

# CAN THIS BE LOVE?

## YOUR SPACE OR HIS? Your hearts fit together, but your households don't

When two people live together, it's rare for both to feel they are getting their rightful portion of physical space, either for their possessions or for themselves. (Which is why many of us who once used the word "space" to refer to emotional elbowroom now precede it with the word "drawer" or "closet," areas in which we often feel we aren't getting our fair share.) See if you recognize your own space problems among the following examples.

**Possession is nine tenths of the closet:** The day my lover and I moved into our apartment, he, being much more organized than I, had all of his things unpacked and put neatly away before I'd so much as

located my own. That's why our medicine cabinet contains, instead of cosmetics, a varied assortment of contact-lens cleaners, a dozen tubes of salve for use on every type of wound known to modern man, and equipment for removing hangnails, splinters, warts and tar. It's also the reason why the large closet in our bedroom houses my partner's duds, hung with half an inch to spare between garments, as if his suits don't really like each other. My own clothing, not a piece of which has been thrown away since the heyday of the Beatles, is wedged into the second closet, which I surmise was originally built to house an ironing board.

**The territorial imposition:** Conflicts over living space often involve not unequal allocation, but outright encroachment. This seems to be the case at my friend Janet's house—her husband sees every surface in their home as his personal space. "We could live in Versailles," she says, "and you still couldn't find an empty chair to sit down on. I'm always having to defend and protect my spaces—like dresser and desk tops—because he doesn't understand that, for me, an empty surface is *not* an accident."

**The incredible shrinking house:** For purposes of space-sharing, it's a good idea

not to fall in love with a man who collects anything, with the possible exception of stamps. But some people "collect" things without meaning to. Molly's husband fits this category. "Things seem to cling to Andrew, as if he were a human magnet. He attracts books and newspapers and boxes of just plain stuff. And it's as if these things have lives of their own—they grow around us, so it seems as if the walls are closing in. We two are cramped, yet a family of five lived here quite comfortably!"

**The partner as obstacle:** For some couples, *things* don't get in the way, bodies do. My friend Susan maintains that wherever she goes in their home, Ted is in her way. "He has a tendency to hover, so that I can't turn around without walking into him." This is especially true in their small kitchen, where his near-permanent position in front of the open refrigerator has a way of hampering Sue's culinary activities. "Sometimes I imagine how luxurious it would be to live alone, and be able to get to the stove without a degree in navigation."

**Too much togetherness:** Annie reports that whenever she wants to sit down and read, her mate proceeds to occupy the chair she intended for herself. "I don't know why it is exactly, but we always seem to want to be in the same place at the same time. We're forever bumping into each other, literally, like The Two Stooges at Home. It was only our move to a place with two bathrooms that kept us from having serious intestinal difficulties."

**One's a crowd:** Some people imitate air, filling any space that's not taken up by solid matter. Thus another friend describes her lover as one of those people who, at a movie, make use of not one seat, but four. "He's sitting on one, got his briefcase on another and his coat on a third. He's also got his legs stretched out under a fourth. And he's the same way at home. When he stretches out on the sofa with his feet on the chair, that kind of does it as far as our living room seating goes. I finally told him one day that he'll have to practice some containment, because I don't intend to sit on a footstool for the rest of my life."

Those of us who feel crowded out of our living spaces can learn from this woman's aggressive approach. If your partner's camera equipment takes up every inch of shelving in your home, for instance, suggest he change his hobby from photography to origami. (If that doesn't work, start a hobby of your own. Collect couches.) Should your partner's bulk occupy more than its fair share of available space, determine to even up the sides. Put on some weight. Wear six-inch heels and lots of crinolines. Hire a double. And remind him: Home is where the heart is—*only* if it can fit.



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by Bette-Jane Raphael