

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

THE WORLD'S WORST-MATCHED COUPLES

And you think you've got it rough...

When people ask you to describe your relationship, are you tempted to tell them that your partner fits you as poorly as last year's slacks, or that the two of you are no more alike than two snowflakes? Then you will be happy to learn that there are many pairs who probably make you and your mate look like a match made in computer heaven—partners who deserve to be placed on The World's Worst Couples List.

1. *Allen and Stephanie*. Both dominant personalities, Allen and Stephanie don't have a relationship so much as a power struggle. How they ever hooked up is as much a mystery as how I gained seven

pounds while eating like a bird. People speculate that they probably got acquainted in a doorway, when neither would let the other through first. Every facet of their relationship is a contest for supremacy, so a discussion about what to have for dinner can turn into a debate about which of them is better informed on the body's minimum daily requirement for riboflavin. Friends have suggested that instead of making their whole life a quest for dominance, they confine the contest to one sphere by taking up a competitive sport, like dueling.

2. *Sally and Josh*. Two of the most helpless individuals ever to make it to adulthood, Sally and Josh aren't so much a couple as a disaster area. Neither knows the first thing about handling money, tools, ovens, or a needle and thread. And neither of them can find his way out of a paper bag, let alone a supermarket. As a result, none of their appliances work, none of their clothes have any buttons left, and there's nothing in their refrigerator or their checking account. If they are invited anywhere, they get either lost or ticketed. Last year, when they took a cross-country trip in their car, alarmed friends gave them a bag of bread crumbs.

Each is always hoping the other will take care of whatever has to be taken care of—the shopping, the bills, the laundry, the carburetor—and each is always disappointed, so they are constantly squabbling about whose fault it is that they are eating dry shredded wheat for dinner and using paper napkins for bath towels. But nobody's to blame except fate, which decreed that they back into one another's cars four years ago and fall in love, thus joining two barely capable people into one totally inadequate couple.

3. *Sarah and Charles*. Both Sarah and Charles have explosive tempers and express their anger in the most clamorous and clattering ways. Knowing this, at the first sign of a commotion, their neighbors jump into any vehicles handy and speed off to the movies, preferably to a four-hour rerun of *Gone With the Wind*. In the aftermath of a fight, their place is apt to look as if it had been attacked by elephants. Since they may not talk for weeks afterward, their friends calculate that although they have lived together for nearly four years, they have had a speaking relationship for only two. These same friends have suggested that instead of exchanging anniversary presents this year, they give each other combat pay.

4. *Alice and Jim*. Unlike Charles and Sarah, who at least have similar temperaments, Alice and Jim have nothing in common but their last name. Even their appearances are foreign; Jim looks as if he lives in the woods, and Sarah looks as if she lives in Saks. Since their tastes mirror their looks, they agree on practically nothing. When it comes to movies, Jim will not see anything that doesn't star either Clint Eastwood or Arnold Schwarzenegger, while Alice says dryly that she prefers English-language films. When it comes to food, Jim believes quality comes through quantity, while Alice feels that a restaurant can be excellent even if it does give you less red meat than is thrown to the lions at the zoo. Since they can never find anything both of them want to do, they usually wind up staying home. This, bewildered friends speculate, might be what has kept them together longer than a lot of couples who go out.

5. *Michael and Jennifer*. Michael and Jennifer have serious communication problems—either one of them would make a stone seem articulate. Each would rather expose himself in public than express an emotion or confide a problem to the other. For this reason they are always the last to know things about one another, a circumstance that causes them innumerable problems. Jennifer didn't know Michael had changed careers until *after* she'd bought him a new stethoscope, and Michael didn't know Jennifer was scared of heights until they were halfway up Mt. Washington. Friends conjecture that the closest they ever come to having a conversation is when both of them talk in their sleep.

If you believe you and your partner belong on this list, perhaps you should ask yourself why you stay together: whether it is because you are hopelessly in love—or hopelessly misinformed about what a love relationship is supposed to be.

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