



## The Odd Couple

*My wife and I are an anomaly in Boston – twentysomethings who already have the house and kid.* **By STEVE HOLT**

**A**s I watched our 3-year-old run around at the park the other day, it hit me: My wife and I are caught between generations. Surrounding me were many of our friends from the neighborhood – dads and moms in their mid- to late 30s, a few approaching midlife. Though my wife and I are both 28, our circumstances – married for six years (together for 10), homeowners, adopting a little boy – push us out of the carefree twentysomething crowd and into the settling-down one.

The twentysomething folks we do know seem comfortable un-hitched for the time being. They're busy doing AmeriCorps, working on graduate degrees and student teaching, and hosting open-mike nights. And though we consider ourselves fairly savvy when it comes to pop culture, we're missing an increasing number of references – at both ends of the spectrum. My eyes glaze over whenever our older friends begin talking about *Knight Rider*, and until earlier this year my wife thought Lady Gaga was British royalty.

Much has been written in recent years about how Americans are waiting longer to get married today than they used to. In 1956, the median age of a man at first marriage was just shy of 23 years old, while women were barely

20. The age of first marriage was never higher than it was in 2008 for men and women: 28 and 26, respectively. Here in Massachusetts, folks are waiting longer than almost anyone – 30 for men and 28 for women.

My wife and I were 21, living in Texas, and fresh off our graduation from a religious university when we got married. Despite the nationwide statistics, pressure in our social circle was high to wed young. Though we always felt in control of our timeline for meeting and marrying, we have wondered since then how our lives might have been different under different circumstances. How would attending college in a place like Boston, for instance, have shaped the way we view family life? Shortly after moving to Boston

several years ago, we realized just what an anomaly we were here. In fact, more than a few curious people assumed we were only cohabitating or, if they learned we were married, that we had to tie the knot because of an unplanned pregnancy. The baby would come a few years later in the form of a little boy who lives with us and whom we are in the process of adopting through the state. Once again, the Holts decide to do things a little differently than their peers.

Despite our outsider status here, my wife and I believe we've found happiness and fulfillment. We've never regretted a day we've spent together and honestly feel relieved that we found each other before needing to hit up Tia's at Long Wharf after work to look for love.

Some days, this leads me to wonder why Bostonians wait to settle down. Career ambitions or pursuit of advanced degrees often top the list of reasons why many haven't met a life partner. Others boil it down to simply wanting to enjoy the party that is their unattached 20s. But why wait, I think, to experience the joys of romance, love, and family – cited by nearly

every one of our grandparents as what's most important?

Other days, I get it. Waiting is about asking the big existential question – "Why am I here?" – setting out to find an answer, and then building one's life around that answer. It's about collecting enough diverse experiences, meeting enough interesting people, and trying (and failing) enough times to discover one's identity apart from social or relational influences. Marriage makes it harder for individuals to search for these answers, especially if the pursuit involves doing things that make little sense in the context of a family – like seeing the world, dabbling in a number of professions, or taking a pilgrimage of some kind.

But I'd argue that while marriage does make this exploration harder, it doesn't make it impossible. Enjoyment can be found in both settling down early and waiting. It just may have more to do with choosing joy than feeling like slaves to circumstance.

*Steve Holt is a writer based in East Boston. Send comments to coupling@globe.com.*

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