

Where have all the good construction workers gone? They're dating doctors! Read about this trend of white-collar women dating blue-collar guys.

By Kimberly Goad

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On the road from dating to marriage, the white-collar guy used to be the destination, while the blue-collar guy was the fun detour for upwardly mobile women. But, judging by all the female lawyers, professors and marketing execs pairing up with cops, carpenters, and construction workers, hard-working "regular guys" have become the new destination. At its most glamorous, we see this trend expressed in the happy marriage of actress Sandra Bullock and motorcycle man Jesse James.

Now that women have the means to create the life they want — on college campuses, they outnumber the males and in the work force, they're landing lucrative jobs once reserved for men — they're freer to follow their heart. And in case you didn't notice, blue-collar guys are the new hunks (just check out the carpenter dudes on those home-improvement shows).

"The more different kinds of guys a woman will let herself get involved with, the more likely she is to find that great chemistry that's the only reliable predictor of a satisfying, long-lasting relationship," says Mira

"Dating him is like a return to my comfort zone."

Kirshenbaum, author of *Is He Mr. Right? Everything You Need to Know Before You Commit*. "And chemistry has nothing to do with how similar your backgrounds are." Still, dating someone who has a very different educational level or career path than yours can have its challenges. So let's take a closer look.

Bye, bye to Mr. BMW

Why are women looking beyond white-collar guys these days? It's not just because of the inevitable professional jealousies and scheduling conflicts that can happen whenever two 9-to-5-ers pair up. "A lot of women have a hard time being themselves around white-collar men," says Lisa Daily, author of *Stop Getting Dumped! All You Need to Know to Make Men Fall Madly in Love with You*. They feel like they have to be on their guard a bit or that they need to impress these guys. With blue-collar men, some of the pressure is lifted. Women who have a college education or a more high-powered career feel like they're impressive enough, which allows them to relax in the relationship."

That's certainly always been the case for Krista Blaisdell, a 32-year-old public relations specialist who spends her workdays planning media strategies for high-powered real-estate developers, bankers and others in Las Vegas, Nevada. "I admire these clients and what they do, but dealing with the issues that go along with those kinds of jobs in your personal life is more than I could deal with. Plus," she adds, echoing the sentiments of many white-collar women, "white-collar men can feel insecure dating a woman who has a better job and makes more money than they do. I'm more comfortable around good ol' boys."

When Blaisdell met Scott Robinson, a 32-year-old union carpenter, she had just called it quits with a lawyer — her own version of a dating detour. "There was always some sort of need for him to impress me — with his car, his Rolex, trendy restaurants," says Blaisdell. And yet she didn't realize he was wrong for her until three months into the relationship when he took her to a party hosted by an equally showy colleague. She looked at the

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BMW's and Mercedes lined up outside and saw all the corporate wives who'd obviously had plastic surgery, and thought, "Lawyers work outrageous hours and make a lot of money and it's all for show. It was all so uptight and pretentious," she says. "I just couldn't see myself a part of it long-term."

With Robinson, however, it was like a return to her comfort zone. Growing up, she dated guys whose parents were farmers or factory workers. Even now, her closest friends come from working-class families. "I never introduced them to the lawyer," she says, sheepishly. "I knew they wouldn't approve."

Even though she and Robinson, who've been together for three years, may seem like opposites to the outside world, they're actually a lot alike. Not only are they equally ambitious (Blaisdell hopes to open her own P.R. firm someday and Robinson wants to move up the ranks and become foreman), but they also each have a fundamental appreciation of the other's career choice. Experts say that kind of connection is important. If a couple shares the same values, then occupying the same station in life is less important.

Not all differences are good and exciting.

"When people are secure in who they are, it doesn't matter if they're white-collar or blue-collar," says April Masini, author of *Think & Date Like a Man*.

Plus, the difference keeps things exciting. There is something very sexy about having a partner who does the exact opposite of what you do. "Most of the girls I know work in bars and wear half-shirts," says Robinson. "When Krista gets dressed for work and she puts on her suit and her glasses and looks all prim and proper—that's sexy."

"So, what does your boyfriend do?"

Of course, not all differences are good and exciting. Some can be downright unsexy. "When one or both people have preconceived value judgments about white-collar or blue-collar workers, the relationship can be poisoned," explains Masini. "Some people think blue-collar workers are uneducated. Others think white-collar workers are crooks."

And friends and family can believe those stereotypes, making the situation more difficult. When Karen Frost, a 38-year-old public relations specialist in Austin, Texas, told her friends she was dating an EMT named Ken, they were immediately dismissive of the relationship. "Knowing the circles I mix in and the parties I attend, they knew it wasn't going to work before I did," says Frost, whose company represents authors, artists, and musicians. "If I were putting together a list of what I wanted on an emotional, soulful and spiritual level, Ken fit the bill. But on a professional level, he didn't. We didn't know the same people, and he wasn't well read."

Still, what they did have in common — a mutual love of dogs and a desire to make a difference in the world — seemed like enough to make up for what was lacking. That and the spontaneity. She loved his creative approach to dating. "He called late one Sunday morning and asked if I wanted to go for ice cream," Frost says. "An hour later, he showed up on his motorcycle and we went on a four-hour ride in the Hill Country to get ice cream. I loved that about him—how he would just find joy in the simple things. It wasn't flashy. He'd spent very little money. But it was a beautiful connection of two people on a great day." Eventually, it was their differences that drove them apart. Frost says she never had complete closure but "I suspect he was uncomfortable with my professional and social network."

"Traditions run deep," says Daily. "Mother Nature compels women to pair up with the best provider and men to pair up with the most attractive. So even though our heads might tell us one thing, we have thousands of years of biology pointing us in another direction."

In the end, it is our chemistry and also our work ethic, family values, and shared experiences that make a couple compatible. Which more and more women seem to realize may have absolutely nothing to do with what a guy does for a living.

Kimberly Goad is a New York writer and editor who has contributed to Self, Glamour, and Redbook.

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