Cohabitation or marriage?

The role of family values in Norway in the beginning of 21st century

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Master's thesis

Master in Global Studies

Word count: 25326

09.05.2019

Abstract

Cohabitation has become a normal phenomenon among Norwegians. It may be seen as a transition before dating and marrying, but it may also be a choice of living together as a family. But even if it is widely accepted, many young Norwegians do see marriage as the highest step in relationships.

Marriage is regarded as the most committed type of union formation, whereas cohabitation is seen as less stable (Wiik, 2010, p. 51). That is why marriage may bring extra security for the family relationships. Parenthood out of wedlock has been increasing in Norway. However, many young couples get married short after they become parents. In my thesis, I also describe why people choose different timing for such big events.

Changes like increasing divorce rates, law fertility rates, greater women participation in labor market, growing amount of children born outside marriage may have different explanations. Development of gender equality is of a great factor here. Both men and women are in the process of finding balance between work and family (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, pp. 6-9). Growing individualization leads to more independent choices in private lives of individuals (Wiik, Bernhardt & Noack, 2010, pp. 272-273). As a result, detraditionalization leads to reconstructing older traditions (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 263). Marriage, in this context, preserves some of its symbolic values, which lack in cohabitation (Wiik, 2010, p.51).

Recent trends that may be observed in Norway may also find the explanation in the Second Demographic Transition process (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 179-218). However, a reversal may be possible. In case of achieving egalitarian relationships based on mutual understanding, a new equilibrium of stable family life may be the outcome (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, pp. 24-25).

Keywords:

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Chapter 1

1   Introduction

The institution of family has been existing for many thousand years. Unlike business or other social establishments that are often motivated by self-interest, family relationships find motivation in love, trust, obligations and duties. And even if one can observe great changes in family patterns during last decades, it remains a central institution of society. Relationships inside the home have altruistic nature, where care for others is of main concern. The behavior of parents may have great influence on children. A good family is the best investment into the future. Economic development and improved welfare system have made people wealthier, but have weakened family relations, making its members less dependent on each other (Becker, 2004, pp. 3-7).

The decline of the family is one of the main issues in developing countries. Research often puts the focus on children. There is much evidence about the positive relations of marriage to parenthood. However, fewer children experience life in nuclear families nowadays. This is due to increasing birth rates outside marriage, divorces, frequent remarriages and step family relations. Especially in Scandinavian countries, it has become very popular to create families without marriage. But studies have shown that such unions are less stable then marriage, which is negative for both relationships and children (Popenoe, 2004, pp. 186-188).

Though traditions have less meaning nowadays, there are reasons why marriage may still be of great value in Norwegian society. Emphasizing on its importance in times of globalization may be vital in order to promote stable and long lasting relationships.

1.1   Inspiration and personal motivation

Family is an institution that follows us through all our lives. We come into this world as a result of our parents love, then we live our lives being surrounded by our family, we take care of each other, love each other, share and expand our love into a new family. I find it very important to study family as an institution with all its rules, rights and obligations. I believe that a good marriage is a key to a happier and more fulfilling life. It is an institution that makes you feel safe, loved, taken care of, committed to your family. Marriage is a great responsibility, it is a step forward into adulthood. High expectations and dissatisfaction are those things that provoke

dissolutions. Instead, problems may be solved by compromising and communicating. Perhaps if people do a little bit more efforts, stable families will happen more and more often. Sometimes more patience is needed, sometimes self-sacrifice. It is all about cooperation. Family is a team that has to find the best ways of making it work. This is even more important during parenthood. It may teach children that obstacles in life may be overcome. Marriage may bring more commitment and, thus, create a safer environment for both couples and children.

I remember when I first came to Norway, I found it quite fascinating that a family can live a happy life, have children and share home without being married. It was strange to me, because in my home country, Ukraine, the structure of relationships is different. Though it happens more and more often that people live together before marriage, they usually get married before they have children. So I was very curious about family situation in Norway. After writing my first assignment at VID about my cultural encounter within this country, I decided to write about cohabitation and marriage. I find it very interesting to learn about the family values in Norway. And now, when I am getting deeper into the field I find answers to my research question, which may be also useful in further research.

1.2   Previous findings

Already in the book from 1985, cohabitation was described as a norm and many people got married after having children together (Hodne, Hodne & Grambo, 1985, p. 191). It was discussed that marriage became something people want to postpone. Several reasons were mentioned. First of all, women empowerment was an important factor. Secondly, less obligated relationships as cohabitation led to more freedom. Intimacy between men and women was on focus. Increased divorce rates demotivated people from getting married. People did not want to find themselves in such situations, and thus looked for alternative types of relationships. Several advantages of marriage were mentioned, like inheritance. But cohabitation was seen as more convenient in case of retirement. It was also mentioned that love is more important than papers, and that cohabitation might be best choice for those who seek more independent relationships. It was hypothesized that it might become an alternative to marriage. However, marriage was seen as an institution of security and confidence. Relationships between two were described as becoming more private and less social matters (Hodne et al., 1985, pp. 194-197).

Since 1985, many questions regarding marriage and cohabitation have remained relevant. Kenneth Aarskaug Wiik has done a lot of research concerning different types of partnerships.

In his doctoral thesis, he pointed out the different associations between socio-economic variables and cohabitation/marriage, and the meaning of education to union formation. He discovered that those more educated and well-established couples choose marriage. He also stated that partners who are happy and most committed in their relationships tend to marry as well. The author also described cohabitants as more individualistic and eager to reach equality in their partnerships. He also found out that marriage is more stable form of union, with many symbols attached (Wiik, 2010, pp. 47-51).

Many changes in our modern life may be explained by the process of individualization and increasing focus on quality relationships. Giddens describes these processes in details, which also makes it easier to understand (Giddens, 1991). The second demographic transition also finds links to self-development while explaining trends in the family formation, combining it with other perspectives (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 179-218).

Anne Lise Ellingsæter have recently studied weddings in times of detraditionalization. She mentioned in her scientific publication that traditions are still important in Norwegian society, though reconstructed and influenced by social changes. The author also emphasizes the meaning of symbols in marriage (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 263-264).

I was also inspired by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim study about individualization. They discuss many important issues of today's life, influenced by globalization. The changes in family life with comparison to older patterns is viewed from the individualization perspective. Detraditionalization as its component is also of great attention here (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Francesco C. Billari are talking about a new equilibrium of equal society. They mention in their study, that new patterns of egalitarian families are in the mode of construction. Women do not except their old roles as housewives, while their new roles demand more time at work. Men are in the mode of getting used to egalitarianism, but need to be more active in sharing home routines. Balance between work and family is needed to be found, with no harm to equality. It may lead to a new equilibrium, with more stable families and higher fertility rates (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, pp. 24-25).

1.3   Research questions

My thesis is aiming at finding out what the values of a modern Norwegian family are. As nowadays cohabitation has become very popular, it questions the importance of marriage. Is it still considered to be the highest step in relationship or can it be omitted? Can cohabitation replace marriage as a family institution or is it just a step before? I find it important to learn about the differences between these two forms of union formation. What perspectives can help us understand different choices people make in their personal life?

One of the main themes in my work is devoted to the values of symbols and traditions. Do they still play some role in the modern society? What changes may be observed? Do people still want to follow traditions? Why do they want to do so?

Another great part of my thesis is devoted to parenthood. Many Norwegians get married after they become parents. Here I want to focus on the different perspectives on timing of this important stage of life. I also look closer at the meaning of marriage to parenthood and the opposite. I try to find out if family stability may depend on the union type. How does divorce influence children?

What constitutes a happy family life? How can a type of union influence the quality of relationships?

I try to discover possible links to continuation of traditional family values in modern context. I do this with the help of different perspectives, such as individualism, gender equality, detraditionalization and symbolism. Taking all these aspects into consideration may provide good explanations to the questions I am looking for.

1.4   Relevance of the study

I find it relevant to study changes in family life, because it is one of the most important parts of every person's life. Cohabitation is very often chosen by Norwegians, but it is also the most fragile kind of relationships. As marriage is seen as a stronger one, it becomes important to study its values in society (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p. 62). People have become less religious, that is why there must be other reasons for them to keep their families stronger.

More and more children experience divorce of their parents, which have great impact on their lives (Widerberg & Kummen, 2012, p. 339). Norwegian welfare state is always focusing on

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children, and by making new regulations help organize a normal family life for them. This is by ensuring they spent equal time with both parents, and that both parents participate in the process of upbringing their children after divorce (pp. 342-343). However, as stable family life is what is best for everyone, there is a need of studying the possible ways of making it less fragile.

The way people see relationships is important to be studied, and the meaning of parenthood plays even a greater role here. In my thesis, I try to emphasize on this aspect, placing it in the contexts of cohabitation and marriage.

Looking for best ways of achieving stability is of great relevance in times of globalization, when people are facing many challenges in finding balance between their identities and social change (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33).

Chapter 2

2 Methodology

2.1 Research method

In order to understand, we need to learn, observe and find some explanations with the support of different theories (Okasha, 2002, p. 2). In my empirical research I am using an inductive method, which means my conclusions are not fixed or generalized, but more interpretative. I am trying to find out the possible reasons why people choose cohabitation or marriage in different stages of their life. My findings have empirical evidence. The results might or might not be true and are opened for further studies. According to Okasha, science need induction. It is important, because some theories might be false, and in order to prove it, one need to make new hypothesis (pp. 18-23).

Following Bryman (1999, pp. 48-58), I decided to do a qualitative research, because I wanted to be in a closer contact with my informants. I did not want to focus on quantitative data, but tried to analyze the situation in a smaller scale with deeper meanings. In order to understand the values of marriage and cohabitation in Norway, I find it important to see it from the inside. In my research, I tried to connect people's interpretations to the changing patterns happening in the society. I was aiming at collecting rich data, based on qualitative interviews.

2.1.1 Research structure

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first one includes introduction, background of the research and its relevance. The second chapter deals with methodological perspectives and main challenges in the study process. The third chapter is describing the relevant theoretical perspectives, which include theories of gender, individualism, the Second Demographic Transition, detraditionalization and symbolism. Chapter four is devoted to analysis and discussion. The study of family requires taking into consideration different stages of its formation. While emphasizing on cohabitation and marriage, I also discuss such important processes as divorce and parenthood. Different aspects of union formation are also presented, including gender issues, socio-economic variables and empirical perspectives on the future. The last chapter contains conclusions and reflections on my findings.

2.2 Data collection

In my research, I use both primary and secondary data. I find them both very important, because it helped me provide good information. There has been done huge amount of research on the question of family and relationships. I include some of these findings along with the analysis of my qualitative interviews.

2.2.1 Primary data collection

For primary data collection, I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews. My fieldwork consisted of 8 interviews, which I have analyzed very thoroughly. All of them were recorded and transcribed. As seven of eight informants were Norwegians, I decided to interview them in their native language. I believed this could help me get true information from my informants, and would make them feel more comfortable when expressing their thoughts. Accordingly, I had to translate those parts of the interviews I found most relevant to quote. I also interviewed one Thai girl, who is cohabiting with a Norwegian citizen. It was very relevant to my field of study and helped me develop a more critical approach. I chose various groups of informants according to their gender, age and civil status. It was very useful because in such a way I got a wider picture of what I was looking for. I have heard different experiences and points of view. Some of them were contradictory, but many resembled as well. The information was given due to my informants' experiences, or based on their personal views. Younger participants were talking more about their desires, while older ones focused more on their life stories. It was interesting to compare them all. Some of the information was similar, whereas other was completely different.

My informants come from different parts on Norway, but most of them live permanently in Stavanger region. I did not always had an opportunity to meet with all of them, due to the distance between us. Therefore, I came up with an idea of interviewing them by voice calls. It had its pros and cons. It was good because it saved lots of time, and my informants could remain home and feel more comfortable and private. The disadvantage of such voice calls was that I could not really follow the emotions of my interviewees. It made the conversations shorter and less reflective.

Religious points of view were not included into the interviews, but appeared in the process. None of the participants expressed great religiousness and referred mostly to other people when talking about it. Some aspects of religious rituals were mentioned, though.

During my fieldwork, I used an interview guide, previously prepared. I worked with open-ended questions in order to get more fruitful data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 118). In the process of collecting data, I noticed gradual changes in my interviews structure, with more aspects appearing. I learned from every single conversation. The process of interviewing was very flexible. I did not follow the same sequence of questions, but rather adjusted to the natural flow of conversation. At the same time, I tried to keep the main issues on focus (p. 117).

2.2.2 Secondary data collection

For secondary data collection, I have used different articles, both peer-reviewed and ordinary ones. I have read several books, including those with historical perspectives. I have also looked into the official statistics of Norway to get a general picture of marriages, cohabitation and divorces. It also helped me see the changes that have appeared recently.

The use of Internet resources is an important tool in doing research (Markham, 2011, p. 148). It was very useful for me, but I was careful while picking information, and used mostly scientific journals and peer-reviewed articles. There were, though, several newspaper articles, that I found very relevant to use in my research.

In my study, I focus on present views and values with respect to different changes in social life of Norwegians. Therefore, I find it important to mention some historical facts that mostly date back to 1970s, when cohabitation became more socially accepted (Hodne et al., 1985, p. 191).

Passive participant observation is also something I found myself in during data collection. I have spoken to many Norwegians and heard different stories relevant to the topic of my research. It also influenced my thoughts about marriage, cohabitation and parenthood in Norway. It helped me adjusting my interview guide, as new ideas appeared.

2.3 Data analysis

The analysis of data is closely related to theories. I find it important in my research to find the connection between my findings and other ideas (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159).

I decided to use grounded theory in my analysis. The hypotheses came after studying the gathered information, and possible theories were connected. After transcribing my interviews, I organized them with a help of coding. I used different colors to define similar categories, and

then compared different perspectives for further interpretation. I also highlighted several keywords, which I found to be specifically descriptive (Silverman, 2011, pp. 218-219).

In the process of analysis, I came across different empirical thoughts. These were always negotiating with existing theories, in order to find support (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159). I tried to follow the principle "of thinking not only about the one's data, but also with and through the data, in order to produce fruitful ideas" (p. 168).

2.4   Ethical awareness

In my fieldwork, I tried to follow all the guidelines of conducting interviews. In order to start my data collection I applied to the Norwegian Social Science Data Service Department (NSD) and got their approval.

All my informants got to sign a declaration of consent. I explained them about the confidentiality and the rights they have during my research project. I started the interviews by telling my informants about the relevance of my study and tried to make them feel excited about it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 210-212). They were happy to participate and showed great interest. The declaration of consent included the description of my research, its purpose, main questions to be discussed, and information about anonymity.

The process of interviewing was quite relaxed and looked comfortable for informants. I think it is due to the overall character of my research, which is not too sensitive. The topic of marriage and cohabitation is not something that people are afraid to talk about, it is rather the opposite and make them feel excited. I found it best to do the interviews in cafes, or at my informants' homes. By offering a cup of coffee, hot chocolate or a piece of cake, the atmosphere became even warmer. Interviewing in the public library was more interruptive. Cafes were also noisy, but light background music and well-chosen places contributed to more privacy.

In my research, I am ethically aware and, thus, follow NESH guidelines (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016, pp. 10-40). I treated all my interviewees with respect. I explained that my master thesis will be available for public, and that anonymity will be provided. As I recorded our conversations, I made it clear to my informants that all records will be deleted from my computer after I submit my work. I am clear and honest in providing

information and I avoid plagiarism. I also take a good care of all the references by using APA style.

2.5   Research challenges

Language was a challenge that followed me through my entire research project. As my research is about Norwegians, a lot of the literature concerning my topic is in Norwegian. I had to do many translations while reading and it took me much more time then reading in English. Language issue appeared also while interviewing. As I decided to use Norwegian language, it was difficult for me to create follow-up questions. The lack of language knowledge made me less reflective and made me stick to only those questions I had. Anyway, I tried to solve this problem by creating more sub-questions around those I already had. It was helpful in a way that I could get more fruitful answers from my informants when their answers for the main question were short.

In my research, I find myself partly as an insider and outsider. As a Ukrainian, I have my strong opinions due to what I experienced in my life before coming to Norway. Now I am married to a Norwegian and it changes my perspectives and views. As an outsider, I am more critical and my reflections on collected data are influenced by my background. However, being partly an insider helps me see things from another point of view and find new contexts. While interviewing I tried to be neutral and understand the given information from my informants' perspectives.

There are some limitations in my study. As I have accomplished a qualitative research, it may not give a full picture of a modern family in the whole Norway. Therefore, further quantitative research may be helpful in order to get broader findings. I have not studied deeper the situation with cohabitation and marriage among already divorced couples. I believe this could give somewhat different results. I have focused more on first-time long-lasting relationships and more general views on marriage and cohabitation. However, one of my informants was married and divorced twice. Therefore, some aspects of second-time partnerships were included during the analysis. Further research may be needed, which may provide more insights into the views of different groups.

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Chapter 3

3 Theoretical framework

The question of family requires to be studied with the complex system of theories. The changes in union formation are influenced greatly by globalization (Solheim, 2011, pp. 153-155). Therefore, I find it important for my research to include gender related theories as well as theory of individualism, detraditionalization and symbolism. The theory of second demographic transition is also going to be discussed. Changes in family structure cannot be understand only from one perspective. All these theories are closely connected. A combination of different factors may lead to a better understanding of today's preferences.

The global perspective is also included. Recent developments may lead to a so-called "cultural cosmopolitanism". It describes identities as fluid, being able to change, while preserving their local traditions (Held & McGrew, 2007, p. 41). However, great variety of information serves as a source of new ideas and values, which may also bring uncertainty among people's choices. Therefore, some people create their own ideas and relations, rather than follow traditional ones. Cultural identity is in the constant process of reconstruction (p. 177).

3.1 Gender related theories

Here I would like to include feminism and gender equality theories, which I find relevant for the studies of family change.

Gender studies are an important unit of learning how people should treat each other. In order for human beings to survive, reproduction is needed. Here is an inevitable difference between men and women. However, the ideas of male and female functions are not similar everywhere. Anthropologists and social scientists find the role of gender very complex in terms of culture. They agree that it is very difficult to generalize them. Gender relations appear to be egalitarian or patriarchal, but there is no such a place where matriarchy could be observed. The possible explanations vary between the differences in physiology and symbolic features. Nevertheless, none of these is completely satisfactory. The question of gender has been actively revised during the last decades, and questions of equality have been raised (Monaghan & Just, 2000, pp. 137-143).

Women and men are not equally affected by the process of development. Men are often those who get well-paid jobs, while women get those lower ones. Gender relations should be studied from the outcomes of the changing role of women. Gender is to be understood as the socially constructed roles of men and women. These relations are flexible and have ability to change due to economic development (Momsen, 2010, pp. 118-119). The women empowerment and increasing gender equality are one of the main goals of Millennium Development, which were agreed internationally. Inequality may lead to poverty, slower economic growth and lower life satisfaction (p.126).

3.1.1   Feminism

From historical point of view, the rights of women were reduced across the world. Men had all the power over social order. Women remained less powerful, because of their presumed weak nature. However, it has changed through the years and equality has become one of the main aims of modern development. However, it "cannot be achieved within a patriarchal setting" (Afkhami, 2004, pp. 56-57).

Feminism takes its beginning in the late 19th century, when the first feminist movements took place. It is described as a concept, which focuses on empowering women. It has become a movement with global concern with associations all around the world. Feminism is not only about gaining equality, but also about emphasizing differences. Among its main demands is to empower women in political, educational and social aspects of life (Juergensmeyer & Anheier, 2012).

Feminist movements may be divided into two waves. The first one took place before the World War I and had more national and patriotic context. One of its main aims was to get the right for women to vote and to get job opportunities. When the Second World War came, men had to fight, while women managed their jobs. Difficult conditions made it impossible for feminists to find balance between the rights and duties. During 1940s and 1950s, there was a period of increased "domesticity". The second wave dates back to the end of 1960s. The new contraceptive method was introduced, which also made focus on female sexuality. These issues, together with abortion, became one of the key demands. In 1970s, the first conference on women was held by the United Nations. Several transnational organizations were formed. Feminism gained a global meaning, taking into consideration the differences between various groups and realizing the importance of cooperation (Juergensmeyer & Anheier, 2012).

The main concerns of feminism nowadays are reducing gender gap in paid work, abortion issues, sexual abuse, and symbolic religious issues (Juergensmeyer & Anheier, 2012).

Several changes that led to women gaining more freedom inside the family were made through the 'individualization boost'. New opportunities appeared, which were also accompanied by new challenges and conflicts. By taking new roles and responsibilities, they continue doing more work at home than men do. Their position may be described as 'no longer and not yet'. Women have got more freedom, but new forms of dependence have emerged. Before, mothers were fully devoted to their families, but nowadays they are also expected to do a lot more in addition. Educational opportunities have led to women development, which results in more equal division of labor. Women have become more financially independent, which brings them self-confidence. Leisure time has become possible and greatly appreciated. But there is also another side of such women empowerment. Their demands become higher, but realization is not always up to expectations. Girls often get temporary or part-time employments, which may lead to failure of their career goals. Women individualization may result in a so-called 'feminization of poverty' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 55-67).

Foucault presented a perspective of power and knowledge in feminism. He argues that social norms may be changed and resisted. In order to do so, one has to define them as harmful. According to Foucault power is all around, but there is a way to freedom. These two notions are interconnected. If freedom is not reachable, then there is no connection with power, there is only domination. Foucault also argues that there is a possibility of power reversal both socially and politically. Resisting norms is a matter of ethics and politics. Power may be resisted by power (in McLaren, 2002, pp. 48-52).

3.1.2 Gender equality

Gender equality means equal opportunities. A society, where both men and women are able to live their lives up to their expectations and needs (Momsen, 2010, p. 125).

According to Beck, there has been an emancipation of women in time of late modernization. It was followed by several changes. The time spent within housework has been reduced. Families have become smaller, due to new methods of birth control. Daily routine has become less hectic. At the same time, high divorce rates often make women struggle financially. They become more active in getting education to find employment. It leads to more equal opportunities for education between men and women, which also brings more motivation for work participation.

The changing role of women requires some changes in the role of men. However, as they often follow traditional principles of male behavior, it may become difficult to find the balance. Family life becomes a contest of roles (in Hurrelmann & Neubauer, 1995, pp. 132-133).

Men and women perceive gender equality somewhat differently. It might be better seen when they start their families. Men understand that they should get new roles in order to achieve egalitarian relationships, but when it comes to actions, they do not always want to change. At the same time, women expect them to do that. They are often disappointed with not being able to achieve their goals, and not getting support in daily life. This puts family relationships at risk. The question of self-respect and opportunities to use own resources are at stake. Men and women have different ideas about their roles in modern life, which are sometimes conflicting. However, the division of housework is not the only issue. Couples seek mutual emotional satisfaction and ability to preserve their identities (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 104-107).

Gøsta Esping-Andersen emphasizes on the valuable features of egalitarianism in 'the Nordic social democratic welfare state model' (in Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006, p. 6). Scandinavian welfare system is focused on equality. It is often based on political and economic issues, but since 1970s has included gender problems as well. It is not just about equal opportunities for men and women, but also focus on equal outcomes. It is believed that it is a constituent part of democracy. Moreover, gender equality does not only include employment issues and financial freedom, but the organization of family life as well. Welfare policies deal with 'refamilisation', by making new regulations around sharing of parental leave, and promoting the family model of 'dual-earner' (pp. 6-7).

Blumberg points out the importance of women's economic independency in reaching gender equality. He argues that the economic power of women may be different according to micro (household) and macro (social) levels. The first one is mostly influenced by the last one. Stronger power on macro levels may have positive effect on micro levels. The author states that increasing levels of economic power among women may also effect politics, result in less violence against women, and create more choices in their life (Blumberg, 1984, pp. 42-78).

3.2 Individualism

Individualism is regarded as a pattern that describes individuals inspired by their autonomy, own choices, needs and rights. They put their aims over the aims of others, and emphasize on their differences with others (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2010, p. 213).

In the encyclopedia of global studies, individualism is described as a view that aims at the value of each individual in relation to the society. People are not bound together, they take responsibility for their lives on their own. Individualization is also characterized by new lifestyles, more dissolutions of unions, and a greater responsibility for own decisions. This process may lead to the changes in social structures (Juergensmeyer & Anheier, p. 2012).

The individualization theory is explained as a move from the industrialization to the late modernization. Giddens focused on impact of globalization on relationships and society. He mentioned in his work that people are more independent and are able to make their own decisions, regardless traditions. Alternative ways of union formation are potential outcomes. The author also claims that relationships have become more democratic and are based on mutual satisfaction (in Wiik et al., 2010, p. 272). According to Giddens, in time of late modernity, there is a great focus on personal development, which does not require the support from older guidelines. Life becomes dynamic and a closer connection between global influence and individual perceptions appear. People play active roles in the process of these social changes. We create our own identities with our self-expression. In the process of self-creation, we meet with uncertainties that also bring new solutions. Here, trust is an important factor, which also is accompanied by risk. In order to be able to negotiate with the global influences, one need to be trustful. Individuals may become confused over all the choices they have, but they think critically and decide creatively (Giddens, 1991, pp. 1-9).

Giddens criticized Sennett's point of view on individualism, which was named for "narcissism". According to Sennett (Giddens, 1991, pp. 169-171), individuals have become fragmented and self-oriented. He called it "a character disorder", where no place for public world exists. According to Giddens, social life offers individuals great variety of opportunities, which also makes them more active in finding new solutions (pp. 175-176).

One of the main features of the individualization process is its constant demanding contribution from each individual. One has to be strong in decisions, success and failure. Individualism is about creating 'self-culture', which leads to more inequalities. It is a decline of traditions. Self-

culture is all about active self-organization, creating own lifestyles, and experiencing freedom. In a society of individualization, people face their problems on their own. The decisions they make may bring anxiety and frustration. Focus on personal development has also brought some changes in family life. It has lost its value as an economic partnership, while new forms of unions have been introduced. However, new conflicts emerge between women and men, caused by the division of labor both inside and outside home. The individualization process brings with it new opportunities as well as uncertainties in social and personal life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 4, 42-52, 101-115).

3.3   The Second Demographic Transition

The Second Demographic Transition is a theoretical framework that combines different factors of changing family patterns (Coleman, 2013, p. 36).

The First Demographic Transition (FDT) was characterized by low fertility and mortality rates. It was first observed in the countries of the West and spread into the other parts of the world. The process took its beginning in the 18th-19th centuries and expanded into the late 20th century (Lesthaeghe, 2011, p. 179).

The continuous decline of the total fertility rates and steady postponement or replacement of marriage led to the Second Demographic Transition (SDT). The theory was proposed by Dirk van de Kaa and Ron Lesthaeghe in 1986. Different patterns were noticed. Less children are born, and the life lasts longer. People are on the move, immigration is increasing, which leads to growing multiculturalism. In Scandinavian countries, SDT appeared in the 1950s-1960s with rising amounts of divorces, later marriages, falling birth rates, and increased singlehood. Cohabitation before as well as after marriage became visible. Births out of wedlock also happened more often (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 180-181).

During the FDT, low fertility rates were revealed by the fact that the child required great investments. In contrast, the SDT is dealing with self-fulfillment. The use of contraception has different reasons for these two processes. In time of the FDT it was used in order to stop pregnancies The main concern of the SDT is to prevent contraception and make pregnancy possible. Non-material values have become of greater importance. People are more concerned with their individual freedom and self-contentment. Independent choices take over social

solidarity. The FDT was mainly focused on material values, while the SDT aims at the 'higher order' needs (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 181-183).

The Second Demographic Transition brings changes into the perception of marriage and divorce. The main concern of individuals is their welfare and then the one of the children. Remarriages among divorced or widowed also happen less frequently, as people tend to live in other types of partnerships. It helps people keep their autonomies into the 'open future' (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 184-185).

In times of the FDT, contraceptive methods resulted in law fertility among older women, marriages lasted longer, and couples had their first children born in younger ages. Among young women, unplanned pregnancies occurred often, because of the failures of contraception. It also kept fertility rates higher. There was a need of more effective methods of birth control, which led to the 'contraceptive revolution' in the SDT. It was followed by the 'sexual revolution' and 'gender revolution'. Intimate relationships started in earlier ages and pregnancies were postponed. Women got an opportunity to control their reproduction. Late parenthood have resulted in overall decline of the total fertility rates (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 185-186).

The FDT was a period of improving social, financial, educational and health care systems. The family life was strictly structured and the traditional pattern of breadwinner and housewife was followed. In the SDT, when material needs are fulfilled and the welfare system is well organized, the wish for self-realization becomes the primary goal. People think more about how their job influence their lives, they are looking for other values that may bring them self-contentment. Egalitarian relationships become relevant in the process of reaching the higher order values (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 187-189).

The trends of growing non-material attitudes is often described as the inescapable historical process of the SDT. However, the patterns may be different, and thus may not be linked to the single description. As an example, some developed countries with new arrangements of living have also high fertility rates, which is the opposite of the SDT outcomes. Another pattern appears when the countries with lower divorce rates, cohabitation and less frequent out of wedlock births have also evidently lowest levels of fertility. The SDT may be more characterized by divergence than transition. Whereas its explanation of recent trends are of great relevance, 'a plurality of explanations' may be needed in order to take into account various factors (Coleman, 2013, pp. 36-39).

3.4 Detraditionalization

Giddens claimed: "The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectic interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options" (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). People face greater changes on personal and social levels, and thus they have to choose their lifestyles. These choices, however, are not the same for everyone. They are dependent on different life situations. Lifestyles reflect our identities. They are not fixed, but may be changeable, according to different settings. The choices of lifestyle concern individuals, but have also consequences on more public levels (pp. 80-88).

Giddens also describes detraditionalization as the influence of media in time of globalization. What happens around the world becomes closer to us, it shapes our thoughts and actions (Giddens, 1991, pp. 4-5). Media creates a visual world, which serves as an instrument of sharing tendencies. It offers people great amount of choices. However, some of them are only distant pictures, which not always may be experienced. Each individual may choose what to read, what to watch, and make his own interpretations (pp. 26, 84, 188, 199). There is a place for freedom and self-expression. Mental health ideology promotes a culture, which is focused on self-contentment. 'Pure relationships' become the center of one's desires, pooling back traditional lifelong commitment patterns. Dissatisfaction leads to dissolutions as the expectations are not fulfilled. According to Giddens, traditions are always important: "The past is not preserved but continuously reconstructed on the basis of the present". He also suggests that new ways of living in a post-modern society brings new challenges, which make people think differently (in Gross, 2005, pp. 289-292). Pure relationships, as Giddens describes it, are not dependent on any social factors, they are "free floating". They concern with mutual contribution to sexual and emotional satisfaction. Commitment, intimacy and trust play great roles here. Development of such relationships lead to creation of 'shared histories' (Giddens, 1991, pp. 88-98).

In times of globalization, people adjust to new conditions and impacts of social change. Therefore, the traditional flow of life is transforming into a more reflexive one. Personal identities go through the constant process of global changes, resulting in new behaviors (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33). Traditions have a tendency to reconstruction in the context of new trends (p. 206).

According to Manuel Castells, detraditionalization have its favorable conditions in late modernity. Feminism serves as a power behind it. Women's empowerment and changes in

family policies, such as recognition of same-sex unions, have led to major changes in traditional views (in Gross, 2005, pp. 289).

Neil Gross distinguishes between two different types of traditions, which may bring new perspectives in studying the process of detraditionalization. He talks about 'regulative' traditions that are closely connected to moral behavior of a particular community. These have a risk of exclusion, if not following guided practices. Regulative traditions may be found in various settings. They may refer to small communities, certain families, religious groups, different associations, educational subjects or national organizations. Preserving identities related to certain groups is of great importance. 'Meaning-constitutive' traditions, on the contrary, are those dealing with semiotics and cultural perceptions, which construct meaningful social actions (Gross, 2005, pp. 286-297). While these are more focused on individual values, regulative traditions have more social character. Nevertheless, meaning-constitutive traditions are based on previous knowledge and practices. They may be reconstructed, but still shaped by pre-given understandings and perceptions. Regulative traditions may be weakened in some contemporary settings. People may decide whether they want to follow them or not, without feeling ashamed or excluded. Sometimes such traditions may be followed just as a wish to repeat what other members did before, however avoiding the meaning of punishment. They may also be reshaped, influenced by each individual interpretations. Meaning-constitutive traditions always follow people's actions. And even if adjusted, they are constructed on the basis of pre-given knowledge. In such a way, Gross tries to explain that traditions are still very important in modern societies (Gross, 2005, pp. 286-307).

Another view on detraditionalization as the result of individualization is described by Ulrick Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim. Traditional behaviors and lifestyles become irrelevant when people get an opportunity to make their own judgments. Such detraditionalization may lead to anxiety and ambivalence. However, the authors mention, integration is possible even in societies with high individualization:

> Where the old sociality is 'evaporating', society must be reinvented. Integration therefore becomes possible if no attempt is made to arrest and push back the breakout of individuals. It can happen if we make conscious use of this situation and try to forge new, politically open, creative forms of bond and alliance. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 1-19)

People are constantly affected by the outer world, because of globalization. The internet, media, travels make our lives transnational, and shape our actions and behaviors. Traditions become

hybrid in times of individualization. They are negotiating with the older ones, bringing new patterns and ideas based on new experiences (Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 25-26).

Zygmunt Bauman associates detraditionalization with late modernization. He explains that cultural guidelines lose their control over individuals, while new patterns appear. Modernity, with its close attachment to social norms has been replaced by post modernity, with its flexible choices. In Bauman's work 'Liquid modernity', social life is described as 'fluid', including such issues as emancipation, time and space, individuality, work and society. He states that new forming structures are not stable, but are constantly changing. Traditions are not guiding people any more. Nowadays society is free, which also makes power move freer. 'Global powers' gain perfect conditions in such circumstances, which helps them succeed. People are busy with their own problems and less attention is drawn towards more public issues. This is one of the negative sides of the process of individualization (in Gane, 2001, pp. 268-271).

Globalization change our perceptions of culture. Primarily, we think about it as something we have, certain qualities that are common among different groups of people. However, culture is something each individual finds relevant while interacting with others. It is not fixed or essential. Cultures are created in the process of everyday life, they derive from our experiences and become shared entities. Different opinions and practices may be mixed, being socially constructed and negotiated (Dahl, 2006, pp. 18-21).

3.4.1 Symbolism

According to Oxford dictionary of sociology, a symbol is described as followed:

> ... any act or thing that represents something else. More particularly, the smallest meaning-unit in the semantic fields of ritual, dream, or myth. ... The link between symbol and referent is not always arbitrary, as with sign, but may be motivated by an association of attributes (for example, the crown as a symbol of monarchy). (Scott, 2014)

Symbols may be seen as the meaning constructed systems. Any ordinary object or event may gain symbolical context. People are capable of creating such meanings:

> ... we find in our socio-cultural environment itself socially approved (symbol) systems offering answers for our quest for the unknowable transcendences. Devices are developed to apprehend the disquieting phenomena transcending the world of everyday life in a way analogous to the familiar phenomena within it. This is done by the creation of appresentational references of a higher order, which shall be called symbols. (Schutz, in Stoltzfus, 2003, p.188)

Symbols let individuals live in the world of diverse meanings. Symbolization may refer to making one's own interpretations shared with others. What gives us meaning may also create a share of values. The practice of rituals help such traditional morality stay preserved. They serve as motivation for social action (Stoltzfus, 2003, pp. 183-193).

Blumer used the term 'symbolic interaction'. He described it as a kind of communicative relations, which includes various spheres of life. One of the topics he studied was the influence of movies through symbolic interactions, which may change people's attitudes and opinions. He mentioned that media may be of a great risk to local cultures. Social life is formed by social actions. Blumer studied symbolic interactions and social creativeness, which may bring new practices. But he did not explain it as that of leading to disorder and confusion, but as such adjusted and compromised. Accordingly, in symbolic interactions things may gain different meanings (in Hałas, 2012, pp. 3-11). Blumer pointed out three main features of this process. Firstly, people perceive different objects due to their own understandings. Secondly, the meanings of the objects are socially constructed. It means that our interpretations of symbols may change in the process of social interaction. Thirdly, individuals may modify the meanings of the objects when analyzing them by their own perceptions (in Levin & Trost, 1996, pp. 103-104).

In symbolic interaction, symbols are also significant. They may have different meanings to people. Symbols have an ability to change and gain new interpretations. They may also be of greater meaning to certain people and of no meaning to others. Different points of view may bring more excitement during social interaction between people. Symbols or objects may gain new meaningful names. These may become socially accepted and long-lasting patterns. Every individual is a part of this meaning constructive process (Levin & Trost, 1996, pp. 102-105). Symbols may also have positive or negative emotional associations. They may be dependent on previous meanings, but gain independency in the process of development (pp. 108-109).

In anthropology studies, Clifford Geertz describes culture as a system of symbols. Behavior also plays a vital role, as the meanings transmit through social actions (1973, pp. 17-18). Symbols are pre-given. They exist in the places we are born. They may be modified and continue their function in lives of next generations. We use them in our daily life. Symbols help people stay organized. They may be reconstructed, but in some way keep their regulative nature. Without a symbolic system, our actions would be out of control, chaotic and meaningless (pp. 45-46). During our lives, we deal with filling an 'information gap' based on our culture. Some

of it is naturally given, while other appears during our social interaction. We take some pre-given information and use it in certain actions, after putting it through a system of symbols (p. 50). Culture has its influence on each individual. We are guided by its patterns. Certain notions follow us though our lives and direct our actions. Both pre-given capacities and acquired behaviors linked together constitute an individual (p. 52). The author is talking about symbolic actions as those, which may describe the meaning of culture in people's life (p. 27). As we develop being surrounded by culture, we need to be guided by its systems of symbols: "Without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men" (p. 49). The author writes about sacred symbols that denote a spirit of cultures and their worldview (pp. 89-90).

In Young's study, rituals possess the meaning of gentle transition of different stages of social life. Here, he points on biological changes like birth, adolescence or death. The author claims that such symbolic rituals intensify emotions, which also helps people assimilate their new roles (in Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984, p. 428).

Semiotics is dealing with the meanings of signs. It is a study of different cultural codes that help people communicate. Semiotics is focused on the text, where the reader plays a great role by his interpretations. In order to find a meaning, one needs a sign, a purpose of its use and its user. A sign refers to an object that means something different from itself. We can use it as a tool to send our messages. C.S. Peirce is talking about a close interrelation between a sign, its purpose and a receiver. Ferdinand de Saussure describes a sign as an object with some associated meanings, which may be understood only by those who use it. Semiotics refers to communication as the process of exchanging meanings. It happens while encoding and decoding our messages. It is a dynamic process, which may be changed. Peirce identifies three types of sign - an icon, an index and a symbol. In the first one, a sign has some similarities with its object. An index means that a sign is closely connected to an object. There is no such connection in a symbol. It becomes significant because people ascribe meanings to it. This is also what Saussure called for arbitrary relation between a signifier and a signified
(in Fiske,1990, pp. 29-36).

Jan Gustafsson discusses semiotic aspects of culture as constructive, empirical and humanistic. Our life consists of signs and communication, which are socially constructed. Culture is the outcome of the dynamic process of such exchanges. Semiotic view on culture is empirical, because it can always be observed in different forms. It is also humanistic, as it deals with

individuals and their interaction between each other. In the process of communication and social exchange, people reconstruct the meanings of signs. Each human being, as well as its interaction with the others, is important for the understanding of social world. Due to semiotic perspective, culture is not isolated, but closely connected to identities. It also gains a meaning when relating to other cultures. Interculturality is what becomes even more evident nowadays. Cultures influence each other when interacting (Gustavsson, 2006, pp. 74-85).

Chapter 4

4   Analysis and discussion

4.1   Cohabitation

Cohabitation in Norway developed slower than in other Scandinavian countries. Nowadays, it has become a common type of relationships here as well. It is much more prominent than in other European countries (Noack, 2001, p. 102). For some it is just a step in dating, which leads to marriage, but for others it already means a family. Cohabitation has become widely accepted in Norway. However, people do not argue that it is a better type of relationships than marriage. It is more seen as an alternative one may choose. Sooner or later most of the couples do get married (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p. 60).

According to Statistics of Norway (SSB), the most popular age for cohabitation is between 25 and 29, as of years 2014-2016 (see tbl.1). We can see that young people in their early 30s get married more frequently, which makes the percentage equal to that of cohabitants. The later the age the lower numbers of cohabitants may be observed, together with the increasing numbers of those married ones. In Norway, 20% of the population 45-49 years live in cohabitation, whereas 57% are married. We can see that the patterns are gradually changing since 1993. The numbers of cohabitants in all age groups are increasing, with some small variations, while the numbers of those who are married are going down:

	Persons (per cent)		
	1993-1995	**2002-2004**	**2014-2016**
Cohabitant			
20-24 years	25	28	23
25-29 years	35	41	39
30-34 years	24	33	37
35-39 years	15	25	31
45-49 years	8	14	20
Married			
20-24 years	6	4	2
25-29 years	30	21	19
30-34 years	53	41	37
35-39 years	67	52	49
45-49 years	77	65	57

Table 1 - SSB, 2019a

Nowadays people can choose themselves how they want to have their family life look like. And when it comes to rights, it is no longer an issue for those who choose cohabitation. If a couple wants to be secured in a case of unpredictable circumstances, they can do it by signing a contract. This should be done to avoid any arguments, if it comes to divorce or death of one of the partners. Otherwise, cohabitation often stands on the same level as marriage, especially when a couple is in a longer relationship (NOU 1999:25, pp. 10-11).

Among other European countries, Norway has one of the most prominent features of cohabitation: it lasts longer, it is legally recognized, and this is often where parenthood begins (Syltevik, 2015, p. 515).

In this subchapter, I want to focus on the meaning of cohabitation in the overall picture of family formation, and look a bit deeper at its stronger and weaker points. In order to understand it better, I want to begin with some background information.

4.1.1 The evolvement of cohabitation in Norway

Even though it cannot be proved statistically, but non-marital relationships appeared many centuries ago, and having children in such unions was not an exception. According to historians, in the 17th century it happened very often that a bride was expecting a baby when the wedding took place. But at that time it could be a chance for young people to get permission of marriage from their parents. Non-marital unions like that continued appearing in the 19th century as well. Wedding celebration was usually postponed until they could afford it (Syltevik, 2015, p. 516).

The 20s century was called The Golden Age of Marriage. At that time, it was very common to have a legal union. In 1970, only 4% of women and 5% of men were not married. Having children outside marriage was also rare, which was only 3% of all births (1950-1965). Nevertheless, intimate relationships were common and in case of pregnancy the couple was expected to get married (Syltevik, 2015, p. 516). Two of my interviewees also mentioned this:

> I got married in 1964. ... In that time it was more common to get married. Nobody lived together before marriage. ... It was a common rule. You had to get married. It was common that girls were pregnant, most of the time. (Informant 7)

It also makes us understand that intimate relationships were common before marriage. Cohabitation was not a constant process of living together, but it was practiced from time to time:

> We were cohabitants in the weekends, when we visited each other ... plus every Wednesday. It was a day for couples to meet. ... In the middle of the week. Then we had not seen each other since Sunday. It was common. In the weekends, it was usually a cabin trip and things like this. (Informant 7)

Marriage had a great meaning for the family: "The most common was that people got married. And it was a matter of honor. If you were not married, the family experienced shame, in a way. It was not accepted" (Informant 2). Here we can also see the importance of regulative traditions (Gross, 2005, pp. 293-295). People followed certain practices in order to stay respected and included in the society. Individual choices were greatly influences by social world. Relationships were seen not only from personal point of view, but also as a part of the society. The norms related to marriage were expected to be followed.

The patterns may also be linked to the features of the First Demographic Transition. Social solidarity and normative regulations were to be followed (Lesthaeghe, 2011, pp. 182).

In 1970s, after a so-called Silent Revolution, cohabitation became a widely known practice in Norway. It took its beginning with the abolishing of concubinage paragraph that took place in 1972 (Ot.prp. nr. 5, 1971–72, in Syltevik, 2015, p. 518). It had different stages, starting with the negative one. Even though it was accepted, cohabiting couples still had less advantages as those who were two single individuals. This period was beneficial for single parents and retired people. The positive stage of recognition happened in 1981 when they gained same rights as those who were married. Cohabitants also got a possibility to share a flat and keep it in case of death of one of the partners. In 1991, cohabitants got the right to keep all kinds of shared housing in such a case. Other prominent recognitions came after 2000, which included inheritance questions and share of parental responsibility (Syltevik, 2015, p. 518).

During the recognition process, marriage was mentioned as important in Norwegian society:

> The majority will emphasize that Norwegian society is built on marriage as the best way of living together, and it is the responsibility of society to support marriage both practical as well as ethical. (...)The minority states that marriage is the most common way of living together in our society. The most important thing is that parents whatever status – give their children a safe, harmonious and developing up-bringing. (Stortinget, in Syltevik, 2015, p. 519)[1]

In early 1970s, the family policy was more focused on women's role, especially on single mothers (St. Meld. No. 117, 1972–73, in Syltevik, 2015, p. 519). Divorce rates were increasing.

Single mothers were treated in the same way, no matter if they lived alone or with a partner. This provoked changes in the process of cohabitation recognition. Unmarried mothers who lived together with a partner did not get support anymore. This question was later discussed in the debates, but no changes were made (Syltevik, 2015, p. 519).

Cohabitation was named as 'paperless marriage' in 1980s (NOU 1980:50, in Syltevik, 2015, p. 520), it was referred to as another kind of engagement or test-marriage. It was mentioned as a change in the family structure, which also included increased divorce rates, low fertility and more women in labor market. But marriage was still seen as preferred practice (Syltevik, 2015, pp. 520-521). These changes may also refer to the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 2011, p. 182). However, the continuous strong position of marriage lead to the point of Coleman, who argued about the sole meaning of that theory (Coleman, 2013, pp. 36-39). These changes should be studied with the help of different theories, like, for example, detraditionalization. Some regulative traditions have been weakened, but marriage remains function on the level of meaning-constitutive traditions (Gross, 2005, p. 286).

In 1994, cohabitation became more equal to marriage. The main idea was that, no matter civil status, both partners should be responsible for their children (or stepchildren). The couple was expected to contribute equally. There was also a positive change in pension allowance. Until 1994, cohabiting pensioners had an advantage of receiving full pension unlike those married who got it reduced. These regulations were revised, which resulted in narrowing down the difference between cohabitation and marriage (Syltevik, 2015, p. 520). The Marriage Act was changed as well, focusing on independence of each partner, which also made it less different than cohabitation.[2] The new law also made it possible for homosexuals to register their partnerships and get almost similar rights as married.[3] Anyway, cohabitation was better regulated by law in case when it concerned heterosexual couples, who were living together for two years or had common children (NOU, 1999:25, in Syltevik, 2015, pp. 520-522).

In 2002-2003, marriage was still seen as important, but strong relationships and rights of children were of even greater concern (St. Meld. No. 29, 2002–2003, in Syltevik, 2015, p. 522). The regulations of cohabitation were improving. In 2005, cohabitants got allowance to take the surname of their better half (Lov om personnavn, 2005, § 4). In 2006, unmarried parents were given shared responsibility for the children (Endringslov til barnelova, 2005, § 35). In 2007, those splitting up had to go through a mandatory conciliation process in case they had children, and were treated as if they were married in relation to tax regulations. (Syltevik, 2015, p. 523).

In 2009, the law of inheritance let cohabitants with children get automatically some amount in case of death of their partner (Lov om arv m.m., 2008, § 28 b). In 2014, due to a new Adoption Act, cohabitants got the right to adopt children (Lov om endringer i adopsjonsloven, 2014, § 5).

As we can see, the regulations around cohabitation in Norway have been changing gradually, and differences from marriage can be hardly seen. Let us look closer at cohabitation.

4.1.2 Advantages of cohabitation

During my fieldwork, I noticed that there were no negative sides of cohabitation mentioned by the participants. Even older generations have become more neutral to this type of relationships. They pointed out that they had a negative association with cohabitation before, but it has changed. Nowadays it has become more and more socially accepted to live together with someone without getting married. This is one of the reasons why many Norwegians choose cohabitation. Nobody forces them to get married. There is no social pressure and no expectations around it and couples are free to choose what is best for them: "Society accepts more and more of those things we did not have before. Society has become more tolerant in all aspects. It concerns abortion, ways of living together, sexual orientation" (Informant 2). This acceptance means also acceptance of individual choice. People can freely decide whom they want to be with, when and how they want to establish their relationships. The process of individualization leads people to make decisions for themselves more often (Wiik, 2010, p. 32). As Giddens mentioned in his work "Modernity and Self Identity", people become more reflexive, they get adjusted to new social changes (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33). This may be interpreted as more acceptance. Globalization make people face different changes, and they have to rethink and reorganize their points of view. Older norms become loose and give way to more freedom for individual choices.

Another advantage of cohabitation is its ability to 'test' relationships (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p. 62). And even if some couples continue their relationships on this stage, most of my respondents agreed that it is a step between dating and marriage:

> It is a big experience to live together with someone you are close to, see each other all the time. We all have our own ideals. And things become visible when you experience it day by day. That is why it is important to have gone through this experience before you get married. (Informant 1)

People become very close to each other when they start living together, it helps them see all the good and bad things about each other. We all have different habits, attitudes and behaviors, and cohabitation can shed some light on such relations. Learning about how to deal with these is not a simple task. But those who pass this 'test' are truly ready to take a step further in the relationships: "Most people choose cohabitation first to find out if they are a good match, and then they get married" (Informant 3). On this stage, people decide whether they want to give their relationship another chance or not:

> I think cohabitation is very good for relationships before marriage. ... Knowing that you can live with that person is very important. I agree that cohabitation is a middle stage in relationships. ... And if one chooses to continue as cohabitant then he doesn't really know if he wants to go further. (Informant 4)

Individuals get an opportunity to choose, they take it as a chance to find a better solution (Giddens, 1991, pp. 175-176). Cohabitation may serve as a process of making further decisions. And if referring to this process as a part of individualism, it may be something that may happen several times, until it is satisfied.

If it comes to breaking up, cohabitation is much less problematic than marriage, both practically and socially: "You do not have legal obligations when you are cohabitants. ... I think you are less bound together as when you are married" (Informant 5). Those who are cohabitants have more freedom: "Cohabitation can let you break up easier. ... If you are just living together then it is just like 'I cannot take it any more' " (Informant 1). That is why cohabitation might be a better choice for those who want to 'test' their relationships. Following Giddens (1991, pp. 88-98), new types of partnerships are built up on mutual contentment. Cohabitation may give couples possibilities to reconsider their relationships and make decisions based on their feelings.

Nevertheless, there are some young people that continue living together unmarried not because they are unsure. They do so, because they choose cohabitation as something lifelong. In this case, it means that it is an alternative to marriage: "I think that for some people cohabitation and marriage have the same meanings, but practically it's only the ceremony that makes a difference. But for someone it does not have to mean something" (Informant 4). There are people that do not find it necessary to have a ceremony. "Wedding in Norway is very expensive. So I think those who choose cohabitation and do not wish to prioritize on spending money on wedding, can be as happy as those who choose marriage" (Informant 5). These points of view,

that state that cohabitation can be lifelong, are very positive. It tells us also that the quality of relationships and love is the most important. Such focus on romantic feelings is also one of the characteristics of the individualization process (Wiik, 2010, pp. 32-33). One of the informants pointed out that there is no need for making relationships official:

> If I want to be with my boyfriend and we want to have a good relationship, we have the same responsibility even though we are not married. It does not matter if we are married or not, if we argue we would just do it the same way if we were married or not. It would not change anything. ... I do not see why a piece of paper can make a family happier. (Informant 6)

Relationships between two individuals become a matter of their commitment and trust. Pure love is on focus, no matter in what way it is organized. It does not depend on outer factors, only on mutual satisfaction (Giddens, 1991, pp. 6, 91). It might mean that people do not need any public or official approval of their feelings. What they need is what they already have. As long as they are happy with each other, their relationships continue.

When it comes to the rights, cohabitants can secure themselves by writing a contract. This is one more thing that makes it look more similar to marriage. But it is the couple's responsibility to take care of such practical things:

> I learned it from my parents. When a couple lives together and have built up a lot together, bought a house and everything like that, should one die, the parents of that person can come and take half of everything that you and your partner have built up together. But if you have got a written agreement, then it is you who get it. And this is really fare, I feel. ... That is why we had such a contract. I think it is very important that nobody comes and takes half of everything you have built up. (Informant 5)

This is the active contribution that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim mention in their work. The process of individualization do not only offer free choices, but also requires more participation in making them work (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 4). In the situation with cohabitation, as a type of union, couples are actively involved in the organization of their relationships. There are no automatic solutions for them. It means they are in charge of all the nuances that may appear in the process of living together. Individuals should be aware of all the challenges the form of their relationships may bring.

4.1.3   Disadvantages of cohabitation

There are still some weak points of cohabitation. Not always couples sign an agreement or contract when they start living together. And it works fine for those who do not own common property and do not have children. But when such changes appear in their lives, they should take care of such paperwork. Not all young people are aware of such things. Those of my interviewees who are in their early twenties, told me that they do not know much about the rights of cohabitation.

Cohabitants do not have the right for inheritance, unless they have common children or have been living together for more than 5 years. In such cases it should be stated in a testament for each other, in addition to an agreement of cohabitation (Lov om arv m.m., 2008, § 28 b).

It may also be less convenient with regards to the couple's family economy. Those who are cohabitants pay more wealth taxes. That is because the couple is seen as two separate individuals, whose free allowances cannot be summed together. As of 2019, this amount is 1.5 million Norwegian kroner, which means 3 millions to those who are married. It might be of disadvantage to those cohabitants, who do not have equal personal assets (Pedersen, 2019; Skatteetaten, 2019).

Cohabitants do not have the responsibility to support each other economically. They are usually seen as two individuals with separate economies (Barne- og familiedepartementet, 2005). This, however, may have its advantages for those, who wish to keep their financial independency. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim mentioned, it may lead to self-confidence, especially among women (2002, pp. 55-67). There is less dependence on men, and they may decide what they want to spend their money on. In this sense, cohabitation may be a way of keeping own financial freedom.

Tore Thallaug, a Norwegian lawyer, have mentioned in his article that those who choose not to get married refuse marriage law, in some way. But as there is no law for cohabitants, their relationship cannot be regulated automatically. Those who choose cohabitation are required to be very well informed about law and regulations around it. But sometimes it is very difficult to find the best solution even with the help of a lawyer. That is why Tore says, that marriage is a smarter choice. It has ready solutions for different kinds of life situations. He also mentions that women are often those who lose when choosing cohabitation (Thallaug, 2018).

Åste Dokka also emphasizes on negative influence of cohabitation on women (Dokka, 2019). She even says that it is feminists who should support marriages. Women are those who earn less and those who suffer much more often when cohabitation is over. To be secure, it is highly recommended for both partners to write an agreement. But then the whole point of paperless cohabitation is of a question. Because if people do choose unmarried relationships, it is because they want to make it simpler. However, if it is even more complicated in the end, then there is no point of it.

Further, if the focus of late modernity is on pure relationships (Giddens, 1991, pp. 6-7), cohabitation may get a negative association with it. When it requires any source of written agreement, it may weaken its primary values.

Cohabitants are usually less committed to each other and, thus, may feel less satisfied then those married ones. It does not concern those who have marriage in their plans for the future. But if it is a long-lasting choice, cohabitation may bring uncertainties into relationships (Furulund, 2010). It refers to different stages of their life as a union. When marriage takes place, it may be a sign of successful relationships: "Marriage can be a step forward, while cohabitation is a little bit like anticipation of it" (Informant 5). Cohabitation may be seen as a process of getting to know each other. And if it is not eventually leading to marriage, it may be seen as not good enough.

There are no rituals connected to cohabitation, which can symbolize the transition towards this form of relationships. Such practices as a wedding day, ceremony, honeymoon or shared surname are associated with marriage. They have a great symbolic meaning in creating a 'norm-guided behavior'. Cohabitation is seldom celebrated (Wiik, 2010, pp. 51-52). Absence of symbolic actions may lead to less culture (Geertz, 1973, p. 49). Therefore, cohabitation may contribute less to the growth of cultural values.

As we can see, cohabitation is not equal to marriage with regards to both legal and emotional matters. It may have negative consequences on relationships and society as a whole.

4.1.4 Cohabitation in multicultural Norway. The Thai-Norwegian case.

Norway has become a home to people from many different backgrounds. Some of them come here to find protection and asylum, while others look for working or studying opportunities. Globalization also plays its role. Nowadays there are plenty of ways for people to meet each other. Travelling and Internet make it possible to erase the borders, which results in more

intercultural relationships (Daugstad, 2006, p. 142). People meet each other in different circumstances, fall in love and start thinking about living together. While some couples have no problems with that, others have marriage as the only choice to stay together. It concerns mostly Norwegians, who have relationships with people from countries outside EEA. For those people marriage is sometimes the only way to keep their relationship. The problem is that those people need a visa in order to live in Norway.

I would like to present here a Thai-Norwegian case, as an example of how cohabitation policy can be non-reachable with regards to international unions in Norway. I decided to write about it after I had heard a frustrating story from one of my informants, who is cohabiting with a Norwegian. But this also concerns people from many other countries, that might have similar problems.

According to the Norwegian directorate of immigration (UDI), in order to get a cohabitant visa, one of the requirements is to document that the couple have lived together for 2 years. Another important requirement is the minimum income of the reference person, which is NOK 260 744 per year, as for now (UDI, 2019). My Thai informant met her boyfriend in Thailand, and they were living together in Australia for 3 years before they came to Norway. She applied for a cohabitant visa twice. The first time it was rejected, because the minimum income requirement for her boyfriend was not reached. Another reason was that the documents they sent to prove their living together all these years were not satisfied by UDI. They decided that her boyfriend had to come back to Norway and work for 1 year in order to meet the income requirement. The Thai girl had a good education and that helped her to find a place to study in a Norwegian university. So then she could come and live together with her boyfriend on a student visa. But in order to do so, she had to come to Norway on a tourist visa. Because of previous rejection, her application was considered as a risky one. Anyway, she got a visa, but only for 1 month and 15 days. After that, she went back to Thailand to renew it. Then she got a student visa and started her studies. A year passed very fast and they were ready to apply for a cohabitant visa again. It was important, because living on a student visa did not let her work more than 20 hours per week, a cohabitant visa would give much more opportunities. But this time the application was rejected again. The couple was frustrated, because they had no idea of what the problem could be. UDI explained that they still could not see it documented that they had lived together continuously for 2 years. The time they were not together, which was the time the girl waited for the visa, was regarded as disconnection. UDI mentioned that it had to be documented that they were registered on the same address for 2 years. When they were living in Australia for 3

years, they did not have any permanent place to stay, as they were travelling all the time. And when they started living together in Norway, she was on a tourist visa, which also had some issues in registering the address. The couple sent lots of documentation to prove that they were together for all these years, but still they did not approve it. They have appealed and it can take months until they get another decision.

In such situation, it would be much easier just to get married, but if it is not what a couple wants, then there should be another way to do it:

> It is like we know each other for 5 years and they don't want to give me a visa and in some other case people can know each other for 2 days and get married and get a visa without a problem. ... Norwegians who are cohabitants have no problems, it's just fine for them, because the system works fine. But it doesn't work for foreign couples. People do not really care when they are not in the same situation, because it does not affect them. And it can affect the whole society. ... The system is not good enough, the policy is somewhere there, but it is not good enough. It does not function properly. Someone has to do a better job as it concerns people's lives. (Informant 6)

This case may have directly negative relation to individualism. Not all people are free to choose the best option for them in their personal life. But according to individualism, they should have more freedom in making their decisions (Holliday et al., 2010, p. 213). As Giddens mentioned, multiple choices are not available for all, and are dependent on different circumstances (Giddens, 1991, p. 82). Therefore, cohabitation as an alternative to marriage may not always be free to choose. Globalization creates various opportunities. However, the choices people make for themselves may have wider consequences (Giddens, 1991, pp. 80-88). It may be connected to the situation with my informant. Travelling made it possible for her boyfriend to meet her in Thailand. At the same time, it created challenges in order to keep their relationship going. Individual choices became more public issues. And again, following Giddens (1991, pp. 175-176), they are trying to find the best solution to stay together.

In 2015, Tord Hustveit mentioned in his article, that there is a need for a so-called 'love visa' (Hustveit, 2015). This would make cohabitation in Norway possible for all, and not only for Norwegians and EEA citizens. Everyone should get an opportunity to choose cohabitation for life or as a step before marriage. The author states that in time of globalization Norwegian law system has to be revised in order to let people who love each other be together.

4.2 Marriage

Following a general definition of marriage, "it is a way to arrange the biological reproduction, hence secure the transmission of material and cultural values from generation to generation" (Hodne et al., 1985, p. 9).

The church has no longer state power over marriage, but continues referring to older traditions of lifelong relationships. It has lost its function of regulating people's private matters according to one principle. Law regulations take into account different life situations and relationships become more liberal. They also promote new norms and values. By regulating cohabitation, it may become a morally internalized type of union, which may erase its differences with marriage. But the laws reflect the changes in society, which has become more individual-oriented. The individualization of relationships make it possible for couples to choose a type of union which is best for them, and which is socially accepted. People do not feel pressure from their relatives or local communities as they did before. The development of private sector opened new opportunities and made it possible to leave behind older structures. Women have become more financially independent. Marriage is no longer seen as an imposed institution, followed by strict rules of religion or society. It is a matter of individual choice, based on personal needs and views (Hodne et al., 1985, pp. 201-203).

Today, it is a matter of course that people get married because they are truly in love with each other. Other reasons would be seen as immoral. Individuals make decisions on their own, and have to take all the responsibility of their choice. Relatives and friends may only play a role of advisors. Such individual choices may people realize their ideals of romantic relationships. But if many of them manage to do it, others may feel confused. Such an opportunity of personal choices may lead to people feeling lonely. If before marriage was an institution where family life and work were closely related to each other, nowadays they are two separate things. Home and work are two different types of social life, which are constantly contesting for the devotion of time (Hodne et al., 1985, pp. 204-205).

By making relationships private matters, the older customs around marriage have been simplified. Some of them continue their functions, though gaining new forms. In older times marriage was considered to be the most significant event in life of each individual, it had a different status in terms of local communities and state. Nowadays its meanings are widened. New alternatives bring marriage its true nature, making it less dependent on the outer factors like state or church. However, these relations are also important, as couples continue having

needs for them in order to function properly. Therefore, some old traditions are still relevant in the modern context. Relationships need a social environment, otherwise they may become isolated (Hodne et al., 1985, pp. 208-210).

In the time of globalization, marriage has gained new shapes with regards to values, norms and traditions. But it is still there, even in Norway, where cohabitation is preferred by many people. It is an individual choice. And if in older times people got married because they needed to, nowadays it is mostly because of love (Wiik et al., 2010, p. 272). Pure relationships is what matters in time of late modernity (Giddens, 1991, p. 6).

4.2.1   Symbolic values

According to my findings, marriage is still regarded as the highest step in relationships. It has a meaning and is based on love. And especially those young interviewees said that marriage should be lifelong, otherwise its values will be lost. All of them expressed willingness to get married in the future. However, their thoughts were also contradictory, as they also said that it is not that important to be married in life:

> I think marriage is a wonderful thing. It is about two people that say to each other 'yes, ... we just stay together no matter what'. ... I do not think marriage is of vital importance. I do not think it is something we must have. It is not a need, but a choice. But I think many people would like to get married. Everyone has an idea of what it is like to be married, and whom they would like to get married with and things like that. But it is not always up to expectations. (Informant 1)

It seems like marriage is an ideal that not always is reachable. And it is totally acceptable to stay unmarried. It is considered as something beautiful and desirable, but not that necessary.

Marriage as a lifelong relationship may be seen as a meaning-constitutive tradition (Gross, 2005, pp. 295-297). It is still considered to be an ideal among those Norwegians that I interviewed. Regulative functions of marriage as a tradition are weakened, because of social acceptance of other types of union. But its meaningful understanding is still alive. Neil Gross emphasizes on the continuation of 'lifelong, internally stratified marriage (LISM)'. Though he is more focused on the American culture, I find it relevant to the Norwegian settings as well. The author explains that LISM still serves as a leading cultural model of the stable family life. It remains an ideal for most people (Gross, 2005, pp. 297-301). In others words, traditions are still alive, especially those that deal with the inner world of each individual.

There was an interviewee, who first mentioned that a family can be happy without marriage, but later focused on many positive things around it:

> To be married, in my opinion, means love stuff, a kind of declaration of love to each other. It is a bit extra. Because I think, if people do not want to get married, then there might be an issue of trust. ... A marriage is a vow one does not take back. It is when people are faithful to each other. ... I think marriage should be only once in a life, it is the whole point of it. (Informant 4)

This symbolic meaning of marriage is still important. The promise of true love and commitment to each other is of great value. But individual choice is to be respected, and if someone choose cohabitation over marriage, it is not something that should be judged. I think those opinions about happiness without marriage mean the confirmation of this freedom. So even if my informants would like to get married in their life or have already done so, they show great respect to the choice of staying unmarried. This is, according to Giddens, adjustment to social changes within society. Globalization influence people and make them change their views (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33). New ways of living become a norm. People are free to make their decisions, but make also other options possible.

Following Geertz (1973), marriage may be seen as a part of cultural symbolic system. Its meaning is pre-given, however it is somewhat modified and continues to get new shapes. The desire of young people to get married in future may constitute the continuing regulative function of the pre-given knowledge. It serves as a guide. And whatever choice people make, the pre-given symbolic meanings always follow them.

Marital status can also have some meaning with relation to security. My interviewees agreed that marriage makes relationship stronger:

> It is when a person have been cohabiting with a partner for a long time and then gets a confirmation that there is actually something there. You fall in love even more when you get married, because then you get something more as well. ... For me it was important to get married to that man. I am a person who likes safe environment around me. (Informant 5)

According to Blumer's symbolic interaction theory (in Hałas, 2012, pp. 3-11), marriage may be seen as a communicative relation. It is a way to express feelings. Through such symbolic interaction people emphasize their commitment.

Marriage may bring relationships to a higher level. And if people take such a step, they prove their love to each other, their commitment and readiness to be there in good and bad times. It is

still considered as something special: "Everyone, almost everyone would like to get married. She must be a princess" (Informant 1).

A wedding day can be a motivation for marriage. It is full of rituals that you share with your family and friends. It shows that relationships are serious and stable. It starts with an engagement, which is expected to be romantic and special, and continuous with a ceremony and beautiful celebration (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 276-277). There is a great amount of meaningful symbols that are constructed by people (Schutz, in Stoltzfus, 2003, p. 188). Marriage is full of them. All the small details gain special symbolic context. Ordinary rings become more than just a set of jewellery, a beautiful dress becomes a wedding symbol, and a honeymoon becomes more than just a trip. Moreover, as rituals make emotions stronger (Young, in Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984, p. 428), marriage may bring positive reflections on relationships.

Nevertheless, symbols may have different meanings to people. They may be changed and adjusted (Levin & Trost, 1996, pp. 102-105). Some of my informants mentioned that wedding symbols are not that necessary: "I would like to wear a ring, but for me it would be just a piece of jewellery. It's not so symbolic to me" (Informant 6). Symbols are not fixed meanings. And even if wedding rings are widely considered to be a special sign of eternal love, for someone it is just an object. Another informant had just married before our interview took place. She expressed a great pleasure to wear her wedding ring, it had a special meaning to her. The simple object became meaningful at the moment her beloved one proposed. Saussure said that a sign with a certain meaning might be understand only by those who use it (in Fiske, 1990, p. 31). It might mean that only those who believe in symbolic values of wedding rings, and also those who wear it, consider it to be special. Hypothetically, the previous informant may change her attitude to a simple ring when her boyfriend proposes to her. Because of previously socially ascribed meanings, the associations may be changed during experience.

The change of one's surname may be of great symbolic meaning. Sociologists say that as women continue taking their husbands' surnames when getting married, it may be a sign that traditions are still important. Sometimes it may be an automatic decision, but it may also have its deeper meanings. In Norway, many women take their husbands' surnames, but also keep their own ones. Those who decide not to change it, explain it as a wish to keep their identities. It has a lot to do with gender equality. There may also be a strong family connection, which individuals would like to keep. However, to change one's surname may be a symbol of a family. Those

women, who do it, often think about children. They mean that a common surname may be a beautiful way to keep a family together. Some women would like to keep their surnames and follow traditions at the same time. In this case, many choose to have also a middle name. Sometimes it may be practical to change a surname. It is, for example, when one of the partners is a foreigner, and would like to get a local surname. Sometimes men also find it useful to take their women's surnames and keep their own as middle names. This is, however, a more seldom practice. Each couple has a freedom to choose the way they want to see their family names (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 274-275). My Thai informant mentioned that a shared surname might be a possible advantage of getting married: "I think for me it would be better to have his surname, because I'm in Norway, it would probably have some effect in my life" (Informant 6).

The study of Turid Noack and Kenneth Aarskaug Wiik shows that there are different factors that make women more willing to keep their surnames when marrying. Here they discuss the role of education, women's independence, marital age and egalitarian views on family roles. The authors found out that younger women are more likely to change their surnames when marrying. Those with higher education often do not follow this tradition. Women with wealthy backgrounds, and whose mothers are highly educated more frequently keep their surnames as well. The high level of gender equality within the country also leads to such pattern, however it was stronger for those getting married in 1980s. The authors emphasize that keeping the tradition of shared surname at marriage may be a symbol that shows a difference from other types of unions (Noack & Wiik, pp. 507-517).

4.2.2 Detraditionalization of marriage

One of the main features of late modernity is detraditionalization. It is reflected in changing family patterns. More people choose cohabitation, marriage rates are declining, while the numbers of divorces are increasing. Detraditionalization is accompanied by individualization, because the focus is on individual choice, and not on social expectations. Traditions become less important (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 1-19; Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 262-263).

But even if marriage rates in Norway are falling, it is still chosen by many people. It means that traditions are still of some value. Detraditionalization does not mean complete disappearance of traditions, but its constant process of transformation. New ideas and patterns shape older practices (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 263). Here we can also refer to Dahl (2006, 18-21), who describes culture as a continuous process of creation. Our knowledge meets new experiences,

which also bring new practices. Many people in Norway do want to get married, but it becomes somewhat different than it was before. New practices are shaped by different factors.

One of my informants mentioned that norms are changing and that can explain why marriage loses some of its traditional values:

> Before, according to God's law, it was 'until death do us part'. ... But now you can choose civil marriage, and then you don't give a vow to God, but to each other. And it is a bit sad, that this promise one gives to another is not that good as that given to God. (Informant 2)

The promises people made when getting married in older times were more powerful. They had more religious meanings. The patterns that we see today may be, thus, explained as those appearing in the time of secularization. Nowadays many marriages end up with divorces. Perhaps the promises are not strong enough:

> In the environment I grew old, marriage was a lifelong relationship, in good and bad times, no matter what. Today people can break up in bad times. There is a change. ... We have not internalized norms, those old norms. Remember, you should live together in bad and good times. And this must, in a way, be internalized. A lifelong marriage, where two become one. (Informant 2)

Such traditions are weakened nowadays. Giddens claimed that the focus on pure relationships replaces traditional views. More dissolutions happen, because people are not satisfied with each other (Giddens, 1991, pp. 88-98). However, for my younger informants marriage is desired to be lifelong, which emphasizes on its continuation as tradition. But it loses its values for those participants, who have experienced marriage and divorce. Like Giddens said, traditions are always there, but they gain new structures according to changes in life that people face (Giddens, in Gross, 2005, pp. 289-292). Detraditionalization happens when individuals can make their own choices. But if people have this freedom, and use it in the right way, traditions may become recreated (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 1-19).

Anyway, marriage still brings more stability to relationships. And when a couple takes this step, it means they are ready to commit to each other even more (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 276). They have made their choice, and they want to celebrate it. A wedding day is a tradition that continuous to be relevant: "You fall in love a little bit more, and you get beautiful memories to talk about. ... We have got a beautiful thing to share in our life, a big day" (Informant 5).

Proposal is very often something that women expect from their men:

> Women want a little bit more in return from their men. So if they ask about engagement, ... they get a confirmation ... , and I think women like it, at least I did. It was so pleasant when he proposed, even if we talked about it before. And it is very nice to get an engagement ring on your finger. (Informant 5)

It is mostly men that take the practical part in the proposal, often after numerous hints from their women (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 268-269). Sometimes men take initiative and plan the proposal on their own. During my interviews, 2 out of 8 informants mentioned that it was exactly their men's decision. Ellingsæter writes about the process of proposal as a Hollywood scenario. It has become very popular among Norwegians as well to plan it in advance as a surprise with all the small details (2018, pp. 268-269). Here we can also see the influence of the Internet and media (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 25-26, Giddens, 1991, pp. 4-5), which shape people's wishes and actions. When seeing all those beautiful images of romantic proposal, one becomes excited about it and would also like to be creative in implementing such roles.

Many Norwegians still choose a traditional ceremony in church. As an example, according to official statistics of Norway, there were 8164 church marriages out of 22111 of all marriages as of 2017 (SSB, 2019d). For some couples such a ceremony is important as a sacred religious ritual, for others it is just a beautiful tradition they want to follow: "I think people see the church as something ceremonial, magnificent. They dress up and do everything possible to be beautiful there" (Informant 5). Such meaningful traditional practices promote share of values, which people want to follow (Stoltzfus, 2003, p. 188). The church ceremony is often followed by people, because of its traditional nature and esthetical beauty. For many it is an absolute must to do it this way, because any other ceremony cannot provide the same atmosphere. But some people also think it is not right for non-religious people to do it this way only because of its beauty. However, for others it may be of great importance for the sake of other family members, or in order to follow their family traditions (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 270-271). As one of my informant said: "It was not even a discussion. It was a matter of course. It was not even an option to do it in the courthouse, for example. I think to get married is something so special. It was what we wanted, to get married in church" (Informant 8). Another informant added about the ceremony: "It was the most beautiful" (Informant 7). Church wedding may be seen as a great part of the process of getting married.

It also becomes more and more popular to get married outside the church. Nowadays people can get married wherever they want to. In January 2018 mayors got the responsibility for

holding civil marriages (Lov om ekteskap, 2018, § 12). VG have published the whole list of popular places in different regions of Norway where ceremonies can be held. Couples have an opportunity to choose a place that means a lot to them and thus make this event even more special (Langset & Johannessen, 2018). This is a great example of the individualization process, when people become creative in their own choices (Giddens, 1991, pp. 1-9). Here we can see how traditions are reconstructing.

A wedding celebration itself is very expensive in Norway, which is the reason for many couples to postpone it: "You have to save a lot and feel like you want to spend money on it" (Informant 5). Globalization makes information easily accessible, which also brings changes to older traditions of a wedding day. Perfect images of this great event help people with creative ideas, but also lead to more expenses. It is mostly women who would like to make it perfect to the details, while men take it much simpler (Ellingsæter, 2018, pp. 271-273). Media has great impact on traditions (Giddens, 1991, pp. 4-5, 26), and may push away local cultures, introducing new practices and adjusting old ones (Blumer in Hałas, 2012, pp. 3-11). Ideas of perfect wedding may not always be reachable, that is a possible reason why some couples decide not to do it. Some people may get inspired, and know exactly how they want to celebrate it. That may lead to postponement of their wedding day until they are ready. All of my younger informants mentioned that they would like to get some financial stability first.

All in all, those who decide to get married wish also to have a wedding party: "I would like to have a wedding, big and nice. If I make this most serious choice in my life and I'm happy about it, then I have to celebrate it" (Informant 1). Many of my informants mentioned that even if a wedding brings a lot of expenses, it is worth it. You get your family and friends together, you share your happiness and create beautiful moments. A wedding may be seen as a shared project (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 273), with many hours of planning and a lifetime of memories.

4.3   Living apart together

Apart from marriage and cohabitation as different types of union formation, there is another one that is called 'living apart together' (LAT), which in Norwegian sounds like 'særbo'. I heard it for the first time from one of my informants during our interview:

> It means that two persons are together, but live separately. They can choose to be together during a weekend, experience different things together, go for a walk together etc. ... They do not have

> common children, but each of them have the children of their own. Those who choose LAT ... do not want to have more children, they are looking for other qualities. They need a good friend. LAT is more common among older people. Young ones often choose cohabitation. (Informant 2)

People who live in LAT relations are couples, who, due to different circumstances, choose to have two separate households. They might be married or not married and of different age groups. There might also be other family members of each of the partners living with them (Levin & Trost, 1999, pp. 281-293).

According to my informant, LAT comes after cohabitation, marriage or divorce, usually later in life. It was mentioned as a trend that can be observed nowadays. Levin and Trost write that for some people it may be another chance for creating a successful relationship. After painful experiences of the previous cohabitation or marriage, LAT may be a better choice for those who do not want to appear in the same situation again. They know all the good and bad things about daily routines and the possible arguments that may appear in the process of living together. Choosing LAT people may help couples focus on the romantic side of relationships (Levin & Trost, 1999, pp. 286-287).

LAT is often popular among retired people. It is of great advantage, because they can keep living in their homes, surrounded by what they are used to, and at the same time contribute to the romantic relationships on a regular basis. They can keep to their ordinary routines and have some time reserved for love. It may also be an easier way for them to maintain close relationships with their families (Levin & Trost, 1999, p. 288).

Another reason for people entering LAT type of union may be the need of taking care for own children or parents. Some people do not want their children to be involved in their private life changes, and keep it in distance instead. Taking care of own parents may also be perceived as a great responsibility, which has to be taken. LAT relationships give people such an opportunity to have private life and fulfill the needs of the others (Levin & Trost, 1999, pp. 283-285).

Young people are also sometimes in need of living apart together. It happens, for example, when each of the partners have a good job, which is located far away from the other, sometimes in another country. Both of them would like to keep it, but they also want their relationship to continue, that is why they choose LAT pattern, which may often have a temporary character. The authors also find some connection with the process of individualization, where independency of each individual is on focus (Levin & Trost, 1999, p. 285). It may also be seen

through Giddens' perspective on self-creation (Giddens, 1991, pp. 1-9). In times of globalization, personal development is an important component of everyday life. New challenges come, but also new solutions become available. In this case, people find their work as an obstacle for their relationships, thus a new form of union becomes possible. LAT pattern helps couples stay together and keep their professional growth, keep their identities strong.

Globalization breaks the borders and brings people together. New opportunities come, job markets become wider and people move more and more often. That is to say, that LAT relationships may increase as well, which lets people combine different important elements of their life. It may also lead to a better understanding of equality between men and women (Levin & Trost, 1999, pp. 290-291). At the same time, increasing divorce rates may also cause more frequent appearing of LAT relationships. However, these may be more fragile unions that are not very easy to follow (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p. 61).

4.4   Divorce influence on marriage plans

According to the official statistics of Norway, there were 9545 divorces in Norway. It is 303 dissolutions less than a year before, and 1495 less than in 2005, when it reached its maximum of 11040. There has been a relative decrease in divorce rates since that time, but the numbers are still very high in comparison with 1970:

	Divorces															
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
0 The whole country	3 301	6 466	10 055	10 053	11 040	10 158	10 235	10 228	10 207	9 929	9 736	9 556	9 306	9 345	9 848	9 545

Table 2 - SSB, 2019b

According to most of my informants, marriage is still desired to be a lifelong institution. However, high divorce rates in Norway show us that it is not always up to expectations. It questions marriage values: "Half of all marriages end in divorce. How good is marriage for life?" (Informant 1). This statement was also mentioned in several Norwegian media resources, which Rune Zahl-Olsen argues is not correct due to its wrong use of statistics. He mentions that it is not right to divide the divorce rates of one year to the total number of marriages of the same year, in order to find out the percentage of all divorces. Instead, the author have studied divorces by marriage cohorts, analyzing marriages and divorces during 1960s-1990s. He came up with the conclusion that between 27-40 percent of marriages from 2013 would end up with

dissolutions. The author believes that by showing right statistics, media may have great impact on decisions couples make. People often repeat what others do, which also creates new norms (Zahl-Olsen, 2018, p. 71). According to Blumer (in Hałas, 2012, pp. 3-11), media serves as a symbolic interaction with people. Social behaviors may influence the whole society. Thus, it is extremely important to present information in a right way.

Different reasons may bring relationships to dissolution: economical, emotional, sexual or social. And it has always been like this. Lower divorce rates from older times do not mean there were no conflicts or arguments. Social pressure and law system made families hold together in their marriages, even if their relationships were broken. Such circumstances are proved to be very harmful for both parents and children (Hodne et al., 1985, pp. 183-186). Divorce is a good choice then: "We do a good thing, instead of living in a bad relationship" (Informant 2). As mutual contentment is of great importance, this is the main factor that may keep relationships going on (Giddens, in Gross, 2005, pp. 289-292). Otherwise, it may end in breaking up. Such fragility may be connected with what Bauman calls 'liquid modernity', it means that people are preoccupied by their own problems, which lead to greater instability of relationships (in Gane, 2001, pp. 268-271).

One of my informants mentioned that it is a bit easy-going today. People get married and divorce many times. But it is hard to explain why*:* "Marriage is not only a bed of roses, there are ups and downs as well. So then it is about how you manage to cope with these problems" (Informant 8). And again, we can find here the process of individualization. People are more focused on the quality of their relationships, which may explain frequent dissolutions, in case of dissatisfaction (Wiik, 2010, p. 32). But this ease, mentioned by my informant, might mean that some people do not always put all efforts to solve the problems, they rather decide to break up, and sooner or later find a new partner. Another informant with 55 years of marriage experience told me: "There must be some arguments. ... And then you become friends. It is good with a stormy marriage from time to time" (Informant 7).

One of my empirical questions during the fieldwork was to find out if divorce rates could influence marriage plans. And all of my informants agreed with that. One of the informants put it this way:

> There was a trend to divorce when I went to school. Those children, who experienced their
> parents' divorce, took it hard, were less pleased, it was stressful for them. Maybe they do not

want to get married, because they think they can experience the same as their parents. (Informant 3)

Marriage is still seen as more committed type of relationship then cohabitation (Wiik, 2010, p. 34). Being aware of it, people postpone it until they are completely sure in their relationships: "I think many people are afraid to bind themselves. It is a vow" (Informant 4). It means they do not want to break these promises. Knowing that many marriages end up with divorces might make people hesitant in their decisions. That might be a reason for many couples staying unmarried.

Cohabitation is often seen as experimental and more fragile than marriage. Moreover, if it is not successful, the efforts to keep it going may be less strong. As people have less bond between each other, it makes it easier to run away from it. Individuality is likely to win over difficulties. Instable nature of cohabitation may have great implications for children's wellbeing and for the society as a whole (Crouse, 2004, pp. 352-353).

According to one of my informants, stability had a much greater meaning before. He explained it in a very interesting way:

> When you read newspapers, there are portrayed those who have been living together in marriage for many years. There is a silver wedding, a golden wedding, a diamond wedding. They are honored, but it happens more and more seldom. Young people think it is weird. And it has something to do with the older culture. It is also connected to the working life. In older times, the longer you stayed employed at the same place the better. ... Today, the average employee seniority is four years. Before, if a person worked at the same place for 25 years he got a golden watch. (Informant 2)

It means that stability may be rewarded. However, nowadays people face great challenges with regards to global developments, which make them more prone to changes in all spheres of life (Held & McGrew, 2007, 41).

4.4.1 Implications on children

Divorces have a great impact on adults, children, and the whole society. Around 30 000 children are affected by such dissolutions in Norway every year. One third of those have non-married parents (Zahl-Olsen, 2018, pp. 55, 70). Sometimes children cope very well with these changes in their families, while others may experience great difficulties:

> People do not talk much about the separation anxiety that develops in children when their parents break up. ... If they have joint custody, ... it can be, in a way, fractionation. Because they have a reason for the dissolution, and there is maybe less respect when people break up. It affects children. (Informant 2)

There has been done much research on harmful effects of divorce on children. An adult gets a new home with a new partner, gets closer attached to the new partner's family and perhaps disconnect with the previous. But children get two families, which means more relatives, friends and bigger social network. It may be of some advantage, but it also may bring more confusion into a child's life. Parents may not know many details of their children's new home, but children know both homes very well. Relationships between divorced parents and their children are less fulfilling. Dissolutions break up family relationships (Widerberg & Kummen, 2012, pp. 334-335).

Some children may lose close contact with one parent, in most cases it is a father. However, there are cases when it is opposite. When being divorced, parents may still play very active roles in their children's life. In addition, extended families may serve as extra resources for kids, as they get more adults to take care of them (Widerberg & Kummen, 2012, pp. 336-337).

Once people become parents, they get a great responsibility. And if it comes to dissolution, they must do their best for their children to avoid any conflicts. It is important to "bring it up, and show respect to each other in front of the children" (Informant 2). Another interviewee experienced her daughter's divorce, and mentioned that her grandchildren coped quite well with it: "We have been speaking very well about their father and his new partner, and we try to spend some time with their little step-sister. I think it is important" (Informant 8). It is important to stay involved in children's life after relationship dissolution.

Nevertheless, a stable family is crucial for children's development. Changes in parents' relationships may have a great effect on their social and emotional well-being. Thus, reducing such instability is of great importance. My findings prove that the type of union might be one of the factors. Individualization is one of the features that characterizes cohabitation. Research shows that cohabiting couples are less stable than those who are married (Crouse, 2004, pp. 350-351; Jensen & Clausen, 2003, p. 67; Popenoe, 2004, p. 188). Such unions, even those who have children, have much bigger chance of splitting up (Widerberg & Kummen, 2012, p. 338). As I mentioned above, marriage brings stronger commitment into relationships (Jensen & Clausen, 2003, p. 67; Wiik, 2010, p. 34), thus it creates safer environment for children.

The study of children and family dissolution in Norway shows that children born in cohabitation unions might face several challenges. There is a higher risk of experience dissolution, which may also lead to unsecure socioeconomic setting. Such families might be difficult to follow publicly, because statistics includes only official divorces. This may bring unclear picture of the total number of children who experience dissolutions. These children are also less likely to have full-siblings, and the study shows that those families with more siblings are more stable than those with step-siblings. The type of union parents choose can have a strong symbolic meaning to children (Jensen & Clausen, 2003, pp. 75-78). Less fragile families within marriage is an important finding here.

Research shows that instable family life may lead to serious problems among children. It may bring depression, anxiety and other disorders. Children who live in cohabiting settings may experience problems with education, have more difficulties with socialization, and are more likely to be engaged in some kind of criminal affairs. Marriage is best for the well-being of both children and parents, and cohabitation is seen as damaging. Its instability may affect all the persons involved, but also the whole society. Marriage is believed to be the best institution for secure future of children and promoting good and strong relationships for adults. It may be of a solid ground for society. It is necessary to emphasize the seriousness of recent changes in family life, so that people understand its consequences and do what they can in order to get back stability (Crouse, 2004, pp. 347-358).

Divorces may also lead to more inequalities between children. As dissolutions happen more frequently among those couples who have less education and less income, it may also reflect on the social development of their children. Thus, a family may become an institution of greater inequalities (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, pp. 66-67).

The regulation of family politics in Norway is viewed as both positive and negative. In 2002-2003, some members of the government discussed it as risky. It was said that at the same time of getting support from the state, people often face loneliness and broken relationships. A stronger family politics was mentioned to be needed. Marriage was named as more obligated institution than cohabitation, being the safest for children as well (St.meld. nr. 29 (2002-2003), s.5, s.6, in Ellingsæter, 2012, pp. 16-17). Other members mentioned that children may be raised well also by non-nuclear families. Marriage in that case was seen as overrated, while the main focus was on personal choices (s.21, in Ellingsæter, 2012, p. 17).

Decisions adults make may not always be as good for children. And even due to well-established welfare system and well-organized social life, nuclear families are of great value. It is best if children are raised by their parents. Living in broken families may result in growing psychological problems (Popenoe, 2004, p. 189).

4.5   The meaning of parenthood in union formation

Parenthood is a great commitment, that is why it requires more knowledge about its role in a family formation. Cohabitation as a form of union has become very prominent, especially in the Nordic countries. At the same time there are more children born outside marriage. Research shows, that eventually, many couples get married. There might be different reasons for that (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, p. 289). The process of individualization make people focus first on self-realization. Cohabitation, then, becomes a more suitable way of union, more flexible one. But when a child comes, it makes a relationship more committed and may lead to marriage. It becomes more desirable, because it brings 'an additional layer of security' to the relationships (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, pp. 290-291). It was also mentioned by my informants: "It is much bigger responsibility than to be married. To have a child is the biggest responsibility you can have. ... And then it will be like 'we take this responsibility together, I trust you, shall we marry then?' " (Informant 1). Parenthood is seen as a motivation towards marriage. It makes people think not only about themselves: "When people get a child, they are, I don't want to say forced, but in need. They need an extra security" (Informant 4). Parenthood binds couples very much, and may serve as a step before marriage or even as its alternative: "When you get married, you take a step forward. ... Nowadays, to have a child is the same confirmation that your partner wants to be with you, as when you get married. You become very attached to each other" (Informant 5). Sometimes parenthood is a choice of the highest priority, as it stays with people all life, unlike cohabitation and marriage. Having children may be of great symbolic meaning, which defines adulthood. And if before it was marriage that symbolized this transition, today it is parenthood that takes that role (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, pp. 298-299). However, one of my informants mentioned that it was marriage that made her feel "a little more adult". (Informant 5) This might mean that both life events may symbolize adulthood equally. Eirin Pedersen writes about a complex process of becoming an adult nowadays. One should have stable relationships, be employed, have a place to live, become a parent and be satisfied with oneself (Pedersen, 2012, p. 152).

Parenthood is considered to be a start of family life and people may feel more pressure towards it. There are more expectations around it than those concerning marriage (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, pp. 297-298). Very often age is the main issue here: "It may become difficult to get a child, if you wait too long. The body is much more ready to have a child in the age between 20 and 30 than after 30" (Informant 5). That is also why marriage may be postponed. My informant mentioned that the 'body image' is very important in Norway nowadays. After becoming a mother, she wanted to get back into shape, in order to look beautiful in her wedding dress. Besides, the celebration requires a lot of expenses as well as parenthood does. Many couples prioritize the latter one, as they find it even more serious (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, p. 298).

Eirin Pedersen writes about the four transitional stages in life of each individual. The first one happens when people start to live apart from their parents. It happens usually in the age of 18-20. Then comes education, which may be of different timing. Here, upper middle class individuals may reach 25 years old by the time they are finished with their studies. Working class individuals may already have some years of working experience when they reach this age. This stage is also perceived as the time for discovering the world by travelling. After that, individuals work on establishing stable working environment and relationships. Then comes parenthood, which is seen as the last stage in becoming an adult. It is expected to happen in the age of 25-30 for those working class individuals and 28-35 for young people from upper middle class. The author have found out that these patterns are common expectations. It may take long time before realizing them all. Age pressure may be the one that becomes a challenge for women, especially those who take longer education. Desire of realizing all expectations before parenthood may lead to difficulties in finding a balance. As a result, delayed births may become problematic and the fertility rates may also be reduced. Thus, women experience more pressure when it comes to parenthood, then men do. They also have less time on realizing all the previous transitional stages (Pedersen, 2012, pp. 150-157). Nowadays, self-expectations are higher due to the demands of the process of individualization (Giddens, 1991, pp. 1-9). However, in contrast with Giddens, older norms still play an important role in the timing of parenthood (Pedersen, 2012, pp. 157-158). This is a challenge of individualism (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 55-67), where a balance should be find in order to achieve happiness and satisfaction. As Norwegian welfare state is constantly improving gender equality system of the family (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006, pp. 6-7), it seems like it may become possible to reach this balance.

When it comes to the question of marriage, many couples do not find it necessary before having children, but would rather do it later in their lives. However, some people would like to be

married first. Marriage may be seen as a component of the family. There may be also several symbolic reasons for such a choice. It is the transition from being 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' to 'wife' and 'husband', and start sharing one surname. Parenthood makes relationships stronger, which also may lead to marriage intentions. It may be a way of confirming the mutual commitment. Marriage and parenthood are often those processes people see side by side. They follow each other. Marriage is of great spiritual meaning to those who are religious. It may also be chosen as a symbol of celebrating love (Lappegård & Noack, 2015, pp. 299-304).

It is a matter of individual choice when to have children and whether to get married or not. Those people who choose marriage first, perhaps prefer to keep such big life events in order. When asking my informants about different steps in a relationship, some of them answered that after cohabiting they would get married first, and then have children. They would like to be sure in their relationship before taking a big responsibility of parenthood. This sequence of life events was mentioned as old-fashioned, but still relevant. However, several informants pointed out that parenthood should come first. Marriage was mentioned, then, as important for the sake of children. When analyzing these controversial attitudes on timing of parenthood and marriage, I found out that the process of individualization is of a great factor. The main focus is on a couple's relationship. It may be described as followed:

	Partnership	**The process of building a family**	**Result/Aim/Last step**
1	cohabitation	parenthood/love/commitment	marriage
2	cohabitation	marriage/love/commitment	parenthood

Table 3 - Partnership example

In the first example, marriage is the result of love and parenthood. Those people, who follow this pattern, have already had some years of cohabitation and are in the process of building a family. Marriage comes as a desire only after they have been through all the previous stages. They have become parents, and by taking this great responsibility and realizing that they are coping well together, they confirm their love to each other by taking this last step in their relationship. The second pattern shows that parenthood is the result of marital commitment and love. It is a more traditional pattern, according to my informants. People get married and give promises to each other, and then they become parents. The process of building a family does not include the experience of parenthood. And when it comes, people may become disappointed with each other. Their expectations might be not fulfilled, which may lead to divorce. The first pattern may lead then to a more stable marriage, which is also better for children.

It may be also seen from another perspective. Following Giddens's theory of pure relationships (1991, pp. 88-98), when people choose marriage after parenthood, they might have more focus on the quality of their private life. But due to the fragile nature of such relationships, they may not come to the last step (marriage). In other words, the couple may break up in the process of building a family. This may lead to many consequences for both parents and children. When following a more traditional family pattern, parenthood comes only after the couple is fully committed and ready for such a big step, being ready to face all the difficulties that it might bring. As marriage makes relationships stronger (Wiik, 2010, p.51), people may do more efforts in order to keep it going. And when it comes to parenthood, they work even harder to achieve stability.

These patterns may of course be different from those described above. It also depends on actual plans on marriage among couples who become parents and their level of commitment to each other. It is all up to individuals, as they are free to make their own choices and decide what is best for them (Giddens, 1991, pp. 175-176).

4.6 Gender equality/feminism perspective on union formation

Changes in union formation are often seen as the result of changing women's roles and the gender equality process. Marriage has become less important when it comes to protection of women and children. It has weakened this role since 1960s. Women started to get more education and by actively entering job markets, became more independent. Welfare system in Norway has also improved a lot since then. But a family as an institution is still precious for society (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, pp. 56-57).

As men and women are less dependent on each other, traditional meaning of marriage is changing. It is not a need any more, but something people are free to choose:

> Marriage is an old concept. Now we drive cars, there's light everywhere, there are cameras all around the world, we know what happens around in the world all the time. ... We live very comfortable. But it was not like this before. It was important to commit to each other, ... to have a legal commitment, to hold together in order to survive. Then people got married because they had to. But it developed through many years and came to the point when there's no longer need for it in society, but people can choose it. (Informant 1)

In pre-industrial times, the family was an important institution, focused on work. All its members had common goals and motives. Individual preferences were less important, because family needs were stronger. Being there for each other was necessary. The family bonds were important to keep stable economy of the households. Members of the family were strongly dependent on each other. The process of individualization and the growth of welfare state have loosened this dependence. Individual needs become primary and possible to achieve (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 88-90).

Some sociologist claim that in order to get a stable family, there should be clearly distinguished gender roles. It is also argued that a couple should be dependent on each other, which underlines men's role as a breadwinner and women's role as a housewife. These theories were appealed. Women have gained financial freedom, and marriage has lost its economic advantages (Wiik, 2010, pp. 21-23). One of my informants compared modern life of women with the older times:

> Women are more independent now, they have jobs, they can take care of themselves. I think women do not feel the need of getting married, because they do well on their own, anyway. Before, women did not have jobs. They could not stay home with their parents, so they needed marriage to survive. My grandmothers went to work, but there were many who did not. And if they broke up with their men, they became homeless. It is not like this today, that is why I think it is not so necessary to get married. (Informant 5)

In Norway, there has been a great increase of women participation in labor market. Men have become more active in housework. It has made the traditional view on the family irrelevant (Wiik, 2010, p. 23). In order to achieve egalitarian relationships, there should be equal division of housework and childcare, equal opportunities of paid labor, mutual respect in making decisions. Both men and women do share daily routines and both contribute financially, but women are still more included in childcare. Weadock (2004) is using the power theory of Faucault. Cohabitation, as an alternative type of union, may serve as a method of resistance to patriarchy. At the same time, marriage is an institution that makes it possible for women to fight for equality. Patriarchy as domination is resisted by feminism. Men also play a very important role against it, as they have become better partners in this resistance. Gender roles within the family become less distinct. Marriage loses its patriarchal structure. It gains its true meaning, which is based on love and mutual commitment (Weadock, 2004).

However, gender equality still faces some challenges. The individualization of women do not always let them achieve the goals they want (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 55-67).

Family life may still be a role contest, and balance has to be found (Beck, in Hurrelmann & Neubauer, 1995, pp. 132-133).

There is a close relation between the public and the private functions of the family. They influence each other. Private family life has become an actively discussed topic in public debates. What we perceive as our individual matters is closely connected to social and political levels. The relation between family and state in Norway has changed during the last decades. The social democratic welfare system offers public care for people, which also may be seen as defamilisation. Some researchers argue that it may be risky for the family institution and may weaken its role in society. However, the state very often puts the question of family into discussion. There are different points of view. The family politics in Norway is being criticized, because of its lack of liberalism. Equality is argued to be more of a choice and is oriented on certain classes, which may create more inequalities (Ellingsæter, 2012, pp. 15-16).

Reaching gender equality has its consequences on the change of family institution. Nowadays, women take more education, and thus take more time before settling down. Cohabitation becomes a better alternative, with all its flexibility (Coleman, 2013, p. 34). Women have become less dependent on men, but marriage is still something they wish to do: "I think women want to get married more than men, I think men feel a bit pressure from their women. Ladies in my environment are very keen to get married" (Informant 5). Even in time of individualism and growing gender equality, women are still willing to keep a tradition of marriage. If to connect it with the Foucault's theory of power (in McLaren, 2002, pp. 48-52), such patterns may show that women resist their complete independency. And, on the contrary, those women who do not wish to get married, may resist such traditional practices. It may help them emphasize their independency.

Marriage rituals continue including some symbols of patriarchic family relations. It is mostly women that expect, and men that propose. Most Norwegian women take husband's surname, which also explains the continuation of traditions. It may be a symbol of a new family creation. Another example is that it is still common that a father follows his daughter in church, which primarily means his approval of daughter's choice (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 277; Wiik, 2010, pp. 55-57).

Norwegian family and welfare politics aim at equal opportunities for both men and women to support themselves. But in some cases it is still an issue. Norwegian women, who want to get married with a person from the country outside EU, experience greater difficulties then men in

the same situation. The main reason is that women do not fulfill the income requirement. It is reported that 40% of women and 20% of men get rejections in such cases. As women generally earn less than men, it will continue being an issue for them. According to regulations, men have, therefore, more freedom when it comes to choosing ones partners, than women do (Haslie, 2013). 'Feminization of poverty' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 55-67) is working against the goals of gender equality, which may have great consequences for women individual choices.

4.7   Socio-economic variables

There is a trend, that people with higher education and higher incomes usually get married later in their lives. Their careers are of a greater focus. Those with lower earnings often choose early marriages. It is more likely that men with greater incomes get married, while their wives stay out of work. But women of higher status, moving towards gender-equality, often stay single. Cohabitation has become very popular among people regardless status. However, research shows, that the higher income of one of the partners the better chance of the relationships to end up with marriage. Financially instable couples are the most fragile ones. The age also plays an important role here. It is believed that the later marriage takes its beginning, the stronger it is. The same with cohabitation (Coleman, 2013, pp. 34-36).

Noack and Wiik emphasize the meaning of love in union formation. They state that those couples who are most satisfied with their relationships frequently have marriage plans. Mutual commitment also plays a great role here. The authors also talk about the importance of education in marriage decisions among young couples. Thus, economic and socio-cultural resources still play great roles in such life choices (Wiik et al., 2010, pp. 280-281).

Research shows that family background may affect people's decisions on the union formation. Education of parents plays an important role here. Those who have parents with higher education start their first cohabitation later in life. It could be the result of socialization process in childhood. Such parents are probably more aware of all the risks of early cohabitation. Parental influence is not so strong for those of older ages (Wiik, 2010, pp. 44-45). Connection between parents and children with regards to marriage intentions was also mentioned during my interviews:

> I think family traditions are important here. Families that do not have higher education, start their participation in labor market much earlier, ... they realize their dreams about an apartment

> or a house earlier, ... and get children, it has its meaning. And if you look at the children of
> academics, they get married much later. ... There are people who have simple needs and simple
> solutions. And these people get married more often than others, and also have more children.
> (Informant 2)

Individuals from wealthy families also choose later marriages, as they often are in search of partners with similar socioeconomic resources. For such people it may be easier to break up their relationship when cohabiting. They choose this form of partnership more often, because it lets them be more flexible in finding a more suitable match (Wiik, 2010, pp. 45-46).

Cohabitants are often those seeking financial equality in their relationships. They usually choose partners of similar educational level. Marriage plans are also associated with socioeconomic factors. Gaining financial stability is of great importance before getting married. A couple also gets more chance to have marriage intentions when one of the partners has higher education than another one. Marriage is delayed, though, as it takes more time to finish education and find employment. More educated couples may also have a better knowledge of all legal differences between marriage and cohabitation. They also know what kind of union is more stable. It may result in more frequent marriage plans (Wiik, 2010, pp. 46-49).

High income and education influence marriage intentions for men more often than for women. It may be still of some expectations that men, more than women, provide for the family. Despite the fact, that women participation in labor market has increased, men still have better income (Wiik, 2010, 49-50). It is that of 'no longer and not yet' description of women status (Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 55-67) that may be a possible explanation here. Some women also want to devote more time to their children and not be fully engaged with their careers. Men, in such cases, support them. This makes us think of continuation of traditional non-egalitarian relationships (Gross, 2005, p. 298).

If to look at the statistics of average age at marriage in Norway, it is clear that nowadays people get married much later in their lives than they did before:

	Average age at marriage				
	1974	1980	1990	2000	2017
Males					
Observed average age for never married	25.3	26.2	28.8	31.8	34.9
Females					
Observed average age for never married	22.8	23.6	26.2	29.2	32.3

Table 4 - SSB, 2019c

It may also give some explanations to the changes in timing of marriage. As described above, many people want to complete their higher education and reach financial stability before they get married. During my fieldwork, I found out that nowadays many young people use their own money for their wedding celebrations. It makes sense that people may afford paying for their wedding if it happens later in their lives. According to my 52-year-old informant, it was not like that before, people used to get married much earlier, and it was parents who paid all the expenses: "I got married when I was 19 years old. ... It was common that parents of the bride paid for the wedding, and the bridegroom's parents paid for the music and drinks" (Informant 8). She also noticed that nowadays it is common to share all the expenses between both parents.

Marriage may serve as an indication of a good life: "It is more like a luxury code. ... It is something you do when everything else is in order" (Informant 1). It means that marriage becomes desirable when stable life is achieved. It is mostly those who are highly educated and those cohabitants who are greatly satisfied and committed, who decide to get married. In such a symbolical way, they mark out their good life (Wiik, 2010, p. 49). This is also a part of the individualization process, which is focused on self-development. People adjust to new conditions and demands of globalization (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33) and create their new cultures, which they accomplish on their own wishes (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 4, 42-52, 101-115). More opportunities that young people face nowadays require also adjustments of their personal life. Marriage may be postponed until the certain level of life satisfaction is reached. Therefore, it may become a celebration of both love and personal success (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 277).

4.7.1 Emerging equilibrium

In a study of family demographics, Esping Andersen and Billary are talking about 'a multiple equilibrium'. The authors talk about the reversal of the Second Demographic Transition. They argue that the changes in family dynamics are influenced by the changes of women's roles. One

equilibrium of stable family life was replaced by a long period of redefining gender roles, which brought confusion and uncertainty. Gaining stable gender egalitarianism may lead to a new equilibrium. The whole process is very dynamic. Equilibrium here means "a condition in which individuals act on well-defined expectations about others' strategies of action" (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, pp. 6-9). The authors move towards a hypothesis that there may be a return to the primary equilibrium, as many women find their careers to be a threat to stable relationships and parenthood. Complete gender egalitarianism is being hard to achieve, when women continue working part-time and make long breaks in their careers while taking care of their children. The study shows that a new equilibrium may become stable only if women become more masculinized in working life, and men become more feminized in domestic life. In addition, couples must be sure they can raise the desirable amount of children (pp. 20-24).

Individualism offers people greater freedom, but is also creates uncertainties. It may lead to new conflicts inside the family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 4, 42-52, 101-115). However, in Norway, welfare state helps people achieve equality in all spheres of life (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006, p. 6), which may contribute to more balanced relationships.

Both men and women have to be involved in employment and family life. They have to enjoy time together, and be there when they are needed. There are so many roles a couple has to combine when being parents. Sometimes it means to change priorities, time schedules or own principles. Nowadays, the key to gender equality is based on sharing daily work, which may also be very romantic (Aftenposten, 2011, 12.02).

Equality in relationships may lead to stronger unions. Even if today marriage statistics is decreasing, it remains strong in society. Most cohabitants are likely to get married sooner or later (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, pp. 71-73). During my interviews and observations, many young people see marriage as something desirable. Most unmarried participants expressed it as a wish for their future, and those married ones appreciate their choices. "It binds society. I think so. Marriage must be there" (Informant 7).

Cohabitation may become a 'light version of marriage'. It is argued that by making it more regulated, there is a risk of losing its primary function as an alternative type of union formation (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p.72). Cohabitation gains more formal status. One can choose between making a partnership contract or getting married. Those who do not want to share inheritance and economy, stay unmarried. But creating regulations around cohabitation may lead to reducing its advantage as a 'paperless' union. Marriage is an institution that serves as an

insurance for relationships. It concerns women more often than men, because they are still those who have less income. Cohabitation may be regarded as a patriarchal structure. Women are those who gain more from marriage. And if the focus is on love and romantic feelings, it is a wedding that offers such a beautiful way to make relationships official (Dokka, 2019).

Marriage symbols and rituals may bring 'a greater psychological investment' into relationships. It makes it different from cohabitation. Sharing a wedding day, family surname, wearing rings may be of great symbolic meaning, which makes a union stronger (Wiik, 2010, p. 51).

4.7.2 Towards a happy family life

During my fieldwork, I tried to find out what constitutes a happy family. Based on my interviews, I can make two conclusions. The type of union is not always what makes a family happy. However, marriage is still desirable and may serve as a confirmation of love. What really matters is stability and mutual contentment:

> It is to be able to live together in joy and sorrow; to be able to withstand each other in hard times, when one of the partners experience it more difficult, to be able to endure it, be able to live with it. At the same time, there must be counterbalance, which is to experience joy together. One says that shared joy is double joy, and shared sorrow is half sorrow. ... It is to experience that one's partner is respectful even when arguing, that one is not humiliated or stigmatized because of different moral, ethical or political perceptions. Mutual respect is very important. We also have to trust each other, give some space to each other and freedom. Freedom based on trust. ... and honesty, also if something goes wrong. ... To share it is a matter of trust. ... When you have children, they steal a lot of time, maybe there is too little time left for parents. Then it is important to organize some time for themselves. ... Happiness is a very complex phenomenon. (Informant 2)

It becomes obvious, that the main focus is on quality relationships. And again, this is what Giddens calls 'pure relationships'. There is a need for intimacy, mutual trust and commitment (1991, pp. 88-98). It is what constitutes a happy family today: "Being faithful, showing your love to each other, creating new memories and having good time together" (Informant 5).

On the other side, those who achieve great contentment in their relationships are more likely to choose marriage as the next step, as previous studies show (Wiik et al., 2010, p. 281). The authors argue that not pure relationship is to be found here, but a more traditional pattern. My fieldwork supports these findings, as my informants described marriage as desirable in their life. Quality relationships are important, but when achieved, traditional ways take hold.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim talk about 'a post-familial family'. They argue, that family values still have place in modern individualized society. People face different challenges in order to find balance in their lives. The modern rhythm of everyday activities requires many efforts and organization in order to make it work. Such hectic life often creates difficulties inside a family, which often results in divorce. Today, great efforts should be done in order to keep the family together. However, as individualization lead to more intimacy and commitment in relationships, family will still be one of the chosen variables. Its stability will strongly depend on people's abilities to negotiate. The patterns of traditional family is being modified, creating new structures and types of relationships (Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 85-98).

In order to reach a happy family life, couples need to work on their relationships:

> One has to avoid stress in everyday life, make a week plan, and find pleasant things to do together. I think it is important not to have too many tasks during a week, as it is very busy anyway. Parents have to be good at communicating. I think it is important. And I think that it is communication that is the keyword. (Informant 5)

The family must remain a secure institution, even if everything around falls apart (Ellingsæter, 2012, p. 26).

Chapter 5

5   Conclusion

Many Norwegians find cohabitation as a very healthy way of getting to know each other. It is also acceptable that this type of union may be a lifelong choice. However, when referring to own lives, many of my informants see marriage as an ideal. Cohabitation, in most cases, is practiced as a transitional stage. It is about learning closer about each other and realizing whether the couple wants to take a step further.

Cohabitation has become very similar to marriage in many different aspects. Nevertheless, it requires some knowledge in order to function properly. In some cases, couples need to make a mutual agreement, which also makes relationships more official. All the attempts to make cohabitation better regulated may lead to its transformation to a 'light' version of marriage (Noack & Lyngstad, 2012, p. 72), which may lose its primary status of 'paperless' (Dokka, 2019).

Marriage, in contrast, remains an institution, which is rich in symbolic meanings and rituals. It has lost some of its traditional values, but the main component is still alive. Meaning-constitutive traditions of marriage (Gross, 2005, pp. 295-297) continue to spread among Norwegians. Love and quality relationships are the most important factors that lead to marriage. It is also regulated by state, which provides people with security in different circumstances. According to my findings, marriage is a more stable and committed type of relationships, which also makes it more attractive.

There are many different reasons why people choose cohabitation or marriage. It is a question of individual choice. However, some patterns may be similar. Marriage often comes after people have finished their education and achieved certain financial stability. It is expensive to celebrate a wedding in Norway, that is why many young couples postpone it. Especially now, in times of globalization, when information is spreading very fast, the demands are higher. Media has great influence on traditions, which also brings more expenses. As Wiik showed in his study (2010, pp. 46-49), higher educated and well-established people do often have marriage plans. However, it refers more to men than to women, as they are often those who earn most. Cohabitation is better chosen by those seeking financial equality. It may also be seen as a way to resist patriarchy (Weadock, 2004). Nevertheless, women are still those who earn less, which

may bring difficulties in making their free choices (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, pp. 55-67). Marriage practices continue including some patriarchic features. As mentioned during my fieldwork, women wish to get married more often than men do. Men are usually those who propose. Women often continue the tradition of taking their husbands' surnames (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 277; Wiik, 2010, pp. 55-57).

High divorce rates may be one of the reasons why people do not wish to get married. Some of them may start doubting the real values of marriage. Moreover, it is much easier to break up when cohabiting. Increasing dissolutions may also result in appearing of other types of relationships, like LAT.

Parenthood may become a motivation to marriage. It is often seen as the most important stage in life. There is also more social and biological press towards it, that is why it is of highest priority. Marriage in this case may be postponed, while still desired by many. It may be a confirmation of greater commitment. However, some couples choose it for the sake of their children, to secure their future. Due to my findings, marriage makes a family stronger.

As women have become more independent, the need for marriage has weakened. Egalitarian relationships inside the family are possible to be reached in Norway, as the welfare system is always improving. It is believed that it may lead to a new equilibrium of stability (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015, pp. 20-24). In time of globalization, there are many things to be combined by each individual. It may take longer time to achieve self-realization (Ellingsæter, 2018, p. 277). Marriage and parenthood come later in life, which may also lead to more stable unions (Coleman, 2013, pp. 34-36).

Mutual understanding, help and well-organized everyday life is what may bring contentment into relationships. There is also a need for personal space and time for intimacy. Balance may be a key to a happy family life.

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