

The Myth of Withholding:

One of the most common defensive strategies used by married and intimate couples to avoid dealing with the truth of their partner is what I call the Myth of Withholding. The Myth of Withholding is the belief that the reason your partner does not behave in the way you would like is because he stubbornly refuses to comply and therefore withholds from you what you need. Therefore, you operate on the belief that for whatever irrational reason, he withholds what he could give to you. Your belief is that he has it to give, but just won't.

This applies to your wish that he be more responsible, interested, affectionate, caring, helpful, thoughtful, honest, reliable, open, etc. With the withholding myth, your assumption is that "he has it but just won't give it", "he could do it but he would not be bothered", "he is able to but won't try" etc.

Now, for many of you, this may be a perfectly logical position for you to hold. However, think about it for a while. There are many negative consequences for you in believing this: You will inevitably feel angry, resentful, disrespected, cynical, betrayed, sad, etc. Believing in the myth of withholding can make you feel a lot worse. Now you might argue that your belief is true and that he can or could comply or respond to you in a better way and you have no choice but to respond with the irritation that you feel.

Well, think it out a bit. There are two important alternatives to be considered here. The first is to consider the possibility that you might be wrong: that is that the reasons he does not behave in the way you need or hope for is because he is unable to do so because of personality and temperament. If you believed that he could not do X or Y because of personal inadequacy and that he just does not have it to give, then you are faced with a completely different set of feelings.

Instead of feeling angry and resentful, you are now more likely to feel sad and disappointed. If you believe that the reason he is not more responsible is because he is inadequate more than withholding, then you have to face your own false expectations of him.

False expectations can be based on an unfulfilled dream. You dream and image of marriage may have been that your husband would have been, for example, more responsible, caring, or interested in your life. You find now that that has not happened. If you hold onto the withholding myth, you can remain bitter and angry with him for decades. However, if you consider (at least for now) the inadequacy belief, then you have to deal with your own lost dream, you have to reappraise your own expectations, and maybe you have to let go something that you have clung to. This might be good for both of you.

I would suggest to you that if you have developed an increasing resentment or bitterness toward your husband it is possible that it can be attributed as much to your personal dream and expectations that his withholding and stubbornness.

There are other considerable advantages in approaching things in a different way – in assuming that, after many years of trying to change him, that he just does not have it to give. The first is that you take back your own power and let go the agenda to convert him. You take charge of your own emotions. By taking responsibility for them, you are then not dependent on him to be happy. If you assume that your irritation is caused by

your own expectations rather than his stubbornness then you are 'driving the bus' of your own emotions.

The second important advantage in rejecting the myth of withholding is that you shift your position from that of complaining, pleading, or trying-to-get-him-to-grow-up to one of ensuring he takes adult responsibility for the consequences of his own inadequacy. For example, instead of giving out to him for X or Y you instead solve the problem in other ways – you get another 'man' in to do the jobs you wanted done, you develop your social life, you stop looking for approval or affection and let him know that you have decided to deal with your expectations in an adult and self-responsible way. In other words, you stop trying to be a mother that is trying to improve him and become his companion by letting him deal with the consequences of his own choices.

Of course, it is not surprising to find that the more you let go of the withholding myth, and operate from the inadequacy myth, the more he is inclined to respond positively. There is inevitability to it! Both of you are the better for it.