

Things to never say to a man

Blokes will laugh at the lowest of things – except any of these

By David Smiedt

Good sense of humour (GSOH). Scan a dating site and it's the term you'll see more than any other. Being able to have a laugh is sealant that glues you together at the start of a relationship and keeps you from coming unstuck when stuff like each other's families and nappy changing comes along. There's not a man alive who doesn't think he has a gold SOH – look at his *Simpsons* collection and the fact he never tires of *Funniest Home Videos*: "Look babe, this kid's going to hit his dad in the nuts!"

That said, there are some topics he'll never find funny. No matter how much he knows you love him. Avoid at all costs:

"What's this?"

Let's say, like the head of *The Simpsons* family, your bloke has a bit of a pot belly. Let's say, like a lot of men, he likes busting out the odd joke about it: "This? This is my VB retirement program!" Do not, under any circumstances attempt to use this line yourself. Especially in public, while playfully squeezing his gut. While it's tempting to assume the gag stems from a place of comfort with his slightly out-of-shape form, it's actually sheer bravado, a faux-jolly deflection

mechanism. While his mates may be able to get away with ribbing him about it (and then only because they're sporting similar "verandahs over the toolshed"), in the mouth of the person who supposedly loves him most, this jape is a razor blade that cuts swift and deep. Think of it as lipo without anaesthetic that requires ongoing pain medication.

"My ex used to..."

While the sex with him may not be earth-shattering, the rest of the relationship makes up for it. Sounds like a fair, if not ideal, compromise right? Not if you're a man. It doesn't matter if he knows he's made you happier, more confident and more emotionally fulfilled



Oh, bucket



than any other bloke, he still can't bear the thought that someone else had you moaning a little louder, grabbing the sheets tighter and banging that headboard faster. Even if you've been with him for decades, that throwaway joke about "Carlos the tradie who gave me spasms in my little toes," will not go down well. Speaking of which...

"So I checked your Firefox history..."

You know he looks at the odd bit of porn. He knows you know and you know he knows you know. Because you are a grown-up realist, you've dealt with it. He, however, has not. Every pleasurable frisson of a mouse click is accompanied by a smaller one of shame. Which is why he tries his utmost to wipe clean his browser history.

You may think that having a little joke about this – "So what's happening at dirtygrannynurses.com today?" – will alleviate the tension and show you're cool with the whole tawdry business. But no. It'll have precisely the opposite effect and he'll burn with embarrassment. The reason for this is that although you may be reconciled with the filthier elements of his nature, he never will be.

"Your mum's emails are so hilarious"

By now, you'll no doubt pick up the unmistakable scent of hypocrisy (think: a blend of overcooked cabbage and regret). If the roles were switched and you were upset by any of these actions, he'd mumble something along the lines of "lighten up", "you've got to learn how to take a joke" or "saying it and meaning it are two different things". Meanwhile, he reserves the right to be mortally wounded by your vicious insensitivity masquerading as humour.

Nowhere will this be more apparent than the subject of family. While your mum and dad's slightly antiquated attitudes, flubbing of social media terminology and fondness for an evening cocktail or three may be open slather for him, the merest lighthearted suggestion that "you sound like

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your dad" will be perceived as an attack on both. Sad but true.

"Oh, cute, a sponsor child! Do you have a photo?"

Your relationship is probably founded on a lie. No, make that several lies. In the early stages, many a man suspects he's not quite good enough to woo you. That's why we embellish on that stint of charity work we did in 1993, our fondness for Jodi Picoult and the notion that "you can't live a fulfilling life from the couch". Call him out on these – it was one Saturday morning of doorknocking for the Red Shield Appeal, he watched *My Sister's Keeper* but only because it starred Cameron Diaz, and in reality the sofa has practically moulded itself around his arse – and he will recoil like a child who's just touched a hotplate. Of course you don't hold these white lies against him and may even love him a little bit more because he was trying so very hard, but his own sense of duplicitousness and latent inferiority will never sit comfortably enough to be joked about.

"Was that a pop 'n' lock?"

There are some men who are comfortable on the dance floor. There are many, many others who are not. Those who grab their partner by the hand and sing along to "my lovely lady lumps" invariably believe that they are the love child of Usher and Fred Astaire. You and I, however, know they actually resemble an inflatable noodle man on roller skates. Do not burst this balloon through imitation or – worse still – stifling a smile as he busts out

his trademark shimmy. Doing so will shatter one of his core self-beliefs – that he has moves – and will have him looking at himself in a disparaging new light. Is this a trivial issue that hardly warrants serious deliberation? Probably. Is he big and old enough to be able to deal with a little ribbing? Maybe. But will he forever remember the time you made fun of his dancing? I can guarantee it.

"Hey, sweet stuff..."

Yes, we're talking willies – the most sensitive spot on a man's body and ego. He may not admit it but there's not a man out there who doesn't wonder if he's long enough and wide enough to satisfy his woman. It's the herpes of personal insecurities in that once you get it, it's there forever and will rear its head – as it were – when you least expect it. The most innocuous of actions can bring this on, so think carefully about the words you use when referring to it in conversation. You don't have to overcompensate with terms like "schlong kong" but for the sake of his fragile self-esteem, do not under any circumstances refer to the mighty sword as "cute", "adorable" or "sweet". Even if meant as a genuine term of endearment, he won't accept it as such. You may as well have kicked him straight in the ego. *wh*

Babe

The number-one most loathed pet name for a partner, closely followed by Treacle and Pickle

SOURCE: A SITEOPIA.COM SURVEY OF 2000 PEOPLE

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