

The Token Man

AN OLD LONDON friend, who had just been transferred to New York, telephoned me full of anxiety about his personal life. He had looked into an Upper West Side bar and almost all the men were tall and handsome, just the way Americans are in movies. "I can't compete with that," he said. "I want to go home where no one has perfect teeth."

I assured him that he was mistaken. As a reasonable-looking, well-educated European, the numbers were *dramatically* on his side: "This is paradise for us, the land of opportunity and choice. American women are *wonderful*. They are far better educated than girls at home. They confuse our accents with erudition. And they won't hesitate to call you first, take you out to dinner and make a pass at you as you say goodnight."

As for competition from the home team, we win by default, thanks to the ubiquity of the kind of American men we Euro-exiles call "Brads." All-American, regular guys, Brads are always too busy doing things with other Brads to be a serious threat. "Brad" is not an acronym — men like this are just more likely to be called "Brad" or something equally monosyllabic.

I first encountered Brads as a law student on an Ivy League campus. On my second day, my section went to a sports bar after class. I was astonished to see three-quarters of my male classmates detach themselves from the group and move in a noisy flock of baseball caps over to the giant TV. Pitchers of beer were ordered; the guys settled down for a night of hooting at the 76ers. The women, many of whom had changed and donned makeup for the evening, stared into their glasses. Witnessing this, a French MBA student and I looked at each other in amazement. These were really attractive women being abandoned



On "Brads"

Jonathan Foreman
explains the men who
sleep with women but
prefer their male pals
for everything else

for a *game*. For a minute we found ourselves asking why straight, extrovert males would behave so unnaturally. And then we moved in.

SINCE LAW SCHOOL, I've come across many more Brads. No matter how old a Brad is, part of him seems jammed forever at the nickname stage of life — somewhere between twelve and sixteen. A disproportionate number of Brads are former high-school athletes, though by their late twenties, after years of beer drinking while watching ESPN, they are usually potbellied and jowly. And they are invariably obsessed with team sports. It's not just because it brings them back to what they remember as glory days. It unites them and excludes all non-regular guys, especially (in theory) gays.

Brads hate and fear homosexuals so loudly and publicly that it's hard for a foreigner not to wonder if they are protesting a little too much. Especially as

their culture is so profoundly — if vicariously — homoerotic. They go to strip clubs *together*; they watch porno movies *together*. They abominate all physical affection among men *unless* it takes place on a football field or on a hockey rink — then all that hugging, kissing, and buttock-patting is fine.

When playing Don Juan's game, Brads, for a start, don't dance. They think it's effeminate. Still worse, for Brads flirtation is a tiresome and confusing ritual. When Brads talk to women they have usually been intoxicated for some time. So they find it hard to be anything but crude, as if the prospect of sexual gratification combined with alcohol has shut down key parts of the brain.

Despite these handicaps, Brads do, of course, sleep with women. Many of them have steady, long-suffering girlfriends. They are usually married by thirty, if only because, for Brads, sex is both a biological necessity and a social obligation. (As soon as they've scored, it's back to their friends for real fun.) And because many women are forced to choose between having a Brad and being alone.

UNTIL THE JAMES Dean era, with its worship of adolescence, whatever Braddish impulses young American men felt were mitigated by manners. Today, good manners are no longer seen as an element of adulthood. They are even considered sexist by some. But good manners once eased communication between the sexes.

American women under fifty are notoriously angry with men. It may well be that their anger stems from having to deal with so many Brads, grown men who are encouraged by the culture to be as boring and boorish as teenage boys. ♦

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