

Dependency and Denial

The Stories That Divide Us

Joseph Pawson



Psychotherapy Matters



ALSO IN THE PSYCHOTHERAPY MATTERS SERIES

Life and Hope Out of Darkness:
Creative Interventions for Helping People in Violent Communities
by Sarah Coleman

Bringing Your Heart to Work:
A Seven-Step Journey to Mental Health and Wellbeing
by Hazel A. Hyslop

Sexual Diversity
by Silva Neves

DEPENDENCY AND DENIAL

The Stories That Divide Us

Joseph Pawson



First published in 2026 by
Karnac Books Limited
62 Bucknell Road
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

Copyright © 2026 Joseph Pawson

The right of Joseph Pawson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80013-451-5 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-453-9 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-452-2 (PDF)

Typeset by vPrompt eServices Pvt Ltd, India



www.firingthemind.com

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
About the author	ix
Introduction	xi
<i>CHAPTER 1</i>	
The storms of early dependency	1
<i>CHAPTER 2</i>	
The stories of denial	13
<i>CHAPTER 3</i>	
The denial of dependency	23
<i>CHAPTER 4</i>	
Relationships	37
<i>CHAPTER 5</i>	
Identities of superiority	49
<i>CHAPTER 6</i>	
Becoming divided	61

<i>CHAPTER 7</i>	
The denial of interdependency	73
<i>CHAPTER 8</i>	
The return of the exiled	85
<i>CHAPTER 9</i>	
Embracing dependency	97
<i>CHAPTER 10</i>	
Discovering our interdependent nature	109
Conclusion	121
Notes	125
Index	131

Acknowledgements

To the many teachers I have been fortunate enough to have. I hope to reflect some of the gifts you have given me in the pages of this book. You are too many to name, but you know who you are, and I am truly grateful.

Specific thanks to those who have contributed to this book, including Conor for his belief and editing at the early stages. To my mother, Gilly, for the many hours spent editing page by page and for supporting me along the way. To Kate, Linda, and everyone on the publishing team who has helped make this book a reality.

To all my relationships, both supportive and challenging, that have led me towards my vulnerability. In particular, to Dani, who has been patiently alongside me whilst writing. And finally, to my clients, who courageously share their pain, enriching both this book and my life immeasurably.

About the author

Joseph Pawson is an integrative psychotherapist whose work brings together interpersonal and transpersonal approaches. Joe grew up in London, where early encounters with altered states of consciousness led him to Peru to explore traditional shamanic practices. There, his experiences inspired him to study herbal medicine at Westminster University, where he earned a first-class BSc. After three years in private clinical practice, he came to see the symbolic and psychological dimensions of healing as the most powerful aspect of his work. This recognition led him to train in integrative psychotherapy at the Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling, where he was able to develop the relational and interpersonal side of his practice. At the heart of his work is a trust that the unconscious intelligence latent in the psychotherapy process will unfold in its own time, given the right conditions. He works with a broad range of clients and carries out a significant portion of his practice online.

Introduction

We stand on the brink of both unprecedented crisis and extraordinary possibility. The environmental systems that sustain us are edging towards a point of collapse, and yet our modern era also offers us unparalleled opportunities to reimagine our world and alleviate suffering. Yet instead of confronting these frightening and astonishing potentials, our society seems to be increasingly plagued by divisions that put us at war with each other, rather than uniting us to face the future together. Beneath this baffling avoidance lies the very same psychological processes that underpin many of the problems that we face in our personal lives, such as anger, addiction, depression, anxiety, and relationship issues. In order to find our way through these struggles, we must turn towards what we both fear and need the most: our dependency on each other.

At the centre of our difficulties lies a paradox: our connection to each other is both the cause and remedy for our wounds. Where we have been hurt in the past, we protect ourselves by closing off our connection to others, denying our need for their care and attempting instead to look after ourselves. Whilst this illusion of self-sufficiency helps us to survive, it comes at a great cost. When we cut ourselves off from our pain, we split ourselves psychologically, exiling the most vulnerable parts of ourselves

that are in greatest need. We, like the society we live in, seek comfort in stories that sell us the idea that we are independent at the expense of dividing us from one another and our own deeper nature.

Stories are the lenses through which we see the world. They are the fundamental building blocks of psychological life, colouring our perception of everything and influencing us in ways that we are not even aware of. We need narratives to make sense of the world. They help us find meaning, order, identity, and safety. However, stories can be a double-edged sword, partnering with our own fear and pain to weave webs of denial that disconnect us from each other and exacerbate the divisions of sexism, racism, and bigotry of all kinds. This book follows the stories that we tell about ourselves and our need for others. It tracks them from their role in our early psychological development, through to their entanglements in our culture and finally into the therapy room itself. Like psychotherapy itself, this book is a journey to unearth the myths that we have taken as truths, so that we can uncover the hidden possibilities that lie beyond.

In changing our relationship to our need for others and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, we can deal with the difficulties that we face in our relationships and emotional lives at their very core. This, of course, is not a straightforward journey. We need to face the shame that we have become caught up in and the blame that we direct at others. We must let our symptoms and difficulties take us into our darkest depths to confront the wounds and pain that we had hoped to leave behind. This journey into the underworld is an ancient tale, one that has taken numerous forms throughout history and been told in many different cultures around the globe. It is the myth of travelling to the most hellish places in order to recover something of incredible importance that has been lost. This book follows in the footsteps of this story, describing the voyage taken in the process of psychotherapy to reclaim the wounded parts of ourselves that we have banished with our denial. In making this journey, we may not only find healing for our own problems, but also come to tend the wounds that lie within the tangled roots of our interconnection and, in doing so, find a sense of existential security and support that no narrative can give us.

We begin by exploring how our psychological worlds are shaped during early childhood through the lens of developmental

psychotherapy. In doing so, we discover how we build our maps of the world upon stories that make our experience of the world seem meaningful, consistent, and safe, but require us to deny elements of our experience. We follow this developmental arc further and examine how, when we grow up, we inevitably have experiences where our needs are not met. We deal with these by splitting off from the parts of ourselves that experience our unmet needs, leaving behind a vital piece of our being. The many different consequences that this has on our interpersonal relationships are explored in detail with stories from the therapy room alongside reflections on how these same difficulties present in the problems that we face as a society. We then study how the denial of our dependency splits our inner world in two and disconnects us from a greater interdependent wholeness, drawing on Buddhist ideas and the theories of Carl Jung. Returning to the therapy room, we follow the path to recovering our abandoned dependency and healing our wounded relationships through the process of psychotherapy. Lastly, we discover how in embracing our dependency, our interconnected nature is revealed, and we explore the profound implications this has for our personal lives and society at large.

A final word before we start our journey. It is worth keeping in mind that all narratives are incomplete truths. When we look at the world from a particular vantage point, our perspective both reveals and conceals aspects of a bigger picture. As we bring things into sharper focus, we lose sight of the background. Therefore, where the reflections in this book become increasingly specific, such as those on British culture and the problems in society, the more incomplete these views will inevitably become, and the greater there is potential for difference and division: this is inescapable. However, the intention of this book is not to promote a specific way of seeing the world, but rather to champion the value of reflection, so that we can hold our perspectives just a little less tightly and, in doing so, open up to experiencing the vastness of what lies beyond the stories we tell.

Client confidentiality

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of ethical psychotherapy practice. Confidentiality not only includes concealing a client's identity, but

extends to handling and treating their stories with the same sensitive care that is embodied within the therapy itself. As psychotherapists, we all carry our clients' stories within us, and it is the spirit in which we hold them that reflects the care that is present in our work. For this reason, all case studies and dialogues used have been altered and amalgamated with other clinical material and experiences to create new narratives that any one client would not recognise as their own. The stories told, however, are essentially true in that they reflect many different aspects of real experiences and clinical practice.