

The Token Man

BEFORE THERE WAS *The Rules*, there were the rules. Once upon a time, women didn't have to buy books to find out what they were. Their mothers (and their fathers, too) taught them. Fortunately, many of these women are still to be found. And for the youngish man who desires a break from dealing with his own generation's poor imitation and wants a taste of the real thing, they are worth seeking out. I am talking, of course, about older women.

Discussion of the entire subject of younger men and older women is one burdened with "Mrs. Robinson" stereotypes, not to mention the Oedipal baggage. (Though interestingly, the same seems not to hold true in continental Europe, where the idea of an older woman initiating a younger man into sex is considered positively civilized.) It's also true that there are not a few first-generation feminists around who have found themselves involuntarily consigned to the First Wives Club and are not at all pleasant to be near.

But from my own personal experience, and that of a surprising number of men I know, women in their forties and fifties who were raised before the age of women's liberation have a certain something that younger men find very attractive. In fact, if a woman of today's generation really wants to know the secret of snagging a man, she could do worse than to put that popular book down and take a look at how an old pro gets the job done.

First, let's dispel a few stereotypes. The two older women with whom I have been involved had successful careers. One owned her own business and the other was an advertising sales manager. These were not the classic bored suburban housewives looking for a thrill. By the same token, the man who finds himself being pulled toward a relationship with an older woman may indeed be having problems with women of his own age, but that might not necessarily be his own fault.



And Here's to You, Mrs. Robinson

John A. Barnes
praises older women

It's an unfortunate fact that younger men just starting out in life frequently aren't attractive to women of their peer group. The more educated and professional the woman, the more pronounced this problem becomes. Such women often have their sights set on much bigger game. The young female associate at the law firm has little incentive to date a male associate when the high rate of divorce among successful older men puts a partner easily within reach. Why risk struggling to build a life with a younger man when you can have it all immediately? Needless to say, the overwhelming majority of these would-be trophy wives end up disappointed, but they spend so long in the hunt that by the time they hit their mid-thirties, it's hardly surprising that so many become

angry and resentful—and consequently, unattractive.

Older women, by contrast, usually have a sense of perspective that these younger women lack. Their jobs are important to them, but they often have grown children of their own to remind them that work and career are not the be-all and end-all of existence. Unlike so many younger single women, the older woman is not relentlessly focused on her own needs and her own career to the exclusion of everything else. But most important, older women just plain like and appreciate men in a way younger women seem not to do. The older women I know, even those who have been through traumatic divorces, do not attribute the faults and foibles of their former husbands to the entire species. They tend to see men as individuals rather than as members of a group, as complementary to women rather than hostile competitors to be tolerated at best and scorned at worst.

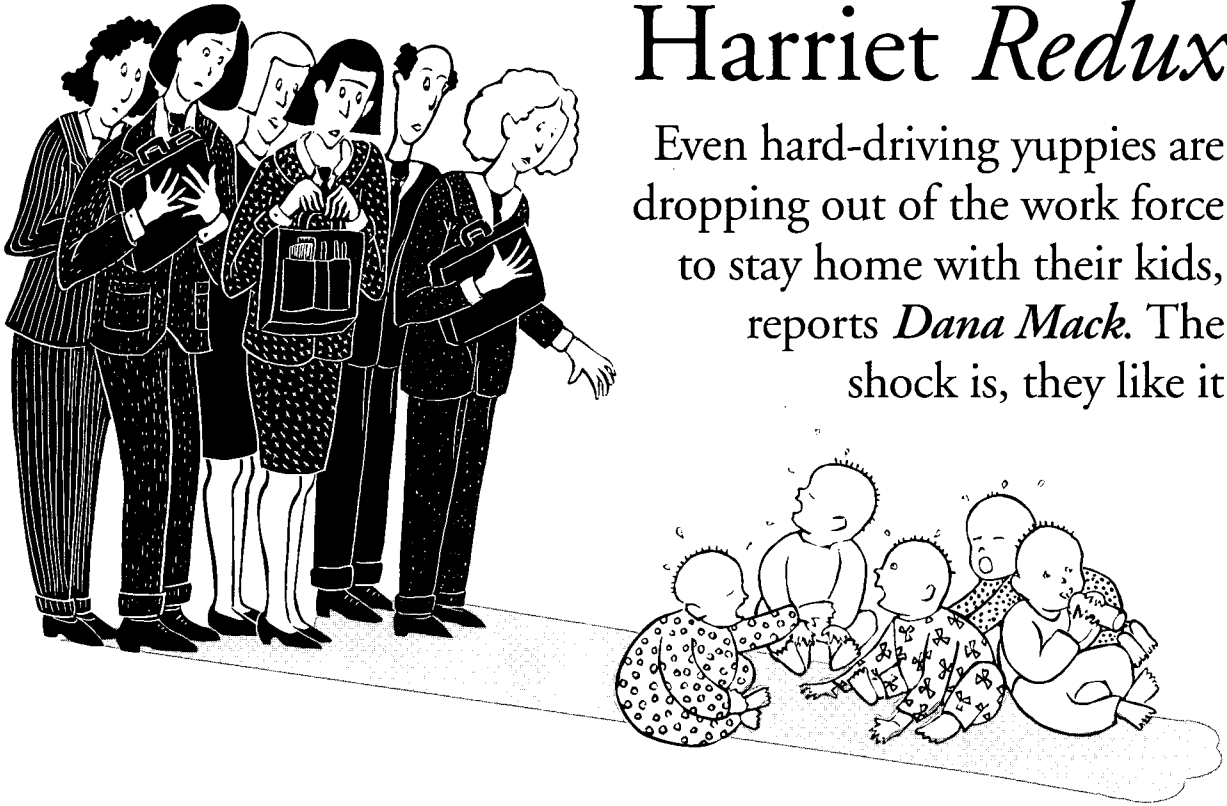
Older women also see relationships as a two-way street. They inquire after you and your well-being in a much more sincere and caring manner than many of their younger counterparts. Older women also bring a perspective to sexual matters that younger women often lack. The twenty-something woman who dragged me to see *The Bridges of Madison County*, which celebrates an adulterous affair, was weeping buckets of tears by the final credits. Many older women whom I consulted were repelled by the way Meryl Streep's character treated her faithful, if pedestrian, husband. Adultery, as many of them knew from experience, invariably ends in tears of a very different sort.

So you can shell out good money for *The Rules* if you want to, ladies. Or you can have a long chat with your mother about how she snagged your dad. ●

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Ozzie and Harriet *Redux*

Even hard-driving yuppies are dropping out of the work force to stay home with their kids, reports *Dana Mack*. The shock is, they like it



AS PART OF a fourth-grade assignment, my daughter was asked to interview one of her parents about his or her job. She chose to interview my husband whose job, by many people's standards, is considered unusual: he is a house-husband. I was not present for their conversations but I was amused to read in my daughter's finished report that my husband experiences "high job satisfaction," and that what he "likes best about his work" is the growing number of male and female colleagues: at-home parents.

The National Center for Fathering notes that the total number of at-home dads with working wives came to 3,385,000 in 1991, and that twenty percent of preschoolers that year were in "father care"—a jump of five per-

cent since 1986. This is not necessarily because the dads are unemployed or laid off. A new survey on the guys once deprecatingly referred to as "Mr. Mom" was released in 1996 by DePaul University's Robert Frank and Roosevelt University's Michael Helford. The survey focused on 371 men who spent at least thirty hours per week taking care of their children. Most were home by choice. A father from Georgia who quit his job as a teacher to stay home with his kids explained that neither he nor his wife liked "having to take the kids to day care every day and hearing second-hand what new progress they had made." Another father, an electrical engineer, said, "I quit my ... job eighteen months ago and haven't looked back.... [W]e had a seventeen-year-

old daughter, a five-year-old son, and a six-month-old son we had adopted. The baby was in day care. My wife made more than sixty percent of the household income. More than half of my share went to day care and before and after care. What's wrong with this picture?"

These dads are joining the increasing numbers of that other non-traditional parent—the driven career woman—who are quitting their jobs to be with their kids, only to discover that not only is it worth the sacrifice, but they actually find it more satisfying than going to the office. Of the 350 at-home mothers interviewed by Darcie Sanders and Martha B. Mullen for their 1992 book *Staying Home*, many identified "being my own boss" as among the principal ben-