

COMMENTARIES ON THE CHARACTERISTICS MOST OF US SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON

Characteristic 12:

While constantly seeking intimacy with another person, we found that the desperate quality of our need made true intimacy with anyone impossible, and we often developed unhealthy dependency relationships that eventually became unbearable.

In the same way that we continually searched for relationships, we were drawn to and craved intimacy. The quest for intimacy was an integral and pervasive part of our constant and compulsive search for sex, romance and relationships. In our confusion and inability to distinguish among sex, love and affection, we did not recognize this. Many of us also found that our need for validation was a driving force in our lives. We had become obsessed with finding another person who might "complete" us, or cure what ailed us by providing their approval. Our feelings of inadequacy tormented us: we felt we were undeserving of real love or affection. Our fantasies about ourselves and others were at odds with our reality but provided some measure of comfort. We found that, if revealing ourselves to another person was required for "intimacy," it seemed beyond our reach. However, we continued to crave intimacy, with its promised possibility of wholeness, as something to relieve the emptiness at the core of our being.

In seeking to fill this void, we pursued compulsive sex and unhealthy relationships. We repeatedly sought out a healthy relationship but we lacked the emotional courage to be open about ourselves. We had long-standing issues of low self-esteem and a history of sexual compulsion that we feared to disclose. There was always the unremitting need to be wanted, appreciated, and valued that governed our interactions with the other person. This situation created a paradox – we wanted to be loved unconditionally, almost like a child, but respected on our merits as an adult partner. Even as we went about this, we knew that we were deceiving ourselves. As a fallback, we often hoped that we could trade sex for a sense of closeness that would make up for what we found ourselves lacking emotionally.

We had little understanding of what it would take to sustain a relationship based on honest and open communication, affectionate closeness, and seeing our partner as a real person, rather than a fantasy. Our sexual relationships rarely developed emotional intimacy, which would require honesty, acceptance, respect, and openness. No matter how much we wanted to be close to another person, our defenses made us wary and withholding. In a relationship, the obsessive intensity and demands we brought to it were often suffocating.

For some of us, our insecurities kept us from revealing things about our lives that we were ashamed of, including aspects of our sexual desires and past sexual experiences. To protect ourselves from exposure, we carefully controlled

information within any relationship, only giving of ourselves what we felt safe in revealing. Often, we were afraid our partners would lose interest in us if we didn't satisfy their needs, sexually and emotionally. Fearing their disapproval often made us suppress our desires and feelings, which in turn led to resentments and distrust.

Our compulsive need to please others often drove us to do things we did not want to in order to stay in a relationship. Sometimes this involved financial and domestic arrangements we might otherwise have rejected. We would make concessions to various requests that were not consistent with our values but which we were willing to overlook for the sake of maintaining the appearance of closeness. Often, we felt so pressured by our need for "belonging" that we sacrificed our principles just to maintain the appearance of it.

Such pressures made us want to cut our dependency ties, but our fears held us back. We felt we had too much to lose by ending the relationship. We were dependent upon the other person. The prospect of losing our domestic arrangements, rupturing our finances, and giving up the physical connection kept us trapped. We could not stand the prospect of another failed relationship, no matter how dysfunctional. If we were the financial provider, we feared we would bear the blame for our partner's hardship. Our already low self-esteem fed our anxieties about appearing insensitive, selfish, and ungrateful.

Our dependency began to consume us: we felt trapped, but were afraid to let go of what little we had. Our dependence in part stemmed from our lack of ability to take care of ourselves. We needed the other person to keep our emptiness at bay. However, the price we paid for this was an escalating demand to perform our dependency role in the relationship. The strains caused by these conflicts made any semblance of intimacy unsustainable. At heart, we were terrified to be who we really were, including sexually, and to share that with others. Instead, we sought to merge with, or subordinate ourselves to, another human being, using sex as the gateway to dependent relationships.

In Recovery

We learn to take care of ourselves and to create genuine intimacy in relationships that are interdependent, and therefore sustainable over the long term. We get to experience healthy and fulfilling love. We work on our intimacy and abandonment issues, seeking to be an independent, integrated person who is looking for healthy intimacy as part of a healthy relationship with a similar person. We consciously seek to let go of old dynamics, including codependency, and take appropriate action to accomplish this. We have faith that, with our Higher Power's help and working the Program, following the example of others, we can transform our life of desperation and clinging need into one of hope, fulfillment and happiness, one day at a time.

(Extract from "The Characteristics Most of Us Seem to Have in Common"

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