

The Seven Deadly Relationship Sins

Beware! These misdeeds can condemn your loving union to partnership purgatory.

By Claire McIntosh Writer, EBONY Magazine



1. WRATH

Couples will always encounter conflict. But there's a big difference between talking things out and having a tirade so toxic your mate needs a hazmat suit to be in the same room with you. Withdrawing. Stonewalling. Exaggerating. Criticizing. Defending. Retaliating. Belittling. Nagging. Name-calling. Cursing. Threatening. If you routinely argue with any of these in your arsenal, you're poisoning your partnership. Find tips on fair fighting from psychotherapist Mary Pender Greene in "EBONY Connect U" on page 92.

2. GREED

Self-interest is healthy. But selfishness to the extent that you can't compromise or support your partner will build resentment and distance between you. The two of you should have three sets of goals: yours, mine and ours. Give your mate the freedom to pursue his or hers, or (s)he may feel trapped or held back by the relationship. If you are dismissing your lover's ambition because it may cost you something or because you don't think it's realistic, (s)he will likely find support from another. Honor who your partner is now as well as the potential of what (s)he hopes to be. Support that vision fully, advises Karen Sherman, Ph.D., co-author of *Marriage Magic!: Find It, Keep It, Make It Last!* (AuthorHouse).

3. LUST

You guys are hot for one another? No problem there! Satisfying the lust for a third party—cheating—is what we're talking about. Cheating kills trust and undermines the love and respect so critical to lasting happiness. But beware of related trust killers: broken promises; inconsistent actions; secrets and lies. At the root of these behaviors is the mentality that it's acceptable to keep a partner in the dark if it means having one's cake and eating it, too. If one of you is compartmentalizing key parts of your life that the other knows little about, you're on a slippery slope.

Many think serial cheating without an emotional component is less harmful than a long-term love affair. Satisfying lust in this way is often written off as a "man thing" or an "addiction" typical of partners who can't control their lust for others. Psychologist Joyce Morley, Ed.D., who works with straying husbands trying to salvage their marriages, points out that even so-called sex addicts have a choice. "It's mind over

matter. If he would mind what he's supposed to—his children and his wife—then the outside women wouldn't matter."

But there is a way to maintain trust and enjoy lust: Find ways to bring the excitement of an affair into your monogamous relationship. Assume fantasy roles; rendezvous at a ritzy hotel or in a secluded-yet-semipublic place. Experiment with new techniques and toys. Make your boo your "deep, dark secret."

4. PRIDE

We're talking about false pride here: the fronting and fakery we employ to shield our lovers and our own egos from the fact that we are far from perfect. Could our flaws be accepted and loved? Pride protects us from the answer by ensuring the issue of our inadequacy never gets raised. Fear-based false pride is why you won't admit you're wrong or why you need to be right. It could be why you may dig your heels in during a fight instead of searching for common ground. Or why you may hide some aspect of your sexual, medical, financial, family or recovery history. Or why you may avoid sharing your fears. It may prevent you from speaking from the heart, even to show gratitude. It's a reason you might fake orgasms rather than speaking up about what feels good. It's why some of us wait for our new gal or guy to say "I love you" first. But to avoid authenticity is to avoid intimacy. Remind yourself that being vulnerable isn't the same as being threatened. Share more of yourself, warts and all, as your relationship deepens. Our flaws make us unique. Our uniqueness makes us lovable. And to miss out on love, well, that would be a sin, too.

5. GLUTTONY

We all know how one partner's packing on 150 pounds can put a damper on desire; but it's not just food addiction that gets in the way of intimacy. From workaholicism to Internet addiction, any activity you do to the point that it prevents you from being present and accountable in your relationship will push away your partner. Having dinner at work night after night; repeatedly cancelling plans because a needy friend has another crisis; compulsive shopping, online gaming or routinely watching sports or porn for many hours at a stretch means you're likely neglecting something that's important to your partnership. It might be sex, communication, money management, parenting concerns, shared leisure or household responsibilities. Make room for what's important to your lover. Otherwise, you'll end up with a roommate—or worse, with an ex.

6. SLOTH

How many times have we heard someone say, "She let

herself go" or "He's not the man I fell in love with" following a breakup? Complacency may be a by-product of comfort and closeness, but it's corrosive to passion. "Letting yourself go" doesn't just mean you've taken to hanging around the house sporting three days' worth of razor stubble and dirty sweatpants. It may mean you've allowed yourself to neglect a goal, habit or interest you prioritized at the start of the relationship. If so, you're no longer nurturing a special part of you—part of what your mate fell in love with. "Often, couples focus on each other and lose sight of who they are. These relationships are co-dependent," says psychotherapist Christine Gutierrez. "What you are striving for is an interdependent relationship. When you don't have sacred alone time with yourself or time with your friends, you tend to suffocate each other. You lose the romance and connection between you, and sometimes, the respect." What passion, dream, ambition, challenge, friendship, routine or talent have you let go of? What time-sucking activity on your schedule can you eliminate to reclaim it and get your needs

met? A final thought: If you or your partner has lost interest in nearly everything, this may signal depression. Learn more at the National Institute of Mental Health (nihm.nih.gov).

7. ENVY

Jealousy is the bitter feeling that others possess desired advantages—including the attention and adoration our mate—that we lack. It stems from insecurity. Frequently, we project those insecurities onto our partner's behavior. So instead of admitting I've gained weight, we assume He thinks I'm fat, or He's ogling that skinny girl. Instead of I'm disappointed that I don't earn more, we think She's out late helping that hotshot co-worker spend his bonus. And that one-down feeling can lead us to try to regain the advantage by behaving in ways that don't show respect for our mate, ourselves or healthy boundaries. Spying on a partner, e.g., checking emails, browsing search engine history or cell phone logs; comments intended to cut a partner down to size; comparing or scorekeeping as well as unfounded accusations of mistreatment or cheating all cross that line. It doesn't matter how well your partner treats you. You won't feel good about your relationship until you feel good about yourself. Begin by keeping a journal to track your daily "wins" and positive attributes.