Why Do I Do That?

Psychological Defense Mechanisms and
the Hidden Ways They Shape Our Lives

by

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To all my clients these many years, especially R. and S.

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INTRODUCTION

I began my training as a psychotherapist more than 30 years ago and I've spent most of my career since then in private practice, working with adults who came to me because of unbearable anxiety or depression, unhappiness in their marriage, an eating disorder, shame or self-loathing, compulsive behavior – for many different reasons but each one involving deep pain. This book represents my effort to distill that experience and what I've learned into a useful guide for people who aren't necessarily in therapy and may not be able to afford it.

I view human nature and psychology from a *psychodynamic perspective*: I believe that for each and every one of us, hidden aspects of our mental life remain outside of awareness and are thus *unconscious*. As a psychodynamic psychotherapist, my job is to acquaint clients with those unknown parts, and one of the primary ways I do this is by helping them to understand the *psychological defense mechanisms* that keep painful emotions, thoughts and fears outside of awareness.

Those defense mechanisms are the subject matter of this book: how they function, the painful elements of human experience they typically exclude from awareness, the reasons why we rely upon them and the potentially great benefits of acknowledging and facing the unconscious pain that lies behind them. Psychological defense mechanisms are a universal and necessary part of human psychology; they protect and help us to navigate the more difficult aspects of human experience, but often,

they stand in the way of growth and satisfaction. Rigid or deeply entrenched defenses may prevent us from getting what we truly need in our relationships, from leading a rich emotional life and living in ways that promote authentic self-esteem. This book will help you recognize your own defense mechanisms at work and determine when you need to move beyond them in order to grow.

Although confronting pain may seem like a difficult chore, it can also be a liberating and exciting experience. What could be more fascinating than to probe your own depths, to recognize the rich psychological complexity of your friends, family members and acquaintances, to view human relationships with deeper understanding? After so many years in practice, I still love my work and find other people endlessly fascinating; I hope this book will impart some of that enthusiasm to you, as well.

My aim is to explain the central concepts and strategies of psychodynamic psychotherapy as I practice it, adapting them to a course of individual self-exploration outside of treatment. *Why Do I Do That?* begins by discussing the nature and purpose of psychological defense mechanisms, as well as those difficult aspects of the human experience that typically give rise to them (Part I). In the long middle section of the book (Part II), I take a closer look at the most important defense mechanisms, with exercises to help readers recognize their own defenses at work and identify unconscious feelings behind them. Part III concludes with several chapters that discuss ways to disarm those defenses and cope more effectively with our most difficult emotions.

In the coming pages, I'll spend a great deal of time discussing and helping readers become aware of pain which they may have a difficult time facing. The experience of reading this book, especially if you engage fully in the exercises, will be neither easy nor

comfortable, but I'm confident that if you persevere, you'll see the benefits of greater self-awareness. *Why Do I Do That?* may help you to get more of what you need from your relationships, to develop a vivid but manageable emotional life, to know yourself better – your strengths as well as your limitations – and thus to develop realistic expectations for yourself that promote genuine self-esteem.

Just as clients in psychotherapy can't face the full extent of their pain all at once – *nobody* could do that – you probably won't be able to absorb all of the insights offered by this book in one go. You may need to read it more than once, or tackle a few chapters now and read the rest later, after you've had time to integrate what you've learned. Real growth occurs little by little, often over long periods of time. While it's important to persevere and not turn away whenever you feel threatened, don't drive yourself too hard or expect more of yourself than you can manage. Each new bit of self-awareness, each step forward has its value.

Also bear in mind that nobody ever gets beyond his defense mechanisms and ceases to rely upon them. Although I'm a therapist, the author of this book and your presumptive guide in this venture of self-exploration, I continue to confront and wrestle with my own defense mechanisms every day of my life. One of the primary messages of this book is that our sensitive emotional issues will continue to pose challenges for us throughout our lives, though with time and effort, we will navigate them more easily and with greater self-confidence.

In other words, the process of confronting pain and struggling with the often difficult memories associated with it is a challenge *for everyone*. As you work your way through the book and exercises, remember that in some larger sense, although it may not

always be of immediate comfort, other people engaged in the same journey are struggling, too.

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The psychodynamic perspective is rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud. As a young psychoanalyst, I used to teach a year-long course covering all 24 volumes of his work – a standard part of the curriculum at most psychoanalytic training institutes throughout the world. Freud has fallen out of favor during the past 50 years, largely because he failed to understand female sexuality and held some views about women that today would be considered misogynistic or patronizing; he's widely considered obsolete and passé.

Despite this view, many of his revolutionary insights have been incorporated into our culture as basic assumptions. Even people who dismiss Freud often accept many of the core tenets of psychoanalysis without realizing it. Our culture has been profoundly and forever changed by his pioneering work.

Since Freud died in 1939, many influential theorists have extended and corrected his ideas. I'll be referring to some of them as I go along, but more often than not I'll be referring to Freud. By the end of this book, I hope you'll have a deeper appreciation for his contribution to our culture, seeing in him, as I do, a revolutionary genius who helped shape the way we all think about ourselves and other people every day, even when we don't realize it.

Part I

Understanding our Psychological

Defense Mechanisms

ONE

The 'Me' I Don't Know

"… he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (*King Lear*, *Act I, Scene i)*

At one time or another, most of us go through an experience when we feel, talk or behave in ways that take us by surprise, when we suddenly see that something unrecognized has been going on "behind the scenes." What seems like a minor incident may set us off and we suddenly realize we've been feeling something intense for a while without being aware of it.

Your partner has been putting in long hours at work and you've gladly picked up the slack at home. *Poor guy, he's working so hard.* Then when you ask him to stop at the dry cleaner on his way into the office and he hesitates before saying *yes*, you snap, "Never mind! I'll do it myself!"

At the last minute, your friend calls to cancel plans – "Something's come up … do you mind?" – and you feel surprisingly upset. Over the years, you've made generous allowance for this kind of inconsideration. Now you realize that you haven't gotten over the fact that she forgot your birthday last year. You see clearly what you've always known but didn't want to face: she has other friendships she values more highly than yours.

Your mother died six months ago after a protracted illness. At the time, you felt

you'd done most of your grieving during her illness and that when death finally put an end to her suffering, it came almost as a relief. One evening, as you're watching a sad movie, you suddenly begin to sob, realizing how much you miss your mom.

We usually go through life believing that our conscious experience of ourselves is the beginning and end of who we are; in truth, important parts of our emotional lives may remain hidden from us. This is not a new idea. At least as far back as Shakespeare's time (see the quotation that heads this chapter), students of human nature have observed that some people know themselves better than others do.

Jane Austen's novels are full of characters who come to understand how certain attitudes or passions have blinded them to their own true nature. In *Pride and Prejudice*, after finally acknowledging the truth in Darcy's letter, Elizabeth Bennett thinks: "Till this moment, I never knew myself." Throughout the history of the novel, authors such as Vladimir Nabokov and Ford Madox Ford have used unreliable narrators to portray men and women out-of-touch with some truth at the heart of their emotional lives.

The term "subconscious mind" was coined by the 18th century German philosopher Sir Christopher Riegel, introduced into English by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and taken up by Sigmund Freud more than a century ago as the corner stone of his psychoanalytic theories. Since then, the notion of an unconscious* part of the mind, remote from awareness, has entered the cultural heritage, permeating our shared understanding of the self and its landscape.

It's fairly common to speak of a "Freudian slip," for example – a mix-up in language that reveals something the speaker didn't consciously intend to say. You may

* In everyday language, many people refer to it as the "the subconscious," though strictly speaking, the correct term is "the unconscious" and the way I'll be referring to it throughout this book.

be familiar with this example from Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall*: the title character has started intensive psychoanalysis and says, "I don't think I mind analysis at all. The only question is: Will it change my wife?" The Freudian slip is a favorite trope in Hollywood, played for laughs in movies such as the Austen Powers series, *Bruce Almighty* and *Liar, Liar*.

Many people infer unconscious motives behind certain actions such as "forgetting" an unwelcome obligation or chore: it's not that the person deliberately neglected to do what he or she had promised; rather, the act of forgetting betrayed a reluctance to follow through. I doubt that many married people whose spouse "forgot" their anniversary would regard the lapse as having absolutely no meaning.

We often believe we know things about other people that they themselves can't see. When co-workers go out for lunch together and talk about another colleague, one of them might say something like: "I should've known better because she really can't take criticism. She thinks she's so perfect." A group of old friends might discuss an absent buddy and his new girlfriend: "Can't he see she's the same domineering type all over again? Exactly like his mother!" Listening to a friend talk about his plans for turning over *yet another* new leaf, you may privately have thought, *Oh stop lying to yourself.*

While we assume we have special insight into people around us, we're likely to resent it if someone presumes the same thing in relation to us. The possibility that we're unable to recognize something about ourselves that other people can see is an extremely unpleasant one for most people. If a friend suggests as much, we'll insist that our slip of the tongue was a chemical glitch, with no meaning whatsoever; that we forgot the dinner date because we were incredibly stressed at work; that omitting a name from the guest list

was a simple oversight and had nothing to do with the way that person snubbed us last year at the Christmas party.

Sometimes we *do* forget because we're over-burdened at the office. Sometimes that slip of the tongue really has no meaning. But often, oversights and slips reveal something at work that we're not aware of and may not want to acknowledge, even to ourselves.

The fact that we're able to recognize unconscious motivations in other people more readily than in ourselves makes perfect sense when you consider the nature of the unconscious, why certain thoughts and feelings remain unconscious and others don't. According to the many psychodynamic theorists who have written about this, from Freud onward, the unconscious carries all the thoughts and feelings we either find too painful to bear, or which conflict with our morality and values and undermine our self-image. In other words, we don't *want* to know about the contents of our unconscious. If we did want to know, those thoughts and feelings wouldn't be unconscious in the first place.

So how do we manage to avoid encountering those parts of ourselves we find too difficult to bear? How is it possible for an aspect of our personality to remain a stranger to us when other people can see it?

This is where *psychological defense mechanisms* (also called *psychological defenses* or simply *defenses)* come into play. Our defense mechanisms are invisible methods by which we exclude unacceptable thoughts and feelings from awareness. In the process, they subtly distort our perceptions of reality – in both our personal relationships and the emotional terrain within us. This book will be devoted to describing those defense mechanisms, understanding how they operate and learning to identify them

within ourselves. It will also teach more effective ways to cope with and express what resides in the unconscious: when our defenses become too rigid or entrenched, they may prevent us from leading a full and satisfying emotional life.

* * *

During my college years when I was deeply depressed and sought professional help, like many people entering psychotherapy I assumed that my therapist would teach me new methods or techniques in order to resolve my difficulties. To my surprise (and often discomfort), I soon learned that instead, he'd listen very carefully to everything I said and then tell me something entirely unexpected, about some aspect of my emotional life that I hadn't been able to see. Although I rejected many of the things he told me, and sometimes felt deeply angered by them, over time I inadvertently brought him enough examples to validate his insights so that I came to accept them as true.

During the 30 years since I became a psychotherapist, I've worked in the same way. I listen to the people who come for help and hear many things they don't consciously intend to tell me – about unbearable feelings of need, anger too frightening to acknowledge, poisonous envy or jealousy, debilitating shame and other emotions so intense my clients can't stand to let them in. I try to help them understand their own defense mechanisms – the unconscious ways they ward off parts of their experience which they find too painful to bear. I also show them how a particular defense often stops them from getting what they truly need or from taking the best care of themselves and their personal relationships.

For here is the problem inherent in psychological defenses: while they're necessary and useful, for each and every one of us, in coping with the inevitable pain that

goes with being human, when they become too deeply entrenched, they may prevent us from accessing important emotions we *need* to face.

On the one hand, temporarily numbing yourself to overwhelming grief may help you weather the loss of a loved one; on the other, blinding yourself to the emotional poverty of your childhood might mean you can't see how that past plays a role in your unhappy marriage. Shutting out the awareness that we're all heading toward death allows us to function on a daily basis and get on with our lives; engaging in high-risk behavior because you unconsciously believe you're invulnerable, not mortal like everyone else, can have tragic results.

By excluding large parts of our emotional experience, we deplete ourselves, diminishing our strength and ability to cope in the world. Anger, for example, can motivate us to make important changes in our lives – to leave an unhealthy relationship with a selfish partner or end a one-sided friendship, to protect ourselves in the face of mistreatment. Admitting the guilt and regret we feel about the way we behaved can help us make it up to someone we care for.

By diverting or misdirecting the expression of some of our strongest passions, our defense mechanisms often lead us to act in ways that don't get us what we truly need; instead, they may be self-defeating or even self-destructive.

Worst of all, psychological defenses may exclude or misdirect parts of our emotional life that we need for effective relationships – not just romantic ones but those with our family members and close friends, or with our colleagues at work. If you block out the awareness of your own needs, you're unable to develop true intimacy. When you "swallow" your anger or unhappiness by compulsive over-eating, you're not motivated to

do anything about the cause of those feelings, whether at home, with your friends or at work. People who habitually withdraw when someone else expresses an emotion that frightens them will develop limited, unsatisfying relationships that pose no threat.

Along the way, this book will apply everything we learn about defense mechanisms to an understanding of their impact on our relationships. We'll look at the role they play in those unhappy patterns we can't seem to shake, the inability to achieve closeness and commitment, recurring difficulties in the workplace, friendships that break down, difficult communications with our parents or our children, and so on.

Our final goal will be learning to disarm those defense mechanisms, the ones that prevent satisfying contact with important people in our world, and to find more effective ways to express what lies in the unconscious. Not all defense mechanisms need to be disarmed, nor must everything that resides in the unconscious be faced; but when our defenses become too rigid or entrenched, profoundly interfering with our relationships, we need to develop more conscious and flexible methods to help us cope.

What is a Psychological Defense Mechanism?

Like the notion of an unconscious mind, the idea of psychological defenses has entered the mainstream, coloring our understanding of human nature. Nearly everyone understands what it means to appear *defensive* or to react *defensively*. We use those words to describe people's behavior when they don't want to admit the truth of something said about them.

"Have you noticed how defensive Jeff gets whenever you bring up the subject of his brother? You know he has to feel guilty about what happened at his wedding."

We recognize that the person is trying to ward off something painful or unpleasant he or she doesn't want to face. We owe this understanding of defensiveness to the earliest work of Sigmund Freud.

Freud began writing about the concept of psychological defenses in the 1890s, most notably in his famous early work, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), which he co-authored with Josef Breuer.[*] Freud wrote in German, of course, and the word he used to describe this mental phenomenon was *abwehr*, more accurately translated as a "warding off" or "fending off" rather than "defense."

We're stuck with many unfortunate translations of Freud's terminology. For example, he used the everyday word *das Ich* (the "I" or "me") when he wrote about the self and the conscious mind; instead of using the same everyday kind of language in English, his translators imported the word *ego* from Latin, giving it a weightier, more "scientific" sound. As a young discipline often attacked and ridiculed by the medical establishment of its day, psychoanalysis wanted very much to be taken seriously.

Freud's idea is a simple one, and not as machine-like as the unfortunate English term *defense mechanism* makes it sound. According to Freud, sometimes when we're confronted with an idea or feeling that we find too painful or morally unacceptable, we ward it off, pushing it into the unconscious. It's not a deliberate decision; it happens outside of awareness, in ways that are often automatic. Freud began to articulate this view toward the end of the 19th century.

His original view of the nature and function of psychological defenses is widely accepted by most psychodynamic thinkers and therapists today, though many other

[*] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud. Studies on hysteria. *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, **3**. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953). All references to this edition will hereafter use the abbreviation "*S.E.*" followed by the volume number.

writers have contributed to and expanded our understanding since Freud first introduced the concept – Alfred Adler, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein to name but a few. The simplest and least theoretical explanation comes from the British psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer who, throughout his work, holds that all defense mechanisms are essentially *lies we tell ourselves to evade pain*.[*]

This view of the nature and function of defense mechanisms makes it easier to connect them to our personal experience. Everyone can sympathize with the desire to avoid pain. We all understand how easy it is to deceive ourselves when to face the truth will hurt badly or make it difficult for us to function. Sometimes, our defense mechanisms help us to get by when to face the full truth would render life unbearable.

At other times, however, we need to confront our pain; avoiding the truth feels better for the moment, but it might only make matters worse in the long run. Here's an example using one of the most common defense mechanisms, one that everyone understands: to be *in denial* about your spouse's affair (despite the tell-tale signs) might help you avoid feeling the pain of betrayal, but it prevents you from dealing with this catastrophe in your life and all the collateral damage – to your children, your friendships, your feelings of self-worth.

Defense mechanisms operate in the here-and-now, with no thought for tomorrow. They're unthinking and reflexive; they aim only to ward off pain this very moment and don't take into account the long-term costs of doing so. Sometimes we eventually "wake up" and face the truth. Sometimes unconscious knowledge breaks through and we realize what has been brewing unnoticed inside us for a long time. More often, we continue as

[*] Meltzer developed this view of defenses from ideas implicit in the work of another British psychoanalyst, W.R. Bion.

we were, our defense mechanisms in place and unnoticed. Human beings are creatures of habit and change is difficult.

This book aims to instigate change by helping you to identify your typical defense mechanisms, to disarm them and develop more effective ways to deal with the truth in those cases where doing so will improve your life and your relationships.

Defense Mechanisms and Your Personality

Whenever we discuss psychological defense mechanisms one-by-one, as individual strategies, it gives the misleading impression that they're discrete techniques used in isolation – as if you were playing golf with the choice of using a wood, iron or wedge for any particular shot. In truth, we tend to develop characteristic or habitual defenses, or groups of them, and those customary ways of warding off pain play a role in shaping our entire personality.

Wilhelm Reich took up this issue in his seminal work, *Character Analysis* (1933). While English speakers today use the word *character* when talking of eccentricity or morals – "He's such a character," we might say; or, "She's a woman of fine character" – Reich used the German word *Charakter* more in the sense of "personality." He believed that one's personality or "character traits as a whole [are] a compact defense mechanism" with the same warding-off effect as any other psychological defense.[*] Such a defense shows up "in the way one typically behaves, in the manner in which one speaks, walks, and gestures; and in one's characteristic habits (how one smiles or sneers … *how* one is

[*] Wilhelm Reich. *Charakteranalyse* (1933). In English: (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972) p.48.

polite and *how* one is aggressive)."[*]

So if people would describe you as an exceptionally nice person who never gets upset or angry, that description would likely tell us something about your characteristic defense mechanisms. If you're an assertive person who tends to dominate a situation, shouting down other people or badgering them until they agree with you – that would suggest an entirely different set of defenses. Your habitual ways of interacting with the important people in your life tell us a great deal about the defense mechanisms you typically use.

In recent years, the media have focused attention on the so-called "personality disorders," raising public awareness of a type of psychological difficulty so profound that it *defines* an individual's personality, shaping his or her relationships in recognizable ways. Men and women who suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder[†] usually have an inflated sense of their own importance, lack empathy for others and react to criticism with anger or shame. Those who suffer from Borderline Personality Disorder are impulsive, emotionally volatile and have unstable relationships with other people.

This diagnostic labeling, based on the way emotional difficulties may define a personality, is a clinical, codified version of the everyday type of psychological summation we all employ: our language is full of expressions we use to sum up people whose personalities reflect characteristic ways of relating. Consider the statements below. These are expressions and ways of describing other people which most of us have relied upon at one time or another. Because these refer to character traits that tend to cause friction or difficulty in relationships, people often mean something critical or

[*] *Ibid*, pp. 51-52.
[†] In the upcoming revision to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual published by the American Psychiatric Association, this diagnostic label will apparently be eliminaTed.

judgmental when they use them:

***A** is such a control freak.*

***B** always makes me feel like I have to rescue him.*

***C** is easy to deal with as long as things go her way.*

***D** is way too needy for me.*

***E** is such a cold fish.*

***F** gets so hysterical about everything.*

*Why is **G** always so uptight?*

*That **H** -- what a hothead!*

***J** is such a drama queen!*

***K** thinks he's God's gift to women.*

***L** is such a timid little mouse.*

*Why does **M** always make herself a doormat in her relationships?*

These descriptions distill a particular trait or style of relating and use it to define our idea of someone's basic personality. Although less obvious, they also point to those areas where the person has the most difficulty: (1) coping with *need and dependency* for **A** through **D**; (2) managing intense and often painful *emotions* for **E** through **H**; and (3) issues of *self-esteem* in relation to others for **J** through **M**.

In Chapter Two, we'll examine each of these areas in detail, exploring what I refer to as life's *primary psychological concerns.* It is our relative difficulty in bearing with these challenges that for the most part determines which psychological defense mechanisms we use.

Each one of us develops his or her *individual* constellation of defenses to cope

with *universal* emotions. Cultures may differ in the ways they condone or condemn certain feelings, thus shaping our personalities and the ways we ward off socially unacceptable emotions, but people everywhere struggle with the same basic challenges inherent in the human experience:

(1) Needing or desiring contact with other people and depending upon them for what we need; bearing frustration, disappointment or helplessness in those relationships.

(2) Coping with difficult, often painful emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, hatred, envy and jealousy.

(3) Feeling good about ourselves and confident of our personal worth in relation to others.

Different people find different issues to be more difficult; two people may struggle with the same emotional challenge and defend against it in entirely different ways. For all of us, the defense mechanisms we use will shape our personalities and profoundly affect our interpersonal relationships.

What about You?

At this point, you're probably wondering, "So what *are* these different psychological defense mechanisms?" Or even more likely: "What defenses do *I* use?" The remainder of this book will be devoted to explaining the typical defenses we all employ, with examples drawn from my practice as well as everyday experiences we can all recognize. To bring it home, this and each of the following chapters in the first two parts will include a set of questions/exercises that will help you see your own

psychological defenses in action and understand why you're doing what you do.

Making Use of the Exercises in this Book

As a prelude to the first exercise, go back and take another look at personality descriptions **A** through **M** from the last section (p. 21). One or two of them might apply to you, possibly in a less extreme form.

Maybe somebody once hurt your feelings by describing you in just those terms: *Why do you have to get so hysterical about everything?* Or: *You're always so uptight! Can't you just relax?* If so, you might have felt self-protective – *defensive*, in the everyday sense of that word. When people tell us things about ourselves in critical language, or resort to character assassination by using words like *always* and *everything*, we naturally find it difficult to listen, however accurate their observations may be.

Even when a friend makes a concerned or loving observation about us, we may want to reject it. Sometimes, no matter how kindly put, such a remark will make us *defensive*. As you review those 12 personality descriptions from above, you may insist to yourself that none applies to you, not even in a less extreme form. Or you may think something like, *There might be some truth to that,* ***but*** … When you remember our basic definition of defense mechanisms – *lies we tell ourselves to ward off pain* – such a reaction might mean that one of your defense mechanisms is at work. The emphatic word *but* often indicates just that. We tend to become defensive when confronted with something painful.

Freud and the many psychodynamic therapists who have followed him refer to this phenomenon as *resistance*. You've probably heard that word before; it's not a

difficult concept to grasp. If we originally warded off feelings or facts too painful to bear – that is, resorted to a defense mechanism – we will naturally *resist* anything that threatens to revive that pain. Sometimes we reject an idea simply because it doesn't ring true for us. On other occasions, though, we resist it because we find it threatening or painful. In that latter case, our resistance to the idea reveals the operation of one of our defense mechanisms.

In my psychotherapy practice, I witness my clients' resistance on a daily basis; without being too confrontational, I draw their attention to this resistance and gently encourage them to think about what it means. If you're not in some kind of therapy, you'll have to do the job of a psychotherapist for yourself as you work through this book, making note of your resistance when it arises. With patience but also with firmness, you'll have to ask yourself the hard questions:

Why do I keep coming back to this idea, over and over, insisting that it's not true?

What is it about the passage that irritates me so much?

Why haven't I picked up that defenses book since reading the bit that reminded me of … now what was it?

Why did I move on so quickly after reading that case study?

I suggest that, while reading this book, you keep a notebook or journal and track your reactions. Store it in a secure place and make sure no one else has access to it. You'll have a harder time recording those shameful or distressing observations if you're worried that someone might read them. Be as honest and non-judgmental as you can. Try to focus simply on *what is* – the ways you actually do feel, your unedited reactions – rather than how you think you *ought* to respond. Don't push yourself toward changing.

In regard to the end-of-chapter exercises: write down your answers, making note of any particularly strong or unusual reactions you may have. As you progress to later chapters, occasionally go back and revisit your earlier responses. You might find that your views and understanding will change over time. And if you don't want to do the exercises or answer the questions, make note of that, too. Resistance shows up in many different ways!

Exercises

As with all the exercises in this book, record your responses in your journal. You could do so in a narrative format or instead make brief notes in summary.

1. When you think about some of the people you know, do you believe there are things you can observe and identify about them that they don't see? Why do you think they don't recognize this aspect of themselves? In what way would it be painful for them to admit the truth?
2. At the beginning of the chapter, I gave a few examples of people "waking up" to an emotion they hadn't realized they were feeling beforehand. Has that ever happened to you? What was the emotion you ultimately felt? Was it unpleasant or painful?
3. Has anyone ever told you something about yourself that deeply upset you, which made you "defensive" in the everyday sense of that word? Looking back on the experience now, is there any element of what the person said that might be true?

Now What?

The simple exercise above aims merely to get you thinking about the reality of defenses, in yourself as well as in other people, and to focus on the ways we all try to avoid painful truths. Tomorrow and during the days that follow, see if you can spot any "lies" that friends, colleagues or family members may be telling themselves in order to evade pain. Begin to ask yourself what unpleasant truths you, too, might not want to face.