



Ready

While some revel in the single life, these students are preparing for lifetime commitments

More than two million people are married in the United States each year, but with hookup culture becoming increasingly popular, the average age for millennials to wed continues to get higher. Only 26 percent of 18 to 33-year-olds are married, according to a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center. For some couples, however, they're wasting no time saying "I do."

Take Nate Halstead and Maggie Van Roekel, for example. The couple met in 2015 during their sophomore year of college. Halstead's roommate at the time

had taken an interest in Van Roekel, but it didn't take long for her to notice Halstead's goofy personality.

"He walked in the room and was wearing a dad vest and no shirt underneath and I was like 'What on earth is this kid doing?'" Van Roekel says. "He was really spazzy and talkative, so I wouldn't say I was interested, but I was more intrigued."

"Oh, you were interested," Halstead jokes.

Halstead and Van Roekel had to work through trials just like most relationships, but because of months spent apart due to

study abroad programs and mission trips, the duo's relationship moved much faster than they both anticipated.

"We had to take a quick start to our relationship and right before I went abroad I thought to myself that I was going to have to decide if I want to pursue this long-term or not," Van Roekel says. "I knew pretty early that I wanted to marry him."

Fast forward to September 2016 and the couple was engaged with a romantic coffee shop proposal. They immediately booked the big ticket items necessary for a



to Wed

BY **LAUREN IVERSON** DESIGN **KALEY LEMPKE** PHOTOGRAPHY **HANNAH OLSON & SANDEEP KUMAR**

wedding, such as the venue, photographer, DJ and various vendors.

"The things that are mandatory to have a wedding we got right away," Van Roekel says.

So what is it really like to plan a wedding in college? Most people would call it an "organized mess" due to tight budgets and a balance between school, part-time jobs and wedding planning. However, it's actually a lot less complex than that. With flexible schedules and free periods throughout the day, more time is available for college students planning their special

day compared to if they were professionals working 40-hour weeks, Van Roekel says.

Though time doesn't seem to be a problem for young lovers, money is. Luckily, supportive parents seem to be the key in affording the hefty costs of throwing a wedding.

"My parents paid for the majority of the wedding and his mom helped a little too," says Laura Schmitt, a junior at Iowa State University. "[Hunter] and I were really blessed, but we did have a really tight budget."

And tight it was. The average American wedding costs just over \$35 thousand, according to a 2016 survey by The Knot. With college loans, living expenses and other money-guzzling circumstances, there is often not much left over for college students to save. With that in mind, Hunter and Laura Schmitt's budget was set at \$5 thousand.

Married in 2016 at the ages of 20 and 22, the couple found ways to cut costs on their big day. Some of these things included forgoing a dance with a DJ, buying all of their food from Costco, reusing a family

friend's wedding decor and simplifying wedding dress visions.

"I bought my wedding dress for 38 dollars and had it tailored for 100 dollars," Laura Schmitt says. "Every girl dreams about her wedding dress and that's one thing I wish I could've splurged on, but it was the first dress I tried on and I liked it enough."

Hunter and Laura Schmitt both say they have no regrets about their saving decisions, and that it's necessary to make compromises when only a limited budget is available.

"At the end of the day I walked away his wife and that was the most important thing," Laura Schmitt says. "I had to keep reminding myself [the wedding] was one day and our marriage will last a lifetime."

On the other side of the spectrum, Trey Achterhoff and Kenzie Mulder's parents, who are also financially supporting their wedding, constantly remind them that they will only be married one time. They say that though it's important to keep a budget in mind, it's also okay to splurge on certain things that will make their experience that much more special.

"There's been a couple of circumstances where we're willing to do something cheaper and our parents have pushed us toward something a little nicer," says Achterhoff, senior at Iowa State University. "Maybe that's something from our college mindset; being willing to save and pitch pennies because we've had to do that as college kids."

With a July 2017 wedding in the works, Achterhoff and Mulder's stressors lay more in the details, such as finding a venue that could support the approximately 300 guests they plan to have.

"The most important thing for us is who's there on the day," Achterhoff says. "We want as many people [at the wedding] as

would want to attend, so our priority is getting people there. We're willing to go cheaper on certain things in order to make that happen."

The venue, a barn-styled building on the outskirts of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, caused anxiety for the duo because they reserved it before ever seeing it.

"We booked our venue 15 months out as a hole in the ground, so there was nothing to look at," says Mulder. "They were building it and we really had to take a leap of faith because it was the last weekend they had available."

Though the venue, dress, and delicate details play a role in each couple's wedding experience, they all agree on one thing-- none of that truly matters. What does matter, however, is the person standing across from you at the altar.

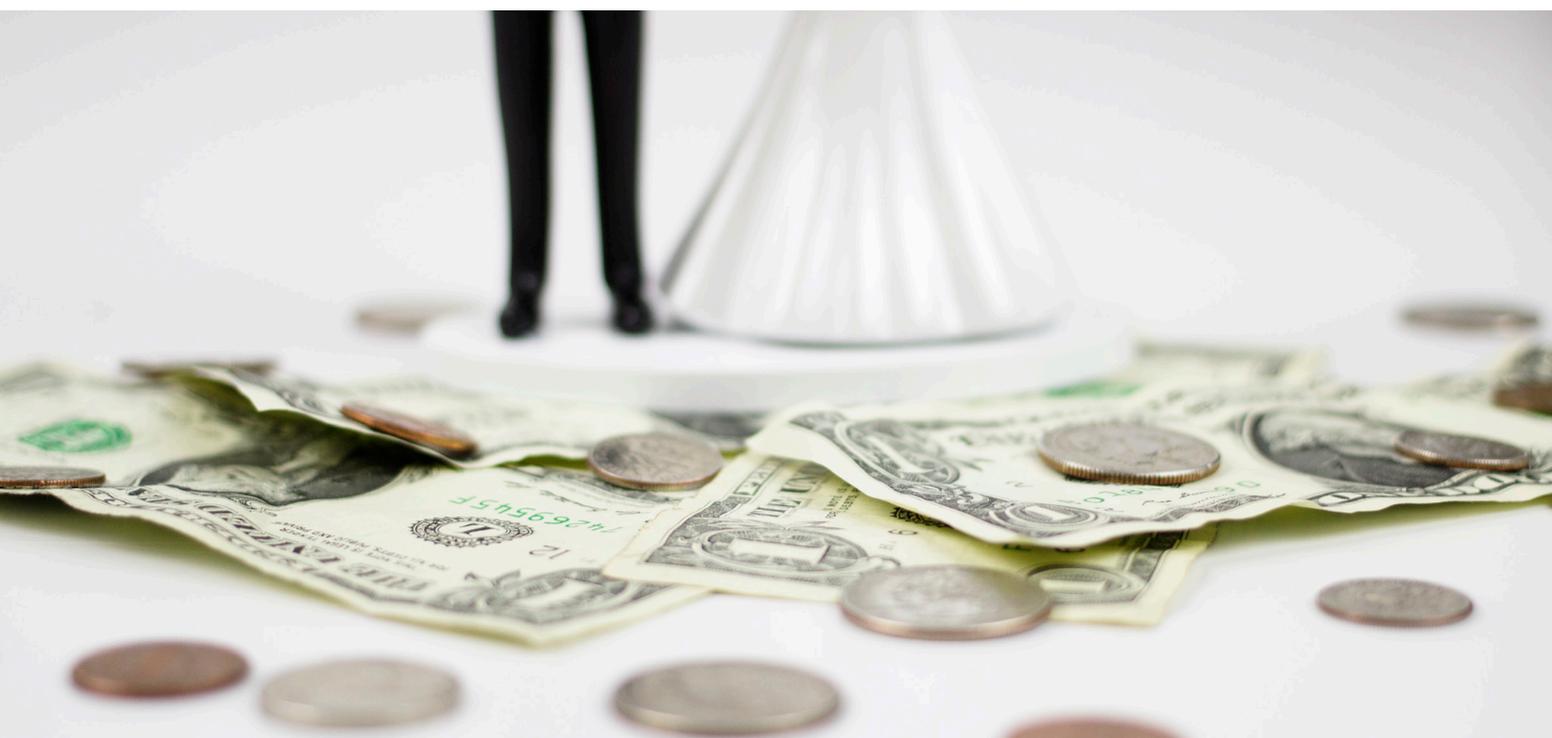
"You have to have someone that you can make that commitment to," Achterhoff says. "It's not always going to be a feeling [of love], but sometimes a choice."

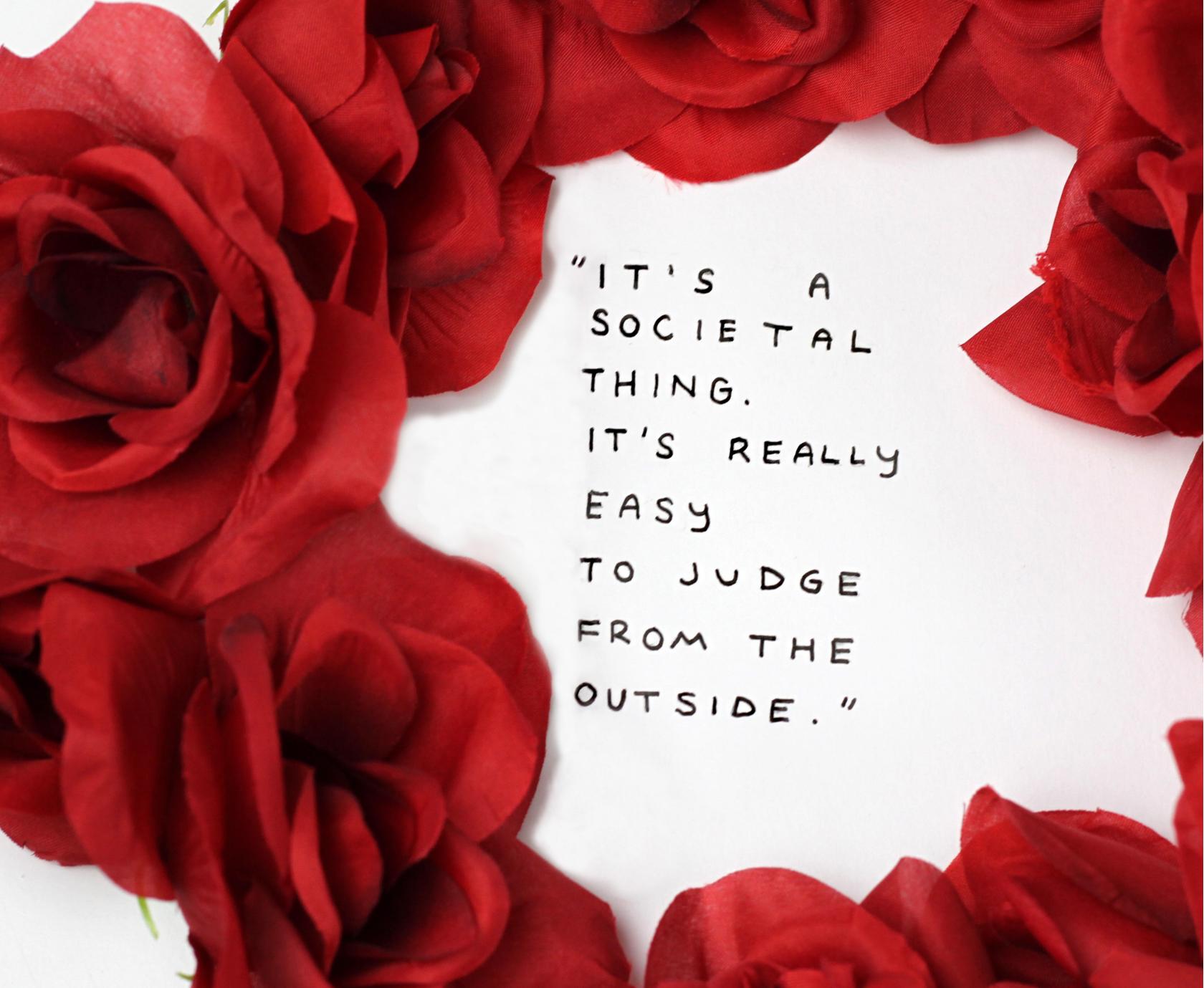
Young love comes hand-in-hand with an abundance of criticism, and many times has people asking "why?" Each couple typically has a routine response to anyone who may express doubt, but ultimately it comes down to the classic cliché-- when you know, you know.

"I had a friend the first month we were dating get engaged young and I was like 'Oh my gosh, what are you doing?!' Van Roekel says, "but it doesn't really make sense unless it's you, and then it couldn't possibly make anymore sense."

Van Roekel and Halstead both expressed that they had no intentions to be engaged during college, but for some, young marriage is what they have always wanted.

"I knew when I was 15 years old and I never doubted it, not for a second," Laura Schmitt says about marrying her husband.





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"It's rare for that. We didn't talk about it with others a lot because we didn't want people to think we were nuts."

Fortunately, Hunter Schmitt was on the exact same page.

"As a junior in high school I thought, 'man, am I ever going to date anyone else,'" Hunter Schmitt says, "but the first girl I dated I loved like crazy, so it wasn't really a concern."

Something that is commonly associated with young marriage is a certain lack of maturity, but it can actually be quite the opposite in many cases. For example, Laura and Hunter Schmitt wanted to get married when she was only 19. While many outsiders viewed them as kids blinded by love, they made it a point to show rather than tell others that they were ready for marriage. This included looking at their financial stability, communication abilities, individual emotional intelligence, and

assuring that their future plans aligned. For them, they saw no need to wait.

"It's a societal thing," Laura Schmitt says. "It's really easy to judge from the outside, so I'm not mad at people who question our marriage."

Another issue many people have with young marriage is the idea that the couple is settling. With divorce rates at nearly 50 percent (according to the American Psychological Association), individuals are taking more time to establish a career as an independent before they decide to tie the knot. However, Van Roekel and Halstead argue that marriage doesn't necessarily mean they lose their independence, but instead they gain a partner to go through life's hardships with.

"This is such a weird transitional stage where everyone is getting ready to move on to the next thing, but the only difference for us is we're getting ready to get married

and move on," Van Roekel says. "If neither one of us wanted to get married then we wouldn't be planning a wedding during college. It's the stage of our lives we're in and we just happen to be in college during it."

Dealing with wedding stressors, negative comments from peers and the entrance into a new stage of life takes its toll on couples, but knowing you will always have that one person's constant encouragement and love makes everything worth it.

"I'm so pumped to see him five, 10, 15 years from now and learn that I love him so much more than I did the five years before. The more we grow and learn things together, the more we're going to love each other and that just constantly continues. There will be hard times, but that means the sweet things will be even more amplified." 