



CO-DEPENDENCY: IT AIN'T ALL HEARTS AND FLOWERS

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

In HEALTHY relationships between friends and between romantic partners, both people participate quite EQUALLY in the giving and taking, demanding and compromising flow of acknowledging and meeting each other's needs. This equality creates a more BALANCED, FAIR, AND "TEAM"-oriented relationship, and typically can POSITIVELY DEEPEN the emotional bond between the two partners. This reaction may occur because each person feels mutually cared about and valued, which, consequently, can create enhanced feelings of love and closeness towards one another.

Even in these more healthy relationships, some "dependency" upon each partner is HEALTHY AND NECESSARY if one is going to be involved in a meaningful, vulnerable, honest, and REAL relationship. This kind of healthy dependency basically involves the ability to lean on each other in difficult times and to generally be able to confide in one another, including asking for guidance or help when necessary. Such actions contribute to being in a full-functioning friendship or love relationship, and, ironically, can result in more emotionally strong, NOT dependent, people.

On the other hand, CO-DEPENDENT behavior creates and perpetuates an UNHEALTHY and often NEVER-ENDING cycle of one person usually being the GIVER/"RESCUER" and the other person usually being the TAKER/"VICTIM-IN-DISTRESS." With co-dependent relationships, the giver keeps giving and giving and giving to the taker, who typically has a bottomless hole in him or her that can never ultimately be filled by anyone (usually, through therapy, the taker needs to fix this him or herself). Yet, the taker often demands and feels ENTITLED to receive endless quantities of care, help, and attention, while rarely seeming to appreciate what has already been given or even recognize that he or she is not giving back anything close to what he/she is getting.

Often, the giver is someone who feels more comfortable and/or grew up taking care of others. Additionally, he or she may be excessively IDEALISTIC OR UNREASONABLY PATIENT in waiting for his or her "turn" to be taken care of by the other. And frequently, the taker is an individual who, as a child, either GOT TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE EMOTIONALLY from one's parent/s. Getting too much emotionally may not seem like a "problem," but it often leads to a child feeling EMOTIONALLY SMOTHERED AND INHIBITED from naturally growing into being his or her own person. A much more common experience is to grow up getting too little emotionally (including being ignored, abused, constantly criticized, etc.), which can lead to that person having a LARGE, EMOTIONAL "HOLE" inside him or her of unexpressed and/or unmet needs.

Overall, the ultimate effect of having this co-dependent relationship is that it typically takes on more of a PARENT (the giver) and CHILD (the taker) dynamic, where this "child," however, usually never emotionally "grows up," but stays dependent on the "parent." This results in a LOSE-LOSE situation for both parties. For one thing, the giver expends a lot of WASTED ENERGY AND DEVOTION towards a non-grateful, "bottomless pit," and the taker stays regressed and helpless, and typically doesn't feel motivated or responsible for regulating or improving one's own life. Also, each party generally ends up feeling RESENTFUL for different reasons: givers eventually feel taken advantage of and unappreciated, and takers tend to feel stifled and dominated. Usually, these relationships will end either on an angry, resentful note, or when the giver finally gives up waiting for a turn he or she will probably never have and leaves. If you feel you may be a "giver" or a "taker," call a Psychologist for help, because awareness of this problem is the only the first step in breaking out of either role.

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