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Hollywood's stand-in dads

A-list studs discover single moms are twice as appealing

By KRISTEN KEMP

When Ashton Kutcher, 27, and Demi Moore, 42, got cozy more than two years ago, he seemed like just another one of her much younger boy toys. After all, according to rumor mills, she'd had short-lived trysts with Owen Wilson, Tobey Maguire and Colin Farrell (um, who hasn't?). As months passed, though, Ashton was still around. Much more intriguing than the movie "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle" were the juicy scenes of Ashton and Demi attending the premiere as one big nontraditional family: Her three daughters (Rumer, Scout and Tallulah) and ex-hubby Bruce walked the carpet almost hand in hand. Shortly after, the couple was photographed playing house on her property in Idaho. Now, they've been supposedly pregnant for longer than the nine months it takes to carry a baby.



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Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore with her three daughters, (from left) Rumer, Scout and Tallulah.



Amendola AP

Matt Damon and Luciana Barroso

Enter the even steamier star couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. Before getting with the big-lipped beauty, he talked openly to Vanity Fair and Oprah about wanting a family. After his high-profile split, Brad was pictured holding and cuddling Angelina's kid Maddox as much as he was spotted smooching her. Then he accompanied the starlet to Ethiopia, where she picked up another adopted baby named Zahara. He's still enamored with the babies -

and the baby-mama.

These A-list actors - extremely rich and handsome men who could have just about any model, starlet, singer or stripper they desired - are bucking stereotypes and choosing moms for mates en masse. Matt LeBlanc did the same thing when he married former model/mother-of-two Melissa McKnight. So did Matt Damon, who just got engaged to former bartender/interior designer/mom Luciana Barroso. Another example: Seal pursuing Heidi Klum when she was singularly maternal, then marrying her and fathering her next child, born just two weeks ago. (But then again, men flock because she *is* Heidi Klum.)

The madness for hot moms signals a trend that may be helping single moms score more dates everywhere. Gone are the days when unhooked women seemed sad, desperate and destined to stay alone. (Think Mia Farrow after her messy Woody Allen split, or even Nicole Kidman's transparent feelings of desertion after her 2001 divorce from Tom Cruise.) Today - thankfully - unhooked women with children hold unique appeal all their own.

"The biggest change? Now everyone has sex - more easily, sooner and often - than they did before," explains April Masini, author of "Date Out of Your League" (TurnKey Press, \$14.95) and creator of the online advice column AskApril.com. The taboo that mothers are secondhand goods while single women are pure virgins is older than the movie "The Graduate." "Most women are sexually experienced now. A woman with kids isn't any different than anyone else," Masini adds.

Shows like the popular "Sex & the Single Mom" on Lifetime help spice up the image, too. TV moms like Drea de Matteo's "Joey" character work it, not to mention Jennifer Aniston's Rachel on "Friends." All of these fictional mamas dated hot men, slept with hot men and looked hot themselves while they did it.

Mark Stevens, image consultant and CEO of MSCO, a global marketing firm, also sees the public sea change in motherly charm. "Forget about the mom stuff. It's all about sex," he says. "I think women - celebrity and real - are selling their sex appeal before their maternal instincts. They're not asking guys to change diapers. Angelina's lips alone, for example, send mushroom clouds of sensuality. Her sexuality doesn't define her, but she knows how and when to use it, when mothers in the past may not have been so bold."

Moms who know best

Jennifer (who asked that her last name not be used) is a 27-year-old mother of a 3-year-old in Brooklyn who finds that "celebs are making dating less complicated by making it more acceptable." After being on and off with her son's father for six years, she recently started seeing someone new. "He seems not to mind the fact that I have a child," she says. "He doesn't seem afraid at all even though he has no children and has never been married."

Of course, she still faces dating challenges because she has mixed feelings about introducing new men into her son's life. She also doesn't have the free time her single counterparts do, especially in the evenings.

Another single parent, Vicky (who also requested that her full name not be used), 37, of Westchester, is now in a happy 18-month relationship with a childless man who adores her 3-year-old son, Ryan. She agrees that celebrity and TV depictions of love, sex and parenting are positive steps. "It helps take away the stigma for a lot of women," Vicky says. "It somehow makes it more acceptable, but I'm not necessarily sure if it makes it any easier."

For her, the biggest challenge was not finding men willing to date her - one was so enthusiastic that he brought her flowers and a toy for her toddler - it was finding free hours and meeting places. "I would only have every other weekend to go out with someone new," she explains. "It was also hard because where do you go to look for men? It's not like I was hitting nightclubs and parties on a regular basis. And any time I had, I was trying to see my friends."

Men on mom lookout

Yet what these New York women look at as challenges to finding love, men might see as assets to dating them. Stereotypically, men value their free time, and dating a mother usually affords them more of that, Stevens says.

"Also, we don't want to believe it, but there is a chance that guys like Ashton and Brad don't want the responsibility of their own kids right now," Masini adds. Single moms also don't feel the urgency to conceive the way that childless girlfriends and wives often do. "Men can date single moms for a lot longer without making a commitment because the biological clock is missing from the equation."

It may sound negative, but it's not necessarily so. Many single moms have usually established careers, are independent

financially and emotionally, and typically are not in a rush to get married. In fact, they tend to take it slowly for the benefit of the child, since they don't want to see their little ones get attached to a man who may not be around for long. They also take things slowly for their own benefit - most have had a relationship go bad and will wait until the new one is closer to perfect.

Susan Newman, a social psychologist and author of "The Book of No: 250 Ways to Say It and Mean It and Stop People-pleasing Forever" (McGraw-Hill, \$14.95), explains that she has found that single mothers who date are happier, calmer and less frustrated than other women out in the dating jungle.

As for Demi, marriage isn't even the priority. In the September issue of Bazaar, she said, "I feel that we are [married] and that we don't need something formal, so to do so isn't a big deal one way or another." In the meantime, she and Ashton are said to snuggle naked in their new Hollywood abode.

Moms are multiplying

As more moms hit the dating scene - according to the most recent stats from the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 10 million single women with children, up from only 3 million in 1970 - more guys will be needed to go out with them.

With any luck they'll be as devoted as Ashton, Seal, Brad and the two Matts.

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