

# CAN THIS BE LOVE?

**WHAT'S SO FUNNY?** He is, when you're lucky

When men and women list the qualities they are looking for in a partner, a sense of humor is inevitably near the top. And that's as it should be, since without humor, living with another human being is no laughing matter—it is, in fact, like living in the Arctic without a coat. On the other hand, when your partner *does* have a sense of humor, it is invariably a plus for the relationship. To take advantage of it, however, you've got to understand the role a sense of humor plays in everyday relating. (Hint: It is much like the role taste plays in everyday eating.)

One of the most important things a sense of humor can do is minimize incompatibility. A good example of this was provided by the friend who told me how she and her husband used to fight about neatness. (Her habits resemble those of Felix Unger, while his resemble those of someone brought up by wolves.) It used to drive him crazy when she brushed the crumbs from around his plate several times during dinner. The day she tried to brush them off his *lap*, he suddenly saw the humor in her obsessiveness. Now he stands quietly while she whisks him as if he were a piece of clothing on a hanger, speculating on whether she derives some sexual satisfaction from this and wondering if they should try to incorporate some form of housekeeping into their lovemaking. In return, she happily wears the anniversary present he bought her this year: a gold charm in the shape of a Dust Buster.

Humor can also be useful in defusing potentially explosive moments in a relationship. Say, for instance, that you and your partner are trying to plan a vacation, and you can't seem to find a common ground between your idea of going to France and his idea of going to Disneyland. Instead of allowing the discussion to escalate into an indictment of his lack of taste, adventurousness and/or mental advancement, or your lack of patriotism, you could lighten the situation with some humor. (Be careful, however, not to make matters worse by employing humor your partner could possibly construe as being at his expense. Don't ask him if the reason for his choice of vacation spot is a yearning to double-date with Chip 'n' Dale.)

If you and your partner find yourselves in a situation that has already turned mean, humor can be used as a leavening agent. Say, for instance, you find yourselves in a fight about which of your mothers is more destructive to your relationship. You *might* list the number of times his mother has called you "Miss Uppity," but that might

heighten the tension. On the other hand, if you throw in an uncanny impersonation of a woman enumerating her husband's flaws on the bristles of a broom, or picking minute particles of lint from your rug with tweezers—you may be able to prevent the argument from degenerating into a melee.

A sense of humor is also important when it comes to making a point, instructing your partner or showing him the light on some issue about which he is pathetically misinformed. Perhaps, for example, he takes the view that biology is destiny and, ergo, women are the only people who cook meals. He may not be impressed when you tell him that these days, destiny aside, grown men are supposed to know how to do more in the kitchen than open and close the refrigerator door. But if you tell him a joke about a man who starved to death because his wife went on a grapefruit diet, he might get the point.

These benefits notwithstanding, you should also know that a sense of humor can be better in the abstract than it is in the specific, and that finding a partner who has one can be easier than living with him once you've found him. It can be a problem, for instance, if his chief source of humor is *you*,

or a particular area of your anatomy, or if your idea of funny is Woody Allen movies, while his idea of funny is Woody Woodpecker cartoons. If you encounter such difficulties, remind yourself that you have to take the good with the bad. Maybe your partner *does* tell jokes suitable for a four-year-old who's just discovered the delights of bathroom humor. But isn't that more than balanced by the fact that he can laugh at your accidentally stripping the gears on his car? Keep in mind that it's less important that you actually *like* your partner's sense of humor, or that your own and his match, than it is that he have one, any one at all.

Finally, it's just as important to the health of your relationship that you know when *not* to laugh. When, for instance, in the middle of chewing you out for your habit of parking in places marked "Taxis Only," your partner is spattered with mud by a passing taxi, suppress your impulse to remark amusingly on the coincidence. Keep in mind that while everyone appreciates a sense of humor, nobody likes a smart ass.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

Flame resistant meets U.S. Standard FF3-71.

### RULES OF THUMB

1. Put the thumb in your mouth.
2. That's the space between your nose and your chin.
3. Don't let your parents see you, however, they'll tell you you'll ruin your teeth even though you don't have teeth yet.
4. Always wear your Carter's. They've got great taste, too.

**Carter's.**

MADE IN THE U.S.A.