

Humility, Love, Pride, & the Nagging Good Wife

A perspective on the real reasons couples stay together or divorce.

By Barrington H. Brennen, September 2018



In this article, I am sharing some things that I've discovered after working with thousands of couples in marital therapy sessions and from seminars conducted over twenty-four years. They are fascinating, profound, but bitter-sweet discoveries. I want all married individuals, and those who are planning to get married, to sit up, fasten their seatbelts and read with an open mind.

Humility: The Number One Reason Relationships Last

Here is my first discovery. I've discovered that the Number One ingredient for keeping a marriage or any other romantic relationship healthy is **humility**. Yes, I said **humility**. I did not hear or read about this word in marital therapy when I did my training in counseling psychology over 24 years ago. Now, there is a plethora of literature on the topic. Before you get upset with me, let me define **humility**. Humility is the attitude, ability, and freedom to admit wrong, apologize, change, adapt, forgive and receive forgiveness, listen to objective criticism, and respect the rights of the other person to have a view, no matter what it is. It is demonstrating a teachable spirit.

Humility, I said is the Number One ingredient to keep a marriage healthy. Notice I am not talking about what starts the marriage or what attraction there might be to lead someone to fall in love. I am dealing with an already established relationship and what keeps it healthy. With this in mind, it brings me to the word **love**. I am sure many of you are wondering, "Isn't love more important?" Some might be disagreeing with me. This is how I describe it: **humility** is the **glue** in marriage—the substance that binds romantic partners together. **Love** is the **heat** that dries the glue and hardens it.

Love Is the Heat

Let me repeat it. Humility is the glue that binds romantic partners together, and love is the heat that dries the glue to make it difficult to fall apart. Let's expand this. When humility is absent, there is something painful that replaces it. It is the antonym to humility—**pride, conceit**. I can even add stubbornness, selfishness, arrogance, laziness. The Merriam Webster Dictionary expands further on the antonym to pride with these words: Cockiness, overconfidence, impudence, boastfulness, chest-thumping, self-applause, self-assumption, self-centeredness, self-complacency, self-conceit, self-glorification. You should have gotten the point by now.

Here is why I describe love as the “heat” that dries the “glue” (humility) in relationships. Humility is an attitude and love is the behavior. Marriage coach, Mort Fertel, states in his book, “Marriage Fitness,” “Every marriage has problems, issues, and challenges. But in every instance the solution is the same. The solution is love!” This kind of love means the following:

1. Loving unconditionally
2. Loving non-judgmentally
3. Loving with understanding
4. Loving with total acceptance
5. Loving with total commitment

Humility allows an individual in a relationship to unquestionably do these five things.

Pride: The Number One Reason Relationships Break up

This brings me to my second discovery. I discovered that the Number One reason relationships (marriage, engaged, partnering relationships) break up, as inferred earlier, is **pride**, or one can use the words stubbornness, selfishness, and apathy. What stands out boldly during my research is that 85% of relationships ended, not because of a specific behavior or activity like adultery, smoking, drinking, gambling, flirting, staying out late at nights, but the relationships ended because of an attitude of pride, stubbornness, selfishness, apathy, and traditionalism. In other words, it is the refusal of the guilty party to admit wrong, change, adjust, listen with understanding and to intelligently evaluate, without prejudice, one’s views or behavior and how it is impacting the relationship. What prevents the guilty partner from doing this?

Pride is always the foundation for the development of other negative attitudes. Or one can say that stubbornness, selfishness, apathy, and traditionalism are some of the ways an individual demonstrates pride.

Traditionalism

What is traditionalism in this context? Traditionalism is demonstrated when an individual holds on rigidly to a toxic (or even non-toxic) belief or practice in the family or church without thoughtful consideration for the specific context, even though it is destroying the relationship. The excuse is: “My mom and dad did this, so why can’t we do it? Or, “That is what the Bible says—the wife must submit.” It allows tradition to override common sense, cries for help, pleas to stop or change. Traditionalism forces one to sit “in a pot of boiling water and thinking he or she will not get cooked.”

Seeking to explore my hypothesis, I did a deeper research and identified a sample of ,1000 couples from my pool of couples. After reviewing the facts, the findings were that 85 percent of partners ended the relationship because the other partner refused to change a negative behavior. The complaint was always that the partner would not listen, admit wrong, was stubborn and proud. My research also showed that this did not happen overnight. It took usually several years of complaining; in some cases, five years, and in others, up to 25 years or more. The complaints were often about very serious problems like multiple unfaithfulness, violent fights, or the innocent partner contracting a sexually- transmitted disease. Some of these partners were over time driven to depression.

One dynamic that drove me to look deeper into this topic is hearing about the difficulties my clients were having in finding grounds for divorce—even in very painful relationships (In The Bahamas). In The Bahamas, the actual grounds for divorce make the divorce process or the need to separate from one’s partner very painful and difficult. Thus, some individuals have to remain in the pain or seek ways to get out of the marriage without breaking the law. My research shows, as stated earlier, that what causes the most pain in a relationship that leads to a permanent breakdown of the relationship cannot be measured by the legal reasons chosen for divorce. My interviews indicate that many spouses realized that they had no legal grounds for divorce although the marriage was toxic, and one needed to get out of it. In the end, a skilled lawyer, after examining the case, would suggest getting a divorce on the grounds of cruelty.

[[SEE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE IN SELECT COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD](#)]

This brings me to the legal grounds for divorce in The Bahamas. Read carefully as I develop this point. The grounds for divorce in The Bahamas are:

1. Adultery
2. Cruelty—mental, emotional or physical
3. Desertion for two years (has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of at least two years).
4. Separation for five years (living separate and apart)
5. Homosexuality & Bestiality. (Since the celebration of the marriage has been guilty of a homosexual act, sodomy or has had sexual relations with an animal)

Note carefully, from among these five grounds for divorce in The Bahamas, **cruelty** has the highest number each year. Here are a few examples from the statistics for divorce for the years 1999 to 2009: Notice the figures in the pink area under “C” which means emotional or physical cruelty.

Legend: **A**=Adultery **C**=Cruelty **D**=Desertion **S**=Separation

YEAR	DIVORCE GRANTED	DIVORCE FILED	REASON FOR DIVORCE
1999	?	408	A=76 / C=143 / D=69 / S=119
2000	389	592	A=66 / C=131 / D=79 / S=113
2001	461	577	A=67 / C=173 / D=87 / S=128
2002	438	556	A=58 / C=177 / D=59 / S=129
2003	324	653	Breakdown not available
2004	647	?	Breakdown not available
2005	538	660	A=53 / C=214 / D=103 / S=140 / AD=16 / CD=7
2006	326	716	A=75 / C=340 / D=135 / S=164
2007	266	665	A=83 / C=284 / D=81 / S=145
2008	191	695	A=64 / C=341 / D=116 / S=168
2009	65	603	A=85 / C=300 / D=84 / S=121

My research shows that each year the number of persons divorcing on grounds of adultery was never more than 85 individuals out of the total number of divorce cases for one year. However, cruelty was often twice or three times more than adultery. Why is this the case? Because since our legal grounds for divorce does not have a ground on “[irreconcilable difference](#)” or “[broken down irretrievably](#),” the more likely legal grounds spouses are choosing are “cruelty, separation, and desertion” even if adultery is involved. Some spouses are forced not to file for divorce right away, even though it is painful to remain in the relationship, so they can qualify on the grounds of desertion to separation. Sometimes this waiting time can extend to a few more painful years being connected to a spouse from whom one needs to be disconnected.

Here’s the punch line of my findings: My research reveals that the real reason the relationships have painfully deteriorated to the point of emotional pain and frustration is due to infliction of pride, stubbornness, and apathy from one spouse to another. This is very, very serious, but it’s not a ground for divorce in The Bahamas. Also, this is not measured by the actual figures of the divorce but by looking deep into each case and discovering the issues.

I am stating that the majority of individuals who got divorced in The Bahamas on the grounds of cruelty did so because of emotional exhaustion and pain due to years of complaint and frustration caused by a spouse refusal to change. No, I have not

investigated the couples in the national statistics on divorce. It is impossible. However, I am inferring, based on my own findings from the 1,000 couples I mentioned and the on-going observations in my own practice.

Is this similar in other countries? My observations and research reveal that it is so. I have conducted marriage seminars in St Maarten, Puerto Rico, Belize, England, Michigan, Florida, and Jamaica; and anecdotally arrive at the same conclusion. I have worked at an institution in Benton Harbor, Michigan where I conducted a treatment program for abusive individuals and observed the same trend.

Further Support for My Hypothesis

Here's another source for my hypothesis. In 2013 I developed the "Brennen's Short Survey on Marital Satisfaction" to use in my therapy sessions and at seminars where I am asked to speak to couples. The purpose of the survey is to simply ascertain the satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the following areas: romance, time spent together, intimacy and friendship. Here are the questions:

1. Indicate your satisfaction with the amount of romance in your marriage.
2. Indicate your satisfaction with the amount of time spent together doing fun things, dating, relaxing.
3. Indicate your satisfaction with the intimacy in your marriage.
4. Indicate your satisfaction with the friendship in your marriage.

The individual would select one of the following to indicate his or her satisfaction in the marriage: Not satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Satisfied, Happy.

Over a period of five years, the accumulative results of over 1,500 individuals revealed that

90% of individuals indicated *somewhat satisfied* or *not satisfied* to Questions 1 and 2 in the survey.

This is significant. The only exception was among individuals married one year or less. The longer the couples were married, the less satisfied they were in these two areas.

What is even more significant is the results of my exploration during the face-to-face interaction in therapy sessions. I noticed that when an individual indicated *somewhat satisfied* or *not satisfied* to the first two questions on romance and time spent together, there was also evidence of repeat disregard of request for change in behavior from one partner to the other. I also noticed that when the complaints continued over years, the more the years of complaint, the further apart emotionally the individuals were from each other, and there was more anguish, pain, and frustration in the marriage. Yet, none of these are grounds for divorce in The Bahamas.

No Specific Behavior Causes a Divorce

Here are the startling results of my observations. In the majority of cases, the final reason for the divorce was not a specific behavior like adultery, flirting, drinking, drugs, gambling, etc., even though the partner might have admitted to any or all of these. As stated, it was the refusal to listen to the complaints of the spouse, change, admit wrong, etc. I am often surprised why wounded spouses would stay together when multiple affairs have taken place. The Number One factor is that the guilty partner was willing to listen, change, and admit wrong. The guilty party shredded the cloak of pride and selfishness and became humble. The wounded partner stayed so long in the relationship, although complaining often, because of a deep and profound love for his or her partner.

Scenarios

Here are very serious and painful scenarios where troubled couples, equipped with humility, fostered healing of the relationship:

- a) Both partners had an adulterous relationship simultaneously.
- b) One spouse had multiple affairs.
- c) The wife contracted two sexually transmitted diseases due to the husband's unfaithfulness.
- d) The wife got pregnant for another man.
- e) The wife got pregnant for another, while simultaneously the husband got another woman pregnant.
- f) The wife found out her husband had a child with another woman earlier in their marriage.
- g) A spouse stole large sums of money from their own bank account.

The healing took place because the guilty partner was willing to stop and evaluate the damaging behavior. The guilty spouse suck in his or he pride and was humble enough to admit wrong, vulnerability, or weakness. Also, the so-called innocent spouse was able to take a deep, introspective look at his or her own behavior to see what part it played in the marital discord.

Here are a few very simple, and not so painful, but easy-to-fix scenarios where usually one spouse is saturated in pride, or stubbornness or arrogance, cause more pain and even separation and divorce, because he or she refuses to change these simple behaviors:

- a) Husband complains that his wife spends too much time each week talking to her mother on the phone who lives alone on another island. Here, the husband refuses to understand the importance and need of his wife spending time on the phone with her mother.
- b) Spouse does not want her husband to do lap dancing with another woman in a strip club.

- c) A spouse constantly comes home too late after work.
- d) A spouse is concerned about the characters of her/his partner's friends.
- e) Husband complains about his wife's girlfriends and the time she spends with them, and the places they go at nights.
- f) One partner continues to smoke in the home or drink heavily, causing serious medical problems to other family members; for example: asthma, coughs, depression, etc.,
- g) One partner does not want the other partner to travel with him or her to social outings, or overseas trips like Carnivals in Trinidad or New Orleans, or Family Island regattas.

It is astonishing that these seemingly fixable problems are the ones that lead many to the divorce court. The judge or lawyer may not be aware of this, but one spouse is in pain because of it. These are examples when pride takes control and prevents change.

The Good Nagging Wife

My final observation on this topic is the value of a good nagging wife (husband). I know this sounds strange because many like to quote the scripture found in Proverbs 27:17: "A nagging wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm." The text does not explain "why" the wife is nagging.

Thus, here are my findings: When a husband says that his wife is nagging, it means that she is always telling the truth about something. Let me explain. Usually the wife is daily, weekly, or otherwise repeating a request for her husband to do something or stop doing something, and he does not respond. Thus, to get around it and to throw blame, he fights back with the word, "you are nagging me," or "stop nagging," and he does not "obey" or respond to his wife's requests.

Some good nagging spouses "nag" about drinking habits, gambling, coming home unusual hours after work, flirtatious behavior, texting inappropriate messages to another person, not enough time spent together, etc. He is too proud or stubborn to listen to or admit that he must do what his wife is asking him to do. A nagging spouse is usually a sign that the marriage has a giant weakness that can be easily repaired if the other partner would be humble and change.

"You Need to Be More Submissive."

Here's my last point. I've discovered that the request from a husband to his wife to be submissive or he complains with the words "You are not submissive enough," is a sure sign that he is threatened by his wife's assertiveness. Usually these men believe that they are the ones "in charge" and the wife must "obey," or at least do not question his points of view or "demands." These men use the Scriptures as a weapon to control and coerce their spouses. They love to quote Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands. . . " But they neglect to read the verses above

(Verse 21) that states “Submitting yourselves on to another.”

My view is that not even once in a marriage should a husband demand, request or refer to this passage when arguing or disagreeing with his wife. It suggests that he does not understand her rights and freedom to think, speak, and have an opinion. It is very disrespectful and controlling and dishonors the integrity of the relationship. Husband who demand submission needs to learn how to be submissive themselves first. They need to review their own views of women. The request to “be more submissive” is a shaming mechanism that demeans women and inflates the ego of husbands. Husbands must understand this profound principle: “If you want to receive understanding you must first give understanding.” Should I also say: “If you want your wife to submit you must first submit.”

Dear husbands, I request of you to rise up and submit to your wives.

Conclusion

We have to fight for our marriage. It must not be a one-sided fight. Both individuals must participate and be willing listen to the pain and complaint of his or her partner. In this article, I am proposing that pride, stubbornness, apathy, or arrogance would be the real reasons a partner does not change and marital break up is inevitable. I encourage couples to seek humility, the glue that binds spouses together. And to show love that provides the heat that dries the glue so the relationship will hold fast.

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980