

My Heart Chart

The Rational Heart

“Marriage is Hard Work”

What’s a Rational Heart?

One of the great sound bites in history was uttered by French philosopher Rene Descartes: “I think therefore I am.” But most people don’t know that Descartes preceded this statement by saying: “I doubt, therefore I think.” And you, along with every other Rational Heart, know exactly what he means. When it comes to love and marriage, you doubt the fuzzy fairy tales you’ve grown up hearing. You’ve questioned the soundness of “living happily ever after.” Your doubts have caused you to think more intently and more rationally about marriage than most.

Your Rational Heart gives you a very practical approach to marriage. You view this lifelong commitment with caution. The word, caution, stems originally from *cavere*, which means “to be on one’s guard.” And that’s exactly what you’re doing as you approach the idea of marriage. You’re guarding your heart. You’re doing what you can to protect it from harm. That’s why you tip the scales a bit more toward rationality than romance when it comes to matrimony. You don’t buy into the mystical idea of finding your soul mate. You view finding a potential partner to marry as a more rational endeavor that will inevitably require some serious work.

ra-tion-al /ˈrɑːʃənəl/

Adjective: agreeable to logic, sound judgment or good sense.

Rational Hearts

- 23% of singles, ages 18 to 30, have “rational hearts”
- Have a rational and balanced view of marriage, approaching it with caution
- Their personal destiny is not tied to being married
- Reject the idea of a soul mate
- Cohabitation is a valuable consideration for this group
- They are predominately Caucasian and affluent
- You’re least likely to find them in the Midwest
- They have a higher education than most
- This category is made up of 52% women and 48% men



What the Rational Heart Needs to Know

Delaying Marriage Improves Success Only Up to a Point

Theresa, 28, and Mike, 29, wanted to be married by age 30. After several years of dating, they were the last of their circle of friends to tie the knot, taking nearly twice as long as their peers. The reason? They wanted to be sure.

Like other Rational Hearts, Theresa and Mike were maintaining their single-but-together status until they were confident it was the right thing to do. The age at first marriage has been climbing steadily for all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The median age is now the oldest since the U.S. Census started keeping track in the 1890s: almost 26 for women and almost 28 for men.

More than other groups, Rational Hearts are prone to delay getting married until they are older. They see it as improving their chances for success. And they are right – up to a point. It's well documented that those who marry before age 20 are two to three times more likely to divorce. According to research at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, age plays a critical role in marital success:

- Of college grads who wed in the 1980s at age 26-plus, 81 percent were still married 20 years later
- Identify segment(s) within the young adult audience that a targeted communication campaign would potentially affect most widely and significantly.
- Of college grads under 26 when they wed in the 1980s, 65 percent were still married 20 years later
- Of high school grads under 26 when they wed in the 1980s, 49 percent were still married 20 years later.⁶

As young people delay marriage longer, there is growing debate over whether waiting is a good idea, and if so, how long is best. Those who advocate marriage in the early to mid-20s say that's the age when the pool of possible mates is larger, it's when couples can "grow up" together and it's prime for childbearing. But others favor the late 20s or early 30s, saying maturity makes for happier unions and greater economic security — both of which make divorce less likely.

In general, the research indicates that the payoff for delaying marriage after the mid-20s is extinguished. Of course, there's no magic number for everyone. Every couple is different. That's why we want to highlight something that's equally as important as age: your inner voice.

According to author Carl Weisman, people who have strong reservations about getting married should follow their gut instincts and not walk down the aisle. For his book, *Serious Doubts: Why People Marry When They Know It Won't Last*, Weisman surveyed 1,036 people across the country who had been through a divorce. Nearly 8 in 10 said that before the wedding they felt "somewhat" or "extremely certain" the marriage would end in divorce. The rest of those surveyed identified themselves as "slightly certain."

In an interview with USA Today about his research,

How Rational Hearts Feel about Divorce

The pragmatic attitude of Rational Hearts allows for divorce if things don't work out – particularly if infidelity or physical abuse enters the picture. While 48% of their peers would say, "constant fighting" is grounds for divorce, 59% of Rational Hearts would agree. And when you ask Rational Hearts what holds a marriage together they are likely to say their communication, compromise and compatibility.





Weisman said they all had one thing in common: “They all ignored their inner voice. They knew it wasn’t going to last.” So why did they go through with the marriage? A separate survey listed the three top reasons as “[I] figured I could make it work,” “It seemed like the next logical step,” and “[I] thought I could change some aspect of my partner.” While Rational Hearts are not as likely as some people to ignore their inner voice, it’s worth noting that this powerful indicator is too often ignored.

Cohabitation Is Riskier Than You Think

Believe it or not, many people get married despite ominous feelings about the marriage’s likelihood of success because they have been living together. Scott Stanley, co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, says his research on couples who live together before marriage has found that some of those couples wouldn’t have gotten married if they hadn’t been living

together. “People have committed themselves before talking about the commitment to the future, and that can get you walking down the aisle not being sure that’s the right thing, or what you want to do,” Stanley says.

Couples who live together average about two years, generally leading to either marriage or a breakup. Cohabitation research published in the journal *Population Studies* in 2000 found that within five years of a live-in relationship, about half of couples married, about 40% split up and the rest continued to live together.⁸

“In focus groups, women perceive cohabitation as a step before marriage to that partner, whereas men are tending to see cohabitation as something to do before you make a commitment,” says Pamela Smock, an associate professor of

sociology at the University of Michigan. Stanley has found similar results. Men who live with women they eventually marry aren’t as committed to the union as those who didn’t live with their mates before tying the knot, he says.

More than any other group between 18 and 30 years of age, Rational Hearts are likely to consider cohabitation. They see it as testing the marital waters. But is it really a good idea? In spite of how rational it might seem, most research suggests cohabitation before marriage increases the risk of divorce because couples are less committed to each other. Stanley, author of *The Power of Commitment*, calls it relationship “inertia.” It happens when couples end up spending more and more time together until finally all of one person’s stuff gets moved into the other person’s place. “People who are cohabiting might end up marrying somebody they might not otherwise have married,” Stanley says. They’re “sliding, not deciding.”

The point is that when it comes to cohabitation, Rational Hearts are not always as rational as they may think. Some believe marriage takes the spice out of marriage. Researchers beg to differ. About

How Your Home Shaped Your Heart

Rational Hearts, for the most part, have grown up in relatively loving and stable homes. In fact, 64% of Rational Hearts grew up with their parents being married (23% divorced) and they say tend to say their parents’ relationships were as good as others’ relationships.





40% of married people have sex twice a week, compared to 20-25% of single and cohabitating men and women. Over 40% of married women said their sex life was emotionally and physically satisfying, compared to about 30% of single women. For men, 50% of married men are physically and emotionally contented versus 38% of cohabitating men.⁹

Leveraging Your Rational Heart

- **If you're matched with a Resolute Heart...** you're with someone who fully embraces traditional marriage and sees it as the centerpiece of his or her life. This person is not only highly motivated to be married but is also dedicated to raising a family. They fully expect their marriage to be lifelong. They are "values-driven." If you're thinking about cohabitation with this person, think again. Resolute Hearts are highly unlikely to be open to living together before marriage. They also do not see divorce as an option. And because you could potentially open the door to divorce under certain circumstances, this is likely to be a point of contention. However, you both know that marriage is sure to include ups and downs and you're both prepared to work at getting through the tough patches.

Bottom line? *While you're not exactly a like-minded match, your prospects for lifelong marriage are relatively good. You'll have some differences to work out, for sure, but you can learn from each other because your dedication toward the same goal is solid.*

- **If you're matched with a Romantic Heart...** you're with someone who tends to see marriage through rose-colored glasses. They're looking for the "happily ever after" marriage. They are a bit more highly motivated to be married than you are and they certainly see matrimony in more magical terms than you do. While you're focused in on the practicality of making love work, they're focused on the fairy tale of love's ideal. Unlike you, they believe there is one person out there for them and that person is going to meet all their needs. If that person is you, be prepared to sweep them off their feet. They're looking for a love story of cinematic proportions. Both of you prize the commitment it takes to make marriage work and, under certain circumstances, you both see divorce as a potential option.

Bottom line? *Your partner is bound to be disappointed in your practicality at times, longing for a more romantic approach. But if you can both move closer toward each other's mindsets, you'll have a relatively positive prospect for lifelong love. It won't necessarily be an easy path, but as a Rational Heart, you already know that.*

- **If you're matched with a Restless Heart...** you're with someone who is definitely not ready for marriage. Their motivation for matrimony is low – at least for now. They are busy enjoying their freedom from responsibility. They not only lack the motivation to be married, but the skills as well. Interestingly, they fear ending up alone ... so much so that they would rather marry the wrong person than not marry at all. Cringe! As you might guess, they also fear that marriage will hem them in and curtail their free spirited lifestyle.

Bottom line? *This match is not for you. It's likely to bring about major*



strife and leave you questioning your own good judgment. This  person has some growing up to do in order to be marriage-ready. Someday, as they mature and begin to take on more responsibilities, they can make a potentially good marriage partner for someone. But this is not that day and you probably are not that someone.

- **If you're matched with a Reluctant Heart...** you're with someone who has a very different perspective on marriage. While you are relatively marriage motivated, this person is actually "anti-marriage." They've likely grown up in a home that is unstable and fractured. As a result, they are cynical about lifelong love. They have the lowest marriage motivation of any segment. Not only do they fear commitment, they see divorce as perfectly acceptable when the going gets tough.

Bottom line? *This match is not for you.*

- **If you're matched with a Rational Heart...** you're with someone who shares your marriage mindset. You are simpatico. You share a relatively moderate motivation to be married and you both view marriage in practical terms. You both expect to be fulfilled by matrimony but you're in no great rush to get hitched. In fact, you're both open to the idea of living together before you get married.

Bottom line? *This like-minded match holds the greatest promise for you when it comes to lifelong love. Your shared practicality may make your progress toward marriage relatively slow and overly cautious, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. If you take in proven advice and work to do what's best, there's no reason you can't enjoy an enduring love together.*



About the Authors

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott are founders and codirectors of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University (SPU), and Leslie is a marriage and family therapist at SPU. The Parrotts are authors of *Real Relationships*, *Dot.com Dating*, *Crazy Good Sex*, *L.O.V.E. Your Time-Starved Marriage*, *Love Talk*, and the Gold Medallion Award-winning *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. The Parrotts have been featured on Oprah, CBS This Morning, CNN, and The View, and in USA Today and the New York Times. They are also frequent guest speakers and have written for a variety of magazines. The Parrott's website, RealRelationships.com, features more than one thousand free video-on-demand pieces answering relationship questions. Les and Leslie live in Seattle, Washington with their two sons.

For more relationship ideas, check out these resources at twoofus.org:

- Article: [Are We Compatible?](#)
- Article: [Why Premarital Education/Counseling Matters](#)
- Video: [Should we live together before getting married?](#)

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