



Vicki Larson

Journalist, mother, thinker

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Why Young Men Fear Marriage

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Daryl Motte and Seth Conger have got a lot going for them. They're young, attractive, smart, employed, single, funny, down-to-earth, slightly old-fashioned and curious -- the kind of guys who'd make perfect husbands.

Except that Daryl, 31, and Seth, 28 -- two longtime friends who run the irreverent dating advice blog, [We're Just Not There Yet](#) and have an upcoming book by the same name -- are just not there yet when it comes to marriage. And a big part of that is the fear of the D-word: Divorce.

It's a valid fear. Daryl and Seth's generations -- Daryl's a Gen-Xer, Seth's a Millennial -- are already divorcing at surprising rates. Of those who married in 2009, 43.9 percent were men in their age group, 25 to 34, according to the Census Bureau's "Marital Events of Americas: 2009," while of those divorcing, 23.7 percent -- more than half -- were ages 25 to 34. For men ages 15 to 24, 19.5 percent married and 3.8 percent divorced.

Men Daryl and Seth's age are "in that stage of life where they are building their income, their economic independence. The worst thing would be if they were to lose it all," says David Popenoe, who headed the National Marriage Project at Rutgers before it moved to the University of Virginia under Bradford Wilcox's leadership.

For Daryl, that is a very real possibility: "I don't see marriage as an option until the (divorce) laws are equal. They're heavily weighed against men," says Daryl, who adds it's just too easy for people to walk away.

The two aren't alone in their thinking. In [AskMen's discussion of Popenoe's 2006 study, "The State of Our Unions,"](#) it's clear that along with the fear of losing freedom and space, dealing with emotional baggage and compromise, feeling pushed into something they may not be ready for, and the idea of having one sexual partner forever, the D-word weighs heavily on men:

When we've been divorced and run through the wringer of the court system, many of us are reluctant (read: "terrified") to risk a second commitment. Nowadays, we aren't exactly chomping at the bit to sign a contract legally allowing a woman to clean us out financially. Successful achievers -- those of us who have built companies and high-powered careers from the ground up -- are especially afraid of being forced to hand over all the fruits of our hard labor and may make the decision never to get involved in a serious relationship again.

But even those haven't been through a divorce have come to expect it. In a [recent study of newlywed women](#), half said they expected infidelity would be part of their marriage and 72 percent said they'd probably experience divorce. With so many couples starting their new life together with those sorts of expectations -- even as they vow "[till death do we part](#)" -- it's no wonder they become self-fulfilling prophecies. Nor is it surprising that men might be hesitant.

A recent *Time* article, "[Debunking the Myth of the Slippery Bachelor](#)," declared men want to marry as much as women do, according to a study of 5,200 people 21- to 65-plus years old. The standouts were men ages 25 to 49 -- they were less inclined to get hitched than the women.

That's what twenty-something blogger Jessica Massa discovered in the past year of interviewing 22- to 35-year-olds across the country for an upcoming book and movie based on her observations on Millennial dating ([WTFIsUpWithMyLoveLife.com](#)). "The guys say, 'Oh no, divorce is not an option. That's why I'm going to wait.' They'd rather not get married than get married and get a divorce. And that puts more pressure on them to wait."

Mark Pfeffer sees it, too. The Chicago psychotherapist runs an "[unwed anxiety](#)" group for thirty-somethings at his Panic, Anxiety and Recovery Center. It isn't divorce per se that scares them, he tells me; it's the financial ramifications of breaking up -- having to face a "50 percent chance of misery." If someone hasn't married by thirty-something -- and the age for a first marriage now is 28 for men and 26 for women -- then he or she has most likely been to enough weddings and experienced a good share of divorces to see what Pfeffer calls "the carnage" of a marital breakup. That's enough to rattle a thirty-something's idea of wedded bliss.

Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais have faith Millennials will avoid the carnage. Co-authors of *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America*, Winograd and Hais don't see the fear of divorce as a big deterrent to twenty-somethings' marriage plans. The 50 percent divorce rate is more the reality of baby boomers, not Gen-Xers and most likely not Millennials either, they say. Although most Millennials are still too young to be walking down the aisle, the ones closer to marrying age "are being so careful about choosing a mate," Winograd says.

That may be true but many young adults still "hold unrealistic, idealized views about marital relationships," according to a 2007 [study of southeastern college students](#). And it's those unrealistic, idealized views that often lead former love-birds to divorce lawyers.

For Millennials, says [Paul Taylor, executive vice president of Pew Research](#), "Only six in 10 grew up with both parents. So broken homes, never-formed homes, re-formed homes -- it's part of their life experience, and ... they are repeating that pattern, perhaps even more so."

As more chose to cohabit, they won't experience divorce but many won't avoid a breakup -- [40 percent of cohabiting hetero couples split within five years](#).

Still, as Daryl and Seth watched their friends exchange vows at numerous weddings this past year, the D-word was the farthest thing from their mind. "I feel there's still hope," says Seth.

But they're just not there yet.

Huffington Post bloggers Vicki Larson and Susan Pease Gadoua are collaborating on a book on reimagining marriage, "*The New I Do*." If you are interested in being a part of their research, please contact them at info@changingmarriage.com