

hitched

life advice

August 2009

Don't Talk Trash About Your Spouse

Talking poorly about your spouse with your friends may be fun, but it can damage your marriage.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



BigStockPhoto

While it may be fun to talk trash about your spouse, it could be harmful to your marriage.

You're having lunch with the girls or drinks with the guys—your once-a-week, let-it-all-hang-out and dish some dirt time. The conversation is lively, everybody is chiming in with their latest on the men and women we love to trash and bash.

"So," says one of them, "what's your spouse been up to lately?"

You think for a moment, "Nothing, really," you say.

"Oh, come on," another retorts, "he hasn't magically transformed into a romantic Prince, or she hasn't turned into Mrs. Wonderful overnight?"

going to be late, he laughs uproariously at the dumbest sitcoms, well... you could go on. But for once, you don't really want to.

Your friends look at you, waiting. Suddenly you feel apart from them, like you don't belong. So you root around for some decent dirt.

"Well, I asked her specifically to pick up the dry cleaning yesterday cause I needed my blue suit for the meeting on Friday and she forgot," or "He wasn't interested in my work woes but couldn't stop yapping about his."

"Again?" wail your friends.

"Yup, again," you say, warming to the topic, "And not only that . . ." You're off and running, once again part of the "trash and bash" clan.

Let's face it, it's fun to trash and bash. It's highly entertaining to pick on our spouse sometimes. TV and film make a fortune off making us laugh about the flaws and foibles of the imperfect people we live with. What we don't realize is what all that picking is doing to your marriage. You see, anything you focus on grows. So if you focus on how miserable you are in your marriage, you get more miserable. If you focus on how happy you are in your relationship, you get happier. Getting together with your friends and bad-mouthing your significant other, the state of your marriage and men and women in general has one guaranteed result: none of those things are going to get better.

You will go home looking even more disgustedly at your partner's flaws, become even more soured on the whole idea of marriage, and kvetch to yourself, "I could have done better," not realizing that you have a "good one" right there beside you, if you'd only focus on their good sides!

All of us are created equal in this regard; we all have good sides and down sides. Barring the really bad downsides (verbal/emotional/physical abuse), most of our downsides aren't that big a deal, unless we make them a big deal.

So ask yourself, "What would I rather do? Ruin the love in my marriage by focusing on the few things I don't like about my partner? Or grow the love in my marriage by focusing on the things I like?" The choice is yours.

There is, of course, a price to pay. You may no longer be welcome at the trash and bash sessions. You may find it uphill work to share stories of the cool, neat, tender, sweet things that your significant other does, 'cause at least for a while, your girlfriends may not like that. You may feel like you don't belong, which can be very uncomfortable. But if you keep at it, you may find that your girlfriends start to share their stories of the happiness in their lives, or you may find a whole different set of friends who prefer to dwell in the land of "How happy I am!"

The choice is yours.

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., is a relationship expert, popular speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and author of nine best-selling books, including her most recent, "Your Man is Wonderful" (www.yourmaniswonderful.com) and "Dangerous Relationships." Dr. Nelson focuses on how we can all enjoy happy, fulfilling lives while accomplishing great things in love, at home and at work, as we appreciate ourselves, our world and all those who inhabit it. Visit www.noellenelson.com for more. Also, enter the Toad to Prince contest at www.toadtoprince.com. Deadline is August 31, 2009.