

Looking For Mr./Ms. Right

*I was looking for love in all the wrong places
Looking for love in too many faces...*

*Searching their eyes, looking for traces
Of what I'm dreaming of...
Hopin' to find a friend and a lover
God bless the day I discover
Another heart, lookin' for love. Waylon Jennings*

In a way, "Lookin' for Love" epitomizes our culture's ideal of love. This ideal tells us that somewhere out there, we will find our soul mate: someone who really understands us, a Mr. or Ms. Right who will take care of us, heal our wounds, and meet all of our other emotional and physical needs. This ideal promises that once we find Mr. or Ms. Right, everything will be fine. Even though most of us know that this ideal is a fantasy, we still let ourselves get drawn into its seductive promise. Who hasn't desperately pretended to be someone that she or he wasn't to either get a potential partner's attention or keep the relationship going just a bit longer? Who hasn't gone to a bar, or a meeting, or a party with the secret hope of finding "the one?" And who hasn't believed, at least in a weak moment, that if he or she could only find Mr. or Ms. Right, everything would be fine?

Ironically, this fantasy sets up our relationships to fail because it focuses our attention on finding that magical "other" rather than on healing our own selves. Inevitably, the fantasy will blow up in smoke. When this happens, we usually pretend not to see the cracks in the façade and cling even more tightly to the fantasy. When we can no longer ignore the gap between the fantasy and the reality, we often break up and start the search over. Very rarely do we look within our own hearts and souls for clues as to what went wrong. It's a lot easier to blame someone else than to explore our own projections and patterns.

Most of us laughed the first time we heard this joke. "What does a lesbian bring to the first date?" "A U-Haul." But at a symbolic level, we all arrive at that "first date" or first encounter with a U-Haul full of baggage made up of our agendas, expectations, and experiences, and unload some of this baggage onto every new person that we meet. As a consequence, even as we idealize the latest potential Mr. or Ms. Right, we unconsciously expect him or her to act just like someone we dated before, one of our parents, the creep who dumped us in the 8th grade, or the girl or guy in college who made soup from scratch for us when we were sick.

Not only do we weigh budding relationships down with old baggage, but we tend to approach them with the same ineffective tools and strategies that we've always used. For example, you may realize that in the last five relationships, you have been the one bringing the flowers, making the majority of the phone calls and doing most of the pursuing. Or you may again find yourself just waiting for the other person to call you. Or you may find yourself withdrawing from the other person when he or she begins to get close. You may find, yet again, that you immediately trust or distrust the new potential Mr. or Ms. Right, even though he or she has done nothing to deserve your trust or distrust. Or you may feel a sense of déjà vu early in the relationship, because for some other reason, it seems to be heading in the same direction as your past relationships.

The bottom line is that if you want a relationship that feels magical and fulfills your needs, you have to make some changes. You have to become aware of the baggage that you carry and to explore your interaction patterns. Only after you have done this can you let go of your baggage and develop new, more effective tools and strategies. So, before you go "lookin' for love," you might want to clean out that U-Hall.

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