

# HL | Uncommon Sense relationship GIRL

Beth Firestein • licensed psychologist



Every time I break up with a guy, I go on a couple dates and before I know it, I am a "couple" again.

## What's wrong with me?

choices have a compulsive quality and that they are often driven by the needs and designs of the person you are dating. If you suddenly find yourself in an unwanted couple relationship, it means you are not steering the relation-ship." If you feel that some of these issues apply to you, it would probably be helpful to seek a therapist that can help you sort these things out and develop new more satisfying patterns of dealing with relationships.

**Question:** Dr. Beth, is there any way to keep my self-esteem from sabotaging my relationship? I work very hard to stay in shape and look good, but sometimes I still have a low opinion of my body — and when I don't feel good about myself, I don't feel like being intimate with my partner. It's to the point where physical intimacy is almost completely absent from my relationship for extended periods of time. Can I fix this?

**Answer:** There are a number of people that struggle with this exact issue. It is not only a matter of self-esteem, it is clearly also a matter of "body-esteem". Most women and quite a few men struggle with issues of

body dissatisfaction and insecurity about their attractiveness and desirability. When this takes an extreme form it is called "body dysmorphia."

Body dysmorphia is characterized by an extreme dislike or unhappiness with your own body and distortions in body image; for example, thinking your hips, belly or other body parts are bigger than they actually are or exaggerating your less attractive qualities in your mind to an irrational degree. Sometimes personal body shame or dissatisfaction can lead to or increase eating disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia or compulsive overeating, which create their own problems. Frequently, these feeling affect sexual interest and feelings of sexual desirability.

There is a wide continuum between normal body concerns and body dysmorphia, but regardless of the degree of personal unhappiness, it can be lessened so that it does not interfere with your intimate relationship with your partner.

There are several resources for improving body-esteem, such as books addressing improving body image and body esteem, body-esteem groups and workshops. If the primary issue is a discomfort with sex, there are also resources for improving your sexual self-esteem. I highly recommend accessing some of these resources and if they don't provide enough support, you might look into groups or individual counseling to deal with these issues.

Perhaps it would be helpful to share your concern openly with your partner and see if he or she can help by sharing the ways they find you physically and sexually desirable. It is also helpful for your partner to talk about non-physical traits that relate to your sexual expression, such as your passion, your sensitivity to their needs, or the quality of your touch. Ultimately, though, these are things you also need to believe about yourself. Look into the resources available to help you feel better about your body and what you have to offer as a person and your intimate relationship with your partner can come back to life.

**Question:** Hi Dr. Beth, I am a woman in my late 20s, and for as long as I can remember I have been in relationships with men. Every time I break up with a guy, I go on a couple dates and before I know it, I am a "couple" again. I always set out to stay single for awhile and it never lasts. Sometimes I don't even like the guys I'm dating that much. What's wrong with me?

**Answer:** It sounds like you are genuinely concerned about the quality of your dating life and whether never being single for very long might mean that you have a personal problem. There are two key things you mentioned that indicate this may be a problem. First, you are wondering if it is healthy to go from being a "couple" to being another "couple" so quickly and so often. Second, you realize that you are sometimes dating people that you don't even like very much.

Common sense suggests that the whole point of dating is to get to know people you are very interested in, people that you like and to whom you feel attracted. When you find yourself dating just to date or being in a relationship just to be in a relationship, the pleasurable purpose of dating and relationships are basically lost.

In my experience as a therapist, I have found a few common themes in the motivations and psychology of people (women or men) who engage in this pattern. Quite often, this pattern reflects an underlying fear of being alone, a fear of feeling lonely, or not knowing what to do with oneself as a single person. Being liked and being in a relationship is a part of the basis for most people's self-esteem, but healthy individuals also derive self-esteem from other sources as well. Self-esteem may also come from their own accomplishments, their friends, and their activities and interests apart from a relationship. Deriving all of your self-worth from being part of a couple is based in fear and perhaps not knowing yourself as a person apart from being someone's girlfriend or significant other.

Another pattern I have noticed is dependency and a lack of confidence in being an independent person. Feeling independent comes fairly naturally to some women, but for many it is an acquired skill. Spending time with women friends that seem to have this quality of independence can help you observe and practice the ways they successfully create an independent self in the world.

Finally, it sounds like your

### UNCOMMON SENSE WITH BETH FIRESTEIN

Dr. Beth Firestein is a licensed psychologist. She has 24 years of therapy experience and has practiced in Loveland for over 14 years. She may be reached by calling her office at 970-635-9116, via e-mail at [firewom@webaccess.net](mailto:firewom@webaccess.net), or by visiting [www.bethfirestein.com](http://www.bethfirestein.com).

