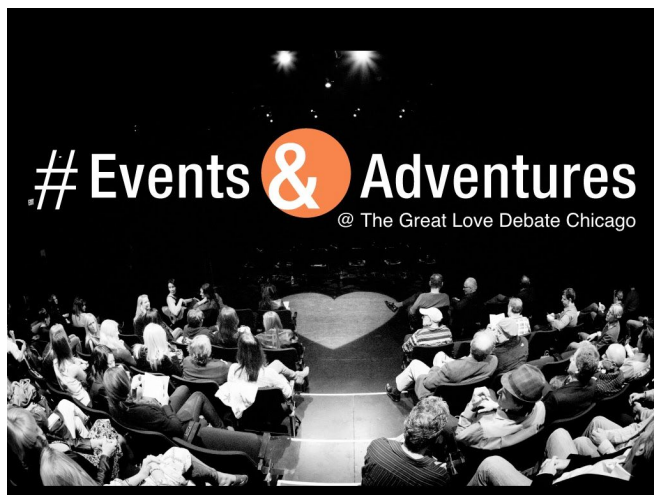


This advertorial was published on a Revolutionary Media Group client's website as well as ~10 partner sites to improve backlinks, provide SEO content with CTA ads embedded on the page to generate leads, and cross-promote the client's event partners.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE? GOING UNDERCOVER TO FIND LOVE IN CHICAGO

By: Mike Noonan
April 23, 2014

CHICAGO - I had walked ten steps from my car before turning back to slip off and deposit my wedding ring in the center console. Like a classically-trained method actor, tonight I was going into deep cover and fully transforming myself into a free man inside and out.



I entered the [Greenhouse Theater Center](#) 20 minutes before showtime, and was delighted to find I had my pick of the prime general admission seats. I sat center stage in the back to be able to take in the full scene. A trio of decently-dressed 20-something women giggled as they walked to Row L directly in front of me. A few men about my age - a *little* older than 20-something - milled about stage left. I pretended to study my phone as I stole glances at the

crowd slowly filtering in. Some clearly had dressed for a full night on the town after this appetizer, while others seemed like this might be the main event of their Friday night.

Finally the lights dimmed at 8:02 p.m. as the night's emcee took the mic. "Hello Chicago!" he crowed like any good front man. "I'm Brian Howie, author of [How to Find Love in 60 Seconds](#). Welcome to 'The Great Love Debate!'" With that he introduced the night's featured experts and the festivities were underway. An author, a professional matchmaker, the owner of a [multinational social club for singles](#), and a comedian emerged from the wings to take their seats onstage.

Over the next 90 minutes, the townhall-style gathering bounced between the type of panel discussion you'd see at some staid conference, to a more interactive format with Howie taking his wireless mic into the seats to let people make comments, query the empaneled experts, and, well, *debate* questions of love, sex, and compatibility. These segments are where Howie, the love experts, and the crowd truly came alive, and are

likely the reason "[The Great Love Debate](#)" has toured in 78 cities since Howie came up with the concept in 2014.

"The biggest challenge to finding love in Chicago in 2014 is *what?*" Howie asked an attractive woman in the 6th row. Moments later Howie summed up her answer. "Too many choices. You poor thing! Alright sit down," to the amusement of the crowd.

Mark Owen, the founder of an aptly-named social club that sets up daily events for singles, [Events and Adventures](#), interjected. "Cell phones. How many promising dates have been ruined in the past 10 years since cells became ubiquitous? It's funny. We started our club in 1991 to give singles a way to network and hang out with people like them. There were no cell phones. Then in about 2005, everyone started walking around with their heads buried in their devices, and social lives definitely suffered.

Things have come full circle, though. Our [club members](#) tell us they love being able to put their phones away and interact and actually really connect with people. Now we're finding people *join* our club to be able to focus on creating real memories, engaging with real live people, and sharing time and space with people in fun ways, doing the things they love to do anyway, like going to wine tastings or hiking, Owen said."

Many in the crowd nodded their head in agreement. Could it really be that people were ready to have more experiences *IRL* - in real life?

Cell phones weren't the only target suffering slings and arrows. Social media, women "setting their proverbial bars too high," and bars themselves all took their lumps as the night unfolded. "The Great Love Debate" really hit its comedic stride when the subject of the dating app, Tinder, came up. A few people were goaded into letting Howie see their profiles, and the panelists took their turns critiquing their "online personas."

"Tinder was a real threat a few years back to clubs like ours, but we've seen that it's effect has diminished in recent years," Owen said. "But I think people seem to have had their fill of the swiping and fakeness that abounds there. The one night stands, the feelings of rejection, the element of danger, even. [Our members](#) say they love meeting people in relaxed and safe environments, and not feeling pressured to have to hit it off or end their night early. If they find someone at one of our events, great! And many do, and many, *many* have over the last 30 years. But, if not, they still can hang out with other people like them, have fun doing things mutually like doing, and just enjoy being free."

There's that word again: *Free*. A few minutes later I was in my car, my wedding ring back in its familiar place as my right hand man. My brief mission undercover as a "free man" was complete. I had gotten what I came for, though. I saw firsthand that love is still in the air in Chicago, at least among the 300 or so people who paid \$30 a head to

attend “The Great Love Debate.” The recurring theme of the night, though, was unmistakable: While *finding* love isn’t always free, per se, the rewards can be rich and last a lifetime.

###