



Young women, same old problem
By Margot Carmichael Lester



William, 45, has always dated younger women. It was only recently, however, that he detected a pattern in those relationships. "I end up raising them — helping them solve their problems, grow up and expand their horizons," he says.

And what's wrong with that, you might ask?

Plenty, says William. "Sure enough, they always leave me for a younger guy."

So why does he keep going back? We asked relationship expert April Masini, L.A.-based author of the best-selling book, *Date Out Of Your League*, why guys like William persist in putting the men back in mentoring.

Besides ego-boosting good looks, what does a younger woman offer an older man?

"There is actually quite a bit that young women have to offer older men besides looks alone," Masini says. "On the most obvious level, there's that fun, young energy they have. There's naiveté, which can be attractive when compared with the cynicism of some older women. There's a playfulness — a lack of the seriousness that can sometimes accompany being an adult and having responsibility. And, for some men, there's the fact that these young girls look up to them — as father figures and as mentors. That, in and of itself, is *very* attractive."

All of these things, though mutually beneficial for a while, eventually wear thin for most women.

"If the relationship is... based on the man being a sort of father or mentor figure, problems can — and likely will — arise once [the younger woman] really begins to grow and come into her own," Masini notes. "Even for couples where there is little-to-no age discrepancy, people often grow in different directions, leading to the dissolution of the relationship."

Add to that a generation gap and you've got an even higher chance that the direction each person moves will be away from the other.

Masini explains: "Like any child breaking away from a parent, she may want to establish more of an independent life, depending on him less and less, perhaps even becoming resentful toward him for the power he has wielded over her."

The result can be a nasty break-up, because as she tries to break away, he realizes he's losing her along with his control. That often spurs a role reversal.

"The man she once looked up to begins to become more and more insecure, more possessive, more demanding and more needy as he tries to regain control of the relationship and her," Masini says. And, unfortunately, this behavior usually does just the opposite. "Not only is he unable to regain his position of power in the relationship — he succeeds in driving her away for good."

Is there hope for William and his brethren to break the cycle? Yes, Masini asserts.

The older man/younger woman can increase their odds of staying together if they:

- Are motivated to grow together in the same direction
- Share interests, goals, values and belief systems
- Commit to making it work
- Accept that they will both go through changes as individuals — and that their relationship will change, too

Success in this arena is dependent on what each party wants to get out of the relationship.

"If he simply likes the physical attraction or energy of a younger woman with little concern for what lies beneath the surface, both parties should beware," Masini continues. "Fortunately, there are some [women] out there who have their lives together, who aren't looking for a father figure, and who just find the stability, wisdom, and maturity of an older man attractive. But if he's drawn to girls who will idolize and defer to him, he enters into these relationships at his own risk — knowing full-well these can only go so far or last for so long."