

For Millennials, Parenthood Trumps Marriage

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by *Wendy Wang and Paul Taylor*

I. Overview

Millennials and Gen Xers Assess Marriage and Parenthood

% saying each is one of the most important things in their life



Source: Data for Gen X are based on 18- to 29-year-olds from a 1997 Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard Survey, conducted Aug. 14-27, 1997. Data for Millennial are from a Pew Research Center survey conducted Jan. 14-27, 2010.

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Throughout history, marriage and parenthood have been linked milestones on the journey to adulthood. But for the young adults of the Millennial Generation, these social institutions are becoming delinked and differently valued.

Today's 18- to 29-year-olds value parenthood far more than marriage, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of attitudinal surveys.

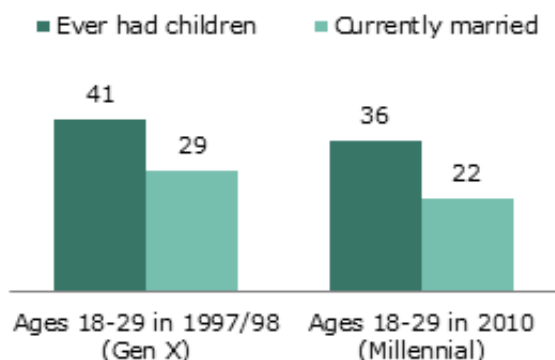
A 2010 Pew Research survey found that 52% of Millennials say being a good parent is "one of the most important things" in life. Just 30% say the same about having a successful marriage—meaning there is a 22 percentage point gap in the way Millennials value parenthood over marriage.

When this same question was posed to 18- to 29-year-olds in 1997, the gap was just 7 percentage points. Back then, 42% of the members of what is known as Generation X said being a good parent was one of the most important things in life, while 35% said the same about having a successful marriage.

Pew Research surveys also find that Millennials are less likely than adults ages 30 and older to say that a child needs a home with both a father and mother to grow up happily and that single parenthood and unmarried couple parenthood are bad for society.

Millennials and Gen Xers: Marital and Parenthood Status

% among 18- to 29-year-olds



Note: % of ever had children is based on women.

Source: Pew Research Center calculations of Current Population Surveys March 2010 and 1997, and June Supplement of CPS, 2010 and 1998, IPUMS.

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In many—but not all—respects, these attitudinal changes mirror behavioral changes. Young adults today are slower to marry than were their counterparts in older generations. Just 22% of Millennials are currently married. Back when Gen Xers were the same age that Millennials are now, some three-in-ten of them were married, as were more than four-in-ten Baby Boomers and more than half of the members of the Silent Generation (ages 65 and older).

The delay in marriage among today's young adults has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the rate of out-of-wedlock births. Just over half (51%) of all births among Millennials in 2008 were to unwed mothers,

compared with just under four-in-ten (39%) among Gen Xers in 1997, when they were the same age that Millennials are now.

However, the overall incidence of parenthood among young adults has declined. In 2010, 36% of women ages 18 to 29 had ever had children; in 1998, that figure was 41%.

Most Millennials Want Both

How Millennials View Marriage and Children

% saying they...

■ Want ■ Not sure ■ Don't want

Do you want to get married?



Do you want to have children?



Note: Based on ages 18-29, unmarried and without children, n=305.

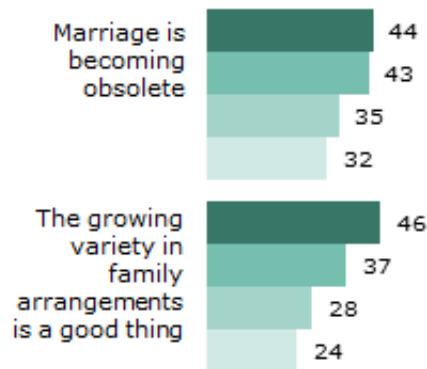
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Even though their generation has been slow to marry and have children, most Millennials look forward to doing both. Among 18- to 29-year-olds who are not currently married and have no children, 70% say they want to marry and 74% say they want to have children. Among those who have never married and have no children, 66% want to marry and 73% want to have children.

How Different Generations View Marriage and Family Structure

% saying...

■ Millennial ■ Gen X ■ Boomer ■ 65+



Note: n=536 for Millennial (ages 18-29), n=729 for Generation X (ages 30-45), n=1,146 for Boomers (ages 46-64), and n=211 for adults ages 65 and older.

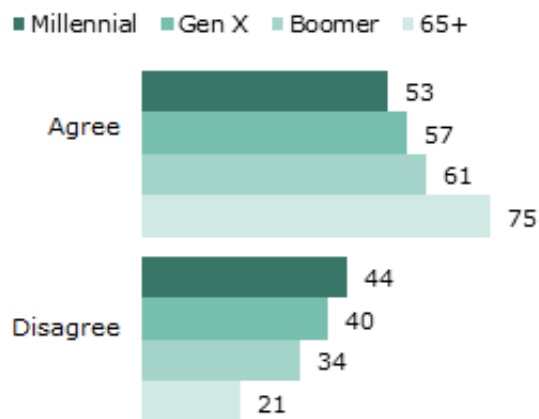
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However, a significant minority of

Millennials aren't sure they want marriage (25%) or parenthood (19%). And a small minority say they don't want to marry (5%) or have children (7%).

Does a Child Need Both a Father and a Mother to Grow Up Happily?

%



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Millennials are less likely than older generations to link marriage with parenthood. About a third of Millennials (34%) think that more unmarried couples raising children is a bad thing for society, compared with 45% of those ages 30 and older. Likewise, about six-in-ten (63%) Millennials think that single motherhood is bad for society, compared with seven-in-ten (71%) adults ages 30 and older. More than four-in-ten (44%) of Millennials say that the institution of marriage is becoming obsolete, compared with 37% of those ages 30 and older.

In addition, Millennials and Gen Xers are less likely than older generations to say that a child needs a home with both a father and a mother present to grow up happily. Only a slim majority of Millennials (53%) and Gen Xers (57%) say this, compared with three-quarters of adults who are 65 years or older.

About the Data

Data for this report mainly come from Pew Research Center surveys and the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys.

Unless otherwise indicated, the report is based on a Pew Research Center nationwide telephone survey of 2,691 adults ages 18 and older, conducted Oct. 1-21, 2010. The number of cases for young adults ages 18-29 is 536. A total of 1,520 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline telephone and 1,171 with those contacted on their cellular phone. Margin of sampling error for results based on the total sample is plus or minus 2.6 percentage points and 5.9 percentage points for adults ages 18-29. Interviews were done in English and Spanish by Princeton Survey Research Associates International.

Data on Millennials and Gen Xers' marital status are from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of March 2010 and 1997. Fertility data are from June supplements of CPS 2010 and 1998 and final birth data for 2008 and 1997, National Vital Statistics Reports.

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II. Comparing Millennials with Gen Xers

Marital and Parental Status among Millennials and Gen Xers at a Similar Life Stage

% among Millennials and Gen Xers

	Millennial	Gen X	Diff.
Marital Status			
Married	22.2	29.1	-6.9
Never married	73.8	65.9	+7.9
Cohabiting*	9.2	5.8	+3.4
% of women ages 18-29 ever had children			
Ever married	67	69	-2
Never married	22	24	-2
Among cohabiting	41	44	-3
% have children and live with own children			
Men	12.6	16.2	-3.6
Women	30.4	35.8	-5.4
Married	60.9	61.4	-0.5
Never married	8.5	9.1	-0.6
Cohabiting	20.2	22.2	-2.0

Source: Pew Research Center calculations of Current Population Surveys March 2010 and 1997, and June Supplement of CPS, 2010 and 1998, IPUMS. Based on adults 18-29 in each year.

*Cohabiting is independent of marital status, someone who lives with a partner could be never married or divorced/widowed. To be consistent in both years, calculations were based on relationship with the household head.

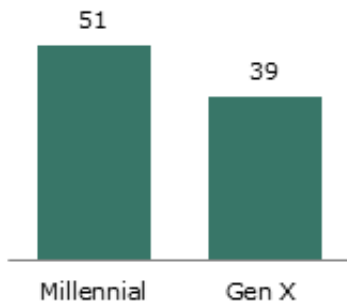
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In 1960, the median age at first marriage in the U.S. was 23 for men and 21 for women; now it is 28 for men and 26 for women. The median age for first-time mothers in 1960 was 22; now it is 24.

As the youngest generation of adults, today's 18-29 year olds are continuing to push the frontiers of these behavioral changes. Indeed, a comparison between Millennials today and Gen Xers back when they were the age Millennials are now shows that a significant degree of change has occurred just in the past decade and a half.

Nonmarital Births among Millennials and Gen Xers

% of nonmarital births among 18- to 29-year-olds



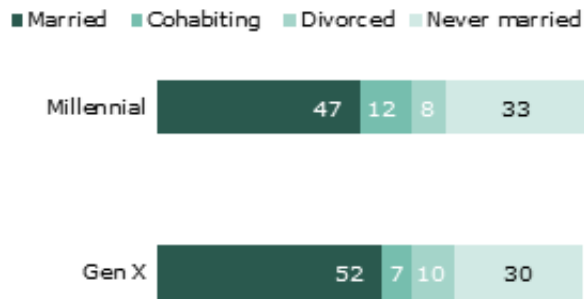
Source: Authors' calculation based on final birth data for 1997 and 2008, National Vital Statistics Reports.

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Only 22% of Millennials are currently married, compared with 29% of Gen Xers in 1997. In the meantime, cohabitation rate (that is, the share of adults who are living together without being married) among 18- to 29-year-olds has increased to 9.2% today, from 5.8% in 1997.

Marital Status of Mothers, Millennials and Gen Xers

% among 18- to 29-year-olds who ever had children



Source: Pew Research Center calculations based on June Supplement of CPS, 2010 and 1998, IPUMS.

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The incidence of

parenthood among young adults has also declined. Just over a quarter of Gen Xers (26%) had children and were living with their children when they were 18 to 29 years old, compared with 21% of Millennials in 2010. Now, as then, there is a sharp gender difference on this measure.

Young men are much less likely than young women to live with their children. In 2010, about 30% of young women had children and lived with their children, compared with only about 13% of young men. The gender gap was similar in 1997, but both shares were higher.

At the same time, today's young women are less likely to be mothers than were young women nearly a decade and a half ago. The share of women ages 18-29 who

have ever had children has declined from 41% in 1998 to 36% in 2010; this decline has occurred regardless of the marital status of the young women.

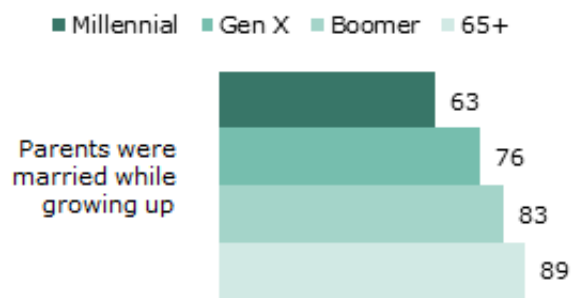
Despite the drop of fertility rate among young adults, the share of nonmarital births has increased. Slightly more than half (51%) of the births among Millennials in 2008 were to unwed mothers. Looking back at Gen Xers about a decade ago in 1997, the rate of birth to unwed mothers was about four-in-ten (39%).

Consistent with these trends, young mothers today are more likely than those in the past to be unmarried. Fewer than half (47%) of Millennial mothers are currently married, about one-in-ten (12%) live with a partner and more than three-in-ten (33%) have never married. In 1998, when Gen Xers mothers were 18 to 29, 52% of them were married, 7% were cohabiting, and 30% had never married.

Family background

Millennials' Family Background

%



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Millennials are less likely than their elders to have grown up in intact families. Asked about their parents' marital status during most of their own childhood, about six-in-ten (63%) of Millennials say that their parents were married, while 20% say their parents were divorced and 12% say their parents were never married to each other. By contrast, 76% of Gen Xers, 83% of Boomers and 89% of Silent Generation adults say their parents were married most of the time they were growing up.

Family Background Matters, but Less to Millennials

% saying each is one of the most important things in their life

■ Parents married ■ Parents not married

Having a successful marriage



Being a good parent



Note: Data for Millennial are from a Pew Research Center survey conducted Jan 14-27, 2010, n=830 for ages 18-29 and n= 351 for ages 30-45. The results for Gen X growing up with parents who were not married is based on small number of cases, n=93.

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Does parental marital status affect one's outlook on marriage and family? To the extent that there are correlations in the survey data, they are more pronounced among Gen Xers than among Millennials.

Among Gen Xers, more than four-in-ten (42%) of those whose parents were married say that having a successful marriage is one of the most important things in life, compared with only 23% of Gen Xers whose parents were not married while they growing up. The gap is 19 percentage points. However, parents' marital status is not strongly correlated with Millennials' views on marriage. For them, the gap is only 5 percentage points. Some 27% of Millennials whose parents were unmarried and 32% of those whose parents were married say having a successful marriage is one of the most important things in their life.

Similarly, about half of Millennials say that being a good parent is one of the most important things in life—and this is the case regardless of their parents' marital status. But for Gen Xers, 54% of those whose parents were married while they were growing up say that being a good parent is one of the most important things in their life, compared with 42% of those with unmarried parents while growing up.

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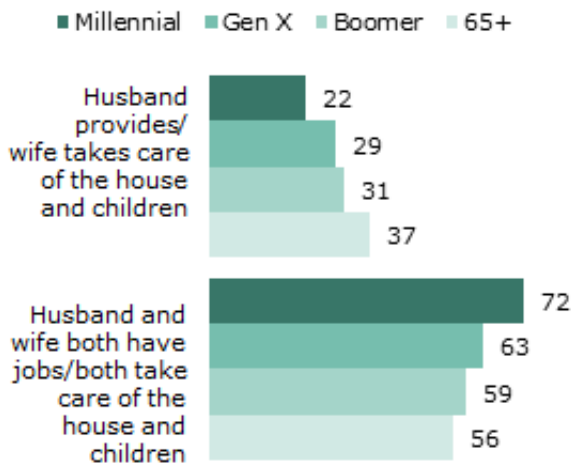
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III. Millennials' Attitudes about Marriage

Ideal Marriage for Millennials

% saying ...



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Asked what kind of marriage leads to the more satisfying way of life, most Millennials (72%) choose the modern egalitarian model (in which the husband and wife both have jobs and both take care of the household and children) over the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker model (22%). Older adults also prefer the modern model, but not by the same lopsided margins.

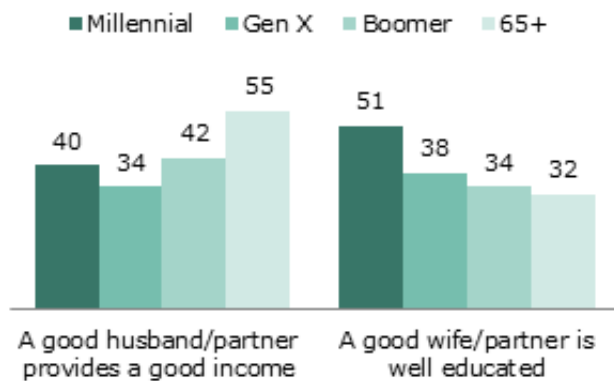
There are gender differences among Millennials on this question; young women are more likely than young men to choose the egalitarian model (78% vs. 67%). There are similar gender gaps

on this question among Boomers and member of the Silent Generation—but not among Gen Xers.

Good Marriage Partner

Spousal Income and Education

% saying this is a "very important" quality



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What makes a good marriage partner? On this question, attitudes are similar across the generations. Being a good parent, being caring and compassionate, and putting one's family before anything else are the top three qualities valued by adults of all ages.

Some generational differences emerge when it comes to rating other qualities. More than half (51%) of Millennials say it is very important for a wife or partner to be well educated, a view shared by fewer than four-in-ten Gen Xers, Boomers and Silent Generation adults. Also,

more than half (55%) of adults 65 and older think it is very important for a good husband/partner to provide a good income, a view shared by just 40% of Millennials and similar shares of Gen Xers and Boomers.

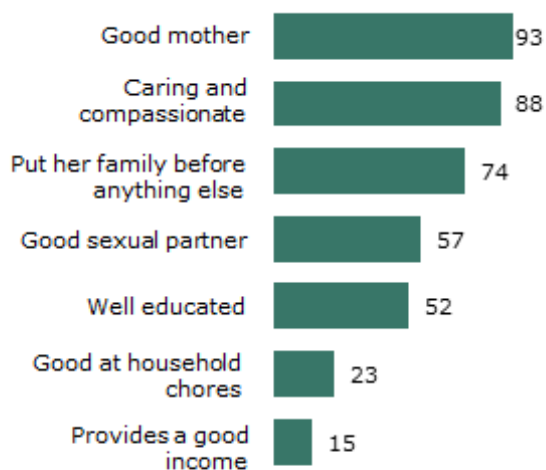
What do Millennial men say about an ideal wife or partner? The top two qualities they value are being a good mother (93%) and being caring and compassionate (88%).

The next is putting her family before anything else (74%). More than half of young men think being a good sexual partner (57%) and being well educated (52%) are very important qualities for a good wife. “Providing a good income” is at the bottom of the list; just 15% of young men think it is very important for a good wife to have that quality.

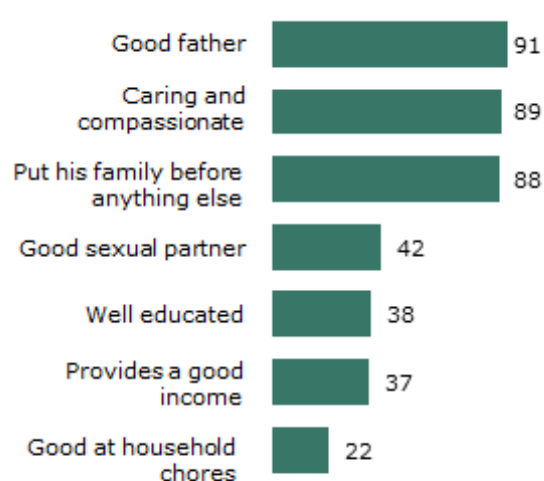
What Makes a Good Wife and a Good Husband? Views from the Opposite Sex

% saying that is a “very important” quality

What young men say about a good wife



What young women say about a good husband



Note: Based on 136 men ages 18-29 and 140 women ages 18-29.

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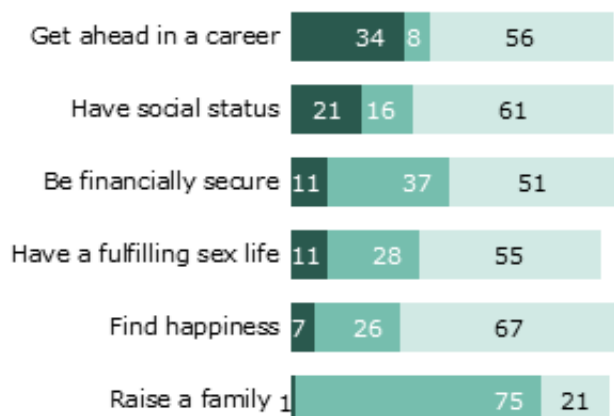
What do Millennial women say about an ideal husband or partner? Compared with young men, young women focus more on the top three qualities: being a good father (91%), being caring and compassionate (89%), and putting his family before anything else (88%). The rest of the qualities tested in the survey, such as being a good sexual partner, being well educated and providing a good income, are not viewed as important. Fewer than half of 18- to 29-year-old women think these are very important qualities for a good husband. “Good at household chores” comes at the bottom of the list, with about one-in-five (22%) of young women saying that it is a very important quality for a good husband or partner.

Being Married vs. Being Single

Single vs. Married? Most Millennials View No Difference

% saying that it is...

■ Easier for Single ■ Easier for Married ■ No difference



Note: Based on ages 18-29, n=536.

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The survey asked respondents to rate whether it is easier for a single person or a married person to achieve six goals in life, such as finding happiness and getting ahead in a career.

On all but one of the goals, a majority of Millennials say that marital status makes no difference. The lone exception comes on attitudes about raising a family; fully 75% say this is easier to do as a married person than as a single person. Just 1% say it is easier to do as a single person.

On the other goals, most Millennials think it doesn't make a difference whether a person is married or single. For example, 67% of Millennials say that happiness is not related to whether you are single or married, and 61% say that social status is irrelevant to marital status.

Among the minority who say marital status does make a difference, married life is seen as being preferable to being single when it comes to being financially secure, having a fulfilling sex life and finding happiness. On the flip side of the coin, the single life is seen as making it easier for someone to get ahead in a career. Also, slightly more Millennials think it is easier for a single person to have social status (21%) than a married person (16%), but this difference is not statistically significant.

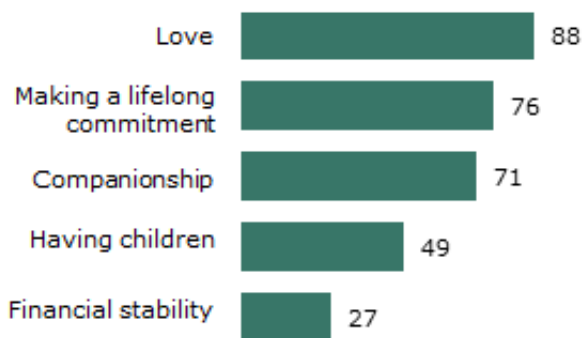
Millennials are more likely than older generations to say that it is easier for a single person to get ahead in a career and have social status, but their assessments are similar to those of older generations in such areas as being financially secure, raising a family and finding happiness.

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Why Marry?

Why Marry?

% saying this is a "very important" reason



Note: Based on ages 18-29, n=536.

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What are the reasons to be married or to get married? From a list of reasons offered in the survey questionnaire, nearly nine-in-ten (88%) young adults say love is very important, followed by making a lifelong commitment (76%) and companionship (71%).

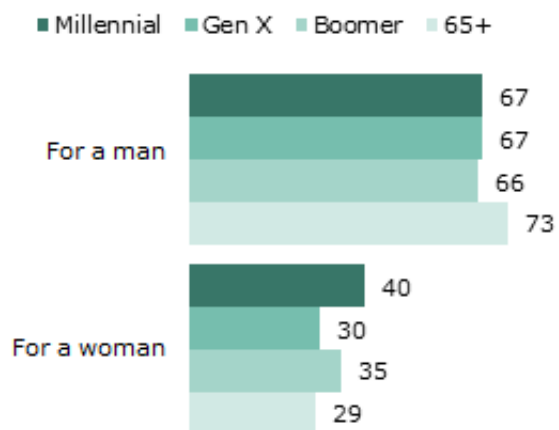
In the ordering of their responses, Millennials are not much different from older generations; nor are married and single Millennials much different from one another.

However, there are some notable differences by generation in the overall value they give to some of the measures. For example, fewer than half (49%) of Millennials say that having children is a very important reason for getting married, and less than three-in-ten (27%) think financial stability is a very important reason. Among adults who are 65 years or older, 60% think that having children is a very important reason for getting married, and four-in-ten (40%) consider financial stability very important.

Which Gender Needs to Be a Provider?

Marriage, Money and Gender

% saying that to be ready for marriage, being able to support a family financially is "very important"



Note: Based on ages 18-29, n=536. Split form sample, Form1 n=259, Form2 n=277.

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Asked how important it is for a man to be able to support a family financially if he wants to get married, 67% of Millennials say it is "very important." But when the same question is asked about a woman, only 40% say it is very important. Young men and women agree on these views.

The view that it is important for a man to be able to support a family financially is shared across all generations. There are small differences between Millennials and older generations on rating women's earning power, although in most cases, they fall short of statistical significance. We do not know what Gen Xers or Boomers thought of this issue when

they were at Millennials' age.

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