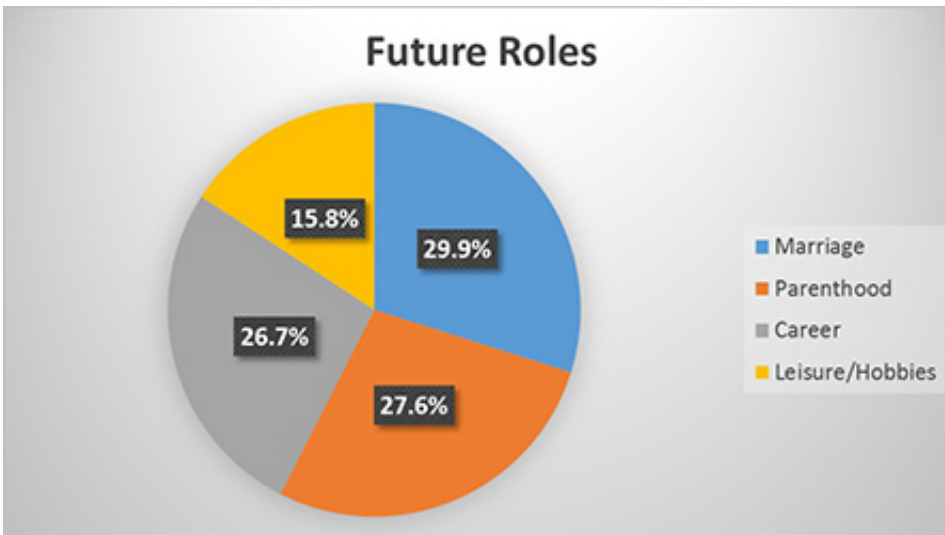


Young adults on marriage say it's so important that they put it off

February 13 2015



With marriage rates declining and the average age at marriage rising, young adults in a new study say that marriage still stands as their most important pursuit in life.

Lead study author Brian Willoughby says young adults aren't delaying [marriage](#) due to a lack of interest. Rather, it's so important that they want to get everything else right first.

"We've been tracking this shift in what marriage means to young adults," said Willoughby, a professor at Brigham Young University. "Instead of

marriage being thought of as the foundation on which you build a life with someone, it's now a sort of capstone. They see it in terms of, 'If you get through college and you have careers, getting married is how you reward yourself.'"

Willoughby collaborated with Ball State University's Scott Hall on the study, which appears in *The Journal of Psychology*. They surveyed 571 unmarried students at Ball State from among the entire student body. In the survey, participants split a pie chart into four sections (marriage, parenthood, career and personal hobbies) based on how important they expected each role to be in their future.

Marriage won by a few percentage points comparatively. The researchers followed up with study participants one year later to see what had changed. Overall, young adults placed even more importance on marriage than they had the year before. Two exceptions to that trend stand out: Those who had gone through a breakup or who had moved in with their partner placed less importance on marriage.

Broadly speaking, the research points to a marriage paradox: It's as important as ever to [young adults](#), yet they increasingly delay getting married. As the authors write:



Young adults in a new study place more importance on marriage than careers, but they put launching a career as a prerequisite for marriage. Credit: Keren Becker from mudcards.etsy.com

Perhaps it is the very centrality of marriage for many young adults that encourages them to seek more education and career opportunities prior to committing to a marriage, allowing them to establish what they deem to be a critical financial foundation for a successful marriage. From this perspective, young adults are not delaying marriage due to disinterest toward or an abandonment of marriage, but because they desire to put themselves in the best position to develop a healthy marital relationship.

There's not yet a clear verdict on whether this delayed approach actually leads to better marriages. Previous research by Willoughby found that delaying physical intimacy in a specific relationship leads to better relationship outcomes. In that sense, good things really do come to those who wait.



Sierra Naumu and Brady Thomas married as undergrads at BYU, where about 25% of students are married. Mormon young adults typically marry about two years younger than their peers nationally and the average age at marriage has risen in sync with national trends. Credit: Adrienne Vaughan

More information: "Changes in Marital Beliefs Among Emerging Adults: Examining Marital Paradigms Over Time Emerging Adulthood" 2167696814563381, first published on December 17, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/2167696814563381](https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696814563381)

"Marriage Matters But How Much? Marital Centrality Among Young Adults." *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* [DOI: 10.1080/00223980.2014.979128](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2014.979128)

Provided by Brigham Young University

Citation: Young adults on marriage say it's so important that they put it off (2015, February 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-02-young-adults-marriage-important.html>

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