

ADDICTION AND CONTROL*

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Abstract

That the reason the 12 Step program and the Serenity Prayer are effective is because they encourage relinquishing the illusion of being in control when the illusion increases tension and pressure only adding to the need to seek relief through alcohol or drugs.

Why are some people prone to conform, to follow the pressures exerted by the group and by authority figures while others resist? Is yielding to such pressures related to conformity in general? Is not yielding related to rebellion? Can one resist such pressures without necessarily being rebellious? What are the roots that determine whether one submits to group pressures or does not submit? And what has this got to do with motivation for succeeding in achieving one's goals in life?

It is difficult to maintain your own beliefs and standards when those around you challenge them. But one might ask, "What about the all those who are non-conformists, who seem to be rebels?" Non-conformity does not represent independence. The rebel is still tied up with those he or she is rebelling against, the non-conformist is opposing conformity. The truly independent person has ideas which may or may not be in line with others, but they are his ideas and if they conform to the standards of others, that is fine and if they are not in line with the standards of others, that's fine too. Independence is not defiance. We are not concerned with being part of the group or of winning praise. We are not concerned with controlling or being in control.

It is crucial to consider those who feel unable to gain control of their lives. Consider alcohol and drug addiction, consider addiction to sugar. These addictions destroy lives and families because of feelings of helpless in the face of substances which we put into our bodies resulting in a loss of control over our lives. The substance abuser feels helpless in his/her need for alcohol, drugs or sugar. There is a wish to be in control that stands side by side with a striving to be free of control. The genetic/biological issues involved are real and significant complicating factors.

Addicts may try desperately to control their cravings, but to little avail. Though many would not admit it, they feel like failures. The alcoholic promises the spouse that he will stop drinking, the obese sugar-addicted person promises the family or the physician that they will lose weight, but the promises are broken.

Lives are lived in states of anxiety and anticipation. Will she be

drunk when I come home? Will he be spaced out? Did he go to his job today? Will she be gorging on bonbons? Sometimes the anticipation and the anxiety is well founded and sometimes it is not. One can never be sure. The housewife can be a meticulous homemaker making certain that everything is in place only to resort to drinking and becoming irritable and slovenly. The overeater may try every diet out there and may lose 50 or 75 pounds, only to gain the weight back to the disappointment of everyone including him/herself.

Though the addictions may be rooted in genetics and in biological predispositions, what to do about them? There are those relatively rare individuals who are able to stop on their own. Some people feel that they have reached bottom and are able to stop gratifying the addiction. Some people are confronted by family and friends who lovingly express concern and worry and succeed in reaching them so that they stop. But for most addicted individuals, The Twelve-Step program succeeds the best, often following a period of rehabilitation [1, 2]. Individual psychotherapy is useful following termination of the active addiction, but it is rarely effective while a person is using alcohol or drugs or binge eating.

Despite the fact that the addict may express feelings of remorse and feelings of having failed themselves and others and despite behavior, which is clearly not under his control, the addict lives under the illusion that he/she is in control even to the point of being grandiose. Though he may be beset with fear, the addict eradicates fears by imbibing in alcohol, drugs, and sugars. The alcoholic does not want to be told that he is in no condition to drive, because as far as he is concerned, he is perfectly capable of driving. The obese sugar addict does not want to be told to diet because she insists that she does not overeat. But she also feels powerful with her 350 pounds. If she loses weight, she panics because she feels weaker and more vulnerable. The alcoholic is king of the mountain under the influence, but when not drinking, he is just another person and that is not acceptable. There is tremendous resistance to relinquishing the illusion of grandiosity and the fantasy that "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."

Why is The Twelve Step program helpful? Why is the Serenity Prayer the touchstone of alcoholics anonymous? If we can understand the roots of the effectiveness of these contributions, we may be in a better position to understand the addictions.

The Serenity Prayer and the Twelve Step Program serve as antidotes to the illusion of grandiosity [1, 2]. They have in common the belief that one needs help, that one cannot relinquish the addiction by himself or herself or with the help of another human being. The illusion of grandiosity of the addict requires the intervention of superhuman power which represents both recognition and an acceptance of one's limitations, but also recognition will.

Grandiosity is crucial to understanding the need to control. The underlying dynamic is that if things get out of control, cataclysmic events can be released. It is therefore essential that everything and every person must be in line and I must be in line because we can do terrible things.

Implicit in the Twelve Step Program and in The Serenity Prayer, is an acceptance of dependency. The addict's illusory need to believe that he is invulnerable, totally independent, and totally in control is tempered, muted, and modified. The message is that dependency, error and vulnerability are OK so long as a supreme power is in control. Grandiosity is relieved and one is permitted to admit shortcomings and weaknesses.

The compulsion to repeat is alive and well in addiction when the addiction is under control, the addict is compelled to test the control (while knowing that he's going to fail the test.) He/she believes: "I haven't used drugs in two weeks, I haven't overeaten high calorie foods in a month, and therefore I can trust myself so I can have a drink, or have a smoke or a snort, or have a cookie." Then the cycle starts all over again here is the cycle: "I'm not in control, I have to set aside my feelings of grandiosity, by inhibiting my cravings, and I have to test out my controls. This leads to failure" The task is to escape that feeling of grandiosity. The task is to reach a point where one can admit and accept the need to exert limits and to accept the need for limits. If one is allergic to poison ivy, one avoids it. Testing the allergy would mean putting one's self in a patch of poison ivy while knowing, yet testing that one will start to itch like crazy. Yet to the individual, it's worth the excruciating itch to be convinced that he can't get away with it [3].

References

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2. Rosner S (2013) Echoes of Inner Voices, Create Space, Amazon.
3. Rosner S, Hermes P (2006) the Self-Sabotage Cycle. Westport, CT. Praeger.

That one's addiction is so strong that it cannot be controlled by mere human effort and.

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