

What is Codependency?

- 1940's: Dr. Karen Horney describes a neurotic personality type found mostly in women define themselves through the dependency or approval of others. Suffering from "tyranny of the should."
- 40s - 50s: Derived from the term "co-alcoholic" from studies of Al-Anon groups for "friends and family" of alcoholic men who enable them and interfere with their recovery.
- 1980s: Mainstream self-help books for "relationship/love addicts" who conflate obsession and torment for a man as love.
 - Women Who Love Too Much: When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change by Robin Norwood
 - Codependent No More by Melody Beattie
- 1986 - Dr. Timmen Cermak wrote the paper "Diagnostic Criteria for Codependency" and proposed to include it in the DSM as a personality disorder but was rejected

What is Codependency *really* about?

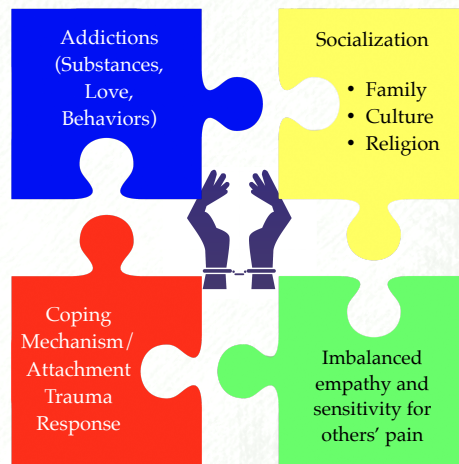
"A pattern of painful dependency on compulsive behaviors and on approval from others in an attempt to find safety, self-worth and identity." - Experts at the National Conference in Scottsdale, AZ, 1989

"Codependency is about the relationship you have with yourself. It's a set of characteristics and patterns of behavior we develop to help us cope, typically from a childhood that revolved around (but not limited to) addiction, emotional instability and trauma, and physical or mental illness." - Carol Weis

"The disease of a lost self...Childhood shame and trauma conceal their real, core self, which they can't access. Instead, codependents develop a persona in the world that reacts to others, to their own self-criticism, and to their imagined ideal of who they should be." - Darlene Lancer

Lack of a secure and authentic sense of self

Portrait of Codependency



Healthy Caretaking (Empathy) vs. Codependency

Maintain a sense of self when helping others

- See their values and self-worth come from within (self-validating)
- Have clear boundaries between self and others (emo, physically, mentally)
- Comfortable with being in solitude and being in connection
- Able to feel and express their feelings and meet their own needs without excessively relying on others

Easily get enmeshed in and lose oneself in the caretaking role

- Look to others to validate their self-esteem and self-worth
- Lack of boundaries and let others' behavior affect their emotions and actions
- Not comfortable with being alone and fear abandonment when not needed
- Disconnected from or suppressed their feelings and needs for the sake of keeping peace or being "good."

Stress Triggered

Core Feelings and Behaviors

Feelings:

- Anxiety and Fear
- Frustrated, Angry, and Resentment
- Shame and Inadequate
- Guilt
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Self-doubt
- Stressed and Burn-out
- Stuck or Imprisoned
- Powerless, Helpless, Victimized
- Empty, Lost and Lonely

Behaviors

- Denial, minimizing, excusing, enabling other's poor behaviors
- Compulsive rescuing, fixing, helping, caretaking "wounded" people
- Poor boundaries and Lack of Self-Care
- Extreme self-sacrificing/martyr
- Over-function in relationships by being overly responsible for other people's needs, feelings, and emotions —> people-pleasing and controlling behaviors
- Do too much, try too hard (fit in, be liked, needed, accepted) while neglecting oneself.
- Tendency to lose themselves in relationships

Cultural Differences or Unhealthy Behavior?

- Western independent / individualistic self vs Eastern interdependent / relational / collective sense of self (depend on our role-relationships and personal attachment to others)
- Self-worth is tied to meeting social / gender role expectations (parentification of eldest children, socialization of girls vs boys, the all-sacrificing mother, obedient and dutiful daughters / wives and sons).
- Concepts of boundary and power dynamic in relationship (Rigid top-down power hierarchy and physical boundaries based on age, gender, and social status but unclear mental and emotional boundaries between family members and SO).
- Concepts of Reciprocity, fear of Indebtedness, Losing Face, Filial Piety —> overly concerned about others' well-being, opinions, beliefs, and ideas over one's own needs as a way to protect and maintain the relationship.

From Codependency to Interdependence



Unhealthy Codependent

- Too much reliance and focus on others to the detriment of oneself
- One-sided give and take
- Little to no autonomy
- Weak, blurred, or non-existent boundaries
- Fearful of expressing needs or using manipulation/passive-aggressive tactics to control



Healthy Dependency

- Can freely receive help without shame
- Recognize when it's ok to reach out for support
- Not afraid to ask for what you need from the relationship
- Safety and autonomy are not threatened by expressing one's needs
- Feel safe to be vulnerable
- Healthy in infancy, childhood, and old age



Interdependent

- Balanced give and take without shame or guilt
- Recognize and show respect for others' differences
- Maintain clear but flexible boundary
- Comfortable with open and honest dialogue
- Shared responsibilities
- Offer and seek support when needed
- Healthy in adulthood



Healthy Independent

- Value autonomy, authenticity, and having a strong sense of self.
- Prioritize self-care and being self-sufficient without shame or guilt
- Cultivate inner resources and strengths to solve problems
- Have clear personal boundaries and independent thought
- Develop during adolescent and young adulthood



Unhealthy Independent

- Too much self and not enough respect for others
- Difficult relating to others
- Rigid and inflexible boundary
- Reluctant to share or show vulnerability
- Want to do it all without seeking help or support

Reflection Questions

How did you become aware of codependency and what does it mean to you?

Where do you see codependency patterns in your life, either in the past or present? What about in your family of origin or the AAPI community?

What messages or beliefs from your upbringing do you think contributed to the development and maintenance of codependency? How did that help or hurt you in your life, work and relationships?

What helpful messages do you have for yourself or other people whom you see struggling with codependency?

Resources

Babushkin, Anton. The Difference Between Codependency and Interdependence. <https://startmywellness.com/wellness-blog/the-difference-between-codependency-and-interdependence/>

Bacon, I., McKay, E., Reynolds, F. *et al.* The Lived Experience of Codependency: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Int J Ment Health Addiction* **18**, 754–771 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-018-9983-8>

Weis, Carol. Codependency Is About Your Relationship with Yourself. <https://psychcentral.com/blog/codependency-is-about-your-relationship-with-yourself#1>

What is Codependency? <https://www.willingways.org/what-is-codependency/#:~:text=In%20the%2040s%2C%20German%20psychoanalyst,%E2%80%9Ctyranny%20of%20the%20should.%E2%80%9D>