

by Carol Sarler

# Sorry, but an Alpha woman will never be happy with a Beta man

**D**EFIANT, chin up, looking the world in the eye, Sarah Churchwell insisted in the Mail this week that she is perfectly happy to be childless, thank you very much — even if she is nearly 37 and in every biological sense running out of time.

You may believe her if you will. Personally, I think she doth protest too much and that a barren future will hurt her more than she knows; certainly her evident adoration of her 'dazzling' two-year-old niece suggests that she is, after all, what she calls 'mother material'.

But what really caught the eye is that long before she got to the pros and cons of children themselves, we were regaled with a list of reasons that she has not, so far, had any — a list that boils down, basically, to a lengthy diatribe against the men she has had in her life, all of them so lousy that she could not bear for them to have fathered her babies.

As she reflected on the failings of these men, all you can think is: here we go again. Only last week we had more of the same from the Mail's columnist Liz Jones, musing — as she has done in print for years — on the failings of all her men, especially her estranged husband, which have culminated in her now living alone.

They have much in common, these two women. Churchwell has scaled the dizzy heights of academia to the elevated position of senior lecturer at the University of East Anglia; Liz Jones made her career in publishing, including a stint as editor of a top glossy magazine and now as a columnist and writer.

Churchwell describes herself as 'a devoted career woman'; Jones cuts right to the chase and calls herself 'an Alpha female' — before going on, much as Churchwell does, to lament what this means to her personal life: 'New men, metrosexual men, men who are in touch with their feelings, who are willing to take a back seat, supporting and nurturing you, don't exist'.

And that, in a nutshell, is the sad conclusion that afflicts today's Alpha women. In my circle, there are legions of them: clever, confident, capable women who — given half the chance — could run the entire FTSE 100 companies single-handedly, but whose troubles start the moment they leave the office desk.

Their men, they moan, are useless. Their men, they sigh, can't handle a woman's success. Their men, they grumble, are to blame for being so pathetic that you aren't risk a future and a family with them.

But blame their men as they might, the Alpha women should know this: in the end, they remain only have themselves to blame.

They, after all, picked them. I have lost count of the times I have seen this syndrome play out: an attractive, achieving, successful woman who appears almost to go out of her way to choose a disastrous mate.

**H**E IS often younger, usually dimmer and always poorer than she is; he will never be her equal — an imbalance that eventually will cause resentment on both sides — but, at least, at first, he suits her purposes.

She says she loves him for his difference, for his sweetness, for his gentleness; so unlike her get-ahead contemporaries at work. She says she loves him for the poet in his soul, the perfect counterpoint to the rigours of her own frenetic routine.

In fact, what she loves is his ordinariness. She may even today be uncomfortable by her post-feminist success; her mother didn't have it, her grandmother didn't have it and to her — underneath the brash exterior, it still feels unnatural, unwomanly, unworthy.

She might be a little embarrassed by her wealth; she had, may have worked all hours to earn it, but she still doesn't feel she deserves it.

And here is a man, who, the better to accommodate his own inadequacies, implicitly agrees that, no, she doesn't.

Thus, it starts out compatibly; he puts her down, she puts him up. She tells him how gifted he is, how talented. She showers him with gifts, money, support, treating him almost as an investment.

So he adopts the role that turns a man into the 'plus one' or the 'and partner' on the joint invitations that inevitably centre around the woman and her earning world. Hard for any man with a smattering of pride. Hard for any man worth having. But the woman doesn't see it that way — yet.

By the time she does, social status has become the least of her concerns. Because while a disparity of success might — only might — allow a couple to scrape along somehow, the almost inevitable disparity of income is another matter. No matter how generously it starts out, it is astonishing how quickly finance will poison these imbalanced relationships.

Even some 15 years later, Sarah Churchwell, for instance, can still cite the exact amount of the wretched £1,000 loan which she was still owed when that partner was sent on his way.

What begins as a belief that love will conquer all, that what's mine is yours and all that, doesn't last. Ask those who really know.

The results of a recent survey suggested that we are now so egalitarian that four out of five people, of both sexes, claim they would be perfectly happy in a relationship where the woman hugely out-earned the man.

I suggest that's because they asked the question, as a hypothetical, of those who had never tried it — and that if they polled only those who had, the results would be very different.

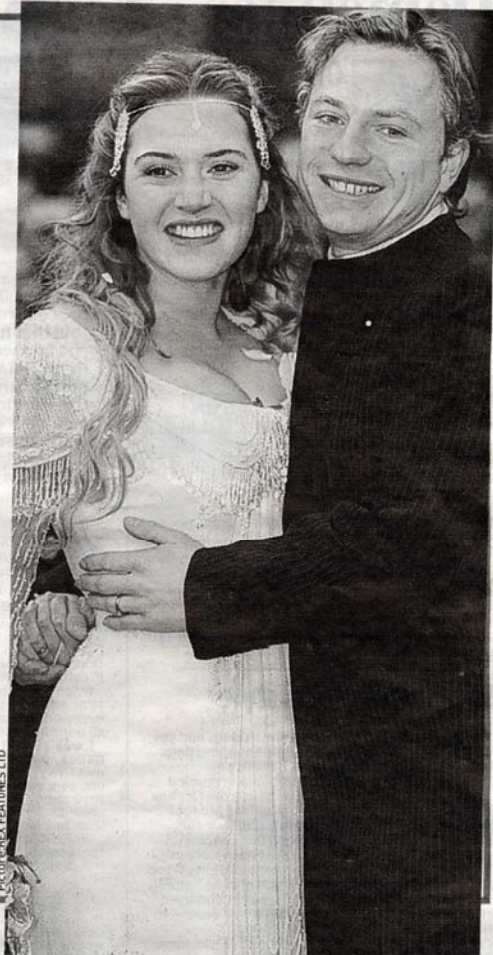
If a woman is constantly paying

for meals, holidays, cars, Christmas gifts, clothes and sundry other expenditure, she rapidly reaches the biggest Catch 22 of all: if he minds her paying, as any man worthy of his testosterone should, he will come to resent her — the common punishment being the persistent infidelities wherein he can at least play at being a real man.

And if he doesn't mind her paying, she will come to resent him for not minding — the usual punishment being her withdrawal of sexual favours, because she cannot be aroused by someone who is not a real man.

In short, it is a lose-lose situation and doomed from the start. And when she has finished counting the cost of him — both emotionally and financially — the relationship finally collapses, with both parties oozing resentment.

Then, our high-flyer is left to agonise over the fact that she worked her butt off to make something of herself — only to discover, yet again, that success at work is paid



Mismatched: Kate Winslet and former husband Jim Threapleton

for by failure at home? How could she have chosen the wrong man again?

Well, on one level, yes, she did. But the solution for this miserable woman is not to change herself, her hard work, her drive or her ambition; she probably couldn't if she tried. The solution is to change the men she chooses. For in love, as in war, the stern playground rule is the same: pick on someone your own size.

**M**Y HOPE for women in their 20s, growing up watching the troubled progress of the thirty-something Alphas, is that they will be smarter than this; that they will muster some self-respect, take pride in what they have achieved, stop feeling guilty about it, forget all the nonsense about the sweet but low-achieving partner — and stick to their own kind.

The problem for these women was that they repeatedly picked themselves a Beta minus, when it is already obvious that the modern Alpha woman is only ever going to settle happily with another Alpha. Or, better still, an Alpha plus.

It is feminist-inspired claptrap that a woman could be properly happy taking charge of a lesser man; every hope for the survival of the species screams otherwise. We are programmed by nature, and for good reason, to aspire to mate with the cleverest, toughest, strongest — and the cleverer, tougher and stronger we women get, the more admirable he'd better be.

God knows, there are enough

Alpha women to prove the point. Kate Winslet married the sweet, low-key Jim Threapleton — but that was his problem: he was sweet and low-key. Now she is on surer, far more besotted ground with the utterly dynamic director Sam Mendes. Even 40 years ago, Germaine Greer thought she'd found the perfect man when she wed a builder. It was over in weeks.

If hard work and determination make you, say, a successful lawyer, you will never really respect the more idle or the more stupid; you need to choose yourself, as did Cherie and Hillary, a Tony Blair or a Bill Clinton.

As for the most Alpha woman we have ever seen, Mrs Thatcher: she could never have settled for a life-long marriage with other than Denis. Quieter than she was, of course. But clever, powerful and rich in his own right. In other words, a man she could look up to without having to put herself down to do so.

The good news for today's high-achieving younger women is that men like that will not resent them. Indeed, where once 'trophy wife' meant someone who was there for decoration, now it means someone to brag about: 'my wife', a wealthy restaurateur told me last week, 'is a solicitor, you know. Her own firm and everything'.

There might not be millions of Alpha men to choose from, and he might even need to be fought for in much the way we have to fight for a top job.

But settle for less and look what you get: a future filled with resentment and years — no, decades — to regret that you ever looked twice at second-best.

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