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A businesslike proposal for single women

By Angela Manfredi, Special to The Palm Beach Post
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Apparently, there's an epidemic I don't know about. The Palm Beach County Health Department has not held a press conference addressing this crisis, and I have yet to receive any automated city-sponsored telephone messages alerting me to the potential dangers of this insidious social situation.

And yet, as I examine the staggering statistics connected to this quandary, I realize that *I am right smack-dab in the middle of the whole mess!*

All because I am a single, over-35-year-old woman.

If you think I'm kidding about the crisis part, allow me to present Exhibit A, the ultimate "single woman looking for a man" manual: *Find a Husband After 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School*, by Rachel Greenwald, happily married Harvard MBA with a bachelor's in psychology from Wellesley.

My first thought upon hearing the book's title: It sounds like an item on a to-do list.

1. Pick up dry cleaning.
2. Buy kitty litter.
3. Find a husband. (Let's see. Should that come before or after "Freeze my Eggs" -- an unprompted suggestion made by a friend on my 36th birthday?)

Then I lamented: "Why, why is the age thing repeatedly rearing its highlighted head? Have we learned nothing from Demi Moore?!"

Well, according to the numbers, as we get older and our hips get bigger, the "man pool" gets smaller. (Crazy coincidence or cosmic conspiracy? You decide...)

Greenwald points out that there are 28 million single women over age 35, compared with 18 million men. (So, if this book works, what happens to the 10 million "leftover" women? But I digress, I've got bigger fish to catch -- I mean, fry.) And this "problem" is getting worse, with the number of never-married women doubling since 1970!

Greenwald identified the "meeting marry-able men" challenge through conversations with professionally successful women who were not able to tout parallel achievements in

their quest for quality companionship. So, in seminars and consultations, she applied the Granddaddy of All Marketing Strategies: that which she learned at Harvard Business School.

From those experiences, her book was born.

Now, ladies, a word of warning: Greenwald's approach to finding a husband is not for the faint of heart. It's a bride-to-be boot camp that requires focus. Don't believe me? Feast your eyes on this passage:

"Let me be clear. This is not a program for the uncommitted. At times, you will feel that this plan requires too much effort and is too contrived. But reading this book is like dialing Marriage 911. It's an emergency." (And all this time I thought dialing "Marriage 911" would get me a double stuffed pizza and a case of Häagen-Dazs delivered by a bare-chested fireman.)

As for the "contrived" part? Greenwald contends that's not a liability.

"It's a strategic plan," she said in a recent telephone interview, "like any business plan for a start-up company. It's well-thought-out. It's smart. It's a rational, logical approach to a challenge. It's not a set of tricks or games. I use the term *proactive*. Just do it. It works!"

"Hmmm," I mutter as I drum my ring-free fingers on the desk. Should we really be drawing a parallel between business and romance? I mean, we've always been told, "When you're not looking, that's when it will happen."

"I hate that!" Greenwald exclaims. "Nothing drives me crazier than the notion that when you stop looking, and just go about your life doing what you love, it will just happen. You could end up waiting forever, and it's extremely frustrating that you have to wait for something to drop out of the sky instead of having control over the situation. At some point, you have to say, 'My life is passing me by.' Life is short. Seize the day!"

Or in this case, seize the guy!

To do that, Greenwald has formulated a 12-to-18-month "strict and bold" technique known simply as The Program. It's a 15-step action plan that includes picking a program mentor, sourcing female friends for leads and creating a "Husband Search" bank account to be used for self-improvement expenses such as a gym membership, makeup, clothes, a new hairstyle and plenty of push-up bras. According to the book, this takes care of one of the most important aspects in marketing strategy: packaging.

As Greenwald writes: "This is simply how you look on the outside: your wrapping paper. I wish I could tell you that it's your inner self that really counts -- and later in a relationship, it is what counts most -- but the truth is that how you look makes all the difference in getting noticed in the beginning. Now the good news: You don't have to be beautiful or have a perfect body to attract men, but you should look your personal best."

(A further note on that "Husband Search" account: Rachel refers to this cash cache as "investment spending," which could also be used to buy a computer for online dating or for moving expenses in order to be more geographically desirable. See, I told you she means business.)

OK, class, let's move on to another step in The Program: Market expansion, also known as casting a wider net. This process encourages singles to be flexible and not to get locked into looking for a certain "type." Greenwald recounts the experience of one of her clients, 47-year-old Julie, a Wall Street executive whose past dating choices precluded all but her male counterparts: successful, Jewish, investment banker sorts. But, alas, Julie never fell in love.

Then she started The Program and began thinking more broadly about what type of man she might be drawn to. One day she went to return a broken cellphone at Radio Shack and asked to see the manager. When the manager came over to ask how he could help her, she looked right in the eyes of her future husband. She actually married the Radio Shack manager 12 months later! He wasn't Jewish, he certainly wasn't the Wall Street type that all her former boyfriends had been, and he was nine years younger than she was. But this guy was a gem, and she fell madly in love with him. He connected with her on an emotional level in a way no one else ever had. He loved her so much that he later converted to Judaism. She has never been happier; they adopted their first child last month.

This is indeed a lovely story. My congratulations go out to Julie and her new husband and her new cellphone... but what if there's not a Radio Shack in the neighborhood?

Aha! Greenwald covers that in Step 12, the step through which she met her own husband: The Program Party. First, decide on a theme, such as a sports or paint-a-room party, or for the cultured crowd, perhaps a classical music celebration. Create a guest list that includes friends, friends of friends, friends of friends of friends... you get the idea. Keep the ratio at 60 percent men and 40 percent women. This, Rachel says, will ensure that the single men have a good time while still exposing your brand to women who are better matchmakers.

Your brand? Yes, that's right, you read correctly. Branding, according to Greenwald, is a key component in the man plan.

A "personal brand" is what makes you different from everyone else. It is a set of distinguishing features and characteristics that will make you stand out in a crowd and render you memorable. And, says Greenwald, in a sea of 28 million single women, you need to be noticed. "It's not the best attributes," she says. "It's those qualities which make us unique and will make us stand out favorably."

Essentially, *How to Find a Husband After 35* offers marriage-minded women an antidote to their severe single-itis and insight into the male thinking patterns for which the marketing techniques are tailored... a "know your audience" approach. Now, if you're one

of those "I'll never change my style for a man, he needs to love me just the way I am" type of women, stop reading here. Among Rachel's revelations: Most men prefer a feminine appearance, which means longer hair or soft layers around the face, and figure-flattering fabrics. And, by the way, Rachel advises that low-cut tops and high-cut skirts will garner only a one-night stand and not the brass ring (or any ring for that matter). To verify this, I ran it by my single friend, Marc (Broad-Shoulders, Warm-Hearted, Financial Expert). "Absolutely right," he agreed. "Someone who shows too much skin will not be coming home to meet my mother."

Although there's no regular feedback mechanism to track the results of The Program, Greenwald keeps a pile of all the success stories she gets, "whether it's getting married or going on a bearable blind date. That pile is 3 1/2 feet high!"

And Greenwald reminds us that women aren't the only ones straining to hear the chime of wedding bells.

"Hundreds of men have contacted me through my columns and seminars. They want to know how they can find a wife. The Program is gender-neutral and will work as long as the commitment is there."

As for what Greenwald wants out of all of this... After the media appearances and script consulting for a movie based on her book, she wants to get ample use out of her favorite flowing party dress.

"I just hope to be going to a lot of weddings."

Angela Manfredi lives in Delray Beach.