

# CAN THIS BE LOVE?

We share our meals,  
we share our bed,  
but when I brush my teeth—  
**I WANT TO BE ALONE**

Today, society no longer offers the guidelines on privacy and sharing that it used to. Back in the fifties, if you didn't want to tell your partner what your earnings were, or offer to put him through medical school on them, you were clearly being churlish and ungrateful. The "love" ethic of the sixties mandated that you share everything you owned, as well as everything you didn't own and everything you owned illegally. In the seventies, privacy (renamed "space") had a resurgence of popularity. You could hardly enroll in an EST workshop, pay a lot of money to let strangers call you a jerk in front of a hundred other people, and then go home and tell your partner all about it. The women's movement further put the hex on sharing, as women realized just how much less credit, income, security and opportunity for advancement they actually had to share than men did.

Nowadays, everybody has his own idea of what constitutes sharing, and obviously you're going to have to work a few things out with your partner if your idea involves telling him everything you ever thought and felt from the day you were born until the day you met him, and his idea is leaving some ice cream in the carton for you when he's finished with it. Ditto, if your notion of privacy means closing the bathroom door when you feel sick to your stomach, and his notion of privacy is not telling you where he's been for the last forty-eight hours.

As usual, I speak from experience. My partner and I have been wrestling with differences in sharing and privacy perceptions for the same amount of time we've known each other. As a matter of fact, our problems in this area started the first night we met, when he thought it was particularly selfish of me not to share my body with him. Among our other difficulties since then, he finds my insistence on a closed bathroom door, preferably one equipped with a police lock, a constant source of irritation, driving him to wild speculation on my activities within: Am I perhaps searching for buried treasure beneath our tiles? Holding religious services for roaches? Secretly securing false teeth? He refuses to see the logic in my defense: That I have to lock the door because his idea of politely knocking before entering has a lot in common with the Gestapo's. Neither is he

impressed when I point to his foibles regarding privacy, like his apoplectic reaction if I wander anywhere within six feet of his desk, and his declaration that, were I ever to open its drawers, even to save the contents from fire, I would be a dead woman.

On the whole, I suppose our peculiarities in this area cancel out one another's. I admit, for instance, that my record for sharing material goods is less than laudatory, a fact that often has my partner standing in front of our open refrigerator asking questions like, "What happened to all the roast beef that was in here yesterday?" or shivering in the draft I create snatching a beloved book out of his hands.

On the other hand, I am more forthcoming than he is with my thoughts and personal information. I could hardly be *less* so, since this is a man who takes my asking him when he'll be home for dinner as a gross invasion of privacy. Although he calls me secretive if I don't feel like telling him how much I weigh, he reacts to the question "What did you do today?" the way other people might react to finding out their telephones are bugged.

My friend Carol would as soon give one of her credit cards to her husband as she would national security secrets to Castro, but feels perfectly free to greet him (and any early guests who might be arriving with him) wearing little but her earrings, while her husband is happy to have Carol check over his bank statement, but behaves as if he'd been born wearing a bathrobe. And my friend Annie considers everything she and her boyfriend own shared property, to the point of throwing out any of his clothes she doesn't like, while her boyfriend feels it's presumptuous to borrow her napkin.

I guess we all have to deal with what we consider our partner's abnormal definitions of privacy and sharing. So my advice would be not to make a big deal over his unfathomable rage at your innocent perusal of his combination checkbook and appointment diary, or his petty demand for an equal share of the sweet and sour shrimp. After all, in the final analysis love means accepting one another's foibles—especially his.

by Bette-Jane Raphael