

Getting it together

Avoiding conflict won't always help a marriage

"I can't understand it!" exclaims the distressed housewife. "It seems a divorce. He says he's bored and trapped. I thought we had a pretty good marriage—we never fought. What could have gone wrong?"

In one form or another, this expression of perplexity is being repeated to hundreds of attorneys and marriage counselors daily. Embodied in it is the belief that if couples never fight they must have a good marriage. And, therefore, couples who fight have bad marriages.

Another concept is correct. The complete absence of arguments in a relationship is rarely a good sign. In fact, it should be seen as a danger signal, a warning of future marital troubles. On the other hand, this does not mean that couples who argue constantly are bound to have successful marriages, either. But a certain amount of verbal fighting is essential to the maintenance of a long-term relationship.

Such a belief in the value of marital confrontations takes issue with traditional marriage models. Most couples are conflict only in negative terms, something to be avoided. And they spend a lot of energy doing just that—running from confrontation.

AMONG THE ways that couples avoid conflict, the current favorite is accommodation, giving in to avoid a battle. Wives learn that if they complain to their husbands, it will just lead to a fight, and so they decide to "suffer privately."

With each buried gripe, the accommodating wife feels she is sacrificing her

selfish needs for the sake of marital harmony. It makes her feel proud of herself for being so tolerant and self-denying, but her husband doesn't even notice.

So the accommodating wife begins to feel unappreciated. She begins to build a stockpile of bitterness toward this man who repays her constant self-sacrifice with continued inconsideration.

She feels that he owes her extra consideration because of all she has given up for the marriage, but all she gets is used. And so the foundation is laid for the growing resentments which can explode so easily into the "I've had it" ending of the marriage.

IN A SIMILAR way, couples learn to avoid confrontations and bury feelings by following rigid rules and acting out roles with each other. "If you can't say anything nice about somebody, don't say anything at all," warns one such rule. Anger is thought of as a bad emotion, an undesirable human flaw which should be stifled. Confronting is labeled "ragging."

Rule followers seek the safety of traditional marital roles instead of making conflict. They try to set and follow predictable

behavior patterns, like cars following traffic laws, to avoid collisions with their spouses.

Father sits at the head of the table. Mother is responsible for the childcare. Father is responsible for major decisions. All is orderly and predictable, until one male gets bored with the sameness and feels trapped by his protective rules. Then a marital crisis is not far away.

Another self-defeating method for avoiding marital conflict is the use of independent life-styles. The wife pursues an interest in community activities, for example, while her husband becomes more and more involved with his job. Eventually,

they spend so little time together that they have nothing to fight about. They also have little reason to be married.

rules for expressing conflicts. These may be sent to the Rochester Observer & Eccentric, 410 N. Main, Rochester, N.Y. 14602.

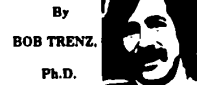
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Finally, conflict-avoiders frequently use certain personal reactions to extinguish marital brush-fires. A common one is walking away when conflicts start. This is most successfully applied when it is done abruptly and calmly, thus sending the silent message: "I am above such bad emotional outbursts."

Nearly as effective is the use of personal fragility, portraying oneself as very sensitive to criticism or frightened of anger. The message here is: "You wouldn't hit a cripple, would you?" And effectively, such fight-stoppers can stifle the angriest spouse, temporarily.

And that's what all of these mechanisms have in common. They can bring about temporary harmony, but they are bound to cause more serious problems later. In fact, the use of such conflict-avoiding models is likely to cause the eventual death of the very relationship they were meant to preserve.

Next week we will explore an alternative perspective, that conflict is actually good for marriages, and we will look at two




By BOB TRENZ, Ph.D.

Mothers:
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• Doctors' shoe prescriptions correctly fitted

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Volunteers

This column describing volunteer needs in Oakland County is cosponsored by the Junior League of Birmingham and the Oakland County Volunteer Bureau. Inquiries regarding volunteer needs listed here should be made to the Oakland County Volunteer Bureau at 642-772. Requests for volunteer listings should also be made through the bureau.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD LEAGUE OF DETROIT needs volunteers in several areas, including in the clinics to register patients at the front desk, provide clerical assistance and update patient charts. Volunteers are also needed in the league office to assist with mailings, telephone and general office work as well as research and library work. Volunteers will also work on a speaker's bureau, prepare exhibits or act as resource people for Planned Parenthood.

MEDICENTER NURSING HOME, Southfield, needs mature teens and older volunteers to be program assistants and to help with games, arts, crafts, music and more or just to talk with patients. Mature, caring and patient persons are needed two to four hours a week, afternoons and evenings. Orientation is provided.

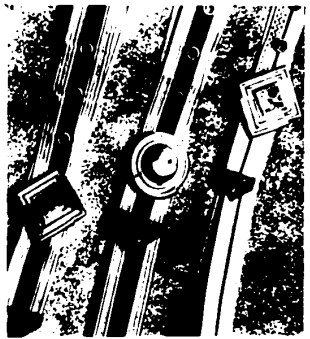
MICHIGAN HEART ASSOCIATION, Troy, needs volunteers to work in their two offices, answering the telephone, distributing literature, processing memorials and coordinating programs. The office is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Three hours of volunteer time each week is requested. Training is provided.

CRANBROOK THEATRE SCHOOLS, Bloomfield Hills, will begin its summer theater activities June 21. Volunteers are needed several hours a week to assist in instruction in dance, art, music and other theater skills. There is also a need for typing scripts and other clerical work. Volunteers with a theater background or college students with a theater major should call the bureau. The program is designed to encourage creativity for third graders and up.

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Cipullo collection

Graphics and pasta furnish the inspiration for jewelry pieces in the Aldo Cipullo 1976 collection. The graphic belt buckles at the left include inserts of semi-precious colored stones and are used on multi-colored decorative military ribbons of 24 karat gold weave. The pendants and cufflinks above look like elbow macaroni and rigatoni.

Sea Babies
... shaping up for summer

Two of the breeziest beauties ever to snuggle up to a sand dune ... to brave the highest waves. A marvelous way to make a fashion splash by ROSE MARIE REID.

Left ... one piece dotted suit with boyleg, swimmer's back, construction bra. Navy/pink.28.00
Right ... oriental poppy design in a draped sheath. Of Antron and Lycra. Black, pink.36.00
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