

# Students don dresses to defy national trend of waiting to wed

By Robin Lowe  
Staff Writer

For most UNC students who struggle to make the grade and actually eat and sleep at night, marriage is the last thing on their minds.

But that didn't stop Todd Wade, a December graduate from Jamestown, from marrying UNC student Angie Wilson, a senior from Madison, this January. The couple wanted a short engagement, because they felt God was leading them to get married now, Todd Wade said.

"We've only been married for a couple of weeks, but (Angie) has been really busy," he said. "It's a big adjustment; she's taking 18 hours to graduate and there are more things to do around the apartment as compared with living in the dorms."

Laurie Chang, a graduate student from Raleigh, is another student who has defied national trends by getting engaged or married while still in school. But Chang, engaged last summer, opted to wait a while before marriage, so that she could finish her education.

"My first priority is to stay in school," she said. In addition, Chang said she wanted to be financially stable, because

money was the source of many marital arguments. Her fiancé attends Georgia Technical University, and she said she still felt like they were just boyfriend and girlfriend.

Long engagements seem to be the most popular marriage option. According to the 1990 U.S. Bureau of Census survey of Marital Status and Living Arrangements, the age at which people are married for the first time has substantially increased in the past 30 years. In 1960, among women between the ages of 20 and 24, only 28 percent had never been married. But in 1990, 63 percent of that age group of women had never been married. Among 20- to 24-year-old men, 53 percent had never been married in 1960. That percentage rose to 79 percent in 1990.

Chuck Burnett, who has a doctoral degree in public health with an emphasis in marriage and family, said the average age for first marriages increased to 27 years old for women and 28 years old for men who have a college degree. For people without a college degree, the age at first marriage is 23 for women and 25 for men, Burnett said.

The average age at first marriage decreased for both men and women from 1890 to 1950, but steadily in-



creased until 1990. According to 1990's statistics, most women get married at 24 and men at 26.

This trend is reflected locally as well. According to the University Registrar's Office, only 5.8 percent of UNC women and 4.9 percent of men were married in 1991. These figures have stayed consistent from year to year, said Joanne Kucharski, assistant registrar.

Sociology professor Ronald Rindfuss said most young people were waiting

longer to get married for a variety of reasons. He attributed getting married later in life to a long-term increase in the number of years of education most people want to achieve. "It's certainly not impossible, but it's difficult to be a student and be married."

Burnett cited the rate of divorce for couples married at the ages 18 to 24 at 36 percent for women and 39 percent for men. "Most divorces occur between the first 10 years," Burnett said. "The longer you stay married, the better chance you have at making it work."

Overcoming and dealing with transitions is a big problem facing young newlyweds, Burnett said. "Changes in jobs, schools and other things all affect the marriage," he said. "The older you get married, the less change you tend to go through and the more stable you are

.... You don't really find your identity until your late 20s."

But there are still those UNC students representing the brave minority that decide to marry at a younger age.

Ginger Meek, a senior from Norlina, announced her engagement in December. She and her fiancé, who is out of school, set the wedding date for next December, so Meek can graduate.

"I've really been struggling with keeping a balance (between school and planning the wedding)," Meek said. "It's hard, because I'm taking a lot of lower-level classes because I transferred, and I've got this wonderful life sitting on go. There's a lot to be done. I always thought I'd be much older when I got married, but when I met (my fiancé) it was so right."

Carmen Icard, a senior from Hudson, has been engaged for a year and a half. Her wedding date is set for June 6, after she graduates. "It's not been bad," she said referring to balancing wedding plans and school. "It's been a lot of fun. I'm looking forward to graduating and having a wedding all at the same time."

Rindfuss also cited an increase in cohabitation and the rising cost of finding affordable and suitable housing as other reasons for young people to postpone marriage.

According to the census survey, out of the 5.7 million partners that lived in unmarried-couple households, 23 percent were under 25. The largest group (41 percent) of unmarried-couple households was in the 25-34 age group.

From 1980 to 1990 the number of unmarried-couple households grew

from 1.6 million to 2.9 million.

Although Burnett knew of no figures to depict the rate of marriage for couples who live together before marriage, he did say that those who live together before marriage have the same chance of sticking together as those people who did not live together. "Cohabitation is typically a path to marriage," he said.

Some of the problems Burnett noted among unmarried couples living together were competition and communication.

"If couples don't communicate well, and the more things there are going on in their individual lives, the more likely they are to have problems," Burnett said.

The notion of competition, the availability of other partners, also drives a rift between unmarried couples living together. "There is no final commitment, so you are aware of other potential partners," he said. "If you're in school, there are going to be more people around which can be seen as potential partners."

"Marriage is still very powerful. Some couples can live together and some can't," he said.

While the odds stacked against any marriage are currently 50/50, Burnett said some studies predict the divorce rate would jump to 60 percent or 65 percent.

However, relationships are founded on trust and love, not statistics. For those of us closet romantics, the saying still rings true, "All you need is love" ... and maybe some aspirin.

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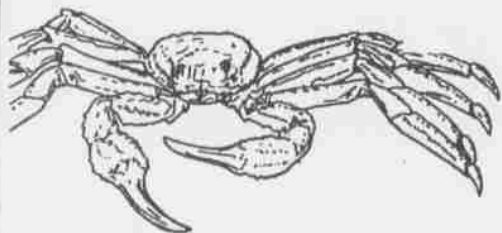
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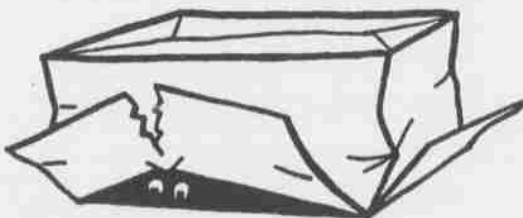
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