

CO-DEPENDENCY

When I was asked to write a report for a newsletter, I felt lost wondering what I could write about that would be interesting to its readers...

I have chosen to share my personal understanding of co-dependency in the hope it will give others in various healing professions more insight into their own ongoing healing process and the healing process of their clients.

When I was first introduced to co-dependency it registered in my mind as having the potential of becoming the next "trendy" disease.

As my knowledge on this subject grew, I soon began to find answers to questions that it seems I have been asking all my adult life. These questions and the desire for fulfillment started me on the path of natural therapies over 3 decades ago.

During years of study, courses, workshops and lectures, I am sure many of you can relate to, I have been growing – growing in my awareness about the human body and how it works. The physical nature of our body I have learnt from a textbook – the emotional and energetic side of us all can only be experienced personally from the inside out. It is this side of myself that has at last become clearer.

I believe now that "personal growth" is different to "recovery".

When I look back at my life with much clearer eyes, it's not at all surprising that I have ended up in a "care-giving" role. I play this role out in my two care-giving businesses with colleague care-givers and care-givers who I employ.

So what is co-dependency really all about?

Before I get into the how and why, I feel it is important to mention where the information for this disease originated. No doubt you are familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous. Decades of research, mainly in America, of the disease of alcoholism, its effects on the individual and their families cannot be denied.

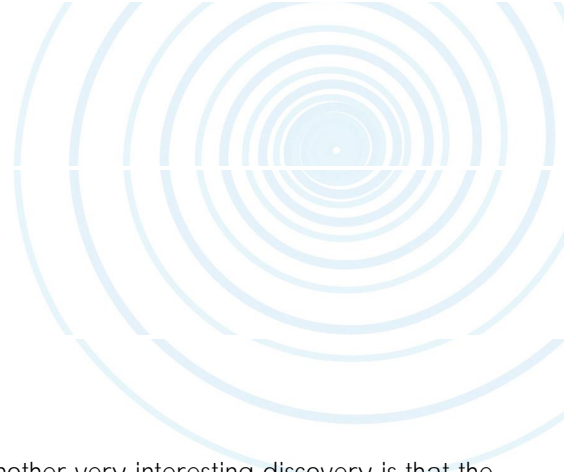
Research has shown certain character traits, attitudes, life patterns and up-bringing. It has shown these patterns to be multi-generational and to affect "most" families in the western world. (I have written "most" rather than a statistic because books seem to vary).

What is clear to me now is most of the people I have known well, personally and therapeutically have co-dependent issues.

Research with alcoholics has shown a pattern of dysfunctional role-modeling during childhood. This dysfunction has prevented the child from getting their basic needs met. These needs might include trust, intimacy, a foundation of self-worth and a sense of belonging, to name a few. It didn't take researchers long to compare parallels of an alcoholic's upbringing to that of other who had been drawn to therapy.

We learn our parenting and relationship skills from our parents or caretakers. They have learnt from their parents and their parents from theirs. The pattern of dysfunctional parenting is rampant in our society. It is often perceived as normal. No one is to blame! Fortunately we now have the resources to re-learn these skills.

How many of us are continually confronted with clients suffering from low self-esteem, relationship problems and lack of motivation. Some of you may choose not to involve yourself with the emotional issues of clients, but I'm sure you cannot deny the potency of emotional disorders and the effects they have on the physical body. Many schools of thought say all physical conditions arise from unresolved emotional issues.



CO-DEPENDENCY cont.

I have mentioned dysfunctional families are multi-generational. Another very interesting discovery is that the effect of alcoholism is also multi-generational (up to 10 generations it is said). This doesn't imply that each generation will see a person addicted to alcohol. What research shows is that the addiction may be "acted out" in some other way.

An addiction or compulsion is when someone can't be separate or away from someone or something without feeling discomfort. The problem is that often it is not until a crisis situation arises that separates someone from the person, thing or substance, that the discomfort is felt. Uncomfortable feelings like panic, anger, sadness, loss, grief, aloneness, powerlessness and worthlessness are blocked by the continual focus "out" on the person, thing or substance. These feelings mentioned are but a few. Feelings when continually blocked eventually have to go somewhere. They may leak out, such as crying in sad movies, or may manifest as a disease state.

I have listed some possible addictive/compulsive situations:

Socially acceptable addictions

Workaholism, relationship addiction to partner, child or friend, overeating, exercise, level one sex addiction, rushing, entertainment, business, spending, eating disorders, caffeine, sugar, pets, television, religion, perfectionism, and anything else that stimulates adrenalin. Adrenalin can also become addictive such examples may be sky or base jumping as in extreme sports.

Socially unacceptable addictions

Alcoholism, substance or drug addiction, gambling, level two and three sex addiction, anorexia, shoplifting and smoking.

This list reflects some of the possibilities for co-dependency. Dependent for what reason? My understanding is that the compulsion provides a false sense of self-worth. Co-dependency issues are about a lack of relationship with the "self". How well do we really know ourselves? Often it is too emotionally painful to even take a quick look. Being compulsed keeps a co-dependent in what may be called a state of "denial", (for those who are finding this interesting but feel it doesn't apply to you may like to re-read this article next time a crisis arises in your life).

Being in an unconscious state of denial keeps us from the truth about ourselves. It keeps us not knowing what we truly feel, want and desire. It also often prevents us getting what we need because when it is there we can't feel it or we're distracted by our compulsive addiction.

I've always thought myself to be a sensitive, feeling person. Now what I'm finding is you don't know what you haven't been feeling until its unblocked and you start to feel an emotion.

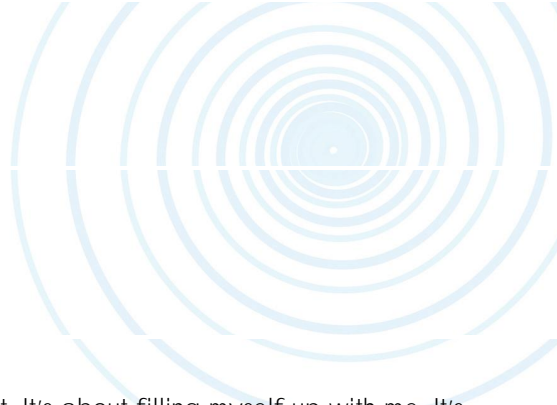
The funny thing about denial is that you don't know you've been in denial until you've come out of it.

"Denial" of what's really going on is a protective mechanism. It protects us from the truth until we are strong enough to re-experience and grieve for what we may not have received in our childhood.

Co-dependency is a disease that grows!

With each new compulsion, it develops. Unfortunately with any addiction the only way out is to give it up. I believe it is also necessary to be in a therapeutic relationship as blocked feelings start to emerge. It can be painful to re-fuel repressed emotion and doing so with a therapist is a highly recommended option.

We experience and embody these painful experiences in relationships with other human beings. To recover we need to bring them up and out "in relationship". Groups are good, especially for support and growing, but inevitably if you want to recover the focus must be individually on you in a "one-to-one" therapy situation.



CO-DEPENDENCY cont.

My struggle for "wholeness" is about getting back what I have lost. It's about filling myself up with me. It's about giving myself as much as, if not more than, I give to others. It is about setting clear boundaries for myself and listening to my gut-feelings instead of thinking everyone else knows better. It is about asking questions so I know I've heard the right message. It's about developing my own sense of self-worth and who I am.

Research has shown that many co-dependants find their way into a healing or helping profession as a way of feeling their own worth.

Continually giving out is very draining. As caregivers we need to set limits for ourselves and stick to them.

As therapists we also need on-going therapy. We need to work on our own life issues to be of real service to others. We need to put ourselves first, so we have something genuine to offer those who are drawn to us for healing and direction.

Suggested reading

John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*

John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family*

Shirley Smith, *Set Yourself Free*

Background of School of Integrated Body Therapy, Australia Pty Ltd (SIBT)

The largest specialty massage school in Australia, established in 1985. During SIBT's growth it has aided and witnessed the evolution of massage as a highly respected, viable profession in Australia. These years of experience have allowed SIBT to develop and offer reliable and sound skills-based professional training. SIBT's philosophy embraces a wholistic approach to healing, wellbeing and recovery through massage and bodywork.

SIBT provides cutting edge training with a focus on the latest hands-on techniques and skills. SIBT is an Australian Government Registered Training Organisation and is accredited by three major Australian professional associations:

- Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS),
- Association of Massage Therapists (AMT),
- Reflexology Association of Australia (RAA).

SIBT currently has the assistance of the Australian Trade Commission to export education and has successfully completed over 22 courses throughout Asia over the last 3 years.

The School's website is www.massageschool.com.au

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Maggie is a Life Member of the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS) and has been an Executive Director of ATMS for 18 years, 9 of those years as Vice President. ATMS is the largest professional association for the Natural Therapies Industry in Australia. She has been structurally and politically involved in the development of the Massage profession in Australia. Maggie is also the Founder/Director of Lake Spa Healing, Therapy & Education Centres, Australia, and has an ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge throughout the world and assisting other countries to raise educational standards and awareness in regard to massage as a viable health and wellness therapy and for its treatment of pain and dysfunction.

