



PEOPLE ARE THINKING **Evi Mustel**

Love? Yes. Marriage? Hmm...

Have we given up on love and marriage? Is it better to have loved, married and even divorced, than to have never married at all? For the first time, there are more single people in Canada (aged 15 years plus) than legally married people according to the 2006 Census. Furthermore, the marriage rate today is less than half the rate since the 1940s.

Clearly, the days of the typical (*Leave It to Beaver*) Cleaver family are behind us as marriage is just not in the cards for the majority. Mustel Group asked a random sample of single B.C. adults "Is being married in the future an important goal for you?" An astonishing majority replied "no" with only 31 per cent aspiring to be married at some point in the future.

Perhaps surprising to some, men place just as much value on marriage as women (33 per cent of men versus 30 per cent of women hope to be married). But interest declines with age; only 9 per cent of those 55 years of age or over hope to be married, in contrast to 55 per cent of those 18–34 years of age. Interestingly enough, those from more affluent households are also more open to the idea of marriage.

What is behind these numbers and trends?

First, living common-law is becoming much more popular and acceptable in today's society. As one of our respondents expressed, "Marriage is just a piece of paper... it is not something my generation focuses on because we are a secular country without a heavy religious influence." The number of common-law-couple families increased more than five times the rate of married-couple families in the latest census.

Second, starting a family, a key trigger to marriage, is increasingly being put on the back burner to pursue careers. The proportion of women in university graduating classes is growing and their participation in the economy becoming more valuable (80 per cent of all new businesses in Canada are started by women).

Even those interested in marriage are waiting longer to do so, men at an average age of 30.6 years and women at the age of 28.5 years. This leaves limited time to build a family, inevitably resulting in smaller family sizes. In B.C., there is an average of only one child per family according to Census 2006. Furthermore, the challenge of finding good quality, affordable childcare discourages many from having ambitious family plans.

Fear of divorce (or another divorce) is also driving this trend. As our respondents comment "Been there, done that." "After the failure of two relationships, I'm very wary of sticking my hand in the blender again." This appears to be one of the many reasons our seniors are leery of tying the knot (including fear of becoming a caregiver for an aging spouse).

In the end does this mean we have given up on the pursuit of love and sanctity of marriage? Probably not with on-line dating services booming, a continued focus on appearance and endless launches of books on relationships. Besides, any research on happiness will tell you that our greatest source of happiness stems from relationships with family and friends. We are simply changing the way we form and express those relationships. **VLM**



Evi Mustel is principal of Mustel Group <mustelgroup.com>, a leading market and opinion research firm in Western Canada.

Is being married an important goal for you?

	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
YES	31%	33%	30%
NO	67%	65%	68%
REFUSED	2%	2%	2%