

Chapter 2-Context

My hypothesis is 'Young people view cohabitation as an acceptable long-term alternative to marriage in which to bring up children.' In my research I aim to discover, not only is cohabitation on the increase but whether or not it is a long-term lifestyle choice.

Marriage is defined as the legal union of a man and a woman. I am using this concept as a main part of my research. I am focusing on this and cohabitation, defined as a situation in which a couple lives together as man and wife although not legally married. Even though cohabitation can mean a homosexual relationship, as I am comparing it to married couples for the purpose of my research I will be referring to heterosexual couples. By this I mean man and wife. I am using these in relation to my second and third aims, which are to examine people's views towards cohabitation.

Writing in 1985 Robert Chester –a neo-functionalist- states people are not stopping marriage altogether, they are just delaying it. He says 'Most adults still marry and have children. Most children are reared by their natural parents. Most people live in a household headed by a married couple. Most marriages continue until parted by death. No great change seems currently in prospect.' Basically Chester's argument is that people are still marrying as much as they used to, they just marry later on. His viewpoint is unlike that of Joan Chandler. Her study in 1993 agrees with my hypothesis. She sees cohabitation as becoming increasingly important in today's society. As it states in my hypothesis she believes people seem to prefer cohabitation as a long-term alternative to marriage. She says cohabitation has been occurring since the 18th century and therefore she believes cohabitation is nothing new.

Burgoyne and Clarke's study in 1984 agrees with the study of Robert Chester and can be used to support his study. Whilst at the same time, disproving my hypothesis and my aims. They asked their sample whether or not they thought cohabitation outside marriage was a good idea. Thirty-eight percent thought that cohabitation as a trial period before marriage was a good idea. Although when asked if they thought it was a good permanent alternative, the percentage was reduced to fifteen percent. This disagrees with my hypothesis as it shows that people viewed cohabitation as a temporary phase.

Beck and Beck Garnishee's –postmodernist perspective- (1995) study states that people are starting to move away from the traditional idea of a nuclear family. This is defined as 'stereotypically seen as a two generational family with one adult male and female with dependant offspring.' They think this is due to individualisation. Individualisation is defined as 'any set of ideas emphasizing the importance of the the individual, and the individuals interests.' Due to this they believe people are trying out a series of other options, cohabitation is included in this. Beck and Beck believe the idea of love is more important now and because of this people are willing to try various different ways in order to find it. In my aims, as I am trying to find out the reasons behind increasing cohabitation rates I believe that the concept of love will be a major part in this. For example an answer I might expect to hear would be 'I would not marry someone until I was certain they were the one for me.' Therefore I feel that I will find young people make individual decisions about lifestyles.

Another concept and reason for my aims that I will be looking at is secularisation. This is defined as 'the process in which religious thinking, practices and organisations lose their significance.' This is an important concept, as I will be using it to see if people are not marrying due to a lack of religious beliefs. This relates to my fourth aim that is discovering whether or not factors such as religion influence people's

views. Both the processes of individualisation and secularisation now mean that people have more choice and freedom to do what they want. Because of this I believe that cohabitation is no longer frowned upon as it once was. It used to be referred to as 'living in sin'. This is no longer a phrase that is widely used anymore.

From my background reading I have found that marriage does appear to be decreasing in favour of cohabitation. Although the viewpoints of Chester, Burgoyne and Clarke appear to disprove this they were writing almost twenty years ago and I believe cohabitation has continually increased as opposed to getting married. More recent sociologists like Beck and Beck Gernsheim and Joan Chandler prove.