



Friendship 2.0

Connecting and Disconnecting in Modern Life
by Andrea Bonior, Ph.D.



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7 Awful Reasons to Get Engaged

The temptation to make the wrong choice may be stronger than you think.

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As your local drugstore bedecks itself with battery-operated reindeer and a cold front sweeps the nation, another yearly ritual happens in American culture: talk of engagements. From over-the-top and nauseating diamond commercials to family gatherings where your martini-wielding Uncle Frank keeps asking when you're going to "settle down," society is full of messages that getting engaged over the holidays is the perfect idea, and indeed, this is the most common time of the year to do it. Might the prevalence of champagne, sparkly lights and well-wishing family be wonderful for the couple who's truly ready to take the plunge? Of course. But others might be pushed into making a commitment they're not ready for. Given that inertia can wield undue power over the decision to get married, here are some commonly felt pressures to consider, but ones that will NOT necessarily lead to happier ever after.

--You're about to turn 35. Or 45. Or 90. Yes, many of us have our lives mapped out and some idea of the point at which we'd like to be married, start a family, or score that corner office. And guidelines are nice, but deciding to get engaged primarily because a certain year is approaching on the calendar is making a move out of fear. If you're motivated to get married mainly by the desire to avoid falling off track, or by some antiquated notion of being "washed up" past a certain age, you're not truly owning your decision, and likely not able to assess the costs and benefits-- not to mention the true attributes your potential spouse brings to the table for the long haul.

--You're afraid you'll lose your partner if you don't commit right now. Once again, acting in order to avoid dealing with something that scares you, instead of embracing something that you know will be great for you, is no way to make arguably the biggest decision of your life. Maybe your partner is hinting heavily that he or she wants to get engaged right away, or maybe there's even been an ultimatum involved. But you must give yourself time to examine your feelings. Are you at risk of committing to something that is too fast-- or too much, just because you happen to love the person you're with? That wouldn't be fair to either of you.

--You've just been asked on a Jumbotron, and you're too embarrassed to say no. In this age of social media, elaborate proposals have been growing by leaps and bounds, with some potential grooms actually consulting wedding planners to plan the proposal itself. Naturally, these spectacles can take on a life of their own, and the social pressures of not rocking the boat is extremely strong in the moment. You might even get caught up yourself, wanting to complete the Facebook-worthy video (surely someone's recording it) in a beautiful exclamation of "Yes!" and a passionate embrace. But if the proposal was submitted to you on paper with no need to respond for 72-hours, would you feel differently? Make sure you give the decision of who to spend your life with at least as much

time and thought as you'd give to whether to buy that car (preferably a lot more.)

--**You're the last remaining single one of your friends.** No doubt it's a tough position to be in, and one that can make you reflect upon your life goals and a timeline for doing so. Someone's got to be last, and you might feel that you are losing all your friends to marriage, which can be a true emotional blow. But that doesn't mean that being in a couple is automatically better than going it alone. Entering into a lifelong commitment with someone who just happens to be the warm body you were dating at the time your last single friend said "I Do" is quite a gamble. Are you convinced that being married to anyone-at-all is better than being alone on a Tuesday night? Talk to any marriage counselor (or some of your friends who have become unhappily married a few years in.)

--**You're dying to plan a wedding.** In this age of Pinterest, there has grown an epidemic of compulsive consumption of lifestyle photos. Maybe you just can't wait to have "Welcome, guests" spelled out in a retro font on a vintage chalkboard; maybe you've already hoarded nineteen photos of the supposedly unique wildflowers you'll have in your bouquet. Maybe-- if you really admit it-- you're more excited for the ring than you are for the guy holding it. You've heard it said before, but it really bears thinking about: the fifty years after the wedding matter infinitely more than the six hours of the event itself. And if your fantasies have more to do with how you'll stage a perfect wedding-kiss photo than who the actual spouse is (whose dirty dishes will be in your sink for the next several decades), you'd better give this some additional thought.

--**Your parents have been pressuring you.** Or maybe it's your coworkers, or your siblings. Maybe you'd love to see your grandparents be able to make it to the wedding, and you worry that it's not just your own clock that is ticking. Maybe you know this will be the icing on the cake to make your parents feel you've really grown up and 'arrived.' But when faced with a decision of such monumental importance, who do you really want to be making the choice for?

--**You've been living together and it just seems like the next logical step.** Research on whether living together before marriage leads to a higher rate of divorce is complicated, and most likely confounded by age and education. And there might be real benefits to living together in a highly committed relationship where both people are on board with equal goals. But if that relationship starts to go awry, think of how hard it can be to extract yourself, even just logistically. Perhaps instead of listening to their doubts and getting some time apart, couples might be prone to sail into marriage instead after a certain time period, because there's nowhere else to go and it's the path of least resistance. It's the next box to check on the ladder of commitment. But it's not like the reason for those doubts will go away just because there's a deejay and a tuxedo involved.

--**You want to have kids soon, and your partner is the default one to have them with.**

Fertility concerns are a significant issue to be aware of, and we do a real disservice to women and men alike when we blast misleading headlines about how "easy" it is for celebrities to get pregnant in their 40s and beyond. Nonetheless, entering into a parenting relationship with someone who's barely "good-enough," and making a lifelong marital commitment to someone primarily because you want them as a biological specimen, when your deep-down, genuine compatibility is lacking for the long-term, can quickly lead to heartbreak. And the possibility of conflict and resentment and regret won't bode well for your child either. If your desire to be a parent is unduly masking problems within your relationship, you'd be better off investigating options of becoming a parent on your own.

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