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From Nuclear to Diverse: Shifting Conceptualisations of Marriage among Australia's 1960s Generation—A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: In contemporary times, the conceptualisation of marriage has shifted; however, societal attitudes and cultural ideologies regarding its construction remain complex. As such, unique generational perspectives are needed to reflect on how marriage has evolved and to comment on ongoing tensions related to it. This study explores how individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise marriage, examining the complex interplay between traditional values and evolving perspectives. Using an exploratory qualitative design underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants (7 female, 5 male) aged 56–65. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) Unveiling the New Vows: The Shifting Values of Marriage and Family, (2) Breaking Boundaries and Transforming Traditions: Debunking Heteronormativity, and (3) Witnessing Progression: Dismantling Barriers and Embracing Diversity and Equality in Marriage. The findings indicate a significant shift in how marriage is viewed, with participants demonstrating both nostalgia for traditional constructs and support for more inclusive definitions. Notably, many participants positioned themselves as more progressive than their peers, challenging notions of homogenous generational attitudes. This study highlights the ongoing tension between traditional and contemporary views of marriage, suggesting that efforts to promote inclusivity must address both legal barriers and deeply ingrained cultural norms. These findings contribute to our understanding of how social institutions like marriage are reconceptualised over time, emphasising the dynamic nature of social change and the capacity for individuals to evolve in their perspectives on deeply entrenched societal norms.



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1. Introduction

The construction of marriage remains a pivotal issue within dominant Western cultural contexts, particularly so during the debate, and the legalisation, of same-sex marriage in many countries, including Australia (Betts and Bennett 2022). Since the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Act (2017) revised the original Australian Marriage Act (1961) to redefine marriage as “the union of two people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life”, the landscape of marriage has changed, yet some of the underlying socio-cultural tensions persist. Today, marriage is seen as more of a fundamental right in many countries (Eeden-Moorefield et al. 2011; Strauss 2016).

In contemporary times, the conceptualisation of marriage has shifted, as more countries worldwide are passing legislation which acknowledges all forms of sexuality and grants equality for same sex couples to marry (Becker 2012; Richardson-Self et al. 2020). The definition is expanding to capture individuals holding a range of identities where individuals and communities advocate for the right for every person to marry no matter their gender or sexual identity (Badgett et al. 2024; Ould and Whitlow 2011). Furthermore, the passing of marriage equality laws in Australia marked a significant milestone. However, societal attitudes and cultural ideologies regarding the construction of marriage remain

complex (Badgett et al. 2024; Richardson-Self et al. 2020). Discourse on marriage is informed by socio-cultural values attached to it and its meaning within western cultural contexts. While legislative change has occurred, it has not necessarily equated to an immediate or universal shift in societal values (Mohammed and Jacob 2022). As such, considering how marriage is constructed in a post-legislation context is important, in order to consider whether the entrenched heteronormative ideologies have shifted or persisted, despite the legal recognition of equality in marriage.

Marriage discourse continues to be informed by deeply rooted socio-cultural values. Although legal barriers have been removed, the acceptance and normalisation of marriage for all vary widely within different social groups (Betts and Bennett 2022). For example, political figures and public opinion leaders often reflect a spectrum of beliefs, from full support of marriage for all to resistance based on traditional values (Mohammed and Jacob 2022). The tension is further signified by the construction of marriage as a permanent, fixed institution or a social construct that is shaped and moulded depending on dominant assumptions and worldviews (Badgett et al. 2024; Richardson-Self et al. 2020). The impact of these perspectives on the broader societal conceptualisation of marriage remains a crucial area of investigation.

1.1. *The Shifting Value of Marriage*

The conceptualisation of marriage has evolved significantly since the 1960s. During this period, marriage rates increased, and the average age of marriage decreased (Carmichael 1987; Willoughby 2020). While attitudes towards marriage were relatively carefree, it remained a sacred institution that offered individuals a sense of freedom and control (Gare 2010; Willoughby 2020). Traditional marriage symbolised cherished ideals and served as a source of social authority and power (Edwards 2007). During the 1960s, the point of view promoted in dominant Western culture was that men were the breadwinners, aspiring for employment in the workforce (Ogletree 2014; Richards and Elliott 2003). Men earning the highest income with the labour they performed was constructed to be of higher importance than the domestic roles that women were expected to perform, such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children (Ogletree 2014; Sassler and Schoen 1999). Tensions emerged within the culture when individuals state their reasons to marry, including love, social pressure, familial influence, finance, or starting a family (Leonhardt et al. 2020; Sassler and Schoen 1999). The tension is further exacerbated when individuals' perspectives shift and whether they conform to dominant understandings of marriage (Willoughby 2020). Within this context, this tension illustrated the beginnings of the sexual revolution. There were many events that took place which influenced attitudes regarding marriage, premarital sex, contraception, abortion, monogamy, and sexuality (Chrisman 2013; Hekma and Giami 2014). As such, it was suggested that the dominant perspective surrounding marriage and gender roles within the 1960s began to change as the decade progressed.

During the late 1960s to early 1970s, the desire to have a companionate marriage emerged, described as the need to share each other's lives, to be close to one another, and to share a strong emotional bond (Gilbertson 2014). Couples began to merge their lives together, and although individuals had their particular role in the marriage, roles soon merged, and the expression of a partnership emerged (Davis 2008; Dawson 2018). Interests outside of the home and into the social life began to unite as the couples soon spent more of their leisure time together (Szreter and Fisher 2010). These experiences did not come without their issues, and the division of household roles and norms gave rise to tension within the household (Cherlin 2004; Dawson 2018). This tension was only perpetuated by the presence of a family and children. Division between work and home life seemed to maintain the tension, which allowed for more awareness of what each individual brought to the marriage (Vogel et al. 2007). Shifting ideals were apparent throughout the history of modern marriage.

1.2. Marriage as a Socio-Cultural Issue

Throughout history, marriage as a construction has served a particular function, reflecting dominant Western cultural norms (Badgett et al. 2024; Johnson et al. 2011; Richardson-Self et al. 2020). While reviewing the history of marriage through a contemporary socio-cultural lens, previous constructions can be seen as “unfair”, “inappropriate”, “unequitable”, and “unreasonable” (Chamie and Mirkin 2011; Mohammed and Jacob 2022). To be truly critical, we must examine marriage in its context as a product of prevailing assumptions and worldviews, which shape and are shaped by these contexts (Burr 2003; Phillips 2023). This approach allows us to reframe the institution of marriage critically. Although commentary on past and current forms of marriage is crucial, it is unrealistic to expect any “new” version of marriage to be entirely problem-free. Instead, commentary should aim to critically review and understand the dominant constructions of marriage.

Research on conceptualisations of marriage, and culture, often employs social constructionism (Atkinson 1987; Becker 2012; Cass 1984; Chamie and Mirkin 2011; Christopher and Sprecher 2000). This approach allows individuals to describe and explain their world without assuming that any construction is “right” or the only reality. Instead, it emphasises how reality is constructed between and within people (Phillips 2023; Young and Collin 2004). For many years, marriage has been a socially constructed practice shaped by dominant Western culture to align with specific social norms, experiences, and realities shaped by heteronormative practices (Badgett et al. 2024; Gergen 2009). Historically, marriage had been defined as a union between a man and a woman, which had significant implications for government decision making and family structure (Betts and Bennett 2022; Kefalas et al. 2011).

Even with the passing of marriage equality laws in Australia, the ideological foundations of marriage remain influenced by long-standing cultural norms. Heteronormative society often assumes heterosexuality as the “normal” and unquestioned identity, manifesting in formal social structures but seldom critically examined (Ericsson 2011; Van Der Toorn et al. 2020). For example, the traditional construct of marriage as between a man and a woman still persists, categorising other gender and sexual identities as “other” (Mohammed and Jacob 2022; Wesling 2014). This dynamic illustrates the complex relationship where individuals shape culture, but culture, in turn, informs individuals about what is considered “normal” (Burr 2003; Van Der Toorn et al. 2020). Despite the legal recognition of same-sex marriage, the underlying tensions and dominant cultural assumptions regarding marriage persist. These tensions highlight the ongoing need to critically assess how marriage is conceptualised and to challenge the heteronormative norms that contribute to influence societal norms on marriage. The struggle for marriage equality, both before and after the 2017 legislation, emphasises the importance of continually questioning and redefining what constitutes marriage in a way that truly reflects equity and inclusivity.

1.3. Research Rationale

Challenging dominant cultural assumptions requires examining both individual and societal contexts, drawing a comparison of current issues, ideas, and realities with contemporary knowledge and recognition that the world is constantly evolving (Easley 2010; Thomas 1996). The meanings we construct are influenced by behavioural, social, political, and cultural factors and contexts (Jaeger and Rosnow 1988; Phillips 2023). These issues, acts, and events are dynamic and active, with reality continuously changing (Georgoudi and Rosnow 1985; Phillips 2023). Human activity is deeply embedded within a socio-cultural matrix of relationships, meanings, and contexts, which are perpetually in flux (Kincaid 2004). It is evident that while the legal recognition of marriage equality marks a significant shift, many underlying cultural ideologies remain. Over the past 50 years, ideals about marriage have evolved from very traditional and conservative views to more inclusive and egalitarian ones (Betts and Bennett 2022; Coriden 2004). Although the political system now enforces legislation that allows individuals to marry regardless of sex or gender, ongoing change requires examining power structures and processes at a macro level

(Rostosky and Riggle 2011; Strauss 2016). Culturally, we must assess the current value and emphasis placed on marriage. By examining the narrative discourse of dominant Western culture, we can understand marriage as part of a broader worldview within a specific context (Badgett et al. 2024; Herek 1986; Richardson-Self et al. 2020). This perspective helps us recognise that, despite legal advancements, many societal attitudes and ideologies about marriage may persist. The challenge remains to critically analyse and continue evolving these views to truly achieve inclusivity and equity in the institution of marriage.

Individuals born in the 1960s have witnessed and experienced shifting understandings of marriage across several decades. This unique generational perspective allows them to reflect on how values surrounding marriage have evolved and to comment on ongoing tensions related to marriage. This cohort can provide valuable insights into the continuity and change in marriage values, highlighting both traditional and contemporary understandings. The overarching research question guiding this project is, *“How do individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise marriage?”*. By focusing on this demographic, this research aims to uncover how their experiences and reflections contribute to the broader discourse on marriage, revealing persistent ideologies and identifying areas where cultural and societal shifts may still be needed.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

I employed an exploratory qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews, and inductive reflexive thematic analysis. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on marriage. The humanistic, interpretive nature of qualitative research allowed for a detailed examination of participants' lived experiences and the construction and interpretation of their realities (Jackson et al. 2007; Phillips 2023). This method revealed nuanced perspectives on marriage, highlighting both the progress made and the areas where further cultural shifts are necessary. I adopted a social constructionist epistemology, recognizing the existence of multiple realities and enabling the construction of a shared reality through various perspectives (Ültanır 2012; Phillips 2023). Anchored in such an epistemology, this approach acknowledges how individual experiences are shaped through dynamic interactions within social and cultural contexts (Ültanır 2012; Phillips 2023). A rich foundation for understanding was provided through the dynamic and contextual nature of this epistemology, emphasising the influence of social and cultural milieus on individual experiences. This epistemological lens provided a strong foundation for a thorough exploration of participants' perspectives, unveiling persistent ideologies and identifying areas where cultural and societal shifts are needed.

2.2. Researcher Positionality

As a researcher exploring the conceptualisations of marriage by individuals born in the 1960s, it is crucial to reflect on my positionality and how it may have influenced the research process. I am a cis-gender man who identifies as male, young, white, and English-speaking. My upbringing in a lower socioeconomic area, despite financial constraints, was enriched by a loving family (consisting of my married parents, my older brother, and I) who ensured I had a flourishing childhood. My education includes a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) degree and a Doctor of Philosophy, and I was the first in my family to attend university. I currently hold a financially stable position, working in a tenured teaching and research role, allowing me to navigate life with a sense of security and comfort. As a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual/Aromantic, and Diverse Sexual Orientations/Gender Identities (LGBTIQ+) community (identifying as gay), I sometimes fear expressing my identity due to potential discrimination, persecution, or violence.

My positionality inevitably shapes my approach to research and interactions with participants. As a young, cis-gender male academic from a lower socioeconomic background, now holding a financially stable academic position, my educational background,

professional status, and my identity as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community could have influenced the way participants perceived me and engaged with this study. My insider/outsider status played a significant role, as I was an outsider to the generational experiences of my participants. This generational difference may have influenced how participants shared their perspectives, perhaps feeling the need to explain cultural contexts that were unfamiliar to me. Conversely, my outsider status potentially allowed for more detailed explanations from participants, enriching the data collected. My identity as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community positioned me as an insider in the discussions about marriage equality and changing societal attitudes. This insider status likely facilitated more open conversations about these topics, but I remained mindful of not projecting my own experiences onto participants' narratives. My academic background in psychology and my current role in academia influenced the framing of research questions and the theoretical lenses applied during analysis. I was conscious of balancing academic perspectives with the lived experiences of participants. Throughout the interview process, I reflected on how my presence as a younger, educated academic might impact participants' responses. Some participants may have felt compelled to present more progressive views, while others might have emphasised traditional perspectives to highlight generational differences. During data analysis, I was acutely aware of my own evolving views on marriage and family structure. I used my reflexive journal to document instances where my personal experiences or biases might be influencing interpretation, and I actively sought to mitigate these influences to maintain focus on participants' narratives.

My experiences of both privilege (as an educated, employed individual) and marginalisation (as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community) provide a unique lens through which I analyse and understand the data. This dual perspective enhanced my sensitivity to issues surrounding marriage and the way I interpreted participant responses, particularly regarding experiences of social change and persistent challenges. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in qualitative research, as my positionality could influence the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. By acknowledging and reflecting on these factors throughout the research process, I aim to provide a transparent and nuanced exploration of how individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise marriage, while remaining aware of the potential biases and perspectives I bring to the research. This ongoing reflection enhanced my ability to engage critically with the data and to present a nuanced interpretation of participants' conceptualisations of marriage.

2.3. Participants

Participants were individuals who were born within the decade of the 1960s and were raised, and/or lived, within the dominant Western culture of Australia during this time, as well as being of varying marital statuses. First, this demographic was chosen due to the unique societal, cultural, and political factors that influenced their formative years. The 1960s and subsequent decades were marked by significant events and movements, including the sexual revolution, the rise of second-wave feminism, and evolving constructions of gender roles (Chrisman 2013; Hekma and Giami 2014). These changes provided a distinct backdrop for shaping their views and experiences, making them particularly relevant for exploring conceptualisations of marriage. Second, the inclusion of participants with varying marital statuses was a deliberate choice aligned with this study's broader focus. This approach aimed to explore conceptualisations of marriage among the 1960s generation comprehensively, rather than limiting perspectives to a specific marital status group. While some existing studies have focused on particular marital statuses (e.g., Azmawati et al. 2015; Maatta and Uusiautti 2012; Stassen and Bates 2010), my approach sought to capture a more diverse range of perspectives on marriage within this generation, although the majority of the sample identified as married. This decision was based on the understanding that individuals' conceptualisations of marriage can be shaped by experiences both within and beyond their current marital status. Including this diversity in the sample allowed for a more holistic understanding of how this generation views

marriage. By incorporating participants with different marital statuses, I was able to explore how various life experiences and relationship trajectories might influence perceptions of marriage. This diversity helped identify common themes across different marital statuses, as well as potential differences in perspectives based on marital experiences. I acknowledge that the different marital statuses of the participants likely impacted the findings and could be explored further in future research. This approach provides a foundation for understanding the complexity of marriage conceptualisations across varied relationship experiences within the 1960s generation.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit the sample, where I targeted those who would provide the most insight on the phenomenon being explored. This sampling method is well suited to qualitative research because it involves the deliberate and strategic selection of participants, matching the objective of exploring phenomena, contexts, and experiences unique to the targeted population ([Andrade 2021](#)). This ensures that the gathered data are relevant, in-depth, and directly aligned with this study's goals. Flyers were placed on university campuses in Western Australia, in community/leisure centres, and on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). On Facebook, I shared recruitment information through public posts on my professional page, as well as in relevant community groups focused on Australian culture and history. On Instagram, I used relevant hashtags to increase visibility of the recruitment posts. LinkedIn was used to share the study information within professional networks related to social sciences and Australian studies.

The sampling strategy and size for this study were determined based on information power, as described by [Malterud et al. \(2016\)](#). This concept guided my initial approach to sampling, considering that the more relevant information the sample holds in relation to the overarching research question, the smaller the required sample size. Initially, I proposed a larger sample size to capture the diversity within the inclusion criteria. However, as I began data collection, I found that the interviews yielded rich, in-depth data that provided substantial insights into the research. The quality of dialogue during interviews was high, with participants providing detailed and reflective accounts of their experiences and perspectives on marriage. In this study, sufficient information power was achieved due to several factors—the specific aim of exploring how individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise marriage, the appreciation of established theoretical frameworks that guided interpretation of the findings, the specificity of the sample (individuals from this demographic group), and the quality of dialogue during interviews. The interviews were marked by fluent and in-depth conversations, with researchers effectively prompting and expanding on participant responses, ensuring that participants, as experts of their own experiences, provided rich and detailed insights. Pragmatic considerations also played a role in the final sample size. Some challenges were experienced in recruitment, with fewer individuals expressing interest in participation than initially anticipated. This, combined with the time and resource constraints of this study, led to a revaluation of the sampling approach. Key ideas were discussed consistently, despite the diverse backgrounds of the participants, and by the 12th interview, I observed that new interviews were not yielding substantially new insights, which suggested that information power had been met. I acknowledge that a larger sample may have captured some additional nuances and perspectives. However, I believe that the final sample provided sufficient information power to address the research question and contribute meaningful insights into the field. Overall, my adopted approach ensured that the sample size was appropriate and sufficient to meet this study's objectives. In total, 12 participants took part in this study, with 58.33% identifying as female and 41.67% identifying as male. Participants ranged in age from 56 to 65 years ($M = 59.92$, $SD = 3.45$). The full range of demographic information collected is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Demographics	<i>n</i>
Age (in Years)	
Mean	59.92
SD	3.45
Minimum	56
Maximum	65
Range	9
Ethnicity	
Australian	12
Gender	
Female	7
Male	5
Education Level	
High School	4
TAFE	2
Bachelor's Degree	6
Current Relationship Status	
Married	8
Engaged	1
Single	2
Divorced	1
Living Situation	
Living with Children	1
Living Alone	2
Living with Partner	4
Living with Partner and Children	5

2.4. Materials

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to offer a framework of broad topics and questions for discussion, while also permitting flexibility to delve deeper into specific areas (Morrow 2005; Ravenek and Rudman 2013; Ryan et al. 2007). This approach aimed to facilitate a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences. By employing the semi-structured guide, active interaction and dialogue were encouraged with the participants, fostering rapport-building opportunities (Morrow 2005; Ravenek and Rudman 2013; Ryan et al. 2007). The construction of the interview guide was informed by the existing literature, tailored to facilitate the exploration of how individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise marriage. Twelve interview questions were developed, with additional prompting questions to explore content in further depth. Example questions included "What are your experiences with marriage?" and "When thinking of the term marriage, what comes to mind?". The guide allowed for an interview of an approximately 60 minute duration. Additionally, a demographic survey was developed to gather information on participants' age, gender, highest level of education, current relationship status, household composition, years living in Australia, and country of origin. This survey did not request any personally identifiable details and was not linked directly to the interview data. Participants were given the option to skip any questions they preferred not to answer. All collected data were de-identified to ensure confidentiality and comply with ethical guidelines.

2.5. Procedure

After receiving ethical approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, recruitment began. Interested participants received a participant information sheet and consent form via email, outlining this study's focus, participants' rights, and data usage. I coordinated interview scheduling with participants to find a mutually convenient time, location, and platform. Verbal informed consent was obtained during the interviews,

and formal consent was confirmed with the return of the signed consent form via email. Participants also completed the demographic survey with assurances of confidentiality and identity protection provided. Interviews typically lasted about an hour but varied in length from 30 to 90 minutes. Following the interviews, participants received a verbal summary and were given the opportunity to add any additional information. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim after each interview, with identifying information replaced by either pseudonyms or placeholders. Transcripts were then manually analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019, 2021). The process of interviewing, transcription, and analysis was iterative, allowing for continual engagement and refinement throughout the study.

2.6. Data Analysis and Quality Procedures

An inductive, reflexive thematic analysis was employed, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021), which diverged from relying on existing theoretical frameworks and theories to allow for a comprehensive and novel exploration of participants' perspectives regarding marriage. To immerse myself in the data, I meticulously listened to the interview audio recordings and transcribed them verbatim. Initially, codes were developed capturing both the surface level and underlying content of participants' narratives, inductively. Subsequently, these codes were organised into broader categories through secondary coding, facilitating the construction of preliminary themes. These themes underwent continuous review, refinement, and definition, ultimately culminating in a comprehensive analysis. The findings, presented in the subsequent section, are characterised by detailed descriptions, interpretations, and pertinent quotations, aiming to encapsulate the essence and significance of each theme within the context of participants' conceptualisations of marriage.

To enhance the trustworthiness and quality of the study, multiple procedures were adopted. First, a methodological audit trail was maintained, including recruitment materials, personal statements regarding methodological rationales, a reflexive journal examining my personal views and experiences to inform reflexivity, notes from thematic analytic sessions, thematic mapping processes and research notes, allowing for a record of information that informed the analysis (Morrow 2005; Yardley 2017). Additionally, the semi-structured interview guide was reviewed and then pilot tested before data collection to assist in quality assurance, ensure the appropriateness of the guide in addressing the overarching research question, and to consider any areas which would be revised in the questioning (Abdul Majid et al. 2017). Finally, when all interviews were conducted and analysed, I invited participants to engage in member checking, where they were sent a summary of the preliminary findings and asked to provide feedback on the fairness and accuracy of the interpretations, allowing for the addition of reflections to the research (Locke and Velamuri 2009).

3. Findings

The analysis of participants' experiences revealed a complex tapestry of perspectives on marriage, characterised by several paradoxes and tensions. These themes, (1) Unveiling the New Vows: The Shifting Values of Marriage and Family, (2) Breaking Boundaries and Transforming Traditions: Debunking Heteronormativity, and (3) Witnessing Progression: Dismantling Barriers and Embracing Diversity and Equality in Marriage, highlight the evolving nature of marriage as a social institution. Participants' views reflect a tension between traditional and contemporary perspectives, showcasing both a perceived decline in the centrality of marriage and a celebration of its expansion to include previously marginalised groups. Generational conflicts emerged as participants critiqued the rigidity of older generations while embodying progressive views themselves. The themes also exposed the ongoing challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community, revealing persistent discrimination despite legal progress. The themes also illuminated the tension between calls for inclusivity and the lingering influence of heteronormative standards. These paradoxes and tensions highlight the complex, multifaceted nature of how marriage

is conceptualised in contemporary society, emphasising the need for continued critical examination of structural inequities and societal biases.

3.1. *Unveiling the New Vows: The Shifting Values of Marriage and Family*

The theme “*Unveiling the New Vows: The Shifting Values of Marriage and Family*” acknowledges the participants’ suggestion of a significant shift in how the institutions of “*marriage*” and “*family*” are viewed and constructed and that there have been changes in the value that had been placed on them over time. Participants first suggested that marriage had lost its meaning of love, commitment, and togetherness, and being married in today’s context did not hold the significance it did in the 1960s. For example, a participant reflected, “*I don’t think people see marriage in much the same way or ascribe to be married. . .*” [P2]. Here, this sentiment reflects the potential decline in the centrality of marriage in society, which could be linked to the broader social changes that have unfolded since the 1960s. These changes may have lessened the social and economic pressures to marry, allowing individuals to prioritise personal fulfilment and self-actualisation outside of marriage. Furthermore, the participant’s comment regarding the change in how people “*. . . ascribe to be married. . .*” hints at a potential evolution in the perceived purpose of marriage. While marriage traditionally served economic and social functions beyond love and companionship, the sentiment here suggests that marriage has shifted towards a greater emphasis on emotional connection and personal growth within a relationship.

Marriage was also suggested as a construct shaped by historical and social contexts, where ideas of marriage highlighted the contrast between “*traditional*” and “*contemporary*” perspectives, suggesting a shift in how marriage is viewed. The traditional view was often associated with the heteronormative ideal (“*. . . marriage between a man and a woman. . .*” [P4]) and emphasised aspects of stability, duty, and procreation. Participants spoke to specific examples to highlight how they saw the construct of marriage was changing and how contemporary views on marriage were taking shape. For example, one explanation was the increase in rates of divorce,

It appears harder for couples and families. . . that is why marriages don’t last. . . people don’t have that perception of marriage like we did when we were younger. . . most marriages last only 5 to 7 years nowadays. . . it shows you most people don’t understand what real marriage is. . . [P3]

Here, the sentiment reflects the perception that contemporary couples lack the commitment and perseverance necessary for a “*real marriage*”. Such discourse is particularly interesting, as the participant implies that “*real marriages*” may have particular qualities (e.g., cohesion, perseverance) and that these qualities may not be evident in marriages forged in contemporary times. Such an evaluation about contemporary marriages implies that they may lack these qualities, which reinforces a binary view of marriage—either “*real*” with traditional values or somehow lesser and “*unreal*”, reflecting contemporary values. This use of discourse infers that there is a version of marriage that is “*right*”, and variations on this could be considered “*not real*”.

Participants also suggested that constructions of “*family*” were also linked to “*marriage*” and that these had changed over time. The emergence of “*contemporary*” perspectives was evident in the participants responses, with one participant expressing that, “*. . . marriage and family doesn’t have to be the old ways of thinking. It can be two adults who love and care for each other, who get married, and then who want to share that with children*” [P7]. Here, the expression of “*old*” and “*new*” ways of thinking suggest that perspectives have changed with differing generations and that ideas of marriage and family do not have to subscribe to more “*traditional*” definitions. Traditional definitions held by the older generations were suggested to be behind the current time and context.

Of interest within these sentiments were the tensions between traditional definitions and how participants identified their personal views as progressive and distinct from the majority of their age-related peers. Participants suggested that such tensions in how marriage and family are constructed are related to their peers being unreceptive to change,

"I mean it's an older generation, they can't change. . .it's funny I have this view when I myself am the same age, and I have changed my views" [P11]. Here, it is important to consider how the participant uses the term *"can't"*, which implies that their fellow peers are static in their views of marriage and family. This points to a critical analysis of generational conflict and the resistance to evolving social norms, which implies an intrinsic incapacity, rather than a mere unwillingness, highlighting a perceived rigidity in older generations' perspectives. Such rigidity can be interpreted as a significant barrier to social progress, where deeply ingrained beliefs and values inhibit adaptation to contemporary understandings of family structures.

Finally, participants expressed evidence of a drive towards suggested contemporary views, where some of the *"traditional"* ideologies identified were no longer viewed as acceptable. Participants expressed frustration and exasperation surrounding the devaluing of marriage by individuals that had the right to marry. One participant spoke to the opportunities for the LGBTIQ+ community to now be able to marry but, yet, were still held to different standards compared to those who identified outside the community,

So, we can get married now, right? But every single day, I always hear some bullshit about how we are destroying the sanctity of marriage. Like what the fuck? You see heterosexual people destroying the institution every day, yet we are the ones who have to prove our worth and ability to be married. Even with having marriage equality, we are still having to say "give us a go, we'll prove it to you" [P1]

Here, the participant suggests how individuals who identify with the LGBTIQ+ community are assumed to destroy the institution of marriage, whereby they are positioned to have to prove their worth to the dominant group. Feeling as if one must prove themselves may relate to the perspective of *"real"* marriage, where the participant alludes that they can have this form of marriage, once they are *"given a go"*. Such sentiments reveal commentary on societal norms and the entrenched biases that dictate who is deemed worthy of participating in certain social institutions. The frustration expressed by the participant highlights the need to critique heteronormative standards that *"gatekeep"* the institution of marriage. By highlighting the need for the LGBTIQ+ community to *"prove"* their worthiness, the participant calls attention to the unjust double standards and inherent discrimination within these societal constructs.

Moreover, the commentary extends to the critique of the hypocrisy observed in the treatment of marriage. While traditional perspectives may promote marriage as a sacred institution, the reality, as mentioned by the participants, is that many heterosexual individuals who marry do not uphold these ideals, engaging in behaviours that undermine the very sanctity they claim to protect. Such juxtaposition illuminates the inconsistent application of moral judgements, where the LGBTIQ+ community is unfairly burdened with proving their legitimacy regarding marriage and family, while others are not held to the same stringent standards. In summary, this theme presents the participants' perspectives, shedding light on the current conceptualisation of *"marriage"* and *"family"*, which serve as a powerful critique of the structural inequities that marginalise certain groups of people over others. Participants called for a re-evaluation of what marriage represents, as well as urging society to embrace a more inclusive and equitable understanding of this fundamental social institution.

3.2. Breaking Boundaries and Transforming Traditions: Debunking Heteronormativity

The theme *"Breaking Boundaries and Transforming Traditions: Debunking Heteronormativity"* considers the different ways in which the specific socio-cultural settings that individuals are exposed to shape their construction of marriage. These settings encompass social norms, historical events, and cultural practices that influence individual perspectives on marriage. Participants described their experiences within two primary socio-cultural contexts: the Australian dominant Western culture of their upbringing, and an idealised, hopeful future context. One participant recounted the heteronormative expectations prevalent during their upbringing, *"I grew up with a mum and a dad. . .I didn't have any friends with two dads or*

mums... it was the expected standard and definitely influenced by society... [P5]. This statement highlights how deeply entrenched heteronormative values were within the culture, shaping the societal expectations surrounding marriage. The implicit message is that these norms were not only widespread but also unquestioned, creating a societal template for what constituted a “normal” family structure. Additionally, it could be suggested that the lack of exposure to diverse family structures during the participant’s formative years may have limited their potential to consider alternative possibilities. An absence of visible examples of same-sex-parented families in their immediate social circle reinforced the notion that heteronormative family structures were at the time the only acceptable or legitimate option. Other participants spoke to this, highlighting that, “...it was expected that you had Mum, Dad, that was the norm” and “...you never saw diverse representation back then really” [P9]. Such a lack of representation may have contributed to a sense of invisibility or marginalisation of non-heteronormative family structures, further entrenching the dominance of heteronormative ideals.

Participants identified these entrenched norms as influencing societal constructs of marriage, often reinforcing ideas of acceptability. One participant noted, “*They’re scared of something different and are not open to new experiences... it comes from being ignorant and trying not to associate with different types of people*” [P1]. This reflection suggests that deviation from the “norm” was met with fear and resistance, indicating a broader societal reluctance to embrace diversity in family structures and marriage practices. The fear and resistance identified here can be considered powerful barriers to social change, where the participant spoke to a deeper discomfort individuals may have with the unfamiliar and unknown. Additionally, the participant’s use of language such as “scared” and “ignorant” reflects the emotional and intellectual barriers to accepting non-heteronormative constructs. Such fear, ignorance, and resistance may stem from a lack of understanding, exposure, or empathy towards other family structures that do not conform to heteronormative ideals. Other participants supported this, adding, “...people are scared of change, because they can’t control the narrative” [P8] and “...discomfort means they’re threatened of something new, and potentially, something better” [P10]. Participants here spoke to a defensive posture, with individuals’ resistance to shifting beyond traditional norms as a way of maintaining a sense of stability and control in perceiving threats to the status quo.

Despite this resistance, there was an acknowledgement among participants of the fluidity and potential for change within the dominant Western cultural context. A participant expressed optimism about evolving social norms, “*I feel we’re all born in the same world... but points of view change, people question and re-evaluate their beliefs...*” [P12]. This statement points to a dynamic understanding of cultural norms as not static but subject to scrutiny and evolution. The participant recognises the capacity for individual and collective reflection, suggesting that exposure to diverse perspectives can catalyse social change. The process of questioning and re-evaluating beliefs appears as a crucial step towards breaking down heteronormative constructs. The participant’s acknowledgement that “...points of view change...” suggests a recognition of the malleability and fluidity of personal beliefs and societal norms, implying that individuals have the capacity to critically examine their assumptions and biases and update their perspectives based on new information and experiences.

The participants’ narratives suggest that while heteronormative constructs have historically dominated, there is a growing recognition of their malleability. The lived experiences within this dominant culture allow individuals to critically assess and potentially redefine what marriage means. This critical self-reflection can lead to more inclusive and egalitarian views of marriage, challenging age-old norms and fostering greater acceptance and support. Additionally, these insights reveal the complex interplay between individual agency and societal structures. Participants’ ability to question and potentially alter their beliefs reveals the role of personal experience in shaping social change. It indicates that while cultural settings impose certain norms, individuals within those settings possess the power to challenge and transform these norms, leading to broader shifts in societal attitudes toward

marriage. In summary, this theme illustrates the tension between traditional heteronormative constructs and the evolving perspectives on marriage within the Australian dominant Western culture. It considers the potential for significant cultural shifts through critical reflection and openness to new experiences, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and diverse understandings of marriage.

3.3. *Witnessing Progression: Dismantling Barriers and Embracing Diversity and Equality in Marriage*

The theme “*Witnessing Progression: Dismantling Barriers and Embracing Diversity and Equality in Marriage*” explores the participants’ reflections on pivotal events and societal shifts that have emerged since their birth during the period of the 1960s. Participants reflected on the struggles and eventual successes of various groups in attaining the right to marry. Acknowledged as living through a period of significant social change, participants spoke to how traditional notions of marriage were rooted in exclusivity and conformity to societal norms, which have been challenged and transformed. This was considered to have influenced their understanding of marriage as an evolving institution. At its core, the theme speaks to the evolving nature of marriage and the gradual dismantling of discriminatory barriers that have historically prevented certain groups from accessing this fundamental human right.

Participants acknowledged that throughout history, marriage had been restricted based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. They recognised that many groups, such as interracial couples and same-sex couples, were previously denied the right to marry within the Australian context, “*Looking back, it’s clear that marriage wasn’t always accessible to everyone. It was limited by societal norms and prejudices of the time against same-sex couples, interracial couples. . .*” [P6]. Here, in considering the experiences of groups who were previously denied the right to marry, the participants recognised that the institution of marriage had been used as a tool of oppression and discrimination, perpetuating inequality and reinforcing societal hierarchies. However, participants also noted the gradual changes in marriage legislation and the expansion of marriage rights to these previously excluded groups. It was emphasised by participants that witnessing these changes shaped their view of marriage as an institution that should be inclusive and equitable, “*Seeing how marriage has evolved to include interracial couples and, more recently, same-sex couples, has made me realise that marriage is about love and commitment, not about fitting into a narrow definition*” [P8]. Here, the power of social movements and collective advocacy in bringing about change and expanding the boundaries of marriage are recognised. The participant further added to this, stating, “*. . .the fight for marriage equality was so traumatising for those involved. I am just glad to see equality for all now. One step at a time. . .*” [P8]. The participant acknowledges here how the efforts of activists, coupled with shifting public attitudes and legal victories, have gradually “*chipped away*” at the barriers to marriage equality. Such change appears to have aided in a reconceptualisation of marriage as an institution based on love, commitment, and equal rights, rather than narrow definitions dictated by tradition and prejudice.

Participants suggested that observing the struggles and triumphs of marginalised groups in attaining marriage equality has heightened their awareness of the importance of equal rights and fairness. They recognised that denying certain groups the right to marry perpetuates discrimination and undermines the fundamental principles of equality, “*When you consider how hard some groups had to fight for the right to marry, it makes you question why anyone should be excluded from this basic human right*” [P4]. Furthermore, participants expressed that witnessing the positive outcomes of marriage equality for previously excluded groups reinforced their belief in the transformative power of inclusivity. They noted how extending marriage rights to all couples, regardless of their identity, strengthened the institution of marriage by promoting love, commitment, and family stability, “*Seeing same-sex couples finally able to marry and build families has shown me that marriage is about creating a loving and supportive partnership, regardless of the couple’s gender*” [P5]. Here, the transformative impact of inclusivity on the meaning and significance of marriage is high-

lighted, with participants expressing how the institution of marriage is strengthened and enriched. It can be suggested that for participants, marriage has become, and has been further conceptualised, as a symbol of acceptance, equality, and the celebration of diverse forms of love and family.

Overall, the participants' narratives encapsulate a profound shift in the ways that they conceptualise and construct the meaning of marriage. These highlight how their constructions of marriage have been shaped by considering the experiences of marginalised groups and acknowledging the power of social change, the importance of empathy and understanding, and the transformative potential of inclusivity in redefining the institution of marriage. By recognising the previous exclusion of certain groups from marriage and witnessing the progress towards marriage equality, participants have developed a more inclusive and equitable understanding of marriage. They view marriage as an institution that should be accessible to all loving couples, believing that extending marriage rights to previously excluded groups strengthens the overall meaning and significance of marriage in society.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide rich insights into how individuals born in the 1960s conceptualise and construct marriage, revealing a complex interplay between traditional values and evolving perspectives. This cohort, having come of age during a period of significant social upheaval, offers a unique vantage point on the institution of marriage. Their lived experiences span from the traditional, heteronormative constructs of their youth to the more inclusive, diverse understandings of the present day. The themes constructed collectively illustrate the dynamic nature of marriage as a social institution and highlight the tensions inherent in its evolving conceptualisation, reflecting both continuity and change in societal attitudes.

There was a significant shift in how marriage and family were viewed and valued by individuals born in the 1960s, aligned with broader societal changes observed since the 1960s, as noted by [Coriden \(2004\)](#), who highlighted the radical development in teachings on marriage and family. The perceived decline in the centrality of marriage, as expressed by participants, reflects the lessening of social and economic pressures to marry, allowing for a greater emphasis on personal fulfilment outside of marriage. This finding resonates with the work of [Cherlin \(2004\)](#), who observed the changing nature of marriage from an institution to a relationship based on personal choice and self-development. It is crucial to note that this shift is not uniform or without contradiction. While participants acknowledged the changing landscape of marriage, many simultaneously expressed nostalgia for what they perceived as "*real marriage*", characterised by commitment and perseverance. The findings suggest a more complex reality where new and old conceptualisations of marriage coexist, often within the same individual.

The findings reveal an interesting paradox in how the participants view themselves in relation to social change. Many participants positioned themselves as more progressive than their peers, challenging the notion of homogenous generational attitudes. This self-perception as outliers within their generation suggests a more nuanced understanding is needed, one that accounts for intra-generational diversity and the capacity for individual evolution of perspectives over time. This finding contrasts with some previous research (e.g., [Twenge et al. 2015](#)) that characterised generational attitudes more monolithically, highlighting the need for more detailed analyses of generational perspectives on social institutions like marriage.

Findings also illustrated the ongoing process of questioning and dismantling heteronormative constructs. Participants' reflections on their upbringing in predominantly heteronormative contexts, and their subsequent evolution towards more inclusive views, align with [Ericsson's \(2011\)](#) observations on the malleability of societal norms. Furthermore, the participants' journey towards more inclusive views highlights the formation and progression of intimate relationships based on mutual satisfaction, rather than tradition.

This shift in perspective among the participants reflects a broader societal transformation. However, it is important to consider that this evolution may not be uniform across all demographic groups. Moore-Berg and Karpinski's (2019) work on intersectionality suggests that factors such as socioeconomic status, education level, and geographical location significantly influence the rate and shift of such ideological shifts. Conversely, findings diverge from assertions in the literature that generational change is the primary driver of evolving marriage conceptualisations (Hendi 2019). Rather, my findings indicate a more complex interplay between personal experiences, societal exposure, and individual reflection. Furthermore, while the participants acknowledged fear and ignorance as barriers, they did not explicitly mention the institutional and systemic factors that are crucial in maintaining heteronormative structures. This gap raises questions about the extent to which individuals recognise and engage with broader structural issues in their personal evolution towards more inclusive views of marriage and family.

Findings also captured the unique perspectives of the participants who had lived through significant social changes. Their reflections on the historical restrictions on marriage and the gradual expansion of marriage rights align with the broader narrative of civil rights progress in the latter half of the 20th century (Becker 2012). The participants' evolving understanding of marriage as an institution based on love, commitment, and equal rights, rather than narrow, tradition-dictated definitions, reflects a broader societal shift towards more inclusive and egalitarian views. However, it is important to critically examine this narrative of linear progress. Coontz's (2004) historical analysis of marriage suggests that the institution has undergone multiple transformations, with periods of both expansion and contradiction of rights. Moreover, while the participants demonstrated evolving views, Cherlin's (2004) work on the deinstitutionalisation of marriage indicates that changing attitudes do not always translate directly into changed behaviours or institutional structures.

The recognition of marriage as a fundamental human right, and the acknowledgement of the struggles faced by marginalised groups in attaining this right, demonstrates a deepening awareness of social justice issues among the participants. This awareness, coupled with the belief in the transformative power of inclusivity, suggests that witnessing social change has had a profound impact on how these individuals conceptualise marriage and equality more broadly. However, it is crucial to critically examine this progression in awareness. While the participants demonstrated an increased understanding of marriage and equality as a social justice issue, this may not necessarily translate into active advocacy or behavioural change. Furthermore, the participants' focus on marriage rights, while important, may inadvertently reinforce what Robinson (2016) termed "homonormativity", potentially overlooking other forms of relationship structures and the diverse needs of marginalised communities beyond marriage and equality. Furthermore, while the participants' recognition of marriage as a human right aligns with international human rights frameworks, it is important to consider Spivak's (1988) critique of Western conceptualisations of rights and Brown's (1997) analysis of rights discourse. These scholars argue that rights-based approaches, while valuable, can sometimes obscure deeper structural inequalities and may not always be the most effective means of achieving social justice. This raises questions about the extent to which the participants' evolving views on marriage engage with broader systemic issues of discrimination and inequality beyond the specific issue of marriage rights.

Implications, Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The findings from this research study have several important implications across multiple domains of psychology, social policy, and community practice. First, they challenge the notion of fixed generational attitudes, suggesting that individuals born in the 1960s are capable of significant shifts in their perspectives on important societal issues, which highlights the importance of avoiding generational stereotypes in both research and public discourse. From a community psychology perspective, these findings highlight

the potential for intergenerational dialogue as a tool for social change. The participants' evolving views demonstrate the impact of witnessing societal transformations, supporting [Kagan et al.'s \(2011\)](#) assertion that community engagement can be a powerful vector for attitudinal shift. Community interventions that facilitate intergenerational discussions about marriage, family, and relationships could potentially accelerate the breakdown of heteronormative assumptions and promote more inclusive community norms. Future research should explore the factors that facilitate or hinder such openness.

This study's findings highlight the ongoing tension between traditional and contemporary views of marriage. This suggests that efforts to promote inclusivity and equality must address not only legal barriers but also deeply ingrained cultural norms and linguistic practices. Furthermore, the evolving conceptualisations of marriage among individuals born in the 1960s suggest a need for more nuanced approaches in clinical and counselling settings. Understanding generational perspectives on marriage is crucial for effective couples therapy. My findings indicate that health professionals working with this cohort should be prepared to navigate the tension between traditional values and more progressive views, potentially employing narrative therapy techniques ([White and Epston 1990](#)) to help clients integrate their changing perspectives into their personal narratives.

The findings illustrate the power of visibility and representation in shaping conceptualisations of marriage. This has implications for education, media representation, and public policy, suggesting that increased exposure to diverse family structures could foster greater acceptance and understanding. Future research could explore how these evolving conceptualisations of marriage influence other areas of social justice and equality. Longitudinal studies tracking how attitudes continue to change over time within this participant group could provide valuable insights into the process of social change. Additionally, comparative studies with other generational cohorts could illuminate intergenerational differences and similarities in attitudes surrounding marriage.

While the findings suggest a capacity for attitudinal change, we must be cautious about generalising the findings to all individuals born in the 1960s. As [Correll et al. \(2007\)](#) note, self-selection bias may mean that participants in such studies are already more open to changing their views. [Dixon et al. \(2005\)](#) argue, though, that increased contact does not always lead to reduced prejudice and may sometimes reinforce existing power dynamics. The tension between traditional and contemporary views of marriage highlighted in this study also raises questions about the potential for backlash or resistance to change. [Hochschild's \(2016\)](#) work on the "deep story" of conservative contexts suggests that rapid social change can lead to feelings of cultural displacement and resentment. Future research and policy efforts should consider how to navigate these complex emotional landscapes while promoting inclusivity.

Our findings are embedded within the cultural and generational contexts discussed, with such specificity allowing for a rich, nuanced understanding of how the participants conceptualised marriage, but it also limits the direct applicability of our findings to other contexts. Rather than aiming for generalisability, which is not appropriate for qualitative research, we encourage readers to consider the transferability of our findings, where they can consider how such findings inform understandings in similar contexts. To facilitate this, I have provided detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and methodological approach throughout this paper. The themes identified, such as the shifting values of marriage and family and the dismantling of heteronormative constructs, may offer valuable starting points for exploration in other cultural contexts or with different generational cohorts. However, it is crucial to recognise that the specific manifestations of these themes may vary significantly across different settings. Researchers and practitioners considering the relevance of my findings to their work should carefully assess the similarities and differences between my study's context and their own.

The participants' recognition of marriage as a fundamental right for all, regardless of identity, aligns with recent legal and social policy changes in many Western countries. However, as [Badgett et al. \(2009\)](#) points out, this focus, while important, should not

overshadow other forms of relationship recognition and family diversity. While this study focuses on marriage, it is crucial to consider how these changing conceptualisations intersect with other forms of relationships and family structures that may fall outside the institution of marriage altogether. Policymakers should consider how to create inclusive frameworks that support diverse family structures beyond the traditional marriage model, reflecting the more fluid conceptualisations of relationships expressed by our participants.

While this study provides valuable insights into generational perspectives on marriage, future research should more explicitly address the intersectionality of participants' identities and how these intersections shape perspectives on marriage. A more nuanced exploration of how gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and other demographic factors interact to influence conceptualisations of marriage is needed. An intersectional approach could reveal how multiple, intersecting identities create unique perspectives on marriage that may be overlooked in more generalised analyses. For instance, future studies could examine how the experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals born in the 1960s differ from their heterosexual peers, considering the compounded effects of generational experiences and marginalisation based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This approach could shed light on the diverse ways in which individuals within the same generation negotiate social changes and personal identities in relation to marriage.

The recruitment process revealed interesting methodological implications. The effectiveness of social media, particularly Facebook, in reaching participants suggests a need to adapt recruitment strategies for different age groups. This aligns with [Fenner et al.'s \(2012\)](#) findings on the potential of social media in research recruitment. However, it also raises questions about potential sampling biases, as noted by [Bethlehem \(2010\)](#), particularly if there is an overrepresentation of social media users among participants. Furthermore, participants' difficulties in recalling influences from their youth on their current views of marriage provides an intriguing example of [Sarason's \(1984\)](#) barometers of change theory. This phenomenon highlights the challenges in studying historical influences on current attitudes and emphasises the need for innovative methodological approaches in future research. The apparent primacy of individual values over historical context in shaping marriage conceptualisations suggests a complex interplay between personal experiences and societal changes.

The study's findings on the influence of heteronormativity on language and social structures open important avenues for future research. Exploring how language constructs and maintains heteronormative social structures could provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of social change and resistance. Additionally, the concept of marital centrality emerged as a potentially rich area for further investigation, particularly in relation to perspectives surrounding the conceptualisation of marriage. Conceptualisations of marriage in contexts less influenced by heteronormativity, examining views across different decades, and delving deeper into the linguistic aspects of how heteronormative discourses maintain specific social structures, are potential future directions of research that could further our understanding of the complex dynamics shaping societal attitudes towards marriage and family structures in an increasingly diverse world.

5. Conclusions

Individuals born in the 1960s appear to hold complex and evolving views surrounding marriage, shaped by their unique position as witnesses to significant social change. Their perspectives reflect both the enduring influence of traditional values and a growing embrace of more inclusive, egalitarian conceptualisations of marriage. By illuminating these nuanced attitudes, this research contributes to our understanding of how social institutions like marriage are reconceptualised over time and across generations. It highlights the dynamic nature of social change and the capacity for individuals to evolve in their perspectives, even on deeply entrenched social norms. This study emphasises the importance of examining cohort-specific experiences in understanding societal transformations. The participants' journey from traditional, heteronormative constructs to more inclusive views

mirrors broader societal shifts yet also reveals the personal struggles and revelations that accompany such changes. Their narratives challenge simplistic notions of generational attitudes, demonstrating that individuals can continue to grow and adapt their world-views well into adulthood and that significant life experiences and exposure to diverse perspectives can catalyse profound shifts in deeply held beliefs. Furthermore, this research highlights the intricate interplay between individual attitudes and broader social structures. While evolving views on marriage were discussed, narratives revealed the persistent influence of heteronormative language and cultural norms. As we continue to navigate rapid social change, understanding these complex dynamics becomes increasingly crucial. Future research must grapple with this complexity, recognising that true social transformation requires change at both individual and structural levels. Ultimately, this study serves as a reminder that societal progress is not solely the domain of younger generations. It is a collective journey that spans across age groups, challenging us all to continually question, learn, and evolve in our understanding of fundamental social institutions, such as marriage.

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