

The Token Man

TWO THEORIES ABOUT men like me in our late twenties and early thirties try to explain why we're getting married ten or more years later than our fathers did (if we do at all). The theory of twentysomething malaise states that since we're not all millionaires with plush suburban homes like our sixty-year-old parents, we are too poor to get married. The other theory, held by single women, is that we are all so selfish that we can't bear the idea of commitment. Both theories are false.

I realized this one Sunday morning visiting my friend Henry, who with some pals had rented a beach house in West Hampton. We were all reading the *New York Times* with great interest. The sports pages? "Week in Review"? No. We successful Manhattan twenty- and thirty-somethings were sitting around piningly reading the marriage announcements.

The men I know are dying to get married; they just don't know how. Let me recommend the Orthodox route. It overturns at least one of the two roadblocks to modern marriage.

THOUGH I GREW up a secular Jew, over the past ten years I've evolved into an Orthodox one. The transition took so long because it was hard to give up habits learned from birth. One of the habits I have had to get used to is Orthodox dating.

According to my previous way of thinking, dating meant the process of taking women out for dinners, movies, etc., in order to lure them into bed. Only afterwards did you consider thinking about talking about thinking about living together. Such a relationship could last



But Can She Make a Nice *Kuggel?*

David Klinghoffer
suggests the modern
bachelor learn dating
techniques from
Orthodox Jews

anywhere from two hours to five years. A guy I know claims to have read that the typical man throughout history has had to get to know some four hundred women, sexually or casually (or both), before settling on his life's love. If every woman a modern man dates counts as one of those four hundred, it's going to take him a while to find his wife.

Orthodox men prefer a more streamlined approach because: 1) they consider marriage the sole way to join, as a rabbi I know puts it, "the company of civilized men"; and 2) thanks to some really inconvenient commandments from that arch-

spoilsport, God, they can't have premarital sex or even, if you want to be strict about it, touch a woman to whom they're not married. Anyone with a sex drive running on a full tank of gas had better get married, fast.

So what you do is date the way my father and grandfather did. By the end of no more than five dates, if you find that you are physically attracted to a woman but unwilling to marry her, you break it off. And so you proceed through your four hundred at a clip. This sounds coldhearted, and it requires discipline of a kind I am still trying to perfect, but it works.

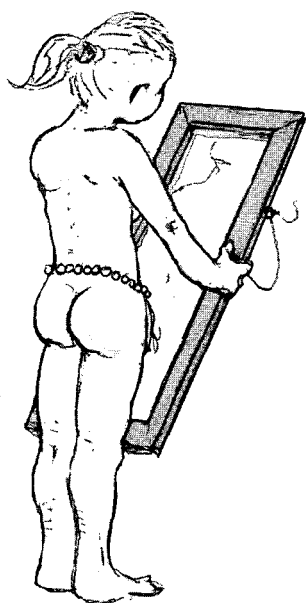
Or should work. As you may have guessed, I am not yet married. The reason for this says as much about modern women and men as about me. For as I mentioned, there is another barrier blocking the way to modern marriage. It is that I'm not sure modern women want families as much as men do. How can you get married or, at any rate, how can you be a mother if you are pursuing a career as aggressively as your husband? At the same time, an ambitious man would feel vaguely ashamed to marry a woman who is not similarly ambitious.

Alas, the Orthodox dating method cannot resolve this conflict. It may be that, as a male friend who's a Reform Jew keeps telling me, I want something impossible in my wife: a man's mind and a woman's soul. If he's right, I guess I would rather marry a woman's mind and a woman's soul than what he is probably going to end up with: a man's mind with a man's soul.

David Klinghoffer is literary editor of National Review.

Why Your Daughter Wants Her Navel Pierced

Olivia Vlahos
can explain it,
if you can't



NOT TOO LONG ago, CNN news explored a new sort of beauty treatment. I watched as a blonde young woman, her hair fashionably frizzed, submitted her bare midriff to a branding knife.

A branding knife! The usually unflappable CNN reporter could not repress a gasp at the hiss of searing flesh. From the brandee — Marylou or Betty Sue, something like that — not a sound. She was, after all, being beautified, her body redesigned, decorated to reflect the tastes of a generation bored with the tattoo. As for the pain — so what? A small price to pay for chic.

I was suddenly reminded of a similar scene caught by the camera in Central Africa some thirty years ago. It was featured in a documentary film which my anthropology students used to watch. Entitled *Bakuba*, the film described life among a people imbued, as the narrator put it, with “a passion for decoration.” Their unique geometric designs, related to their sacred king, were applied to wooden sculpture, to beadwork, to raffia mats, and to the human skin.

Riveted with horror, my students watched the Kuba artist (whose services were not cheap) cut typical designs on her client's bare back, stanching the blood flow with ordinary dirt. Some shuddered involuntarily. Some squealed. Not a few refused outright to watch. Never mind that the woman being beautified neither flinched nor cried out. Never mind that the results of countless previous operations marched in elegant, bumpy scars over her body from neck to pubic region. “Barbaric!” was invariably the verdict of the class. “How could a person do something like that?” they demanded.

But here on my television screen

were young women not unlike my students, children of today's affluent, up-to-date, technologically with-it culture, submitting to beauty treatments no less disfiguring, no less “barbaric” than those of the Kuba. And, in a society so afraid of pain that dentists routinely offer tranquilizers to patients fearful of an ordinary cleaning, here were pain seekers courting the sensations of a severe burn — and paying for the privilege.

WELL, WHY NOT? That has to be the response of anyone who takes the long view of human experience. The urge to redesign, retool, complete what nature has bestowed, to advertise on the body the wishes of the soul or the conventions of society has been as much a marker of our species as the urge to speak.

The use of paint by early humans can be traced in archaeological sites dating back 400,000 years or more. And since the paints in question often appear as roughly shaped “crayons,” much rubbed on one end, we can assume that they were probably applied to the only surface readily available at the time: the human skin. No painted rocks of similar antiquity exist to tell us otherwise.

What prompted those ancient ancestors of ours to paint themselves? Who can explain the origin of their body art? One might begin by imagining the sort of world they inhabited. It was a world dominated by animals larger and more powerful than the puny, scurrying humans who feasted on the kills of great beasts. Would not these clever, watchful beings seek to distinguish themselves from — elevate themselves over — their predators and sometime prey?

Drawings by Charles Jaffe