

# Make 'Em Laugh

Who wants to talk about politics or money —when you can talk to Chris D'Elia about the dicks in his phone?

Words by Vanessa Pascale

I receive a phone call from Chris D'Elia as I rush through The London NYC's lobby toward Maze by Gordon Ramsay's entrance, where the 35-year-old, 6'3" comedian is standing (I am five minutes late thanks to cross-town morning traffic). After apologizing for my tardiness, we chat while they prepare our table. The star of NBC's *Undateable* is donning his usual five o'clock shadow, black-rimmed glasses, gray tee with a forest of black trees imprinted on it, gray Nikes and maroon pants scrunched up above his ankles. [When I post our photo on Twitter, Chris tweets, "I actually had no idea my pants were like that but fuck that, that's my new thing now." Oops.]

Chris knows how to laugh at himself, and if you can't laugh at yourself, consider yourself undateable in his eyes. "That drives me nuts. Like, I love making fun of people, and if I make fun of you, and we're on a date, and you're like, 'No, well, I'm not really like that, that's not it...' 'Alright, I'm kidding, relax.' Being defensive is the word. I really hate that." At first, that alone is enough to count as three undateable characteristics (I asked him for three), but two more immediately come to mind. "I don't like when people talk about money, that's a big turnoff. In L.A., you get a lot of people that talk about work, and that's awful, too. I don't care about what you're in or what you do, but that's L.A., so." He stops the waiter to order a cup of coffee.

*Undateable*, which Chris stars in as Danny, returns October 9th. After doing a successful live episode last season, the show decided to do the entire third season live. "It's really exciting. It's so much more work, but really is so much more fun to do it that way. There's four comedians on the show, so we're used to that live performance and I think it charges us." Chris already knew most of the cast from working the L.A. stand-up comedy circuit. "Brent [Morin] was one of my best friends... It's kinda like camp because you see these guys literally everyday and then you go to the clubs at night and see them at the clubs and you're like, these

guys are my whole life." Our waiter approaches the table to take our breakfast order. "Are you hungry?" Chris asks me. I decline. He sticks with just the coffee.

When creator Bill Lawrence was assembling the *Undateable* cast, he couldn't find the right person to play Danny. Brent suggested Chris, who was already starring in NBC's *Whitney*. At first NBC was reluctant to let *Undateable* borrow him for their pilot episode, but after Bill promised to recast the part of Danny if the show got picked up, they allowed it. As fate would have it, *Whitney* was cancelled, allowing Chris to join *Undateable*—where all the characters are essentially undateable. "All the other guys you don't even want to go out with them once. But Danny, you go out with him and realize he's an asshole, so you don't want to date him," he says about his character.

So what makes a person dateable? I ask. "To me, if there's a connection. I guess it's different from person to person. If someone's just easygoing, goes with the flow. I like when someone doesn't take things too seriously. Likes dogs—that's a good one. I've got two dogs (Yorkies named Sam and Butters). I dated a girl who didn't like my dogs and that was super weird. I was with her for two years and it was a bummer. What kind of girl doesn't like dogs?" he asks incredulously, "That's so weird." I tell him I've seen their photos on his Instagram. "They're cute, man."

Recently, while "scrolling deep" into his photos in his phone he uncovered several cute photos of his dogs as well as weird photos that he needed to delete. Curious, I ask, what weird photos? The collection of dick photos he accidentally accrued from using WhatsApp with his Canadian friend. He claims the app automatically saves photos to your phone. "We have a group chat and we'll send each other pictures of dicks and shit. I don't know why it does that! So I'm trying to get rid of all the pictures of dicks. Anyways, I saw cute pictures of my dogs is what I'm saying." So, it would not be good if someone were to look through your phone.



## Born to Be Funny

“I was making these jokes about how horrible Life cereal could be, and then I’d be like, ‘Don’t worry, your kids will eat it!’ My dad laughed so hard that when the light turned green, he couldn’t catch his breath to go. ‘Whoa, I made him laugh so hard he missed the light. There’s so much power in that—that’s awesome,’” Chris recalls the time he was 8-years-old and realized comedy’s power.

“Oh, it would be a disaster! Dude, if I tried to run for office politically, I would be out the first day, ‘He’s got pictures of dicks in his phone!’”

Chris, who performed at Comedy Central’s Roast of Justin Bieber this year since he’s the singer’s favorite comedian, kills it in his Netflix comedy special *Incorrigible*. The voices, mannerisms, subject matter, and that giggle of his when he laughs at himself, get me every time. Hilarious onstage, Chris didn’t start stand-up till he was 25. “I always wanted to be a comedian—that was one of the first things I ever said I wanted to do

when my dad would ask. I always would make people laugh. I don’t like doing anything more than that, nothing, absolutely nothing, including sex. I’d rather make people laugh. And I like laughing. But I procrastinate. I knew I had to start stand-up but I was like, I’ll get in through acting or something. So, I was an actor and then when I turned 25... it was off to the races. I did open mics everywhere; I was on stage everyday at least once or twice.”

When I compliment his spot-on impressions, he corrects me, they’re not impressions – impressions aren’t his thing (though I’d beg to differ). He is “painting a picture with characters,” he explains. “It’s a fun way to tell a story. I

don’t want to stand there and just do well-written jokes. I like being silly,” he says, citing “silly guys” Jim Carey, Eddie Murphy and Robin Williams as his inspiration. A few of my favorites include his fake son (“probably the most talked about on that special,” he tells me. Basically riffing, he’d never done the bit before the taping of *Incorrigible*), and his popular Drunk Girls bit that totally nails girls’ drunken behavior, and even sounds like them. “I was walking down the street the other day, and someone was like, ‘Drunk girls! Drunk girls! Still?! I’m on TV and they only give a fuck about the Drunk Girls thing. So funny. But I’d rather people know my standup than anything else, so that’s good.”

His favorite is “Black Dudes are the Best Laughters.” “That’s so funny—it’s stupid ’cause to think about a dude driving to Las Vegas ’cause he laughed so hard... I think it’s pretty funny and resonates with people.” And what about the girl who called your orange shirt pink during an unexpected run in, did she confront you about ending up in your stand-up act? No,

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Photo Credit: Darren Michaels / NBC

## Do people recognize you more from your stand-up or from TV?

"I think Middle America probably knows me from TV, but definitely in New York, L.A., San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle, they know my stand-up, for sure. Some people don't even know I'm on TV."

## What do you think fans would be surprised to find out about you?

"They're always surprised that I don't drink. Always. They think I do cocaine. I have people come up to me afterwards, 'Hey, what are you on?' I'm like, 'Nothing.' This girl was like, 'You're crazy up there.' I'm like, 'Yeah, it's an act! What are you talking about?' People don't believe me, but it's 100% true."

## Since you don't drink, what are some of your vices?

"Coffee. Always. All day. Ya know the comedian Ron White? He's always got Scotch on stage, and I always have an iced coffee—that's my Ron White thing."

## What are you watching on TV?

"I like watching thrillers, like if somebody dies and then they gotta find out who did it. I wanna be like, *Oooh, I wonder who did it?* Anything British where they're trying to figure out who killed someone. *Oh shit, I'm going to figure it out before they figure it out!* *Happy Valley*, *Broadchurch*, you don't know 'em because they're all British, *The Fall* (all on Netflix). On Netflix, when you're done with the eight episodes, they'll be, *What about this?* And you're like, *Oh yeah! Is it British? I'm going to watch it.*"

## So you have an affinity for the British?

"They're *good* actors. There was this one—this is when I knew I'm only watching British shit—this one scene on *Broadchurch*, something happened to this lady's kid and she starts crying and falling down. You're like, *Wow, she's so good, how do you do that as an actor?* She's crying so hard that she starts dry-heaving like *uggghh* (he gags). It was so uncomfortable and good. I was like, I wanna do dry-heave acting! That's my goal, to get so good at acting that when somebody tells me some shit I just ball and start dry-heaving and the people on-set are like, 'Oh shit, should we get him some water?' And the director's like, 'No, keep going, keep going.'"

## This is where you're getting your acting tips?

"Yeah, British thrillers."

## What are you listening to?

"I only listen to hip-hop. I love Tech N9ne, Tupac. I also like Hall & Oates from the 80s and Phil Collins. But most of the time, I don't listen to too much music. I listen to talk Radio or NPR or I have a Podcast, I listen to all my stand-up. No, I'm kidding—in the car listening to me."

because she wouldn't realize it was about her since it was in passing, he tells me. "When that happened, it was six months later when I started talking about it. What is it with people who want to prove their point? And *nobody* gives a shit! I was like, there's probably something funny about that. Every day I would think about that. *That's so annoying and stupid.* Finally, I was like I'm going to talk about it 'cause it's annoying," he explains about how it ended up in his act.

I nod. Do you find comedy to be cathartic—to get all of that stuff off your chest? "Yeah," he pauses to think about it. "I suppose so, because I don't really have all these demons. I don't really have a stressful life, so it's hard to say something's cathartic because I'm kinda carefree, usually. But yeah, I do. I think if I didn't have that I might be stressed. I've done stand-up for nine and a half years; the longest I've gone without performing is eight days in a row. It's

just so what I do. I don't not want to go on. It's just too fun." He's also really into laughing. "I hate not laughing. It sucks when people are all serious and shit, like when they want to talk about religion and politics. I hate that shit, man. Whhhhaawhhat about dicks or something?! What about the dicks in my phone? People want to talk about politics. What about the dicks in my phone?!"

Because of his "fuck this, fuck that-kinda humor," Chris thinks that some people don't realize this is just a part of his act. He gets serious for a moment. "I really love people. I have that part about me where I'm like I don't want to talk about politics, like I said, I just want to laugh. But I'm not a dick—do you know what I mean? I still appreciate you and your thoughts. I think people think because I'm aggressive on stage, I might be off stage and I'm not really. I'm a softie," he confesses. "I love people, like, my family. I love my family, or like my girl, I love her. Or like my dogs." **ML**