

What is Happening to 'Traditional' Forms of Marriage? A Preliminary Account Using the Free-list Method to Evaluate Changes across Age Groups in Lithuania

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Abstract. In this paper, I will present the results of data collected between April 2021 and January 2022 on how Lithuanians across four age grades (18–29; 30–39; 40–59 and 60+) perceive marriage. The data was collected by using the systematic emic method of free-listing, which is intended to determine the main concepts comprising a particular cultural domain. A cultural domain is any coherent cultural construct about which many members of a culture share a common understanding. Free-listing is a simple data-eliciting method in which you ask a sample (usually around 30 participants is sufficient) to list all the kinds of things (or concepts) you associate with some cultural domain. The domain may be a coherent set of things, such as kinds of healthy foods, contagious diseases, and prestigious jobs, or it can be more abstract, such as whatever you associate with social justice, Russia, or, in this particular case, marriage. Our research group decided to ask a sample of Lithuanians to “list all the things that come to their mind when they think of marriage.” The instructions and questions were presented in the Lithuanian language. Given that researchers have shown that ideas of marriage have changed significantly in the recent times, we thought it would be interesting to conduct free-lists with four different age groups to compare both differences and similarities. While free-listing is only the first phase of a research project, it allows us to elicit terms reflecting the salient features of the concept of marriage and provides an extensive array of terms showing the distribution of ideas related to marriage. This report shows some of these results.

Keywords: free-list, romantic love, marriage, children, cultural domain, relationship.

Introduction

Marriage is a social institution which has been around for centuries. It is a union of two individuals who promise to love and cherish one another. The institution of marriage has evolved over time, and still continues to change with the times. Our research team have been studying marriage and seeking answers to the question of why there has been a significant decrease in marriage rates, and, with it, a decrease in children born in wedlock.

Our project covers cultural conceptions and practices questioning the traditional forms of love relationships, pair-bonding (i.e. marriage being the prototypical type of pair-bonding, being replaced by cohabitation) (Giddens 1992) and reasons for having children. The research is expected to go through four stages of data collection and analysis. The paper is organized as follows:

1. A brief introduction of why this study is needed;
2. An explanation of how the data was collected on what people think about marriage;
3. Analysis of the data;
4. A conclusion and a brief discussion of the next step.

Only about a half of Americans are married now, which is down from 72% in 1960, according to the census data. The age at which one first gets married has risen by six years since 1960, and now only 20% of Americans get married before the age of 30 (Wagner, Choi, and Cohen 2020). It is considered the most appropriate time to marry for females is between 23 to 27, and, for men, between the ages of 27 and 30 (Johnson, Krahn, and Galambos 2017).

In Europe, the situation is somewhat similar (Sánchez Gassen and Perelli-Harris 2015; Maslauskaitė 2009). Cohabitation for some people is a transitional state towards marriage – this is as if a prelude to marriage, but, contemporarily, cohabitation has become a norm, and, for some, it has even become an alternative to marriage, which means that cohabiting couples never intend to get married (Hiekel 2014). In Dirsytė's (2021) research, only 26% of cohabitant persons stated they were planning to marry, 27% were not planning to marry, whereas the remaining 47% were not sure of their plans for marriage. On the grounds of the data of *Statistics Lithuania*, we can see that both male and female age of the first marriage has risen.

In 2010, most first marriages per 1,000 males were in the following age groups: 20–24-year-olds: 30.2, 25–29-year-olds: 65.6, 30–34-year-olds: 30.2. In comparison, in 2020, for 20–24-year-olds: 16.1, 25–29-year-olds: 48.2, 30–34-year-olds: 32.3.

In 2010, most first marriages per 1,000 females were in the following age groups: 20–24-year-olds: 50.0, 25–30-year-olds: 60.7, 30–35-year-olds: 18.0. In 2020, for 20–24-year-olds: 34, 24–29-year-olds: 57.3, 30–35-year-olds: 25.5 (Lithuanian Department of Statistics 2022). We can see a trend here that the age for marrying has increased.

Table 1. Male first marriage rates by age group, 2010–2020

	First marriages per 1,000 males at the age specified						Total first marriage rate*	Mean age of males at first marriage*
	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49		
2020	16.1	48.2	32.3	13.5	5.6	2.0	0.59	30.3
2019	19.8	60.4	43.1	18.7	8.2	3.4	0.77	30.7
2018	20.0	65.7	44.7	17.5	6.9	2.6	0.79	30.3
2017	22.6	70.6	47.9	18.7	6.9	2.5	0.85	30.2
2016	22.5	72.6	45.8	17.7	6.2	2.4	0.84	30.0
2015	25.2	77.3	46.0	16.9	5.6	2.0	0.90	29.7
2014	27.0	78.0	45.0	15.5	5.7	1.5	0.90	29.5
2013	26.4	75.2	40.1	14.0	4.3	1.4	0.81	29.3
2012	28.9	77.4	39.2	12.3	3.8	1.2	0.82	29.0
2011	27.8	71.7	33.0	11.1	3.3	1.3	0.75	28.8
2010	30.2	65.5	30.2	9.7	2.7	1.1	0.71	28.5

* For males aged under 50.

Table 2. Female first marriage rates by age group, 2010–2020

	First marriages per 1,000 females at the age specified						Total first marriage rate*	Mean age of females at first marriage*
	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49		
2020	34	57.3	25.5	9.2	3.9	1.4	0.68	28.2
2019	43	71	33.1	12.3	4.3	1.8	0.85	28.3
2018	44.5	73.8	30.8	11.5	3.8	1.4	0.85	28.0
2017	47.0	78.6	32.4	11.1	3.8	1.3	0.90	27.8
2016	46.3	78.8	30.9	9.5	3.3	1.2	0.88	27.7
2015	50.9	80.5	30.0	8.8	2.9	1.0	0.90	27.4
2014	54.1	78.9	27.9	8.8	2.3	0.8	0.90	27.2
2013	51.4	73.2	24.8	7.5	2.0	0.7	0.83	27.0
2012	55.4	72.8	23.4	6.3	1.9	0.6	0.84	26.7
2011	51.9	66.4	19.5	5.5	1.1	0.6	0.76	26.6
2010	50.0	60.7	18.0	4.4	1.2	0.5	0.71	26.3

* For females aged under 50.

There have been many studies explaining the reduction in the marriage rates and a delay in marriage as a consequence of individualism (desire for autonomy), the costs of children, and the internet (Slater 2014). We may thus wonder: *But what of love?* This is the reason why Lithuanians marry and start a family. Has there been a significant change in the way people perceive the institution of marriage, and what are the reasons for this?

In the research literature on the Lithuanian marriage and family, Dirsytė (2021) noted that one of the defining features characterizing the transformations of the modern family is the people's attitudes toward the institution of marriage and the rise of a preference for cohabitation. The pattern of forming one or the other union (i.e. marriage versus cohabitation) depends quite significantly on socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics (Dirsyte 2021). The researcher points out two reasons: 1. The cultural value changes, which leads to 'fewer marriages'; 2. Economic restraints lead to postponing the marriage until economic stability has been achieved. A few authors have looked at the new forms of intimacy as a reason for the decline in the marriage and fertility rates. Yet, what other studies seem to lack is the humanistic perspective, notably, people's agency. It is of importance because these are not economic or some other 'constructed' factors, but these are the thoughts of people and how they perceive it. We are not extracting people's agency from their material circumstances. Economic factors have a very clear and immediate impact on agency, but, in this research, our focus is to find other, less visible factors of decisions to marry (or not to marry) besides the economic ones.

This perspective rests on the importance of autonomy, but also the rise of cultural norms and attitudes which consider marriage as 'not necessary' and 'a gilded cage', or an instrument of society and the urge to domesticate people to national and religious traditions. In this paper, we shall use new methods to inquire about the reasons Lithuanians give regarding their perceptions of marriage. It is about how intimate relationships are changing and how they are affecting fertility rates and the decisions to marry. The particular aim of this paper is to focus on the reasons why people decide to marry or not, and how this differs by age. This study is part of a larger project to understand how cultural models influence a statistically traceable decline in marriage and fertility. Lithuania is part of a global trend, which is most apparent in Europe and East Asia, toward fewer and later marriages, and of the trend of decisions taken by women and couples to be childless, or to have only one child (Stankūnienė, Jasilionis, and Baublytė 2014). Fertility rates in all the countries in these two regions are below replacement rates. This shift away from what has been called the 'Paradise curve'

(which means that the population is increasing exponentially) and our global food supply has kept pace with the ever more modern agricultural innovations and improvements. The purpose of this study is to discover, describe and analyze cultural models which are manifested among Lithuanians that can account for the national pattern. This global decline in marriage and children was noticed by Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (2008, 81–118) in the 1980s and was termed the *Second Demographic Transition*; the first being the exponential rise in population as a result of the *Industrial Revolution* at the end of the 18th Century.

Much of the research on these declines has centred around two reasons: one of these is an increase in women matriculating from secondary school, entering the workplace and putting their efforts into their careers (Stankūnienė and Jasilionienė 2008); whereas the second reason is the high costs of having children – starting already with the day care expense, and thus birth is seen as an outlay that keeps on costing rather than a gift (Jonkarytė 2002). This project focuses on the same consequences, but from a cultural and cognitive perspective. The concept 'Cultural' here refers to the observation that these national trends regarding marriage and decisions to have children must stem from a shared reasoning process, and thus this is a cultural phenomenon. Second, the ideas must be cognized, which is decided based on some emotional and rational conjunction of motives, experiences, and hypothesized projected risky or negative outcomes that correlate with marriage and children.

Talking about the changing love relations and marriage according to Illouz (2019) and Regnerus (2017), *Second Demographic Transition* is the key theory of visible transformation of relationships. There are many reasons for the *Second Demographic Transition* focus of this paper on marriage. We present the initial data from Lithuania to describe the contemporary cultural models across generations and to discover how they articulate, adapt, or oppose the traditional (western) models of love, marriage, and family.

In this paper, the results will be presented for data collected between June and December 2021 on how Lithuanians across four age grades (18–29; 30–39; 40–59, and 60+) perceive marriage. The data was collected by using the systematic emic method of free-listing, which is intended to find the main concepts comprising a particular cultural domain. A cultural domain is any coherent cultural construct that many members of a culture share a common understanding about (Robbins and Nolan 2019). Free-listing is a simple data-eliciting method in which you ask a sample (usually, around 30 participants are sufficient) (Dengah, Snodgrass, Polzer, and Nixon 2020) to list all the kinds of things (or concepts) you associate with some cultural domain. The domain may be a coherent set of things, such

as kinds of healthy foods, contagious diseases, and prestigious jobs, or it can be more abstract, such as what you associate with social justice, Russia, or, in this particular case, marriage. Our research group decided to ask a sample of Lithuanians to “list all the things that come to their mind when they think of marriage.” The instructions and questions were all presented in the Lithuanian language. Given that researchers have shown that ideas of marriage have changed significantly in the recent times, we thought that it would be interesting to conduct free-lists with four different age groups to compare the differences as well as the similarities. While free-listing is merely the initial phase of this research project, it allows us to elicit terms which are expected to reflect the salient features of the concept of marriage and provides an extensive array of terms showing the distribution of ideas related to marriage. This report presents some of these results.

Methodology

Theoretical approach

Data collection and analysis were performed by employing the free-list method. Free-listing is a method which can be used to produce data that can then be developed for different arguments which can be aligned with a variety of different theoretical approaches. It is used to identify the most common and culturally important terms that reveal a cultural domain (de Munck and Dapkūnaitė 2020). Although cultural domains may vary in terms of content and structure, they refer to all things at the same level of abstraction about which the members of a culture (or a group) say that they belong together. In other words, they refer to the set of core features that constitute the domain (de Munck 2009). Freelists quickly and easily amass data which 1) identifies items in a cultural domain, or an emic category; 2) indicates which of those things are most important, or salient within the culture; and 3) reveals how much variation there is in the knowledge or beliefs in question (Quinlan 2016). The freelist method lies on three assumptions. First, when people free-list, they tend to list terms in order of familiarity. When listing kinship terms, for example, people generally list ‘mother’ before ‘aunt’, and ‘aunt’ before ‘great-aunt’. Second, those individuals who know a lot about a subject tend to list more terms than the people who know less. For instance, people who can look at an unlabeled map and correctly name many countries also make long free-lists of country names. And third, the terms that get mentioned by most

respondents indicate the locally prominent items: Pennsylvanians list 'apple' and 'birch' trees more frequently and earlier than they mention 'orange' or 'palm' trees (Quinlan 2019). This approach is highly useful in revealing the conceptualization dynamics of 'marriage' among different age groups.

Research participants

To illustrate the nuances of conceptualizing 'marriage', the corresponding number of people were interviewed in the four age groups – 30 people from the 18–29-year-old age group, 47 people from the 30–39-year-old age group, 47 people from the 40–59-year-old age group, and 34 people from the 60+-year-old age group. According to literature, 20–30 research participants are sufficient (Weller and Romney 1988). The 18–29-year-old age group can be seen as representative of young adults who may begin to consider getting a partner and to marry. The second age group – those who are aged 30–39 – can be representative of the age when adults are starting a family and having children. The 40–59-year-old age group can be representative of the age when adults have their children reach teenage years, and adults above 60 years usually have their children grown up and living independently. Collecting the data from all the four age groups not only revealed the associations related to 'marriage' across generations, but also enabled the researchers to compare how these associations changed over time.

Sample

The convenience sample was used for sampling. Most of the potential research participants were approached online. An online questionnaire was prepared by using *Google Forms*, and the link was shared on the researchers' social media accounts and various communities (e.g. groups of students) on *Facebook*. 20–30 research participants usually are sufficient to reveal the cultural domain and reach data saturation (D'Andrade 2005). Additionally, when analyzing cultural domains, the sample can be small if dealing with cultural models that do not manifest much variation, because culture is shared, and the likelihood that two people mention the same thing when the variety of response number is 100 is very low (1 in 10000) (de Munck 2009). All the four age groups reached data saturation, which means that any additional surveys were unlikely to change the established patterns (François Dengah, Snodgrass, Polzer, and Nixon 2020). A small-sized sample was also made in person – in such places where people usually are not in the rush and may be willing to take part in the study, i.e. parks, streets, and cafés of Vilnius, Lithuania.

Data collection and analysis

The research data was collected during the period of June – December 2021. The research participants were asked to name all associations which come to their minds when they think about marriage. This question was chosen to obtain a variety of terms reflecting a range of thoughts about marriage. Raw free-list data from each age group was very rich; however, it would have been too extensive to include it verbatim in its entirety in the free-list analysis. Thus, as usual in this type of publication, the data presented in this paper represents a cleaned-up version of the raw, but rich data that one first elicits from the research participants (de Munck 2009). After collecting the data, the next step was to clean it up to equalize the words and establish synonyms, which essentially means the same thing. We did not create new words; we merely chose which ones to use and which adjectives to reject. Data cleaning was also done by reducing long and rich descriptions, while, at the same time, not losing the richness of the responses. This step was accomplished by a team of researchers¹ who discussed what/which terms would be used for further analysis separately and what terms are similar enough to be combined. All lengthy answers (such as phrases, sentences, or longer explanations) were discussed and reduced to one or two key terms, thereby reducing every phrase to its corresponding minimal 'meaning unit' (de Munck 2009). If three or more research team members voted for an interpretation, it was kept in the final document for free-list analysis.

As soon as an agreement about each term had been achieved, the cleaned-up data was processed by using *Anthropac*, which is software for collecting and analyzing data on cultural domains, or *Flame*, which is software entirely dedicated to the analysis of free-lists. Two measures were used for each age group: the average rank and Smith's Index. The average rank refers to the average place of a term in the lists of all informants who mentioned the term. A classic example is the lexis in the domain of the English color terms – the term 'red' is more salient as it appears more frequently and earlier in free-lists than the term 'maroon'. Smith's (S refers to saliency) Index is straightforward – it is meant to measure the salience of terms. Smith's Index is considered to be the more

1 The data presented in this paper was collected as part of the project *Love Relationships in Contemporary Lithuania and their Effect on Marriage, Fertility and Family Choices*. This project received funding from the *Research Council of Lithuania* (LMTLT), agreement No. S-MIP-21-47. Members of the research group are Prof. Dr. Victor C. de Munck (head of the project), and Dr. Jūratė Charenkova. The data was collected with the help from research assistants: Žygimantas Bučius, Ieva Kairienė, Indrė Bielevičiūtė, Dorotėja Sirvydytė, Kristupas Maksvytis, Edvinas Dovydaitis, and Emilija Krikštaponytė.

significant statistic as it combines the frequency with the average rank of terms. Some terms may have slightly lower frequencies but higher average ranks, which will show up in Smith's Index (de Munck and Dapkūnaitė 2020). In this paper, only the preliminary top ten words are deemed to be most salient, and they are presented in terms of frequency in each of the age groups the way these words were observed; as a result, the main patterns were captured.

Research ethics

All participants were informed that they were free to refuse participation and/or were free to leave at any time. They could also refuse to reveal anything they deemed uncomfortable. No personal data (such as names, addresses, phone numbers, etc.) was collected, except for their age, gender, type of residency (city versus rural area), and the relationship status (single, married, or cohabiting). This data is only used in the research participant's code name, and it was not saved in other research files. The fact of having children was also indicated (by writing 'Y' for yes or 'N' for no in the research participant's code name), but more details, such as the number of children, their age, or gender were not indicated.

Results

All the four age groups – 18–29, 30–39, 40–59, and 60 and older – will be discussed separately, and later compared to show how the conceptions of marriage change when moving from the younger (mostly, the pre-parent phase of life) to the parent (pre-teen) and teen/post-teen age group to the grandparent age group. Such a structure reveals how the perceptions of marriage of Lithuanians shift over their life cycle. Not only the top 10 terms will be analyzed, but also the entire free-lists from each group will be explored. However, only top 10 terms per list will be shown because, otherwise, the lists would simply be too large.

18–29 y.o. age group

When discussing the youngest age group, the first thing to stand out from other groups is the term 'sex' [lt. seksas], which is a high energy (these are terms which are more associated with activities or some psychical action) term, and the only word representing vigorous terms. No other age group mentioned this term. However, other high-energy words can be found further down in the free-list.

Generally, low energy terms are quite salient and are found high up in terms of the frequency compared to low-energy terms. There were 9 low-energy words in comparison to only one high energy word, and thus the 9:1 ratio suggests that low energy positive features are more important than high-energy terms. This is fairly interesting because, in 2006, de Munck published a paper on love in Lithuania (de Munck 2006) by using free-list words, and the emphasis back then was being made more on high-energy states. The emphasis on comfort by Americans was found by de Munck in comparison with Russian and Lithuanian senses of love which saw it as a temporary state and a high-energy feature. None of the age groups in these samples mentioned that love was 'temporary', and most focused on low-energy states. This could be a consequence of the pandemic/post-pandemic period and/or a move toward the American model.

It seems that there are some necessary features for a relationship to have in order to progress to the next stage. There are the following stages: 1. Getting your life together: Studies, career, money; 2. Getting married; 3. Getting an environment suited for bringing up kids: house, feeling ready; 4. Having kids. In this case, for some young people, marriage was understood as not important as they were okay the way they were. Some answers were more associated with a negative view towards marriage. Some respondents of this age group pointed to not wanting to get married. This shows a clear preference for the 'mainstream' social norm of being married, which signals that a person is a well-adjusted and functioning member of society. This could also be related to the above outlined ideas of 'stages' meaning that this is the natural progression, and anyone who does not follow it might be 'out-of-norm' personally as well.

Some people representing this group saw marriage as a festival, a wedding ceremony, a party but not something that alters one's life or relationship in a significant manner. Multiple answers about marriage were depicted as 'expenses'. This can be linked to another group of answers which can be generalized as 'do not see a meaning in marriage', where the very idea of marriage is equal to living together and having a long-term relationship, with the only difference being the externally manifested symbols and a symbolic ceremony. This suggests a move from a 'sacred' view of marriage to a secular and individual one. The next stage of the research involves the need for the collected data to be checked in interviews. Below are the top 10 most frequently used terms in the youngest age group:

Table 3. Associations about 'marriage' in the 18–29 y.o. age group

Number of Lists	30		
Average length of lists	5		
Number of cited items	65		
Total number of cited items	120		
Original Name	Translated Name	Occurrence Number	Smith's Index
šiluma	warmth	6	0.162
seksas	sex	5	0.086
draugystė	friendship	5	0.138
romantiška meilė	romantic love	4	0.150
pora	couple	4	0.107
buvimas kartu	being together	4	0.077
šeima	family	4	0.152
rūpinimasis	caring	4	0.084
pasitikėjimas	trust	4	0.127
artumas	closeness	3	0.051

This is the only group which singles out 'romantic love' [lt. *romantiška meilė*], whereas other groups mentioned only 'love' [lt. *meilė*]. A highly popular term among 18–29-year-olds was 'being together' [lt. *buvimas kartu*]. It refers to all of the instances where the informants were mentioning different activities or situations when the two partners would spend their time together. There is a lot of variation in the way this time can be spent, however, these kinds of things were mentioned fairly often, but this particular term is absent in all other age groups in the sense that they were more specific exactly in terms of what kind of activity it is.

30–39 y.o. age group

In this age group, there were many intrinsic terms, such as marriage, which are about forming a 'family' [lt. *šeima*]; marriage is about 'fidelity/faithfulness' [lt. *pilnatvė*]. Still, on top of that, there were also a high number of extrinsic terms, such as 'social status' [lt. *socialinis statusas*], 'respect' [lt. *pagarba*], 'financial stability' [lt. *finansinis sabilumas*], 'expensive services' [lt. *brangios paslaugos*], 'state' [lt. *valstybė*], 'public pressure' [lt. *visuomenės spaudimas*]. Here, we can see the aim of marriage being moved slightly towards more extrinsic things in comparison to those listed by the previous age group. At the same time, the terms in the 30–39-year-old age group are more 'practical'. What is similar to

the previous age group is that some people in both age groups see marriage as a wedding. There were words related to celebration: 'a white dress' [lt. balta suknelė], 'expensive services' [lt. brangios paslaugos], 'fanciness' [lt. prabanga], 'ritual' [lt. apeigos], 'wedding' [lt. vestuvės], 'tradition' [lt. tradicija], 'rings' [lt. žiedai], 'matching rings' [lt. tinkantys žiedai], 'church' [lt. bažnyčia], 'legitimize' [lt. įteisinti]. To 'legitimize' is an umbrella term which combines all words related to legal matters, e.g. "changing of the surname" [lt. pavardės keitimas], "the legal status of the family" [teisinis šeimos statusas], etc.

This list involved a higher share of negative terms than the other freelists: 'public pressure' [lt. visuomenės spaudimas], 'decrease in individual activity' [asmeninės veiklos sumažėjimas], 'difficulties/hardships' [lt. sunkumai], but then, there was no term 'divorce' – as observed in the 18–29 or in 40–59-year-old age group free-lists.

Among the more frequent terms, there were 'support' [lt. parama], 'stability' [lt. stabilumas], 'cooperation' [lt. kooperavimasis], 'trust' [lt. pasitikėjimas], 'self-determination' [lt. apsisprendimas], 'responsibility' [lt. atsakomybė], which means that the respondents see marriage as being less idyllic than love. It seems that marriage demands more hard work and cooperation in terms of maintaining this kind of relationship than what has been presented in the previous free-list.

Marriage is also perceived as the 'next' stage in relationship; there are terms such as 'buying a home' [lt. namo pirkimas], or 'matureness' [lt. brandumas] which were absent in the 18–29-year-old age group's free-list.

Table 4. Associations about 'marriage' in the 30–39 age group

Number of Lists	47		
Average length of lists	3		
Number of cited items	72		
Total number of cited items	134		
Original Name	Translated Name	Occurrence Number	Smith's Index
atsakomybė	responsibility	16	0.268
džiaugsmas	joy	11	0.178
meilė	love	10	0.161
rūpestis	care	10	0.151
įsipareigojimas	commitment	5	0.081
gyvenimo prasmė	purpose of life	3	0.060
pasiaukojimas	sacrifice	3	0.030
ateitis	future	3	0.046
pilnatvė	fidelity – fullness	3	0.035
šeima	family	3	0.050

In comparison to the other age groups regarding marriage, the 30–39-year-old age group has the highest number of different terms describing marriage – 72 different terms were mentioned. In this age group, first of all, marriage is about 'commitment' [lt. įsipareigojimas]. In the top 10 terms, kids/children are absent; this term was actually ranked lower, although it was still included in the list. Likewise, it is still worth thinking about it and investigating more in the extensive interviews.

40–59 y.o. age group

In many of the answers, there was the wording 'long-term' [lt. ilgalaikis], or 'lifelong' [lt. visam gyvenimui] (this adjective was added to the word 'responsibility' [lt. įsipareigojimas], especially when noting it as something to be feared or avoided). It is interesting that, even when portraying responsibilities brought by marital commitment negatively, they are still regarded as 'lifelong'. Thus, they seem to be an intrinsic, necessary aspect of marriage as an institution. In a way, this understanding mirrors the 'old-school'-related understanding of being married-for-life; however, it seems to be perceived as a decision which is taken personally, rather than a cultural norm across the board.

Table 5. Associations about 'marriage' in the 40–59 y.o. age group

Number of Lists	47		
Average length of lists	3		
Number of cited items	68		
Total number of cited items	137		
Original Name	Translated Name	Occurrence Number	Smith's Index
vaikai	children	10	0.115
atsakomybė	responsibility	9	0.139
meilė	love	9	0.170
įsipareigojimas	commitment	9	0.181
ištikimybė	faithfulness	7	0.098
pagarba	respect	6	0.103
šeima	family	6	0.115
saugumas	safety	4	0.053
bendra buitis	shared household	3	0.048
kompromisai	compromises	3	0.038

While we do not observe the term 'children' [lt. vaikai] in the younger age groups, they are at the top of the list in the two oldest age groups, which might indicate a slightly more conservative attitude towards marriage. Especially in this age group, the term 'children' [lt. vaikai] is most commonly associated with marriage. This suggests that this particular age group sees marriage as a way to have children. There is a connection between marriage and kids. Kids are part of family life; one respondent wrote the full sentence: "Why should I marry if I don't plan to have kids?" [lt. kam man tuoktis, jei aš nežadu turėti vaikų?]. Although in the free-list there is no word 'kids', it can be related to the term 'family' [lt. šeima], while other respondents expressed themselves as: "Only by having kids, my marriage becomes important" [lt. santuoka svarbi tampa tik susilaukus vaikų] – which suggests that marriage brings people closer. There is a distinction between the family life and the personal aspirations. Family life impedes the individual freedom and self-development.

High in the free-list are the words related with devotion and maintaining the relationship – such as 'responsibility' [lt. atsakomybė], 'commitment' [lt. įsipareigojimas], 'faithfulness' [lt. ištikimybė], 'compromises' [lt. kompromisai].

60 y.o. and older age group

Table 6. Associations about 'marriage' in the 60 y.o. and older age group

Number of Lists		34	
Average length of lists		7	
Number of cited items		69	
Total number of cited items		132	
Original Name	Translated Name	Occurrence Number	Smith's Index
meilė	love	13	0.275
vaikai	children	9	0.127
šeima	family	9	0.194
bendri namai, svajonės, planai	shared home, dreams, plans	5	0.114
pasitikėjimas	trust	5	0.031
pagalba	help	5	0.032
vyras	husband/man	3	0.087
atsakomybė	responsibility	3	0.067
saugumas	safety	3	0.083
stabilumas	stability	3	0.04

In the 60+ age group, one can see words linking marriage to the extension of one's family line: 'extension of family' [lt. giminės pratęsimas], 'grandchildren' [lt. anūkai]. Among the listed words, there were 'traditions' [lt. tradicijos], 'Christian values' [lt. krikščioniškos vertybės], stereotypes: 'legitimization of relationships' [lt. santykių įteisinimas], 'a man and a woman' [lt. vyras ir moteris], 'marriage among young people is not popular' [lt. santuoka jaunimo tarpe nepopuliari], 'to spend the whole life together' [lt. kartu praleisti visa gyvenimą].

The most common association with marriage for the oldest age group is 'love' [lt. meilė], whereas 'children' [lt. vaikai] is in the second position. Interestingly, the term 'husband/man' [lt. vyras] was the seventh most frequently mentioned term, but 'wife' [lt. žmona] did not get into this list at all.

Children are fairly high on the list compared to the other age groups, except for the 40–59-year-old group. Safety is also higher in this and previous age groups, i.e. it is much higher than in the 18–29 and 30–39-year-old age groups.

Discussion and conclusions

The collected data indicates possible fundamental differences in the attitudes between the age groups or compared to the 'traditional view of marriage'. Rather than being a natural (or organic) part of the life cycle, marriage has now become a choice. All the age groups see marriage as a way to have kids ('children' [lt. vaikai]), except for the 30–39-year-old age group.

In the first two age groups, the legitimization of relationships is at the top of the list, which indicates that people give priority to concrete proof of the legitimacy of a relationship. The term 'love' [lt. meilė] is also fairly high in all the age groups, which indicates that the feeling of love is also closely linked to marriage. Interestingly, the word 'love' [lt. meilė] was the highest term only in the 60+ y.o. age group. Family is at the top of the list for every age group. This indicates that marriage changes the status of the relationship between two people and makes them a social unit. It is also strange that the term 'sex' [lt. seksas] appeared only in one list – that of the 18–29-year-old age group.

We see a lot of terms relating to sharing, which seems to come with marriage: living together, sharing a house, being together and sharing household chores. Another noticeable feature, according to the common-sense understanding of marriage, is that one needs to check certain boxes before entering a marriage. These are somewhat tangible and material in such fields as job, education and housing, and essentially in anything related in any way to material security, and

not so closely related to the personal growth and development. This also raises a question of what type of idea of marriage is portrayed here as, in many answers, 'marriage' and 'family' is used interchangeably. This may raise the question regarding the differences between 'cohabitation' and 'marriage'. The latter is strongly related to having kids and creating a family; therefore, material security (house, stable income, etc.) is required. This seems not to be necessary when partners decide to just live together.

In the free-list of the 18–29-year-old age group, many material things associated with marriage are mentioned: Church, rings, and the white dress. It is possible that some people in this age group are not yet thinking seriously about marriage, and thus they associate marriage with the traditional things that are shown in the popular media. They relate it to a tradition which is symbolized by these material features.

All the age groups mention terms related to the stability of marriage: security, certainty, and stability. The 30–39-year-old age group is more focused on the relationships – on each other – and they do not talk about kids. The youngest age group also sees marriage as a celebration/festival/party, while the other age groups are focused more on safety and helping each other in marriage.

This is only one minor part of a more extensive research. The following steps include pile sorting, survey, and conducting extensive interviews. In these interviews, free-list and pile sorts data will shape the kinds of questions we will ask our informants in the interviews. Therefore, questions will *not* be constructed by researchers and will *not* be based on their inherent biases or knowledge, but they will be grounded on the emic data obtained by free-listing. All the insights gathered from the free-lists can be validated in surveys and interviews later on, in the further stages of the research.

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