



Ask Uncle Mike

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm a single man, thirtysomething, and I think I'm a serial monogamist. I'm not a jerk or a user and people tell me I'm a nice guy. I totally enjoy my relationships with women, but they wind up being just that---episodes with a beginning, a middle and an end. We both start off thinking this one's it, but something always fizzles for one of us. Is life a treadmill? Is there something here I'm not getting?

---John in Nestucca

Dear John,

This is a tough nut for Uncle Mike to crack since, in your headlong rush to burden others with your problems, you neglected to say how serial your monogamy is. Since you assure Uncle Mike you are neither a jerk nor a loser, we will assume your average relationship is longer than a ski weekend. If so, you have suffered a series of brief marriages punctuated by brief divorces. That Uncle Mike was able to guess this right off gives an inkling of how unique your situation isn't.

This said, boldly on to your problem. First off, John, you're either a nitwit or a real kidder. You "totally" enjoy your relationships with women? Do you do this while walking on water and healing the lame? We'll get nowhere if you don't tell Uncle Mike the truth. Uncle Mike has no idea where you were during these relationships you fall in and out of, but the truth is that men and women have no end of trouble getting along. This may or may not be because they evolved on different planets, but their madcap adventures in misunderstanding and vengeance have fueled a number of Greek tragedies. Historically, they've stayed together, through thick and ugly, in order to survive and rear children. Neither thinks this is funny anymore. This, along with the brave new freedoms that selfishness and irresponsibility bring, account for most of the discontent and spontaneous decay between the genders.

It is your whining about relationships having a beginning, middle, and end that should concern you. What in nature does not progress through a cycle? Although Uncle Mike has never done it, he imagines the trick to mating for life is to extend the middle---the part where you're best friends working toward a common goal---until one or the other of you croak.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm 26, I've got a great boyfriend, we get along fine and we love each other. So what's my problem? The rat bastard keeps looking at other women. He knows it makes me nuts. It's not like he's gross about it, but the thought's what counts. Are all men hounds?

---Connie in Newberg

Dear Connie,

Absolutely not. Many men are mere potential hounds---the Walter Mittys of dogdom. Not unlike your boyfriend when he first appeared before you, the apparent answer to your dreams.

Political correctness aside, Connie, you never want to forget that, even in Birkenstocks, we're still part of the wild kingdom. Rather than go on and on with vivid anecdotes from his own past, Uncle Mike suggests you pick up a good book on primate behavior and try harder to notice what goes on around you.

Uncle Mike is no rocket psychologist, but he's willing to bet that, John the Baptist and Peter the Hermit being dead, few men breathing do not gambol, at least mentally, on strange lawns. Like Mt. Everest, the lawns are there, as is the call of the wild. Or at least the different. The trick, as any domesticated male will admit when he's not moping, is to not act out one's ribald fantasies on an unsuspecting world.

If you're looking for preventative measures (not to be confused with training), Uncle Mike would suggest: not letting your hound run free at night, saying "Good Boy" a lot, and giving him treats when he doesn't ogle.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I've tried self-help books, so why not you? I'm forty, have close family and friends, a woman I love and good kids nearly grown. Not the dream, but close. So why do I feel so disconnected lately? Like more than enough's not enough. My wife says I'm having a midlife crisis and should join a men's group. What do you think?

---Adrift in Astoria

Dear Adrift,

You've come to Uncle Mike just in time. First off, you need to face facts. In a space/time continuum in which each object/event (your angst ridden organism included) is inseparable from every other, feeling disconnected comes under the heading of brickheaded misunderstanding. Kafka aside, isolation is a figment of our perceptions, not an aspect of reality. Unless, of course, you're a bad mime.

When Uncle Mike asks himself (as he often does in karaoke bars), Why is there a universe and why won't it do what I want?, he must finally cop to the fact that it's doing what it should and what he's disconnected from is himself. He is perhaps gauging his life by silly standards, comparing himself to Errol Flynn, Mahatma Gandhi, or (if he's really in a funk) Crazy Horse.

Our world, like it or not, is a reflection of our actions in it. Your friends, your family, and your mortgage would not be there as you see them if it were not for you. You are mutual creations and, instead of picking reality to death, Uncle Mike suggests you try falling in love with it again.

As for men's groups, Uncle Mike prefers playing poker to conducting group searches for the warrior within. No matter what it said in the Utne Reader, a dozen sensitive guys in Dockers beating drums does not constitute a tribe.

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- Helen Keller

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