

Men who marry younger women

By Bill Hall of the Tribune

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A middle-aged store clerk was starting to tally my purchases when I noticed that she had one eye on what she was doing and the other eye on the Hollywood handsome guy she had just finished ringing up.

"You better grab him while you can," I said, teasing her.

She surprised me by more or less admitting what had been going through her mind. "Yeah, but he's too young for me," she said.

"Older men go with younger women all the time," I told her, "and it's a two-way street."

"No, it doesn't work that way," she said wistfully.

Actually, it does work that way. You see such pairings more and more, though probably not nearly as often as relationships involving an older male and a younger woman. But age-difference marriages seem to work for many couples. Many of them endure for years.

Perhaps it does happen more often with an older man and a younger woman, but not for reasons flattering to men in general. Most men are slow to mature. Many never do. On the average, women become almost fully adult about 20 years sooner than men, so maybe a 50-year-old man is about the same level of maturity as a 30-year-old woman.

Mixed-age marriages often work because, ultimately, you marry the person and not the package. Part of the initial attraction might have been a trophy wife - the erroneous conceit that a stunning younger woman on a man's arm invariably elevates his stature among other males.

The good news for all of us, male and female, is that the wrapper on our personalities ages but the personality remains pretty much the same. So if years ago you liked the person who is now your old husband or you liked the person inside what used to be the young wife, then you probably pretty much feel the same today.

But that does not necessarily work in the outer world of the community at large. People see an older man with a much younger woman and they sniff, "trophy wife." To them, it looks like another old goat marrying appearance rather than substance.

But having said that, I admit I am personally a bit of an age bigot. During my dating years, I was always a little uncomfortable dating a younger woman. But that was mostly because of generational differences in popular culture. If you cut your teeth on Elvis and she cut her teeth on Elton John, some compromises have to be made when listening to the car radio.

If your favorite movie is "From Here to Eternity," and hers is "The Lord of the Rings," turn yourself in. You're dating a child.

If she was a teenage flower child during the Vietnam War and you used to collect scrap metal to support the troops during World War II, then the two of you lack a common frame of historical reference.

At times there is something a little flashy about marrying a younger woman. It's kind of like having gold teeth, wearing an orange tuxedo, eating caviar or riding a Harley. It's a trifle show-boaty.

However, one day when I was about 45, I found myself in a delicate situation. I was sure that an attractive and blatantly much younger person was trying to get my attention. It was my guess that she was about 27. I ignored her for several days in a row - and then finally introduced myself, bought her a glass of wine and chatted with her for a time.

But I finally bit the bullet and told her the blunt truth: I very much enjoyed her company and her mind (not to mention her looks), but I had a policy against going with women under 30.

"I have a policy," she replied to my astonishment, "against going with anybody who can't remember World War II."

It turns out that she is one of those people who look a lot younger than they are. She was not 27. She was 43, two years younger than I was then.

I married her, of course. And over the years, we have occasionally heard frosty comments of disapproval because I look considerably older than she does. Some nosy people believed I was a cradle robber who had married a much younger woman.

Not true. In fact, I am 71 and Sharon will turn 70 this very week.

The same nosy people also assumed that she is my trophy wife.

True. Absolutely true.



*Hall may be contacted at wilberth@cablone.net or at 1012 Prospect Ave.,
Lewiston, ID 83501.*