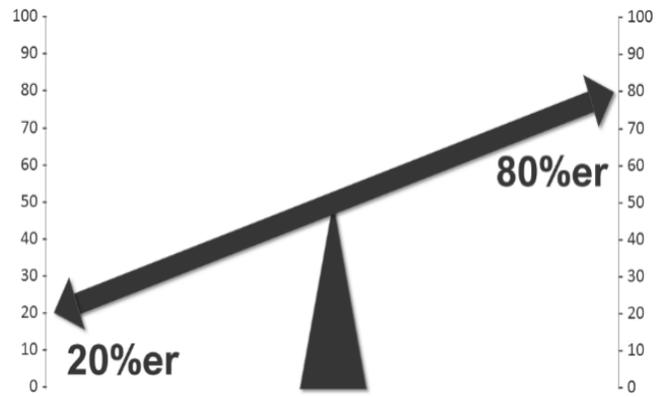


# THE 80/20 RELATIONSHIP DYNAMIC

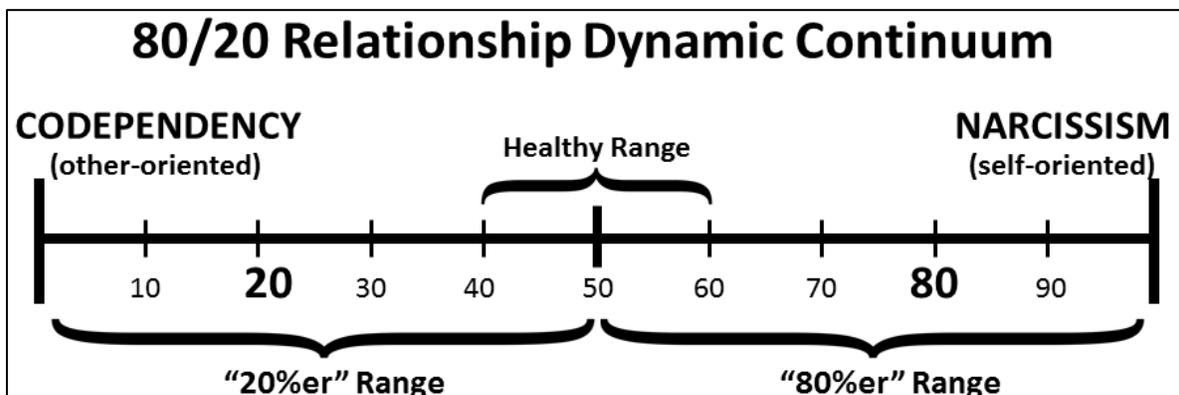
Laura M. Brotherson, LMFT, CST

The following is an important relationship dynamic to understand and keep in mind so that you are able to identify which side you fall on and what efforts are needed to move toward better balance in your marriage.



## BASIC CONCEPTS

- Most all relationships exhibit this complementary dynamic to some degree. It is a built-in power differential in every relationship until couples become aware of and work to shift the dynamic to a more balanced and co-equal, interdependent relationship.
- Couples need to know which side of the dynamic they individually lean towards in order to understand which direction they need to go in order to move toward becoming a team that operates closer to a 50/50 dynamic of "self" and "other." Like a see-saw as the 80%er works to become a 60%er, for instance, the 20%er will become a 40%er and vice versa.
- Opposites Attract -- We tend to naturally attract someone whose strengths and weaknesses complement ours. Those with codependent (other-oriented) personalities and those with emotionally manipulating (self-oriented) personalities are natural human magnets. If someone is a 80%-er they will attract a 20%-er. If someone is a 40%-er then will attract a 60%-er. If you decide to divorce an 80%-er spouse but don't do the work that a 20%-er needs to do to get into a better balance/healthier range of relating then you will likely just attract another 80%-er due to the complementary, magnetic nature of this relationship dynamic.
- This 80/20 concept can apply to the entire relationship or it may just show up in one specific area of the relationship, i.e. the sexual relationship. One couple realized that in the sexual dimension he was the 80%er and she was the 20%er, but in the parenting dimension she was the 80%er and he was the 20%er. It all depends on what dimension the couples are trying to improve, in order to know what efforts are needed.
- WHY? -- as many couples presented in counseling with a relationship dynamic where husbands (80%-ers) had "taken" and wives (20%-ers) had "given" for so long (especially in the sexual dimension) that the wife couldn't do it anymore. The core of the relationship had become too unbalanced/damaged and something had to change in order to heal and strengthen the marriage. When the 80%-er accepts the reality of this dynamic (being an 80%-er) and begins to "take less" and "give more," and the 20%-er learns to "take more" and "give less" then we begin to heal the relationship. The detrimental effects of "duty sex/charity sex/obligatory sex" became readily apparent.
- This concept operates on a continuum between both extremes that are unhealthy and dysfunctional with the healthy and functional range being in the middle.



- **Codependency** is on a continuum - the gist is a well-intentioned but unhealthy orientation toward helping, rescuing, sacrificing for, caretaking, taking responsibility for, enabling or trying to orchestrate change in others who behave in unhealthy, self-absorbed ways.
- **Narcissism** (emotional manipulation) is on a continuum - the gist is an orientation toward self-centeredness. It's a sense of specialness or entitlement, seeks admiration, doesn't take advice or criticism well, often deflects blame onto others, struggles with empathy, and can be emotionally manipulative.

**CAUSAL FACTORS** -- Which side of the dynamic you tend toward is generally based upon three things:

1. **Gender** - stereotypical male characteristics (dominant, aggressive) lean toward the 80%er side, while stereotypical female characteristics (submissive, nurturing) lean toward the 20%er side.
2. **Personality** - when gender-typical characteristics don't fit the side you lean toward, personality steps in. Type A personalities - outgoing, competitive, driven, ambitious, aggressive, impatient, confident the person leans toward the 80%er side; with Type B personalities - reflective, more laid back, tolerant, cooperative, accommodating the person leans toward the 20%er side.
3. **Upbringing** - the "self-orientation" of 80%ers was likely developed through developmental experiences that taught the 80%er to lean on themselves to get their needs met (counter-dependency); with the "other-orientation" of 20%ers likely developed through developmental experiences that taught the 20%ers to lean on caring for others to get their needs met (dependency). Self-orientation (80%er) often comes from an avoidant attachment to one's parents, while other-orientation (20%er) often comes from an anxious attachment to one's parents.

**CHARACTERISTICS -- 80%ers & 20%ers**

**80%er**

1. oriented toward "self" - they view things through a "self" lens, i.e. how will this affect me?
2. tends toward counter-dependence
3. puts self ahead of others
4. resistant, aggressive
5. a taker - tends to take more than they give
6. takes to get their needs met
7. compulsive care-"taking" at the expense of others' needs ("addiction to self")
8. controls, manipulates others / walks over others
9. takes control / leads
10. accesses their agency easily
11. cares for self at the expense of others
12. disregards or discounts others' wants, needs, opinions to avoid negative feelings
13. they get/demand love and respect without giving it in return
14. relies on self; avoids relying on others due to mistrust
15. over values self
16. tends to naturally take up more of the "air" in

**20%er**

1. oriented toward "others" - they view things through an "others" lens, i.e. how will this affect others?
2. tends toward co-dependence
3. puts others ahead of self
4. compliant, accommodating
5. a giver - tends to give more than they take
6. gives to get their needs met
7. compulsive care-"giving" / compliance at the expense of their own needs ("addiction to others") - leads to accumulating resentment
8. lets themselves get walked on
9. allows others to take control / follows
10. relinquishes their agency to avoid confrontation, etc.
11. cares for others at the expense of self
12. overlooks their own wants, needs, opinions to keep the peace and avoid negative reactions, feelings, confrontations
13. they give love and respect without requiring it in return
14. relies on others
15. under values self
16. tends to willingly take the leftover "air" in the

<p>the relationship often without even realizing it</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. focuses on own needs</li> <li>18. tends toward overt aggressiveness - "my way or the highway"</li> <li>19. may be so self-absorbed that they can't even recognize or accept themselves as the 80%er in the relationship</li> <li>20. self-dependent or selfish</li> <li>21. often blames others</li> <li>22. easy for them to stand up or speak up for themselves</li> <li>23. both orientations can be unhealthy on the far ends</li> <li>24. often the male</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;">~~~~~</p> <p><i>"It's not just that he is self-absorbed, but that his thoughts, feelings, and opinions all take precedent or priority over my thoughts, feelings, opinions, perspective, etc. He's been 'taking' in that way for so long he may not even realize it."</i></p>	<p>relationship often without even realizing it</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. denies, discounts, minimizes own needs</li> <li>18. tends toward passive aggressiveness - makes them pay other ways</li> <li>19. may be so concerned about the other's feelings that they don't want to acknowledge the reality that they have been going with less for a long time</li> <li>20. co-dependent or other-dependent</li> <li>21. often feels guilty</li> <li>22. hard for them to stand up or speak up for themselves</li> <li>23. both orientations can be unhealthy on the far ends</li> <li>24. often the female</li> <li>25. can be so other oriented that even the spouse rarely gets priority attention</li> </ol>
<p><b>What 80%-ers Need to Do to Change This Dynamic</b>  <i>(...Move Toward a "50%er" Balance Between Take and Give / Between Self and Others)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. focus on others/other-care; stay out of "What about me?" thinking</li> <li>2. be more respecting of others' wants, needs, opinions</li> <li>3. do more following – take more of a back seat</li> <li>4. listen more for other's wants, needs, opinions, perspectives and speak less;</li> <li>5. ask her/his opinion</li> <li>6. practice doing one thing a day that's important to your spouse that meets her/ his needs</li> <li>7. acknowledge when you "take" and apologize</li> <li>8. be willing to confront yourself and identify your weaknesses</li> <li>9. take down your walls/barriers to being vulnerable/ connecting</li> <li>10. say "yes" to the other's requests more often</li> <li>11. attend to the other's needs, opinions more – do it their way more often</li> <li>12. don't argue or pushback when they do speak</li> </ol>	<p><b>What 20%-ers Need to Do to Change This Dynamic</b>  <i>(...Move Toward a "50%er" Balance Between Give and Take / Between Others and Self)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. give yourself permission to focus on self / self-care</li> <li>2. require respect from others - take/ get/ demand more (to be more balanced)</li> <li>3. show more leadership – take more of the lead</li> <li>4. stand up, speak up for yourself more – your wants, needs, opinions, perspectives</li> <li>5. be open and honest with self and others about your needs, etc.</li> <li>6. make the other attend to your wants, needs, opinions, perspectives as much as you do theirs</li> <li>7. say things like, "That was a 'Take'" to help the 80%er realize when they are "taking"</li> <li>8. "carefront" (confront) – care enough about the relationship to speak up and confront others when necessary</li> <li>9. build healthy boundaries and hold them firm</li> <li>10. say "no" more often (especially when you don't really want to do something and/or know you'll feel resentment if you do say yes)</li> <li>11. don't give in to the other's preferences-- instead insist on yours equally</li> <li>12. develop to ability to handle/cope with strong</li> </ol>

<p>up/ give an opinion or express a want/need or they may just continue to shut down and/or shut you out</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. willingly take/get/demand less (as you move from an 80%er to a 60%er, for instance); resist the urge to pushback or manipulate to keep things as they are</li> <li>14. don't put guilt or blame on the other person; recognize your "taking" default and your need to change it to attain better balance</li> <li>15. develop more compassion for others</li> <li>16. be more willing to identify and express your feelings not just facts (to try to be right or to prove a point)</li> <li>17. do a written daily check-in each night where you write out 2-3 ways you were selfish, demanding, manipulative, controlling, prideful, or angry/frustrated that day</li> </ol>	<p>negative reactions (i.e. be okay with them being mad at you or being disappointed or inconvenienced by you)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. be able to handle the discomfort of the push back the 80%er will give when you try to change these dynamics</li> <li>14. push away thoughts of guilt, or that you're being selfish, or that problems are your fault; strive for balance</li> <li>15. develop more compassion for self</li> <li>16. do things out of love not fear</li> <li>17. Do a written daily check-in each night where you didn't speak up or stand up for your truth</li> </ol>
--	---

## RELATIONSHIP GOAL

For 80%-ers to be more "other-oriented," and *take less and give more*; while 20%-ers need to be more "self-oriented" and *take more and give less* in order to move closer to a 50/50 dynamic where there's a more balanced and equitable distribution of needs met, opinions given credibility/weight/validity, and the perspective respected.

## WHAT HEALTHY LOOKS LIKE

- **Differentiated** - the active, ongoing process of defining self, revealing self, clarifying boundaries, and managing the anxiety that comes from risking either greater intimacy or separateness; the ability to advocate for oneself and respectfully treat each other as separate but connected individuals each having their own equally valid perspectives, interests, priorities, etc.; interdependent.
- **Self-aware/Self-reflective/Self-correcting** - can recognize when "giving" and "taking" are in balance on both sides of the relationship; more 50/50; correcting as needed.
- **Healthy Boundaries** – both maintain and respect each other's boundaries; as you each move closer to the 50%er range, boundaries won't be consciously needed because they will be automatically built into the mutual respect healthy individuals show toward each other in their relationships.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Breaking Free of the Co-Dependency Trap](#) by Barry K. Weinhold Ph.D. and Janae B. Weinhold Ph.D.
- [The Flight from Intimacy: Healing Your Relationship of Counter-dependence -- The Other Side of Co-dependency](#) by Janae B. Weinhold Ph.D. and Barry K. Weinhold Ph.D.
- [Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life](#) by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
- [The Human Magnet Syndrome: Why We Love People Who Hurt Us](#) by Ross Rosenberg
- ARTICLE – ["Six Hallmarks of Codependence"](#)
- ARTICLE – ["What is Narcissism?"](#)
- ARTICLE – ["Healthy Narcissism"](#)

(updated Jan 2019)