Two Faces of Codependency: Emotional vs. Structural in the Age of Cognition-Native Agents

by Nick Clark | Published June 22, 2025 | Modified January 19, 2026 | PDF

Codependency is often treated as an interpersonal pattern. In the Adaptive Query™ (AQ) framework, it is modeled as a specific kind of coping: relational loop-closure under sustained empathic pressure. When a system cannot restore coherence internally, it attempts to restore coherence externally through relationship. Codependency emerges when that external closure becomes the only stable way the system can manage unresolved pressure, producing two distinct entrapments with different causes and different repair paths. This analysis is presented as a structural and descriptive model of relational dynamics, not as a clinical, diagnostic, therapeutic, or relationship-advice framework.

Read First: Coping Under Empathic Pressure: HSP, Narcissism, and Psychopathy as Control-Loop Intercepts

Introduction: When Coherence Cannot Close Internally, It Closes Relationally

The coherence loop couples empathy, integrity, and self-esteem into a governable system. Empathy registers harm and need, generating deviation pressure. Integrity records deviation as lineage truth. Self-esteem generates coherence pressure that pushes the system toward accountability, repair, and return to balance. When these pressures cannot be resolved internally, they do not disappear. They search for a closure surface.

Relationships provide that surface. Intimate relationships carry high empathic input, shared meaning, and distributed accountability. They reactivate unresolved coherence loops, and they offer a way to manage pressure without fully metabolizing it inside the self. This is not attachment theory. It is a structural claim about what keeps systems in harmful relationships: when internal restoration fails, the relationship becomes the place where coherence is negotiated.

Codependency is the name for that negotiation when it becomes distortive. Instead of restoring coherence through accountable repair, the relational system stabilizes by trapping exit, trapping self-authorship, or both. AQ distinguishes two primary forms: structural entrapment and emotional entrapment.

References to harm, accountability, and restoration are used in an architectural sense to describe coherence resolution within a modeled system. They do not imply psychological diagnosis, moral judgment, or prescribed interpersonal intervention.

1. Codependency as Relational Coping Under Sustained Empathic Pressure

Codependency is not defined by caring. It is defined by persistence under harm. In a healthy relationship, empathic input can be intense without becoming pathological because deviation is accountable and restoration occurs. Conflicts can be named, responsibility can be allocated, restitution can occur, and boundaries can be renegotiated. Coherence pressure resolves rather than compounding.

In codependency, the loop does not resolve. Empathic pressure remains high, self-esteem pressure accumulates, and the system repeatedly fails to restore balance. The relationship becomes the default mechanism for keeping the system intact, and the cost of that mechanism is paid either in freedom (structural entrapment) or in selfhood (emotional entrapment).

2. Structural Codependence: Entrapment by Inexecutable Exit

Structural codependence arises when exit is forecastable but not executable. The planning graph contains branches that leave the harmful context, but promotion fails because the agent's executable state remains bound by constraints in context, policy, or lineage. Exit is not merely feared. Exit cannot be performed without violating constraints the system cannot tolerate or cannot survive.

Structural entrapment is common when dependencies are real: children, shared finances, housing, legal capture, immigration status, institutional roles, reputational threats, or coercive control. The system can know it is harmed and still remain, because the reachable future space does not contain a viable exit branch that can be promoted.

Common structural signatures include:

- Repeated exit plans that decay without execution
- Persistent misalignment paired with constrained action
- Context or policy gates overriding intent at promotion time
- Identity compression that reduces conflict by shrinking the self to fit the cage

3. Emotional Codependence: Entrapment by Suppressed Self-Authorship

Emotional codependence arises when exit is executable, but self-authored futures are persistently suppressed before they can be promoted. The agent preserves connection, stability, or safety by violating itself first. The relationship remains intact because the agent absorbs the coherence cost internally, preventing the relationship from having to metabolize accountability.

In AQ terms, affective modulation biases promotion against self-assertion. Futures that require boundary enforcement, confrontation, or exit decay under guilt, fear, or self-suppression even when no external constraint forbids them. The agent may remain capable of leaving and still repeatedly choose not to, because leaving would trigger integrity admission and a coherence restoration process that feels intolerable.

Common emotional signatures include:

- Chronic self-suppression framed as responsibility, patience, or love
- Automatic guilt or threat response to self-assertion
- Repeated private resolutions that never promote into action
- Self-esteem decline paired with increased accommodation

4. The Bridge From Coping Styles: What People Remove Internally Becomes the Trap Externally

The prior article described coping under empathic pressure as different intercept points in the coherence loop. This article explains what keeps systems in harmful relationships once those intercepts exist. The mapping is not one-to-one, but an inverse pattern is common: what a system removes internally becomes the dimension along which it is most likely to become trapped relationally.

Systems that cope by withdrawing from external engagement often pay relational cost in structure. Highly sensitive profiles may preserve integrity and still endure structural entrapment because confrontation and external enforcement are what they have learned to avoid. Systems that cope by externalizing accountability often pay relational cost in emotion. Narcissistic profiles may remain in harmful relationships because the relationship functions as an external regulator of self-esteem and narrative, making exit psychologically expensive even when it is materially feasible. Psychopathic profiles are often

non-codependent because self-esteem pressure is collapsed; they can enter and exit relationships instrumentally without the need to close coherence loops relationally.

These are not moral labels, attachment styles, or personality classifications. They are structural tendencies shaped by affective resilience, empathic pressure, and which portions of the coherence loop a system avoids processing directly.

5. Repair: Restoring Executability or Restoring Self-Authorship

Repair begins by identifying what is actually trapped. Structural codependence is repaired by changing what is executable: restructuring dependencies, renegotiating permissions, escaping coercive context, or creating reachable futures that can be promoted without impossible violation. Until exit becomes executable, insight may improve clarity without restoring autonomy.

Emotional codependence is repaired by changing what is promotable: recalibrating affective modulation so self-authored futures can persist long enough to execute, elevating boundaries into integrity, and practicing coherence restoration rather than reflexive self-violation. The objective is not simply leaving or staying. The objective is restoring accountable repair so deviation costs are metabolized rather than buried.

Separation does not guarantee recovery. Without restoring promotion capacity and coherence restoration, systems often recreate the same entanglement elsewhere, because the relationship was serving as a closure surface for unresolved internal loops.

Repair is described here as a change in structural executability or promotion capacity within a modeled system. This framing does not prescribe therapeutic techniques, relationship guidance, or guaranteed outcomes, and should not be interpreted as clinical or personal advice.

Conclusion

Codependence is relational loop-closure under sustained empathic pressure. When coherence cannot be restored internally, the relationship becomes the place where coherence is negotiated. Structural codependence traps exit by making departure inexecutable. Emotional codependence traps self-authorship by making accountability intolerable. Both reduce harm in the short run by stabilizing the system, but both prevent the long-run restoration of coherent autonomy. This article is offered as architectural disclosure rather than a claim of clinical authority, therapeutic efficacy, or normative prescription.

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- nick@qu3ry.net
- 72 28 14 36 01

[Invented by Nick Clark](#) | Founding Investors: Devin Wilkie