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MARRIAGE & WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND NOWADAYS

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Abstract

This article aims at comparing the role of women in the 19th century and nowadays. It is based on EMMA by Jane Austen (1815). This writing is the result of the process seen in Pedagogical Communicative Project V, directed by professor Nancy Carvajal, where the main topic was British Culture.

Key words: Marriage, Women's roles

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comparar el rol de la mujer en el siglo XIX y hoy en día. Este está basado en EMMA por Jane Austen (1815). Este escrito es el resultado del proceso visto en Proyecto Comunicativo V dirigido por la profesora Nancy Carvajal, donde, el tema principal fue la Cultura Británica.

Palabras clave: matrimonio, el rol de la mujer

Some women wish to have a family in their lives. They want to share, to do different things and give love to them, sometimes without getting married or having a legal contract. Today, this affirmation is possible, but in the 19th century women could not choose whether or not to get married, and whether or not to have children and how many. According to this perspective, this paper analyzes how marriage affected women's social role in the 19th century and how they have changed today.

These questions have come up from the book *Emma* by Jane Austen. This story is about Miss Emma Woodhouse, she is twenty-one years old and lives in Highbury (England). She does not decide to get married, but she likes loving matches. However, she forgets her own life. Her first love match was between her governess Miss Taylor and Mrs. Weston. Then, she meets Miss Harriet Smith, and Emma looks for a couple for her. She thought that Harriet should get married to her friend Mr. Elton, who is a village vicar. Throughout the time, Emma realizes that Mr. Elton is interested in her. At the end of the story, Emma takes George Knightley's advice into account and she recognizes her mistakes and changes her insights about making love matches. Mrs. Knightley, who is her older sister's brother-in-law proposes marriage to Emma, and they live happy together. Consequently, some questions are proposed to solve the previously named contract. First, what does marriage mean? Second, what did marriage mean for women in the 19th century? Third, what does marriage mean for women today? Finally, how has marriage affected women's social roles?

Beginning with the main topic "Marriage", it is necessary to talk a little about the meaning, and what people understood by marriage. According to Polls (1999), the traditional meaning could be "marriage as a social institution. The institutional perspective argues that marriage changes individuals both to the extent that others tread differently into the extent that they come to view themselves differently. The marital relationship carries with it legal, moral and conventional assumptions about what is right and proper". In other words, marriage is the sharing of two people lives usually in an intimate and sexual union. Marriage is recognized in a variety of ways, depending on the culture in which is found. The joining could be made formal by a wedding ceremony that is also called "matrimony".

There are different opinions about marriage. Some of them are positive and other negative. On the one hand, marriage is the joining of two souls given to each other to walk through this world together. Marriage is a decision that two people make, where both are aware that the union is beneficial to them both. On the other hand, it does not have a natural aptitude or emotional strength to handle things that are natural without "title recognition." Also, it is seen as a private expression of love or public institutions impacted by traditional culture, religion, and laws. In brief, marriage is conducted and its rules have changed overtime, depending on the demographic of the time.

Marriage has had different changes throughout the history. In the 19th century marriage was the only opportunity that women had of subsistence. Wojtczak (2003) affirms that

“They had to obey men because in most cases men held all the resources and women had no independent means”. This affirmation could be shared with Austen (1815) argued that “the event had every promise of happiness for her friend. Mr. Weston was a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable age, and pleasant manner”.

Furthermore, if a woman wanted to be single she had to come from a wealthy family, if she was an only child, but she wanted to live with a man without being married she would be socially disapproved and pitied, also she could not have children or a profession. To illustrate, in the book *Emma* the most important character is Emma, never wished to have a husband because she did not need money or a high status for living; Instead of getting married, she decided to match happy couples to get a social status. We can notice it when she said “I promise you to make none myself, papa; but I must, indeed, for other people. It is the greatest amusement in the world”.

Pitifully, women were the property of men. They had a little opportunity to make decisions and to express their disagreement in the matrimony. Women lost their belongings because their husbands could appropriate them. According to Wojtczak (2003) “every man had the right to force his wife into sex and childbirth. He could spend his wife’s inheritance on a mistress or on prostitutes. It is clear that men used to dominate their wives, they not only prosecuted them when they made an offense or ran away from intolerant marriage, also the police could catch and return them home and the husband

could imprison and give a moderate correction to his wife.

Women’s sole purpose was to get married and reproduce. They submitted to take care of their house, husband and children, because they did not have the opportunity to have an education. In addition, when men committed adultery women could not divorce. However, if women committed adultery, men had a reason to leave their wives. Something curious, women did not have free movement, because their clothes represent constricted lives. To illustrate, Helena Wojtczak (2003) argued “tight lacing into corsets and cumbersome multiple layers of skirts which dragged on the ground impeded women’s freedom of movement”.

Throughout the time, the meaning of marriage has changed for women because they demanded more love, more work, more time and more daily negotiation from both partners, not just the wife as it was in the past. Now, marriage means a relationship where women have an important role in it. Marriage today is based on a new interpersonal relationship such as mutual affection, the sympathetic understanding and companionship of its members.

Marriage perspective has significantly changed throughout the time. Hemming (2011) argues that in Britain, today is possible to have sexual relationships or have children outside of marriage. Furthermore, many British people agree to live together without having legal contract. According to Park, Curtice, Thomson, Jarvis and Bromley (2001/2002).

“Between 1984 and 2000 the proportion of people thinking there is “nothing wrong” with premarital sex increased from 42% to 62%, while the proportion thinking it to be always wrong. This illustrates that, in 16 years people perception about free relationships has increased 20% from 1984 until 2000”.

These days, marriage is not seen as an institution, because it has taken second place in women’s lives. Nowadays, women can receive an education; they can go to the university and study a profession. It opens their view of the world and women do not consider necessary to get married because their work is their passion and marriage it not so important for them. Also, marriage is not a social norm, because the desire for an economic independence makes women see marriage in other ways whether it is traditional, religious or civil. For that reason, women and men live together for economic and social ends.

Since the 19th century, until today, marriage has been revised: there have been changing meanings of marriage from marriage as an institution to marriage as a relationship. Marriage as an institution was based in response to external and formal authority according to different aspects such as: the law, rigid discipline, tradition, public opinion and elaborate ritual. In contrast, marriage as a relationship goes beyond previous aspects, because it consists in understanding and the mutual affection of its members. This allows that relationship would only be achieved when there is gender equality.

Women’s changes in the marriage started by not having a freedom because they are affected by wider society or kinship

obligations, inequality, economical aspects such as property and the sexual division of labor. All these aspects carry women to make a revolution, where they fought for the rights as humans belonging to society. This revolution was called Feminism which women started to defend their rights as independent women, without fulfilling the orders from their husbands.

Marriage was seen by women as an obstacle by women to achieving their expectations, because they were previously used as a machine to make children, in order to satisfy their husband’s wishes. Koivunen (2006) quotes Ellman and Taggart (1993) suggests that the difference in power between women and men is institutionalized by the culture and often is expressed in the everyday relations of men and women. Also, Koivunen (2006) quotes Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Knudson-Martin, 1997 argue that “gender issues in marriage are often related to issues of power and control, the power is related to sex, emotional and psychological intimacy, and financial and economic issues must be explored.” Other important issues include the relative importance of each spouse’s career and employment goals and opportunities, as well as parenting and the gendered socialization of children.

In conclusion, throughout time the concept of marriage has changed, because in the 19th century marriage was seen as an institution, then, that concept has lost its meaning, for the reason that nowadays many couples like to live together without getting married, so they think that it is not necessary.

But, women were tired with that situation, so they created a feminist movement, and

they began to fight in order to be recognized in the society, which their voices were heard for a new life as a woman. Hence, the matrimony role changed, because women began to take their own decisions about their life and marriage. However, marriage has changed in the society, such as being professional in any field. Gender equality has not changed a lot because women still do the same housework; she looks up for the children, cleans the house etc.

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