



# Doctor Debug™

Ron Sterling, M.D.

## Welcome to Doctor Debug!

This column is Tekbug's contribution to your sanity. Yes, you heard me right, *your sanity*. The Tekbug folks finally gave in to my constant whining about what I felt was the rather anti-intellectual style of many of Seattle's publications (you know, none of them seem to want trained, educated, or—omigod—licensed counselors providing advice to their readers). I know. I have checked. So, consider this Tekbug's way of saying, "being emotionally smart is as important as being tech savvy in this complex, high-stress world."

In my humble opinion, Seattle deserves something more than the make-believe TV shrink, *Frasier*. Oh sure, he is witty, he is smart, and he is ... nonthreatening. If you feel too challenged by advice from a real

shrink, well, you have many other cushy alternatives in Seattle. But, if you want an expert, you have come to the right place.

## Anticipated Questions

**Who are you?** I am Ron Sterling, M.D., licensed to practice medicine in Washington, and host of DearShrink.com, a tech-savvy Internet mental health center. You want more information about me? Come back here in the future. You don't expect me to spill my guts in the first session, do you?

**What's up with your use of the word "debug"?** If you are asking, "Are you pilfering a techie term for your own personal profit?" the answer is, sort of. I confess, I experienced a confusing uneasiness for a few minutes thinking about it. And, tiny twinges of guilt tweaked my conscience until I got help from

an unexpected source—the dictionary. **Debug:** 1. To remove a hidden electronic device, such as a microphone, from. 2. To search for and correct malfunctioning elements in: *debug a computer program*. 3. To remove insects from, as with a pesticide.

So, I am adding: 4. To assist in finding and fixing malfunctioning elements in personal programming and neurophysiology, as in: *debug a person's dysfunctional self*. If technology people can five-finger the word "debug" from the CIA, the FBI and the pesticide industry, then Doctor Debug can surely introduce the term to the psychobabble world.

**Is this column going to be like Psych 101?** No, not exactly. Here, you should get more bang for your buck (It's free!). Expect both serious and delirious bug-whacking in this column.

**What can you do for me in this measly little once-a-month column?** More than I can do in no column at all. This is history in the making. Lighten up! Need more help? You can find me at DearShrink.com.

**Are you going to take up all my time with AQs?** No. See my answer to a reader question directly below—"Debugging Dependence."

**If this is your first "Tekbug" column, how could you have a reader question already?** I swiped it from my DearShrink.com enterprise. Is

that okay with you? (I know, there seems to be a lot of borrowing going on here ... no different from the usual dot.com, eh?)

## Debugging Dependence

Dear Doc,

I am a 23-year-old waiter. My current girlfriend started out as a very nice person. She even paid for some of our lunches and dinners together. After a few months of dating, she started criticizing me a lot. I have to admit, I didn't notice it that much until a couple of my friends pointed it out to me. She even convinced me to let her help me shop for clothes and change my appearance. I guess I could have said, "Screw off, I like myself just fine the way I am," but I didn't. I went along with her.

We are planning on living together, but I found out that she is having sex with another guy. You don't want to know all the details on how I found out. She doesn't know that I know. I don't want to break up. Maybe, when we move in together, she will be different. What should I do?

—Hooked on Kathleen

Dear Hooked on Domination (oops, I mean *Hooked on Kathleen*. I think I made a Freudian Slip, no? For more on Freudian Slips, come back next month.)

Seriously, Mr. Hooked, I sympathize with you. I have been in a similar place myself.

And, it is a very tough place to be in -- to be in love so much and, yet, compromising so much. The love feels so good it almost makes the compromise tolerable. However, unhappiness and hostility are guaranteed to build up. For your own sanity and health, you must talk with Kathleen about your knowledge of her sexual relationship with another man. I don't see any way out of that. To do otherwise would be risking your own health.

In addition, it is time for you to start working on your contribution to this type of relationship, because you are likely to repeat this scenario over and over until you learn enough about yourself and your programming to create a different balance in your relationships with women. Kathleen is unlikely to

change just because you start living together.

Is it a natural human condition to put up with crap to get what appears to be love? Sort of. We all seek attention. It is a core human trait. A long, long time ago (in the 1940s), researchers such as Rene Spitz proved that physical touch was required for human infant survival. It was also discovered that as we get older we can get the same "stroking" from verbal feedback.

So, verbal remarks can substitute for actual, physical strokes. It doesn't matter to us as much, when we are younger, whether the verbal stroking is criticism or praise, it is attention. However, if the verbal strokes we receive are primarily "cold pricklies" (a transactional analysis term), then we learn to

look for them because we equate cold pricklies with love. The earlier we are programmed to feel that we deserve such put-downs all the time, the harder it is for us to get out of the habit of putting up with unjustified criticism or even seeking it.

**Your bug equation:**

Someone taught you well that love is cold pricklies. Kathleen gives you cold pricklies. Kathleen must love you.

By writing to me, you may have started to debug your dependence on disapproval. For the full debug, I recommend doing some reading and getting some help. It is time to start looking for "warm fuzzies" (another transactional analysis term).

—*Doctor Debug*  
May 13, 2002

**Feeling bugged?**

Doctor Debug is Ron Sterling, M.D., a psychiatrist with 27 years of counseling experience. Ask him about mental wellness, or send questions regarding personal, social, relationship, medication or sexual concerns. Send your e-mail to [deardoc@doctordebug.com](mailto:deardoc@doctordebug.com).

E-mail sent to Doctor Debug is read only by Ron Sterling, M.D. No identities, whatsoever, will be revealed in any published answers. Any names used in published answers are *fictional*.

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