

INSIGHTS THAT MY CLIENTS HAVE TAUGHT ME

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING ABOUT ANYWAY?

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Part Three

THE NEED TO BE IN CONTROL OF YOURSELF And/Or IN CONTROL OF OTHERS

All fights, whether between individuals or nations, are about one or a combination of three things. There are three things underlying your fights that are more basic than sex, religion and politics! Since the basic underlying issues are hardly ever expressed, solutions are not found and, as a result, most fights never get resolved and are doomed to be repeated over and over.

In the first part, I discussed the importance of feeling significant. In part two, I looked at a second thing that causes fights, which is the fear of not being connected, the fear of being abandoned. The third thing that causes conflict is the need for control, which often leads to power struggles.

At two years of age, the child's favorite word is **NO**, often followed by "I do it myself!" This need for autonomy is another need that you will never lose. At this third developmental stage, conflict becomes very prominent. Some people have labeled this developmental stage THE TERRIBLE TWO'S. For the child's development, this is a very important time for them to start establishing a sense of autonomy separate from their parents. [You do not want your twenty-five year old being totally dependent on you.]

There is nothing wrong with having control issues as a child. In fact, the terrible two's were a very important step in your development. For the first year of your life, you were totally dependent. The second year you worried about abandonment. At two, you needed to prove that you could do it yourself.

After the terrible two's (which can last for years) comes the teenage years with all the power struggles that come with them. Then, as a young adult male, this need for control may be expressed as commitment phobic behaviors. Here, and it usually more in young men than in young women, they see commitment as a loss of control.

For this group of men, commitment means having to answer to others, wife, children; it means having to keep your nose to the grindstone; do what you are told. As a result, you may hear "you're not my mother...I don't have to tell you where I'm going." This is often just a continuation of power struggles from the teen years.

For young women, they are more likely to deal with this time of their lives by trying to "be a good wife (partner) and make him happy by taking care of him." The end result of this is that after several years, resentment may start to set in. Her control issue is that he is the boss, he should be in control of me and it is my duty is to make my husband and children happy. I need to control the emotions and behavior [happiness] of my family.

The problem is her belief which says, "I should make my husband (children) happy." That automatically assumes that when he is unhappy, it is her responsibility to do a lot of extra groveling things in order to "make" him happy. As a result, the man learns very quickly that when he is unhappy, she will do all these wonderful things for him. So, he remains unhappy because he is afraid (usually on an unconscious level), that if he gets happy, she'll stop doing all these wonderful things. Consequently, the harder she tries to make him happy, the more unhappy he will become. Since most people seldom, if ever, question their belief systems, she assumes that there must be something wrong with her, not with her beliefs.

The second belief that some wives have is: "If I stay here and I take this abuse over a long enough period of time, he will see how much I love him and I will have proved my love for him." Her expectation is that then, in some miraculous way, he will start loving and responding to her the same way she has been loving and responding to him. The problem here is that the more she stays and takes the abuse, the more insecure he becomes. He knows that he would not take this kind of abuse from anybody, so she must be staying with him because she is too afraid to leave. Now he becomes even more insecure because he is not sure if she is there because he is keeping her there by means of the abuse and manipulation or because she loves him.

After a number of years of this, you will start hearing, "I am tired of taking care of everybody else. When is it going to be my turn?" There is a counter to this belief: **the only person you can make happy is yourself**. For so many women, they have been taking care of others for so long that they no longer know what makes them happy and besides "But, isn't taking care of yourself being selfish?"

If taking care of everyone else is not working for you and is only making the relationship worse, maybe it is time to try something else.

May I suggest an alternative that does work? What would it look like if you made yourself happy and invited others into your happiness? You say, "But what if no one wants to join me in the things that make me happy?" That is a risk. In fact, not everybody will enjoy everything that you enjoy. Maybe, you could find some compromises, "I willing to go to the races with you, if you will go to the philharmonic with me." To be able to do that means that you have to be OK with the idea that it is not your job in life to make the other person happy.

It is not just the young who have problems with control issues. Some parents will end up having power-struggles with their children. "When you are in my house and have your feet under my table, you will do what I tell you. When I say jump, you will jump and ask how high on the way up." When children are small, you are able to force your control on them just because you are bigger and stronger. As the child continues to grow, it takes more and more physical force to maintain the control. The result can end in physical fights between parent and child which can leave emotional scars for years to come.

Some people have *personal control issues* with themselves around drugs, drinking or sex. This may sound like, "It is not fair, others people can drink. I should be able to drink also." Some diabetic people become angry because they cannot have that ice cream/cake when others can. In both of these cases, the result can lead to "falling off the wagon". The rationalization is, "It is my body and I can do whatever I want."

The ultimate control issue is anger at not getting what I want/need. This entitlement mentality is invading most of society from people on welfare ("It is time to share the wealth even though I have not worked for it"), to middle and upper income American's who demand "a bailout," because I made bad decisions. This type of thinking leads to everything from car jacking, bank robbery, home invasions and rape. "You have all the stuff, so I will just take it from you." Rape is the ultimate control issue. "You've got something that would make me feel great and you are too selfish to share it, so I will take it by force. I'm entitled to it."

Control issues can spill over into power-struggles with any authority figure from bosses to the police. "You can't tell me what to do." The less freedom a person believes that they have, the bigger the issue of control becomes for that person. That is when you hear, "Nobody controls me... You can't control me." (I will show you that you don't control me by doing just the opposite of what you want.) This belief sets the person up to be negatively controlled. Many people, especially gang members and prisoners, are easily controlled because of their need to "prove" that nobody controls them. The less power a person believes that they have, the easier it is to control them!

When I was working in the prisons as a visiting therapist, I would often set the inmates up by saying, "You are all fools. There is not one of you fools that I can not control!" It never failed; there would be a number of the prisoners who would challenge me.

"You can't control me!"

Then I would turn on one of them, usually the loudest and say to the group, "Did you see he just gave me his power, now I can have him going up and down like a yo-yo and he won't know happened!" Then I would say to that fellow, "I'm the boss here, you can't defy me; you are going to sit in that chair and I am not going to let you stand up!" Of course, he immediately stood up with his mouth going, telling me that I didn't control him.

My response to him standing was, "OK, you not going to defy me! Now you have to stand there and not sit down until your feet hurt." And of course, he sat down with his mouth still running. I repeated the stand up, sit down routine for several more time with the prisoner doing just the opposite of what I said.

Finally, I stopped and said to him, "Didn't I tell you I would have you going up and down like a yo-yo and you wouldn't know what happened? What have you been doing?!"

It was like a pulley. I pull down and you go up. I let up and you sit down. But, if I tell you to sit and you sit, aren't I also controlling you?" If you do what I tell you, I'm controlling you but if you do the opposite I'm also controlling you, so, when do I not control you?" No wonder so many people have problems with control issues because they have not resolved this dilemma.

Think of it this way. If it was you, did you really want to go up and down like a yo-yo, trying to "prove" to me, that I didn't control you? Or were you content to stay resting in your chair? Much of what is seen as adult and adolescent rebellions is about control and proving that no one controls them. Is it worth it? "I dare you." "What is the matter, are you still tied to your mother apron strings?"

As soon as one of the prisoners said, "No body controls me," I knew I had him and that was the one I would focus on. If you know that you are making the decisions for yourself, then you have the freedom to decide what you are going to do. And, if it turns out to be what the other person is telling to do, then he is not controlling you, you are doing what you want to do.

Everything that you have ever done is what you wanted to do!

Nobody can make you do anything! Even if someone holds a gun on you, do you have a choice? It may be the choice of giving them what they want or death. But

isn't that a choice? I did not say you would like your choices. Some people have chosen to die rather than give in. If held up, you can create the illusion of being powerless by saying, "I didn't want to give him my valuables, but I had to." No, you did not have to give him anything. You choose to give him what he wanted because you preferred to live. What was most important to you? Think of the early Christian martyrs, did they have a choice?

You cannot, not be powerful; you only create the illusion of powerlessness.

When you try to change others, you are powerless. You are absolutely powerless to change another person. However, you are absolutely powerful to change yourself.

Does that mean you should not set rules in your home or your business? "The rule in this family is that if you are going to be late, you need to call." That sounds like a reasonable rule as long as it is based on common courtesy and it applies equally to all members. The problem begins when one or more people refuse, "Don't tell me what I have to do." The question is, how much do you want to risk getting the change you want? "If you are not willing to be a part of the family by agreeing to our rules, then I am not willing to cook, or do your washing for you (because you have set yourself outside of our family agreements).

One more group of people who have major autonomy/control issues is those who have an Anxiety Disorder, such as PTSD, Panic Attacks, OCD, etc. Their common belief is: The world is a dangerous place and I am not able to protect myself (and/or the ones I love) in this dangerous world. As a result, I have to try to control myself and my environment. For the OCD person, it is, "If I don't check the stove seven times before I leave the house, something terrible will happen." The person with Panic Attacks believes, "I must stop the room from spinning; I'm going to have a heart attack." Those with PTSD have flashbacks that prove that the world is not safe.

In the situations that I have discussed in this section, they all focus on control, either controlling myself, others or my environment. No wonder control is such a big issue when it comes to the things that we fight about.

Reviewing the last three articles, there are three things that you fight about. They are:

- ✓ The need to feel important/significant,
- ✓ The need to be connected (the fear of abandonment) and
- ✓ The need to feel like you have control in your life.

With this knowledge, it is now possible to look at all your fights and start figuring out what one or combination of things you were really fighting about.

Remember the fight about, “We never spend enough time together.”? What were you fighting about what was the other person fighting about? See if this fits for you. If you were the woman, were you fighting about being significant? If you were the man, my guess would be that you were fighting about not being controlled. No wonder you could never resolve the conflict. You were fighting about two different things!

Make a list of the ‘dumb fights’ that you have had. Now, sit down together and figure out what the fight was really about. Start talking about how each of you can get their emotional needs met. Or if you would rather, you can keep doing what you have always done. And how is that working for you?

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