

Boundaries

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boundaries, we sacrifice our own needs and, in time, lose control and begin to resent the other person.

"With poor boundaries, we allow ourselves to be violated, and to violate others," said Stephen Braveman, a local marriage and family therapist.

Oddly, some boundaries increase with time as others break down.

The horror of peeing in front of a loved one, for example, often wanes as people become more comfortable with each other — and tire of the inconvenience of separate bathroom trips.

(I guess we'll have to hang in there, Jerry.)

Touching, sexual activity and even passing gas often fall into that category.

Others, such the use of another's possessions and money, often increase with time.

First month: *Baby, you look so sexy wearing that shirt of mine.*

Five years later: *Dammit, Marge, why is it every time I go into the closet to find my black shirt you're wearing it?*

That's because after first romantic flush comes the "separation/individualization process" in which each person "realizes there is more to life than you/me/us," Braveman said.

Boundaries become more defined. What's-mine-is-yours becomes what's-mine-is-mine, be it possessions, friends or activities.

Ultimately, it's not so much the boundary that counts as the respect one shows for it, Braveman said.

Which is why I won't touch my girlfriend's toothbrush. I wouldn't want to cross her.

Because in dating her I've already violated my own boundary: Don't date your next-door neighbor.

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BOUNDARIES

2/14/03

Would you use your lover's toothbrush?

By ALEX FRIEDRICH
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It was dinner time, and I was telling my girlfriend about a recent gross-out incident in the Friedrich household.

My visiting sister had forgotten her toothbrush and used my mother's in a pinch. When my sis off-handedly mentioned this to my mom days later, my mother wiggled.

How can this be? My own mom a neurotic!

My girlfriend shook her head. "I know how she feels."

What?

"Certainly you'd let me use yours, right?" I asked.

Her eyes narrowed. She stared straight at me and lowered her tone:

"I have four very important words for you: Don't . . . use . . . my . . . toothbrush."

I was stunned.

I have kissed this woman many times, so Lord knows she's already familiar with my mouth. And my mom is my own flesh and blood. My saliva is her saliva.

How could they both betray me like this?

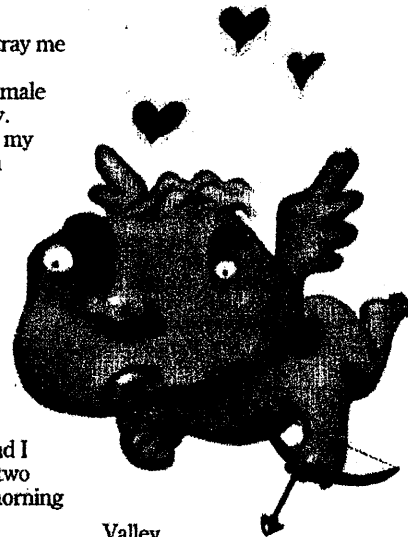
Later at work, another female shook her head at the story.

"Boundaries, Friedrich," my co-worker said firmly. "You have got to establish boundaries."

I had a sinking feeling she may have a point. I have needed to put up boundaries at times. I've had ill-advised affairs with co-workers with tragic results. I have lost numerous books, CDs and shirts to the romantically acquisitive. And I have raised an eyebrow or two from bosses with my late-morning slides into work after some particularly late nights.

But c'mon, sharing a toothbrush? If that's a legitimate boundary, then those two cold-hearted, uptight, possessive women in my life can keep them. By God, I'm a free spirit.

Or maybe not. I soon realized that after a short talk with Jerry and Jamie Cornish of Carmel



Valley. After 15 years together and

five years of marriage, they do have a boundary or two.

"He won't go to the bathroom in front of me," blurted out 33-year-old Jamie.

Jerry was aghast. The 44-year-old covered his face and

shook his head.

"Oh my God, Jamie. You just tell it the way it is, don't you?"

I hear you, Jerry. Do I pick my nose in front of girlfriends? Of course not. So why have some felt the need to waltz into the bathroom and pee while I'm shaving?

So I suppose everyone has some boundaries. Any therapist will tell you they're healthy, as long as they don't prevent the day-to-day functioning of a relationship.

Some people set boundaries for themselves, such as not dating co-workers or roommates (that's me), because of the mess involved in a breakup. Others set boundaries for others, such as in sex, use of possessions and outside activities.

Those are especially vital if two people want to have their own identities and lives — and not slide into that overly romanticized I-am-nothing-without-you dependency trap that alienates outside friends. Without

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