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Could a return to old-fashioned
courtship solve some of
today's **DATING** dilemmas?

BY SARAH TRELEAVEN

there has been a lot of buzz lately about Adelle Waldman's 2013 novel, *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.*—in particular for how the book expertly captures the current state of dating. It's the story of how nice guy Nate, a consummate bachelor and Brooklyn hipster, sleeps with a plethora of women in the absence of any obligation to make a commitment. It's what has been described as "the scourge of indecisive men." He is content to enjoy ▷

OLIVIA FRUJUCH (MODELS); GEOFFREY ROSS (HEARTS)



and marrying young? Can these approaches help us navigate the modern dating world? Or is it too late to go back?

FOLLOW DATING RULES The 1960s sparked decades of increasingly liberated sex—but some women would prefer to impose a little order on their romantic lives. Fein and Schneider updated their advice in 2013, publishing *Not Your Mother's Rules*, to include advice on texting, sexting and Facebook use. The key to their play-hard-to-get philosophy is for women to remain aloof and allow the man (always the man) to pursue. They argue that women can do this by never initiating contact, refusing a date unless given sufficient notice and declining sex before commitment.

Several other rule-based dating approaches have popped up in the past few years. Recent studies indicating that couples who live together before clearly discussing marriage are more likely to divorce have sparked a chorus discouraging pre-engagement-ring shacking up. (It's that proverbial "cow-milk-free" chestnut.)

Sara Eckel's book *It's Not You: 27 (Wrong) Reasons You're Single*, published in January, explores the idea that women are single because they're doing something wrong—whether it's being too arrogant or having low self-esteem. In other words, if you can just figure out which rules you've been unwittingly breaking, true love will come waltzing into your life.

Eckel initially bought into the idea that she couldn't find love because she was commitment-phobic. She got a dog to prove otherwise. She also took acting lessons to improve her poise. "I went to one party and tried to act confident," she says. "The guy I was talking to was clearly annoyed." (She went home alone.)

Eckel abandoned the nagging voice that told her she was the problem and started giving in to the things that made her happier and healthier. When she met her now husband, she was guided by one key rule: Wait for the right guy.

Many women might take issue with the idea that following a set of generic rules can make

anyone more lovable—or the idea that life's endgame is to snag a husband. But Schneider says that the bottom line is about dating with "self-esteem and boundaries."

HIRE A MATCHMAKER The idea behind matchmaking is simple: Finding true love isn't about throwing a bunch of phone numbers against a wall to see what sticks. The basic role of matchmakers has remained unchanged for centuries—but the contemporary matchmaking industry has a very high-profile spokesperson in Stanger, whose show is now in its seventh season. Further evidence that the industry has started to pick up was provided by eHarmony in December, when the company announced a new premium service: For \$5,000, you can get a personal counsellor to help sift through all those online profiles and approach all those prospective dates.

The anonymity of the Internet, and the uncertainty surrounding intentions or even basic identity, can drive daters to more personalized services where they expect real results. In the words of Edmonton-based matchmaker Krystal Walter: "Someone isn't going to pay me thousands of dollars just to get laid on a Friday night."

Matchmaking is getting back to basics, and there's a reason it has been around for centuries, explains Vancouver-based matchmaker Jane Carstens. "When we look for a house, we use a real-estate agent because we don't want to see every house on the market," she says. "That's what a matchmaker does too: We pre-screen and show you the guys that fit."

But there is another good reason. Sitting through an assessment—which can include multiple home visits and interviews with friends and family—can help someone better understand their relationship priorities. Sofi Papamarko, whose Friend of a Friend Matchmaking service is based in Toronto, has developed a professional mantra, borrowed from a client's mother: Everyone thinks that they have a type until they fall in love. "Keeping an open mind is key," explains Papamarko.

One of Papamarko's clients, Jodi (who declined to provide her last name), decided to try matchmaking after unsuccessfully dating online for years. "I loved the idea of someone taking the time to get to know me and do the work for me," she says. Jodi, who lives in Toronto, >

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is now happily dating a match and says her experience taught her the value of third-party help.

Paying for the services of a matchmaker—which can get pricey very quickly depending on the level of intensity—isn't for everyone, but that doesn't mean you can't apply some of the core wisdom: Ask for help when it comes to looking for love, and use your network just like you might if you were looking for a job or an apartment.

CONSIDER AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE This option might sound extreme, but it does have a fair share of advocates. Many have found the low divorce rates of arranged marriages—typically in the single digits—intriguing enough to merit further investigation. Nandini Krishnan's 2013 book, *Hitched: The Modern Woman and Arranged Marriage*, explores the idea that an ancient tradition can be updated. (The modern twist on arranged marriage involves the fanning out of family networks to find options that a prospective bride is free to reject.) And Nell Freudenberger's 2012 novel, *The Newlyweds*,

follows a couple who marry for practical instead of magical reasons.

Toronto journalist Reva Seth got engaged to her husband on their seventh date—but she insists it wasn't quite as whirlwind as it sounds. Seth, 37, made a “marriage must” list where she detailed her essentials in a mate. She wanted someone who had travelled, who was politically engaged and who has a sister. “Once I made that list, I knew what I wanted,” she says. “I also knew when I found it.”

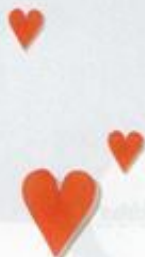
Arranged marriage tends to be exactly that pragmatic. Krishnan says that both parties are encouraged to immediately lay all their cards on the table. “Do you both want children? Where will you live? These are questions that might pop up in other relationships after three or four years.”

For Seth, part of the problem is that most people don't put enough effort into knowing what they really want in a partner. “We typically put more effort into researching car insurance than into thinking about what we want in a relationship,” says Seth. “It can be very uncomfortable to think about these things in a culture where we're constantly told that love conquers all. But then you just slide into relationships with people and it's hard to get out, even when they don't meet your needs.”

Seth subsequently published a book in 2008—*First Comes Marriage: Modern Relationship Advice From the Wisdom of Arranged Marriages*—and she believes that a lot of modern relationships collapse under the pressure of finding a soulmate. “But with arranged marriage, you go into it with reasonable expectations and you're matched with someone because they can meet those expectations.”

Arranged marriage is clearly not for everyone, but there is one key lesson that can be drawn: Know what you want out of a relationship before getting into one.

GET MARRIED YOUNG There have always been references to young women pursuing higher education's “MRS degree.” (Although those are starting to wane, no doubt, as the average age for first marriages for both men and women continues to climb.) In a letter last March to *The Daily Princetonian*, Susan A. Patton—since dubbed the “Princeton Mom”—urged undergraduate Ivy League women to hurry up and >



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pick from the crop of high-quality men in their immediate orbit, something the divorcee wishes she had done. "Forget about having it all, or not having it all, leaning in or leaning out," she wrote. "Find a husband on campus before you graduate." Patton, a Princeton alum with two sons at the school, generated both a book deal (due to publish this spring) and a lot of controversy. Responding in *New York Magazine*, Maureen O'Connor was one of many women who balked: "[She's] pushing women—and women alone—to define themselves by their spouses."

In another recent take on rejecting the never-ending dating smorgasbord, Karen Swallow Prior, a professor at Liberty University in Virginia, wrote an essay for *The Atlantic* on why women shouldn't write off the option of marrying young. Prior married her husband when she was 19, and she claims the strong sense of stability actually allowed her greater focus on both school and her career.

"It's about approaching marriage as a cornerstone," Prior told me. "Our culture tends to see marriage as something one does after going to college, having a successful career and buying a first home; it's the last item on a list of accomplishments." This modern model encourages individuals to seek out partners who have complementary (and increasingly specific) resumes—which may help explain the prevalent idea that we're all getting pickier. Prior suggests an alternative where you pick a partner earlier and start building a foundation together. "Rather than coming together as highly defined individuals, you're actually shaping each other through those rites of passage."

Lori Gottlieb, author of *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough*, believes you shouldn't hold out for romantic fate to deliver someone perfect. Gottlieb claims that we've been conditioned to focus on superficial qualities like height instead of key character issues like reliability, generosity and kind-heartedness. "People assume that because they both like rollerblading and sushi, they're going to have the same ideas about things like trust, marriage and money," she says.

Marrying young might not be on your radar—or it might be an option already firmly in the past. Still, whittling your "wants" into a more substantial, less superficial list will help—as will trying to recognize a good thing as soon as you've got one.

SLOW THINGS DOWN While many women yearn to slow down the increasingly rapid pace of courtship, it's impossible to turn back the clock entirely. "We now live at a completely different pace, and you have to meet a lot of people before you find the right one," says psychologist McCance.

And while there is no one-size-fits-all prescription when it comes to love, there are lessons that can be gleaned. The old-fashioned options listed above offer cross-currents of sensible advice—even if you don't want to take them to their more radical conclusions. So if you're looking for long-term love, figure out what you want for yourself and in a partner, draw up some reasonable boundaries for getting there and don't be afraid to ask for help. (Best-friend matchmakers typically only demand payment in the form of an occasional milkshake.) "Take an honest look at yourself and ask if what you're doing is working," says Carstens, the Vancouver matchmaker.

Eckel advises women to relax and not sweat perfection or agonize over ways to become more lovable. Of both herself and her flawed, now-happily-coupled friends, she writes: "We have gray hairs and unfashionable clothes and bad attitudes. [Our partners] love us anyway." □