

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

WHY YOU NEED TO KNOW HIS IDEAS ABOUT LOYALTY

Everybody has a different idea of what constitutes loyalty to a mate. One person may feel that being loyal entails hiding her partner's faults from others, while another would no more think of hiding her partner's faults than of hiding his clothes. One person might feel it's disloyal to give away so much as her partner's shoe size, and another think it's perfectly all right to give away his shoes.

Finding out that you and your partner have such differences can be as unwelcome a surprise as finding out that he can't sleep with the television on. I was less than pleased to discover that my partner's idea of loyalty is as unreasonable and exacting as his idea of a well-ironed shirt, and that he has the prehistoric notion that I am being disloyal if I fail to put his interest above my own. Often I have to fight this by pointing out to him that nobody was ever hanged as a traitor because she refused to watch a *National Geographic* special when there

was a William Hurt movie showing on another channel.

Even knowing one another's sore spots doesn't necessarily guarantee harmony. Take Gil and Sue. Sue knows that to Gil, embarrassing one's partner in public falls into the same category as selling out one's country in private. Still, she can no more keep a secret than she can keep bees, and is constitutionally unable to pass up a good story—even if it's one that makes Gil look foolish. She is particularly fond of telling how he invested all his ready cash in the stock market on the same day Donald Trump took all of *his* ready cash out. Gil views the revelation of this information as an act of disloyalty, and gets angry when Sue tells the story, as well as when she breaks her oath of secrecy by informing friends that, before surgery, Gil's aunt was originally his uncle.

Annie and Peter run into problems because Annie believes that the best

way her husband can demonstrate his allegiance to her is by demonstrating indifference to other women. Peter complains that if he talks to a pretty woman at a party, Annie treats him as if he'd tried to clean out their money market account and decamp for Switzerland. He must constantly remind her, he says, that "blind loyalty" is *not* a literal term.

My friend Nancy complains that Les thinks fealty means total absence of criticism. Her position is that loyalty is not synonymous with blanket approval of everything Les says and does. She maintains she is not being a traitor when she points out that the chair he built for their den won't hold anything heavier than a seat cushion without breaking, or when she chastises him for entertaining their brunch guests by balancing several bagels on his head.

Loyalty-related problems can often be mitigated by compromises such as the one Nancy and Les worked out. Although Nancy felt she couldn't entirely refrain from criticizing Les, she agreed to refrain from doing so in company. Now she waits until they are alone before commenting that the theory he introduced at a friend's dinner party—that men lose their hair more often than women because they have more than complex brain activity going on

To Les, loyalty from Nancy means a complete absence of criticism.

underneath it—puts him on an evolutionary par with Peking man.

If you and your partner find compromise difficult, try making a bargain. For example, Sue has promised Gil to try to keep her trap shut whenever possible, and every time she gets through a social evening without revealing that Gil didn't learn to swim until he was twenty-eight, Gil cleans behind the refrigerator.

Another way to avoid trouble is by trading viewpoints on loyalty before problems arise. If you know your partner's general attitude ahead of time, you won't take it as a stab in the back when he refuses to stop speaking to his sister because she said you look like Bette Midler. And if he knows your general attitude, he'll be forewarned not to mix up *your* views on loyalty with those of Mrs. Gary Hart.

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