

Mix and matches

Most people will have heard the old joke about marriage being a fine institution, as long as you like living in an institution. But unlike many institutions, marriage seems to change over the generations.

Think back to the marriages of 50 years ago. A 1950s couple had clearly defined roles. He was the breadwinner with the responsibility of taking care of his wife and the finances. She was boss of the domestic front, in charge of the family social life, bringing up the kids and being the supportive woman behind the man.

It could be a real trap if the marriage was unhappy, especially if domestic violence was involved.

But for many, this was a happy state of affairs. Everyone was able to feel satisfied with a “job well done”.

Spinsters or bachelors were on the margins of society, and an openly homosexual relationship was not an option.

The average age of people getting married was early 20s. Jump forward to the 90s and the average age had gone up to the mid-20s. Today it's the late 20s to early 30s, and it's not uncommon to see people wait till well into their 30s and early 40s before marrying, if at all.

Most partners today expect to study, travel and establish careers before settling into a marriage. The idea of the male breadwinner and female homemaker with children seems quaint.

With people marrying later the question of children can be a vexed one. Fertility hasn't changed and women may find they can't conceive naturally, and head for the IVF programs that may not work.

Today both partners have had a chance to discover who they are and what they want from life, including marriage.

Most people marrying have lived together. They know each other's habits and have a chance to see if they can co-habit successfully.

But there is a downside. Sometimes co-habiting couples get married because it's expected of them; they just drift into it, or one partner wants it as proof of commitment. These reasons are not sufficient to head into the symbolism of marriage for life.

Today there is the choice of heterosexual marriage, homosexual commitment, marriage without children, marriage with children, or no marriage at all.

And all are, by and large, accepted by society.

Survival tips

- **Today's marriages are very different from those of the 1950s in terms of expectations**
- **It's very common for people to co-habit before marrying in order to learn about each other**
- **People are marrying much later, and tend to be established in their own lives before embarking on a permanent relationship.**