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Where's The 'Me' In 'We?'

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Written by [Savia Rajagopal](#)
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Do you do *everything* with your partner? Does your life center around him? Savia Rajagopal defines toxic togetherness and tells you why it's important for you to avoid the "couple trap."

You go out *together*. You shop *together*. You eat *together*. You socialise *together*... You get the idea. Very often, women get caught in the common relationship trap where they feel it's absolutely vital to have their partner

involved in everything they do. It almost reaches a point where one partner is unrecognisable without the other.

Recalls Sonia Nehra, Human Resources professional, "I had a friend, who was stuck to her husband like glue. If her right hand wasn't always wrapped around his left, I don't think I could recognise her. It was quite annoying to have our friend drag her husband along every time we made plans."

If Sonia's friend sounds like you, this could be your wake-up call. Think back a little. Do all your sentences begin with 'we'? Do you always worry about 'us'? Is there no 'me' unless there's a 'we' involved? If you answered "yes" to

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the questions above, then it's time to take a closer look at "you."

It's not always easy to maintain your individuality when you're part of a twosome. Whether it's a relationship or marriage, women tend to imbibe qualities and behave in certain ways to appease their partners. It's not long before women start being more like what others want them to be, as opposed to whom, they really are.

Offers Seema Hingorrany, clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, "Relationships are important in life but that doesn't mean we stop living as individuals. Identity forms your personality and if you can't be yourself with the one you love then you should reconsider your relationship."

Some women feel that thinking about themselves amounts to being selfish. A notion that Hingorrany is quick to dismiss, as she states emphatically, "There is a world of difference between being yourself and being selfish. The latter involves ignoring other people's feelings and doing things solely to derive pleasure for yourself. Being yourself is about individuality and asserting your identity."



It comes as no surprise that women who get caught in the "couple" trap, suffer from frustration, anxiety, low self-esteem and in extreme cases, depression. Sometimes a lively, fun-loving woman turns into a complete doormat in order to accommodate her partner and loses all semblance of individuality. You may have noticed someone like this within your own friend circle or maybe this is you.

Are you able to express your opinions independently or do you wait for approval? Do you believe in your own ideas or is your presence merely to provide support to your partner, in a living re-enactment of Dolly Parton's 'Stand by your man'? Answer these questions honestly, and you'll have a far better idea of where you stand.

So how do assert your identity as an individual even when you're part of a couple? The first and most important thing to watch out for is dramatic personality changes. Every relationship entails a certain degree of compromise but if you find yourself putting your husband's or partner's wishes above yours, *all* the time, then you should be concerned.

"Have faith in your own self. Don't try to make others happy all the time, at the cost of losing your identity as an individual. Life is not about meeting others' expectations always. Value yourself," recommends Hingorrany. Learning to put "me" first is paramount, though it is easier said than done.

The next on the list of casualties are your friends. Have you noticed that you are avoiding your own friends and yet going out of your way to accommodate your partner's? Having a close circle of friends is important and very often can be a good reminder of who you really are.

Says Neha V, "I got caught up with a relationship and only socialised with my partner's friends because he never made time for mine. I never really fit in with his friends but trudged along anyway to make him happy. Luckily for



Single women enjoy the benefits of freedom, financial independence and the ability to prioritise their career above family. Staying single is a choice that Indian women are choosing in increasing numbers, as they refuse to settle for less than satisfying relationships. Pallavi Bhattacharya analyses why, like all other choices in life, choosing to staying single has its pros and cons.

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me, my friends sat me down and welcomed me back with open arms."

It is important to find a middle ground and socialise with both sets of friends (unless you're amongst the lucky ones who have friends in common!) but make sure you get time to spend with your friends, without your partner tagging along, or it turning into a couples-only event!

Another case of losing yourself is forgetting what YOU like to do. An active interest in each other's hobbies is good but don't do it at the cost of missing out on what makes you happy. Watching a soccer game is fun but if going for a classical concert makes you happy, go for it!

Don't wait for your partner to offer; make a suggestion. Set aside time each week to participate in activities that you enjoy. Enrol in a new class, join a book club or just catch up on some old hobby – whatever you choose to do, do it because *you* want to.

Being yourself is not easy in a romantic setting as often your expectations and those of your partner supersede the realities of imperfection. Even if you are in a steady relationship or marriage, make it a point to be honest with yourself at all times. That is the first step towards being yourself and being an individual – even as part of a couple.

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Savia Rajagopal

About the author:

Savia Rajagopal currently lives in Canada and has been with The Times of India, Mumbai as a features writer. Apart from writing on relationships and fashion, her diverse portfolio includes articles on the watch and jewellery industry, education, careers and home décor, for various national and international publications and online portals. She particularly enjoys interviews and rates meeting supermodel Linda Evangelista and film producer-director Kanika Myer as the highlights of her journalistic career. She can be reached via email at rsavia@gmail.com

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