

The Quiet Rise of Introverts

**8 Practices for Living and
Loving in a Noisy World**

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Practice Four: Getting Past Independence Principles of Love and Relationship

*"We might think that knowing ourselves is a very ego-centered thing, but by beginning to look so clearly and so honestly at ourselves — at our emotions, at our thoughts, at who we really are — we begin to dissolve the walls that separate us from others." — Pema Chodron, **To Know Yourself is to Forget Yourself***

One spring, I focused on working on the outside of my house. There were maintenance issues inside as well, but the big projects happened outside. I had the deck restained. I had the shake repainted, and cleaned up the landscaping. The outside work ran parallel to my then new views on living and loving. I began to see that to have healthy self-esteem, the outside world had to be cared for as much as the inner.

I'd spent the previous few years working on accepting myself and justifying solitude. I thought I was bolstering my self-esteem by gaining self-awareness and validating my sensitive nature. I gained understanding and knowledge, but my self-esteem didn't fully rise until I *applied* that understanding to relationships and meaningful work—both entities outside of my heavily analyzed and prized, inner realm.

INTROVERT FEELS COMPETENT IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Psychotherapist Nathaniel Branden (in 1969) defined self-esteem as *"the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness."* As a sensitive introvert, it takes courage to push myself into the external world, but when I do, I feel truly alive and fulfilled. Dealing with the outside world is a basic challenge of life for the deeply introspective.

Our inner world feels so safe and the outer world bombards us with stimuli and emotional energy. I spend a good portion of my coaching time helping clients gain personal power to manage energy and the two worlds—inner and outer.

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS HELP WITH CONFIDENCE

As relationship coach Bruce Muzik says in his post, "Fuck Self Love", we build lasting self-esteem by cultivating nurturing relationships with supportive people. The truth in this has become

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clear to me over the years. My self-worth plummeted when I was not in a nurturing relationship.

For a while, I only had a few people who offered supportive and nurturing companionships. That was when I went deeply internal and studied myself. I don't think this was a bad move—I learned so much—but in the end, it left things unbalanced. I focused intently on my own feelings without applying them to anything. Even when I started writing, the self-expression was heavenly but still missing that fortifying real interaction with the environment and people.

I needed a more hands on way to contribute to the community.

Once I reached out with coaching, I not only felt validated, I felt more confident. I genuinely felt I added value to the world and was worthy of love and happiness. The act of using my skills made me feel competent and purposeful. By building secure and nonjudgmental relationships with my clients, I help them feel confident and competent as well—a win/win.

Dr. Elaine Aron, author of the *Highly Sensitive Person* series, mentioned a study she and her husband, Dr. Arthur Aron and their colleagues conducted with ninety-six individuals found in the top and bottom quartiles of the Sensory Processing Sensitivity Scale. In the study, the subjects rated their arousal level when viewing emotionally evocative and neutral pictures selected from the International Affective Picture System.

High SPS (sensory processing sensitivity) individuals rated pictures eliciting emotion, especially positive emotion, as significantly more attractive (positively valenced) and tended to respond faster to the positive pictures; also, high SPS individuals who had reported having high-quality parenting reported greater arousal in response to positive pictures.

Overall, results suggest that high SPS individuals respond more strongly to emotional stimuli—especially positive stimuli—without being more aroused unless they had especially high-quality parenting, in which case they were more positively aroused.

“This is the second result to show that we respond more to positive than negative stimuli, helping to explain our “differential susceptibility”—that we do worse in poor environments, true, but better than others in good ones, apparently because we pick up on and process more of the positive experiences in our life.” —Dr. Elaine Aron

No matter how much I love myself through self-awareness, self-care, and self-soothing, I am still going to crave connection. There’s a draw toward emotions and humanity. We aren’t meant to be in isolation. Even people especially sensitive to stimuli (many introverts) need and desire interaction to grow and thrive.

Introverts and extroverts consciously (and subconsciously) absorb feedback from people in our environment. This affects our confidence. It makes sense that we’d want positive people in our environment to foster our growth. Of course, this needs to be a two-way street. We need to offer support and responsiveness as well.

I’m not so idealistic (but I’m pretty idealistic) to believe we can only have positive feedback in our world. We need constructive feedback too. Those into nurturing (love + care + help) give criticism with diplomacy and actionable steps.

HARD TO SAY WE NEED SOMEONE

I've written a lot about loving yourself first before you can love another. I've encouraged being your own amazing boyfriend and love affairs with solitude. I've been embarrassed to say I wanted or needed someone. I still have attachments to those ideas but more and more I see the power of growing through relationships.

As a staunch advocate for solitude, autonomy, making yourself happy, and the right to be gloriously content as a single person, it was difficult for me to consider putting a romantic relationship first, before my needs and ideals.

After my divorce, I was determined not to settle for anything less than pure magic when it came to my next relationship. I wanted the heady, perfect, romantic, sexy, intelligent, steadfast lover who could keep me on cloud nine mentally, spiritually, and physically. Of course, that did not work.

One day I caught Dr. Stan Tatkin, Doctor of Psychology and couples therapist, on Jayson Gaddis' *Smart Couple Podcast*. His main message? Put your relationship first. Partners must depend on each other. They are in each other's care. For a secure relationship, the couple team comes first before children, job, performance, appearance, friends, pets, everything and everyone. Your job is to comfort and soothe your partner. You need to know everything about them to understand/alleviate their distress and foster their growth. Their job is to do the same for you. No matter what, you are a team and together you are better than you could be on your own.

After several short unsuccessful relationships and one long-term (but ultimately ended) relationship, I decided perhaps I had been wrong in my approach. I had been, as Dr. Tatkin says, pro-self instead of

pro-relationship. I had expectations for my partner and spent a lot of time making sure my needs were spelled out and met instead of focusing on creating a secure relationship. My pro-self-behavior involved pointing out where my partner fell short. Pro-relationship behavior would have worked to gain understanding about his and my behavior.

My battle cry to be magnificently independent and solitude-seeking was based on my fear of being dependent on someone (and being used or let down) and my introverted and creative nature. I wanted love, but no one had soothed me or put me first in a long time. And honestly, I had not done that for anyone else in a long time either.

Dr. Tatkin's words, and scientific data to back them, made it OK to rely on someone. I did not have to be tough and self-reliant all the time. My attitude about dependency within a relationship shifted.

I began to strive for interdependence, that lovely existence where individual integrity ebbs and flows with dependency.

HOW TO KNOW IF WE ARE DEVELOPING AS HUMANS

I consider personal development, particularly for an intuitive introvert, the transformation from a superficially focused being -> to one willing to explore their complete inner world -> to one interested in reaching out and creating nurturing and supportive relationships. In the end, internal and external worlds unite and form a mature being who meets their own needs and those of others.

As introverts, it's oh so easy to retreat into our shells. We will always need solitude and downtime, but the real growth and power comes from sticking our necks out and improving our connection with the outside world.

Making improvements on the exterior of my home changed my focus and gave me a different kind of satisfaction, one not based on my inner world but one shared with those around me.

ARE WE SEPARATE OR RELATIONAL BEINGS?

Hungarian physician and psychoanalyst, Dr. Margaret Mahler's *separation-individuation theory* (not to be confused with Carl Jung's individuation process) stipulates that to grow—beginning in infancy—we have to move further and further away from others. The mature person does not need others. They are a self-contained unit. In fact, the separate-self model has us intrinsically motivated to create firm boundaries between others and us. It states our nature is to gain power over others and compete for limited resources. Sounds like life in the meritocracy, doesn't it?

Dr. Amy Banks, psychiatrist and author of *Wired to Connect*, suggests that mutuality or interdependent connecting (*the relational cultural theory*) is the more natural human inclination. She argues our brains and nervous systems are designed to move us toward more relational complexity. Studies using fMRI show the same part of our brain that lights up when we feel physical pain reacts when we feel social exclusion. Healthy social inclusion tells our brain to stop the stress response.

Within the relational cultural theory people come together, experience each other and then move away in order to absorb

what was learned. There is flexibility and an ebb and flow to our mutuality. It allows us to see ourselves and the other person more deeply. It enhances our personal growth by strengthening positive neuropathways and processes through repetition.

In a growth-fostering relationship, we are not denigrated or silenced. We don't have to put our guard up. We are free to develop clarity, boost our self-worth, become more productive, and move toward other fulfilling relationships.

In fact, in patient/therapist relationships where relational cultural theory is practiced, the therapist does not remain reserved or withhold personal experiences, thoughts and evolution. The patient and therapist work together and form a bond.

ARE WE DISTRAUGHT BECAUSE WE DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH BOUNDARIES AND INDEPENDENCE OR BECAUSE WE DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS?

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders affect 18% or 40 million people of the US adult population. Of those 40 million people, almost 7 million of them suffer from generalized anxiety disorder, 15 million suffer from social anxiety disorder, 14.8 million suffer from major depressive disorder, and 7.7 million are affected by posttraumatic stress disorder.

How many of those who suffer from anxiety or depression are introverts? That is not known exactly, but a study done by members

of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2001 found suicidal affective disorder patients were significantly more introverted than non-suicidal affective disorder patients.³ Other studies show isolation as both a cause and effect of depression. With our sensitive nervous systems, society's preference for extroversion and our penchant for alone time, it is a fair assumption we make up a good percentage of those suffering.

After learning of the separation-individuation theory and the relational cultural theory (which has growth and healing occur through human connections), I wondered if anxious and depressed people—many of them introverts—are distraught because they do not have enough independence and personal boundaries or if they are distraught because they do not feel connected to others.

Dr. Banks and many studies point to a sense of belonging and companionship as antidotes to stress and potions for positive well-being.

A large and long-term study started in the 1940s and done at Johns Hopkins involved 1,100 male medical students (all healthy at the start of the study). They were asked how close they felt to their parents. They were tracked down fifty years later. Those who had developed cancer since the start of the study, were less likely to have close relationships with their parents than those who did not have cancer. The correlation, not necessarily the scientific causation, demonstrates the importance of positive relationships to our health. Interestingly, the lack of a close relationship between a male student and his father was the strongest predictor of cancer. These findings were gathered after eliminating known cancer risk factors.⁴

Another particularly intriguing study done at Yale University, looked at cardio angiographs of 119 men and forty women. Cardioangiographs tell whether our coronary arteries are blocked and if so, to what extent. The patients who reported more “feelings of being loved” had far fewer blockages than those who did not. Interestingly, the patients who felt loved had even fewer blockages than the patients who reported having busy social circles but didn’t feel particularly nurtured or supported, thus giving credence to the idea that positive nurturing relationships are more powerful than superficial relationships. It should be noted that the angiography study took into consideration genetic disposition for heart disease and any known environmental risk factors.⁵

Put this together with the study mentioned in Practice Three about children who lost their mother at an early age showing warm relationships are vital to our self-esteem and self-discipline, and we have an excellent argument for the necessity of good caring relationships.

Dr. Tatkin says from a psychobiological perspective, most people need to feel closeness and ongoing connection with another human being. We need other people. We can’t do it ourselves. Relationships with others reduce our stress and enrich our lives. Another person can understand us, amplify our enthusiasm and joy, provide guidance, make us more productive, help when we are in trouble, motivate us to be more than we are on our own, touch our souls, and, as we will see in Practice Five, heal past wounds.

COUNTER-DEPENDENCE

We know complete dependence on others to help us physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually is at the far-left end of the maturity continuum. It leaves the locus of control in other people's hands. We all start out this way as children, but as we grow and mature we move to independence.

The practice for this chapter is to get beyond independence and embrace relationships or interdependence. Now, independence is more mature than dependence because it means we are not completely influenced and reliant on others. We make our own decisions, take care of ourselves physically, are emotionally inner directed and find self-worth from within.

Many of you may have heard the term codependent. Codependency has its roots in the *Alcoholics Anonymous* program. Codependency is a type of dysfunctional helping relationship where one person supports or enables another person's drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or underachievement. The codependent relationship requires the participants to rely on each other's approval for their sense of identity. It sounds a lot like dependency but it is two-way and involves the dysfunctional element that perpetuates addiction, poor mental health or underachievement.

The majority of you have probably not heard the term *counter-dependence*. Mental health professionals mostly use it. Counter-dependent people avoid asking for help, prefer to be completely self-reliant and have a fear of dependency. They will do whatever it takes to avoid needing someone.

What causes counter-dependence? Usually, a message we receive early on from our parents that says, "You're on your own. Learn to

be fiercely independent.” Sometimes a parent is absent as is the case with a death, deployment, or divorce. Sometimes the parent is there but not really there, such as when parents have issues with chemical dependency and depression or a parent is a workaholic. Sometimes the parent is just overly permissive, not willing to establish and enforce rules, and leaves the child to his own devices. In any case, a sense of the importance of being self-reliant develops. That aversion to dependency gets carried into adulthood and applied to any relationships the individual aspires to create. Unfortunately, healthy long-term relationships require independence and the ability to rely on or trust someone else.

SIGNS OF COUNTER-DEPENDENCE

- Resist or avoid asking for help
- Prefer to do things yourself
- Find intimate relationships difficult
- Need to be right all the time
- Expect perfection in yourself and others
- Find it difficult to relax, like to keep busy
- Avoid anything that makes you appear vulnerable

Counter-dependence robs us of the gift of interdependence. Without interdependence, we never know what it is like to love and feel loved. We miss out on the comfort others bring. When we can't or don't ask for help, we often don't receive it. Others never lessen our burdens. Our fear or plain lack of understanding regarding needing others holds us back from the richness and depth of a mutually interdependent life.

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As a parent with counter-dependent tendencies, we feed our children the same message our parents fed us. We subconsciously tell them it is not OK to depend on others. It is most acceptable to take care of ourselves. Needing others is for wimps.

To avoid doing that, we need to show our children we are there for them, consistently. We need to show it is all right to rely on others. No one is belittled or judged for expressing a need for help. It is safe to ask for it.

Examples of ways to be there for our children:

- Maintain rituals or routines in the morning and at bedtime. Wake them up gently and have breakfast with them. Tuck them in at night and take a few minutes to listen to their concerns about the day
- Be around to offer assistance with homework. Let them do the work but be there if they do not understand it and need clarification. Quiz them for tests and help edit papers
- Ask them about their ideas and future plans
- Make something together in the garage or in the kitchen
- Eat dinner together every night. Make the dinner table a safe space to share good news and bad
- Give hugs often

There is a small chance helping our children too much or too often causes a problem, but that only happens if we help them when they do not truly need us.

HELPING VERSUS RESCUING

My daughter is the youngest and only girl among my children. There have been many instances throughout the years, that I have felt the need to protect her from her older brothers. My sons are strong guys with sharp intelligence and occasionally sharp tongues.

My daughter is often the easy target and butt of their jokes. Her tender-hearted spirit and eagerness to join her brothers' team only widen the chasm between them. My penchant to stick up for the underdog flares when I witness any apparent injustices between my sons and her.

In many ways, I am sure this dynamic reminds me of the harsh relationship I had with my sister as a girl. I have a fierce need to protect my daughter from feeling the way I did when my sister and I fought.

After many occasions when I ran interference, my sons made it clear they felt I favored my daughter. No matter what they did or she did, I would side with her.

In the past, because I found it difficult to hear negative remarks and criticism, I developed a knee-jerk reaction to every bit of feedback my sons dished out. To me it sounded like constant put-downs. To their more logical and less emotional minds, it was the truth and even sometimes meant as helpful feedback. In one case, they honestly believed they were saving my daughter from ridicule by telling her the t-shirt she decorated and wore was ugly.

At some point, I stumbled across an article describing the problem with rescuing people. In essence, if we perpetually rescue someone, we are telling him or her we have no faith in their abilities to take care of themselves. It is a vote of no confidence.

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With my daughter, I stood back and observed the next few times my sons interacted with her. I saw her respond on her own and I saw her react and look for me to step in. I decided to stop jumping in and speaking for her every time her brothers teased her. I am mindful of the psychological damage of repeated verbal assaults and would not let that happen, of course. But instead of rescuing her, I helped her gather tools to prevent her from feeling like a victim. I gave her funny, albeit corny phrases like, “Buzz off” or “Go jump in a lake” to use when they were being pests. The boys made fun of the phrases, but at least a shift in focus occurred and changed the direction of the conversations. I told her she could always leave the room. She does not have to stand and take it. She can turn away and walk out. I also suggested using humor to earn their admiration. I know how hard it is to throw out funny one-liners when your feelings are hurt (as an introvert, it’s hard to throw out one-liners off-the-cuff, period), but if she can do it, the mood in the room will definitely change for the better. Giving her tools instead of a bailout gave her power.

KNOWING WHEN TO FOSTER INTERDEPENDENCE

How can we tell if our children really need us or if it is a good opportunity to let them work through something on their own? The best way to help your child is to stay in tune with him or her. Attachment theory (which we will discuss in Practice Five), says healthy parent/child relationships require an emotional connection with our child. We must pay attention to the child and make sure we are sensitive to his needs and meet them as quickly as possible. For example, expecting a six-year-old to take care of and entertain himself after school is unreasonable. An emotionally in tune parent would know their child needs parental supervision and a chance to

talk about their day. They would be there at the end of the day with their child or make arrangements for someone else to care for him or her.

Parents are not perfect. We will fail to help our children occasionally, but if we sincerely try to be there, our children will feel it. As they grow up, they will know it is acceptable to reach out to others when needed. They will have skills for independence and the ability to ask for assistance when needed.

As a personal coach, I have had to learn how to help clients come to their own solutions through a process called *motivational interviewing*. In motivational interviewing, active and reflective listening are employed. I listen to my client tell their story and then rephrase their words as I repeat them back to them. I may include an emotion I sensed in their words and ask if that is indeed what they are feeling. I repeat what seem to be the options or points causing them distress. I let them hear the conflicting options and pause to ponder the best choice. I let them sit in their ambivalence and take care not to offer answers. This is harder than it sounds. Offering solutions or suggestions is just another form of rescuing. If they come to their own conclusions, the action steps needed to resolve the issues are more likely to be carried out. The client feels empowered.

Instead of making my daughter or my clients dependent on me or codependent on me, I create an interdependent relationship with them. They have a healthy dependency on me but also the skills to take care of themselves. The parent/child relationship is largely dependent in that the child has to rely on the adult to take care of her, but as the child matures it is natural for them to develop independence and the ability to ask for help. If they have been able to comfortably depend on their parent then they will hopefully feel at ease being interdependent within future relationships.

WE HAVE TO LOVE OURSELVES FIRST?

We've all heard variations of the saying that we have to love ourselves before we can love another. We at least need to like ourselves and we can't like ourselves if we don't know and respect ourselves. We know ourselves by finding our element, spending time reflecting and paying attention as we said in Practice One. We respect ourselves by exhibiting self-mastery and self-discipline, as mentioned in Practice Three. Stephen Covey says self-mastery and self-discipline are the foundation of good relationships with others.

Why is this? Inevitably, tough times descend upon a relationship. If we do not have the inner-security, self-awareness, proactivity, and self-discipline of a truly independent person, we may regress to comforting addictions, finger pointing, or simply giving up and leaving the relationship. Our personal integrity gives us the grit, the values to prioritize, and the strong character to stick through the rough spots. If we only have relational skills that help us gain power over others or achieve material rewards, i.e. résumé virtues, we will not know how to dig deep and access our eulogy virtues. Eulogy virtues are created and uncovered as we experience independence and important relationships. Knowing and liking ourselves gives us the stability to create effective relationships.

A client of mine learned the value of independent maturity when about six months into a new relationship she received a work assignment that would take her out-of-state 50% of each week for months. She knew her absence could have a dramatic negative effect on the relationship. The time away would be lonely and take a lot of her energy. If she was not careful, she and her boyfriend could drift apart. She could get so worn out that all she wanted to do when she came home was lie on the couch and watch television. Through self-awareness and self-discipline, she prioritized her health and relationship. She made effective choices that created

an intentional schedule. While away and at home, she made plans to work out most mornings. She watched her diet while traveling. It was easy to slip into giant heavy meals at restaurants while on the road but she knew all that excessive eating would only further deplete her energy and add to her midsection. She and her boyfriend spoke on the phone often when she was gone. When home, she spent as much time as possible with him, while still maintaining her home, getting good rest and occasionally meeting with friends. This client was not an introvert, so the energy and socializing were possibly easier to manage but she still had to be aware of her priorities, be dependable, and be proactive and intentional for the relationship to thrive during her absences.

WE FIND LOVE IN RELATIONSHIPS?

Couple therapist Bruce Muzik and Dr. Stan Tatkin disagree with the notion we have to love ourselves first. Dr. Tatkin brings up the argument about babies not loving themselves first. They receive love from their parents and learn to love others through this experience. Tatkin also states in *Wired for Love* that chances are if you believe in yourself or “love” yourself it is because someone loved you in the past. The nurturing in past relationships shapes who you are today. A big part of our loving ability is based on how we were loved, and not on how much we love ourselves.

Subsequent chapters will help us decide for ourselves, which comes first: self-love or love.

SYNERGY

The relationship partners have with each other serves as a catalyst to growth and productivity and as a unifying element. Relationships and their synergy create possibilities that were not there. The synergy and interdependence found in mature relationships bring creative cooperation. One plus one can equal eight or eight thousand. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

How to achieve synergy? It requires an appreciation for differences, openness to new possibilities, personal security, and a fair amount of vulnerability and courage.

If we have not experienced a lot of synergy or magic of collaboration in our lives, we tend to remain defensive and closed to it. We fear being too vulnerable and subsequently walked over. A nurturing space to grow, make mistakes, sample different methods and admit weaknesses, fosters synergy. Within such a space, we safely learn independence and eventually interdependence.

I mentioned earlier an intuitive writing class I took at a local literary center. The instructor, Roxanne, made it abundantly clear the classroom was a safe place to write and share. There would be no harsh red-pen critiquing or any critical judging of content. We could choose whether or not to read our writing out loud or keep it private. One of the first writers to read her work out loud was an older woman who bravely read of the incarceration of her oldest son. She wrote of the shame but also of the enduring love she felt for him. Her vulnerable words made it easy to empathize with her and her son. After her reading, the floodgates opened. Everyone read his or her work out loud, despite the option to keep silent. The camaraderie and trust level in the room skyrocketed. Suddenly, the classroom and its inhabitants had so much to say. Ideas and memories abounded. The air seemed to crackle with creativity,

hope, and joy. Even if the stories were sad, the connection and unity compensated for the sorrow. Individual authenticity caused a tidal wave of relatedness and understanding. It was moving and inspiring to be a part of something so meaningful.

A combination of high trust, openness to new possibilities, and an interest in understanding versus dominating, provides the perfect environment for a synergistic relationship, one where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. In this setting, the relationship or how each person relates to the other is its own entity and can lead to incredible creative collaboration.

One important point to make is that agreeing all the time or practicing conformity within relationships does not equal unity or oneness. It actually stifles it. Differences are meant to enhance and enrich relationships. To keep each other restrained in our feelings and creativity only serves to devolve our output and collaboration. If we are maturely independent and have self-respect, self-discipline, and self-awareness, then we can handle the risk of disapproval that comes with vulnerability. In effect, we have to have wholeness within ourselves in order to have wholeness in a relationship. It is necessary to dip into the valley of humility to quiet our ego and listen to what others have to contribute that might complement our strengths or weaknesses. We must be able to rely on ourselves and reach out to our partners as well. Independence and interdependence.

CHALLENGES OF GETTING BEYOND INDEPENDENCE AND INTO INTERDEPENDENCE

Our culture loves the independent spirit and the independent person. We value the ability to take care of ourselves. There is a ubiquitous message that permeates society saying, "Don't be needy."

Action steps for sidestepping the independence ideal:

- 1.** Increase your time within nurturing relationships. Nurturing relationships offer love, care and help. They make it safe to depend on others. Mature people understand the ebb and flow of independence and dependency. Search for these people in places that make you feel at ease and alive.
- 2.** Decrease time with people who denigrate you for asking for assistance. If you are secure and mature enough, strive to move them out of their isolation and defensiveness into connection and understanding by showing a willingness to appreciate differences, new possibilities and vulnerability.
- 3.** Take note of all the research pointing to healthier and happier people with robust and loving social lives.
- 4.** Read *Wired for Dating* or *Wired for Love* by Dr. Stan Tatkin to learn about the benefits of a healthy, dependent couple bubble.

Another challenge is loving ourselves first before we can love another.

Action steps for loving yourself so you can give to another person:

- 1.** Know yourself. Practice paying attention, spending time in solitude and with significant others who mirror your good and bad traits. Figure out your values and let them guide you and keep you focused.
- 2.** Like yourself. Gain self-respect by proactively applying self-discipline. Hold yourself responsible by starting a new fitness program or a new job. Start small, wash dishes every day.
- 3.** Become whole. Intentionally work on skills or preferences that challenge you. If you are intensely logical, for example, try following your gut or your heart next time a decision must be made.
- 4.** It is possible to be in a loving relationship while you learn self-discipline and self-respect, but the difficult times in the relationship will be extra challenging due to your budding independence and lack of self-mastery. Seek a partner who desires a committed, growth-fostering relationship. They will make your concerns their concerns and offer support and relief when they see you are stressed.

One other challenge of moving past independence is counteracting a strong counter-dependent reaction.

Action steps for counteracting counter-dependence:

- 1.** Recall whether your parents instilled a strong need to be self-reliant. Did you fend for yourself as a child? Was either of your primary caregivers absent often? Awareness is a start to healing.

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- 2.** In small increments, increase the level of intimacy and dependency you feel for a significant other. Instead of running to the store yourself for an ingredient you need for dinner, take your spouse up on their offer to pick it up on their way home. Send a few more texts and maintain eye contact a little longer than you find comfortable.
- 3.** Take note if others say you are aloof and unemotional. Notice the behavior that preceded the remark. Do it less.