

1/24/2016
English 2010
Professor Gibson

Rhetorical Analysis

In their article, "The Suffocation Model: Why Marriage in America Is Becoming an All-or-Nothing Institution", Eli J. Finkel and his colleagues discuss marriage and how it has changed throughout the history of the United States. They are part of the Department of Psychology in Northwestern University and they are able to strategically discuss how the institution of marriage goes hand-in-hand with Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This article is magnificently persuasive due to the evidence that is given and how it tells us about the progression of marriage. We learn of some advantages and pitfalls that we currently have with our marriages in America and how we can achieve happier marriages but does fail to give any sort of counterarguments or concession to help us see other points of view.

The situation is that most of us have seen or experienced the ever-increasing statistic that marriages are failing more than they have in any other point in history and we can take our turn at the guessing game to figure out why. Perhaps it's the fact that a spouse is unfaithful, that there is some sort of abuse that is going on in the relationship (physical, sexual, or emotional), or that the couple simply fell out of love after previously being in it. Of course, that is just to name a few of the broad spectrum of reasons why people get a divorce and decide to end their marriages that they once cherished. Finkel goes into this discussion from a psychological point of view by having building blocks to what they are about to discuss. They first ask us what marriage is and why people do it in the first place. After that, they tell us that "marriage is a pathway through which people seek to meet certain needs and goals". Next, they investigate how marriages have

changed throughout time and integrate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs into this equation as well to show how they correlate.

Maslow's Hierarchy consists of five levels. The first is consists of physiological needs, or basic needs, such: as hunger, warmth, thirst, etc. The second level includes needs for safety: physical safety, control, or even economic security. After that comes the love and belonging level. That level requires the need to trust others, have sexual intimacy, and belonging to a group. Fourth comes in the form of esteem. This encompasses self-esteem/respect, sense of mastery (having a talent), or prestige. The final level is self-actualization: personal growth, self-expression, or spontaneity. According to Maslow, achieving these different levels are meant to make one happy and fulfilled.

Finkel's purpose to his article is to coordinate Maslow's hierarchy of needs into past marriages and modern-day marriages and why they may be failing. He simply outlines them for us and we can see that there are possible solutions to these problems and also pitfalls to avoid as we are going through our marriages.

The major claim of this article is that due to the changing and progressing world in which we live couples are stressing about different situations in their marriages and personal lives than before. In 1776, couples worried about their basic needs of survival: food, shelter, physical safety, etc. By contrast, in 1940, couples normally have these basic needs taken care of and were looking to find fulfilment through trusting others, sexual intimacy, belonging, etc. We can even look to 2016 to see differences: basic needs are met and belonging and love are met. Now what? According to Maslow's Hierarchy, people then look for things like self-esteem/respect, personal growth, and respect from their spouses. Finkel claims that it is much more difficult for couples to fulfill these top objectives than the lower ones but that it is possible.

One minor claim from the article consists of certain solutions that we could adopt to help build our relationship instead of letting it fall apart. One of the mentioned factors is an increase in investment and time that the couple puts into their relationship. By going on dates or get-aways, the couple's relationship can be intimate and/or strengthened due to the one-on-one time that they are giving to each other. The opportunity to discuss the hopes and dreams of the spouse are given in this moment and the couple can make goals to achieve each other's hopes and dreams. As a result, this "has the potential to make the marriage deeply fulfilling."

Another minor claim from the text supports this concept by stating that couples have "decreasingly invested the time and energy required to help the marriage meet these expectations." It is pointed out that lower income couples have more difficulty achieving the higher points of the hierarchy because they are busy working all of the time to fulfill their basic needs. The text goes on to say: "The acute pressures of daily life can sometimes force people to prioritize factors other than the ones they would like to prioritize". It isn't that the less well-off couple doesn't want to get together and go out for a date, it's the fact that they are inconveniently too busy to do so. Their top priority may be to each other but work and getting money to help their family (their top priority) gets in the way. As a contrast, we can look at a wealthier couple who can pay for a babysitter to watch their kids while they go on a date and don't have to worry about anything but each other and reacquainting themselves. They are able to do this because, unlike the other couple, they don't necessarily have money as a priority because they have already attained it. Then there are statistics that Finkel brings up about eating together, spending leisure time together, and visiting friends together have all decreased in the last 20 years.

The audience in this piece is believed to be other psychologists who had seen this theory before but had questions on its relevancy and accuracy. Finkel clearly describes how it is

applicable to human behavior and our wants and needs. Others who may read the article can understand what is being said and can implement the concepts into their own marriages as well to make them more satisfying by avoiding the pitfalls that are mentioned and taking on other, more positive, behaviors.

One of the faults of the article is that a concession and counterarguments aren't really addressed. There is another article on the same subject that describes some potential points that Finkel's article misses and gives us other vantage points into what has already been discussed by Finkel and his coworkers. For example, the other article discusses other potential variables such as: demographics in the changing nature of marriage, gender and its role, and even the meaning of marriage for across someone's course of life. You could say that this other article contains the counterarguments and concession. Finkel mainly goes forward without considering other arguments which is a blessing and a curse for the reader because we can't see any other variables or variation for more growth in his argument or the subject as a whole.

As far as Finkel's claims go, the claim of value is most accurate in this situation. We are told that there are problems with the way that some marriages are using marriage to fulfill their individual needs which is causing an unhealthy strain in the relationship. On the other hand, there are also traces of claim of policy because there are problems that need to be addressed and Finkel gives some potential solutions to these problems.

In all, the article was simple yet persuasive. Eli J. Finkel is able to help psychologist and others understand, through their evidence, that marriages have changed throughout history and may require more effort than in the past. This may require more time to make a relationship flourish and analyzing your priorities may be necessary to help with this progression. However,

these marriages, however difficult, can be very fulfilling if people follow Finkel's findings and do our part to achieve our happily ever after.