways of thinking and life cycles are recast and displaced by universalistic forms of learning and knowledge. Depending on its duration, content, education makes room for certain degree of self-discovery and reflection"*²¹⁸. Beck implies that there is a plausible correlation between people's length of education and choice of living. Thus, the shorter the education, the faster the women get married, and the more accepting they are of conservative gender roles. In Japan, women are still underrepresented in higher education and generally only go to colleges or take an

²¹⁸ *"Risk Society"*, p94

undergraduate level of education²¹⁹.

In Norway, on the other hand, women's educational level has even preceded men's, and today 56% of the students in the universities are women²²⁰. Since, Norwegian women have far higher educational level than Japanese women, their opportunity to reflect on their choices in life as well as to realize themselves is therefore also greater. *"The educated person incorporates reflexive knowledge of the conditions and prospects of modernity, and becomes an agent of reflexive modernism. Education is connected with selection and therefore requires the individual's expectations of upward mobility. Since mobility is only possible to pass through formal education succeeding in these institutions becomes crucial"*²²¹.

5.1.5 "Battle of the Sexes"

"The battle of the sexes." More and more frequently expressions in the media and among scholars are implying that there is a war between the sexes, that

²¹⁹ School Basic Survey; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, august 2005: In 2005 there were 1.740.158 male university students and 1.124.909 female university students. Women are still fewer than the men, but comparing with the data from 1985 the women's percentage has increased greatly (men 1.414.297/ women 434.401). They are still dominating the junior college education, but the figures are decreasing (women 333.175 in 1985 and 191.132 in 2005/ men 37.920 in 1985 and 28,225 in 2005).

²²⁰ KK, "The new women's occupations"; Women are gradually taking over the status occupations which used to be male dominated. Today almost 60% of the students in the faculty of law are women, in medicine they are at least half of the students, and in the veterinary studies as many as 90% of the 2004 graduates were women. 2005.08.24

²²¹ *"Risk Society"*,p94

their relations reflect a struggle against each other “²²² The consciousness of individual freedom and the independent in both genders has caused a conflict inside and outside the family Beck argues. *“The relations between the sexes have become “complexified” involving topics of sexuality, affection, marriage, parenthood, work, profession, inequalities, politics, and economics”...“Quarrels between the sexes, which occur as between individuals have also another dimension. What happens between men and women both outside and inside the family follows a general pattern”.* ²²³ The indivisible principles of modernity, individual freedom and equality has been ascribed by birth to only one gender and withheld from the other gender, argues Beck. In the process of reflexive modernization, as women become increasingly aware of this inequality, it causes conflicts on the micro level, within people’s marriages. *“In marital/extramartial relationships conflicts are initiated by the opening up of possibilities to choose”.* Before women obtained higher education and made advancement in society, they did not have a free choice of living and were more acceptant of their fate as housewives. However, as women achieve a higher education, as parents start to also invest in their daughters’ education, this opens up for a new understanding and expectations²²⁴.

“On one hand epochal changes have occurred especially in areas of sexuality, law, and education. However, on the other hand, on the whole, other than in sexuality these changes exist more in consciousness than on

²²² *Ibid*,103

²²³ *Ibid*, p89

²²⁴ “結婚の社会学”.p32

paper”...“Through more equal education opportunities and an increased awareness of their positions, young women have built up expectations of more equality and partnership in professional and family life. However they encounter contrary developments in the labor market and in male behavior... Men have practiced rhetoric of equality without matching their words with deeds”.²²⁵

The conflict between the sexes arises because there is a mixture of a new consciousness and old conditions which causes a mutual mismatch of the expectations of the sexes. If there is a gap between the individual's independent self-concept and what is being expected from one as a man or a woman, it has quite contradictory consequences. On one hand men and women are released from traditional ascribed roles in search of a life of their own, on the other hand people are still driven into bonding in search for happiness in a partnership. The conflicting essence in this situation is that at the same time as men and women have equal oppositions which cause conflicts of interests, they also are dependant on each other and actively seek the togetherness.

Professor Masahiro Yamada at Tokyo Gakugeidai University argues that the dilemma of mismatch is one of the main factors which cause the difficulties of getting married, which many people in Japan today are experiencing. Looking at the Norwegian conditions, however, it is apparent that the gap between the sexes is smaller and therefore provoking far less antagonism between the sexes.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 104

“With the equalization of prerequisites in education and law the position of men and women become more unequal, more conscious, and less legitimated”.

In Norway, women’s place in society as well as the gender equality awareness in general has been elevated through the active campaigning of the women’s liberation movement. Thus, the gap between the new consciousness and the present conditions has become diminished. Gender equality is so natural that many young women take it for granted and are not always aware of that discrimination actually does happen²²⁶. However as Norwegian women expect equality they are not willing to accept unfair conditions. This can for instance explain the high divorce rate in Norway²²⁷. In the labor market, Japanese women can achieve gender equality to a certain extent. Meanwhile, once they enter the institution of marriage, they are suddenly forced into unequal gender roles. This discrepancy in women’s pre-marriage life and life situation as married can be seen as an explanation in women’s postponement of marriage, argues Beck. *“Women’s protesting attitudes reflects the beginning of liberation from the feudal ascribed roles for the sexes”* ²²⁸...*“Consciousness has rushed ahead of conditions. The ascription of the gender characters is the basis of the industrial society and not some traditional relic that could easily be dispensed with”.*

It is not impossible to change the gender roles in a society, but it must be made radical actions and reforms, insists Beck. In Norway, the changes were

²²⁶ “ノルウェーの政治”.; Many young women take gender equality for granted, p176

²²⁷ Norwegian National Bureau of Statistical;

²²⁸ *“Risk Society”*,p104

achieved by an explosion of women in the political sphere, who thus were able to obtain radical change through their new power positions ²²⁹. Norwegian woman acknowledged, that they could not expect men to make the changes that they wanted, and that they had to become more political active themselves. Today, women have more than 40%²³⁰ of the seats in the assembly while the figure in Japan has only reached 9.2%²³¹.

“Wage labor presupposes housework, production mediated through the market presumes the forms and ascribed roles of the nuclear family. Industrial society is dependant upon the unequal positions of men and women” ²³² ...*“However; gender inequality contradicts the principles of modernity and therefore becomes problematic and conflicting in the continuity of reflexive modernization”*. In the process of modernization after the Second World War the advancement and the dissolution of industrial society coincide. The conflict between men and women today can be seen as a personalization of the contradictions of the industrial society that has destroyed the foundations of the sex’s ability to live together through its reflexive modernization and individualization. One can not turn back the clock on consciousness, therefore the only key in solving the contradictions is to restructure the society towards gender equality, concludes Beck.

“For instance diverging professional mobility of the spouses, division of

²²⁹ “男を消せ”, p92

²³⁰ Likestillingscenteret, Mini-facts on Gender Equality 2004; In the Norwegian diet women are represented by 36.6% and 46.2% in the local assembly.

²³¹ White paper on gender equality; Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet office May 2005. In the diet there were only 9.2 % women in 2005 and even less in the local assembly 7.9%

²³² “Risk Society”,p105

housework and childcare...In making decisions people become aware of the difficult and contradictory consequences and risks for men and women, and thus of the contrasts in their contradictions".²³³ In the gender separated marriage structure, which is still prevailing in Japan, women are economically dependant on a husband, while men have to use most of their time working to support their wife and children. Men, though they have the freedom to work and earn money, they do not have too much time to use it, or to be with their families. Often their earnings are handed over to their wives, who are the economical administrator in the home. Some men even have to ask their wives for allowance. Women, meanwhile, as they primarily become caretakers, they have to give up having a career and being independent. This way of arranging marriage life limits both women and men's freedom, and people who oppose to it are increasing.

In Norway, as both men and women in most couples work, women are in general economically independent, and men do not have to work as much as Japanese men. This gives freedom to both parts. The possibility to make decisions has a personal and an institutional side. *"Lack of institutional solutions aggravates conflicts in the private relationship...Conversely institutional provisions ease the private squabbles of the sexes"*. In this aspect the difference in the institutional conditions in Japan and Norway again become essential. The lack of daycare, flexible working hours, and the insufficient social protection are factors which causes the great gap in gender equality in Japan compared to Norway. *"Private and political strategies for*

²³³ *"Risk Society"*,p109

solutions must be seen as connected”.

“The private sphere is becoming reflexive and political, a struggle of reunifying work and life, and housework and paid labor”...“Men and women who want to lead economically independent existence can not accomplish this in the traditional role assignments of the nuclear family, nor in the institutional structures of professional work, social laws, schools etc.. Which presupposes precisely the traditional image of the nuclear family within its gender separated status foundation”²³⁴.

Whilst an attempt to practice liberation of men and women is being made within the old framework of nuclear family, this causes disappointment and personal guilt, Beck explains. Even though many men in Japan still are conservative and expect women to take care of the housework and the children there are still increasingly more men who want to be more cooperative²³⁵. However, since the structures and systems in the Japanese society are still shaped by the tradition of gender separation of work it is very difficult for men to change their behavior. Therefore, even though women in Japan today increasingly are advancing in society and pursue having careers they still are left with most of the housework. Childcare is also seen as a women’s job. Father’s interaction with their children is very limited. For instance, have only 40% of Japanese men ever changed their children’s diapers. Looking at the statistics it becomes clear that there is

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p109

²³⁵ “結婚の社会学”, p7; 60% of the men in Japan are positive to the separated labor roles of men and women. It is important to note that as much as 50% of the women also are supportive of this structure.

very little difference between the share of housework of working women and housewives. Thus working women end up doing double-shifts.²³⁶

In Norway, the housework is still not completely equally shared and women take out the major part of the childcare leave. However, men have the right as well as the obligation to take out the so called “father quota” leave. They are also more present and show more interest in their children’s lives. There is for instance an increase of men who fight for the custody of their children when having a divorce. Norwegian men are far more cooperative, which is a vital element in achieving an equal and stable partnership²³⁷.

²³⁶ Statistics Bureau; Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts, and Telecommunications, January 2003; In cases of single income households the men do in average 0, 07 hours of housekeeping and 0, 13 hours of childcare every day. In the double income households the men only use 0.02 hours more (0.09) on housekeeping and actually less on childcare than men in the single households (0.05).

²³⁷ Samfunnsspeilet nr.4-5 2002, Ragni Hege Kitterød; There is a decreasing difference between the sexes in the amount of time they use on housework/unpaid labor. However this is rather caused by reduction in the women’s share of housework than an increase by the men. The statistics is not separating the single and the double households as the double households represent the majority of the households. Statistics from year 2000; Men use in average 0, 51 hours on housekeeping and 0, 28 hours on childcare every day. The total amount of housework is 2, 41 for men and 3, 56 for women.

6. Conclusion

What made this research particularly interesting is that, the more I looked into the state of things, the more diverse and complicated it appeared. I became aware of historical facts about both countries which have been very eye-opening. In the case of Japan, “the housewife role” which I thought was a long tradition and deeply rooted cultural aspect, came to be disclosed as a fairly new concept. Meanwhile, Norway, in spite of that it is my mother country, I discovered facts about women’s positions in the past, which reflect that the gender equality taken for granted today, is more a product of modern times than I was aware of. In fact, as shown in the chapter 2, about historical background, the inequalities of the sexes were common characteristics in the Japanese and Norwegian societies not more than 40 years ago.

Japan, has an image of being a very homogeneous society, where people live similar lives, with the same chronological structure. However, search in the Japanese society’s historical background, has presented a more ambiguous picture. Diversity has become increasingly more apparent and can be seen even in the institution of marriage. Marriage used to be an inevitable aspect of life, especially for women. They were to get married within a certain age, with a man who could give them economical security, and take care of the home as housewives. The strong fixed presumption of how to live pressured people to chose accordingly. Thus this caused a sense of homogeneity as a larger segment of the population ended up living similar lives.

The tendency of unison social norms is prevailing. Meanwhile, the diversity which has been present underneath the surface is emerging with the current changes in society. Women are obtaining higher education and are able to pursue a career and to become economical independent. Therefore, they have been given more options in life. Accordingly, marriage becomes one choice out of many lifestyle possibilities. In the process of choosing, the image and actual state of things have a great impact on women's life choices. As long as marriage is not changing with women's wishes, it becomes unattractive and lose in the competition with more attractive lifestyles. Further, as described in the chapter 3, there are many contextual elements which are damaging people's perception of marriage. For instance, as the divorce rate is increasing, young people start having doubts about marriage as an institution.

In Norway, marriage has been seen as a free choice for some time, as gender equality and individuality has been the social ideology since the 1970's. Furthermore, different from Japan, the choices at hand are far less restricted and conditioned by the surroundings. Therefore, the reason why people choose not to get married is not only because they rather stay single, or are forced to choose between career and family, but people often choose to live in cohabitation without getting married.

Marriage is not what it used to be. It can no longer be seen as one synonymous institution. The meaning of marriage and its practical constellation varies from person to person. For instance, the reason why many young women do not get married is that they simply do not have to.

However, some women, especially younger women, still sees marriage as a pact that gives them security and status in society. What women think about marriage is strongly correlated with their educational level. Women with lower education have a lower average age for when they get married than highly educated women. This is both because a woman who takes higher education naturally reaches her marital age later in life, and because she also has much more optional life-course choices.²³⁸ Women's ideals are also greatly shaped by their surrounding. Some women are encouraged to have an education and to realize themselves, and others who have mothers who are housewives perceive this as an ideal. People can only choose within the frames of their surroundings. Thus, as Japanese women still have an inferior position, they are prone to think economically when choosing a partner.

Norwegian women, on the other hand, are independent and normally financially self-sufficient. This gives them the freedom of choosing partners solely based on romantic feelings. Further, as most young women today have mothers who are working, it is only natural for them to also work. The housewife role is no longer usual and women would rather be looked down on if they make this choice.

In the traditional constitution of marriage, which is still prevailing in Japan, women are forced to sacrifice their careers, while men have to give up their leisure time. This arrangement becomes increasingly unacceptable, as men and women become individualized and conscious about their life choices. Men are less willing to work excessively to support a family, and women do

²³⁸ “結婚の条件”, p32

not want to sacrifice their careers for the sake of marriage. Therefore, this causes people to postpone marriage, or not to get married at all. Today, the ideal age for getting married is 32.4 years old. The tendency to avoid marriage is mainly because Japanese women's point of view is changing. Young women today have had a gender equal education which has made them more conscious and also make them demand more equality in life. At work, unmarried female workers experience gender equality to a large extent. However, when they get married and have children, the circumstances changes completely. Comparing with other Western countries, Japan is old-fashioned and strange, as it is clinging on to the traditional arrangements, which only allow one form of lifestyle, in spite of that the society and people's lives have increasingly become diversified²³⁹. The awkwardness of marriage in Japan is being brought into focus by the increase in people who do not want to get married.

Today, as women have become more professionally active, they also expect men to help out and taking their share of household chores and childcare. It is apparent that women are becoming more modern in their way of thinking and living. However, even though women are more professionally active, they are still conservatively oriented, as they prefer men with high salary and continue to seek economical security from men.

Men, on the other hand, even though they are conservative as they prefer domestic oriented women. They also want women to work and earn money.

²³⁹ Newsweek Japan, “日本の結婚はおかしい (The Marriage in Japan is Strange)”,

p31-38. 6.16.2004

This is as long as they still take care of the home and do not have higher professional and economical status than the men. When men still prefer domestic women and do not change their ideals, they will have difficulties in finding a partner. Further, as the weak economy causes fewer Japanese men to have an economical power which matches the ideal of women, they are not being chosen by them either. The changes and conservative remnants, which can be seen both in men and women, are not on the same track and causes a mismatch. Thus, many unmarried women express that their ideal type of men does not exist or are already married²⁴⁰.

*“What generates and escalates this development is that human-beings are choosing creatures. In the modern society people are probably choosing more than ever before in history. With the establishment of the knowledge-society people is presented with a diverse context of multiplicity of choices that are in a constant generative state. However humans do not act and choose alone in a vacuum. They act within institutional frames. They are a part of a family, organizations and social network. They relate to norms and rules. Human-beings act largely according to what they mean is best for them.”*²⁴¹. Marriage is something that has to be correlated with other important aspects of life. This is the common mentality among women in Norway. They see family as important, but do also demand time for personal development. Modern women are increasingly reluctant to just being someone’s wife and mother and this is a tendency which seem to be here to stay. *“Collapses of*

²⁴⁰ “結婚の社会学”,p4

²⁴¹ "På spor av en ny tid",p10

*norms and stands in a society are generated by a series of factors, in a dynamic that is known as the "snowball-effect"*²⁴².

In Norway, having a profession is strongly linked to people's identities. The pressure towards realizing oneself and having goals and dreams seem to have turned into an obsession. This continuous urge of ambition can cause a contradictory dilemma in people's lives, as women still long for finding a partner and having a family. Even though there is a high level of gender equality in society, Norway has a very high divorce rate. This can be explained by that people's lives are getting increasingly more complex. There are more things to do, experience, and learn, thus also more difficult to make choices and prioritization. As people become increasingly more individualistic orientated, their choices are also affected by this development. In result, people expect and demand more from life and act according to what they see as best for themselves.

With an inclination of self-preservation, people's stands towards marriage and partnership are influenced by the evaluation merits and demerits. Marriage is a safer way of organizing a partnership, but cohabitation is freer as it is easier to get out of. With the rapid increase of divorce in the 1980's, marriage came to lose its importance, and more people choose cohabitation. However, recently marriage has had a revival, as marriages are more stable and also seen as more romantic. Besides, as divorce has become very common, people are less afraid of ending up in that situation. Further, the normalization of divorce has caused people to be less accepting of

²⁴² *"På sporet av en ny tid"*, p12

discrepancies between their own expectations and reality, thus caused an escalation in ended marriages.

Focusing on the youth illustrates that social change often follows generations. Young people without the strong anchor in the past as older generations are much more open to new trends. However, the history does not run straight. Change is not unambiguous. It is reflected in a series of developments that takes different directions and turns. Cultural development is often understood as consequences of other circumstances. The development of the status of marriage has taken several different turns only over a short period of time. After a time with reluctance to getting married among Japanese women in their 30's, there is a revival of a more traditional pro-marriage attitude among women in their early 20's. The younger women have watched the lifestyle of struggling lifestyle of unmarried women. Thus, staying single has come to appear as a less attractive choice. As mentioned above, marriage has also become more popular in Norway as it is perceived as more romantic. The state of marriage in Japan and Norway, as in other modern countries, is changing drastically. *"People's individual choices affect the social and cultural patterns. Choices made influence the premises for other choices and other people's choices"*²⁴³ Just a few years ago, one was seen as abnormal as a Japanese woman if one was not married at 25 years of age, and was pressured to get married by the surroundings. Over the last 5 years, women have increasingly chosen to prioritize their careers instead of marriage. This

²⁴³ På spor av en ny tid.p.15

trend has had such a sudden and overwhelming outbreak that it has altered the norms and perception of normal lifecycle-patterns. Now, more than 30% of women in their 30's are unmarried, and getting married in the early 20's has become to seen as abnormal.

The organization of the lifespan is a fundamental trait in a society. Life faces are partially conditioned by biology and partially by culture. The fact is that when one is young, old or middle aged, and what is expected in the different faces is only decided by nature to some extent. In the agricultural society as well as the previous industrial society, life was in general premised by external factors. In the post-industrial society, on the other hand, the lifespan has become increasingly more open. Life is not predetermined, but has to be planned and the ability to do so is an essential quality in the modern society. Elongation of education and other new factors in life naturally cause people to get married and settling down later. This again creates other ideas and concepts of the period of youth which influences the rest of the lifespan. It is obvious that the young-adult period has become expanded and many people in their 30's still see themselves as young²⁴⁴. Even though people have more leisure time than before, the free time has also gradually become filled with more obligations. The modern human being is very busy. Norwegian people, even though they live in advantageous circumstances in comparison with in Japan, still talk and complain about the problems of balancing family and work, the so called "tidsklemma" or "the time-squeeze".

²⁴⁴ Weekly Students' time, "Thirty is the new 20?", p7. May 2004

Values and social patterns can change quickly in a historical perspective, but changes in cultural ideals and conceptions, values and attitudes, marriage and family affairs are not easily altered. *“People do not only relate to relations within their own countries borders, but have contact across the globe which influences them and their social surrounding. Certain researchers talks about “ethnoscape”, the modern global and ethnic landscape”*²⁴⁵.

The technological development also creates structural possibilities for a special economical and social dynamic, which characterizes what we can call globalization. The global stream of money and information globalizes the working life as well as education. With increasing interaction across borders, this contact creates an inter-correlated stream of influences which also affects people’s social and cultural life. Thus governments can not longer only think domestically, but must also be aware of global influences. As Beck points out through his theory of reflexivity, it is not possible to uneducate the women and to take away their knowledge. Thus to be able to obtain a successful transition of change the reflex processes must not be hindered, but be enhanced and given secure frames by society.

In spite of cultural differences between Japan and Norway, the changes generated in the transition of generations and the urge to self-realization and the search for personal meaning is still common characteristics of the youth in both societies. Why the changes in society have been faster and more overwhelming in Norway than in Japan is an intricate and complex

²⁴⁵ *“På spor av den nye tid”, p32*

issue which is strongly related to the combination of difference of culture, political ideology, and contextual circumstances. An element which Beck avoids elucidating is the importance of a society's location. Beck, as a European sociologist, is influenced by the contextual factor that the European community represents. Japan is affected by the modernization process to a certain extent. However, as the country is an island country and also is situated in Asia, where the neighboring countries are even more conservative, this slows down the process. Meanwhile, even though Japan has been lacking pressure from the surrounding countries in the past, the women have caused a pressure from within.

Many young people say that there are many things that they want to do before getting married, that getting married marks the end of one's freedom. In Japan, marriage, or at least having children definitely causes limitations on life. Especially for women, since the society still see childcare as their responsibilities. Due to lack in childcare institutions, it is only natural that it is difficult to pursue goals and dreams. Therefore, women are forced to choose between family and career. The negative side effects can be seen in the apparent reluctance among women to get married and to have children. What is being sacrificed in the clash between the new and the old streams of values is no longer for women to have a career, but becoming mothers.

In Norway, gender equal is a highly valued element in society. Thus, it is only natural that women realize themselves professionally as well as men taking responsibility for their children. Through the establishment of

supportive structures in the welfare system, boundaries and limitations which marriage and family once represented have become diminished.

“Lifespan changes cause profound changes in the social and cultural structure which aggregates changes in other areas and represents a major force which drives the development further”²⁴⁶. The changes which can be seen in the modern societies are in general taking the same directions. As reflected in the interviews in my fieldwork the Japanese and Norwegian women’s ways of thinking and wishes in life are not all that different. Thus, the contrasting developments which can be seen in Japan and Norway are results of diverging responses to the changes by the respective societies. “Changes in demography and life-phase developments are not an ephemeral phenomenon, but represent changes in deep fundamental patterns. They are unavoidable and irreversible. The young women will not go back to staying at home and the housewife role, so the gender equality process will continue”²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁶ *“På spor av den nye tid”, p55*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid, p55*

Appendix

Group1.

: Women, who are working, unmarried, and do not have children.

Group2.

: Women who are working, married, but do not have children.

Group3.

: Women, who are working, married, and have children.

Group1. Norwegian women, single and working:

She is 31 years old, has a high university degree, and is an independent woman living by herself and working as a consultant in a highly competitive business. She is very ambitious and says that she has been working hard to achieve her job and sees it as very important to her.

When I ask her the question of marriage she says *"I have never been married and have not thought about it to much either."* However when I ask her if she wants to marry she admits that she actually does want to, but that the timing has not been right yet. She has been in two serious relationships where she even lived together with her boyfriends, but says that in both of the cases either one or the other was not ready to commit. They both wanted to enjoy the freedom and the variety of choices that unmarried-life gave them. *"This freedom does not include being romantically involved with other people off course, but marriage just seamed to be so final and that one could not act as freely in that situation"*. She admits that both she and her boyfriends

were afraid of committing. Besides it was convenient as it was and so marriage was just not a subject. Marriage was not discussed even when she was living with her boyfriends. Just moving in together seemed very natural and highly socially accepted and so she did not think too much about it she concludes.

However now with her past experiences she admits that she is not as afraid of committing. *“If I meet a new man who is suitable as a partner I want to marry him quite fast and do not want to go into the same situation just living together.”* she insists. To the question why it did not work out with the other men she says that the first man was too different from her and that they had difficulties with adjusting to each others life rhythms. They were also both too busy to make time for each other. With the last partner the problem was that they were too much alike and therefore after a while living together their relationship ended up being a routine. Furthermore they were also in a different phase in life, one studying and the other already working and therefore it was difficult to coordinate each others lives she concludes.

Even though she previously lived together with men without being married she expresses that she thinks that marriage is the ultimate choice. The reason why she has not yet gotten married is that she thinks it is a serious choice and that all the responsibility that follows with making this choice can be a bit overwhelming. Even so she now wants to marry because she thinks that one has to take the responsibility in a relationship. *“When you get*

married you have to promise to try to keep on living together with your partner for the rest of your life". There is no guarantee that it will last for sure, but one has to at least try to stay together. If you have children you should be married she insist. This is because being married gives a sense of safety for one self and the children. She sees marriage as a conscious choice.

Living together in a cohabitation relationship is a little bit more practical choice and easier to break out from as well. However she says that she thinks that it is important to try out living together before getting married because going on dates is not the same as living together she underlines. Couples who have not tried out living together may find it difficult to adjust to each others way of living.

She thinks that young people today are too focused on the individual and personal freedom and that they therefore may see marriage like a prison. *"Married or not the moral in the relationship is the same, one has to be faithful"* she insists. The only difference is that it is easier to get out of the relationship as unmarried and that one has fewer rights than married couples.

Her expectation in a marriage and to a marital partner is that he has made the same choice as her. Living together with out being married is less secure and she wants the security that marriage represents. *"I want to be proposed to, this is far more romantic than just ending up living together"*. In her previous relationships she says that she was missing the romantic atmosphere that marriage in her eyes has. Norwegian women are independent and can manage economically on their own that is why young

women today are more picky and postpone marriage more than women used to she comments. *“They want to marry “the one” or “Mr. right” and choose maybe to only live with someone who they see as good enough for the time being”*. She seeks a man who is kind and gentle and who sees her as a person, what she likes and accepts her just the way she is.

Her “Mr. Right” would have to have common values with her and can not be too self-oriented and egoistic. He must be willing to make sacrifices for the relationship. Further he also has to be interesting, have an interesting job and hobbies. *“He must be passionate about what he does”*. It is important that she can be able to look up to him and admire him. There must be mutual respect between them and so he has to admire her as well. He has to be mutually supportive of her and be someone who she can feel safe with. The economical aspect is not as important. The major factors are his personality, behavior, and that he is stable as a person in all aspects. He has to be confident and have a good self-image and be generous and tolerant. He has to be conscious and be good at giving attention to people around himself and have a good attitude and humor. *“He must be able to see things in a bigger perspective”* she adds.

He does not need to have a high education and be intellectual, but he has to be satisfied with what he does and not have complexes if he has a lower wage and professional status than her. However she says that the probability that he has a similar educational level is quite high just because her partner will probably be from her own social surroundings she adds. He does not have to

have high wages, but enough to be able to contribute and cooperate in creating a normal life standard. He must be proved of himself, be in a good mood, sporty and sociable. She says that it is not vital, but that she prefers that he is taller than her. *“Status is not important at all”* she insists.

The ideal age of a partner is from 1-2 years younger than her till 5-6 years older. She says that she prefers that he is more or less the same age. *“At least he has to be in the same phase in life”*. He must have matured and be ready for having children and settling down she concludes.

The most important reason for getting married is that it is a safe framework for organizing family life. However the choice to get married has to be based on love. *“When you have found the person who you want to have children with and share the rest of your life with”*. Marriage can not be expected to be 100% sure this is too naïve she says, especially looking at the high divorce rate in the modern society to day. However one has to promise to try really hard and not give up too easily she insists. The high divorce rate does not make her unsure of marriage as an institution or afraid of getting married.

When I ask her if she wants to keep on working after she gets married she looks at me as if I was joking. To her that question did not make any sense at all. She takes it for granted that she will keep on working without any changes even after having children she insists. It is important for her to work and owe her own money. *“As married I am willing to make some*

changes to adjust my life, but I will never accept having to give up or down prioritize my career". That her life will change to some extent is only natural and she also sees having children as a natural consequence of being married as long as they are able to of course she adds.

Listening to the situation in Japan where the birthrate is very low and only continue to fall she thinks that it is a reason for worrying. *"Human beings are also animals with the instinct to reproduce and bring new life, if humans loose this urge there is something wrong with the environment which is repressing natural behavior".* The birthrate in Norway is high because the ways of living and organizing the society has been adjusted to women's active vocational participation. She sees Norway as a modern and flexible society which accepts that women can have both a family and a career. She thinks that Japanese women will only continue to have the urge to work and realize themselves. The fact that the Japanese government and society are not following up to this development seems to her to be what is causing the low birthrate and needs to be changed. *"Women who are informed and educated will not give up their curiosity and aspirations".*

She sees her job as very important, but still wants to have children and hopefully more than one. She could not imagine only having one child because she thinks that it is important for children to have siblings. Having three children she sees as a nice thought, but admits that it may be a bit too much. *"There are just too many things to do in life".* She wants to work, but also have enough time for all of her children and husband. The worst

scenario is, having to struggle to find enough time to do both her job and be with her family. She does not want to have a stressful life, being caught in the so called "time pinch". Stress is very unhealthy. One can not do everything at the same time and so at times one should choose. Therefore she could consider staying at home 1 or 2 years when the children are small, but not more. *"There is nothing negative by staying at home, but for me working is as essential as having children"*..

She does not see having many children as a status symbol the most important element is having enough time to spend with the family. *"I do not see having children as a hinder from having a career"*. She respects those who choose work or family, only one or the other aspect in life. However it must be possible for women to have both and this is a matter of prioritization she adds. Having a good and prestigious career and many children, but not enough time to spend with them is not right." *One can not expect to prioritize the job 100% when one has children this goes for both parents"*. Furthermore when a couple has children both parents should reduce their working hours. She thinks it is unfair if only she has to make the sacrifice. It is important that the children see both of the parents equally much she insists. She prefers to work less even though this implies that she would get a lower salary. Economy should not be a hinder from having children. The ideal way of living is not needing money too much, but rather having enough time she concludes.

"The most important in life is to be happy and satisfied with one self and to

have someone to love and be loved back". Self-realization is a vital element in order to feel satisfied in life she underlines. Besides from that friends and family and having a reasonable economy is also essential. She thinks that the development to marry later is a result of people's increasing urge to get a higher education, to realize themselves, and in general to do more things in life. Young people today are too busy and do not have time to marry or are reluctant to commit before they have fulfilled all their goals. They seem to fear that marriage is going to be a hinder to them. She does not think that it is embarrassing to be 31 and not married yet, and she says that she never feels any pressure to marry either.

"Marriage is a serious choice and so I rather look down on people who marry too early or too quickly, if the choice is not well considered". It is not smart to rush in to things and it is as important to have enough time to develop one self and to be independent before getting married she says. As far as she sees it there is no stigmatization of unmarried women in Norway. Her surroundings never pressure her to marry, but there is still some expectation of grandchildren from her parents. It is however still not in a form of fussing or worrying her, and they always say that it is her life and her choice.

In job interview she has attended she has never been asked about her civil status. In her present working place marriage is not a central topic. Many of her colleges are also not married and therefore it is a very relaxed and social environment she says. Her firm has a good family policy and she only works 37, 5 hours per week. Further the firm is a very family friendly working

place and they have parties where all the colleagues bring their families and partners, whether they are married or not. *"It is a very including and sociable environment"*. There is a high acceptance for reduction of working hours and in fact all of the employees with smaller children in her firm only work 80%. There are neither any prejudices nor negative reactions from colleagues when one takes out childcare leave or has to stay home with sick children. *"It is only positive to make use of the family policy rights"*.

Infidelity is not acceptable and breaks the promise that one makes when getting married. She would automatically seek a divorce she insists. If one falls in love with someone else one should first of all reconsider the marriage and if one still chooses the new person one should get a divorce before getting involved with someone else. *"Infidelity is totally unacceptable even just once"*. Being unfaithful is being disrespectful to one's partner and it would also be impossible to respect and trust that person again she concludes. After the act of unfaithfulness one can no longer look up to the partner and therefore there are no reasons for staying together any more she concludes.

Furthermore she would also seek to get a divorce if the partner is violent or unkind, if he is a bad father, and if he manages the economy badly by gambling or other hazardous behavior which undermines their relationship. *"If I feel that the relationship is empty I would make real effort to change the situation, go through therapy and try new things"*. She would give her partner a chance to make things right, but would finally seek for a divorce if

he did not seek help or show any effort to change the situation himself.

“Sex and marriage has only a natural connection.” When I tell her that more than 30% of Japanese married couples her age are sex-less she is really shocked and puzzled. Sex is as essential as other elements in a marriage she insists. *“Showing each other tenderness and being sexually involved is a great part of being married”.* She thinks that it is dangerous for the relationship if one starts thinking that sex is not important. As a married couple it is important to be both lovers and friends. She sees a healthy sex-life to be in average making love 2 times per week, but that it also depends on the situation. Often the sexual aspect of a relation can be a good barometer if one is happy together or not she adds. If one does not want to have sex or is not able to it is a warning signal, if it continues too long in her own relationship it would definitely cause her to seek a divorce she insists.

“The romance and the tenderness are very essential aspects of being a couple. It is important to remember to be boyfriend and girlfriend even after getting married. To be attentive of each other, to see each other, and to keep the romantic atmosphere in the relationship is the key to a long and happy marriage” she concludes.

At the moment she is happy and satisfied as single, but still hopes that she will meet a man who fulfills her life even more. However it is important to be satisfied with what one has as it is. *“It is easier to meet someone if one is happy with oneself and life in general”* she emphasizes. She is satisfied with

her career, her relationship with friends and family and her economy, but is misses having a romantic partner and a sex-life. Her ideal life situation would be that all of these aspects in her life would function well altogether. Her dream and goal for the future would be to find “the man of her dreams”, get married, and have a harmonious family-life with her loving husband and two children, and also a career which fulfills her professional ambitions. To be able to reach her goals of meeting a good partner she is working to improve herself and her situation, and try to be happy and optimistic. *“I do not go around thinking that everything will be perfect if I only get married”*. In her daily life she is very active and does all the things that are important to her. She is really enjoying life as it is and believes that Mr. Right eventually will come along.

Norwegian men are very good partners in marriage. This is because they are willing to take more of the responsibility at home and accept that women are equal and working professionally she says. She finds them in general very attractive both physically as well as mentally and adds that they have good values. If she gets married she would prefer to have a Norwegian partner she insists. She thinks that they are romantic to some extent, but that this depends on the person. *“Norwegian men are quite masculine and can seem to be afraid of appearing too soft or feminine if they are too romantic”*.

The negative side effect of the gender equality movement is maybe that Norwegian men tend to be less romantic. As women have become more equal it has also become more normal for women to take the initiative in a relation

and this may have caused men to become more passive she concludes.

“However they are good at being supportive in everyday life situations”. Norwegian men are good at sharing all of their life aspects with their partner. They invite their partner to join them in their hobbies and socializing with their friends she remarks. *“In a relationship Norwegians are very equal and integrated into each others life spheres. This is because Norwegians see marriage as a partnership where it is important to be both friends and lovers and where sharing is the essence of the relation”.*

Japanese single women

She is 30 years old and working as an “office lady” which in Japan means doing desk work in a company. In Japan this kind of work is mostly done by women and implies having a lower salary and status in the company. She has an undergraduate university degree and has been working for several years now, but is still living with her parents.

She has never been married, but have though about it quite a lot and really do want to marry. The reason why she has not gotten married is that the timing has not been right yet she explains. She says that Japanese women in general want to marry before they turn 30 years old and that she also had this goal. However her boyfriend who she was dating for several years did not want to marry. *“He just wanted to keep on being lovers and have his freedom and living by himself at the same time”* she comments bitterly.

Her expectation in a marriage is first of all to have a supportive partner. She wants to have someone who sees her as equal and helps out at home. *“I want to have a man who makes me feel relaxed when I come home tired from work and not a man who expects me to do everything”*. He has to be someone who listens to her and supports her emotionally. He also has to be able to get along with her family and friends. *“Housework should be equally shared, or actually the man should do more of the cleaning and the heavy house work since men are physically stronger”*. Her partner has to be kind, mature, and honest. It is not important that he has high education or status, but that he works hard and gives her and their children a secure life. However she insists on that the most important is still his personality and that he has a good heart.

The ideal age for a partner is about the same as her or older. The most important is that he is mature she insists. She is not interested in having a younger so called “pet-boyfriend” if he is not matured for his age and is serious in the relationship. *“The most important reason for getting married is love, to support each other emotionally”*. She expects marriage to last for the rest of her life. When people get married it is a twosome thing, meaning that it changes life for both parts she emphasizes. It is a good thing to be married. It gives you security since you are not alone and as a couple one can support one another she adds.

She would accept that her life would change. For instance she sees having children as a natural part of being married and that having children changes

ones life automatically. She wants to continue to work, but realizes that it probably will be difficult to achieve. *“The low birthrate in Japan is not a sign of people being egoistic and self-centered, but it is an effect of the fact that the society has not made the adjustments needed to make it possible for people to both work and have time for a family at the same time”*. It is an economical problem and a matter of how one prioritizes the time, or rather how one is forced to make use of the time by the circumstances in the environment she concludes. Knowing that it is difficult for women to continue to work after having children forces women to be more practical orientated when looking for a partner in marriage she comments. She admits that she also tend to keep this in mind when meeting potential partners.

She wants to have children and several. However this depends on if she has the economy, time, and strength to bring them all up. *“Work and economy is definitely an obstacle for having children”*. Even though there is a law that gives her the right to take leave from work when she has children the environment and her colleges at work make people feel like they are doing something wrong if they take out childcare leave, especially if one does it several times. There is also low tolerance for leaving work early she adds. Furthermore there are not enough institutions where one can leave the children and the few that exists are often also very expensive she underlines. *“The responsibility for taking care of children should be equally shared”*. Therefore her partner has to be present in their children’s life teaching them what they need and give them a lot of love and affection. However even

though she want to marry she does not see marriage as the most important aspect in life, her work and hobbies are equally important she insists. *“I also need to have a part of my life which is only mine and not just be someone’s wife and mother”*.

The increasingly high marriage rate in Japan she sees as only a natural effect of the fact that Japanese women are seeking to have higher education than before. Today women study longer and also show a stronger urge to work. As long as women feel that work and marriage is not compatible it is only natural that they postpone getting married she points out. To the “makeinu” expression she thinks that it is a wrong way of thinking to say that one is a loser just because one does not get married. She herself has also been called “makeinu”. It was uttered like a joke, but she says that she still found it uncomfortable. *“I do not feel that I am loosing in any way just because I have not gotten married yet”*. In this sense there still seem to be some stigmatization of unmarried women in Japan. However personally she has never been pressured by her parents to get married, they rather tell her not to rush into things. She has never been introduced to “omiai” which is a type of arranged marriage where one is being introduced to men with the sole purpose of getting married. This is a bit artificial way of meeting someone and says that she hopes that she will meet her future husband in more natural circumstances.

“Until now I have never felt unequally treated or discriminated against in

my working place". However this may change as she gets married and have children she comments. In her company she gets the right to 1 year of childcare leave, but will not be paid by her company and only gets some funding from the government. Therefore it will be a big economically burden to have children she emphasizes.

"If I fall in love with someone else when I am married infidelity is no option and I would not pursue it, but if I am not married maybe I would". If her husband was unfaithful she would consider a divorce, but does not see it as an automatic cause of action. She would talk to her partner about it and reconsider the relationship first. Other reasons for considering a divorce would be if he does not satisfy her wishes in relation to their children, if he is cold to them or violent she adds. She thinks that the reason why the divorce rate in Japan has risen drastically over the last few years is that women are getting increasingly more economically independent and therefore can afford to get a divorce. *"Japanese women are changing, but the men have not changed in the same speed and direction"*. Since more people get divorced it has become less stigmatizing and socially unacceptable and therefore also an easier choice to make she concludes.

She is satisfied in her life as it is, but still misses someone who supports her and loves her. Her dream is to find a good partner and to become better at doing her job. She wants to have a fun and relaxing life. *"Even though I know what I want in a partner it is difficult to find someone who fulfills my*

expectations, to find a man who understands and accepts my way of thinking and value system” she says with a resigned voice. However she still feels that men have improved. Young men today seem to be better than their fathers’ generation, but they have yet a long way to go she insists. Even today it is still the women who take all of the childcare-leave when they have children or in most cases stay home when the children are sick. “There are many laws which are suppose to give women rights and protection related to work and family affairs, but they have yet not become effective in real life and are just something written on a paper” she concludes.

“Sexual relationship is a very vital aspect in a marriage and an important way of showing that one loves each other”. She can not understand how so many Japanese young people can be married and still not being sexually involved. She could not accept being in a sex-less marriage, that would only be if the reason was because of illness she underlines. She sees a healthy sex-life as making love at least 3 or 4 times a week. If she was in a sex-less relationship and the situation did not change she would eventually seek for a divorce if there were no good reason for the circumstances.

Japanese men seem to her to be a bit weak and indecisive, and that they lack the courage to make a decision. *“They are not masculine enough and worry too much about what people around them think”.* However they are in general kind and earnest, but not romantic she emphasizes. To many men it is embarrassing to be too emotional and expressing one’s emotions openly.

This is because being very romantic is not perceived as manly among men themselves. *“However women really want a romantic man”* she insists. There are several vital mismatches of men and women’s expectations in a relationship and marriage and because of this the communication and romantic kinship between men and women end up being malfunctioning she concludes.

Group 2: Norwegian woman, working and married and with out children;

She is 33 years old, has a higher education, and working as a consultant in an institution for mental health-care. She met her husband at a previous working place and they have been married for 2 years. They were together two years before getting married and getting married was a natural development she says. He was the one who proposed, but she adds that it is not necessarily the man who needs to do it. Her expectations in a marriage were that she would be equal to her partner and that they would have mutual respect for one another. *“Marriage is like a partnership where one works towards the same goal and supports one another”*. Further her expectations of her partner were that he is open, respects her, and is both her friend and her lover. He must be able to be both strong and weak and also accept that she is both as well. All her expectations have been met she insists. They fulfill each other completely. She is impulsive and creative and he is down to earth and conservative, but still gender equal orientated she adds.

“It is only natural that housework is equally shared if both are working full

time.” However when it comes to taking care of the children it has to be as equal sharing as possible because both parents are equally important to the children she underlines. Her partner is 5 years older than her, but age does not really matter she says. He has a lower salary and education than her, but this is not a problem for either of them. Status and money are not important aspects. She did not look for economical safety in her partner. This is something she is able to obtain herself she underlines. They are equal partners and have a shared economy. *“I do not think that men necessarily should be the main income source. Who earns the most is not essential and he does not think that it is a problem that I earn more either.”*

To the question “what is the most important reason for getting married” she automatically says *“love and wanting to spend ones life together off course”*. She is very puzzled by this question and says that she could not even think that there would be another answer. She expects that marriage will be for life and does not see marriage as old-fashioned. Further she did not expect life to change, and says that it in fact has not changed at all. She admits that one has to be open to change, but emphasizes that she would never give up her job. When I explain that this is quite normal in Japan she is very shocked. To her it is only natural that women work as well. However she does not think that staying at home or cutting down on work is negative, but insists on that this must be a voluntary choice and something the person wants to do.

The situation in Japan where women often are forced to quite their jobs is

very sad, unfair, and unacceptable she comments. *“Women should not have to prioritize family more than men this is both when it comes to housework as well as taking care of the children.”*

Having children is not necessarily an automatic aspect of marriage. However personally she wants to have children, but not more than two because she wants to have enough time for them. Since both she and her husband want to work full time she thinks that two children are enough she explains. However this choice is not an economically based choice and she does not see economy as a hinder from having children. *“I do not see work as a hinder from having children at all”*. The reason why they do not have children is that they have not yet been able to become pregnant. She insists on that they are not postponing it and adds that they are ready to become parents at any time.

When I explain about the low birthrate in Japan she thinks it is very alarming and sees it as a severe problem to the society. However she can understand that Japanese women want to wait since they often are forced to quit their jobs once they have children. *“This is so unfair.”*

“The child-care leave should be equally shared”. She is prepared to give up half of the leave to her husband and he himself is also prepared to take on half of the leave she insists. They are both willing to cut down on work to be able to have more time with their children. *“Having enough time is more valuable than having a good economy”*. However the sacrifice of cutting down on work should be equally made she underlines. Furthermore her husband

has to participate in the upbringing of their children as much as her. He has to be supportive, make enough time for the children, and be caring and loving towards them. When I explain the reality in Japan she can not believe that Japanese fathers in general can be so little present in their children's everyday life and actually accept this situation as well.

“Getting married and having a family are essential aspects of life, but realizing oneself should be seen as equally important for both men and women.” The reason why people in Norway get married later than before she explains is that Norwegian women want to realize themselves before getting married. Furthermore they do not have to marry to be able to be in a serious relationship. Marriage is just one out of many lifestyle options she comments. *“The freedom of lifestyle choices lessens the pressure towards getting married”* she says. For instance people in Norway do not have to marry if they get pregnant. The situation in Japan with “dekichatta-kekkon” or marriage which is rushed into because people get pregnant is to her a phenomenon from the past, something that occurred in Norway more than 30 years ago. Therefore she is really surprised when I tell her that 30% of all marriages in Japan over the last couple of years were consecrated because couples got pregnant. She personally preferred to get married, but says that the choice to just live together or getting married should be a free and equally valued choice. The most important is that one is equal and has the same rights in the relationship she underlines.

Her choice to get married was because living together with a co-habitant contract is not as safe and one also has fewer rights than in a marriage. *“The co-habitant status is easier to get out of and therefore less safe”*.

One does not have to get married to be satisfied in life and she thinks that it is terrible if unmarried women in Japan are being stigmatized. About the “makeinu” discussion in Japan if a woman is a winner or a loser depending on her civil status this does not make any sense to her. She personally feels like a winner. However this is not because she is married, but because she is satisfied in her life she underlines.

“The choice has to be free”.

It is not necessary to have children as married, but personally she would feel that she was lacking something in life without. She does not feel stigmatized as married with out children and does not feel pressured to have children either. In her working place her civil status was not an issue at the job interview. Marriage and family affairs is not a negative subject, but is talked about openly among her colleges. In her present job she feels equally treated in relation to her male colleges. However she has experienced being discriminated against at an earlier working place. In this situation a man got a position instead of her in spite of the fact that he had less experience and education than her. *“When I asked for an explanation they just said that he was preferred because he was a man”* she says with bitterness and anger in her voice.

Her present working place however is a far more gender equal and a family friendly environment. It is a very flexible institution and has many different

solutions for workers who want to prioritize their families. For instance they have a “time account” in relation to the child-care leave. This means that workers can take some time off and then go back to work for a while before taking more of the leave again. This policy is to help workers not to lose track of their work. Differently from her previous job her present working place is a public institution and therefore all of the public rights are being upheld she explains. *“I am free to work less and even though I choose to work only 80% I can still stay in the same job”*.

Divorce is considerable if she is not satisfied in the marriage. Marriage is not holy and one should not stay married if the relation is unhealthy she insists. *“Infidelity is totally unacceptable and unfair behavior”*. She would never accept it and not even consider forgiving her partner. The act of infidelity is the same as saying that one does not love and respect one’s partner anymore she concludes. The high divorce rate in Norway where as many as 46% of the marriages ends in a divorce can actually be seen as a good sign she says. This is in the sense that people have the courage to realize themselves and get out of a negative relationship she adds. However it is sad if people take too easily on divorce and if the high rate reflects that people marry without thinking it through well enough. She also thinks that people have become more egoistic and demanding that they expect too much out of a relation. *“People seem to have a too romantic image of marriage and that they forget that marriage is not just “in good” but also “in bad”*”. Everyday life is challenging and one has to compromise and make sacrifices to be able to coordinate a life as a couple

and a family she concludes.

She is very satisfied in her life situation and says that it is perfect as it is now, but that having children would be an extra bonus. Having a sexual relation is a natural part of marriage and being lovers is equally important as being friends she underlines. *“Romantic behavior is not a demand, but I personally appreciate it and see it as a positive incentive in the relationship”*. Marriage life goes up and down which is only natural. However if her marriage was sexless she would not stay in that relation if the situation lasted too long. She sees sex as a vital part of the acknowledgment as a partner and as an expression of love. Thus marriage without sex would eventually also become loveless. A healthy sex-life would be at least once a week and sometimes more often, even every day in periods if one has the time and the energy she adds.

She is satisfied with her love life and feels that they are able to make enough time to be together romantically. *“ We do everything together and share each others hobbies, now we are renewing our house together”*. The most important thing to her is that they are able to be relaxed together. They go on dates occasionally, but she sees the everyday events as most important. Her workday is 7.5 hours per day which is the regular working time in Norway. Further she does not work too much overtime and thus she and her husband spend most afternoons together. She does not like to stress and feels that their relationship is relaxed and natural, and satisfying in all ways she concludes.

“Norway can be seen as highly gender equal in comparison with Japan, but even in Norway it is still not completely gender equal yet. This is in relation to both wages, leave from work, and even peoples norms”. She is conscious about that there still are differences and says that the ideal is definitely complete equality. This is possible and society should develop towards this goal she insists.

“Norwegian men are in general gender equally orientated, but the whole specter of men can also be found in Norway as well.” There are still many conservative people even among women. However she emphasizes that Norwegian men at least have a general acceptances of that woman work and that women are equal, this is also in relation to romance she adds. The concept of “lady first” and that it is first of all the men who has to attend the women is not so prevailing anymore she says. Women can equally take the initiative to a relationship or be active in the relationship. Romantic aura depends on the person, but in general Norwegian men are relatively attentive and caring, and emotional expressive she concludes.

Japanese Woman, working and married and with out children;

She is 32 years old and has been married for 1 and a half years. She has a higher university degree and has also done some of her studied abroad. She has worked for more than 7 years before she got married and worked in big international trading company where she had achieved a quite high position with responsibility for foreign affairs. Until she got married she was a career woman with a promising future in her working place. However once she

decided to get married she quit her job and started working part-time in a restaurant instead. When she explains why she decided to give up her career when she got married she says that her husband wanted her to. *“My husband was brought up by a working mother and does not want his children to have the same experience as him where their mother never has time for them and that nobody is at home when they come home from school.”* He does not want their children to become “kagiko” or so called latchkey children she explains.

She says that she did not have too much against giving up her career and that it was not a hard choice to make *“I was actually happy just to get away from the hard conditions at work”* she admits. In her job she had to work from morning till dawn and put in a lot of extra and often unpaid hours. Often she did not even have enough time to sleep she comments with a frustrated voice. *“Working part-time is much better and gives me a chance to live a more relaxing lifestyle”*. She admits that she misses her job to some extent and that she earns a lot less in her present position and that her status also has changed drastically.

She met her husband through friends and they were together two years before getting married. *“For me getting married was natural, but also the only option”* she comments. Since it is very few people who live together without being married it is not very socially accepted. Further she also says that there is discrimination against children out of wedlock. When I describe the situation in Norway that as much as 40% live together without being married she is very surprised and almost shocked.

Her husband proposed to her which only felt natural she comments. She expected marriage to give her security and that her partner would be faithful. Since she cut down on work she expects her husband to give her economical security. Her expectations have been met to some extent, but since her husband is very busy they do not spend too much time together and he does not help out at home as much as she had expected. *“However he is kind and supportive as far as he can”* she insists.

She chose him because he is kind and an earnest person who she can trust and rely on. Since she works less than him it is only natural that she takes care of the household chores. Her husband is 2 years younger than her, but age does not make any difference to her she comments. *“The most important thing is that he is matured and has a stable income and can give her a safe and good life”*. His economical level was an important factor when deciding to get married she admits. However he does not have a high education and status is not important to her at all she insists.

The most important reason for getting married is that one has met someone who one likes and who one can create a happy and safe family with. She expects marriage to last for life.

Before getting married she was prepared for that her life would change. *“I want to first of all prioritize taking care of my children”*. She is willing to give up her job or at least cut down on working while her children are small. Her mother was a housewife and she thinks that staying at home is a positive and valuable lifestyle choice. *“It is more natural for women to take care of*

children than men". Women have a stronger instinct towards taking care of children and are therefore more suitable for childcare she insists. She thinks that having children is an automatic result of being married and really wants to have children. However bringing up children in Japan is very expensive and therefore she does not want to have more than two children. She and her husband are at the moment waiting with having children until their life situation is more stable and economically safe she explains.

The reason why women in Japan get married later than before is only natural since it is still difficult as a woman to realize herself at the same time as being married and having children. *"By postponing marriage life the women get a period where they can focus only on work first and then later dedicate all their time to the family life"*. She thinks that separating work and family into periods in life where one concentrates on one or the other element is a good solution.

Having a career is definitely a hinder in raising a family and she also thinks that having children is greatly conditioned by economical circumstances.

As a father she expects her husband to be a strict, but also caring. However since he is very busy on the weekdays she is prepared to take most of the responsibility for their children. It is important for women to realize themselves she insists, but still thinks that the family has first priority. *"Bringing up my children myself is very important to me. I also think that this is better for the children than sending them away to some childcare*

institution.”

Getting married or not should be a completely free choice. The pressure against unmarried women in Japan is not right she underlines. When it comes to the “makeinu” discussion she never felt like a loser as unmarried, but still felt pressure by her surroundings related to marriage. *“People were always fussing about marriage and wanted to introduce me to different men”*. Having children is also part of the pressure. Many people still think that a woman’s life is not complete if she does not get married and become a mother she says. *“Personally I would be missing something in life if I did not get married and have children, but I still think that this should be a free choice.”*

In her working place she did not directly feel stigmatized as unmarried, but it often became a part of a conversation and she was asked repeatedly if she did not want to get married. She was even asked about her civil status in the job interview and her aspirations once she got married. When she decided to quite her job this was not seen as strange by her colleges, but only as natural she adds. There were very few married women and almost no mothers working in her company. *“Discrimination at work was almost institutionalized and it was only seen as natural that men and women were treated differently”* she comments. Her company did not have any special policy regarding family and childcare. She would have the right to take one year off, but this would more or less be unpaid. Further it was a hard job with long working hours and high expectation of overtime-work and a lot of traveling. *“It would simply be impossible to combine my previous job with*

raising children” she concludes.

When it comes to infidelity she says that she would not accept it, but that she would not necessarily demand for a divorce. *“I would not stay in marriage if my husband was violent, gambled, or treated our children badly. However infidelity could be forgiven as long as he promised not to continue being unfaithful.”* In relation to the increasing divorce rate she thinks that this is because people rush into marriage too quickly and also give up too easily. She is very shocked when she hears that the Norwegian rate is close to 50%, and comments that this must cause a lot of social problems. However it is still positive to some extent since it reflects that women have become more economically independent and that they are able to get out of a miserable situation she remarks.

Her life as married is satisfying, but she has to admit that she does not get to spend too much time together with her husband. Her husband is very busy and travels a lot in his work and has a stressful and demanding job she explains. Sex-life varies a lot some times more sometimes less often, but if she should give a regular number she would say once a week. *“Sexual relation is important in a marriage, but not everything. It is essential being good companions as well”*. The increasing sex-less problem among Japanese couples is only an understandable result as Japanese people tend to be too busy and do not have enough time and energy after work. Now that she works part-time she works 6 or 7 hours per day depending on the day, but her husband comes home late at night almost every weekday and also works on the week-ends at times. Therefore they do not have too much time

together. *"We mostly spend time together only on the week-ends"*. She wishes that they would have more time and romance in their marriage, but says that she accepts the situation for the time being.

Her project in the near future is to have children. *"I want to be a giving mother and spend time with my children as much as I can, make real home cooked meals, bake cakes, and make handcrafted things together with my children"*. It is important to her to create a warm and happy home for her children. Her ideal life is being able to be domestic at the same time as being able to continue her career on a part-time basis.

Japanese men have the image of lagging behind the new change that the women have gone through. *They appear to be weaker than the women as if the positions of the sexes have become swapped*. Young Japanese men today seem to be lacking courage and tend to be a bit passive. They are in general kind, but are not masculine enough and do not seem to be partners who one can depend on she remarks. *"Many young men seem to be too attached and dependant on their mothers"*. Men with "mazakon" meaning men with a mother complex seem to be increasing. In general Japanese men have a weak image and are less attractive partners in marriage she concludes.

Her thoughts about the future is that Japan has to become more family friendly in terms of cutting down on peoples working load, and that it has to be made easier for women to both work and have a family. *"Times are changing and I feel that Japan has become more gender-equal conscious, but*

in real life there is still not enough concrete change” she concludes.

Group 3: Norwegian woman, working and living in a cohabitation relationship and has children

She is 45 years old and has lived together with her partner for 24 years. She is not married, but lives in a co-habitation relationship. However she insists that there would make no difference to her family life if she was married. She met her partner just coincidentally when she was on vacation and they were together 1 year before he moved in with her. *“I had an apartment and therefore it was just natural that he moved in with me”* she says. He was the one who took initiative to their relation. However he did not propose and they did not mark the occasion of starting to live together. *“We just ended up living together.”* She says that she never dreamt about getting married and that she never felt pressured to get married either. Her expectation to a relationship is to have someone to do things together with, share common interests with.

“A partner must be supportive and a companion in every way”. There must be focus on each other she remarks. Her expectations have been met to a certain extent, but she admits that she has been a bit disappointed related to gender equality issues. She expects a partner to be fully equal both in terms of work load at home as well as regarding economic contribution. There must be mutual respect, and a good communication. These expectations have mostly been met. She admits that she felt less equal when her children were small. However this was not because of her husband’s lack of will, but

related to the political policy related to family and work at the time she underlines.

“House chores should be equally shared as long as both are working fulltime.” She admits that the division in the beginning actually was 90%-10% and that she was doing most in the home. *“My partner was not domestic at all in the beginning and I had to teach and train him, but today the share is completely equal”* she insists.

In the question to what attracted her to her partner she says that he was kind and charming. He is three years older than her, but age had no importance. The most important reason for getting together was that they loved one another. She did not look for someone with high status or education and the economical part she was able to secure herself she underlines.

She describes her partner as very kind and social, but that he has a tendency to take her for granted. *“Our relationship has become a bit of a routine”*. However this has also a positive meaning she insists. *“The fact that we have a sense of “off course ness” between each other, that we take it for granted that we are together gives me a feeling of security”* she explains. She has a strong belief in life together and expects her relationship to last life through. The fact that they are not married does not change this belief and she made the choice not to marry because it felt natural. After living together for a while and after they had children they made a contract which secures their rights and economical situation in case of a break up or if one of the partners passes away.

She expected her life to change and it has she confirms. *"You have to prioritize differently when living with someone. I do not as often go out with friends as I used to. I got a new best friend in my partner and am satisfied with sharing most of my time with him.* However the sacrifices which are made should be made equally by both parts she insists. She does not think that women should prioritize family and children more than men, this is equally much a man's responsibility she emphasizes. To the question if she wanted to continue working she only sees this as natural and is surprised that I even ask the question. *"Staying at home is not even a thinkable option to me and I would never accept it."*

She has three children and did not want to have less or more. She thinks it is better to have several children because it is good for children to have siblings. They can learn a lot about life and how to interact with people from each other she remarks. Having children is not an automatic effect of being in a serious relationship. She and her husband for instance did not have children before 9 years after they start living together. *"We did not want to have children straight away, but wanted to use the time on each other to experience things together as a couple first"* she explains. When I tell her about the tendencies in Japan where people are not having children at all or often just choose to have one child she thinks that it is sad. It is a great value to the individual as well as the society that many children are born and therefore Japan should be interested in making it easier for women to both work and have children at the same time she comments. *"Personally I do not*

see any hinder from having children. What one decides to do one is able to realize". In Norway one can have children even when one is still a student, there are many possibilities and economy is not a hinder she insists.

"Childcare and raising children should be equally share and the father is as much important as the mother" she emphasizes. She expects her partner to be present in their children's life, to be an active and supportive father. This expectation is met to some extent, but she still uses a little bit more time than him because he works slightly longer hours than her. When they had their first child, she staid 9 months at home and he had only the right to 5 days off and with out pay. He was at that time working in the private sector and therefore had fewer rights she explains. Furthermore the system in general was not as good 18-15 years ago when their children were small as it is today. She thinks the childcare leave should be more equally shared and is positive to men taking 50%of the leave. *"It should be a freer and more flexible use of the childcare-leave, but the men should take a larger share either way"* she insists. When they had their first child her partner had close to no rights and there were no kindergartens or other child-care institutions where she could leave her child. Therefore she had to work part-time the following two and half years. At the time their second child was born the circumstances had been improved and she got to stay one year at home and her partner got two weeks off with pay. She still did not get a place in the kindergarten for her child, but used babysitters and worked 80% in stead. *"By the time our third child was born the rights for fathers had been*

drastically improved as the “the papa-quota” policy was fixed by law”. After her last child was born she staid at home 11 months and her partner got 6 weeks paid leave. “It depends on the will, and I wanted to work”. Even when the system was not good and she did not get a spot in the kindergarten for her children she managed to work she points out.

The most important in life to her is to be an independent person and she does not want to give this up for a family. *“I would not be able to be a good partner and mother if I did not have an independent life sphere, a job, and a personal income”*. She sees the high average age for getting marriage as only a natural result of that people want to realize themselves and that they want to find their place in life before starting a family. She sees the co-habitant situation as easier than marriage and has to admit that there actually is more safety in a marriage. However she personally still does not see any problems with not being married. *“I do not need to sign a paper to trust my partner and to feel safe in our relationship”*. She and her partner made this choice because it felt natural. It just ended up this way she adds.

To the question if she thinks that one lacks something in life as single, she thinks that one will loose out on the family ties and human relations in the family. One may end up lacking being close to people and become egoistic if one only has oneself to think of she comments. However it should be a free choice and the Japanese society’s stigmatization of unmarried women she sees as unacceptable. *“How a person organizes and lives his or her life should*

be free. The sense of satisfaction is obtained differently depending on the individual” she emphasizes. She says that there is no stigma related to civil status in Norway and that she also feels equally treated as a working mother. Civil status causes no hinder in a job relation she insists. However even though she feels equal to her colleges and has equal pay and status she still can feel some prejudice and sense of discrimination from the leaders in her job institution. “Leaders in many cases are still often men and older men with a more conservative way of thinking” she concludes.

Furthermore she feels safe in her job and there is no danger of loosing her job if she does not work 100%. She works in public government and is entitled to all the public rights she remarks. At the moment it is possible to take two extra years off when taking child-care leave, but this is however unpaid. Either way when one goes back to work one will at least be guarantied one’s job back. *“I had no problems and was not forced to make any changes in my job when I returned to work after taking child-care leave”.* There is even a set of extra rights for workers with children under 12 years of age she adds. For instance workers who have two children get 10 days of sick leave in case their children get sick, and 15 days when they have tree children. There are also special rights if one has handicapped children she adds.

“I have no tolerance when it comes to infidelity and would automatically seek for a divorce”. You should finish one relationship before initiating another she insists. Therefore she would not follow up the feelings if she fell in love

with someone else before she got out of the present relationship. Once her partner has been unfaithful this destroys their relation and her feelings for him and therefore there is no reason for staying together she emphasizes. When I tell her that the infidelity rate in Norway is about 40% and that it is almost the same in Japan she is very shocked. This is a sign of egoism and that there is too much focus on the individual's rights in the modern society she concludes.

She is satisfied in her life situation and her relationship with her partner. *"There is really nothing that is missing. I am able to do most of the things that I want to do"*. Her dream and ideal life situation is not any different from now, but she says that she wants to continue to live a good and happy life together with her partner and children, and other people that she cares about. *"The worst thing of all is fighting"*. They sometimes quarrel, but are able to discuss about their differences and find a solution to it in the end. In relation to the high divorce rate in Norway she says that she thinks that this is a sign of impatience. *"People seem less willing to make the effort to get a relationship working again when it has gone bad"*. To make a relationship function it is important to work on it all the time and to be conscious and focused on each others needs and the contextual circumstances she concludes.

Sex-life and romance she sees as very important aspects of life as a couple. She would not accept living without this, but she would not demand for a divorce straight away. *"I would only demand that my partner satisfied me"*

she says with a confident voice. If there was no medical explanation to the sexless problem and he also showed no interest in finding a solution to it she would leave him, but only after really trying to solve it she underlines.

To coordinate a relationship successfully it is essential having the time and energy for it. They both work 37, 5 hours a week and have no overtime, but her husband sometimes travels in his work. They are both busy and use especially a lot of time on supporting and following up their children. Therefore she admits that they are not able to make enough time just for the two of them. *"We almost never go on dates and we travel together maybe only once a year"*.

She admits that she thinks that they should prioritize their relationship more. However they spend a lot of time together in companion with their children and friends and they also have many of the same interests she explains. They both like to do sports and often go bicycling, skiing, and sailing together. *"We often make the dinner together and spend a lot of time together as a family"*. Sex-life is important and a normal frequency to her is once a week. It also depends on the situation she insists. *"In periods it can be less frequent and than suddenly it blossoms up and happens several times a week or even in just one day"*. She is very satisfied, and says that if she is not she will express her wishes openly. Sex is one mean of communication and it is important to have an open dialogue about this aspect as well in a relationship she insists.

Her image of Norwegian men is that they are not too romantic and maybe

even a little bit unimaginative, but kind and robust. This is first of all men in their 40's she remarks, and says that young Norwegian men today seem more focused on their appearance and that they are more self-indulged. The new generation of men is very different than young men 20 years ago, and it is apparent that there has been a great change in the male ideals she underlines. *"Young men seem more focused on image and are less afraid of expressing their emotions more openly and are maybe more romantic"*. However she has an impression that they postpone serious relations and that this is because they only want to think about their own needs she concludes.

Expectations for the future would be a further improvement of the gender equality. She says that Norway is not completely gender equal yet and that she actually feels that the development has somehow stagnated. *"In the last several years there has been no real improvement or more so it has had a reversing tendency. This is especially among men, but also among young women because they often believe that they already are 100% equal."* There is still a long way to go to obtain fully equal rights especially related to wages and the childcare leave policy she says. However she is positive to the future, but thinks that complete gender equality is difficult to achieve.

Japanese women, working and married and has children

She is 35 years old and has been married for 6 years. She has a high university education which is mostly taken abroad where she also met her husband. Now she is working as a consultant in an international company in

Tokyo and has a little daughter who is 3 years old. Before getting married she was together with her husband for 6 years. *"We were friends at first, but then it developed into more than friendship"*. No one of them took a direct initiative like making a proposal, but the choice to marry was a common decision and a natural development. She felt some pressured by her surroundings, but personally wanted to get married thus did not experience this in a negative way she insists.

Her expectations to marriage were clear. *"First of all I definitely wanted to be an equal partner and to share everything with him"*. She expected to get support and love from her partner and to create a warm and happy family together. All her expectations have been met she insists and says that her partner is very supportive and insists on taking half of all the responsibilities. *"He is Japanese, but since he has been living several years abroad he is not a typical Japanese man"*. They share many ideas and opinions and have the same value system. They both agree on that a family should be an institution with close ties and where both parents participate actively in the children's life. Household chores should be shared equally as well as both being able to having professional careers. *"The way things are in Japan at the moment is not good for anyone in the family"*. To able to give their children a more flexible and international life as well as maintain the equality in their marriage they plan on living abroad in the future she explains.

"He makes as much effort as he can, but is limited by the circumstances". Her husband fulfills her expectations and her dissatisfaction is only directed

to the Japanese society and the bad family policy in Japan. This is especially related to men's limited rights regarding children and family affairs she underlines. She thinks that household chores and taking care of children should be equally shared at least when both are working full time. At the moment they both work full hours, but since he has to put in more overtime than her she does slightly more housework than him. However she insists that he helps out as much as he can. *"He starts later at work and takes our daughter to the kindergarten every day"*.

Her husband is one year younger, but age has no importance as long as he is matured and has the same values she comments. He is open and flexible and interested in many things, and he is also kind, easygoing, and funny which made her attracted to him. It is important that a partner in a marriage is a good companion that he is your best friend as well as your lover she insists. She expects marriage to last out life and says that she has a strong belief in it because they match each other in so many ways. She is of course aware of the high divorce rate and she admits that she would consider a divorce if her partner was abusive, unfaithful, and worst of all if he was a bad father. Further she says that she would never stay in an unsatisfying relationship, but still try hard to make it work first.

"Getting married was important and a big event in my life, but I did not expect nor accept that my life should change too much". She says that her life has not been changed. Living together with someone forces you to adapt, but she would never give up her career. This was however never a worry for her since her husband and she studied together and he knew from the beginning

how important having a career is to her. Furthermore he also expressed that he wanted to marry a woman who had ambitions.

"Before getting together my husband told me that for him to be able to love someone he had to respect that person and that he also found professional able women very attractive". They both agreed on even before becoming a couple that a marriage is a partnership where both work and also take equal share of the responsibility for the children. *"I could never be a housewife".*

She has one daughter, but would like to have 3 children if possible. Her dream is to make a big happy family which is lively and full of love. She thinks that it is better for the children to have siblings who they can learn things from as well as have them as friends.

She does not see having children as an automatic result of being married, but personally would be missing something in life if she did not have children. They waited 3 years with having children and this was of practical reasons she insists. *"In my previous job which was a Japanese company the rights and policy related to having children was not good, and the workers was not tolerant regarding these affairs either".* Therefore she waited until she found a job where it would be easier to both work and have children she explains. She does not see any direct hinder to having children, but admits that the conditions in ones working place and surroundings can make it difficult. She does not see economy as a real hinder and says that it is all a matter of prioritization.

The support from a partner is very essential she insists. Her husband takes

close to 50% of the care for their daughter, and is only to limited by the circumstances at work to some extent. She expects her partner to be a present father and to guide their daughter, to both teach and play with her. He has to give their daughter a lot of love and express it openly she remarks. Hugging is very important and gives children a sense of closeness and security. *“Japanese men are in general not good at expressing their feelings, but my husband is different”.*

In spite of that men in Japan only have the rights to stay home with the children 5 days her husband took out 2 extra weeks which was off course unpaid she underlines. She definitely thinks that men should get the right to take out more of the leave. This is both so that women can go back to their jobs quicker and so that men get the chance to be close to their children she remarks. *“Men also need to experience staying at home so that they realize how hard it actually is to take care of children”.* Both she and her husband have flexible working hours which makes it easier for them to coordinate work and family life she explains. He takes their daughter to kindergarten before work and she picks her up after work. They are lucky to have found a good and flexible institution to take care of their daughter, but she has to admit that it is a bit expensive. Further they have many friends and colleges in the same situation. *“We have a supportive family and a good and positive network around us who helps us out a lot.”* Getting help from others is essential to being able to avoid stress to much and to living a freer life she explains.

The high age for getting married in Japan is only a natural development as

women also get high education and seek to realize themselves professionally. However the society's reluctance to change and accept the modern Japanese women's lifestyle is making the age rate unnecessarily high she concludes.

"The most important in life is to realize my potentials. To both make use of my professional talents as well as become a good wife and mother" she emphasizes. All these aspects are equally important. She prefers marriage and personally would not want to be in a co-habitant relationship, but admits that there should be more openness and flexibility in Japan to other ways of organizing life. To "marry or not to marry" should be a personal choice and insists on that one can be fulfilled as single as well.

"The question on loosing is first of all related to making full use of ones own abilities". Therefore she thinks that women who do not develop the professional side of themselves are loosing out on an important aspect of life. Before she got married she never felt stigmatized or pressured to marry, and she does not feel discriminated against as a working mother either.

"In my working place the majority of my colleges are women and married women with children and therefore there is a good understanding among the workers as well as a good policy related to having a family" she explains. The company she works at is international and has better policies than regularly in Japanese firms. If she cuts down on work she does not have to worry about loosing her position. *"In Japanese companies women have the right to take out 1 year of childcare leave, but often found themselves without a job afterwards."* She can even take out 2 more years of childcare leave and still be sure of having a job to go back to, but this leave is of course unpaid she

underlines. Besides from having a good policy in her company, the working hours are both flexible and shorter than regularly in Japanese companies, and last and very importantly there is almost no use of overtime she emphasizes.

When it comes to infidelity she would never accept if her husband was unfaithful. Further she would neither follow up the feelings if she fell in love with someone else. At least she would reconsider her relationship first she insists. *“My husband and I have a very good and open dialog even about our sex-life and are able to communicate if we are not satisfied.”*

The family is very important to her and making a safe and healthy environment for her children has high priority. Therefore she would make a real effort to stay together with her husband. However she would not stay married on all terms she underlines. *“If my husband and I are not able to love each other anymore I do not think that we would be able to create a good home for our children either”.*

She is shocked to hear that close to 40% of Japanese men and increasingly many women as well are unfaithful. However she thinks that this is a result of lack in communication. *“Many Japanese married couples do not seem to be able to communicate both verbally and physically” she remarks.*

Personally she is very satisfied in her relationship and in life in general. However she says that her dream and ideal life situation would be living abroad, having an international career, creating a warm and happy family with many children, and to live a flexible and multicultural life.

Japanese men have an image of being inflexible, old-fashioned, and macho, but at the same time weak and lacking of courage she remarks. They are in general also not good at expressing themselves and seem passive and not romantic she adds. *“I really thought that I would end up with a foreign man, but my husband even though he is Japanese is both good at expressing himself and romantic, and also respects me and my career. He is the man of my dreams, a perfect partner”* she concludes.

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The status of marriage as an institution in modern sociology:

A comparative study of Japan and Norway with a focus on gender equality.

Hanne Knarvik Svendsen

This research looks into the modernization process of marriage and how it has been affected by the enhancement of gender equality, in the cases of Japan, in comparison with Norway. Japan and Norway were both gender unequal societies until 40 years ago. However, Norway has moved towards gender integrated social structure, while Japan has continued the gender separated arrangements. Modernization has given women more freedom, thus marriage becomes just an option. As marriage in Japan is not being altered with the change of women, the numbers of women who do not want to get married are rising. In 2005, the death rate surpassed the birth rate. This is alarming for the Japanese society's future. People are too busy to be married, have children, and even to have sex. Further, as economy is getting more crucial, as divorce increases, marriage has become a risk. Meanwhile, risks in society, due to lack in welfare structures have caused a revival of the housewife. Thus, Japanese women are forced into a contradictory position, as they can work, but also have to seek security from men. In Norway, as the social system makes work and family compatible, women can stay independent. Therefore, even though the divorce rate is high, women are still positive to marriage. Comparing deep interviews of Japanese and Norwegian women, this thesis shows that they are not so different, but are conditioned to live differently, as equality has yet become a global standard.