

# The Lost Role of Dependency in Psychotherapy

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This article critiques prevalent cultural understandings of dependency, and attempts to present a more rounded, de-pathologized conception of the experience of dependency in psychotherapy. Dependency is conceptualized as a developmental process, with the capacity for independence resting on the achievement of a "mature dependency." Excessive self-reliance is taken up as the counter-part to problematic dependency. A case study is presented in which the therapist initially varies the therapeutic frame to help the patient to develop a greater capacity to tolerate interpersonal dependency, and later implements a more traditional therapeutic structure.

“I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”  
Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

WHEN THE WORD *DEPENDENCY* appears in an article about psychotherapy, it is almost a given that the author's focus will be on the patient's dependency as a therapeutic problem and the therapist setting limits as the solution. For example, in a review of the literature on dependency and psychotherapy, Bornstein and Bowen (1995) cite a number of studies that suggest a correlation between dependent persons and elevated rates of depression (O'Neill and

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