

## Workbook Chapter Nineteen Take Back Your Projections

### Self-Assessment Tools:

#### Projections Self Inventory

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**Directions:** On a scale of 1 to 4, indicate how frequently these beliefs influence how you think about yourself and others. Key: 1 = Hardly Ever; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Frequently; 4 = Almost Always

- \_\_\_ 1. My reactions to conflicts are far greater than they should be.
- \_\_\_ 2. When I am in conflict, I have feelings that remind me of how I felt in past conflict situations.
- \_\_\_ 3. In a conflict situation, I find myself focusing on what the other person is saying or doing and I lose my train of thought.
- \_\_\_ 4. I find myself using loaded words like "always" or "never" to describe conflict I have with another person.
- \_\_\_ 5. I see in others positive qualities that I can't see in myself.
- \_\_\_ 6. I see in others negative qualities that I have trouble accepting in myself.
- \_\_\_ 7. I have trouble admitting a mistake. Instead, I immediately point out something that someone else did or said, and blame them for the mistake.
- \_\_\_ 8. I space out when someone tells me something I don't want to hear.
- \_\_\_ 9. When I know someone doesn't like me, I avoid them like the plague.
- \_\_\_ 10. I find myself making moral judgments about the character or behavior of people I don't like.

\_\_\_ **Total Score**

#### Interpretation of Your Score:

- 10 - 20 = Little evidence of projections.
- 21 - 30 = Some evidence of projections.
- 31 - 40 = Strong evidence of projections.

#### Using Perception Checks To Uncover Projections

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An important communication skill that people in a "False Self relationship" need to learn is "perception checks." When you find yourself feeling blamed or projecting blame on others, it is important to check your perceptions. For example, in the couples' therapy session about a client I am calling Jane, she said to her partner, Art, "I don't think you really want this relationship to work. You just want to blame all our problems on me like my mother did and then leave (like my father did)."

"I asked her if she would be willing to label that as her "perception" of Art, and I suggested that she ask him if any of what she said was true "for him." Jane hesitated, but finally said, "Art, is any of what I said true?" Art replied, "No, Jane, I really

*want this relationship to work, and I am not going to blame it all on you and then leave."*

It was important to Janae to acknowledge that her perception contained a grain of truth. So, I asked Art to tell me what, if anything, was true about Jane's fears. Art thought for a minute, and then said, *"Jane, I was at the end of my rope and feeling hopeless about things when I threatened to leave you last week. What I really wanted was a time-out from the struggle. I can see now how this could make you feel afraid and believe that I actually meant it."*

I asked Jane if there was anything she wanted from Art and, if there was, to ask him directly for it. She replied, *"Art, when you threaten to leave me, I get really scared. Will you agree to not make threats like that anymore unless you really mean it?"* Art answered, *"Yes, I'm willing to make that agreement."*

Almost all projections can be handled in this manner, if both people are willing to help each other. It is also helpful to remember that the person who is not projecting may recognize the presence of projection before the other person does. To help the person who is projecting, the other person might say, *"It looks and feels as though you might have a projection operating here. Are you willing to take a look at what you are saying or doing to see if there is a projection involved?"* In addition, one person can simply ask the other if he or she is willing to do a perception check.

### **Case Example: The Anatomy of An Affair**

John, had been married for 9 years when his wife found out about his 11-month long affair. She totally freaked out and asked him to leave the house. He then sought therapy to better understand why he had the affair and how he might approach his wife to see if they heal this betrayal and stay married. They have three young children, whose welfare John is wanting to consider in deciding about the future of their marriage.

In my third session with John, I presented the idea that the reason for his affair might go all the way back to his failure to separate from his parents at age 2-3. He had previously told me that his father was an alcoholic and his mother was an enabler. Although he could not fully remember what his father was like when John was a toddler, his later memory of his relationship with his father showed him that his father was not ever able to be emotionally present with his son, John, even later when John was an adolescent.

I explained to John that as a toddler, he sought validation as a separate person from his attachment to his parents for meeting this basic need. I explained that if he didn't get enough validation and support from his parents, as early as two years old he likely declared, "I will show you, I can do it myself." He then told me that his whole life he has had trouble asking anyone for help, even when he needed help.

Usually, this separation process for a toddler requires the support of both parents. The successful completion of this separation process requires the toddler to eventually become emotionally separate without having to make his/her parents "bad." However, if you have to make someone "bad" or wrong to get emotionally separate from them, it just doesn't work. You cannot get emotionally separate from someone by making them the cause of your inability to separate.

The father plays an important role at this point in the toddler's development by validating, but not agreeing with, the feelings of the toddler. The father or a second bonded care-giver has to be present and remain neutral to provide support for both the child and the mother. This is necessary to prevent the toddler or the mother from "splitting." This means the toddler sees the mother as "good mother" when she is able to be present and meets the toddler's need. When she is unable to do that, she becomes "bad mother." Only the intervention of the father or another bonded caregiver can prevent splitting from occurring.

John's failure to separate led to him to view his parents as "bad." This is what happened when a toddler finds that his parents are not able to know what to do to validate his need to become emotionally separate from them. When the toddler is able to separate emotionally, he/she can then build the foundation for a separate, autonomous self.

If this process is not completed successfully, the toddler remains stuck and plays out this dynamic in his adult relationships. He told me he sought validation from his wife and when he did not get it, he blamed her (he said he made her "bad") and sought validation from another person. He admitted that he received a lot of the validation from this woman. She provided what he was seeking but not finding from his wife.

He began to see that his life-long people pleasing behavior was designed to still get the validation from others, in order to finally finish what he tried to finish originally at age 2-3. I told him that I could provide the validation he is seeking, so he didn't have to look for it in other women. In order to help him complete this incomplete process, I have to make sure I do not make his wife bad. I have to stay focused on his feelings and validate his need to achieve an emotional separation. The completion of this separation process requires that he is able to see himself and others as imperfect human beings, with both good and bad qualities but are safe to get close to and are still okay.

I asked John to go to his wife and apologize for making her the reason why he had an affair and tell her about his early incomplete separation process. Tell her that he is going to seek the validation he needs from me, his therapist, and never again seek it from another woman. I told him to pledge to never again seek that validation outside of his marriage.

### **Additional Resources**

**Novels:** "Recitaitif" by Toni Morrison