

Book explains how to break all 'The Rules'

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Now that nearly every unmarried woman in the country has memorized "The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right," every single guy can take refuge in "The Code: Time-Tested Secrets for Getting What You Want From Women Without Marrying Them!"

"The Code" (Fireside, \$5.99) is a manifesto for commitment-cautious men. It was written by Nate Penn and Lawrence LaRose, a couple of bachelors miffed by "The Rules."

That book (Warner, \$5.99) was written by Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, a couple of happily married women (thank you very much) living in Long Island and New Jersey.

The "Rules," in a nutshell, are the dating do's and don'ts our mothers played by: Don't call him, don't accept a last-minute date, don't pick up the check, don't throw yourself at him, do be hard to get.

"The Code" is an end run around "The Rules." "The Code" says that "commitment squanders the critical hunter-gatherer skills we are justly famous for." The only rule is, there are no rules where bed-able women are concerned.

Followers of "The Code" know "that the half-life for any ecstatic relationship is roughly three months — the rest is just emotional fallout."

Are these guys serious? Or just socially suicidal?

"There are plenty of informed readers who will read the satire," LaRose said. "We're not oblivious to the fact that some lesser readers, some men, might take it as gospel. But we hope those are the men who end up marrying 'The Rules' girls."

Mostly, "The Code" is a sendup of "The Rules," its authors and women who stoop to anything — say, refusing a last-minute invitation — to catch a marriageable man.

"The Rules," according to its authors (did we mention they're happily married?) is "not about getting a date, but a husband." "The Rules" make Mr. Right "obsessed with having you as his by making yourself seem unattainable."

Playing by "The Rules" means playing hard-to-get, a time-honored technique that may not fly with members of your therapy group, but it works, said Fein and Schneider. (Did we mention they have gorgeous children, too?)

Penn and LaRose admit they didn't read "The Rules" cover to cover — "It made me nauseous," Penn said.

They also admit that "The Code," which instructs men to keep silent so women can invest them with "the compassion and wisdom of Bishop Tutu and the sensuous abandon of The Artist Formerly Known As Prince," may put a crimp in their social life.

"A lot of people say, 'You'll never get a date again,'" LaRose said. "There are others that think we'll be inundated."

No matter. "Code" guys want "Code" gals, women "not bound by social mores, who make their own rules by breaking the old rules."

Who are such women?

Lauren Bacall, Batgirl, Drew Barrymore, Madonna, the authors say.

Did we mention they — the authors — have never been married?