

Marriage strike?

Dalrock | 19 October, 2010 | by Dalrock

Grerp has sparked a spirited discussion on her blog with her post [A question for the gentlemen](#). In that post she mentions the oft cited manosphere threat of a marriage strike:

Having read extensively what the men in this corner of the interwebz have to say about marriage – that it’s a trap, a form of indentured servitude or slavery, that it’s a sure way to get robbed of both your money and your children in divorce court, that [there are no women who are good wife material left in America](#) – I’m left wondering what women should do if there is to be a marriage strike (or if there is already a marriage strike, which may be the case [given the recent census data about marriage](#)).

So this has me thinking about the question of whether or not there really is, or will be, a marriage strike. My first answer is that it depends on how we define the term. If those using it are thinking of a classical strike where men would eschew marriage out of a sense of male solidarity in an effort to extract a better social bargain, **this isn’t happening and won’t happen any time in the near future**. As I pointed out in [Sex Cartel!](#) in order for such an effort to be effective there would need to be means to enforce the strike. But this still leaves open the possibility that men would avoid marriage not because they wanted to achieve some grander social aim, but because they felt it was in their individual best interest. This of course is another question entirely.

The most frequently cited data considered proof of a marriage strike is the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women. The Spearhead shared exactly these statistics in a post earlier this year ominously titled The End Of Marriage. They compiled the data into a helpful graph to assist us in visualizing the extent of societal change we are experiencing:



The end of marriage?

They even project out the trend into the future in semi tounge in cheek spirit:



Predicting the end of marriage.

So I guess thats it ladies! Game over; you may as well pack up your ring fingers and go home, right?

Maybe not. The data in the chart above suffers from two common problems when we are looking at data on marriage rates.

The first problem is that it lumps in all racial and demographic groups. I pointed out in the [Sing for a husband](#) post that since the delightful lady in question was 35 and white, per the census data she was one of the remaining 15% of women in her demographic who were unmarried. Thats right. [Roughly 85% of white women](#) in the US have married by the time they reach 35. But the story would have been different [if she were a black woman](#) singing for a husband at age 35. In that case she would have been in the same boat as [roughly 45% of her peers](#). 15% and 45% are very different numbers, especially if you are singing for a husband! Any time you see marriage rates lumped together, you have to ask how reflective this is of you or whoever you are talking to. Averaging 15% and 45% isn’t helpful to either group.

The second problem with the data in the chart above is a bit more subtle. The biggest problem with answering the question of whether marriage rates are changing is the problem of *timing*. If 100% of women used to marry exactly at age 20, and now 100% of them marry exactly at age 40, do fewer women marry now than in the past? In either case, 100% of women are marrying. But something rather

important has also happened. More vexing still is for someone looking to understand marriage rates in the above hypothetical there would be a twenty year period where marriage rates appeared to decline precipitously. The data would show 100% marriage until the change, then decline steadily, and then jump back up to 100% again. Until the first crop of women delaying marriage reached aged 40, all you could do is speculate on how likely they would be to marry. That is a 20 year information gap, simply to know what would happen for *today's women*. If you wanted to know about the next generation you would have to patiently wait another 20 years.

The data series above is deceptively susceptible to exactly the kind of delay in marriage we are experiencing. Lets go back to the absurd hypothetical above for illustration purposes to see how such a shift would show up in the data. It probably isn't correct but lets assume that the above graph only measures marriage rates for unmarried women 20 or older. Lets also assume no divorce, and no deaths, changes in birth rates, etc. For the first scenario where women all married exactly at age 20, the number of marriages each year per 1,000 unmarried women would be 1,000. For the second scenario where women wait until exactly 40, only 1/20th (5%) of the women aged 20-40 (all unmarried) would marry on any given year (those who turned 40). So in the second scenario the rate of marriage per 1,000 unmarried women would be 50. In this admittedly absurd hypothetical, the rate of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women dropped from 1,000 to 50, even though *the only change was a delay in the age of marriage*. In both cases 100% of women were ultimately marrying.

So the marriage rate per 1,000 unmarried women metric isn't particularly helpful; we know that women are delaying marriage, and we know that marriage rates vary widely based on race. This takes me back to my original analysis from my [second post on Grey Divorce](#). Lets look at the most recent census data for white men and women:

White alone – Non-Hispanic	% Men who have ever married 1999	% Men who have ever married 2009	% Women who have ever married 1999	% Women who have ever married 2009
20-24 years	17%	12%	30%	23%
25-29 years	51%	42%	65%	57%
30-34 years	71%	69%	83%	79%
35-39 years	81%	81%	89%	88%
40-44 years	86%	84%	91%	90%
45-49 years	90%	85%	93%	92%
50-54 years	94%	89%	95%	92%

Percent of White Men and Women Ever Married by Age, 1999 and 2009

What I see in this data is that those in their mid 30s and older today don't look that different than their predecessors did 10 years ago. At the same time women today in the age brackets under 35 look markedly different than their predecessors, and the difference is progressively greater the younger the age bracket you look at. **Something is happening.** The question is *what is happening?* Is the change simply an acceleration of women delaying marriage [as we have seen for over a hundred years](#)? And even if this is their *intent*, will they be able to catch up with previous marriage rates in the future? Will men still want to marry all of these additional late brides? We simply won't know for another ten or so years.

What I do know is that the women making these choices are [taking a significant risk](#) if they expect to marry later. In just ten years time, the percent of white women marrying by their early 20s has dropped from 30% to 23%. This is comparatively a rather large 23% reduction. Whether they know it or not, they

are betting that men 5-10 years from now will be *more willing to marry an older woman* than men have in the past. They might be right. We can only speculate while we wait to see.

See Also:

- [Driving a stake in the heart of the US marriage strike myth.](#)
- [Clarification on my position on a marriage strike.](#)
- [Supply and demand in the marriage market.](#)

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