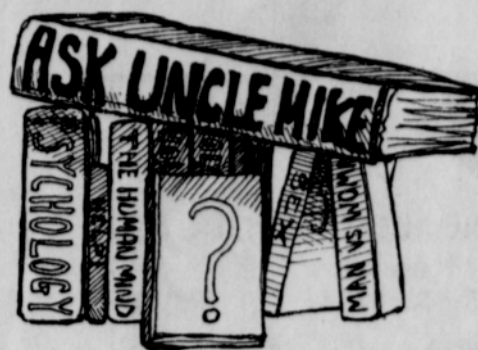


Therapy Page



Dear Uncle Mike,
I have an interesting situation. I am 54 and have been married for 22 years. My wife and I have two children, both of whom are out on their own. Our youngest moved in with her boyfriend three months ago. My wife is the same age as I but has much less interest in sex. Yes, I know this is not an unusual development. I have never been unfaithful but I am getting frustrated. My wife thinks at our age, once every two weeks is normal. I love her dearly but I can't help feeling that she is being selfish. We have no serious marital problems and I would never think of divorce but for the

first time I am considering an affair. The problem is that the woman is my wife's younger sister. She and I dated briefly before my wife and I got together and this has always been a source of good natured wisecracks at family gatherings. She and her husband separated six months ago and she has begun divorce proceedings. A month ago, we bumped into each other at a shopping mall and had lunch. We both enjoyed ourselves more than we should have if you get my meaning. When we parted, she gave me a long hug and said, "Maybe we'll bump into each other again." The double meaning was obvious. The next week, I went to the restaurant on the same day at the same time and there she was. It was obvious to both of us why we were there and after lunch and a few drinks, we drove to a motel and made love. To my surprise, neither of us have a whole lot of guilt about it. We just both feel under loved and think of what we're doing as giving each other comfort which keeps either of us from falling into a more damaging or less satisfactory relationship with someone else. We have agreed to meet once a week and keep close tabs on our feelings. She loves her sister and would no more do anything to hurt her than I would. We're just very close and have common needs. It seems a better situation than having an affair that could become complicated and affect my marriage. I'm not asking you for advice. I just enjoy your opinions and thought I would throw you an interesting "problem" to consider.

Call Me Fred, Salem, Oregon

Dear Fred,

Uncle Mike's opinion is that you and your sister-in-law are, aside from behaving like weasels in heat, being deeply stupid. Giving each other "comfort"? What a chuckle. What you're doing is having sex with your wife's sister. What she's doing is having sex with her sister's husband. While there are cultures in which this sort of doing is acceptable behavior, the culture you live in isn't one of them. If you have a brother, Uncle Mike would recommend you close your eyes and picture he and your wife comforting each other with mutual assurances that they wouldn't hurt you for the world. This should clear things up a bit.

The deeply stupid part of your little adventure is assuming it won't have an effect on your wife. To imagine that rolling in the hay with her sister won't in some way change the three of you and so, your relationships with and to each other, is an opinion which, if voiced by one of your children would make you wonder how you'd failed as a parent. Believing that just because you're adults you can behave like adolescents and get away with it is a real knee slapper. Uncle Mike would encourage you and your wife's sister to stop violating your principles before your wife finds out you've been violating her trust.

As long as you choose to remain married, your sex life is not something that includes third parties. If your wife no longer initiates lovemaking, it could be that what you're offering is sex rather than anything resembling romance. Put the energy you're setting aside for her sister into courting your wife who, seeing her children grown and gone, is in the midst of redefining herself as a woman. Your sensitivity and devotion may not improve your love life immediately; or, to look at the down side, ever. In which case, you have two options: a mutual redefinition of your marriage or the pursuit of sexual activity that involves no one but yourself. Uncle Mike hopes you enjoyed his opinion this time.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I don't get it. What's wrong with a man taking care of a woman? I'm a woman (27) and I'd love to find a man to take care of me. I hate working. I'm also good looking and know how to cook. What's so bad about letting the guy bring home the money? Where are the men who want a wife instead of a fellow worker?

Kat, Beaverton, Oregon

Dear Kat,

After rechecking his equations, Uncle Mike still sees nothing wrong with a man taking care of a woman. Or, for that matter, with a woman taking care of a man. There are as many possible relationships as there are humans to create them. The challenge in one earner households is how to maintain equality. As Shakespeare would eventually have said: people are funny about sex and money. If you want to test someone's character (which we all should try not to do), give them some power. Or, just as telling, take some away. If you hate working, you may not be crazy about sleeping with the person who cashes your checks either. Where are the men who want a wife instead of a fellow worker? Out looking for the best deal, probably. Just like the rest of us.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I wanted to respond to the letter from "Down Deep" from Portland. He was unable to get a woman who refused to speak with him out of his mind. I have been blessed with the intimate companionship of some very wonderful, compassionate, creative women whom I am sure will be life long friends. There are things in life that although are vital, are at the same time very fragile. Integrity, reputation, loyalty, trust, and affection may take a great amount of effort to build, but can be easily destroyed. There is something people do that I call emotional thievery, and to be intimate with somebody who refuses to talk with you is a very harsh and unimaginative way of ending a relationship. I believe with some people this is merely a tactic to not only make you feel bad, but look bad as well. Simply harassing a woman into talking to you generally doesn't work. The sad truth is some people don't know why they do what they do and to attempt to extract an explanation from them is useless. Simply recognize this type of selfish character for what it is and avoid it at all costs.

New and Improved Male, Corvallis, Oregon

Dear New and Improved,

One of the truest political truths is that people get the government they deserve. The same can be said of relationships. People who give attract people who take like iron filings to a magnet. People who allow people to walk all over them attract people wearing heavy boots. No good guys, no bad guys; just humans being themselves. Karma, as they say, is karma; reaping what you sow sort of thing. The parable of the frog and the scorpion comes to mind. The scorpion asks the frog to give him a ride across the river. The frog refuses, on the grounds that the scorpion will sting him to death. Don't be stupid, says the scorpion. If I did that I'd drown. The frog sees the logic, tells the scorpion to hop on and the two set out. Midway, the scorpion stings the frog. Dying, the frog cries foul. The scorpion says, Don't blame me. You knew I was a scorpion. As you point out, the first step is to know a scorpion when you see one. The second is to have brains enough to stay away from them. Neither country western music nor the sonnet would exist were it not for heartless lovers and the pitiful mopes who can't take being stung for an answer. Like any response to having your hopes and dreams fed into a shredder, moping can become a habit. We should all try to obsess only about matters that are worthy of obsession. Truth and beauty, for instance, or the difference between excitement and pleasure. People who don't love us anymore don't, in Uncle Mike's study group, make the cut. When Uncle Mike starts behaving like a bad country western song he reminds himself that, metaphorically speaking, he still has his pickup and his dog.

Dear Uncle Mike,

When you turn off a light, where does the electricity go?
Darryl, Reno, Nevada

Dear Darryl,

Back into the bottle. The genie that lights your lamp is the relationship between positive and negative poles which, in scientific terms, are the genie's good and bad twins. Flicking the switch ends the relationship and the genie goes back to sleep. It's helpful to think of electrons as faeries and the flicking of the switch as proof of your belief in something that only leaves tracks in a bubble chamber. The switch isn't all that substantial either.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Women can say anything they want to about men now but men can't say anything. I'm a waiter and am developing a real distrust of women from listening to their conversations over lunch. It's real vicious stuff. Jerk this and jerk that, all men are liars and cheats, the only good men are gay and on and on. I'm beginning to think all women sit around and cut men to pieces. Tell me I'm wrong.

Don, San Francisco

Dear Don,

You're wrong. Not by much, but wrong nonetheless. Uncle Mike shares your fear and loathing of the sort of male vivisection that's become fashionable since women have ceased to regard men as equals. Uncle Mike has been around a little and has literally never been in the company of men who spent more than thirty seconds waxing bitter about the female jerks in their lives, let alone eviscerating them and reading their entrails over a glass of cabernet. In the face of too much evidence to the contrary, Uncle Mike encourages you to have faith. There are women out there, many of them in this country, who are able to see men as humans. Badly trained and woefully lacking in intelligence, but human nonetheless.

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