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Dating game changes after 40

By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY

Of almost 127 million Americans age 40 and over, more than a third are unattached. They're either casualties of the divorce explosion (13%); widowed (11%); or never married (8%).



Rick Hosler, right, speaks with a potential date in Berlin, Md. Match.com says registrations by people over 50 are up 340% since 2000. By Chris Gardner, AP

Of those singles, more than 25 million are women. And perhaps because these over-40 women are likely to be more fit and health-conscious than their mother's generation, and to have a younger mind-set, observers say they're seeing a surge in over-40 dating — in a dating world that has changed as much as they have.

"The standard parameters of dating from your 20s are no longer in play," says Jane Ganahl, 53, editor of *Single Woman of a Certain Age*, a collection of essays from 29 single-at-midlife female writers.

"Women in their young life date to get married and date to have babies. After a certain point, it becomes almost a non-issue," she says. "The 'M word' and the wedding aren't the primary focus anymore. It's liberating."

But it's still scary.

"I'm 16 all over again," says Paula England, 55, a Stanford University sociology professor divorced for eight years. "What I experienced was this feeling of being back in high school again, but I didn't know the rules or conventions." (**Related story:** [Silver singles get dating advice from young](#))

Now, a glut of new dating books is helping these women adjust to changes and new mores with practical advice and others' experiences.

"I've done everything from answering ads in newspapers to online dating to spending \$5,000 for a matchmaker to going out with people that friends have introduced," says Sherry Halperin, 62, of La Quinta, Calif. Her book *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat* is based on her re-entry into the dating scene about a year after her husband's death. They had been married 26 years; she was 50 when he died.

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Sherry Halperin, author of *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat*, offers advice for older women on dating re-entry:

- Dating now is much more casual, with fewer conventions and formalities. That means women can set those boundaries — from whether he'll open the door or pull out a chair to whether to kiss on the first date or go Dutch.
- Everyone has baggage, although some models are lighter than others. Make an effort to be tolerant and to compromise.
- Try not to compare past loves. If you had a good marriage, understand that all men have different qualities to bring to a relationship.
- If you're looking for a relationship, see how his life and goals mesh with your life and expectations. One person may be looking for a long-term commitment, and another may just want a dinner or vacation companion.

about the rest of their lives in terms of the grandchildren," says Katherine Chaddock, 58, co-author of *Flings, Frolics, and Forever Afters: A Single Woman's Guide to Romance After Fifty*.

"I think it has a lot to do with the volume of the baby boomer demographic, and it has to do with women themselves," says Chaddock, a professor of educational administration at the University of South Carolina in Columbia who has been divorced twice. She co-wrote the book with her sister, Emilie Chaddock Egan, 60, a widow in Edwards, Colo.

Interest in dating and remarriage among older singles has become the subject of research. Deborah Carr, an associate professor of sociology at Rutgers University, studied that interest among people 65 and older who had lost a spouse. Carr, who reported her findings last year in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, suggests that late-life romantic relationships will likely increase because the Internet has made it easier for older singles to meet.

Those over 50 account for 21% of visitors to the online dating site Yahoo Personals, including Marilyn Rogers, 62, a beauty consultant in Pleasanton, Calif.

"When I first started this, I had three dates in one day," says Rogers, who was divorced in 1998 after 34 years of marriage.

In her book, *Romancing the Web: A Therapist's Guide to the Finer Points of Online Dating*, Diane Berry, 48, suggests that time pressures in today's society make dating via the Internet very efficient for those seeking companionship.

"I was determined not to waste a heck of a lot of time," says Gloria Kreitzberg, 52, of Rochester, N.Y., who attempted online dating after trying other methods. Divorced for five years after a 20-year marriage, she says she tried to meet people through friends, which "never worked." She frequented singles spots but found "the same recycled people going from place to place."

Kreitzberg says physical attraction is no longer the first and foremost path to a relationship, like it was when she was in her 20s. "At this age, we're smarter, more experienced in life and know what's good for us."

But mature women say finding dates isn't always easy; men their own age often seek younger women. Ironically, many younger men have no problem dating older women.

A Yahoo Personals survey released in September found that 51% of men and 56% of women say it's acceptable for a potential date to be up to 10 years younger.

So more older women are taking a cue from celebrities who are linked with men who are years or even decades their junior.

"Everybody is banking their hopes on Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher, and Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins," Carr says.

Still, even though they often appear confident on the surface, single women over 40 aren't necessarily secure in the dating realm and might not even be sure what they want. Some are looking for marriage; others want a relationship without the legal entanglements. Some just want companionship.

"Women of a certain age want to date but don't necessarily want to be married," Carr says. "Women don't feel middle-aged. They feel there's a long life ahead."

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