

Love's a funny thing

ASK ALMOST ANYONE what they're looking for in a romantic partner, and "a sense of humor" is bound to be toward the top of their list. But how important is humor when it comes to a strong relationship? And does the type of humor matter?

Researchers at the University of Western Ontario recently tried to find out. They studied nearly 100 couples, focusing on the role of two forms of humor in their relationship: affiliative humor (using comments, jokes, or witty banter to make someone laugh or feel better when they're down) and aggressive humor (using sarcasm or ridicule to criticize or put someone down without regard for their feelings).

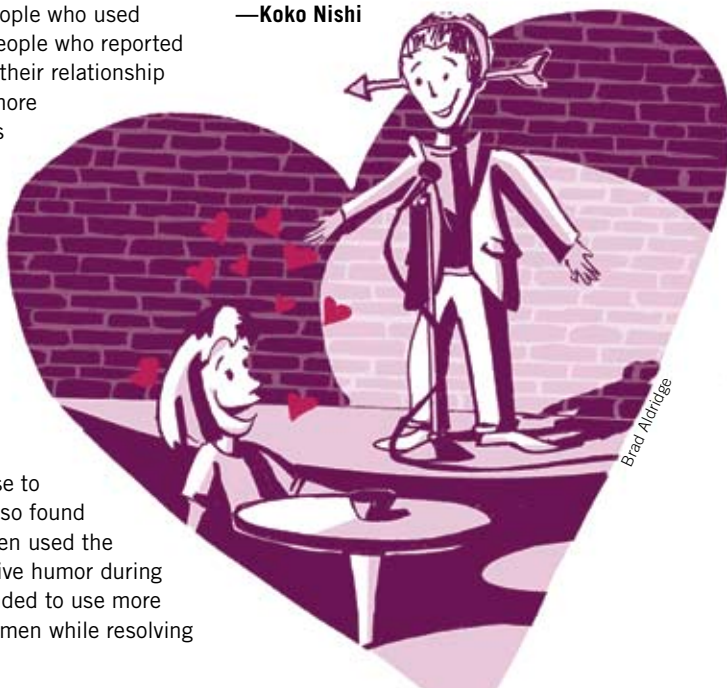
All couples in the study had been dating for at least three months. The researchers gave study participants a questionnaire measuring their own and their partner's style of humor, as well as their satisfaction with their relationship. Two weeks later, the couples returned to the researchers' lab and were asked to discuss an unresolved conflict that had arisen over those previous 14 days. The researchers observed the couples during their discussion in the lab and analyzed how they used affiliative and aggressive humor. They also filmed the discussions and later

had a team of observers watch the tapes to rate how funny each partner was during the conversation.

The results, recently published in the journal *Personal Relationships*, showed that people who used affiliative humor were rated just as funny as people who used aggressive humor. But people who reported greater satisfaction with their relationship had partners who used more affiliative humor and less aggressive humor while resolving their conflict. What's more, when people used affiliative humor while discussing their problem, their partners reported feeling closer to them afterwards; when people used more aggressive humor, their partners reported feeling less close to them. The researchers also found that while men and women used the same amount of aggressive humor during the discussions, men tended to use more affiliative humor than women while resolving their problems.

The researchers caution that they don't yet know whether affiliative humor leads to satisfying relationships, or the other way around. "When people feel happy with their relationship, they are more likely to engage in pro-relationship behaviors, such as affiliative humor," says Loren Campbell, the study's lead author. "On the other hand, people who use affiliative humor more often are probably more likely to have partners who appreciate their humor and thus feel more positively about the relationship."

—Koko Nishi



How was your day?

IT'S A COMMON, EVEN BANAL question, often asked and answered without much thought: "How was your day?" But a new study suggests that this simple question carries significant emotional benefits for both partners in a romantic relationship. Getting your partner to talk about his or her day, it seems, will not only make him or her feel better, but it will give you an emotional boost as well.

Researchers at the University of Utah asked 48 cohabiting romantic couples to report and rate the best event and the most stressful event of their day for 21 days straight. They also asked whether each partner told the other about these events.



Participants reported better moods at the end of the days on which they had told their partner about a positive event. But on days when they disclosed stressful events, there was no significant increase in

their levels of negative emotion, unless the event involved their partner.

What's more, the researchers found that on days when participants asked and were told about their partner's day, their moods improved when they learned of positive events, especially if they were involved in their partner's good piece of news. There were no significant increases in negative emotion after hearing about stressful events, unless the event involved the listener.

"Both positive and negative disclosures should be encouraged," says Angela Hicks, one of the study's authors, "as the negative disclosures do not seem to cause emotional harm, and both types of disclosures are likely to lead to greater feelings of intimacy and connectedness between relationship partners over time."

—Tanya Vacharkulksemsuk