

# My HeartChart

## The Reluctant Heart

“Why Take the Chance?”

### What’s a Reluctant Heart?

I’m Not the Marrying Kind. That’s the title of an Elvis Presley song but it could be the anthem for anyone with a Reluctant Heart. More than any other segment, this group is cynical about matrimony. In fact, it’s the only segment to lack a desire to wed, probably because their own homes were examples of how not to do it. Not only is their marriage motivation very low, one in five say they never want children. You might even say that this group is scared single. Why? Because they are twice as likely as their peers to say, “Lifelong commitment scares me.” They are also the least likely group to say they expect to be married for life.

When studying the differences between the “marrying kind” and the non-marrying kind, you’ll see that Reluctant Hearts are not only more accepting of divorce, they are more likely to question the very value of marriage. Actress Cameron Diaz, who made headlines by calling marriage a “dying institution,” is a good example. She said: “I don’t think we should live our lives in relationships based off old traditions that don’t suit our world any longer.” Reluctant Hearts are nearly three times more likely than the average person their age to say, “Marriage is conforming to society’s expectations.”

Re-luc-tant/rilektent/

*Adjective: Exhibiting resistance or unwillingness.*

## Reluctant Hearts

- 14% of singles, ages 18 to 30, have “reluctant hearts”
- Are “anti-marriage,” fearing lifelong commitment more than others
- Believe people are better off staying single
- Strongest proponent of cohabitation
- Having children does not appear to influence their decisions to marry or stay married
- Are less suburban and more urban
- Have average education levels and slightly lower income
- Have an average distribution of ethnicity
- This category is made up of 46% men and 54% women



This resistance toward marriage is particularly true in the African American culture. The 1890 Census showed that 80 percent of African-American families were headed by two parents, according to Andrew Billingsley's book, "Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacies of African-American Families." But in 1970, census figures showed that only 57 percent of black men and 54 percent of black women were married. More recently, those numbers had slipped to 42 percent for men and 35 percent for women.

Reluctant Hearts can be found most anywhere. "I think [marriage] vows should be changed," says musician Rod Stewart, "because they've been in existence for 600 years, when people used to live until they were only 35. So they only had to be with each other for 12 years, then they would die anyway. But now, it's a big commitment because you're going to be with someone for 50 years. It's impossible. The vows should be written like a dog's license that has to be renewed every year."

Did you catch that? "It's impossible," he says. Try telling that to the millions and millions of couples who make it work. Even so, that's what the Reluctant Heart believes.

## How Reluctant Hearts Feel about Divorce

Reluctant Hearts are nearly twice as likely as their peers to say that divorce is acceptable in their family. Consequently, they find many reasons for divorce, including falling out of love. That's one reason they are the strongest proponents of cohabitation before, or as a substitute for, marriage.

## What the Reluctant Heart Needs to Know

### Marriage Helps You Become Your Best

*The Times* of London reports that marriage, having been marginalized, weakened, and all but dismissed in some circles, is making a comeback among some young adults who actually see marriage as an act of social revolution. "The idea of marriage being the edgy, adventurous choice is a common theme among the young and newly married," the article states.

Amy Jenkins, a writer, surprised herself by bucking the trend when she married two years ago. She comes from a background where, she says, the line is "I don't believe in marriage." And she subscribed to this idea wholeheartedly until she met the man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with. "A lot of people said, 'Why not just live together?', and I did find that quite a hard question to answer," she says. "I suppose there's an absoluteness about marriage. And I think it is completely different for our generation: all the reasons why marriage was considered restrictive have evaporated, if you're coming at it from the place that we are. So now it's okay ... because it imposes a structure. I actually feel more empowered by being married."

Amy, a Reluctant Heart, came to realize that marriage, even with its "absoluteness," does not mean giving up your identity and independence. Quite the opposite, it helps you become a better, more empowered person.

"Getting married is a way to show family and friends that you have a successful personal life," says Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University and the author of *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. "It's like the ultimate merit badge." That may be true, but it's much more than an





outward symbol to others. Marriage, by its very nature, helps you work on who you are. The mere fact that you are living with someone who has committed themselves to you means you'll be helping each other be better people.

Your experience of seeing other people's marriages falter need not scare you into thinking that marriage is obsolete. Deep down, we all have an intrinsic longing for fulfilling relationships. Marriage offers the ultimate in a committed relationship and provides one of life's greatest adventures.

## You're Not Doomed to Repeat Your Parents' Mistakes

How to Deal is a movie about 17-year-old Halley Martin. Halley is jaded by the dysfunction of those closest to her. Her parents have recently divorced, her unmarried best friend is pregnant, and her sister is engaged to someone she constantly bickers with. As a result, Halley (Mandy Moore) ponders if it is possible to truly love someone.

Having just returned from the wedding of her father and his girlfriend, Halley sits on the porch, drinking tea with her mother. She describes the ceremony for her mother, calling it tacky, and describes her father as a loser.

"Was Dad that much of a loser when you guys got married?"

Her mom offers a gentle rebuke. "Your father is not a loser. But he did choose to look like one at our wedding, too. He insisted on wearing a powder blue tuxedo."

Halley asks, "Well, then, why do people get married anyway? I mean, we know they're lying to each other, but are they lying to themselves too? How can you promise that you're going to feel the same way forever?"

After an extended silence Halley's mom responds, "Sometimes things change."

And, of course, they do. That's life. Nobody promises on the day of his or her marriage to always feel the same way forever. That's not how emotions work. They change. A lot. But for a married couple, their commitment can remain constant even when their feelings vacillate.

Most Reluctant Hearts haven't witnessed that kind of commitment. In fact, they have the lowest incidence of being raised by both partners and the highest incidence of being raised in a single parent household. They are less likely than others to describe their home life as happy and they're far more likely to say it was tense and distant. As a result, they've witnessed more marital mistakes than any other segment. But this doesn't mean they are doomed to do the same thing as their parents. Why? Because research shows that the chances for success improve dramatically when you do two things: match well (see advice to the Restless Heart) and learn the skills that matter most.

What are these skills? Communication is a good place to start. If we know anything about improving

## How Your Home Shaped Your Heart

This group has the lowest incidence of being raised by both parents (just 45%). The majority were raised by single parent households. More than any other group, Reluctant Hearts have grown up seeing poor examples of loving relationships. In describing their home life, they are apt to say it was "distant."





communication skills, it is that you need to put yourself in your partner's shoes. The more you do this, the better you communicate. Conflict resolution is another important skill set. Learning how to fight fair is essential to a lasting marriage. After all, every couple fights on occasion – no matter how good the marriage is. And when you learn how to temporarily set your own agenda aside and accurately hear your partner's perspective, you're taking the first step toward diminishing the conflict between you. Other skills you can learn include money management, impulse control, kindness, adaptability and so on.

Even if you were raised in a family riddled with divorce and dissention, you can break the chain. Some call divorce "the death that keeps dying." But it doesn't have to kill your chances for a great marriage if you are willing to fight for success.

## Leveraging Your Reluctant Heart

- **If you're matched with a Resolute Heart...** you're with someone who fully embraces traditional marriage and sees it as the centerpiece of his or her life. This is a person who is not only highly motivated to be married, but one who is also dedicated to raising a family. They fully expect their marriage to be lifelong. They are "values-driven" and frown upon cohabitation. They also do not see divorce is not an option. And because you could potentially open the door to divorce under certain circumstances, this is likely to be a major point of contention.

**Bottom line?** *This is an unlikely match with you. But if you ever have a radical change of heart, this is a person who will work as hard as anyone to keep your marriage alive and well for lifetime.*

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- **If you're matched with a Rational Heart...** you're with someone who sees marriage in very practical terms. While they are only moderately motivated to be married, this motivation is significantly greater than yours is. On top of that, this person is especially careful about his/her prospects for matrimony. He or she is taking their time and seriously considering how to make the relationship go the distance.

**Bottom line?** *This is also an unlikely match for you. After all, a Rational Heart will likely move in the opposite direction of your reluctance toward marriage. They are serious about matrimony. But if and when you are ever ready, you can likely learn a great deal from this person about the prospects of lifelong love.*

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- **If you're matched with a Romantic Heart...** you're with someone who tends to see marriage through rose-colored glasses. They're looking for the "happily ever after" marriage and are far more highly motivated to marry than you are. They believe there is one person out there for them and that person is going to have to sweep them off their feet. They're looking for a love story of cinematic proportions.

**Bottom line?** *This is an unlikely match for you and one that would be fraught with challenges. At the heart of the tension would be the vast gap between your divergent motivations for marriage.*

- **If you're matched with a Restless Heart...** you're with someone who is not currently motivated to marry – at least for now. They are busy enjoying their freedom from responsibility. They fear that marriage will hem them in and curtail their free spirited lifestyle. Not





only that, they currently have no serious desire to learn the skills they'll need for lifelong love. However, they fear ending up alone ... so much so that they would rather marry the wrong person than not marry at all.

**Bottom line?** *Even though you both share some beliefs, neither one of you is ready for marriage. Since neither of you are motivated to be married, the question of matrimony potential isn't even on the table.*

• **If you're matched with a Reluctant Heart...** you're with someone who shares your "anti-marriage" attitude. You've both likely grown up in homes that did very little to encourage a positive view of marriage. As a result, you both share a cynical perspective about lifelong love. The two of you have the lowest marriage motivation of any segment. Not only do you both fear commitment, you both see divorce as perfectly acceptable when the going gets tough.

**Bottom line?** *While you're a like-minded match, neither of you is ready for marriage. Not now, and in all likelihood, probably not for a long while. But the day may come when the predictions you're making about not wanting to ever be married could change. And if your attitude about marriage ever does shift, you'll definitely want to find a match that's not from this same category.*



## About the Authors

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott are founders and codirectors of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University (SPU), and Leslie is a marriage and family therapist at SPU. The Parrotts are authors of *Real Relationships*, *Dot.com Dating*, *Crazy Good Sex*, *L.O.V.E. Your Time-Starved Marriage*, *Love Talk*, and the Gold Medallion Award-winning *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. The Parrotts have been featured on Oprah, CBS This Morning, CNN, and The View, and in USA Today and the New York Times. They are also frequent guest speakers and have written for a variety of magazines. The Parrott's website, [RealRelationships.com](http://RealRelationships.com), features more than one thousand free video-on-demand pieces answering relationship questions. Les and Leslie live in Seattle, Washington with their two sons.

**For more relationship ideas, check out these resources at [twoofus.org](http://twoofus.org):**

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