

## Domestic detox

**Why do most men do most of the driving? And most women most of the housework? Have you carved out roles for yourselves, and now feel lumbered? Review your chores and renew your romance.**



*At the beginning of your relationship did you sit down and decide who was going to take out the dustbin every Wednesday evening? Vacuum the lounge? Cook Sunday dinner?*

Did you ever agree that one or other of you would do the bulk of the long-distance car journeys or always sort out the tickets for airline bookings? No, we didn't either. Yet in most relationships, we find ourselves committed to being the only person doing a particular task. Maybe you get lumbered with taking out the cat litter because your partner always spills it on the carpet. (Have you ever asked yourself why that happens?) Perhaps you do all the long-distance driving because it's what the man is 'supposed' to do. Or do you care more than your partner that the bookcases are dusted and the fridge is cleaned regularly? Some of us can't live with a blown bulb while our partners aren't too bothered.

'If I don't wash the car nobody will,' whinges Nick. It's a source of festering discontent and resentment. He feels it's just not fair. His partner Alice has grumbles

Here's an  
idea for  
you...

**Have a mini household meeting at the start of each week. Write down all the cleaning, shopping, fetching, collecting and other errands that need to be done and share them out. We find it helps to write each partner's initials by their jobs. Put the list up somewhere prominent, like on the fridge or kitchen noticeboard. And don't mention it again during the week. There's no uglier utterance than nagging. Some people like to get their jobs out of the way and feel smug about it. Others are last-minute merchants. As long as everything gets done, who cares?**

Defining  
idea...

**'Hatred of domestic work is a natural and admirable result of civilization.'**

REBECCA WEST

of her own: why should one particular partner be lumbered with washing their dirty linen in private and making sure that the household doesn't run out of toilet paper or tooth paste?

### **TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'**

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Most men have discovered that cooking, especially if you don't have to do it all the time, is actually quite therapeutic. It's a great way to unwind at the end of the week or after a hard day at the office. Chopping onions is a great method of getting rid of pent up anger or aggression, and putting meals together is actually fun. Conversely, more and more women are having a go at DIY tasks and getting deep satisfaction from wallpapering, tiling and painting - once the exclusive preserve of the males of the tribe. Better still, many couples have come to realise that cooking or even tidying up hardly feels like a chore when the two of you are tackling it together. The work is done in half the time, leaving you both with spare time to do all that stuff you really want.

## NOBODY WEARS THE TROUSERS

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In a lot of long-term partnerships, one or other member suffers from what we call ‘victim of your own success syndrome’. One partner always reads maps or does the big drives because he – sorry, but it usually is a he – is better at it than she is. Of course he is: he’s put in the mileage. But if you share the job around, her second best can easily become joint equal. When a lover’s self-esteem is built on being the sole role-holder, he might find it difficult to let go. When your partner has a go at what is traditionally your job, avoid being critical or sniping if at first they don’t measure up – neither did you when you first started.

**While you’re thinking about your home, why not look at IDEA 27, *Dump your junk*, to find ways to make it more manageable?**

Try another idea...

***‘Keeping house is as unpleasant and filthy as coalmining and the pay’s a lot worse.’***

P.J. O’ROURKE

Defining idea...



***‘Conran’s Law of Housework – it expands to fill the time available plus half an hour.’***

SHIRLEY CONRAN, writer of *Superwoman*

Defining idea...

How did  
it go?

**Q An out-of-town superstore has just been built. My husband drives me there for our weekly shop and drives me mad once we get there. He wants to take over the job and tell me how to do what I've been doing unnoticed for the past 17 years! Why should I put up with it?**

*A That's men for you. Seriously, you could suggested that he goes alone a couple of times, or you could suggest that you divide the list into two: you could get the meat and veg one week while he gets the household goods and other bits and bobs, then reverse it next time.*

**Q I would truly love to share the housework with my partner but she seems unable to do the simplest thing without breaking something. Is there an evening class for this sort of thing?**

*A It's a nice thought! Seriously, she's either doing it on purpose to get out of doing the housework or she's just naturally very clumsy. Don't assume it's the former as she may have a condition called dyspraxia, which would explain her butter fingers. We suggest you both make a list of the household tasks and odd jobs that each of you hates. You may well find that what you hate, she might stomach. If you both hate the same jobs, or if the breakages continue, it might be cheaper to pay a cleaner or a relationship counsellor.*

**Q My husband always hangs the toilet paper the wrong way round, so the paper faces inwards instead of outwards. It makes me so irritated. I've shown him lots of times. Why is he so contrary?**

*A There's no easy way to tell you this, but it's your problem, not his. If it's that important to you, hang it yourself.*