

Kia Abdullah



I'm happy living with my partner, but why should that mean I have to give up my personal space?



It has been said that the secret to a successful marriage is sharing. On the contrary, I believe that the true secret is separation. Like long-term couple

Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Burton, who famously live in separate houses, I believe that personal space is the key to a healthy relationship. While my partner and I can't afford the extravagance of two houses, I'm hoping separate bedrooms will work just as well.

After two years of dating and a year-long engagement, we recently bought our first house together. Having moved in a month ago, we have already started to get on top of each other – and not in the fun way. Sharing our first home should be an exciting time, but as a woman who has always valued her independence and autonomy, I find the prospect of sharing everything rather disconcerting.

I can handle my partner stealing a few chips off my plate, or sharing the remote, but sharing my space is a different matter altogether. He makes a mess and I'm a militant clean freak; he likes to open windows and I get cold a lot; he has a penchant for mahogany – enough said? While I understand that every couple faces battles like this, I'm not sure I want to compromise – separate bedrooms means I won't have to.

I know that this setup traditionally signifies the death of a marriage, but I think it can help. When you commit your life to another person, why should it automatically grant them access to your personal space and belongings or allow them to burden you with their annoying habits? Separate bedrooms give a couple freedom, peace and *carte blanche* over the general order of things, including layout and decoration (he can knock himself out with the mahogany as long as I don't have to see it).

When I suggested this idea to a few friends, they refused to take me seriously. While I can see that financial constraints and the lack of spacious housing are a hindrance to my solution, I refuse to accept my friends' platitudes about "togetherness", "true intimacy" or how marriage melds two people into one, eliminating the need for personal space. I believe that one and one make two and that maintaining a sense of self is conducive to a healthy relationship.

Some will remain unconvinced, claiming that separation is suitable only for the frigid, but let's be honest here: how many conjugal beds play host to hot, fiery, passionate lovemaking every night of the week? A few years into marriage, burning passion usually settles into a quieter companionship and couples quickly become accustomed to each other. I, for one, don't want to get accustomed to my partner. I want his presence next to me to be something special for as long as possible.

I believe that, rather than the death knell of

Let's be honest here: how many conjugal beds play host to hot, fiery, passionate lovemaking every night of the week?

a marriage, separate bedrooms can preserve some of the mystique that promptly dissipates when a couple starts cohabiting. With separate bedrooms, my partner won't have to watch me sort my dirty underwear or grab a pack of Always Ultra at that time of the month or watch me dress and undress as part of a daily (monotonous) routine. When he is allowed into my bedroom, it will be for one reason, and surely that can only serve to heighten the experience.

Something Eddie Murphy once said, back when he was good, springs to mind: if you're starving and somebody throws you a cracker, you're going to think it's the best cracker you've ever tasted, but eat a cracker every day and you'll taste nothing at all. Yes, it's crude, but the sentiment is there – scarcity increases value which in turn increases desire. And if sleeping in separate bedrooms allows me to retain my privacy, mystique and desirability, then I have no reason to complain.

I can't claim to be a football fan but the recent clash between Manchester United players and Chelsea ground-staff caught my attention. Claims were published that French defender Patrice Evra was called a "fucking immigrant" in the build-up to the brawl (although Chelsea insisted the second word was "idiot"). The national press described this as a "racist slur" and reported United's anger at it. They also said that the team will be filing a complaint with the FA next week urging it to investigate the matter.

The incident led me to question why the word "immigrant" has become a slur. As a 25-year-old British Asian, I have been called many things, ranging from "Paki" to the slightly more imaginative "Bin Laden's daughter", but I have never been called an immigrant. Semantically, there is nothing offensive about the word, so why has it developed such negative connotations? Has today's society become so xenophobic that "immigrant" can now be used as an insult in its own right?

The word alludes to being foreign or being "other", but those are not negative things. I'm not an immigrant but I certainly am "other" – my skin is not white; my mother tongue is not English; my traditional dress is a shalwar kameez; and, come December, I won't have a Christmas tree in my house.

My father was an immigrant, as was my mother. They came to England in the early 60s and built a life from scratch. Like most immigrants, my parents settled in a country largely unaccustomed to integration and fought battles to give their children a better life – surely commendable actions?

I wonder if Britain's tolerance levels will ever reach a stage where "immigrant" simply refers to a person who lives in a foreign country, and is neither racist nor a slur.



This week Kia finished writing her second novel, *Innocence Lost*: "Now begins the dreaded editing." **She watched** In Bruges: "It's funny and shocking with a fantastic performance from Ralph Fiennes." **She bought** tickets for the Tutankhamun exhibition at the O2 in London: "To console myself for missing the Terracotta Army at the British Museum."