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Focus: The new language of love

Dating and mating for over-35s

Mergers, acquisitions, takeover bids... that's the vocabulary as would-be wives take a business approach to relationships, report Paul Harris in New York and David Smith in London

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High heels clicking, designer handbags at the ready, the women walk purposefully into the lecture room. They are a varied cross-section of New York's well-to-do Upper East Siders, from the glamorous blonde in her figure-hugging skirt to the woman in her sixties taking a seat near the front. All are united by one thing: they are here to find a husband. And they believe Rachel Greenwald can help them.

Greenwald is the hottest thing to hit America's dating scene since *Sex and the City*. She is a slick graduate of the elite Harvard Business School who believes the ruthless rules of commerce can be applied to the hunt for a mate. Out go roses, chocolates and eyes meeting across a crowded room. In come 'branding' and 'marketing'. Romance may not be dead inside this room, but it certainly seems to have gone corporate.

Greenwald is promoting her book, *Find a Husband After 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School*. Promising to 'teach you a simple proven 15-step program to find a wonderful husband', the book roared into the bestseller lists last week, and Greenwald has even sold the movie rights. Now she is doing the rounds with the talk-show hosts.

She will arrive in Britain in January when the UK edition is published. Curiously, its title will be rounded down by five years to become *The Program: How To Find a Husband After Thirty*. Tara Lawrence, editor of the British edition for Time Warner Books, explained: 'We went for 30 because it has more resonance for people here. In the States they don't bother with big 30th birthday parties, but in Britain the age has impact, especially for women.'

She said the book was distinct from the self-help guides that have flooded the shelves in recent years. 'Rachel Greenwald has a direct and bold way of talking to the readers, balanced with humour. It's absolutely practical on how you can create opportunities to do something about being single.'

Government projections suggest half of British women aged between 30 and 44 will never have been married by 2021, compared to 13 per cent in 1981.

Those who are bothered by that may wish to heed Greenwald's message that a Thatcherite devotion to market principles is the key to finding a husband. The 15 steps include advice on how women can 'package' themselves as a desirable product and shop around for a suitable 'buyer'. There are also sections on 'guerrilla marketing' and recruiting an 'assistant' to provide support.

Greenwald's tactics include telemarketing, or ringing everyone in your address book to ask if they know of any potential partners. She also advocates 'auditing' and conducting 'exit interviews' -

getting a third party to contact unsuccessful dates for feedback. She insists that around 70 per cent of men, if asked, will be candid.

Greenwald, a married woman who lives in Colorado with her three children, argues: 'If you were searching for a job, you would devote enormous time and effort to finding the right one. If you wanted to lose weight, you'd abide by the required sacrifices and rules. The Program is like a combination job search and strict diet: there are commitments, sacrifices and rules involved.'

At the 92nd Street Y, a prestigious New York lecture hall that has played host to Presidents and royalty, Greenwald is in full flow. For the Observer correspondent, trying to sit unobtrusively at the back, it is an unnerving experience. These women are about to get a three-hour lesson in how to devote yourself to one task: snaring a husband. Even in America, where dating is a national sport, Greenwald is brutally upfront and honest. She promises a mate within one year to 18 months. All it takes is iron discipline and the will to carry it out.

The figures she quotes tell a grim story. In America today there are 18 million single men over 35 - but 28 million single woman in that age bracket. She rapidly dispels the last lingering sense of romance from the room. 'This book is not about the fairy tale. It is the realisation of being a woman and single and taking matters into your own hands.'

Her book is written in the style and language of countless management guides that litter American bookshelves. She consciously avoids any analysis as to why people may be single, focusing instead on making sure they do not remain so. 'It doesn't matter why you are single. It matters what you are going to do about it,' she said.

She cuts an elegant figure in black trousers and a fashionable jacket. She looks every inch the serious and successful businesswoman she is. She admits that, once her lectures are over, only about half of those present usually feel they can commit to The Program. 'Are you willing to do things that are illegal or immoral?' she asks. The audience laughs nervously. Greenwald is only half joking. 'There are some tactics that will make you feel uncomfortable,' she adds.

The first big intake of breath comes when she talks about spending money. Lots of money. 'It does cost money to find a husband,' she says. Greenwald says those following her method must create a separate 'find a husband' bank account. She recommends putting 10 per cent, or perhaps even 20 per cent, of total income into it. This will pay for new clothes, gifts, a hairdo, a computer for internet dating... the list is endless. It is at this point that many in the audience seem to grasp how big a commitment Greenwald is asking for. Suddenly a 50 per cent dropout rate after the seminar looks about right.

Marketing is Step One of The Program. This involves maximising any chance to meet men. It means cancelling subscriptions to newspapers so that you have to go and read them in public. It means never staying in when you can go out (that's where the 'find a husband' budget will help). It means joining evening classes (and signing up for fly-fishing, not cookery). 'I don't know where your husband is, but I know he is not at your home,' Greenwald said.

Greenwald gets angry when she is accused of making women look 'desperate' for a mate. She says that it is chauvinistic to refer to her tactics in that manner. She is being honest and empowering women to go and get what they want. There is nothing wrong in wanting a husband, and therefore there is nothing wrong with going about it in the most efficient and effective way. 'I want to eradicate the word "desperate" from the dictionary,' she said.

The steps continue. Step Three involves finding a 'mentor', a friend who will be honest in an appraisal of how things are going. Step Four is about improving the packaging. Step Five is about

branding. 'A woman without a brand is like a pair of designer jeans without a label,' Greenwald tells her audience. She talks about successful brands like Coca-Cola and FedEx.

Then she asks about effective human brands. What do you think when you hear the word Mother Teresa? 'Saintly,' come several replies before one woman pipes up: 'She was single.'

There is a burst of laughter. 'Only in this room could Mother Teresa's brand be seen as being single,' Greenwald said.

After a break, the steps continue, including a 'quarterly review' of progress made in the previous three months. Found a husband yet? No, then change tactics and improve your performance.

Greenwald met her own husband when she was 28, but says she was already using The Program to find a mate. 'I was precocious. I knew I didn't want to be single after 35, so I planned ahead,' she said. She had concentrated on her branding, had found a mentor and was maximising any chance to meet members of the opposite sex. She found Brad at a 'Program Party' in Boston that she had organised and asked all her invitees to bring unattached friends. They were married a few years later.

As the lecture ends and the women disappear back into the Manhattan night, they depart with the knowledge they think they need. They certainly depart with the dream that out there - somewhere - another Brad is waiting. They just need to develop a business strategy to find him.

15 steps to a profitable husband

- 1** Marketing focus: make sure you really want to find a husband.
- 2** Marketing support: seek the help of a best friend.
- 3** Packaging: improve your appearance and always look your best.
- 4** Market expansion: hunt for a man in as many places as possible.
- 5** Branding: show what makes you stand out from the crowd.
- 6** Advertising: Ask anyone if they know of a possible date.
- 7** Online marketing: use an online dating service.
- 8** Guerrilla marketing: get out of the daily grind.
- 9** Niche marketing: ask your married friends if they know any suitable men.
- 10** Telemarketing: call everyone you know and ask about possible dates.
- 11** Mass marketing: think of everywhere you might meet men and try them all each week.
- 12** Event marketing: throw a party and invite single men and friends who can bring some.
- 13** Product life cycle: if it's not working, take a break to recharge your batteries.
- 14** Quarterly performance review: take a hard look at why you're still single.

15 Exit strategy: how to decide if you are going to dump him or marry him.