

By ANN ROSEN SPECTOR

Please hold the vitriol

Selling wedding dresses on eBay with a vitriolic diatribe about the ex-wife who wore it.

▶ Trash-talking on Facebook and MySpace pages about ex-friends.
▶ Airing the marital frailties of one's soon-to-be ex-hubby on YouTube.

▶ Selling your baubles on exofriendjewelry.com with your version of what terrible things he allegedly did to you.

▶ Videotaping and broadcasting the physical beating of someone who did at least one of the above.

And we used the think those folks who walked the streets with signs proclaiming "The End of the World Is Near!" were the only crazy ones. Now we see that they were merely low-tech.

Whatever happened to discretion? The people seeking fame this way probably don't even know who Andy Warhol was or

that he said everyone would eventually get 15 minutes of fame. But even if they do, shouldn't it be for something benefiting mankind, rather than the merely tacky and tawdry?

There is a lot to be said about keeping things private. For one thing, the exhibitions of anger described above are like spitting in the wind. Most of it winds up on the spewer's face.

In those moments of pique that cause people to vomit hate, do they think about their families, especially their children?

Or friends? The people who they do business with? What impression are they providing about themselves?

Endless blaming of others robs people of insight. Ultimately, the only one whose behavior we can

control is ourselves. So it's far better to ask, "What did I do wrong in this relationship that I can improve on in the future?"

Or, "How can I choose more wisely and see the relationship more clearly from the beginning?" Love may be blind, but clarity does not follow a vicious voice mail.

Both the beginning and ending of a relationship are important. A clean break lets you start with a new person enlightened, not burdened, by the past.

Imagine dating someone who's broadcast to the world that his former significant other was a complete jerk. Is that a turn-on for the next object of affection?

Would that make you more or less secure about a future disagreement with that person?

Sooner or later, each of us is going to be the bad guy or girl in the other person's version.

If we believe everything our new love says, derisively about the former love object, we're setting ourselves up to get knocked off the same pedestal.

IN THE OLD days, when the breakup came, we'd whisper to our closest friends, who'd tell his closest friends — but it would be a performance for only a select few.

Today, we can write a scathing post online, or send a damning e-mail to the listserve.

Instant notoriety. In the old days, if we got over the initial heartbreak, we could get on with our lives and loves. But on YouTube, once we get a

million hits, we're on Leno or Letterman. We're famous for being famously indiscreet. We may think we're witty or clever, but is the audience laughing with us? Or at us?

All of us get to tell the story of our lives with ourselves as the protagonist. But it's all selective memory. I challenge you to read an autobiography and compare it with a companion biography. There will be differences, in facts and perspective. The same is true of every "relationship story."

By expending so much energy on retaliation, we're actually robbing ourselves of the opportunity for self-reflection.

We need to rethink letting it all hang out. Perhaps we ought to just zip a fair amount of this stuff right back in. ★

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