

# CAN THIS BE LOVE?

## PHONE FRICTIONS How to understand the pitfalls of sharing a phone with a man

Experience has taught me that the disparity between the sexes is nowhere more apparent than in their use of, and relationship to, the telephone. For me and most of the women I know, the telephone is a conveyor of emotional information, as in, "I just called to tell you I feel like garbage." In contrast, every man I've ever known, either locally or long distance, has seemed to view the instrument as a conveyor of *factual* information, as in, "The movie starts at eight." (In fact, his statement might very well be in direct response to hers, and the two sentences together constitute a couple's entire phone conversation.) The result of this disparity is a variety of phone-related problems

that can be minimized only if you make it your business to understand the pitfalls of sharing a telephone—and a telephone bill—with a man.

Realize, for instance, that men can't understand the length of time women spend on nonbusiness telephone calls. They wait until you get off the phone and then ask an argumentative question such as, "How can it take a normal person forty minutes to make a lunch date?" When this happens, it's your job to realize that his inquiry is *not* aimed at baiting you; it comes from a real feeling of bewilderment on the part of your mate, who is looking for information, not a fight. Perceiving this, you might answer him without rancor, perhaps suggesting that your taking forty minutes to make a lunch date is just as normal as *his* taking forty minutes to run a four-minute mile.

Due to their limited understanding of the instrument, men often have the odd idea that certain hours of the day are more appropriate than others for talking on the phone, as if there were some corollary between time and the urge to communicate. (Once again, they may express this belief in the interrogative, shouting, "Who are you talking to in the middle of the night?" at just past 11:00 P.M.) For this reason, if you have

both a phone and a man in your bedroom on a more or less permanent basis, the phone should always be nearer to you than it is to him—nearer to you, in fact, than either *one* of you is to him. Then, if a friend or relative calls you at what your partner terms "an ungodly hour" (meaning any time after he turns off the ball game), you can answer with the speed of a 911 operator and tiptoe to an extension before he is roused. Putting the instrument on his side of the bed is as foolhardy as putting his old girlfriend there.

Your partner is liable to feel uncomfortable using the telephone to deal with delicate social matters, so be prepared for his asking you to handle these amenities. Then you won't feel so cranky when you're the one who has to call his mother and ask that she please *not* drop off her Vegetarian Meatloaf for your next New Year's Eve buffet.

Understand, too, that your partner probably believes that phone communication can be conducted in the verbal equivalent of Morse Code. Because of this, he is unlikely to understand a phone bill that, according to him, makes it look as if you've been engaged in long-distance filibustering. In order to avoid monthly wrangling, consider dividing your utility expenses so that *you* pay the phone bill, which he need never see, while he pays the electric bill. To make sure your financial responsibilities are more or less equal, you can always buy yourself a few new electrical appliances.

Most important of all, understand your partner's inability to respond to your periodic need for emotional communication with him by telephone. For instance, if you call him because you're upset over a severe problem at work (your desk has been moved away from the window and put in front of the door to the men's room), try not to be further upset when he hustles you off the phone, responding as if your "hysteria" were a disease he could catch through the receiver. Remind yourself that he doesn't mean to be insensitive and that, constitutionally, it's as impossible for him to get emotionally involved talking on the phone as it is for him to get drunk reading a liquor ad.

Not all men exhibit all of the above symptoms, of course, and there are some men who are more evolved than others in their attitudes toward the telephone. A few are even able to see the instrument as their friend, and not as a threat to their emotional and financial stability or a beast whose ring signals the end to peace of mind. But don't bet that you will be lucky enough to find one of these new males. Be prepared for phone-related difficulties. That way, you'll be ready to handle them, and you won't spend needless hours wishing that Alexander Graham Bell had never been born, or pondering the irony of his having been born a man.

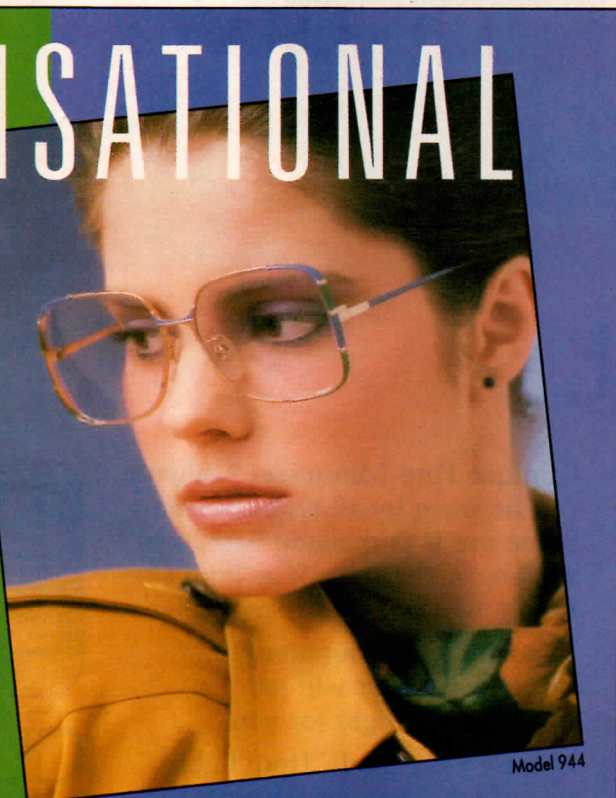
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