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Married love and other stories

Relationships don't look like they used to (and that's a good thing). But what does it honestly take to make a modern romance work? As part of Committed, we're exploring partnerships ranging from a textbook marriage between high-school sweethearts to a gay couple creating a life together in the conservative deep South.Share on PinterestMy husband and I are pretty stereotypical Brooklyn creatives. We live in a Bushwick apartment filled with comic books and art supplies; he and his two partners run the ad agency GrandArmy, and I started the geeky clothing brand Jordandane. We spend our time working, creating, and partying, and at first glance, seem like roll-your-eyes cliches.So when I was in my early 20s, the fact that I had married young was pretty shocking to practically everyone I met. Responses ranged wildly, from "OMG that's adorable," to "Really? Why?"When someone thinks my relationship status is unexpected, my favorite thing is to let them in on all the other details that are even more surprising. I got married when I was 21 to my first boyfriend, whom I met in high school... which we attended with fewer than 80 other people only one day a week.We were semi-homeschooled in the age just before online classes were a norm. Our parents weren't thrilled with the public school options available, so we attended a co-op high school in Delaware. Our friend groups overlapped, mostly because he had an unrequited crush on one of my best friends, which conveniently let us slowly get to know one another. He was adorably genuine and sweet, in that Chris Evans Captain America sort of way. We spent many long nights chatting away online and officially started dating the week after my 16th birthday, because my parents wouldn't let me have a boyfriend when I was 15. We stayed together through high school, our separate college experiences, and into our adult lives.We never broke up, but we did create our own lives apart from each other. His college was an hour away from mine, which was far enough to create a bit of a long-distance relationship, especially since I didn't drive. He had an internship in Oregon and spent a summer in London; I studied for a semester in Spain. He spent the last of his college kid savings to come visit me in Sevilla. Between meeting all of my new friends and touring around the city that had become my temporary home, he asked if we could take a trip to the neighboring beach town. While taking a midnight stroll down the sandy shore, he asked me to marry him. I was 20, and we'd been together for five years. It wasn't even a question.10 Ways to Seriously Improve Your Dating SuccessI think one of the biggest concerns about marrying someone you meet so young is that you might miss out on more experiences and opportunities to find someone who's an even better fit. You don't want to just meet one person, decide they're it, and stop looking for anything else. What if there's something better out there? What if you let yourself blithely slide through the steps of dating, engagement, marriage, starting a family, without stopping to consider what you really want?I decided early on that I wasn't going to do that. Every day that we were dating, I asked myself if I still wanted to be with him, and promised myself if that answer ever changed, I would do something about it.This is funny to admit, but a moment from Jane Austen's novel Emma stuck with me. In an effort to convince her friend not to accept a proposal from a man she deems unworthy, Emma asks, "If you prefer [Mr. Martin] to every other person; if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with, why should you hesitate?" This question was meant to dissuade a friend from pursuing a relationship, but for me, it became a way to confirm that I was intentionally choosing what I really wanted.Despite my firm commitment to actively make a daily choice that would make me truly happy, it can be strange to have missed out on an experience that so many of my peers have had. I technically understand how online dating and apps work, but I don't really get how to make a connection with someone through a profile. I have absolutely no game; my flirting skills cap out at about a 15-year-old level. I got pretty good at crafting a cute response to an AIM away message, but that doesn't exactly transfer to the adult version of sending a sexy reply on Tinder or to a late-night text. The only romantic experience I've ever had started as a teenage friendship, developed into love, and ended in our staying together forever... which isn't exactly helpful when a friend is trying to figure out what a guy means when he texts her nothing but the strawberry emoji.In our early 20s, almost all of my close friends were single. I never wanted to stop being in my relationship, but the young, single life did look like a lot of fun. Going out, meeting someone new and interesting, and hooking up with them is just one of those exciting things I never got to do; I haven't had a first date since I was 16. So when a group of friends is chatting about hook-up stories, I'm not exactly able to participate.Of course, I also don't find myself nostalgically comparing the relationship I'm in or the sex I'm having with other—perhaps fonder—memories, simply because there aren't any. I don't have to miss the fun aspects of adult single life because I never experienced them. Someone joked at my college graduation that I was an old married lady, but by "settling down" so young, I've actually learned the importance of not settling down at all.It's easy to fall into a routine when you've been with someone for years, which is a very unattractive position to be in at the ripe old age of 23. Staying with the same person for over a decade can make your world seem very small, but I don't want to let myself stop being interesting or interested in what's happening outside of the two-person world I live in; I want to keep meeting new people, having new experiences, and learning. For every trip we take together, we take five with other people. Instead of coupling off in social settings, we make sure to catch up with everyone around us. We're active participants in separate circles: he in the New York design world, me in the growing community of nerdy women. Our honeymoon phase should have ended years ago, but I'm not interested in letting that happen.Here's What 15 Relationship Experts Can Teach Us About LoveThe most important thing I've learned by being in one relationship for my entire adult life is that adapting to change is vital. We both went through so many changes in the decade between ages 18 and 28, and we got to go through them together. Some of those changes have been easy and great, and some have been a nightmare. On a day-to-day level, we traded in washing machines and driving for the headaches of laundromats and public transportation. Ideologically, we've both shifted politically from being pretty conservative to very liberal, although not at the same time—and there was some serious awkwardness and frustration in-between. We've had part-time jobs, freelanced, worked 80 hours per week, and started two businesses, each taking different tolls on our finances, free time, and happiness. And we don't even have kids yet.In a dating relationship, you can decide which issues are worth fighting for. In a marriage, there's no option; seemingly unsolvable problems need to be solved, which can teach you a lot about being creative while working through issues. I've learned to compromise and adapt every day. Not only has this increased flexibility been very healthy for all of my relationships, it also allows me to enjoy things in life I otherwise never would have. I never wanted to live in a city, and I spent my first few years here planning my escape. I made myself miserable until I realized that this situation wasn't changing, we weren't moving, and I could resent that fact forever, or start looking for things to love about New York. I found them.We've been there for each other through nearly all of life's ups and downs. We've celebrated high-school and college graduations, new jobs, personal victories, and every exciting thing that's happened to our friends and families. We've suffered through national tragedies, deaths, failures, and the struggles of making really hard choices. We've changed political parties and religious beliefs. We know how the other person makes decisions and how to work through problems together. We've learned which issues we simply don't agree on and which we may never change our minds about.I absolutely understand why what we have is rare. For all the beautiful moments we enjoyed, there were so many hard ones. We've made a lot of huge changes that the other person had to be OK with, and we didn't have the freedom that comes with being single. And if you asked me 10 years ago to describe the life I pictured for my future self, what I have definitely isn't that. It's not four kids and a house in the suburbs, baking cookies at home while my partner works a normal 9-to-5. It's not being able to plan out exactly what my future looks like. For me, what I have is so much better.Jordan Ellis founded Jordandane, a geek chic clothing brand for kids and kids at heart. She's a proud Hufflepuff who loves dressing up and throwing extravagant theme parties. Follow her on Instagram at @jordandaney and Twitter at @jordandane. For many young girls, being a bride is the closest thing possible to living out childhood fantasies of being a princess. The wedding industry and bridal magazines collaborate in spinning the myth. Find the perfect prince, put on the perfect wedding pageant and live happily ever after. It's an alluring story for almost everyone. How could it not be? For the unhappy, the alone, and the lonely it can be an intoxicating idea. Getting married can seem like the end of all a girl's problems. Getting married can seem like a way to get a new start.It doesn't work that way. Marrying as a solution to painful circumstances almost never leads to a good and lasting marriage. Marriages that are a conscious or unconscious way out of a difficult situation don't have the staying power that comes with mature love, shared values and a commitment to the future by two mature adults.Here are my top five mistaken reasons that people marry:1. To escape the family of origin.Jackey's parents are brutal. She hasn't felt loved just about ever. Her mother is constantly critical. Her father scares her, especially when he drinks. Her younger sister seems bent on setting her up to be the target so she can fly under the radar of parental chaos. For Jackey, marrying her boyfriend as soon as they graduate from high school this June seems like a way out.Yes, some families are abusive. Some parents don't know how to love and protect. Some are so toxic that the only way to survive is to flee. But flight into an early marriage with a teenage sweetheart or just anybody who is willing isn't a good enough foundation for a marriage. The fear that spurs flight can cloud a person's judgment about who would really make a good partner. It's easy to romanticize someone who offers an alternative to daily ridicule and pain. 2. Because it's the next logical thing. Tony and Melody have been dating since they were 14. Neither of them has ever dated anyone else or even considered it. They've been best friends and lovers through their teen years, went to the same college, and have been talking for years about what kind of house they'd like to have someday and what their kids' names will be. Tony's parents adore Melody. Melody's parents think Tony is a fine match for their daughter. It only makes sense for them to get married. Or does it?Neither Tony nor Melody has a clue about who they are without the other. They have never tested themselves as individuals; never been anywhere or done anything significant that didn't involve the other. Sometimes couples like them can last. But often enough, the growing up that happens in the 20s means growing apart. As they enter careers that introduce them to new people and new experiences, one or the other of them may well begin to wonder if they would make the same choice now as they did when they were 14.3. To fix the other person. Joey and Maryanne agree on one important thing: He needs fixing. He needs her. He feels empty and desperate without her. He says he will die if she leaves him. He has even threatened suicide if she tries. She has an idea that she can rescue him and that she gives meaning to his life. That idea gives meaning to hers. Neither of these people has a strong sense of self or life goals they are passionate about. The intensity of their relationship consumes them and distracts them from finding and maintaining good friends or good work. They are each other's everything. What they fail to understand is that by being so wrapped up in the drama of "saving" him, neither one of them is developing personally into the adult they could be. It's unlikely that Maryanne can "save" Joey when Joey doesn't really want to stand on his own feet. A marriage created on these terms is likely to be disastrous for them both.4. To legitimize sex.Angie and Nick both come from deeply religious families. Angie pledged she would stay pure until marriage. Nick agreed that it was very important to wait until their wedding to have sex. But a combination of hormones and alcohol overtook those good intentions. They had sex. They liked it. They rationalized continuing to be intimate but the guilt that came with it made them both miserable. To them, getting married makes going against their own values at least a little okay. Never mind that they each had some doubts about the relationship before they fell into bed with each other. Never mind that they each still kind of blame the other for what happened. Those seeds of doubt and blame are likely to fester and grow. Marriage may make them feel less guilty about having sex but it won't resolve other issues that undermine their relationship.5. To avoid being alone.Robyn is terrified. She's always had a boyfriend since she was 13. She has dated a number of guys but always had someone new lined up before she ended a relationship. Now 22, she's just been dumped by the most recent boyfriend for being too needy. A demanding project at work has meant long hours at the office and no time to look for someone new. She hates being alone in her apartment at night. She doesn't know what to do with herself on weekends. She feels empty and scared. She's tried calling her ex but he's put off by her tears. She's running through her files for someone, anyone, who can fill up the hole in her life. She's likely to fall into marriage with the first guy who shows interest just so she'll never have to feel this way again.Marriage does provide a partner in life but it doesn't guarantee that the partner will be good at partnering. Sometimes people like Robyn luck out and find someone who is truly willing and able to be their best friend and companion. More often, they are terribly disappointed. In their rush to marry to fend off their fear of abandonment, they didn't take the time to find someone who shared their interests and values.Men can be as vulnerable to making these mistakes as women. Older people aren't exempt either. Regardless of age or gender, the desire to marry, to have a constant partner, and to share a life is a healthy one. However, a wedding that's a mistaken solution to personal or couple problems won't guarantee a happily-ever-after marriage. That requires a union of two complete and whole adults who love each other deeply, unselfishly, and respectfully and who share a commitment to keep their wedding vows. Only then can a bond be created that withstands life's challenges and deepens over time.

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