



Little irritations can camouflage larger marital troubles

Personal habits

Lovable, laughable or arguable?

By MARY CONNELLY

He leaves the towels unfolded on the towel rack.
She leaves cigaret ashes on the coffee table.

He hangs his shirt on the closet doorknob.
She never shuts the closet doors.

The annals of marriage abound with variations on the classic tale of the wife or husband who pushed a mate's hostility to the surface by squeezing the toothpaste in the middle of the tube.

MARRIAGE COUNSELORS say that no marriage can avoid encountering the little eccentricities all people exhibit in daily living.

But how a couple deals with the three pairs of shoes left in the front hall can be indicative of the state of the marital relationship.

"When things are going well, these are minor, some things to be laughed about and overlooked," said Southfield marriage counselor, Dr. Edward Bernan.

"When a person becomes sensitive to them, they are symptomatic of the

fact that the relationship is not in tune. They are not causes. They are symptoms. In themselves, they are not that big," he said.

"Usually, a couple comes in for marriage counseling when they know that the small things are symptomatic of something larger," said marriage counselor, Dr. Sidney Grossberg, executive director of Counseling Associates, Southfield, and assistant professor of social work at Wayne State University.

"YOU ALWAYS have minor differences with someone. But when the small things really begin to border on talk of 'what's wrong with you,' when they become personal, that's when they are symptomatic."

"Usually what is behind it," Grossberg explained, "is a feeling of 'if you loved me, you would do this thing or that thing.'"

Being intolerant of socks left crumpled on the floor or being unwilling to drop them into the hamper can turn into a signal that a couple's exchange is faltering.

"Couples find fault with little things

and try to use them as an excuse," said Birmingham marriage counselor, Jane Kamm. "But when you get to talking, you get below them into what is a lack of feeling."

According to Mrs. Kamm, there is a growing incapacity among young couples to love and accept each other.

"THEIR RELATIONSHIPS are not as deep, meaningful and sustaining as they have been in the past, those of our folk's marriages or our grandparents' marriages," she said. "More and more people are coming in to me saying 'I don't know, I look at her and nothing happens.'"

"More and more I'm getting people coming in and saying 'I just don't like him or her anymore.'"

"On the individual level, they feel free to be critical of each other and intolerant."

"They have an incapacity to be loving individuals."

"They don't have access to their feelings like other generations have had," she said.

Mrs. Kamm attributed the emotional shallowness to changing patterns in

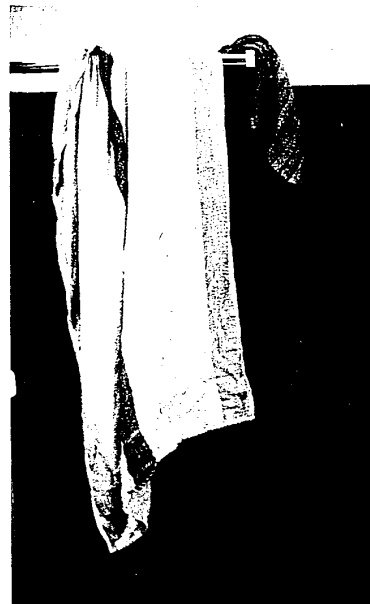
the home brought on by modern lifestyles. Frequent family moves, absences of parents from the home due to work, entertaining or socializing and lack of parent involvement in family life stand behind the change, she said.

"WHAT THESE things are producing, and they have been going on for awhile, are kids who are alienated. They don't know how to relate as well or love as well," Mrs. Kamm commented.

As a consequence, couples are less capable of circumventing minor differences or airing them to find the reason behind the behavior.

In addition, social philosophies, such as the women's liberation movement, are nudging their way into daily habits and further complicating marital relationships.

Previously, Mrs. Kamm explained, "if a man sat down to dinner and said 'I don't like this salad dressing,' the woman would have said 'I won't serve it anymore' or 'I'll have it when he's not here.' The modern woman is saying 'Well, I like it so we're going to have it some of the time.'"

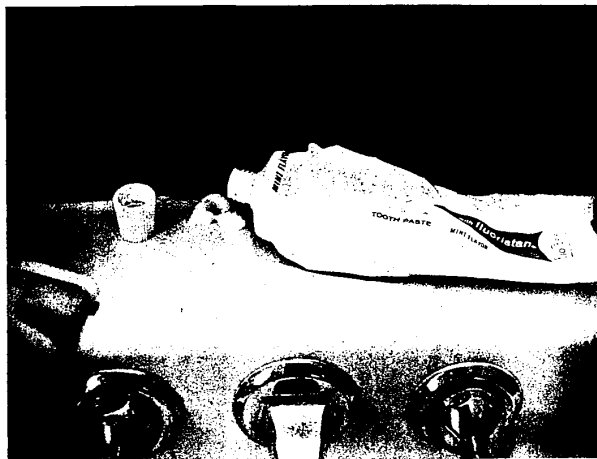


His or hers?

Photographed by
Barbara McClellan



"These little things remind me..."



The proverbial tube of toothpaste