COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

Emotional Dependency



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The Essentials of Applied Psychology
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Disclaimer: This book is a tool for information and personal development.
It is in no way a substitute for professional therapeutic care.

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INTRODUCTION -- To Love or to Need: The Fundamental Distinction

There is a question I systematically ask during the first sessions with my clients: "Do you love this person, or do you need them?" The answer, almost invariably, is silence. A heavy silence, laden with confusion, sometimes with pain. Because in our culture, we have learned to confuse these two movements of the heart -- love and need -- to the point of no longer being able to tell them apart.

This confusion is not insignificant. It is, in many ways, the source of immense suffering. When we love someone, we rejoice in their presence and accept their absence. When we need someone, their absence becomes an internal hemorrhage, a panic that invades every cell of our body. Love is generous; need is voracious. Love liberates; need chains. Love makes us grow; need diminishes us.

In my practice, I see men and women who suffer from what clinical psychology calls emotional dependency. They are not weak people. They are not people incapable of loving. They are, on the contrary, beings of often remarkable sensitivity, of extraordinary empathic capacity, who simply learned -- very early, often in childhood -- that love must be earned, that solitude is dangerous, and that their worth depends on how others see them.

Emotional dependency is not a fate. It is a learned pattern, and any learned pattern can be unlearned. This is precisely the purpose of this book: to guide you, step by step, toward understanding your emotional mechanisms, and to offer you concrete, scientifically validated tools to free yourself from them.

What this book will bring you

In the eight chapters that make up this work, we will walk a path together that leads from awareness to transformation. We will begin by precisely defining what emotional dependency is, distinguishing it from the healthy attachment that enriches human relationships. We will then explore codependency, that particular form where the need for the other disguises itself as devotion. We will delve into the roots of this dependency, tracing it back to childhood attachment experiences. We will dissect the toxic cycle that keeps the dependent person trapped in their patterns. We will confront the fear of abandonment, that core wound fueling all dependency behaviors. We will examine enmeshment, the loss of identity that occurs when one dissolves into the other. Then we will chart the path toward emotional autonomy, before discovering what a truly balanced relationship looks like.

Each chapter is illustrated with fictional clinical cases -- inspired by real situations but entirely anonymized and reconstructed -- that may allow you to recognize yourself in some of these stories. Each chapter also offers practical exercises that you can complete on your own or with a professional's guidance.

A scientific and compassionate approach

My approach is grounded in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), enriched by John Bowlby's attachment theory, Jeffrey Young's schema therapy, and contemporary research on relational addictions. Every assertion in this book is supported by scientific references, primarily from the PubMed database, which you will find in the bibliography.

But beyond scientific rigor, this book is first and foremost an act of compassion. If you are holding it in your hands, it is probably because you are suffering, or because you are supporting someone who is suffering. I want you to know this: emotional dependency is not a defect. It is a survival strategy that your psyche put in place at a time when it was necessary. Today, this strategy causes you suffering because it is no longer adaptive. You have the right to set it down. You have the right to choose yourself.

Who this book is for

This book is for anyone who recognizes themselves in one of these situations: you cannot stand being alone. You feel as though you do not exist outside of a romantic relationship. You accept the unacceptable to avoid losing the other person. You tend to lose yourself in your relationships. You move from one relationship to the next without ever taking the time to find yourself. You confuse emotional intensity with true love. You have a visceral, overwhelming fear of abandonment.

It is also intended for helping professionals -- psychologists, psychotherapists, coaches, social workers -- who wish to deepen their understanding of emotional dependency and enrich their therapeutic toolbox.

A note on terminology

You will notice that throughout this book, I use the term "emotional dependency" rather than "love addiction," although the two expressions are sometimes used interchangeably. This choice is deliberate. The term "addiction" implies a pathologization that does not always seem justified -- many people display traits of emotional dependency without meeting the clinical criteria for addiction. The term "dependency" is more encompassing, less stigmatizing, and better captures the spectrum I mentioned earlier.

Likewise, I use masculine and feminine pronouns interchangeably in examples and clinical cases. Emotional dependency knows no gender or sexual orientation. It affects men and women equally, heterosexual and homosexual relationships alike, young couples and older couples. The underlying mechanisms are the same; only the expressions may vary depending on the social and cultural context.

How to use this book

This book can be read in two ways. The first is a linear reading, from beginning to end, which will allow you to progressively build your understanding of emotional dependency, from its roots to its solutions. The second is a thematic reading: if you already know which aspect of your functioning you wish to work on -- codependency, fear of abandonment, enmeshment -- you can go directly to the corresponding chapter.

I nevertheless recommend reading at least the introduction and Chapter 1 before diving into the thematic chapters, as they lay the conceptual foundations necessary for understanding the whole.

The practical exercises, offered at the end of each chapter, are designed to be completed in the order they appear. Each one builds on the skills developed by the previous ones. I encourage you to actually do them -- to write, to draw, to feel -- rather than simply reading them. Intellectual knowledge is necessary but insufficient; it is practice that truly transforms patterns.

Finally, equip yourself with a notebook that will accompany you throughout your reading. This notebook will become your transformation journal -- an intimate space to record your insights, your emotions, your progress and your difficulties. Reread it regularly: you will be surprised at how much you evolve, even when you feel you are stagnating.

A note on the therapeutic process

This book does not replace therapeutic support. It complements it, prepares for it, sometimes extends it. If you recognize deeply entrenched patterns of emotional dependency in yourself, I strongly encourage you to consult a professional trained in CBT or schema therapy. The exercises offered in this book can be completed independently, but their effectiveness will be greatly amplified within the framework of structured therapeutic support.

If you are already seeing a therapist, this book can serve as a useful support for your shared work. Do not hesitate to discuss it with your practitioner, to share your reactions, your questions, your insights. The dialogue between reading and therapy is often remarkably rich.

Are you ready? Then let us turn this first page together. Not toward a life without love -- quite the contrary -- but toward a life where love will no longer be a prison, but a free and joyful choice.