

Co-dependency: Half a Loaf of Self

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Co-dependency has been defined as a pattern of relying on people outside of ourselves to define us and our worth. That way of being is also known as “externally referenced.” Sometimes this dynamic is expressed by the phrase “other directed” which means guided in behavior by the values and expectations of others.

So what does externally/internally referenced mean?

When externally referenced, we believe the idea that self-esteem, worth, happiness and pain come from people and things outside of ourselves. People who are more internally referenced believe that pain and joy, self-esteem and self worth come from inside us.

In the co-dependent world, 3 common false beliefs are:

- 1) My worth and lovability are defined outside myself
- 2) My feelings, both pain and joy, come from outside myself and
- 3) I cannot handle the loss of love

Imagine how you would feel if you were to sit for three hours in a chair with no reading, watching TV, talking on the phone, with absolutely no distractions, only your own thoughts. How would you feel during that time? When people do this experiment, it becomes clear that all the feelings come from within. The feelings come from the thoughts, and the thoughts come from the belief systems.

Why is a co-dependent system “half a loaf of self”?

Stuck in co-dependency patterns, one is not able to consistently embrace **both** halves of a spectrum of caring for: 1) one’s self and 2) the other person. Either the self **or** the other person is the focus of caring behaviors. Everybody exhibits some co-dependent behavior at times. But the degree of stuckness in one half of the loaf or the other can lead to enormous pain and loneliness in whichever half one is stuck.

The co-dependent person may feel strong empathy for another, but dismiss, deny or be unaware of their own feelings and needs. This is the “caretaker” or empathic position. The caretaker may take care of his/her own needs only when alone or sick. One caretaker belief is, “Your needs and feelings are more important than mine.”

The other position is the “taker” or narcissistic position in which the person has empathy for his/her own feelings and needs, but denies, dismisses or is unaware of the other person’s. One taker belief is, “My needs should be more important to you than yours.”

When two co-dependent people get together, they create a co-dependent system. Usually this is with one person in the taker position, the other in the caretaker role.

Control patterns

In each position, one is dependent on the other person, and attempts to get what they want and need by controlling behaviors. Some of the controlling behaviors are easily seen--overt. Some examples of overt controlling behavior are: criticizing, judging, making comparisons, sarcasm, yelling, pouting, and getting sick, lying, threatening, lecturing.

Other controlling behaviors are covert--more hidden. Some examples of covert controlling behaviors are: being "nice" when you don't feel like it, giving gifts with strings attached, giving in, giving up, going along, people pleasing, rescuing, censoring what you say about what you want and feel.

Becoming Whole Food

For each to become whole and enjoy their full loaf of personhood the caretaker needs to develop healthy narcissism and the taker needs to develop empathy for others.

Dr. Jane Bolton, a marriage and family therapist, master results coach and contemporary psychoanalyst is dedicated to supporting people in the fullest self expression of their Authentic Selves. This includes Discovery, Understanding, Acceptance, Expression, and Self-Esteem. Call 310.838.6363 or visit www.DrJaneBolton.com.