



Despite the hurdles, some college students in love are choosing marriage.

For them, it comes down to one question:



by Chad Comello  
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Antonia and Brian bought a wedding planning book for \$14. But sometime later Antonia's maid of honor bought them another one for \$4. They returned the \$14 book. Such is the way of things when college students are trying to get married. Young marriage. Once commonplace, it has now become the exception to the rule of waiting to get married until after college, when couples can achieve financial stability and emotional maturity before diving into a lifetime commitment. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census shows that the average age at first marriage for American women was 26, up from 21.5 in 1970. The average for men also jumped: from 23.5 in 1970 to 27.8 in 2000. Yet many of these Millennials – young adults reared by overprotective Baby Boomer parents in an increasingly “me first” culture – are still choosing to buck the trend of postponing marriage until their late 20s and take the very unselfish step of getting married during their already stressful college years. So what's the motivation? Most young people today don't expect to get married during college, so the desire to get hitched and to hell with the statistics goes beyond finances or merely settling down earlier than usual. According to four North Central students, who are all at different points of the engagement-wedding-marriage path, it's about what feels right. Brian, a junior engaged to Antonia, a senior, said he didn't expect to get married until after college. “But then Tone happened,” he said. The thought of getting married didn't seem weird to him at all. “I just couldn't imagine being with anyone else. Why wait until later when I could just do it now?” Angie, a junior married for nine months, felt the same way when she got engaged during her freshman year. “Ryan and I knew we were going to get married,” she said, “but I always thought we would have a longer engagement. Even right when we got engaged, the initial date of the wedding was after I was graduated from college. That lasted about two weeks. We thought, logistically, why wait?” Aileen, also a junior, expected to follow the common path toward marriage. “I

thought I was going to be mid-to-late 20s, established with whatever I was doing. I never thought I was going to get married young.” But she found herself engaged at 18 to a man 12 years older than her. The age difference, though, was never an issue. “We just wanted to get married. It was a natural thing – no questioning it or anything.” Marriage to these college students was not something they took on with the same assumptions and concerns their parents had before getting married a generation ago. They're getting married because they want to, because they can do it relatively easily with the safety net their parents provide. This doesn't mean they think a lifelong marriage will be easy; it simply shows that true love and its appeal were too great to ignore. “I think that for us you can't take faith out of the equation because we knew that God wanted us to be together,” Antonia said. “Obviously we were a little apprehensive as to when, but after praying and being with each other, we know we want to do this after I graduate.” Angie echoed the reliance on faith. “It definitely played a part in our relationship from the start,” she said. “I think because of the faith we share, as a couple we were years beyond most couples at our age. Maturity-wise I think we grew up a lot. It really grounded us in the things that really matter.” But getting engaged, it seems, is the simplest part of the whole ordeal. The reaction from friends and family is where the sparks start to fly. Angie's parents had also married young, so the news to them was surprising but still exciting. They did, however, want to make sure she didn't drop out of school. “That was a priority because they knew it was important to me and they didn't want me to lose sight of that,” Angie said. The reaction from her classmates was considerably more mixed. Getting engaged as a freshman was unusual, making her nervous about what people would think. “Most people were nice about it,” she said. “But I did get some pretty rude responses. I had one student walk up to me and say, ‘So are you engaged?’ I said,

yeah, I am. I was kind of nervous to tell him. But he was like, ‘Wow. Why? Are you serious? Why would you do that?’ And it just killed me.” Aileen encountered similar apprehension. “My parents were a little apprehensive about it, only because I am young,” she said. “Other than that, the response was pretty nice. Everyone was excited.” Yet the age difference was always an issue, though not to her. “With the connection we had I never really though it necessary to care about that. My mom was OK with it because my grandparents were 11 years apart, so she was like, ‘Hell, what's another two years? It really doesn't matter.” Brian and Antonia received a lot of support, making them wonder about people's true feelings about their engagement. “To be honest I wish we'd had more skepticism,” Brian said. “Everyone was just like, ‘Oh, awesome!’ and were super supportive. I would have appreciated more honesty because not everyone would have felt that way. I was shocked at how much support we got.” Antonia said she's gotten more pushback, almost a year after the engagement, from an unlikely source: her professors. “I've heard, ‘You're going to be married forever. Do you know what you're doing to yourself?’ And I'm like, ‘Yeah, I realize that. That's why we're getting married.’” Those voices of doubt were not unreasonable. Statistics on the fate of young marriages tell a dreary tale: the New York Times reported on studies that show teenage marriages today are two to three times more likely to end in divorce than

marriages between people 25 years of age and older. Another study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 48 percent of those who marry before 18 are likely to divorce within 10 years, compared with 24 percent of those who marry after age 25. Knowing the odds against a successful young marriage yet still diving in anyway shows a confidence in the institution of marriage these young betrothed have that previous generations did not. These students were worried for other reasons, like how to pay for a wedding and start a life together without having established a career. “Weddings are expensive,” Aileen said. “Plus, I have to pay my own way through college – that's all on my shoulders. Financial stability is going to be an issue for both of us, but I really never think of problems. If they come up, they come up.” Angie was less worried about the money than her fate as a college student. In the months leading up to the wedding, she worried she would become disconnected from school and have to drop all the things she loved doing. “But Ryan and I sat down and talked about it and we decided that if I wasn't doing all these things that I'm doing, I wouldn't be myself,” she said. Still, she did wonder. “Should we wait? Maybe we should have held off for another two years. Is it really that big of a deal? I definitely had those questions.” Even with the doubts swirling, they still need to plan a wedding. How do they do it as full-time students with jobs and class and extra-curriculars filling their days? “It got really stressful,” Angie said. She was getting married a month and fifteen days after classes ended, but was also the female lead in the school's production of Romeo and Juliet. “I just didn't have time to focus on the wedding. I didn't even touch my invitations; I picked them out and my parents did it all for me. They were saints.” But was worth it? Is getting married before you're even allowed to rent a car worth the late nights and doubting loved ones and the chance you'll end up another divorce statistic? Angie was unequivocal. “The last seven months have proved all my worries false,” she said. “Since we've been married I've never questioned it. We definitely made the right decision.”

Photos courtesy of Antonia Jankowski, Angie Snodgrass and Aileen Rak. Images courtesy of Google.



RYAN & ANGIE

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AILEEN & NICK

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ANTONIA & BRIAN

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–Brian Waters, ‘11

## The Statistics

Average Age at First Marriage	
1970	2000
Women: 21.5	Women: 26
Men: 23.5	Men: 27.8

**65%** of altar-bound men and women live together before getting married.



**88%** of American men and women between 20 and 29 believe that they have a soul mate.

**Teenage Marriages** are 2 to 3 times more likely to end in divorce than marriages between people 25 years of age and older.

Sources: Bride's Magazine, Louisiana State University, U.S. Census, The New York Times