

'Men can't be chased. It's biology'

In 1995, a book laid down the rules to find Mr Right. Now updated for the digital era, Tim Teeman asks if they still work

Every diet book could be reduced to "eat less rubbish and exercise", then the feverish pages of infamous dating book *The Rules: The Heart of Mr Right* could be condensed to its intended straight female audience thus: "Never pursue, be pursued."

Its thirtysomething authors, Sherrie Schneider and Ellen Fein, taught a generation of women to lie in the bath before a date intoning "I am a beautiful creature unlike any other", then not to return the man's calls. Some two million women in 27 countries bought their advice.

But that was 1995, and this is now, the era of Facebook, texting and naked photo messages that dissolve in seconds. What could Schneider and Fein possibly have to say to this generation? The answers are detailed in *The New Rules: The Dating Do's and Don'ts for the Digital Generation*. The new rules contain such advice as not to put it all "out there" on social media ("like walking around naked"), with videos of you having sex ending up online, and not to respond to late night calls, texts or "booty calls" ("We don't answer the phone after 10.30pm,"

Schneider says). Do place an online dating ad — but then wait for it to be answered. Never answer ads. "Women can chase apartments and jobs, but not men. It's biology," says Fein, now 55. Every chapter comes with a plethora of capital letters: Don't Sext or Send a Guy Anything You Wouldn't Want Him To Have If You Broke Up; Stay Away From His Facebook Profile.

After four e-mails if he hasn't asked you out, forget it. Don't text first. Age governs how quickly you reply to texts: a 20-year-old should leave it an hour, a 50-year-old four hours. Never see him more than three times a week. "Rules girls always have things to do. It's not anti-feminist, or trickery, you're just in control," says Schneider, who at 53 still has long, glossy brown hair, tight jeans and is a UK size 8. She works out every day and hasn't had surgery or Botox: "I drink lots of water."

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Schneider and I meet at a Bloomingdale's store in New Jersey where she meets clients, "high-powered women" who spend \$350 (£220) an hour, or \$1,500 for a package makeover of hair, wardrobe and advice. "They're upset, they haven't had a boyfriend for years or haven't been proposed to. We tell them they should look like they have a fabulous life." Schneider and Fein have seen about 1,000 clients and claim a 100 per cent success rate. "Work can only make you so happy," Schneider claims. "Women want to be fulfilled by a partner and children. Take that away and they're devastated."

While she and Fein "believe in equality in the workplace, men and women are different romantically". Their advice was old-fashioned even in the Nineties — the germ of *The Rules* came to Fein and Schneider via a friend's grandmother, and they followed it themselves. "Ellen played hard to get with her husband and so did I," says Schneider, who dated "around 50 men, five seriously, sleeping with a handful", before she married her husband 18 years ago. A week before her husband proposed he asked about the book she was writing and "almost fell off his chair" when she told him about *The Rules*, but "totally agrees with it", she adds. He was a "player" and she walked away when they first met. He went after her, then "it went like clockwork". He calls her "ten times a day", which apparently isn't tiresome.

"I would like women to be able to ask men out, but the reality is very different," Schneider says. "We never thought feminism meant being able to chase a guy. We thought it was equal pay. Our strength is quiet and powerful: it doesn't come from being aggressive, but from managing relationships." It hasn't been as smooth for Fein. She divorced her first husband — "it was abandonment," in 2000 after 16 years of marriage; she has a daughter aged 21 ("She grew up naturally doing *The Rules*") and a 25-year-old son. In 2008 she remarried. "We grew apart, it doesn't disprove *The Rules*," Fein says of her divorce. "I moved on pretty quickly. My second husband (Lance) knew about *The Rules*. I did them on him. He thought it was cute and funny."

"We have a lot of clients who are divorced and we help them to re-marry," says Schneider brightly. "You can be married, then want a different kind of husband. You may want a mover and shaker at 25 and a soulmate at 40."

But whatever age their client, she will be advised to have long, straight hair. This rule is immune to fashion. Quite simply, men like straight hair. They don't like curly. "And if a man doesn't like your look, he'll leave you for a girl whose look he does like," Fein says.



Authors Sherrie Schneider, left, and Ellen Fein

What if a woman likes her short or curly hair? "If a woman does what she wants — whether talking to a guy or eating a piece of cake — it is the antithesis of discipline," Schneider says. "Many women are doing what they want and failing miserably, having one-night stands and so on. That's fine if you want short-term gratification..." Her frown ends the sentence.

She and Fein must hate Lena Dunham's drama *Girls*, featuring a group of twenty-something Brooklyn women in vintage dresses having rubbish sex. "They think they have all the time in the world," says Schneider. "You'll sleep with guys, get hurt, but you won't lose fertility years. In your thirties it's suicide to do that."

"They break every Rule," Fein roared. "I saw one character chasing — not for — and then having sex with a guy who didn't respect her. It was like watching a funeral." Schneider's 16-year-old daughter knows *The Rules* "instinctively", she says.

Fein says that if *The Rules* became a TV show "it would be very boring; go to school, work, see friends, have dinner, don't drink too much or jump into bed with someone. This isn't *Girls* or *Sex and the City*. respect yourself, respect your body." She has pinpointed *The Rules*' best resonance. "You can sleep with a guy on a first date, but afterwards don't ask 'Am I gonna hear from you?' Leave him alone," advises Schneider. "Clinginess does damage." Ideally, when should you sleep with him? "After three months. If you're 17, wait a year. You want him to fall in love with your soul." Never accept business cards, says Fein, you might be tempted to call him: "They must take your number." Men call when they are ready, Schneider says.

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Do's & don'ts

Do not respond to late night calls, texts or "booty calls" (don't answer the phone after 10.30pm)

Do place an online dating ad but never answer a man's ad

Don't "sext" or send a guy anything you wouldn't want him to have if you broke up

After four e-mails, if he hasn't asked you out, forget it

Don't text first

If you are 20, leave it an hour to reply to a text. If you're 50, leave it four hours

Do not put it all "out there" on social media

Never see him more than three times a week

Never accept a business card. They must take your number

Never go Dutch. He should take you out

You can't get a guy by chasing him

It doesn't seem *Rules*-woman exercises much agency. "Ellen and I are feminists," Schneider insists. "We started our own company. The problem is women think they can do in the romantic arena what they do in a corporate arena. Women go on dates and ask men their astrological sign, his five-year plan, 'here's my phone number and e-mail', tell him about past relationships, losing a job: the date becomes therapy. We're not saying, 'Be brainless', just talk less. Men will marry the girl who doesn't give them the time of day."

What's feminist about insisting on short skirts and busty tops? "We know what works with men," says Schneider, with a shrug. "Oh, never go Dutch. Even if he has no money and you have a mansion he should take you out for pizza." If you're suppressing the real you, that's not good. "By the time the guy proposes or says 'I love you, we're exclusive', you can share more," Schneider says. Can't a woman be sexually assertive? "No," Schneider says. "These women are like Samantha in *Sex and the City*. *Sex and the City* girls aren't *Rules* girls. You can't get a guy by chasing him. We tell women a man is not your friend. Until he proposes he has the power to hurt you by never calling, by sleeping with you and never calling. Men can be cruel, not because they want to be — they just don't love you."

Don't men feel hoodwinked if their partners turn out to be different to what they've been dating? "We're not being manipulative, we're being our best selves," Schneider trills. "My husband could see I was a nice Jewish girl, not an axe murderer on the side."

How soon should you date after a break-up? "What are you doing tonight? The best way to get over a guy is to get another," Schneider says. If you're widowed? "Maybe a year." Divorced? "You should be out there. He's probably marrying the woman he cheated on you with." Go to singles nights, not museums: "You won't find marriage-minded guys there." We pass some paisley trousers. "No," cautions Schneider. "Not good. Women shouldn't dress for other women. Men want sexy stuff, action and lights. Every guy wants the 'It Girl'."

"You can trash us," Schneider concludes, "but this works." What if *The Rules* don't feel like "you"? "Fake it," Schneider says. And that, in a blur of tight dresses, long hair and kittenish game-playing, is *The Rules* all over. *The New Rules: The Dating Do's and Don'ts for the Digital Generation* (Piatkus, £9.99, or £9.49, free P&P, from Times Bookshop, 0845 2712134)

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18 years ago she wrote *The Rules of dating*

But are they relevant now?

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