

Relationships sour with fights

BY ANNE REBAR
Columnist

I think it's safe to assume everyone knows relationships are not going to be 100 percent perfect 100 percent of the time. Anyone who refuses to accept this fact is either deluding themselves or dating an imaginary friend.

Given that a relationship will not always be a smooth ride, how can you tell whether you've just hit a rough patch or gone careening off a cliff? Deciding when it's time to cut your losses, get out of the car and find another ride can be tricky, even terrifying, but it also can be for the better.

It's normal for a couple to work through low points in a relationship and come out just fine, but sometimes a low point just keeps sinking lower. There is no perfect formula — is there ever in relationships? — for knowing when to break up, but there are signs to look for. If you experience them consistently, it might signal it's time to end things and move on.

A lack of respect in the relationship is a sure sign it's heading in the wrong direction. All relationships, romantic or otherwise, are built upon certain principles, one of which is always respect. Annie Bennett, psychotherapist and author of "The Love Trap," said if one person is constantly belittling what the other says and does, boundaries are being crossed.

She said this behavior is a sign that one person has stopped respecting the other's values and therefore has stopped accepting who they are. If your partner constantly demeans you for being you, well, it's time to

let him or her go.

If you don't look forward to his or her contact or company, that could be another sign it's time to go. At one time, your heart did that little backflip and an involuntary smile crept onto your face every time their name appeared on your cell phone or popped up on a Facebook chat, but now those things have become an annoyance. You purposely ignore his or her phone calls and text messages and decide you'd rather hang out with other friends. Keeping someone

around if you don't even want to interact with him or her, or continuing to stay when it seems your significant other would rather box Mike Tyson than talk to you, is not fun or beneficial to either party. Time to move on.

Crumbling communication between two people is another sign the relationship is dying. It's important for a couple to be able to communicate with each other effectively to voice their needs and desires.

Laurie Moore, a relationship author, said everyone has different communication styles, and you don't want to spend all your time trying to communicate with each other. It's too much work, and the relationship will suffer because of it.

Fighting more often and because of progressively sillier things is another reason a breakup might be on the horizon. Why spend all your time fighting? That gets no one anywhere. If little tiffs and jibes between the two of you that used to be brushed aside turn into atomic sized blow-ups, not only is the relationship not going to be fun anymore,

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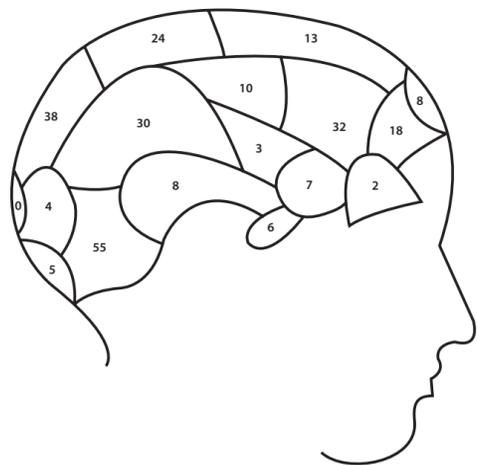
it's going to have a negative effect on your overall mood. No one wants to be forever brooding over the most recent "nothing fight" with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Life is too short.

Relationships should be beneficial to both participants, so if one person is doing all the work, it throws the benefits off balance. If one person is constantly doing all the calling, all the favors, setting up all the dates, while the other person sits back and does nothing, it's not going to work. The person putting in all the effort is getting nothing in return and might eventually feel under-appreciated and even resentful. The person receiving all the benefits from their dedicated companion

can begin to take that person for granted. It's not fair, and it's not healthy. It's time to break up.

After putting so much time and effort into a relationship, you want it to work out, and once you've become used to having another person in your life, it can be scary to think about being on your own again.

Dennis Neder, relationship author and columnist, said in an article for Discovery Health that this can create a fear of loss and insecurity, which makes people want to stay in the relationship despite it being unhealthy. Neder said if you aren't getting what you want or need in a relationship, it's time to move on. It's not good for either party if one is not being fulfilled.



BY ELIZABETH NECKA
Columnist

The disaster of Haiti is truly devastating. Within a matter of moments, buildings crashed to the ground, trapping and killing hundreds of thousands of people and leaving hundreds of thousands more homeless.

The death toll isn't even completely tallied 16 days after the Jan. 12 earthquake, which registered a 7.0 on the Richter scale. Haitian relief efforts are still working through the rubble to find survivors, but their time is limited, and the likelihood they will find someone alive decreases exponentially every day. Imagining such a monstrosity among our fellow humankind is alarming, especially given the unexpected and organic nature of this damage. It always seems to be the case that people from all different walks of life pull together to help one another in times of emergency. After all, we're all human. This is called altruistic behavior, or actions which deliberately pursue and aid another's interest, often at the expense of one's own interest. Haiti is no exception.

Three doctors, four nurses and 75,000 pounds of medical supplies, food, water and construction materials successfully made it to Port-au-Prince for use in the local hospitals, according to the Hope for Haiti non-profit

The Truman Experiment:

People pull together during devastating times

organization (hopeforhaiti.com). Vapour, Inc., donated a water filter generator to produce more than 250 gallons of clean, pure drinking water daily to aid survivors and relief efforts. Last Friday's celebrity telethon raised more than \$57 million in donations. Reaching out to a wider, more technologically advanced public, many organizations accepted text donations. For example, texting the word "quake" to 20222 donates \$10, automatically added to your cell phone bill. U.S. Troops, Salvation Army volunteers and Humanitarian Relief volunteers already have gone on-site to help, and a multitude of church groups and other charitable organizations back in their home countries have begun assembling care and food packages.

Truman is also doing its part to help out. Tonight at Il Spazio is a poetry slam — full proceeds go to Partners in Health for the Haitian disaster. On Feb. 19, there will be a benefit concert at the Journal Printing Building.

It seems to me that the prevalence of altruistic behavior spikes rapidly immediately following disasters. Think of the fervor with which altruism spread throughout the U.S. immediately following Hurricane Katrina or the World Trade Center attacks. But does our tendency to help others and behave selflessly for the betterment of society as a whole diminish without the external circumstance of devastation?

One 2008 study in the Social Psychology Quarterly divided people into two subgroups: egotists, who donate because their short-term action will make them feel more socially accountable and ultimately has long-term benefits for them, and the altruists, who engage in helping behavior more consistently, even without necessarily benefitting mutually as a result of the exchange. I'd like to hope many of us are altruists and constantly are putting ourselves out to help those who need it, but the sad fact is that many of us are just the opposite. The authors

of the study suggest that indirect reciprocity, or the recognition one receives as a result of his or her work, might be a high motivating factor for prosocial behavior.

Granted, some personality types are just more likely to be giving than others. Those who are highly agreeable and emotionally stable, or easy to get along with and unlikely to fret and worry aimlessly, also tend to be more empathetic. Empathetic and vicarious understanding encourages philanthropic actions.

Sometimes it's the institutions with which one is involved that determine a person's generosity. As a general rule of thumb, altruism soars within religious communities. A perpetual problem in psychological research is determining the direction of this relationship: Whether this is because people who join religious groups are inherently similar in their willingness to give, or because people are inspired and affected by those values and people they are surrounded by.

Although people as a whole are much more likely to give within the public sector and while monitored by others, both egotists and altruists were likely to engage in helping behavior even independently. However, the disparity between public and private efforts was much more sizeable for the egoists than the altruists, which could be expected.

Altruism is a very unique trait to study. It seems like it should be written into our DNA, but very often requires a catastrophe before actually emerging in our daily behavior. Whether we are motivated intrinsically by our desire to seek rewards or externally by our desire to help others, altruistic behavior is highly advantageous for harmonious functioning in today's society, especially given the likelihood of natural disasters such as Haiti's earthquake. Humans were meant to take care of one another — that's just the way it is.

MEDITATIONS OF MICHELLE: Seasons become metaphor

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Columnist

Life seems slightly grey-tinted during winter. As I ride my bike from class to class I simply endure the wind chill while wishing for spring, when I can cheerfully ride my bike in a skirt and tank top, pleasantly warmed by the sun overhead.

Alas, the overcast sky often leaves me feeling a little overcast myself. Don't get me wrong, I am certainly not depressed, but mood swings seem to be universally prevalent in the winter. Throughout winter I try to remember that for every miserable day, I will later enjoy a bright day during spring. I remember that the earth must spend a season encased in its frozen tomb before it is rejuvenated with the joy and brightness of a new season.

The constantly changing seasons are a powerful metaphor, reminding us life works in opposites and cycles. The earth gives us both the frigid extreme of winter and its opposite — sweltering summer. Maybe if I patiently endure winter (fre-

quently sipping hot cocoa along the way), I will value spring that much more when March rolls around. I'll never miss an opportunity to be outside — and, trust me, I usually don't.

The existence of natural contrasting forces illustrates a fundamental Taoist principle, symbolized by the yin-yang image. I remember seeing yin-yang on earrings, posters, pins and shirts but never knowing what it meant. Now I realize that it embodies two opposing energies which, together, create the world.

The yang is the active force: bright, pure and stimulating, while the yin is the receptive force: dark, passive and tranquil. You need both yin and yang to create anything of substance.

And although the Chinese philosophers might view notions of good and bad as human constructs, sometimes you have

to endure the unpleasant to fully savor the pleasant. As the cliché goes, you can't have your cake and eat it too.

Let us briefly consider an example. I can't have a genuinely healthy meal unless I take the time to cook it and purchase the right ingredients. This is a balancing act — the benefit of a wholesome, delicious meal requires a sacrifice of equal proportion on my part.

However, if I spend money on cheap ingredients, like using canned tomatoes instead of farm-fresh tomatoes, then I sacrifice nutrition and taste to save money. And cheap food

often incorporates questionable production methods, such as factory farming, so someone or something pays for the cheap price tag, while the production shortcuts boomerang back to us in the form of lower nutrition and hormone-laced food. In short, if I bring less to the table, I get less in return.

This balance of give and take is the essence of yin and yang. If imbalances exist, nature will find a way to correct them. If you burn yourself out working on projects (too much yang), then you will probably crash for the whole weekend afterward (corrective yin). Nothing can exist without a "flipside." Every brilliant idea requires hard work to realize it. Every Saturday spent partying or relaxing requires a Sunday of homework and meetings. All money earned requires a proportional amount of your time. If you think you've found a way to take a short cut — like taking a diet pill instead of exercising — the balances of the universe surely will catch up with you when you start experiencing the side effects.

Examine the personalities of your family and friends. Each one of them has both pleasant and unpleasant



traits. For example, perhaps your friend is tons of fun to hang out with, but she's flaky. Maybe you have a teacher who is a brilliant thinker but is intimidating, or a kind, friendly coworker who talks your ear off. Every positive trait has a shadow — its complementary opposite. Likeable people can be arrogant, quiet people are often thoughtful and even cruel people could be intelligent or determined.

Accepting the necessity of opposites creates a sweet sense of tolerance during times of unpleasantness and cultivates the wisdom that we reap what we sow. When homework overloads us, when friends and parents clash with us or when the sky is dim with clouds, we can remember that this isn't the apocalypse. Like the changing seasons, our lives will forever cycle between winter and summer.