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The wrong man can do more damage than heartbreak - how can we protect one another from *that* pandemic?

Entanglements aside, for women, the wrong relationship can cause more than heartache. For us, bad situations can end in financial or career ruin, and violence/death at a disproportionate scale. And yet, so many of us stick around for not-shit dudes. We've all lost a girlfriend or two because she got into a bad relationship we couldn't support; causing her to feel isolated, and us to lose respect for her. How can we prop one another up to stop allowing the sink into shitty relationships?

The implications of dating gone awry can be legitimately dangerous for women. While online dating does pose more traditional safety concerns, with sexual and financial predators lurking on apps, regardless of the method you use to date, overall, women are more likely to bear the brunt of a relationship gone rocky. With breakups, women are at a higher risk for financial losses and physical violence than their male counterparts. According to a [study published by the NIH in 2018](#), women encounter disproportionate losses in income, and associated increases in risk of poverty and single parenting after a divorce. Women are also more likely to be the victims of post-breakup stalking. In [2014, the CDC reported](#) that approximately 15% of women had ever experienced stalking, compared to 6% of men. Further, women become victims of violence and death at a higher rate - 1 in 4 women, compared to 1 in 7 men, have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime ([2011](#)). Falling in with the wrong man can *literally* kill us.

With the risks associated with dating, why is it, then, that so many of us get and stay in shitty relationships? Almost every woman can recall a friend they lost as a result of her having fallen in with the wrong dude. Many of us have even *been* that girl who has lost friends, and later ourselves, in a bad situation.

Women get and stay in these relationships for a myriad of reasons - there could be financial burdens at play, children in the picture, the list goes on. A common denominator we usually come back to, though, is low self-esteem. Some women might not love themselves enough to know that they deserve better; some may not believe they're capable of finding love again.

Seeing a friend lose herself to an absolute non-factor of a man is reminiscent of watching a horror movie. You're powerless as the main character explores the creepy clown giggle from the basement, rather than getting out of the house. It's common, too; there is a whole other pandemic at play of intelligent, capable, talented women who get dragged down into awful situationships with men who are lightyears beneath their caliber.

This is why it is essential to scoop your girlfriend up out of the depths of a bad relationship before it even gets that far. Female friendships are fundamental in creating a culture where self-love is a top priority, and tolerating subpar partnerships is out of the question. To combat this, women can build our communities up so that they stop falling into the trap of bad relationships *to begin with*.

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The recipe for success in dating looks different to everyone, but for the moderators of [Female Dating Strategy](#), a popular dating subreddit, it is first about being a “high value” woman, meeting a “high value” man, “vetting” him with the strictest standards in mind, to create a relationship you both get something out of. The subreddit sees submissions from women struggling to leave their ‘PickMe’ ways, and enforce a strict no bullshit policy in their dating lives. If a man doesn’t plan a nice dinner for your first date, and subsequently pay for the whole thing? Red flag. It might seem extreme, but the alternative exists where dudes invite us over to their homes for the infamous ‘Netflix and Chill,’ and the low-effort investment sets the standard for the relationship moving forward.

YouTuber, Entrepreneur, and Mentor [Sheneka Adams](#) teaches her community similar lessons. On [her Instagram page](#), she hosts ‘Girl Chats’ discussing tactics and scripts to use to vet men as high-value before investing too much of your time. “Why should you let a man in your life if he contributes nothing? That’s not a partner, that’s a parasite,” she recently reposted on her page. “Your taste in people will change when you learn to love yourself,” another one reads.

This community curriculum may be intense, especially as women work to untangle ourselves from generations of patriarchal standards and determine how equality comes into play in our search for a possible life partner. The core messages, though, are essential - how are you holding your group of girlfriends accountable for the men they allow in their lives? Are you leading by example with a ‘take no shit’ mentality?

At the first post-pandemic brunch with your girlfriends, as you sit around the table and talk about the perils of Bumble and dating in the 21st century, help protect your girlfriends from falling into the wrong thing - considering asking the question ‘and what is he bringing to the table that makes this worth your time, energy, and hot years?’ Maybe even don your [Britney-inspired ‘Dump Him’ tee](#). They may thank you for it one day.

The culture in your community should set a high standard for how you are all to be treated. The rules should follow common advice; break up with someone after the first red flag, keep a stash of ‘eff you’ money to dip whenever required, and to quote the late Maya Angelou, “when someone shows you who they are, believe them.” Your community can also share resources, host self-love weekends, and take a book club approach to self betterment and how to set and maintain healthy boundaries in dating.