

Scott: Do you have an interdependent relationship? This is Stay Happily Married episode number 310.

Recording: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates and the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Scott: I'm Scott Blair and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Do you have an interdependent relationship? In today's day and age we are all programmed to be independent. We go off to four-year colleges to get our degrees. We then use those degrees to land ourselves a career to support us through life's necessities. Being independent means that we don't have to rely on anyone else to aid or support our needs and wants. Wanting to be independent is a good virtue to have when it comes to financial stability and careers.

However when it comes to relationships, being independent might not be what's best for you and your loved one. What happens when we try to be too independent in our relationships? Can being independent hurt our relationship with our loved one? What can we do to become more mutually dependent with our loved one.

Earning her doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology at Temple University, Dr. Susan Orenstein is founder and director of Orenstein Solutions in Cary, North Carolina. Dr. Orenstein has devoted her professional career to helping individuals and couples improve their most intimate relationships. She specializes in relationship and couples issues. Dr. Orenstein is committed to providing state of the art practices in marital counseling and to that end, continues to attend professional training programs. Welcome back to the show Susan. I'm so glad you could join us again.

Dr. Orenstein: Oh it's my pleasure, thank you.

Scott: Susan you are here today to talk to us about the distinctions between co-dependence, independence and interdependence. Would you mind taking a minute and elaborating a little bit about the differences in this topic?

Dr. Orenstein: I'd love to Scott. Well, first of all, when people read the title of this content, "View of an Interdependent Relationship" I just wanted to first of all clarify that interdependent is not a dirty word, it's actually a good thing. So I'll go through the distinction. Co-dependent is what became pretty popular 20 or maybe 30 years ago or so with the substance abuse movement where the family therapy folks noticed that when an adult or a teenager in a family had substance abuse that it affected the entire family so there was the dependent adult or teen on that drug or substance but they're also the codependent to or part of this difficulty and they were suffering too.

They noticed that the codependent has certain patterns of behavior where they would stop looking as much at their own needs as the person with the alcohol or drug addiction and it would be actually enabling that person to continue that

destructive behavior. Since that time we have used the word codependent for all kinds of things basically insinuating that in a relationship someone is being too dependent and giving themselves away and making themselves small and of course that's really not healthy. That's what codependent is.

Then independent is what American's in our rugged individualism strive for is we want to be individual and we talk about the self-made man or the self-made woman and there's Horatio Alger's story of from rags to riches where we did it all by ourselves and we have a lot of pride about that. But in reality, nobody does it all by themselves. Especially in a healthy relationship and a healthy partnered relationship, what really strengthens relationships and leaves people feeling very secure and happy is what I'd call interdependent relationship and that's what I want to talk about with you today.

Scott: Well there surely is no such thing as a self-made man.

Dr. Orenstein: There's a dog behind every man and woman. There's a sweet dog at their lap.

Scott: Absolutely. What problems do you see that couples experience in their relationship when you talked about there being a little bit of confusion in this terminology so when there is confusion between whether they are acting out of co-dependence or independence or interdependence, what kind of issues do you see arise there?

Dr. Orenstein: In my practice, I so often hear couples where one or both partners will say "I can take care of myself." Or they'll say they don't confide in their partner because they don't want to burden them or they can just take care of their own needs. I hear that all the time.

Scott: Or "I was getting along fine before you get here and I'll be fine after you're gone" type of attitude.

Dr. Orenstein: Right, right. They might have good intentions like "I don't want to burden you, I want to protect you" but on the other hand you're also sending the message to your partner "I don't need you." That's not a good place to be on the receiving end of that message.

Scott: Sure.

Dr. Orenstein: So in couple's counseling, when I see one or both people saying "I can take care of myself" or "I don't want to burden the other person" they're really operating under a 1-person system. They're not operating as a couple. That's what I work with them in couple's counseling on is what it means for them to be a couple and how can they join forces and mutually take care of each other to be interdependent.

Scott: Well left unresolved, if they're trying to take care of themselves and keep their dependence. What types of problems are you seeing that this creates inside the relationship both short term and long term?

Dr. Orenstein: Unfortunately, those with the belief that independence or "I can do it myself" is the ultimate [inaudible 00:06:09]. They're likely to feel lonely and insecure in the relationship because that's really hard in life not to have somebody there in your corner and then if they do want that mutually dependent relationship, that interdependent relationship, and the partner is fighting for independence, they might feel neglected and abandoned.

Scott: When do you see that most couples are becoming aware that they are dealing with this type of behavior inside of the relationship where maybe one or both are trying to maintain independence and they're not really being interdependent?

Dr. Orenstein: Often times I see the couples come in when there's a crisis. It could be an affair, it could be a death in the family or a major illness or a job loss and that's when the couples really get in touch with that loneliness and wanting their partner more than ever. So that's generally when I see them coming in.

Scott: Earlier you mentioned that, especially here in the U.S., we have this real spirit of independence and like to be self-made and do things on our own and stand on our own two feet but have you noticed any other patterns maybe among the couples or the individuals that are dealing with this being independent and not being able to interact interdependently?

Dr. Orenstein: I'm so glad you asked that. I do think it's an American phenomenon but I also think it's based on attachment theory and in couples counseling I draw from something called attachment theory and neuroscience which basically talks about when we are children, how do we learn to soothe ourselves? Do we get that soothing from a caregiver and we can really trust that caregiver and rely on that and know that someone's there for us?

Or is that caregiver inconsistent or even absent? In those cases, that's when folks have a really hard time with the concept of interdependence. It could seem threatening to them to have to rely on their needs from someone else and to give somebody else help and to care for somebody else. In some ways, it's a form of protection. I'm going to take care of myself, you take care of yourself and we'll be good. The problem is, it doesn't work out so good and a lot of couples feel really lonely and isolated with that [inaudible 00:08:38].

Scott: So when you have a couple that comes in and they're struggling with this and they're starting to feel kind of lonely and not working together well - where do you start them? What do you suggest that they do to start building this mutual dependent relationship?

Dr. Orenstein: I start by helping the couples have an understanding that this is natural. All adults have different kinds of attachment styles and it's not uncommon for couples to struggle with this. I take the pathology out of it, that's the first thing I do, and I help the couples understand that to actually want that soothing and that bond and that warmth and that intimacy is biologically programmed into us just like the drive for water or food or air. For them to crave closeness and nurturing and intimacy, yet still struggle with it and be afraid of it, that's really the human experience and that's something I can help them with.

Scott: Do you mind drilling down on that a little bit more? Like specifically what are some of the items that the couples work on to build interdependence between each other?

Dr. Orenstein: I would love to. Like I said, my work is based on some work coming out of California by Stan Tatkin in a model called PACT which is the Psychobiological Approach to Couple Therapy and what Tatkin talks about is helping couples develop a secure interdependent relationship by having a couple's bubble where they really turn to each other and basically have each other's back. Then I can drill down on what that means.

Basically couples work to have an agreement between them that they put each other first, they protect each other, they don't humiliate or bully each other in public or private and they have strong boundaries from the outside and permeable boundaries between them so they know that they come first and they have boundaries around the outside world. And that both partners also recognize that it's important for each partner to have their own individual identities and they can celebrate each other's success and encourage each other to have their own friends and hobbies and things like that.

Scott: So when you have a couple now that you're working with and they're starting to learn to kind of confide in each other to collaborate on things, put each other first, not to publicly humiliate each other or privately, and they're building this bubble I think you called it. What are some of the improvements in the quality and interaction of the relationship that you see?

Dr. Orenstein: Overall I see them build a sense of safety and security and what that does to our nervous system is it just helps calm everything down. This is a mind/body approach. When couples know that they have each other's backs and that they're not going to degrade each other and that they're going to be able to tell each other everything, they can relax and settle down and they can have eye contact and a lot of physical touch and not feel threatened. I see a lot more physical intimacy and a stronger sense of safety and security.

Scott: I can imagine. I know so many of us, especially after maybe being hurt in a previous relationship, really fight to keep that independence so nobody else in the future can hurt us again. So, Susan, is there anything else that you think our listeners should know when it comes to this topic of interdependence?

Dr. Orenstein: What I love about this model and what I love about doing couples counseling is I'm teaching couples to be there for each other and to take care of each other and that's such a lovely gift for the next generation because then they children can be children or the teenagers can be teenagers. They don't have to be their parent's confidants. They don't have to take care of their parents, they know that their parents are taking care of each other. So the kids can also feel secure and the kids can have this blueprint for their own future relationships that will be very healthy.

Scott: Well Susan, as always it's a great pleasure and thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us and being on the show today.

Dr. Orenstein: Thank you Scott, my pleasure too.

Scott: To find out more about Dr. Susan Orenstein and her practice, Orenstein Solutions, you can visit their website at [www.orensteinsolutions.com](http://www.orensteinsolutions.com) or call 919-428-2766 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at [www.stayhappilymarried.com](http://www.stayhappilymarried.com). I'm Scott Blair, until next time, stay happily married.

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