

Another Face of Codependency
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CLC

Background:

At the 2007 Coda Service Conference (CSC), the state of Arizona requested adding verbiage to the CoDA *Patterns and Characteristics*. The reason? There were people attending meetings who appeared to be suffering from failed relationships, but who could not identify with the *Patterns and Characteristics* as read at every meeting. Some of these people left CoDA; others stayed, but exhibited troublesome behaviors, such as monopolizing conversations, attempting to control through intimidation, needing to appear right at all times, and passing critical judgments on others.

The CoDA Literature Committee (CLC) was asked to look into Arizona's request. Questions arose: Was this behavior even part of codependency? If so, was this issue important enough to make changes to a foundation document? And if changes were made, what repercussions would there be for our current literature? Would everything have to be reprinted? In some of the local CoDA communities, in the United States, Canada and abroad, groups were meeting to discuss these types of behaviors using the term "counter-dependence" or "anti-dependence." At the International CoDA Convention in 2009, an information-gathering session was held to assess the interest of the greater CoDA community. The results represented views from the United States and Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany and were positive and enthusiastic for CoDA to move forward with this issue.

In the fall of 2009, the CoDA Literature Committee (CLC) began engaging in an exciting dialogue about the need to recognize this other face of codependence. This other face of codependency manifests in behaviors that seem far removed from the classic compliant codependency; i.e., people-pleasing, approval seeking, self-denial, selfless giving, caretaking, and being overly sensitive and easily intimidated. In contrast, this lesser discussed aspect of codependency may appear as defiance, stubbornness, resistance to authority, incapable of vulnerability or intimacy, self-righteous, arrogant, angry and isolating.

As a committee, we were intent to ensure that our literature covered this little-discussed side of codependency. In *The CoDA Book*, *Peeling the Onion*, and others, we found many references to descriptions of self-will that included engaging in overbearing attitudes, nonconformity, rebellion, lying, overt manipulation, avoidance, aggression, over-controlling, abusiveness, issues with authority figures, an inability to ask for help, and others. Confident that our literature already contained information on this aspect of codependency, we felt inspired to move on to the next topic: How many of us had experienced both of these paradigms at different stages of our recovery?

Through introspection and open sharing, we came to realize that there may be some common underlying issues that result in differing core behavior patterns. Most of us could agree that periods of frustration, anger, and resentment could cause us to flip from one end of the spectrum to the other. For example, we could move from victim to aggressor, from being a love addict to an avoider, from feeling less than to feeling better than, from being passive to being aggressive, and from having fear of abandonment to having fear of engulfment, and vice-versa. The consensus was that people tended to be more dominant in one area over the other.

We wanted the fellowship to recognize these behaviors as different, but still part of the codependency continuum. Codependency, as a disease of extremes, ranges from overt fear of abandonment to an overt fear of intimacy. The common denominator is that both are deeply rooted, compulsive, self-damaging and involve attempts to exercise power over others.

We may do this by putting others first or putting ourselves first and demanding others comply. We may be direct or indirect. We may be fearful, self-effacing, or narcissistic. But the bottom line is we think living their life is our job. Our consensus was that we would and should treat these behaviors as deserving the same responsible attention that has been given the more easily recognizable categories of codependent patterns.

What would be the best method of addressing this aspect of “resistant” codependency?

We discussed the ramifications of using language that would clarify the concept, but which might divide the fellowship and become a violation of Tradition One, “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.” There was a need to identify the patterns and characteristics of this

behavior in a way not currently understood or recognized by many of us who suffer from this problem. Above all, we needed to be sure that we were addressing a problem that belonged to “us,” and not “them.”

Tradition Four states, “Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting...CoDA as a whole.” We needed to reach consensus on what to call these behaviors and to back up our decision with facts, because this would affect all of CoDA, not just a few select groups. We spoke of “counter-dependency,” “oppositional behavior,” “reactive codependence,” “anti-dependence,” “super-controllers,” and other descriptors that differentiated this behavior from the typical codependent behaviors associated with codependency.

In order to cover the subject without creating division, complications with semantics, or a departure from the principles of our program of recovery, we ultimately reached consensus that these behaviors represent just another aspect--another face--of codependency.

We decided that the easiest and most effective way to get this information out to the fellowship would be to modify the *Patterns and Characteristics* since it is typically read at every meeting and is especially helpful to newcomers who question whether they are actually codependent. Each of the categories of codependency—denial, low self-esteem, compliance, and control—presents a good opportunity to expand the characteristics to include these types of behaviors which look anything but compliant, caretaking, or approval seeking. Further, we determined that a new category of “avoidance,” which is already present in CoDA literature, would present further opportunities to describe these behaviors. This is what we are working on at our face to face meeting at the end of February, and will present our results at the CSC.