

Episode intro:

People think somebody who really sees through projections is really smart, because they come up with really cool, unique, innovative ideas, or they act in a way that is seemingly not normal but yet it works. It is not so much really that they are smart or not smart. It is that they don't see the same level of limitation on everything that somebody who fully buys into the projections sees.

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My name is Brett Kistler. I am an adventurer, entrepreneur and a self exploration enthusiast. I am here with my co-host, Joe Hudson. Joe is a business coach who has spent decades working with some of the world's top executives and teams developing a unique model of human patterns that underpin how we operate with ourselves, each other and the world. A good entry point into this model is a mindset called VIEW, vulnerability, impartiality, empathy and wonder.

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Brett: Today we are going to talk about projections, so Joe, you have talked about projections a lot in our courses, this idea that from our past experience we create these beliefs that we carry into the present. This shapes our reality in the moment, and I would like to get into that a little bit further today. Joe, what are projections?

Joe: It is such a complicated subject because the word "projection" is used for many things. There is the psychological projection, which somewhat stems from Jung's work and some other psychologists. That is this idea that the parts of ourselves that we cannot own, the parts of ourselves that are either good or bad, but that we cannot have full ownership over. We project onto other people. This is something that happens when you are deeply triggered.

An easy way to look at this just briefly is, you look at most politicians, and if you see them really just accusing somebody else of something, you can see a way in which that is true about what they are doing as well. If you are dealing with somebody and they are like they are so arrogant, that comment in itself is arrogance. It is as if you can presume to know what their reality is. That's projecting the unknown parts of ourselves, and it can be positive things too, like oh my gosh, they are so smart. They understand everything, and I don't. That can

also be unowned parts of ourselves, positive unowned parts of ourselves that we then project on to other people. There is that. That is what we will call psychological projection.

Then, there is this projection onto the world, and that's more about how we lived our first eight or nine years of life, when we are theta brain waves and where we are basically learning what life is. We might learn that love is associated with shame or money is associated with lack. Authority is associated with anger. Then we go and recreate those projections in our life, because we are like, "That's what we learned it is.", and so you go into the world. You are in your 20s, 30s, your 40s, and you find out that everybody who you choose to have a romantic relationship with has a tendency to shame you, or you see money as something there is not enough of and then you are not able to have the money that you want or need. There is that kind of projection onto the world.

Then there is the projection of self, and the projection of self, which is closely related to the next projection, but I want to make a distinction between the two, the projection of self is that we don't really see the world. We see ourselves, or we don't really see reality. We see ourselves in reality. That would be like if somebody is a thief, they see the world as a world of thieves. If somebody has a deep relationship of self-love, then they see the world as love. Even when they see the atrocities of the world, they see it as people trying to love themselves, and they are not capable. The way that we see ourselves and relate to ourselves then is how we interpret the world. That's another level of projection, the projection of self.

The final projection that I see is the projection of I, which I am making a distinction here though there is not a real one, but I think it is useful to make the distinction. That's just the idea that there is a you that is separate. We have this identity. The way humans work is we have a sense of identity, and we don't know if other animals have that sense of identity. But we have a sense of identity. At the very core of that sense of identity is the idea that there is an I that exists as separate, and a tremendous amount of spiritual modalities. Ramana Maharishi is the most known example where a lot of the work is really to see the self not as something to be protected, not as the body, not as an emotional state, not as something that has existed for 45 years or whatever it is, but as illusory in nature or to see the self as the awareness of all of those things. That's the last way that I think about projection. It is those four ways I think about projection.

Brett: You have got psychological projection where you are projecting onto essentially someone else's psychology, making assumptions about their intent or their experience.

Joe: In that case, it is disowned parts of yourself, parts of yourself that you don't want to fully accept about yourself.

Brett: These can be parts that you judge about yourself, but also parts that you judge about yourself not having.

Joe: Correct.

Brett: Like in the case of admiration towards somebody.

Joe: Specifically, they can be things that you don't actually see in yourself. It is so disowned that you cannot even see it in yourself. If you see somebody as super brilliant, there is no person I have met that doesn't have their own level of brilliance in some capacity. If you see that, admire that, put that up on a pedestal, it is a strong indicator that you cannot see it in yourself. Similarly, if you are like that person is a thief, and you cannot see that you also have that in you and in your actions, then that's the psychological projection.

Brett: That's the psychological projection, and then you have got the projection onto the world, which is sort of your baked in assumptions about how the world works from your early childhood experience.

Joe: Yes, right.

Brett: You have got this projection of self. This isn't a projection onto yourself, but it is a projection of yourself onto the world, seeing the world the way you are internally organized.

Joe: Correct. That's right. I use the example of the saying in love, but if you think that it is really important to be dressed and put together, then you are likely to think it is important for other people to be dressed and put together. That's the simple version of it. What's good or bad for you is good or bad for the world. The way that you see yourself and relate to yourself is the way that you relate to the world.

Brett: If it is weak for you to cry, then it is weak for others to cry.

Joe: Correct, great example.

Brett: Then the last one is the projection of I, which is you are distinguishing from the projection of self as this one is more of a meta projection that you are a separate self from the world.

Joe: That you have an identity.

Brett: There is some boundary that is you.

Joe: If you think about that, if I cut you in half. If you think you are your body and I cut you in half, which half is you?

Brett: Or a split brain experiment, where they cut the corpus callosum and people had basically two very separate identities, each controlling half of the body and at odds with each other.

Joe: Exactly, or people think I am emotional. You were emotional, but what happens if that emotion just stops? Are you still emotional? Is it essentially you? What is essentially you is the question? Ramana Maharishi uses language like who am I. The deconstruction work of almost all spiritual traditions are getting to the basic underlying question of what you are essentially. What is that you are that you have always been? From the moment of birth to the moment of death, what is the unchangeable, immutable part of yourself?

Brett: Which I suppose is just a process of seeing through projections of the self, which changes our experience of the world as we do that. So as you mention emotions, how do emotions play into projections? How do they interact?

Joe: When we have big emotions, we learn differently. Part of how people brainwash folks is that they create big emotional experiences for them, and then that's what allows them to change habits. When we have big emotional experiences, it allows us to learn. If you want to redefine somebody's idea of themselves or idea of the world, basic training is an example of this. You create these big emotional experiences, and then they have a different sense of themselves at the end of it. Emotions are useful in that way. They are evolved to do that. If I get bit by a snake, and I have this big emotional experience and a big physical experience, I am less likely to be bitten by that snake in the future.

What this does is, it makes traumatic experiences really key definers of who we are. If we have had long-term abuse or we had a car accident or if we have been in a war, it starts to define us because it upends our learnings from those early days or maybe it even happens in those early days of life. They are really important that way. I think the nuance that people often don't quite get is that oftentimes people recognize when they have big emotions, that they are out of control themselves. You could say they are acting in trauma, or you can say they recognize that when that big emotion takes control, they do stuff they don't want to do.

The natural movement when they see that correlation is they assume causation, and in that assumption of causation, they say I need to manage my emotions so that I don't have big emotions, or I need to be in control of my emotions. What that path ultimately leads to is a level of disassociation. The emotions are still there. They are still moving us, but we disassociate from them. They become harder and harder to recognize.

The other way to think of it is to assume correlation. These things are together, and my job isn't to control them or suppress them or push them down. It is to learn how

to surf them and to love them and to accept them deeply, and to find the joy in them or to not resist them. If we take that step, then what happens is the emotional currents of our life become vitalizing. We fall in love with them. There still isn't control, meaning that we don't find ourselves succumbed to these big emotional experiences, because we start to see that that is just another level of resistance. But we don't disassociate from them, and we don't stop to see or recognize the massive impact that these emotional currents are having even if we have pushed them so far down that we don't feel them anymore. If we don't disassociate, we start to recognize that these big emotional currents in our lives are more like road signs rather than causation.

Brett: It almost sounds like you are describing sort of chicken or egg thing with projections or emotions, where the emotions we have in our early youth— Children are very emotional, and that correlates highly with their learning rate and how quickly they soak up information like a sponge. They create these projections, and then we carry these projections into our lives and tend to see the world as it was when we were kids, which will then tend to bring us back into those emotions we had when we were kids. If we let ourselves feel those emotions and process them, then being in this emotional state can allow us to shift our projections.

Joe: That's exactly it. I would say it is not that we only see the world. We create the world. When we are living through a projection, it is not just that we see the evidence that it is true. But you also attract the same experiences. You also manipulate events to create the same experience. On an emotional level, what's happening is that emotion that wasn't allowed to be felt all the way through, that wasn't allowed to move all the way through you is looking to recreate circumstances so it can move all the way through you, and then the circumstances stop getting recreated. That's how it works on an emotional level.

Brett: Then feeling the emotion completely allows the projection to shift into maybe some generalized form, because it seems like a projection is a limiting perception on the world.

Joe: Yeah, and that doesn't mean they are bad or good. They are just useful or more useful or less useful, meaning I project onto snakes that they are deadly. Now obviously all snakes aren't deadly, and I might find a snake and think it is deadly and jump away, but it is not deadly. The question is what the projections are that are useful, that create peace and joy, productivity, love in our lives, purpose, whatever it is that one thinks they are after. What are the projections that create the things that we are not after?

When you are doing the deep work, the stuff that was programmed in the early days, like if you were lucky enough to have parents that just deeply loved you and

were attuned to your emotional experience and wanted you to feel safe and protected and weren't emotionally trying to cajole you into certain emotions and not other emotions. Then, it is really easy for you to reproduce that kind of love in your life. But if you didn't get that, it is more challenging. It is those early projections, because we have a rational conscious mind, we can say that is the world I want to live in. Do I want to live in a world where love is conditional, or love is shame or love is control? Do I want to live in a world where love can be different?

We have the choice, and then the work is not just feeling the emotions but falling in love with them on an emotional level. Intellectually, to be able to just see them, to just identify them can be incredibly freeing, and then to work with them and say wow, I am in a projection. What if I take a contrary action? Intellectually, that is that way to work on them.

Brett: It also sounds like falling in love with the projections is part of this path, too. I've definitely seen and experienced in the process of discovering that projections exist and that everybody is doing them, there can be a process of, "I've identified a projection. That's bad. Projections are bad.", which is just another way of disowning yourself. The only way you can navigate a chaotic world is to create some kind of sense-making system of projections.

Joe: I have never thought about it as falling in love with projections, but it is beautifully said. Fighting against your projections is only a way that increases their stability.

Brett: I imagine going birdwatching, but you don't like birds. How many of them are you going to find? If you love finding a projection, it is like wow, I am projecting right now. That might be useful. Also, it might be useful to do it a little bit differently or experiment with it a little bit.

Joe: That's great. When you say how many birds you will find, it is like proof. For instance, if you talk to somebody and you say, "Tell me about a trauma that you had.", and let's say their trauma was that when I was a kid, I had a dad who would always yell at me. The lesson that I learned was that I had to be quiet to not get yelled at. Let's just say. Let's keep it simple. That's the data they picked up. The data that they didn't pick up was the ways that they still asserted themselves even by not speaking up. They didn't learn that, "Wow, I can survive a tyrant in my home, not that I have to, but I can." The information that they didn't pick up was that mom was actually loving me the whole time, or I didn't pick up the information that dad did love me from time to time. There was this love that was available.

What's interesting is our brain is adapted to pay more attention to the negative things, and so oftentimes one of the ways we recreate these things is to only see the evidence that supports the pattern, the projection.

Brett: What is the practice then of becoming more aware of these projections and reengineering them?

Joe: I mean it is different for the different levels of projection. In the psychological projection, everywhere you are triggered, you are triggering an unknown part of yourself. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't be triggered. It doesn't mean that you are not right. It just means that you are also projecting it on to somebody else. Every time that you are triggered is a great example of how you are projecting a disowned part of yourself or anyway in which you idolize somebody, you are projecting a disowned part of yourself. That's a good way to work on the psychological projection.

The projection on the world is just a really easy thing to do, is just list out 10 things that are important to you, like money, love, authority, decision making, whatever they are. Then, ask yourself what the essential learning was you had from your childhood about money and love and authority, and notice how you are recreating those things and notice how you are manipulating the world into it. I'll give you an example in a second here— How you are attracting it and notice how you are proving it.

An example of this is just like almost everybody at some point in their lives, you keep on dating the same person with different names. I used to attract or create this world in which I was going to be emotionally abandoned. One of the things that I did was I attracted people who were more likely to emotionally abandon me. I was attracted to them. The other thing I did was, I manipulated the world to do that, so when I felt unheard, instead of saying ouch, I feel unheard and I would really like to be heard, I would get angry. You are not hearing me. Because I was in my trauma, and then that of course would push them away even further.

Then I would look around the world and I would say that person emotionally abandoned me, and that person emotionally abandoned me, but I wasn't noticing all the people who weren't or who really wanted not to, and I wasn't allowing it. I was abandoning them. That's the way to look at it as far as that level of projection. Then on the projection of I, I mean the easiest thing to do is say what I am, and really sit in the question rather than to look for an answer. But there are other things you can do as well, which is just notice the part of yourself that has always been there or put your attention on to a tension. There are lots of things that help you see through the false sense of identity, the kernel of that identity being that you exist as a separate thing or as a non-separate thing even. The kernel of the identity is that I exist.

Brett: Another area that I have heard this concept, kind of a metaphor, is something called object fixation or target fixation. If you are flying a parachute and

you want to land in a field, but there is a tree in the field, if you look at the tree, you are probably going to hit the tree. Driving a motorcycle around a corner, if you look into the ditch, you are going to go into the ditch.

Joe: That's a beautiful metaphor. I really like that metaphor.

Brett: There have been lots of times in my life when I have seen some kind of disaster coming in business or in a relationship. I am not wanting it, but I am scared of it, which makes me think of it more, which makes me see and look for the evidence of it more and not see the other paths available to me, and then the thing happens. I am then surprised for some reason.

Joe: Right now, I got in touch with an old friend, and he is in a state of believing that he is bad and incapable. You can watch this reality that he is living in, create itself. He needs to do something at his job, and he doesn't want to feel the anger of his boss, so he doesn't need to do the thing that he needs to do to make sure that job is done right, because he is trying to avoid the anger. Then, by not doing the thing he needs to do, he has got more evidence that he is bad and incapable, because he is trying to avoid the feeling of being bad and incapable by being yelled at by his boss. That's how the whole thing moves. It is like as we see ourselves as a certain way, subconsciously or consciously, we are recreating that over and over and over again.

Brett: So that's how that ties into this projection of I being the base level projection of all of these really. Because the more you see yourself as any certain thing defined by any particular characteristics or identity, then that's going to set the context for the projections you are going to have in your relationships, in the world and upon yourself.

Joe: That's right. Unfortunately, even if you see through the I, it doesn't really resolve the emotional stuff. You can have a lot of cognitive freedom. You can have a lot of intellectual freedom when you see through the personal I, when you have that kind of awakening, but it doesn't change the emotional experience of stuff. In fact, it can make the emotional experience harder to access, because it starts operating at a more disassociated way or in a lower-level way harder to recognize way. The freedom of the intellect is great, but it is far more productive to meet it with the emotional freedom as well, with the loving of all of the emotional experiences that are happening.

Brett: That's really interesting to me. I am very intellectual, heavily weighted on the intellectual, personally, and so the more I start to recognize some of my own projections, they can easily just become a way to be not good enough. I am still living in this. I don't know how to get out of this particular projection, but I see it. I

am frustrated by it now. There is this layer of frustration as an emotion to feel on top of whatever emotion is driving that projection to begin with.

Joe: That's one way it happens. Another way it happens is the emotional scenery becomes more and more in the background, but it is still driving you. I know we have talked about this. We cannot make decisions intellectually. All of our decision making is emotional. If you remove the emotional center of a brain, then a person ceases to make decisions even though their intellect, their IQ is still operating at the same level. The emotions are still moving us, but they have become so far in the background. There is this kind of way of saying nothing is real, nothing is true, there is no I, and yet all of these emotional decisions are still happening. Still there is this level of drama and chaos in life, even if you go and move to a monastery. It is still there.

Brett: What then is the way to take the information from this episode and understanding this existence of projection, become more aware of them and use that as breadcrumbs into the emotional experience underlying them?

Joe: On the intellectual level, I think the underlying problem that people experience when they start to recognize projections is, they will be confronted with a reality that everything is a projection. There is nothing that we see or do that isn't a projection. If you want a direct experience of this, just look at a tree. It is better if you look at a living thing and see it as a tree. This is a tree. I see it as a tree. Then, see it not as a tree. See it as this is just this thing that's in front of me, no label, no projection, no need to identify, classify, and just be in the presence of the tree.

When people talk about deep presence, this is what they are talking about is to have a moment or two without the projection operating at full speed. Not that it is not always operating, not that it is not accessible to us at any time, but to really just be in what is in this moment without any of the labels and stuff. You can get that really direct sense of being more in projection and less in projection. The issue that arises, like I was at least trying to say, was that at some point you see the whole world as a projection, the whole thing. There is no thought you can fully trust. There is no emotional experience you can fully trust. There is no body sensation you can fully trust. It doesn't mean you can't trust, but it is literally like the world becomes a kaleidoscope.

That's some scary shit. Because if you interpret it as "I am in control, oh my God, it is a kaleidoscope, I don't know what to do, I am out of control!", it can be very, very scary. It can be something you really, really want to avoid. The idea of projection itself is something that often people will accept and embrace very slowly, because they have to confront this thing. If they do it really quickly, it is just really important. If you really can all of a sudden just see this whole world is a projection, it is really

important to see that essentially that's not going to stop you from operating at any level at all. It just is what is, and there is this huge freedom to it. Oh wow, I don't have to take anything seriously, and yet I can still enjoy myself and yet I can still have purpose and yet I can still be productive. But I can take everything with this light-hearted joy that comes about. So that's the intellectual issue is that at some point you come across this idea that everything is a projection, and you are like crap. There is this fear.

As far as the emotional part goes, it is kind of different for people who haven't had the kind of identity of self switched to awareness or to the infinite and those who have had that switch happen. If the switch hasn't happened, then leaning into your emotional states, loving your emotional states, inviting your emotional states, seeing the emotional states when they are out of control is just another form of resistance. Allowing them to move through your body, looking forward to them, that's the work. That's the really powerful work. If it is afterwards, that's the same work, but you have another step on top of it, a step for the before, which is to dig them out. It is to really deeply go in and look for the most nuanced little emotional shift and plumb the depths of that and almost magnify it.

One of the people who taught me about this stuff, he used to work with monks. I think he worked with Trappist monks and Tibetan monks, all sorts of monks. He said when I do the work with them, it is like dragging them back into hell, because they have to go back into the emotional experience they had pushed so far into the background. When that is happening, the thing is that you see people who have that peace but without the joy, when they have calmness, but they don't have the exuberance of life, like if they don't laugh easily, that's a pretty good indicator that the identity has shifted but the emotional experience has been suppressed.

Brett: A lot of this conversation is reminding me of this psychological test that can be conducted. You think of an object, and then you have 10 minutes to write down how many uses for that object you can think of. Let's say for a brick. Your projection would be this is a brick. It is used for masonry, and you could build a wall with it. But the more you start to see the brick just as an object, as just something that it is not a brick, then you could start to see other purposes for it, like counterweight for an elevator or you could break into sand and make playdough out of it, or a million other uses.

I think the same thing can be true for an emotion that a projection might come from. I am angry. That means somebody else has wronged me, and it is their fault. That's one projection of this emotion, but if I just go into the essence of the emotion and feel that, then what else might that mean for me? What other richness might there be in that experience?

Joe: That's cool. First of all, never heard it explained like that, and I am really digging that. Second of all, I thought you were talking about something different, which it also applies to. Let's start with the emotional experience. That anger could be an indication that I haven't drawn the boundary I need to draw. That anger could be an indication that I am not taking care of myself. That anger could be an indication that somebody has wronged me. You are right. All of that is levels of projection.

The thing I thought you were talking about, which also seems like a really cool idea to me, which is the brick could be this, the brick could be that, it is the same with projections. Oftentimes something that happens when people start seeing through their projections, they have a lot more opportunity in front of them. They see a lot more options. The array of possibilities opens up to them, and so a lot of times people think somebody who really sees through projections is really smart, because they come up with really cool, unique, innovative ideas, or they act in a way that is seemingly not normal but yet it works. It is not so much really that they are smart or not smart. It is that they don't see the same level of limitation on everything that somebody who fully buys into the projections sees.

Brett: Right, that is something that I meant by that as well. I went the emotion route, but really I think this applies everywhere. This is really kind of the core of how VIEW can change our lives, because particularly impartiality and wonder, but also vulnerability for other people to have this experience with you with getting more information and empathy, being curious about other people's experience and being with them in it. These characteristics or these traits lead us to have a more granular awareness of reality, beyond the initial assumptions we might have had, even though those initial assumptions still exist, and they still can guide our behavior and allow us to act quickly and effectively. The more we can become aware of them and the more we can see them for what they are, as projections, then the more granular our awareness of the world around us can be and the more we can start to see other possible interpretations of the world than the ones that we have started with.

Joe: Again, that is the third time on this podcast. I have seen it that way, and it is such a beautiful articulation of it. It is such a great story to build around it, because that's absolutely how it works when you look at it that way.

Brett: Of course, that's also just a projection.

Joe: Of course, that's also just a projection. That's the thing. That's another thing that's really cool about this work is, I know you have seen this in my work, but I will go and pontificate on something, because that is what I am asked to do. Then, they will say you are totally wrong about that. I will be like yeap, that's true. I can

absolutely see the world in which everything I am saying is incorrect, because I can see that there is some correctness in every point of view and some fallacy in every point of view. The fear for me when I was entering into that way of looking at the world was, “Oh shit, I will never be able to act. How will I act if I don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong? How will I be able to act if I know that everything is and isn’t true and act the same way that you would, if you were an animal or a dragonfly?”

Actions still exist, and you are still processing information. You are still having emotions, but what happens is, you start choosing the projection that serves you best, the projection that allows for more freedom, that allows for more love, that allows for more joy. You start choosing it, but you can’t stop seeing through it. You just realize at some point if all of it is true and not true, then I actually just get to be who I am, who I want to be.

Brett: I think the more that you accept all of your projects rather than labeling some of them as good or some of them as bad, then the more all of them can kind of be present in each moment and your entire past experience can sort of average out to one statistically most likely scenario, one specific next step from each scenario that is likely to have the better outcome, but nothing is guaranteed.

Joe: Yeah, and you don’t really give a shit if it is guaranteed or not, because whatever shows up in your field, it is not resisted and it is not labeled. If I was to choose, do I want to go to prison and love myself or do I want to stay out in the free world and hate myself? Consequences become less important than the actual freedom to see yourself in the world in a way that is enlivening, that is joyful.

Brett: That seems like a great stopping point for this episode. Do you have any integration questions for us, Joe?

Joe: One question that arises is, if you write down four of the things that trigger you most in the world, in what ways are you judging or disowning that part of yourself? In what ways are you judging or disowning that part of yourself? Second question is, if you are looking deeply at who you admire or who you put on a pedestal, what are the parts of them that you admire and how do you not own that aspect of yourself? The last question is, what’s looking out behind your eyes?

Brett: That’s a good one.

Joe: I encourage you not to answer that question, just be in it.

Brett: Wonderful. Thank you, Joe.

Joe: Thank you, Brett.

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