



Life Issues Forum

“When Me + Me ≠ We” by Theresa Notare

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Just when you thought you’d heard the last re-definition of marriage, a new mutation is born. Apparently, while many were hawking the importance of no-fault divorce, blended families, co-habitation, same-sex marriage, and polygamy, a new creature was forming and quietly growing: LATs – *Living-Apart-Together*.

LATs are relationships where two people claim to love each other, may have an exclusive sexual relationship, may share some financial expenses, but deliberately do not live together. The bottom line is that LAT “couples” want independence, and don’t want to share themselves or their possessions unconditionally with each other.

The number of people in LAT relationships is on the rise in Europe and the United States. Sociologists are at a loss to explain what is causing this trend. Some say it is a reaction to divorce, both from an emotional and economic perspective – “My kids would never get along with him” or “Why bother joining households and lose a great city apartment?” Some point to advantages older LAT couples might have in avoiding the complicated inheritance issues that would arise if they were to marry. Others say it is just a harmless lifestyle alternative for both young and old. Still, insightful people are worried that it may be simply autonomy run amok.

This last point was starkly highlighted in a *New York Times* article (May 4, 2006) which featured interviews with couples in LAT relationships. Most spoke about their need for “alone time” or “personal space,” or said they didn’t want to “wait on” the other person. In each case, the couples had a fiercely narrow view of personal freedom as freedom from the inconvenience of others. It is a warped understanding of freedom where the individual has absolutely no legitimate ties to anyone, according to Jennifer Roback Morse, author of *Smart Sex: How to Find Life Long Love in a Hook-Up World*. But it also seems like narcissism, taken to another level.

A popular dictionary defines love as “unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another.” Love points to a person’s deep connection to another. It requires things like saying “I am yours!” When a man and a woman love each other as spouses, it goes even further: “and the two shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). “Me” becomes “we.” John Paul II said of this love that it “involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person” are present. “It aims,” he said, “at a deeply personal unity.” (*Familiaris consortio*, no. 13). When a man and a woman recognize each other as “my other half,” a whole new self understanding is born. A symphony of give and take, mystery and recognition forms a deep sense of mutuality. One need not fear losing one’s “individuality.” Living a life of love is restorative. It is nothing short of a return to Paradise – how God wants us to love!

Theresa Notare, MA is the Assistant Director of the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning, Pro-Life Secretariat, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3070