



Couples Unbalanced

The Dangers of Too Much (or Not Enough) Closeness

Two people fall in love and from that moment on, they go everywhere and do everything together. They are a perfect match sexually. Their interests and values coincide in every respect. They are inseparable.

This is how love goes...right?

Well, no.

This is the myth of being a couple: two lives merge into one melded front.

It's a story fraught with perils, for it most often leads to exactly the opposite of togetherness: one partner feels smothered and withdraws. The other feels rejected and abandoned. This push-pull dance of too much closeness or too much distance sets up a high level of anxiety for both partners and too often ends in heart-ache and separation.

It's possible, however, to rewrite this story of togetherness in a way that makes a better ending possible. Instead of togetherness being a merging of two people in which two halves make a whole, what if togetherness meant a deep commitment to supporting each other's fulfillment as an individual and as a member of the couple?

"A co-creative relationship is one in which two people access more of their creativity as a result of their loving interaction," write Drs. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks in *Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment*. "Out of the harmony of a co-committed relationship springs an enhanced energy that enables both partners to make a greater contribution than either one could have made alone."

In this kind of togetherness, there is deep, mutual support for cultivating the unique gifts that each partner brings to the other and the world. Needs for both closeness and space

apart are honored, and the communication channels are open to express each person's needs and desires. Greater individual fulfillment enables each to contribute more richly to the relationship, and growing feelings of aliveness spark the relationship itself, infusing it with greater passion and energy.

Here are some suggestions to help you move toward this different model of togetherness:

Pursue your own interests. Take a class or work on a project because it interests YOU. When you are fed creatively, intellectually or emotionally, you'll contribute more aliveness to the relationship.

Cultivate friendships outside of your relationship. Your partner cannot meet all of your relational needs. Besides, it's fun and enlivening to experience different facets of yourself through contact with others.

Take time alone. Whatever helps you connect with yourself and your spiritual source can bring a sense of rejuvenation. You might: spend time in nature, enjoy a hot bath, journal, garden, meditate.

Create special time with your partner. Relationships flourish with open, loving communication. Make time to share with your partner, to nourish the bond of intimacy. That loving bond will support you both in powerfully contributing to the world outside your relationship, as well as within it.

To paraphrase author Anais Nin, a strong relationship is one in which, rather than facing inward toward each other exclusively, two people stand side-by-side facing outward—together. *

10 Ways to Truly "Show Up" for Therapy

To be proactive in your own growth and development, you have to do more than just physically attend therapy sessions. Here are some additional ways to show up.

- 1. Know what you want.** How do you want to feel? How will you know you're improving and growing, or when you're ready to stop?
- 2. List your highlights.** Come to your first session with the history of: your life, any problems, relationships, substance use, hopes, dreams, etc. You'll be able to focus on the therapy faster.
- 3. Give details.** Just telling your therapist, "We had a fight," doesn't uncover the dynamics in the relationship.
- 4. Prepare for appointments.** What's changed since your last session? Reflect on any insights, and bring them with you.
- 5. Write in a journal.** Journaling helps you process your sessions and bring new material to the surface.
- 6. Notice patterns.** When things recur in your life, they are big clues and shouldn't be ignored.
- 7. Act on your insights.** Putting new insights into action makes great therapy sessions stick.
- 8. Be honest.** Yes, with your therapist. But most importantly, with yourself.
- 9. Take responsibility.** Your therapist is there to support you while *you* do the work of healing and transformation.
- 10. Be patient.** Change happens over time. With patience, you CAN shift to a place of greater peace. *

A Letter From *Geoff Chapin*



No matter how much cultural awareness there may be that relationships are challenging—and successful relationships even more so—the myth of perfect togetherness continues to endure. And as the page 1 feature article discusses, it can continue to cause damage to the true closeness that’s possible. Be sure to read the suggestions for greater fulfillment, passion and energy in your relationship.

Whether as part of a couple or as an individual in everyday life, many people live with a voice in their heads that judges or criticizes their every move. That voice varies in its viciousness. Some people may find it a second-guessing kind of voice, while others may hear it urge suicide. It can be that lethal. The article on page 3 explores where this voice comes from and then offers several strategies for lessening its harmful impact and finding relief.

Also in this issue are 10 ways to get the most out of therapy. The quiz can help you discover if your beliefs and assumptions about people and life and events are getting the better of you or leading you toward mental freedom.

Finally, the back page article lists a set of strategies for coping better, and easing the pain, during times of adversity, whether personal or collective.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles, or would like more copies, please don’t hesitate to call.

Are Your Beliefs Affecting Your Mental Health?

Beliefs or assumptions about people, places and things can be automatic. It’s likely a throw-back to our reptilian brain, which constantly scans to see if we are safe or in danger. Some assumptions are useful and necessary—such as assuming that night will follow day. However, other beliefs and assumptions can undermine our well-being, our level of connection with others, and our overall success in the world. Take a look at the following questions to discover if your assumptions are undermining you:



True False Set 1

- 1. I base what I believe is possible on past experiences I’ve had.
- 2. I assume I already know what I do and do not like and therefore stick to what I know.
- 3. I tailor what I say and do based on expressions I see on other people’s faces.
- 4. I don’t tell certain people what I think or feel because I already know what they will say.
- 5. I can pretty well size people up within minutes of meeting them and then know what to expect.
- 6. How I relate to people is influenced by the way they look, dress and speak.
- 7. My opinions of others are influenced by what kind of work they do and where they are from.

Set 2

- 1. I regularly examine the assumptions I have about myself to determine whether my beliefs are holding me back.
- 2. I know that my truth is not necessarily other people’s truth.
- 3. When I have an assumption about someone, I check it out with that person first before acting based on what I think is true.
- 4. I make time to clear the air with my loved ones and work-mates so that we don’t just assume we’re on the same page.
- 5. I consciously endeavor to open my heart to people I think are different from me—and am delighted when I discover we have more in common than I had imagined.
- 6. I make an effort to learn about differing beliefs and try to keep an open mind.
- 7. I cultivate curiosity as a way to counteract my natural human tendency to make assumptions.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to examine how your beliefs and assumptions are undermining your relationship with yourself, others, and life in general. Please don’t hesitate to call if you’d like to explore this issue further. *

How to Counter Your Inner Critic When It Becomes Lethal

The Critic is a common and unfortunate constant in our inner lives. This internalized voice assumes the tone and language of our mother, father, religion and/or society. After every step forward there it is, doubting or damning our choice.

But for many people, “critic” is much too mild a word. The voice they hear is relentless, a vicious screaming that cripples and controls. They might call their voice the “Self-Hater” or the “Killer Critic.”



Not everyone hears self-hatred as a voice in their heads. Sometimes, it’s a way of being that manifests in myriad forms, including:

- sabotaging healthy relationships or good jobs,
- attempting to prove worthiness by being perfect or through high achievement,
- being drawn again and again into abusive situations.

Where Does the Critic or Self-Hater Come from?

A Protector

In *Embracing Your Inner Critic*, Hal and Sidra Stone write that in order to protect us from the pain and shame of always being found “less than,” a voice develops within us “that echoes the concerns of our parents, our church or other people who were important to us in our early years.” That voice criticizes us before anyone else can.

Punishment

Cheri Huber, author of *There Is Nothing Wrong with You: Going Beyond Self-Hate*, sees the culprit in childrearing practices based on punishment. These practices, she says, teach us that we need to be punished in order to be good. Because we believe that punishment is the path to goodness, we continue to do it to ourselves as adults.

Internalized Shame

Internalized shame from having been molested, neglected or abused as a child can create the most vicious forms of self-hatred. David was molested by his mother and lived constantly with a voice in his head that told him he was unworthy of life. He used to silence that voice with alcohol and drugs. “Only when I was high,” he says, “did I have any peace.”

How Can I Get It to Just BE QUIET?

Understanding where the Critic originates is helpful, but then you have to ask, how can I get this voice to leave me alone? Many who have tried to argue or fight with or ignore it would attest to the futility of those tactics. Here, instead, are three strategies that have helped others.

Meditation. In *There Is Nothing Wrong with You* and its follow-up *When You’re Falling, Dive*, Huber lays out a process in which you learn to listen to and then disbelieve the voice—to unlearn the lie that something is wrong with you. When Crystal started listening with detachment, she was shocked to discover that her crushing voice thought it was helping her become a better person by screaming her “flaws.”

Therapy. Skilled facilitation can be crucial for healing the childhood traumas that often give rise to the Self-Hater. David went on an antidepressant and started therapy. He found relief and detachment from the voice and realized that his self-hating voice jump-started his depression and addictions. Through therapy, he’s gradually coming to accept himself just as he is. He still hears the voice, but it doesn’t drive him to despair.

Understanding the Message Below. Hal and Sidra Stone recommend dialoguing with your Inner Critic—with a therapist or in your journal—in order to understand what it is trying to communicate.

Francis tried this approach in her journal, writing out each of their parts, as though they were having a conversation. She discovered that the voice that always called her stupid was afraid that if she made a mistake she would lose her job. She still hears the voice, but now considers it a call for help to which she responds with compassion and curiosity. When it starts calling her names, she asks what it is afraid of, thus defusing

its previous power over her and sometimes gaining useful information.

The goal in these strategies is not to silence the Critic or Self-Hater, but to transform it by disbelieving its slander, facing the traumas that empower it and

understanding what it really fears, as well as the needs from which it may spring. You may never silence the voice completely, but it is possible to lessen its impact, and find relief and healing. *



Increase Your Inner Strength to Thrive During Challenging Times

Catastrophic events like hurricanes, fires, earthquakes and floods can knock us to our knees.

But personal catastrophes can pack an equally powerful punch.

Our spouse is diagnosed with cancer, our son has a mental breakdown, we lose our home. Often these events seem to come out of nowhere and feel completely unmanageable as we struggle to regain our footing and any semblance of “normal.”

But, like great trees, humans can grow stronger when exposed to powerful winds. That is easy to say, we may think, as we recall those who did not grow stronger but instead broke in the wind. How do we increase our inner strength and flexibility so that we not only survive the adversity but thrive? Here are several strategies that can help.



Have courage and speak up. Courage is taking action despite the fear you feel. If your doctor isn't taking you seriously, speak up. Be your own advocate. Tell him or her what you

want and need. Don't assume that he or she “should know.”

Get support. No one can handle everything alone. When you get that overwhelmed feeling—or even before—reach out. Ask for help. Next time, ask for it sooner. You'll be amazed by how much better you feel.

Take responsibility. Look at your role in the situation. Was the event, in fact, predictable? You may have had more control over the situation than you realized. At the same time, don't take more responsibility than is warranted. If your daughter develops

a brain tumor it's not because you did something wrong. Be honest, but don't point fingers, not even at yourself.

Take the long view. Remember that “this too shall pass.” Recount other times when you have overcome challenges. How did you do it? Who or what helped you? Who or what can help you this time?

Maintain a sense of humor. There's truth in the adage: “laughter is the best medicine.” Even in the darkest of times, laughter can help ease the pain.

Don't quit. Persistence may be the greatest human quality that helps us overcome adversity. Draw inspiration from the great heroes of the world—Nelson Mandela, Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi—people who persisted despite the odds. Remember, you are your own best ally. And you're stronger and more resilient than you thought. ✱

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