He checks my phone every night. Is this love or control?

I have been married to my husband, Brian, for two years. At first, everything seemed normal, but over time, he developed a habit that now troubles me deeply. Every night before we go to sleep, he asks for my phone and checks my messages, call logs, and even my social media accounts. He says it is about transparency and building trust in our marriage. I have never cheated on him, but if I hesitate or question him, he becomes suspicious and accuses me of hiding something. To keep the peace, I hand over my phone, but inside, I feel uncomfortable and controlled. I no longer have a sense of privacy, even during personal conversations with friends and family. Is this what trust in a marriage looks like, or am I ignoring a serious red flag? **Patricia Auma**

Dear Patricia,

What you are experiencing with your husband is a manifestation of what is termed "coercive control." This control usually follows a pattern, as you have described. Victims may take time to realise they are actually being controlled. It often involves gaslighting, which consists of comments or actions that cause victims to question their own reality.

For instance, if the controller does something and the victim questions it, they may be manipulated into feeling that they do not have a legitimate issue to raise or even feel guilty for questioning their partner. An example of gaslighting could be when you wonder about something being wrong, and the controller makes you feel irrational for those thoughts.

Regarding your specific situation, we do not know if there was a mutual agreement about checking each other's phones in the spirit of transparency. If such an agreement exists, then it is that issue which needs to be addressed. However, the way you wrote indicates that the "transparency" concern primarily revolves around your privacy.

If that is the case, we must consider that you are experiencing coercive control. This situation strips you of your privacy and, to some extent, your dignity, which explains how you feel about his behaviour. It can indeed amount to emotional abuse. If this situation is uncomfortable for you, action needs to be taken.

Breaking the cycle of coercive control (in this instance, emotional) is challenging because the controller often derives satisfaction from their actions. They may resist changes, which can instill fear in the victim, urging them to surrender to the control. While you have mentioned only the phone, other areas could also be

34%

Prevalence. Out of 32 social media reactions on partners checking phones, about a third (34 percent) emphasised mutual transparency, suggesting that both partners should exchange phones to ensure fairness.

A quarter (25 percent) focused on trust issues, highlighting emotional insecurities and projecting behavior. Nearly one in five (19 percent) suspected cheating, warning that obsessive monitoring might indicate hidden infidelity.

