

'Self-partnered' Watson leads single revolution



Pioneer: Watson led the UN's HeForShe gender equality campaign. © Alasdair McLellan

Are traditional relationships dying? Emma Watson has described herself as "self-partnered" rather than single, as millions of people around the globe embrace life without romantic love.

Emma Watson, former *Harry Potter* star and international **feminist activist**, is very happy being single. So happy, in fact, that she thinks of herself instead as "self-partnered".

In a new *Vogue* cover interview, 29-year-old Watson said that women approaching 30 face an "influx of **subliminal messaging**" about what milestones they ought to have achieved.

"If you have not built a home, if you do not have a husband, if you do not have a baby...There's this incredible amount of anxiety," she said.

But Watson is rejecting these expectations in favour of a "self-partnered" life.

The label has made headlines around the world, resonating with a global wave of young people who are turning their backs on traditional relationships.

"I'm now referring to myself as self-partnered instead of single. I love my new relationship status," wrote one user on Twitter yesterday.

For the first time ever, more than half of Americans aged between 18 and 34 say they do not have a romantic partner. The 51% figure is up from 33% in 2004, and 45% in 2016.

Those who do decide to marry are making the commitment later and later. In the UK, the average age at which a woman will marry for the first time is now 30.8 years, rising by more than eight years since 1971.

Even in Indonesia, a country of "universal marriage" where just 2% of women in their 40s are unmarried, a soaring number of young women are deciding to pursue a career without the distraction of a relationship.

Experts believe there are many factors at play. Women raised in an era of greater equality are unwilling to sacrifice their education and careers for motherhood, while more reject marriage as an outdated, **patriarchal** institution.

Financial insecurity in a **post-crash** world prevents many **millennials** from meeting traditional markers of adulthood like home ownership and parenthood.

But the anti-romantic trend has an up side. According to Paul Dolan, Professor of Behavioural Science at the London School of Economics, unmarried and childless women are the **happiest group** in the population.

Relate, the marriage counselling service, recently predicted that marriage could be largely extinct by 2030. Are traditional relationships dying?

All the single ladies

In *Quartz*, Cassie Werber writes that "from Brooklyn to Paris, Rwanda to Japan", societies are undergoing "a fundamental change in the way we think about love and partnership" as people delay or give up on marriage and romance altogether. Careers take priority, dating apps overwhelm us with options, and self-care culture tells us that the secret of happiness is being comfortable with oneself. We just don't need relationships anymore.

But can that really be true? Trends always go around in circles. As it happens, social factors may have conspired to make marriage seem a bit stale, but falling in love is one of the most powerful and meaningful experiences in a human life. Companionship, affection, intimacy: these are things that cannot go out of date.

You Decide

1. Are romantic relationships overrated?
2. Should we get rid of marriage altogether?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write down five things that you think are most important for living a full and happy life.
2. What might Watson mean by "subliminal messaging" targeting women in society? Write at least two paragraphs in response to the question.

WORD WATCH

Feminist activist – Watson was appointed UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in July 2014. Since then, she has headed the HeForShe campaign, which encourages men to stand up for women's empowerment.

Vogue – The world's most famous fashion magazine. Watson will appear on the cover of the December issue.

Subliminal messaging – Messages that affect someone's mind without them being consciously aware of it.

Patriarchal – When a society is controlled by men. Many feminists believe that our societies are still fundamentally geared towards male control.

Post-crash – The global financial crisis in 2008 triggered economic recessions around the globe.

Millennials – A generation born roughly between 1981 and 1996.

Happiest group – Speaking at the Hay festival in May 2019, Dolan said that the latest evidence shows that single, childless women have better mental and physical health.

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