

PARENTS TALK BACK



Photo by Stephanie Cotta

Professional portraits of newborns are increasingly popular — and can be costly.

Your newborn's glamour shots can cost thousands

Add another item to the pregnancy checklist: Book the glamour shots for your newborn.

It only makes sense for a generation used to displaying their curated and polished life milestones.

You've seen this pictorial story on Facebook: First comes the newly engaged couple sitting in a tree. Then comes the art-directed wedding. Then comes the baby posed in a baby sling.

There may also be professional pregnancy photos and a gender reveal along the way. But the Anne Geddes poster-worthy baby — that's the money shot.

St. Louis-based newborn photographer Stephanie Cotta says she was one of the first to bring the idea of "newborn art" to the city back in 2010, soon after the birth of her first child. She has perfected a series of 17 poses she only uses on babies between four and 14 days old.

"I've worked it down to a science," Cotta said. The photo may involve a bucket, a blanket or beanbag, but it's the wrinkly days-old baby who makes the shot.

Three-month-olds are too late. "When they are that old, they're not as sleepy and not as curly," she said.

Too bad, so sad, punkin.

Moms-to-be start contacting Cotta in their second trimester, because she books six to eight months out. Even if it's too late to get into her schedule, new moms and other aspiring photographers can take her "Newborn Mentoring Workshop," in which she shares the art of newborn posing. The goal is to "capture exactly how little they are in the first few weeks." About 40 percent of the clients taking her workshops are new moms with new cameras.

The camera is the new mirror. But unlike a reflection intended for personal use, this mirror is reflected to the world. It says something semipermanent about you, and a baby has become an extension of that personal brand.

Her clients typically spend between \$800 and \$2,500 for newborn photos.

Cotta wants to create a piece of work that will evoke, decades later, the same emotions as when the baby was born. Now, there may be a tiny bit of whitewashing required. Cotta says she edits and Photoshops all the images, and in some cases, that may involve smoothing baby skin or "addressing color issues." Sometimes newborns get little scratches or baby acne on their faces, but that's easily erased, too.

"Everything else, I leave it as they are," Cotta said.

Not everyone opts for such a stylized representation of those earliest days.

Beth Kerley, mom to a 13-month-old daughter, booked her newborn shoot near the end of her second trimester. But she didn't want the typical baby-in-a-basket shots. She hired a documentary-style baby photographer, who followed them around their house for a few hours, documenting the new parents taking care of their 3-week-old baby.

She caught images of Kerley's husband making a bottle in the kitchen and holding the baby while watching a hockey game on TV.

"We wanted something that captured how we were feeling and what we were doing at that point of our lives," Kerley said. She had no desire to sit in a studio under lights three weeks after a C-section.

While she opted for a more affordable session (\$450), she understands the impulse to overspend.

"Anything associated with babies and weddings, there's a higher price tag because it's a very emotional moment. You're willing to pay more," Kerley said.

She also chose a more low-key, natural look for baby's first professional shoot, but she doesn't judge those who choose a more cultivated option.

She waited until her baby was three weeks old — pushing the edge of that newborn photo shoot window — because she wanted to wait until the umbilical cord stump had fallen out.

Their newborn's bellybutton looked picture-perfect.

But Kerley wouldn't be surprised if the photographer touched it up a bit.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @Aisha.S.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Marriage in America today

Rich-poor gap, later vows, gays gain access

By **DAVID CRARY**
AP National Writer

Does marriage in America need help? What kind of shape is it in? In simplest terms, the diagnosis is mixed.

Among college-educated, relatively affluent couples, marriage is doing pretty well. Where education and income levels are lower, it's often a different story — higher divorce rates; far more children being born out of wedlock, including many to single mothers.

There's broad sentiment that this "marriage gap" is unfortunate, but no consensus on what to do about it. Some believe government-funded marriage-promotion programs can make a difference. Others depict marriage-focused solutions as misguided and say the problems can be eased only by broader economic and social initiatives benefiting all types of households.

"There is no one silver bullet," said David Blankenhorn, head of a centrist think-tank, the Institute for American Values, that focuses much of its work on marriage and families.

Yet despite uncertainty about solutions, he and others believe there is now an opportunity to bridge the left-right split over marriage, particularly in light of the sweeping gains for gay and lesbian couples.

For many years, the gay-marriage debate was intertwined with assertions about "traditional marriage" between a man and a woman. A federal act passed in 1996 and a subsequent wave of amendments adopted in many states used the term "defense of marriage" to deny recognition to same-sex unions. Many opponents of same-sex marriage argued that allowing gays to wed would somehow undermine heterosexual marriage.

Such arguments have fared poorly in recent federal court cases. And there's a strong likelihood that the Supreme Court will order the legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 states in a ruling expected soon. Opinion polls show a solid majority of Americans support it.

"Marriage as culture war in America can now be replaced by marriage as common cause," said a coalition of scholars and civic leaders in their manifesto for a new initiative called Marriage Opportunity.

The group, with Blankenhorn as an organizer, envisions liberals fighting for economic opportunity, conservatives fighting for stronger families and gays who have now won marriage rights for themselves all uniting to confront the marriage gap.



In this June 4 photo from left, the Chudoba family, Chad Chudoba, Isaac Chudoba, Rachel Chudoba and Alexandra Chudoba, spend family time together as they walk through Myriad Gardens in Oklahoma City. Rachel and Chad are graduates of Family Expectations, a program that provides relationship education.

AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki

Scholars who have chronicled the gap say it stems in large measure from the loss of stable, well-paid industrial jobs — consigning many young adults to precarious, low-paid work, and prompting some to put off marriage even while having children out of wedlock.

In contrast, college-educated young adults are more likely to wait until marriage to have children and then have the prospect of raising them in a household supported by two good incomes.

According to the Pew Research Center, the share of American adults who've never married is at a historic high. In 2012, 20 percent of adults 25 and older had never been married, compared to 9 percent of adults in 1960. Back then, according to Pew, the likelihood of being married didn't vary according to level of education; now men with advanced degrees are far more likely to have married than those who didn't go beyond high school.

Another striking figure: Unmarried mothers account for 40.6 percent of children born in the U.S., according to recent Census data. In the African-American community, the rate is 71.5 percent.

Tera Jordan, a professor of human development at Iowa State University, has studied

various aspects of marriage and relationships among black Americans.

She sees a need for multiple changes — more access to good-paying jobs, better educational opportunities, a lowering of the incarceration rate for young black men. Her advice to young adults wondering about marriage: "Be clear about your goals, be patient. Finish your education."

Before moving to Iowa, Jordan worked with a federally funded marriage-strengthening program in Georgia. In all, according to experts who study the field, more than \$1 billion in public funding has been spent since 2005 on such programs, yet their effectiveness remains subject to debate.

The largest, most durable state-level program is the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, recently renamed Project Relate. Since its launch in 1999, it has served more than 400,000 Oklahomans — about 10 percent of the population.

One of its primary programs, Family Expectations, entails 30 hours of classes for low-income expectant parents who want to strengthen their relationships. Independent assessments found that couples taking the program are more likely to stay together than other couples.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Tiny guests move into swinging home

Spring is the time for new beginnings, and one of the most ubiquitous signs of spring is nesting birds. They build their homes in a variety of places: trees, under the eaves of roofs, and even in houses provided by helpful humans. But one set of parenting birds in 1990 built their home in a most precarious place — on top of a wind chime.

Arnold and Arlene Schiller first noticed the pair of Rufous hummingbirds fluttering around the porch of their home on Southwest Hailey Avenue in Pendleton in early June. The



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

nest, built of spider webs and grass, was perched on the top of the wind chime, where it swung freely in the breeze. "That nest must be on there pretty good because the wind blows

it around like crazy. They must like the swinging," said Arnold.

Usually, hummingbirds are a frenzy of activity, flying upward, downward, backward

and forward on wings that beat more than 70 times per second. On June 22, 1990, the female hummingbird was firmly planted on the nest, which the Schillers said contained two or three navy bean-sized eggs. Bill Jacobson, biology instructor at Blue Mountain Community College, said the birds sometimes will have two broods, each with one to three eggs, which hatch after a 20-day brooding cycle. Rufous hummingbirds, which usually breed and nest in the forest or on brushy slopes, winter in the southwest as far as south central Mexico.

The Schillers said they hadn't changed their lifestyle much since the arrival of their tiny guests. They put up a feeder, and they didn't let kids come up on the porch. And, of course, they kept the cats away.

"They really are a lot of company," said Arlene. "They will fly up and look through the window at us."

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Report of plane crash actually monster truck's bath time

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (AP) — Ambulances, law enforcement officers and several emergency responders rushed to a property in southwest Missouri upon receiving a report of a possible plane crash.

Instead, they found a man washing his jet-powered semi — named "Shockwave" — on Monday afternoon.

Owner Neal Darnell's new neighbors called 911 after hearing the loud noise and seeing smoke over their tree line.

Darnell said he recently raced the vehicle, which can reach 376 miles per hour, on a dirt course so it needed to be washed on Monday, the *Springfield News-Leader* reported. To wash the 36,000-horsepower truck, Darnell has to use its jet engines, which causes a lot of noise and white smoke.

"We do it from time to time and it will usually generate a couple of 911 calls, but today for some reason it brought out a whole army of emergency vehicles," Darnell said. He also said he doesn't blame the neighbors for being concerned.

A Greene County sheriff's deputy told the newspaper that no citations were issued and that the 911 callers had acted in good faith because they believed someone might be in danger.



The semi-trailer known as Shockwave is parked in Springfield, Mo., June 8. The truck is powered by three jet engines producing 36,000 horse power.

Nathan Papes/The Springfield News-Leader via AP

Darnell said he takes Shockwave to truck shows across the country, where it does things like setting stacks of cars on fire or racing fighter planes.

Does free ping pong in parks stop crime?

SEATTLE (AP) — The city of Seattle is wondering if free ping pong in its parks may help stop crime.

KING-TV reports that the city's experiment with a free ping pong table seems to be making a difference.

A ping pong table was installed at Hing Hay Park in Chinatown four years ago. Since then, crime data from the Seattle Police Department suggests

incidents in the area seem to be going down, although there have been ups and downs. There were 46 crime incidents in the area in 2009 and 16 in 2014.

No one is willing to draw a direct connection between the ping pong table and the crime statistics, but the city has installed four other tables since then. Officials believe the positive community activity could be crowding out crime.

Police: Man baked potato, raked leaves during break-in

HOBBS, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico man is facing charges after police say he

walked into an unlocked home, stole car keys and stunned a resident who found him baking a potato and raking leaves.

Patrick Lynn Waits, 45, was arrested early Tuesday following a bizarre chain of events that confused residents of a Hobbs home, the *Hobbs News-Sun* reports.

A female resident awoke to noise in her kitchen, and found Waits allegedly wiping down a countertop and baking a potato in her microwave oven, police said. "She asked him what he was doing there, and he told her he was making a potato," according to a police report.

When told to leave, a criminal complaint says Waits walked outside and left his potato in the microwave.

The report said Waits then went outside to rake leaves in the front yard.

The female resident convinced Waits to stay by saying she wanted to pay him for his service, police said. The move was apparently a ploy to get Waits to stay long enough before authorities arrived, police said.

Waits was found stumbling while walking, and he slurred when he talked, officials said.

Waits was arrested on burglary and unlawful entry charges. He also faces several felony warrants for failure to appear in court.

It was not known if Waits had an attorney.