

# Three forms of container pathology: towards a classification

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to make a contribution to understanding the nature of the pathology of container-contained through an appreciation of the pathology of the internal container. Bion described a parasitic "!" relationship which destroys rather than creating a mind capable of thinking its thoughts. This is described in this paper as a refusing container, in which the container does not want to know the contained and the contained does not wish to be known. Two additional pathological configurations are suggested, namely, the defective container and the non-existent container. The defective container is overwhelmed by the contained because of faulty alpha function. The mind with a non-existent internal container is not able to conceptualise an object-with-an-inside, and a two-dimensional object is consequently internalised. The three categories are distinguished by the nature of the construction of internal space and its relationship to projective identification. In the refusing container, there is a robust internal object which refuses to take in projections, which therefore become more desperate and more omnipotent. The defective container has a deficiently constructed internal space which is not able to hold or process the contained. Projective identifications thus go out into space, dispersing the personality. The lack of interior space in the non-existent category creates an internal object-without- an inside and this results in the atrophying of the function of projective identification. The personality uses adhesive identification in order to maintain itself as an entity.