



Dear Uncle Mike,

Would you please tell me why men have such a problem with committing to a relationship? I am a 34 year old woman, once divorced. Since I married young (I was 23), I chalked the failure up to our immaturity. I expected that people, myself included, would grow up and finding a partner would be an easier matter as we got older. I'm still waiting. I've been single now for three years and have seriously dated four men during that time. At some point, every one of them said essentially the same thing: I'm not ready to settle down.

These are men in their late thirties to late forties. I understand the biology of the situation and have been come on to by enough married men to know what's what. What I don't understand is why anyone would want to live their life without having someone to share it with. You're obviously a sensitive and intelligent man. Talk to me.

Kris, Salem, Oregon

Dear Kris,

Uncle Mike's first thought is that you should move to another town. Being not only the state capitol but also the site of the state prison, Salem's male demographic is badly skewed toward politicians, lawyers, police persons and ex-convicts. For a woman looking for a nice guy to settle down with, this is a gene pool that offers little in the way of hope.

This said, men are notoriously difficult to house train and even harder to keep on a leash. Behind most domesticated male humans is a frustrated Labrador retriever. Uncle Mike doubts that age has much bearing on an individual male's ability to commit. It has to do with understanding, the capacity for love, and the knowledge of what a positive force a good woman brings to your life. As Maria Muldaur put it so well: them that don't know don't know they don't know. Why would anyone want to live their life without having someone to share it with? Uncle Mike would guess it's because they're not comfortable sharing things with women. Or, in the worst cases, with anyone. Real guys don't need nothing and don't hang out with people who do. Silly, but there it is.

And then, there's responsibility. Although hardly gender specific, irresponsibility is the backbone of what Uncle Mike calls the free range male. These are men whose heroes have usually been cowboys and whose emotional range runs the gamut from childish to child like. It is their independence and freedom that attracts women with a vicarious taste for danger and a misguided urge to tame something. It seldom works out. Given free rein, most men would stay out playing long past dinner time, let the lawn go to seed, and never talk of getting in touch with their feelings. Free range males don't see why this should be a problem.

Which brings us to issues of control. Relationships of any sort often become power struggles. What began as a celebration of unity and difference, a decent working definition of love, deteriorates into attempts to pound round humans into square holes, a decent working definition of trench warfare. No one, man or woman, should either participate in or put up with such nonsense. Men are afraid to love women for the same reason women are afraid to love men: we're all afraid of losing who we are. We're afraid of losing control. In politics, that's when the repression starts. The idea is to get past two party gender politics. That takes real humans acting on something besides self interest, behaving toward their partner as if they were best friends, and recognizing each other's right to, within reasonable limits, be and become who they are.

The men you've run into may not be capable of committing to anything more demanding than their bowling league. Or they might have noticed something about you that made red lights flash on their control panel. No fault, no error, no blame. Just different commitments. Uncle Mike recommends we all continue to look for whatever it is we want. And that we all try to play nice.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Of the fifty ways to leave a lover, which do you recommend most?

Kirk, San Francisco, California

Dear Kirk,

Your glib approach to one of life's more gut wrenching experiences makes Uncle Mike happy for whoever you're thinking about leaving. Your question is patently absurd; so absurd Uncle Mike is amazed you didn't ask him for a few pick-up lines. As you may or may not discover in your stumbling, damage strewn existence, any situation involving another human is unlike any situation that's ever occurred before. This said, Uncle Mike suspects many of your relationships would be, on close examination, numbingly repetitive. Rather than squandering what little mental activity you seem able to muster on ways to leave a lover, why not count the ways you could, and should, cultivate a sex life that doesn't involve other people? You end relationships, nitwit, the same way you do anything else: with dignity, respect, and compassion.

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