

Trying What the Experts Say

A *New York Times* article by someone called a research anthropologist makes me think that maybe I have to make adjustments in how I select women to date. The adjustments involve rebalancing what the author says are the “three independent systems” responsible for “human partnerships,” namely “sexual attraction, romantic yearning and long-term attachment.” These “very fickle” systems “can act together or they can act separately,” which explains “why people can be wildly sexually attracted to those they have no romantic interest in, and be romantically drawn -- or even permanently attached — to people who hold no sexual interest.”

I’m out with my third “long-term attachment” project, the third woman I’ve dated since learning that I have to pump steroids into my “long-term attachment” module, while desensitizing my “sexual attraction” and “romantic yearning” aspects. The prior two were fine people, each of whom I went out with twice; the first time to note that I had no interest, the second, what I call the BOD (Benefit-of-the-Doubt) date, to confirm that all my wiring was intact during the first encounter, all readings correct, nothing overlooked.

The current choice my system's not going for is Marleen, her cuteness being distilled away by her rigidity, the personality equivalent of the hundreds of pounds of weights she lifts, and the long workouts she does every day, all to win the macabre female bodybuilding contests she trains for. Her body, probably flat and taut in all the wrong places, is something I'm desperately trying to prepare myself for seeing, to make myself "choose" to want to get into.

I assume that she keeps inviting me to her condo for that purpose, and by now I'm down to asking about the fiber makeup of the contents of her Pier I pillows and the countries of origin of her Ikea furniture, having run out of things to do there to avoid sitting quietly together, having already closely examined every photo, scrapbook and book (yearbooks and the scary *A Female Bodybuilder's Life* included), plus asked about every piece of artwork including, most recently, a crumpled orange-red piece of construction paper on a bookcase that, she informs, is garbage left by a kid, not sculpture.

It's a week before Thanksgiving, a holiday that used to be quite festive, with me a happy drunk cooking a notoriously good meal for the

extended family. I don't have my kids this year, have no place to go except Marleen's, and don't want to be alone. So I'm desperately trying to hold on to whatever relationship I have with her until after the holiday.

The problem, though, is that almost every time I get near her, she edges closer; she wants physical contact. For my part, I'd rather tongue kiss the Michelin Man. To avoid real physical contact, and the conversation about my feelings or lack thereof that would prompt, I'm keeping us as busy as possible with physical activities, at least until Thanksgiving. We've slowly hiked every trail, some twice, in our relatively trail-less Connecticut suburb. We've ever-so-slowly plodded through every room in the two museums that exist in all of Fairfield County. We've laboriously perused every single *cute* antique store within thirty miles. But now, the day before the holiday, I'm cornered. I'm sitting idly with her on the sofa in her condo living room. I'm about to be smooched, no options left, nothing to do except let it happen and then discuss why it's not happening or, as I do, not wanting to discuss or explain, rising and leaving.