Fear Example: Not Respected

Appears in #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6 | Areas: Ambition, Sex Relations

References: Common Fears | Fear Inventory — Drill-Down | Fear Inventory — 4-Column | 4-Column Expanded

This fear runs through workplaces, marriages, friendships, and every relationship where we believe we deserve recognition. It is the demand that others see us the way we want to be seen – and the terror of what it means if they don't.

From Column 3: *"I want the respect of others."* – the ambition statement that reveals the fear: if they don't respect me, something is fundamentally wrong with me or my position in the world.

Fear Drill-Down

This table shows "not respected" traced through progressive "why" columns. Each column asks *"Why do I have this fear?"* – tracing the fear to its root. When a fear has already appeared, it's crossed out (~~strikethrough~~) – that line is done.

(a) I Fear being…	(b) Why?	(c) Why?	(d) Why?	(e) Why?	(f) Why?	(g) Why?	(h) Why?
not respected	not valued	not important	unwanted	alone	emotional pain	using	dying
not respected	weak	powerless	alone	~~emotional pain~~			
not respected	looked down on	failure	worthless	hate myself	~~using~~		
not respected	dismissed	invisible	~~unwanted~~				
not respected	exposed	not good enough	~~worthless~~				
~~**alone**~~							
emotional pain	using	dying	the unknown	no God	self-reliance fails		
~~**using**~~							
~~**worthless**~~							

Summary Chain

> ***not respected → not valued → unwanted → alone → emotional pain → using → dying → the unknown → no God → self-reliance fails***

The Trail

“Not respected” never stays on the surface. When someone dismisses me, talks over me, or treats me like I don’t matter, the feeling I register is not just irritation – it is threat. The drill-down reveals why: disrespect triggers a chain reaction that leads straight to my core fears. If I’m not respected, I’m not valued. If I’m not valued, I’m unwanted. If I’m unwanted, I’m alone. And if I’m alone, I’m sitting in the emotional pain that drove me to use in the first place.

There are multiple entry points. Sometimes “not respected” leads to feeling weak and powerless – especially in the workplace or in relationships where I believe a “real man

commands respect" (#4 My Wife). Sometimes it leads to feeling looked down on, which collapses into failure and worthlessness – the fear that I am fundamentally defective. Sometimes it leads to feeling exposed – as though the disrespect ripped away a mask I didn't know I was wearing.

But every path converges on the same root: alone, in pain, without God, and with nothing left but the self-reliance that has already failed me.

4-Column Brief

1. Fear of:

Not being respected – by coworkers, spouse, friends, family. Being dismissed, overlooked, talked down to. Having my opinions ignored, my contributions unacknowledged, my presence treated as unimportant. The fear that others see through me and find nothing worth respecting.

2. Why:

Pride, ego, vanity, self-centeredness, insecurity, dishonesty. I demand respect as evidence that I matter. I confuse respect with worth. When someone doesn't treat me the way I think I deserve, I take it as a verdict on my value. I am judgmental of others – I rank and measure people constantly – so I assume everyone is ranking and measuring me. I am dishonest about my motives: I tell myself I want fairness, but what I really want is admiration.

3. Self-Reliance:

I posture, dominate conversations, name-drop, or pull rank. I get angry when challenged. I gossip about people who don't show me respect. I avoid situations where I might not be the expert. I keep score of slights. I punish people who disrespect me with coldness, sarcasm, or retaliation. I replay disrespectful moments obsessively, building a case against the offender.

4. Better Way:

> *"This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."* (◆ BB p.67)

True respect comes from being respectable, not from demanding respect. God asks me to be of service, not to be admired. When I am focused on what God would have me be, the question of whether others respect me loses its power. My worth comes from God, not from the opinions of coworkers, spouses, or strangers.

4-Column Medium

1. Fear of:

Not being respected – in the workplace, in the marriage, in the fellowship, in the family, in public. Being talked over, dismissed, condescended to, overlooked, corrected in front of others, left out of decisions. The fear that others don't take me seriously and never will.

This fear appears in 6 of the 12 resentment examples – more than almost any other fear in the inventory. It shows up under Ambition (*"I want the respect of others"* – #1 Mr. Brown, #2 Mrs. Jones, #3 My Employer) and under Sex Relations (*"A real man commands the respect of their family"* – #4 My Wife; *"A real woman commands respect and can control the situation"* – #5 Susie). The fact that it cuts across both ambition and sex relations reveals something important: this is not just a workplace fear. It is a fear about identity itself.

2. Why:

Character defects: Pride, ego, vanity, self-centeredness, insecurity, dishonesty, anger, resentment, entitlement, self-pity, comparison.

SDSF breakdown:

- **Selfish:** I want to be seen as important. I want my opinions to carry weight. I want to be the person in the room who matters most. When I don't get that, I feel cheated – as

though something has been stolen from me.

- **Dishonest:** I tell myself I just want to be treated fairly. But fair treatment is not what I'm after. I want *preferential* treatment disguised as fairness. I also hide the parts of myself I'm afraid won't be respected – which means the "respect" I receive is for a version of me that doesn't exist.
- **Self-seeking:** I perform competence, dominance, or charm to extract respect from people. I name-drop, one-up, correct others, and steer conversations toward topics where I'm the expert. I seek respect the way an addict seeks a fix – the relief is temporary, and I always need more.
- **Fearful:** I'm afraid that without the respect of others, I have no evidence that I matter. I've outsourced my self-worth to other people's opinions. When the supply is cut off, I feel empty.

Areas of self affected:

- **Ambition:** *"I want the respect of others."* This is the demand that the world recognize my value. It appears in examples #1-3 as a workplace fear and in #5-6 as a social fear.
- **Sex Relations:** *"A real man commands respect."* / *"A real woman commands respect."* This is the belief that my gender identity depends on whether I can control how others treat me. It appears in #4 and #5, connecting respect to masculinity, femininity, and relational power.

The self-fulfilling cycle: I demand respect. People sense the demand – the posturing, the defensiveness, the need to be right – and they pull away. I interpret their distance as disrespect. So I demand harder: louder, angrier, more controlling. They pull further away. The very thing I do to earn respect destroys it. The cycle runs until I am isolated, resentful, and convinced that the world is against me – when in reality, I drove it away.

3. Self-Reliance:

Behavioral patterns:

- Dominating conversations to demonstrate knowledge or authority
- Getting visibly angry or cold when challenged, corrected, or contradicted
- Gossiping about people who don't show me respect – cutting them down to feel taller

- Avoiding situations where I might not be the most competent person in the room
- Keeping a mental ledger of slights and bringing them up later as ammunition
- Name-dropping, credential-citing, or referencing past achievements to establish status
- Retaliating against perceived disrespect through passive aggression, sarcasm, or withdrawal
- Comparing myself to others and feeling either superior (they don't deserve respect) or inferior (I'll never get it)

4. Better Way:

> *"This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (◆ BB p.67)*

> *"Our actor is self-centered – ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. He is like the retired business man who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the twentieth century; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia if the rest of the world would only behave." (◆ BB p.61)*

> *"We thought 'conditions' drove us to drink, and when we tried to correct these conditions and found that we couldn't to our entire satisfaction, our drinking went out of hand and we became alcoholics. It never occurred to us that we needed to change ourselves to meet conditions, whatever they were." (12&12, Step 4)*

> *"Many of us become clean in a confused state, and ourselves confused for a long time. Recovery through the Twelve Steps brought about a restoration to sanity." (NA, Step Two)*

Prayer: "God, remove my need for the respect of others. I have made their opinions my higher power and their approval my evidence of worth. Teach me that respect is not something I can demand, earn, or control. Let me focus on being respectable – honest, humble, useful – and leave the rest to You. When someone treats me with disrespect, help me pray for them instead of punishing them. Remind me that my value was settled by You before anyone else had an opinion. Amen."

Cross-references: This fear connects directly to resentments toward Mr. Brown (#1, #6), where workplace competition triggers the demand for respect; Mrs. Jones (#2), where social snubbing exposes the fear; My Employer (#3), where professional authority intersects with the need to be valued; My Wife (#4), where "a real man commands the respect of their family" reveals the deepest layer; and Susie (#5), where friendship betrayal exposes the demand for respect among peers.

4-Column Expanded

1. Fear of: Not Being Respected

Not being respected – in any setting, by anyone. The fear that others see me as small, unimportant, incompetent, or beneath them. The fear that my words carry no weight, my presence makes no difference, and my contributions go unnoticed. The fear that the people I live with, work with, and worship with look at me and see someone not worth listening to.

This is one of the most pervasive fears in the resentment inventory. It appears in six of twelve examples across two distinct areas of self – Ambition and Sex Relations – which means it operates in both the public sphere (career, reputation, social standing) and the private sphere (marriage, family, sexuality, identity). Most fears appear in one or two examples. This one appears in half of them. That frequency is not a coincidence. It points to something deep in the addict's psychology: a fundamental uncertainty about whether we matter.

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2. Why – Expanded

Character defects:

- **Pride:** I believe I deserve respect. Not as a basic human dignity, but as a tribute to my specialness. When it's not offered, I'm offended – as though a tax hasn't been paid.
- **Ego:** My sense of self is inflated and fragile at the same time. I need constant external validation to keep the balloon full. Without it, I deflate.

- **Vanity:** I care deeply about how I appear to others. I curate my image – competent, successful, in control. Disrespect cracks the facade.
- **Self-centeredness:** I interpret everything through the lens of "what does this say about me?" Someone disagrees with me at work – it's about me. My wife challenges me – it's about me. A friend forgets to call – it's about me.
- **Insecurity:** The demand for respect is a defense against the suspicion that I don't deserve it. If I were truly confident, I wouldn't need anyone to respect me. The louder the demand, the deeper the insecurity.
- **Dishonesty:** I present a false version of myself – more competent, more together, more in control than I really am. Then I demand respect for the performance. The dishonesty is double: I lie about who I am, then I resent people for not respecting the lie.
- **Anger:** When respect is not given, I default to anger. The anger feels powerful – it feels like strength. But it's actually a cover for the vulnerability underneath.
- **Resentment:** I build cases against people who've disrespected me. I catalog slights. I replay conversations. The resentment becomes a full-time occupation, consuming energy that could go toward actually living.
- **Entitlement:** I believe I've earned special treatment. I've worked hard, I've suffered, I've accomplished things – therefore the world owes me recognition. When it doesn't arrive, I feel robbed.
- **Self-pity:** "Nobody appreciates me. Nobody sees what I've done. Nobody understands what I'm dealing with." Self-pity is entitlement in mourning.
- **Comparison:** I measure my respect against what others receive. If they get more, I'm furious. If they get less, I'm temporarily satisfied – until the next comparison.

Cognitive distortions:

- **Personalisation:** "They didn't ask my opinion because they don't respect me." In reality, they may have simply forgotten, been in a hurry, or assumed I already agreed. But I make it about me – always about me.
- **Belief in mind-reading:** "I can tell by the way he looked at me that he thinks I'm beneath him." I assign motives to people based on my own insecurity. I read contempt into neutral expressions. I project my self-judgment onto others and then resent them for what I put in their heads.

- **Splitting:** "Either you respect me or you're my enemy." There is no middle ground. A single perceived slight erases a history of positive regard. People are either for me or against me, and I decide which based on how they make me feel in any given moment.
- **Emotional reasoning:** "I feel disrespected, so I must have been disrespected." The feeling is treated as evidence. If I feel small, someone must have made me small. The possibility that the feeling comes from inside me – from my own insecurity – is not considered.
- **False generalisation:** "He didn't listen to me in that meeting, so no one at work respects me." One incident becomes a universal truth. One person's behavior becomes everyone's verdict.

Areas of self – detailed:

- **Ambition:** *"I want the respect of others."* This statement appears in examples #1, #2, and #3 – the three workplace resentments. The ambition is not really about respect. It's about status. I want to be seen as someone who matters, someone whose opinion counts, someone who cannot be dismissed. When I don't get that, I feel my position in the world is under threat.
- **Sex Relations:** *"A real man commands respect"* (#4 My Wife). *"A real woman commands respect and can control the situation"* (#5 Susie). Here the fear of disrespect is woven into gender identity. For the male addict, disrespect from a wife or partner strikes at masculinity itself: "If she doesn't respect me, am I even a man?" For the female addict, disrespect from friends or partners strikes at worth and agency: "If they don't respect me, I have no power." In both cases, respect is confused with control – and the loss of respect feels like the loss of self.

Psychology:

Narcissistic vulnerability is the clinical term for what most addicts experience around respect. It is not narcissistic personality disorder – it is a fragile self-esteem that depends on external validation and reacts intensely to perceived slights. Research by Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) distinguishes between "grandiose narcissism" (I am great and you should know it) and "vulnerable narcissism" (I need you to tell me I'm great because I'm not sure). Most addicts live in the second category. The grandiosity is a shell around the vulnerability. Disrespect cracks the shell and exposes the wound underneath.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) identifies three basic human needs: autonomy (I can make my own choices), competence (I can do things effectively), and relatedness (I am connected to others). All three are implicated in the fear of not being respected. Disrespect threatens autonomy ("you don't get to decide"), competence ("you're not good enough"), and relatedness ("you don't belong here"). When all three are threatened simultaneously, the response is not just emotional discomfort – it is existential alarm. The self feels under siege. This is why a relatively minor slight – being interrupted in a meeting, being corrected in front of others – can produce a response wildly out of proportion to the event. It's not about the meeting. It's about whether I exist in the way I need to exist.

Terror management theory (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997) adds another layer. This theory holds that much of human behavior is motivated by the unconscious awareness of death. We manage this terror by building self-esteem and belonging to meaningful cultural groups – both of which make us feel significant, lasting, more than just biological organisms headed for the grave. Respect, in this framework, is a form of symbolic immortality: if others respect me, I matter; if I matter, I'm not just a body that will die and be forgotten. The fear of not being respected, then, is not ultimately about social status. It is about mortality. Disrespect whispers: *you are small, you are temporary, you will be forgotten.* No wonder it feels like a threat to survival.

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3. Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle:

I walk into a room already vigilant. I'm scanning for signs: Does he take me seriously? Did she acknowledge my contribution? Is anyone paying attention when I speak? The vigilance itself is a form of self-reliance – I am monitoring the world to make sure it treats me correctly, because I don't trust God (or the world) to take care of my worth without my supervision.

When I detect a threat – real or imagined – I react. I get louder. I get colder. I get aggressive. I correct people. I pull rank. I remind everyone of what I've done, what I know, what I've been through. The reaction is designed to restore respect, but it has the opposite effect. People don't respect people who demand respect. They tolerate them, avoid them,

or write them off. The more I demand, the less I receive. The less I receive, the more certain I become that the world is against me. So I demand harder. The cycle tightens until I am alone in a fortress of resentment, surrounded by people who have learned that the safest thing to do is keep their distance.

And here is the cruelest irony: the people who actually respect me – the ones who see something genuine in me – are the ones I push away fastest. Their respect doesn't register because it doesn't match the specific form I demanded. They respect my honesty, but I wanted them to respect my competence. They respect my kindness, but I wanted them to respect my intelligence. I reject the real respect and chase the imaginary version, and I end up with neither.

SDSF breakdown:

- **Selfish:** I make every interaction about me. Every conversation is an opportunity to establish my standing. I listen not to understand but to respond – and my response is always designed to elevate myself. Other people's needs, feelings, and perspectives are secondary to my need to be seen as important.
- **Dishonest:** I present a curated version of myself. I exaggerate accomplishments. I hide weaknesses. I pretend to know things I don't. I claim credit I don't deserve. And then I demand respect for the performance – which means the "respect" I receive is for someone who doesn't exist. I am also dishonest about my motives. I tell myself I want fairness and equality, but what I really want is deference. I tell myself the other person is the problem, but I know – somewhere underneath – that I'm the one keeping score.
- **Self-seeking:** I steer conversations toward topics where I can shine. I name-drop. I bring up credentials and past achievements. I seek out people who admire me and avoid people who challenge me. I collect compliments like currency and spend them in my head when the self-esteem account runs low. I use humor, charm, anger, or intellectual dominance – whatever tool works in the moment – to extract the respect I need.
- **Fearful:** I'm afraid that without the respect of others, I am nothing. I have made their regard the evidence of my existence. When it is withheld, I don't just feel disrespected – I feel erased. And underneath that: I'm afraid they're right. I'm afraid that the version of me I've been selling is the only version with any value, and if they don't buy it, there's nothing left.

Behavioral patterns:

- Dominating conversations to demonstrate knowledge, authority, or experience
- Interrupting others to assert my point before they finish theirs
- Getting visibly angry, cold, or withdrawn when challenged, corrected, or contradicted
- Gossiping about people who don't show me respect – tearing them down to build myself up
- Avoiding situations where I might not be the most competent, experienced, or knowledgeable person
- Keeping a detailed mental ledger of slights and deploying them in future arguments
- Name-dropping, credential-citing, and referencing past achievements to establish status
- Retaliating against perceived disrespect through passive aggression, sarcasm, silence, or social exclusion
- Comparing myself to others constantly – measuring who gets more recognition, more attention, more deference
- Refusing to ask for help because asking means admitting I don't already know

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4. Better Way – Expanded

Literature:

> *"This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (◆ BB p.67)*

This is the instruction for the moment of disrespect. Not: "stand up for yourself." Not: "demand what you deserve." But: this person who disrespected you is sick, just like you. How can you help them? The prayer doesn't say the disrespect doesn't matter. It says the disrespect is not the point. The point is: what will you become in response?

> *"Our actor is self-centered – ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. He is like the retired business man who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation." (◆ BB p.61)*

The actor analogy is the cure for the fear of not being respected. We are actors in a play we didn't write. God is the playwright, the director, and the audience. Our job is to play the role assigned – faithfully, to the best of our ability. Not to receive accolades for it. Not to make sure the other actors treat us as the lead. Not to rewrite the script so our character gets more lines. Just to play the part. "We are in the world to play the role He assigns" (◆ BB p.68) – not to receive standing ovations for it.

> *"We thought 'conditions' drove us to drink, and when we tried to correct these conditions and found that we couldn't to our entire satisfaction, our drinking went out of hand and we became alcoholics. It never occurred to us that we needed to change ourselves to meet conditions, whatever they were." (12&12, Step 4)*

I have spent my life trying to correct the "condition" of not being respected. I have tried to fix other people's perception of me instead of changing myself. The Twelve and Twelve makes it plain: the problem was never the condition. The problem was my refusal to change myself to meet it.

> *"We were newcomers to AA, and all we knew was that the old way of running our lives had not worked." (NA, Step Two)*

The old way – demanding respect, posturing for recognition, punishing people who didn't give it – did not work. It never worked. It left me resentful, isolated, and drinking.

Connection to the actor analogy:

The fear of not being respected is the actor believing he is the character. If I am the character, then the character's reputation is my reputation. Every slight is a wound. Every dismissal is a rejection of my essential self. But if I am the actor – a spirit playing a role that God assigned – then respect and disrespect are both part of the script. They happen to the character, not to me. The actor who plays Hamlet doesn't need the other characters to respect Hamlet. He needs to play his part well and let the playwright handle the rest.

"We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity." (◆ BB p.68)

Disrespect is a calamity. A small one, usually. But the response to it reveals whether I am living as the character or the actor. The character demands respect and falls apart without it. The actor plays his part and trusts the Director.

Prayer:

> *God, remove my fear of not being respected. I have made the opinions of others my higher power. I have demanded that the world see me the way I want to be seen, and I have punished anyone who refused. This is self-will, and it has failed me.*
>
> *Teach me that respect is not something I can demand or control. Teach me that my worth was settled by You before anyone else had an opinion. Help me focus on being respectable – honest, humble, useful, present – and release my grip on whether others notice.*
>
> *When someone treats me with disrespect, help me pray for them. When I feel the urge to retaliate, remind me: "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him?" When the old fear rises – the fear that without respect I am nothing – direct my attention to what You would have me be.*
>
> *I don't need their respect. I need Yours. And I already have it. Help me believe that. Amen.*

Practical actions:

1. **Use the sick-man prayer in the moment.** When someone disrespects you – interrupts you, dismisses you, talks down to you – silently pray: "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." Do not respond until the prayer is finished. The pause itself is the spiritual act.
2. **Examine where you demand respect vs. earn it.** Write two columns. Column one: situations where you demand respect (getting angry when challenged, pulling rank, name-dropping). Column two: situations where you earn respect (showing up consistently, doing honest work, keeping your word). Which column is longer? Which column produces the respect that actually lasts?
3. **Do service work where no one knows your name.** Clean up after a meeting. Set up chairs. Make coffee. Do something that no one will thank you for and no one will know you did. Practice being useful without being recognized. This is the antidote to the demand for respect.

4. **Stop keeping score.** For one week, refuse to catalog slights. When the urge arises to replay a disrespectful moment, pray: "God, I release this. My worth does not depend on how that person treated me." Write down each time you catch yourself keeping score. The frequency will show you how much mental real estate this fear occupies.
5. **Ask a trusted person: "Do you respect me? Why?"** Listen to the answer. Notice whether the reasons they give match the reasons you've been chasing. Most of the time, people respect us for things we take for granted – our honesty, our reliability, our willingness to show up. Not for the things we've been performing.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-68; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Steps 4 & 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 2-5; Step 04 Fear Solution guide (Step 04 21); Pincus & Lukowitsky, "Pathological Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder" (Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 2010); Deci & Ryan, Self-Determination Theory (1985); Greenberg, Solomon & Pyszczynski, Terror Management Theory (1997); Brene Brown, Daring Greatly (shame & vulnerability); Resentment Inventory examples #1-6

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