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DOUBLE TROUBLE

Dating traps: they're more common than you think. **JEFF HERRING** looks at the three most common pitfalls, and how to avoid them.

The dating world can be such a challenge – even more so if you've come out of a long-term relationship and haven't been in "the game" for a while.

There are many traps out there that should be avoided. And doing that involves an "inner game", paying attention to your thinking and emotions and being honest with yourself about what you think and feel.

Here are three of the most common traps, their signs, symptoms and, most importantly, what to do instead.

THE FAIRYTALE

Trap: Remember the fairytales we heard as children? While most of them had good moral lessons, they were still fairytales.

Yet we handle so many of our relationships as if fairytales are real.

We expect our ideal partner to magically show up someday, without any effort on our part.

Many singles express it like this: "One day I looked across the room, our eyes met, and I just knew he/she was the one!"

Well, maybe yes

and maybe no.

Either way, after the glow of "newness" wears off, you still have to learn to live with another person. It's messy at best.

Solution: Take responsibility for your relationship choice and an active role in finding a good match. Don't just react to the people who choose you, the classic "I'll like them because they like me." Interview a lot of people for the position of your partner.



Is it a fairytale or reality?

THE RESCUE

Trap: Many singles get caught in this one. They believe if they can just meet the right person, all their emotional, financial and other problems will be solved. It's a trap because that's way too

much pressure to put on anyone. In addition, this convinces you that you have very little power to affect your own life. It leaves you feeling desperate and needy. When problems multiply instead of disappear, the relationship is likely to fail.

Solution: There is a proverb that says, "Without a vision, the people perish." This is true for relationships as well.

What is your vision for your relationship? One way to get started is to ask the question: "If I could write the screenplay, what would it look like?" Your relationship will not exactly match the screenplay. Too many times we look for a custom-tailored, perfect fit in an off-the-rack world. This is one way to get you started on creating your relationship vision.

The second thing you should do is resolve your personal, emotional, financial and other life problems before you commit to a long-term relationship. You then stand a much greater chance of relationship success.

DATE-TO-MATE

Trap: Ever tried to put a round peg in a square hole? This is one of the dangers of the

date-to-mate trap. If you go into the dating world with the goal of finding a long-term relationship or even marriage, you set yourself up for trying to make something fit that does not, can not, and will not.

Take the example of a man who enters a marriage knowing he wants children and that his new wife is ambivalent at best. The outcome is predictable. Having children was a requirement for this person. A requirement is something you must have, and is non-negotiable. In this example, you cannot have half a child.

Solution: Be very careful of becoming an instant couple, especially just to be with someone. Know what your requirements are in a long-term relationship and settle for nothing less. Taking this position scares many singles because it reduces the number of available partners. Remember, it only takes one.

Date a bunch of different people without the pressure of the date-to-mate trap. This solution greatly increases your chances of finding "the one".

■ **Jeff Herring is a marriage and family therapist.**

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?



Affairs are all about secrecy. "The infidelity is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't who you lie with. It's who you lie to."

Be honest.

Have you ever, even once, got your hands on your honey's mobile? Quickly searched through their inbox? Read the list of calls they recently placed? All the while your heart pounding that you might find evidence that baby's been up to no good?

According to Rome-based private eye Miriam Tomponzi, there are three prerequisites to cheat successfully:

1. Delete your phone records from the phone memory.
2. Erase incriminating text messages.
3. Learn how to fake a work conversation if your lover calls when your partner is present.

Affairs are all about secrecy. As Frank Pittman writes: "The infidelity is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't whom you lie with. It's whom you lie to."

A UK study found that 45 per cent of people lied about their whereabouts by text.

It's too easy. Say your boyfriend calls you. Instead of answering the call, you could just text back a few minutes later: "At grocery store, home in an hour", when in fact you could be at a nearby hotel, minutes away from shagging the life out of some hottie.

Texting allows us to craft our communication and our spatial and temporal locations.

Many suspicious partners look for behavioral clues, physical symptoms of gonorrhea or, increasingly, choose to play cyber detective.

They work to secretly get hold of their

partner's email or mobile phone. According to my research, this is a widespread phenomenon, particularly for women.

"Sometimes I look in his inbox when he's in the shower; that's the only time I look because he takes his phone everywhere, and he's a light sleeper" said one woman.

If they don't find incriminating evidence, some women continue to sporadically check their partner's mobile. It gives them a feeling of reassurance nothing naughty is going down.

In a national survey, Sandra Davis, head of a posh UK law firm, found 30 per cent of participants used electronic communication to flirt with potential partners or to nurture an affair, with 22 per cent communicating every day with the person and 62 per cent once a week.

One in seven had surreptitiously read their partner's emails and texts, and one in five had discovered a flirtatious communiqué.

A study in Italy found mobile phones were involved in 90 per cent of discovered affairs. And now, of course, text messages, voice messages and call registers are admissible in the court of law in infidelity cases in numerous countries.

Affairs and the mobile phone increasingly go hand-in-hand. Ironically, the same communication device that enhances the workings of an affair also causes disenchantment: discovery. Stupid people often leave cyber footprints.

— **DR BELLA**

BTW

Questions, thoughts, sexual tips? Email me at dearbella@mxnet.com.au