

Single Without the Mingle

WHY DATING YOURSELF
COULD BE YOUR
BEST RELATIONSHIP YET

By Kelsey Anne Rankin

A date night at the Bijou Art Cinemas on East 13th Avenue: I feel flustered and find myself battling between excitement and insecurity. I take my time getting ready: hair and makeup, on point. Outfit: classy with a pinch of sex appeal. I'm not worried about my looks — the worry comes from the date itself and where this night might lead (and the last-minute conundrum: not being able to recall the last time I washed this thong.)

Nearing 7 pm: I'm out the door, my head a flurry of thoughts as I make my way to the theater.

Walking up to the building, I notice the rhododendron blossoms surrounding the entrance, which matched the delicate intricacy of the cream-colored structure. I open the front door and find myself bathed in dim lighting that sets the mood. Buying my ticket, I stand awestruck, looking over the selection of indie movies galore.

It's showtime.

I pick a seat in the cozy theater and shut off my phone (goodbye, outside world). The previews flicker to life on the small screen. Settled in and ready for the film, I reach for my glass of wine and realize how comforting it is to be with myself; to be alone.

Alone — a loaded word that is undergoing dramatic shifts as growing numbers of people adopt it as a lifestyle, more so than ever before in U.S. history. People young and not-so-young are trading in the traditional milestone of marriage for a different kind of commitment: being single.

Singlehood, by choice or circumstance, is no easy journey and is often bombarded by social stigmas or pressure to hop on the Tinder train for the occasional validation of a one-night stand. Plenty of single people, however, are choosing to date themselves instead of giving into the pressure to shop around.

"Self-dating" is a term for those flying solo with a self-oriented goal. It is a commitment to oneself — passions, career and dreams — and it builds an

intimate relationship with yourself instead of hooking up with another person (or persons) in the stereotypical romantic way.

It means getting to know yourself, for yourself.

STEP ONE: THERAPY

"I've made a new resolution," I said on a phone call while suffering a bad case of mal-connection. "I want to get into a relationship with myself."

Meg Blanchet, a local holistic healer with plenty of relationship therapy-themed workshops under her belt, replied with a pause — either processing or trying to hear me over the static — and then belted out with a laugh like a hug: "That's just wonderful!"

Blanchet, 59, is devoted to helping cultivate healthy relationships in any aspect of a person's life, starting with the relationships people have with themselves. Her perspective on self-love was sewn in her Santa Cruz upbringing and has helped Eugeneans who are divorced, married and everything in-between build healthy relationships with themselves. She describes the need to get to know yourself as paramount; the relationship needs to be honest, accepting and intimate.

"If you're not in a relationship with yourself, then you're not going to be in the right relationship with others," she says.

Right. I've heard this before and read it in a handful of late-night, lonely Google searches. You can only love others if you love yourself. So, where's the magician and how do I pull self-love out of my ass?

Blanchet recommends courting yourself. With quality time and a focus on yourself, something inside eventually starts talking back, giving you guidance for the rest of your self-exploration trip. She explained to me how our body and mind know what we really want, but it's up to you to take the time needed to understand and know how to listen to what these parts of you are saying.

"You've got to listen deeply inside of yourself and think, 'What gives me joy?'" Blanchet explains.

The rewards of spending more time with yourself

— as opposed to chasing after any attractive distraction walking by — are subtle. You're not given a pat on the head or a golden star for getting to know yourself.

What you do discover, according to Blanchet, is another kind of happiness. "You're going to be looking less to others to complete you — more to be sharing with you instead of to be completing yourself in some way," she explains.

"I think you're better able to recognize what's going to really be the most wholesome relationship for you," she continues. "Nobody else can make you happy. You can be happy with someone or without someone."

TABLE FOR ONE, PLEASE

Courting myself? OK. I'm attractive, have a fine personality and I find myself absolutely hilarious. The only thing that stood between me and a self-date to paint the town was hesitation of trying out something far from my norm.

For eight years, I've either been in some form of committed relationship or on a binge of one-night-stands to keep loneliness at bay. So, I decided to start off dating myself with baby steps: something small, simple and with little to no chance of talking myself out of it.

A movie it is, then.

As it turns out, the Bijou Art Cinemas is one of the top spots for moviegoers taking themselves on a date.

Julie Blonshteyn, who has been working at Bijou Arts Cinemas for nearly two and a half years, guesses about 20 people come to the theater by themselves during an average week. She describes seeing so many independent moviegoers as incredible.

"It happens a lot more here than in other places because of the kind of environment this is," she says. "It's more like art-house movies," Blonshteyn adds, noting that in comparison to movies shown in multiplex theaters, art-house movies are "more cerebral ... I can think about it, and a lot of times there will be people who want to talk about it who have seen it, and we can stand in the lobby or sit in the courtyard and discuss movies. That happens all the time."