Choosing a Dissertation Chair

Marcie is a second-year Ph.D. student in the educational research department at a public university. She is an excellent student with a promising career in research and publication ahead of her. Currently, she is sitting in the hall, waiting for a meeting with one her professors, Bob Johnson, an older member of the department. While she waits, Marcie is rehearsing what she wants to talk to Bob about. Her problem is this:

Another member of her department, Mike Smith, has been talking with her. Praising her ability and potential, Mike has discussed whom she should choose as her dissertation supervisor and partner for a program of research. Mike told her that she should choose him because his national reputation practically guarantees that she will get a first-class job when she graduates and that the top journals will publish her articles if his name is also on them. Being an ambitious student, Marcie has been considering this carefully. However, her topic of interest does not exactly correspond to Mike's. They are close enough that it would not be unrealistic for him to direct her dissertation, but his work is not what she really wants to do. Other members of the department—Bob Johnson, for example—would be more suitable in this regard, and Marcie wonders how she should make the choice. Specifically, she worries whether she would be able to work well with Mike.

She took Mike's seminar during her first year of course work, and she was struck by several of his offhand comments that betrayed a negative attitude toward women, especially women students. She also thought that he sometimes dismissed the ideas of other scholars without considering them thoroughly, something he also seemed to do when students disagreed with him. In addition, she often had problems scheduling meetings with Mike to discuss her term paper. She has heard older graduate students mention that they worked hard on projects that never came to fruition because Professor Smith did not contribute his share of the work. Now she wants to talk to Bob about how she should proceed. Should she select Mike as her dissertation adviser or choose another member of the department?

Questions

1. What should Marcie do? What questions should she ask Bob?
2. Has Mike behaved ethically toward Marcie and the other graduate students, as well as toward his colleagues?
3. What should Bob Johnson tell Marcie?