

## Back on Top

Does he have road rage? Does he hate his mother? Does he *live* with his mother? Is he a slob? Does he cheat at golf?

**Eventually, you start to find out things that *do* matter to you in a partner.**

These are character qualities that you just won't learn unless you get out from under the covers once in a while. And if you started out in bed, it may take you months to learn. By then, you could be fairly invested in the guy. You may be heavily in lust, you may have introduced him to your friends, you may have brought him to the office party. You may even think it's love. And it will be harder to untangle yourself from all this than if you had learned some of these things while your clothes were still on.

My guess is that soon you will not feel good about yourself or him if you continue to forgive his propensity for yelling at clerks or peeking at your text messages or borrowing money just because he's good in bed.

## Your Brain on Love

And all the advice I just gave you? That's pretty much straight from my therapist, and it only cost you a few minutes and less than twenty dollars. You have no idea what a bargain that is. Of course, you don't have to come back next week and tell me *how's that working for you?*

I have come up with a personal solution to this, however. From now on, any potential boyfriends are going to have to date

## How Many Dates Until We Have Sex?

my therapist before they date me. Because when I'm falling in lust or love or even like-you-a-lot, it's like being on mind-altering drugs. Something equivalent to say, several Cosmos or the best stuff you smoked in college. It's enough to send my senses reeling—all five of them, and that's completely excluding my common sense.

According to the experts who study loveology, when we talk about “feeling chemistry” after meeting Mr. Right we are dead-on accurate. Falling in love wreaks havoc with your brain's chemicals, causing great surges in dopamine, adrenaline, and endorphins. These are the culprits responsible for spine-tingling feelings like ecstasy, bliss, rapture. They are also freakishly similar biochemically to obsessive-compulsive disorder. So when you've got the hots for someone, it's like you've suddenly contracted an amped-up case of OCD.

**When I'm  
falling in lust or  
love or even like-  
you-a-lot, it's like  
being on mind-  
altering drugs.**

Just think how many times you, your best friend, your sister, or your co-worker has said: “I think I'm in love with [insert name of date du jour] and I can't stop thinking about him.” Enough said.

This is your brain. This is your brain on love.

So given the fact that I have been known to get loopy on just two Advil, how can I possibly make a wise decision about whom to date when all these chemicals are making me higher than those pot-smoking kids on the Anti-Drug commercials who

## Back on Top

sit around watching TV all day? If I am completely without my senses, I shouldn't even be *driving* to see my therapist.

Is there a Breathalyzer test for the love-doped?

*Officer: "Excuse me, ma'am, I have been following you for three miles with my lights flashing and my siren blaring. Not only did you not respond, you ran two red lights, knocked over a pedestrian's shopping cart, and your car muffler is trailing toilet paper. Step out of the car and tell me what kind of drugs you're on."*

*Me: "Oh, Officer, I am so sorry. I assure you I am completely sober. It's just that I met this cute guy and we spent the last hour gazing into each other's eyes at this little lunch place in midtown. I can't stop thinking about him and my mind is obsessed with wedding details. Can you just give me a warning?"*

Rather than risk Atlanta's Finest pulling me over, my date will just have to drive himself. To his appointment. To see my therapist.

Don't worry, she's very cool, very wise, and doesn't do any of that *tell me about your mother* stuff. I should know. I've been seeing her for fifteen years.

I know what you're thinking—I'm a lifer. Maybe I am. But I can tell you with absolute assurance that my marriage would have ended with one of us in jail for resenting the other one to death had it not been for Amanda, licensed therapist. That I might not have known when it was okay to finally stop trying and let it go. That we would not have the extraordinary divorce and

## How Many Dates Until We Have Sex?

friendship we have today had it not been for what my ex and I learned in therapy.

It's just that we met Amanda one year too late.

I wonder how things would have been if I had sent my ex-husband to Amanda when he was still just my boyfriend. Say, for an evaluation—*before* I committed to love, honor, and cherish him forever, no matter what. Forever is a freakin' long time. And *no matter what* is a phrase that just doesn't belong anywhere near a committed relationship. But you're not thinking about that under the chuppa because your senses are still reeling from the pathology of love pulsing through your veins. And standing so close to him . . . well, don't even get me started on pheromones.

So, I'm thinking my therapist can give me kind of a rate card for my next boyfriend. Something simple like . . .

- On a scale of one to five, how heavy is his baggage (and can he carry it himself)? Does it match or clash with mine?
- On a scale of one to five, how likely is he to sleep with my best friend? His best friend?
- On a scale of one to five, how likely are his cute little idiosyncrasies (calling me five times a day just to say hello) to drive me certifiably crazy before “forever” is even halfway up?
- Or how about something simple, like: On a scale of one to five, how likely are we to have a lifelong love?

## Back on Top

With this psychological report card from my therapist, I would now be armed with a powerful antidote to the drugs taking over my mind, body, and heart. When the surge of hormones surges, I can whip out the rate card and try to put some logic around the illogical process of falling in love. Perhaps I can actually catch myself *before* I fall.

Yeah, I'm smirking over that last line, too.

Who among us has ever walked away from a potentially disastrous match because someone told us that he was wrong for us? Come on. Show of hands. I thought not.

**Who among us  
has ever walked  
away from a  
potentially disas-  
trous match  
because someone  
told us that he was  
wrong for us?**

How many people whose opinion I trusted told me I should stop and reconsider marrying my ex? Or at least slow down?

Well, let's start with the woman who introduced us—the lead singer in his band and a really good friend of mine. She didn't actually introduce us as in, "I think you two would make a great couple." She hired me to do the band's press kit, and I met him over interviews. In fact, she actually warned me from day one that this was not going to work, and she had valid reasons—proof—as well as a background in mental health for crying out loud. Did I listen? Uh, yeah, that's a rhetorical question.

Next, my best friend of fifteen years, in her sweet, tender way, said to me when she met him, "This isn't the guy you were telling

## How Many Dates Until We Have Sex?

me about, is it?” And when she looked at me expectantly, I could hear her thought mantra: *Sayitishn'tso-sayitishn'tso-sayitishn'tso*.

So what makes me think I would listen to the impartial evaluation of my therapist? What makes me think anything she said could have stopped the love train I was on? I mean, thirty minutes after we told my parents that we were engaged, my mom was looking at bridesmaid dresses. You think I'm kidding? I wish I had tested the dopamine levels in *her* brain when she learned her youngest daughter was getting married—finally.

I'm betting that no one could have talked me out of marrying my ex. I was truly in love and thought I had complete control of my senses. And truth be told, I don't regret having married him. We have the miracle of our son (and I mean miracle), and my ex is one of my best friends. He is the ideal man for me . . . to be in a divorce with.

Still, if someone really wants to date me, he probably should keep that appointment with my therapist. Maybe he can convince her to open my files and the two of them can spend some time delving into the question of am *I* right for *him*? I just hope he asks how big a trunk he'll need for my baggage.