

How to live with an imperfect partner

By Virginia Corner
Toronto Star

You're in love and think you've found the perfect partner, but as time goes by you begin to notice the other person's flaws and quirks.

Jane ("the compulsive") won't let you put the groceries away because you don't group the tin cans properly or she's ("the chronic dieter") perpetually brooding about fat thighs, calories and cottage cheese.

Dick is a "ladies' man" who, although he loves his wife, won't give up other women, or he's a "nice guy" who would never admit anything's wrong.

According to psychologist Louis Janda, author of *How To Live With An Imperfect Person* (New American Library of Canada Ltd., \$20.95), most people who fall in love and settle down in a long-term relationship find out, once the honeymoon is over, that they have different "personality styles."

Easy to read

In his easy-to-read guide to coping with all the annoying habits and traits of imperfect mates, Janda identifies 12 such styles that can be potentially dangerous to a relationship — from the "cling-on" who demands unconditional emotional support and approval 24 hours a day, to the "moper" who is always depressed about something and whose favorite line is "I'm fine, just leave me alone."

Starting with quizzes to help readers determine which personality style best describes their partner, Janda explains the dynamic of that type, using case histories and anecdotes, and offers practical strategies for

dealing with it.

Unlike a lot of self-help books that tell you how you can change and be a better partner, Janda's book focuses on identifying and accepting differences in your mate.

"Everyone is imperfect," says Janda, 38, an associate professor of psychology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. "One thing that I talk about in the book is that a lot of people when they get married are in love and have these romantic feelings. They sometimes think they've found a person who's just absolutely perfect for them. If they do notice some quirks or flaws, they may be unconcerned about them. I've heard so many people say, 'We love each other so much that we won't have any problems working those kinds of differences out.'"

"The fact of the matter is that everyone has to learn to live with an imperfect person if they're going to have a long-term relationship."

Generally speaking, the bloom is on the rose only for the first three years of marriage, Janda says. After that, romantic love should give way to what psychologists term companionate love. "This is a feeling of liking and respect that people who have been together for some time have for each other, and if given a chance, it grows as our lives become deeply intertwined with another person's."

Early in a relationship we are tolerant and accepting of the other person's less-than-perfect qualities, Janda says, but as time passes, the shortcomings seem to have more and more of an impact on the relationship and are no longer viewed as shortcomings, but as fatal flaws.

Sometimes these flaws come as a total surprise or a partner discovers something that was concealed. For other couples, the passage of time is enough to change one person's perspective of the other.

Those people who have satisfying long-term relationships have adjusted to the reality that their partner isn't perfect, Janda contends.

"First, they are slow to assign blame when things do not go the

way they want them to," says Janda, a warm, witty man who is married with two children. "The second quality these people have is that they try to understand the perspective of others."

In his private practice, Janda says, one of the biggest complaints he hears from women is that their husbands tend to withdraw rather than deal with conflict and/or difficult issues.

"A lot of women complain that they just really don't have any

relationship with their husbands — that they never talk to each other," says Janda, adding that money and sex are the two biggest problem areas for couples.

Many experts have argued that within a relationship it is not possible for just one person to have a problem, but Janda disagrees, particularly in the case of the ladies' man.

Severe problems

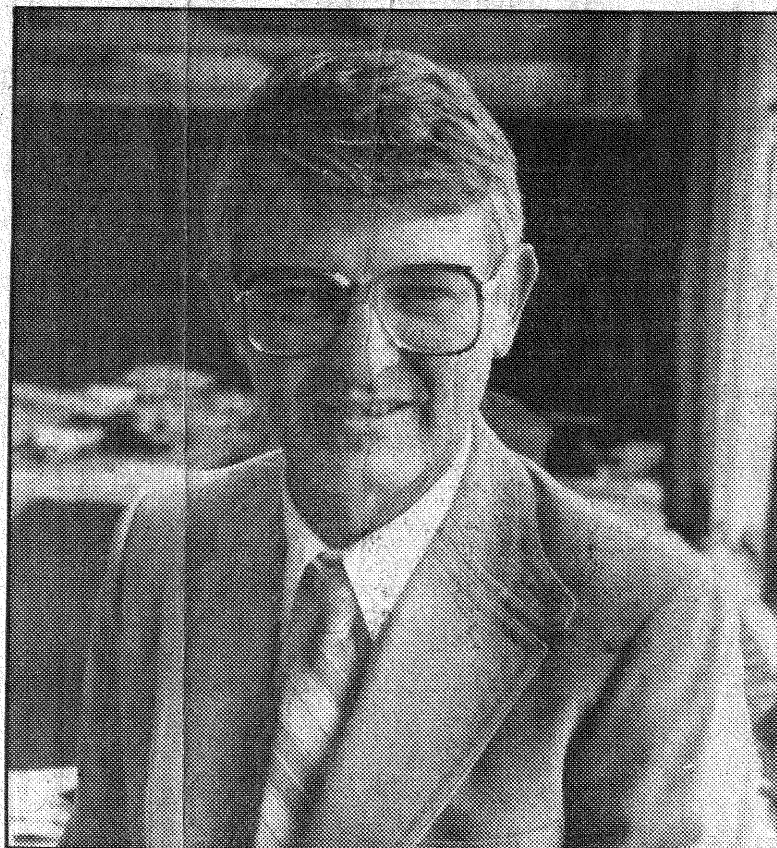
"In order to be able to live with a ladies' man, a woman must be either extremely secure or insecure. A secure woman will see her partner's episodes for what they are — a sign of his problems. Insecure women will view their partner's wandering as a sign of their own deficiencies."

Not every relationship is worth saving — some people have problems so severe that the odds of them changing are slim and other partners are simply not right for each other — but that doesn't mean people should give up too soon, says Janda.

"It's important to realize that when you're in a relationship that you're going to have times — weeks, months, sometimes even a year or two — when you're not particularly happy with your relationship. There are just a whole lot of things that can cause stress, like having young children or having financial problems. You can't expect to be constantly happy."

A life shared with someone through good times as well as bad, however, can be very gratifying, Janda says.

"Imperfect people can live happily ever after."



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Louis Janda: Author of *How To Live With An Imperfect Person*, a guide to coping with the annoying traits of your mate. "Everyone is imperfect," says the associate professor of psychology.