

Chapter 15: Methods for Gaining Insight into Ourselves

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Introduction to Insight

If there are *unconscious motives*, urges, feelings, defenses, and thoughts inside of us, or if parts of our brain carry out mental processes we are unaware of, it seems reasonable that *knowing about those forces would improve our chances of controlling and directing our lives*. There is so much we do not understand about ourselves and others, partly because we just don't know the laws that determine behavior and maybe partly because we are unconscious of what's going on. Perhaps it was no accident that the first psychotherapy--psychoanalysis--strove to uncover "the unconscious." That was 100 years ago. Today, everyone is to some extent a Freudian psychoanalyst. We all psychologize about what makes people tick. We look for the true (often hidden) motives of a new date, a salesman, a politician, an employer, and others. Once we become aware of defense mechanisms and repression, we even wonder about our own unconscious perceptions, needs, thoughts, and intentions. The notion of unconscious processes constantly being at work in all of us has been well ingrained in our culture for several decades. Now, even the new brain research supports the idea that many parts of our brains can be doing things without our conscious "self" being aware of what's going on (see The Mind series on PBS).



Man's mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.
-Oliver Wendell Holmes



As additional methods of psychotherapy came along--Client Centered, Psychodynamic, Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Interpersonal--the methods changed but the purpose for all these therapies remained the same, namely, to gain insight, to understand our mind and emotions better. Only during the 60's and 70's did the Behavior Modification and Behavior Therapy approaches disregard the unconscious. More recently, with the resurgence of Cognitive and Cognitive-Behavioral techniques, the unconscious is back but in a different form. The Cognitive therapists recognize that the distortions of our perception and thinking are often unconsciously self-serving, but they do not speculate a lot about evil repressed motives. As long as the unconscious is there in any form, some of us will feel a need to explore it.

As you may know, insight-oriented therapists say that self-analysis is very important for a therapist, even essential. Freud devoted the last hour of every day to understanding himself. The truth is, however, that most psychoanalysts and other therapists become introspective only when they are having personal problems (Goldberg, 1993). Furthermore, even when stressed, their self-insight efforts tend to be superficial. My point is: the professionals, who are taught it is important, haven't invested much time and effort into self-analysis. Why not? Maybe it is too uncomfortable to probe into one's real, honest motives, or maybe we just don't have the techniques or methods for making self-analysis fruitful, or both. Goldberg, a psychiatrist, believes that we humans universally avoid thinking deeply about ourselves because that process would soon reveal how little we know, how limited and fragile our relationships are, how little control we have over life, how ashamed we are of ourselves, how constantly vulnerable we are to pain and death, etc. Thus, we subtly resist getting to know ourselves--preferring to have our illusions that "everything will magically work out." Unfortunately, seeking the comfort of denial and ignorance makes it unlikely that we will cope well and self-improve in any of these areas that we prefer not to face. Every one of us faces this predicament (i.e., self-study or self-avoidance) right now. I urge you to learn as much as you can about yourself and others. Relationships with people will be the most important part of your life. Be an expert, starting with yourself.



All men should try to learn before they die what they are running from, and to, and why.
-James Thurber



Insight oriented therapies, like all therapies, make assumptions about human nature. Based on what theorists think they have found in clients' minds, naturally they suggest that is what you should find when you self-explore. Psychoanalysts believe unconscious selfish, hostile, destructive, infantile, sexual, and love needs dominate our unconscious and drive our behavior. Humanists and client-centered therapists believe that safety, self-acceptance, and needs for love, friends, ideals, and self-actualization drive us. If you accept the psychoanalytic view, you must remain constantly alert to the sinister and animalistic motives that lurk inside all of us...we must tame the beast within. If you accept the humanistic view, you only have to avoid neurotic barriers to achieving your basic needs to be good. The neurotic needs prevent you from automatically blossoming into a caring, mature, self-actualized person. I personally assume that both selfish-evil impulses and stressful neurotic thoughts are sometimes shoved out of our awareness and into our unconscious where they still have influence. I suspect both mean-selfish-angry impulses (mostly

out of awareness) and good-caring-achieving drives (mostly in our awareness) are constantly competing for expression in all of us.

Regardless of whether our *basic* nature is good or evil, it is obvious that *many cognitive processes occur without our awareness*, e.g. our unique perception of the situation, our specific memories brought to mind by the circumstances, our idiosyncratic explanation of events and feelings about them, etc. We are not able to perceive how mental events (our perception, learning, memory) occur--but not knowing how our mind works isn't the same as being unaware of our hostility that everyone else can sense. Also, a distinction needs to be made between driving a car automatically (without conscious effort) and being unaware that our political opinion on some issue is self-serving. Only the latter self-protective deception (where our sense of justice is influenced by selfish needs), not the driving, is ordinarily considered an unconscious process. In short, implied in the notion of an unconscious process is some unpleasant force influencing the person but hidden from him/her. Still, there are two conceptions of what kind of "forces" get pushed into our self-protective unconscious: impulses, feelings, thoughts, motives, or acts that are (1) aggressively mean, selfish, sexually immoral, nasty, and humiliating (Freud's unconscious) or (2) uncomfortable, stressful, and embarrassing because they would expose our weaknesses, problems, selfishness, or denial, and force us to get in touch with our anxiety (cognitive unconscious).

So, in any case, it isn't surprising that *people resist looking into their unconscious*. How about you? Surely, it is a little scary, even though you are curious. Freud thought people in the Victorian era were very afraid of and repulsed by his ideas, such as the sexual interests of children. (Even today, the sexuality of children is vigorously denied by adults, partly because of the epidemic of sexual abuse. Of course, the adult abuser is totally responsible but that doesn't prove that children are never interested in sexual play.) Many people resist getting to know their true selves. There is even a prejudice against people who have been in psychotherapy. Perhaps there should be a bias in favor of the intelligent, courageous people who seek to "explore and straighten out their minds." But heaven help the presidential or vice-presidential candidate who admits he/she has been in therapy. That bias is naive! We might do better if we *required* candidates for high office to have had therapy (or prove he/she has never needed it!). Avoiding frank honesty with oneself does not occur just among the naive, pure-and-innocent, and overly-religious types but, according to Bertram Karon, it is a factor in drug-oriented psychiatrists who avoid doing psychotherapy, in research-oriented academic psychologists who bad mouth psychotherapy, in patients and their parents who see mental illness as a chemical imbalance, and in many other circumstances. Even some insight-oriented psychotherapists may fear understanding their patients and, then, seeing themselves in their patients (DeAngelis, 1988). But most therapists are insightful. If you want to know more [about psychotherapy](http://www.aboutpsychotherapy.com/) (<http://www.aboutpsychotherapy.com/>) , try this site by Dr. Bennett Pologe.


 I have never seen a patient, the germs of whose disease I could not find in myself.
 -Sigmund Freud

Naturally, we don't like to uncover bad things about ourselves. Yet, awareness, mindfulness, insight, introspection, psychological-mindedness, introversion (as described by Jung), self-reflection, or private self-consciousness are generally valued concepts. One could argue that it is better to be aware and have a chance to cope with some "problematic" personal characteristic than to have this undesirable trait operating inside of us and be ignorant of it and, thus, helpless to change. But, some people think psychological-minded people are emotionally detached, emotionally unexpressive, poorly adjusted, and painfully self-conscious. Not true (Farber, 1989). Actually, more aware people are more emotional, *but* they may not express a greater proportion of their emotions (and, therefore, look like they are withholding their feelings). Unfortunately, while psychologically aware people may be wiser, they are probably sadder and have lower self-esteem (see Farber). Being insightful means you see your faults, your failed opportunities, your selfish and mean impulses, your self-serving self-deceptions, etc. This is humbling and maybe scary. Nevertheless, insight is made more tolerable *if* you can take a deterministic attitude (method #4 in chapter 14), believe everyone has all kinds of evil thoughts and feelings, and think you can and will stay in control so long as you know what is going on inside of you. Facing your true nature can be more of an asset than a liability.

One hundred years after Freud described in fantastic detail the unconscious (the "hidden 6/7ths of the mind"), experimental science has not come close to objectively investigating and explaining the denial of an alcoholic or a smoker, the mechanisms of repressed childhood abuse, the self-cons of the procrastinator or underachiever, the blindness of a hysteric or a hypnotic subject, etc. Clinicians describe and speculate about these matters, but science is pretty impotent with the unconscious, thus far. Science has investigated the subliminal (quick) perception of words or symbols (we do learn without awareness), subliminal popcorn ads and self-improvement tapes (no evidence they work), other very simple perceptions (are influenced by needs and expectations), and very simple judgments, like "Is this a famous name?" (such judgments are influenced by "forgotten" information). But, we certainly don't know scientifically how influential or how smart the unconscious is (see June, 1992, *American Psychologist*).

With the evolving view of the brain as having many parallel clusters of neurons, researchers now think unpleasant information, such as the denial of cancer or the repression of sexual abuse, is being

stored separately from verbal awareness. That's neat, but why and how is this done? What part of our brain decides that certain ideas and experiences are too painful to remember? How does that part make its judgments and then put the memories into "don't-think-about-this" folders? The new theories substitute mysteriously functioning neuron clusters for Freud's little censor inside our head who has advanced warning of bad thoughts coming from our unconscious and immediately protects our conscious selves from painful information, memories, or urges. Not much of an advance for 100 years. In fairness, brain functioning is a hard area to research.

The major way used by helpers to make the unconscious conscious is to describe what probably goes on inside our heads without our awareness. The hope is that the helpee will overcome his/her resistance to unconscious factors, accept the ideas as possibilities, explore different ways of seeing their situation, and, then, try out better ways of coping. Much of chapter 9 takes this approach. Thus, if you are interested in learning more about unconscious processes, please read chapter 9 before attempting to use one of the following methods. The previous discussions of personality, games, life scripts, childhood traumas, gender roles, chauvinism, etc. provide road maps to what you might find in your unconscious, such as common aspects of everyone's personality, possible hidden motives, self-deceptions, effects of parental neglect, unseen dynamics in relationships, etc. Reading chapter 9 is a good basis for doing more fruitful exploration by using the methods in this chapter.

It may, at first, seem paradoxical and impossible for a self-helper to deal with his/her own unconscious. However, just as there are methods for a therapist to reveal the patient's unconscious to the patient, there are methods for you to discover your unconscious all by yourself. That's what this chapter is about--providing you with specific methods for increasing your insight and self-awareness.

Like other chapters, select the most interesting and promising methods and read the "general idea" section to see if it seems promising. You will not be able to immediately use all these ideas; some require a lot of time and thought.

Becoming Open-Minded



First, as mentioned in the "Straight Thinking" section of the last chapter, we are prone to over-simplify the causes of our behavior. Remember the "fallacy of the single cause?" Almost every action has many causes, perhaps 15 or 20, maybe more. It is not our custom to think so complexly, but it may be closer to reality. Secondly, the strength of each of the causes is probably constantly fluctuating, so

the precise prediction of human behavior is very difficult. The murderer might have run away from the victim or broken down and cried or killed him/herself, if he/she had waited one more minute. Thirdly, there are influences on our behavior that we are ashamed of and deny. Being open-minded to the complex causes and to the unconscious factors operating might greatly improve our coping with real problems.

If we could honestly explore and accept every possible motive, thought, or feeling within us, regardless of how mean, perverse, or shameful it is, presumably we wouldn't have Freud's kind of unconscious, i.e. a pool of *repressed* threatening, immoral, inconsiderate, destructive, self-defeating forces that influence one's thoughts and actions in unknown but usually unhealthy ways. Why shove scary, evil thoughts out of your mind, if recognizing those thoughts and handling them will help you understand yourself and make reasonable decisions? Ask yourself: Who would I feel safer with, a friend who recognizes his/her resentment or jealousy of your brains or possessions or love life and monitors his/her thoughts and feelings to guard against acting on those irrational feelings in hurtful ways *or* a friend who was oblivious to his/her feelings and their causes? The answer is obvious.

Nevertheless, you may still worry that recognizing all these evil impulses will cause you to lose control or, at least, cause you stress. I understand. Indeed, some discomfort is likely, e.g. if you are homophobic or just have a reaction of "yuck" to imagining sex between two people of the same sex, yes, it is going to be uncomfortable to also realize some positive attraction within you to homosexual activity. Examples of uncomfortable thoughts in this area: realizing your liking and wanting to be with your best same-sexed friend has some similarity to homosexual "love," males realizing their interest in observing and comparing penises, females finding breasts attractive (and why not, they nursed the same as boys), and getting a little aroused by an X-rated movie of homosexuals. But, by increasing self-awareness and going through some stress, you may become less hateful, less discriminating, more understanding, and more at ease interacting socially with homosexuals. You are *not* going to become homosexual if that isn't your natural and powerful inclination. So, why be so afraid or appalled?

It may also be reassuring to remember that having a thought or a feeling is not the same as carrying out the act. As discussed in chapter 6, thinking of beating up on somebody is not the same as doing it. On the other hand, repeated thoughts about assaulting people don't sound too healthy and probably increase the likelihood of undesirable actions. If Jimmy Baker and Jimmy Swaggart had thought less about prostitutes and affairs, they probably would have been less likely to act out. If they had totally denied to themselves any interest in other women, they might have had other problems--an obsession with stopping prostitution or topless dancing, condemning all "johns" to hell, and similar actions, called "reaction formations." A wise self-

helper will understand and control his/her thoughts as well as behavior.

As Freud openly admitted, therapists usually find they have tendencies similar to their clients. After seeing patients, Freud devoted time every day to self-exploration. If therapists did not have this awareness and tolerance of their own basic drives, they would surely have more difficulty helping their patients gain insight. Part of becoming an effective therapist and, likewise, a good patient is to become open-minded, to accept that everything is true of you to some extent. This is "a hard pill to swallow"--what about murder or incest or becoming totally dependent? You may have very little tendency in certain directions, but there is probably some. The point is not so much that we are all potentially vile, crude, and dangerous, but rather the idea is that we should be able to explore within our own psyche and soul. It can be an exciting, fruitful adventure.

Purposes

- To learn to accept needs and ideas that have been denied. This may include saintly motives, such as the urge to feed the 30 children dying somewhere every minute from starvation, as well as sinful ones.
- To recognize the likelihood that behavior is complexly determined.

Steps

STEP ONE: Look for multiple causes of behavior and consider that "everything is true of you."

I have consistently encouraged you to think of the causes of your behavior as being complex. First, as chapter 2 says, there are five parts to every problem--behavior, emotions, skills, cognitive and unconscious factors. Each part has many causes, e.g. if the problem is being overweight, the behavioral habit of eating dessert at lunch and dinner is one aspect of overall eating behavior. But, overeating is also a function of many other behavioral-environmental factors, such as childhood and current eating habits, food availability in the house, tradition and social environment, spouse's and friends' attitudes, and so on. The lack of exercise is related and also caused by many factors. Likewise, emotions--stress, loneliness, sadness, guilt, feeling inadequate, and anger--may contribute to eating. Each emotion has its own complex history and causes, and its own connection with eating. The lack of knowledge about calories and cooking skills can contribute to overeating, as can denial, rationalizations, excuses, a defeatist attitude and other rational and irrational cognitions. Finally, we have unconscious factors, each with its own learning history. By now the foolishness of the fallacy of the single cause, referred to in chapter 14, should be clear to you. Humans are complex. Probably most behaviors or thoughts or motives have 15 or 20 or more contributing causes.

Besides the obscurity due to complex causes, this method is also concerned with embarrassing causes which are hidden from ourselves. How can we possibly overcome our own barriers to seeing threatening, unpleasant causes of our behavior? First, by increasing the value we placed on awareness and, second, by decreasing the shame and repugnance we feel towards an unconscious motive. Just being open-minded and honest with ourselves is all we can ask. But it takes practice. Remember from the beginning paragraphs, the question is not, "What am I?" but rather "How much am I this way?"

STEP TWO: Look for evidence of unconscious needs or feelings.

Surely you occasionally have self-critical or even self-destructive thoughts: "I hate myself," "I want to be mean," "I should be punished," "I am bad," "I'd like to die," or some very negative feeling. Do you take risks with your life by driving fast or reckless? Do you smoke or drink (even one beer knocks off brain cells) or over-eat? Do you neglect a possible health hazard? Do you unnecessarily disclose your faults and mistakes? Do you break the law and, thus, risk your reputation? Maybe there are more of these self-defeating thoughts and impulses than you are aware of, i.e. unconscious influences.

Surely you occasionally have very mean, angry thoughts: "I'd like to kill him" or "I wish I could prove to everyone what a jerk he is." Do you hold grudges and want to get revenge? What about sexual urges and motives? Do you have sexual dreams that embarrass you (or would if you told)? Why do lots of people fantasize about being a prostitute or gigolo? Do you leer and recognize your sexual attraction to people other than your current lover? ("Oh, sure," you say, "I'm human.") Well, besides these conscious feelings is it possible that many other sexual needs are kept in your sub-conscious?

Surely you occasionally wish to be as free as you were as a child, without responsibility and duties, taken care of completely, held and stroked, and perhaps even feed by breast. Do you like to curl up in a ball ("fetal position") under a warm blanket--is that returning to the womb? Do you wish to be powerful, perhaps handsome or beautiful, admired or even worshiped by others? Do you enjoy beating others in some competition, perhaps even enjoy seeing others fail sometimes? Might you be willing to neglect the needs of some people in order to gain advantage for yourself over others? Might this overlooking of others' needs be an unconscious way of avoiding seeing a responsibility you have to help them?

I am not saying you *will do* awful things--murder, incest, steal, abuse, lie, etc.--but I am suggesting that maybe you have tendencies to do all kinds of things. Not very strong, but a little... a potential. Instead of denying all evil impulses, I'd encourage you to explore them, see if they might be there; if so, accept them and understand them, and keep them under *better* control than if they were unconscious. Are you resisting looking for certain feelings? The more you resist and deny any possibility of feeling a certain way, the more

you should look for evidence in that direction. Example: I once saw a young couple with marital problems. One disagreement was about having sex as a couple with a male friend. The husband wanted all three to have sex together. When I asked if he had some homosexual interests in the friend, the husband immediately became very angry at me, accusing me of distorting his motives, of being in the "dark ages," and wanting to make something "perverse" out of an open marriage. He protesteth too much.

Don't just look for unacceptable urges; look for good impulses that may also be held in check by fear, "being reasonable," or selfish interests. Examples: Loving someone or, better yet, everyone, adopting an abandoned child, giving up a good paying job for one that provides care to others, doing volunteer work, sharing some of your most intimate secrets with a friend, etc. Quite possibly we unconsciously repress our saintly tendencies as well as our sinful impulses.

STEP THREE: Try to understand some of your baffling behavior by listing all the possible causes. Look for "unfinished business."

If you are still trying to digest the idea that everything is true of you (and have not yet thrown up or thrown the book away), select a specific problem, behavior, or interaction to understand better. Go through the five parts (see chapter 2) and list all the causes or influences you can imagine for each part. What needs might be satisfied by this behavior or problem? What are the possible obvious and hidden payoffs? Consider all the outcomes that might actually occur and ask, "Could I possibly be wanting that outcome?" (answer "yes" even though you consciously think that outcome would be terrible). What old emotional hang-ups could be aroused in this situation? For example, does this person or the situation remind you of some emotional experience in the past, some "unfinished business?" This is frequently a powerful unconscious factor. Examples: a new boy/girlfriend reminds you of the old one (and you respond inappropriately); the boss reminds you of your father; taking a test reminds you of flunking the last one.

When you run out of ideas about causes, try to find even more:

1. Read about this sort of behavior or problem (see the next method), add to your list other peoples' ideas about causes.
2. Ask friends for their honest opinions about causes and influences in your situation.
3. Talk to people who have or have had the problem.
4. Discuss the problem with a respected person, a psychologist, or other persons.
5. Some therapists (Mc Mullin, 1986) have already prepared a list of all the possible causes of a specific problem, e.g. agoraphobia, they can think of, including events, thoughts, and other feelings. Examples: anger, guilt, sexual urges, loneliness,

fear of going insane, feeling unreal, fear of losing control (panic), money problems, demands by others, failed at something, etc. You can add to your list the ones that seem true for you (and make a mental note of the causes not true for you).

You are likely to identify 10 or 15 conscious causes and 5 or more unconscious causes. Like in brainstorming, don't criticize your ideas about causes; just record the influences as they occur to you, even if they seem unlikely or ridiculous. You will evaluate each cause in the next step.

STEP FOUR: Weighing the importance of each cause or motive or influence.

All behavior is 100% caused, so take the list of all possible causes of your problem and assign each cause a percent, according to its importance or degree of influence, so that the total is 100%. Use your knowledge of behavior, your intuition, or your best hunch to assign weights. It will, of course, take some adjusting of percentages to get the total weights to equal 100%. But it is usually eye-opening to see how many causes are involved and to realize that even the most powerful causes may only contribute 10 or 15 percent of the total.

A different approach was used with phobic patients (mentioned in #5 of the last step). Each person was asked to list 10 situations in which they panicked and 10 similar situations in which they had not panicked. Then they rated which of the possible causes existed just before they panicked...and before not panicking. Thus, they identified probable causes of their panic in several situations...and conditions that do not lead to panic.

STEP FIVE: Use your analysis of the causes as a guide to strengthening the factors that produce the desired behavior and to reducing the troublesome factors.

All self-help involves trying to increase the factors that produce the desired behavior and reduce the factors that produce the unwanted behavior. Example: suppose you get mad at a lover because he/she did something that unconsciously reminded you of a disliked parent. If you become aware that one of the causes of the excessive anger is the similarity between lover and parent, i.e. "unfinished business," you can talk to yourself and reduce the inappropriate anger by saying, "Hey, my lover isn't my parent and I'm not going to be irrational about this." Without insight, you are left with "my lover makes me so mad" or "I have such a temper." The insight-oriented therapist depends on the rational part of the client to detect and correct the irrational, unconscious parts. The cognitive therapist, however, might simply focus on the irrational expectations made of the lover (without worrying about the reason for these expectations); the behavior therapist might desensitize you to the lover's behavior that made you mad (without regard to how you originally learned the anger

response); other therapists might teach you how to handle the anger, as in "fair fighting," (without analyzing the source) and so on. All methods might work, but insight seems cleaner and more complete //, as in this case, awareness of the unresolved anger results in fewer over-reactions in a variety of situations.

Let's suppose at age 24 you are looking at the causes for your procrastination. One factor among 15 or 20 might be a resentment of having to work and a wish to return to your care-free years of 8 or 10. All of us yearn for the security of being totally cared for, being free of responsibility, having the time to do whatever we feel like doing, etc. If we thought about it consciously, such child-like wishes would be seen as unreal and foolish. Yet, if left unconscious, the wishes can exert some influence, perhaps through the vague feeling that if I don't study or do well on this job (procrastinate), I can go live at home and dad will get me a good job and everything will be comfortable and wonderful. Some part of you has to tell the scared, dependent part to face facts and stop screwing up your life.

Please note that unconscious factors frequently exert very little influence relative to the conscious payoffs, emotions, skills and thoughts. Also, note that unconscious factors may strengthen desirable tendencies as well as unwanted behaviors and feelings. Examples: the same sexual interests that push a person to get fat to avoid temptation may push the same person at another time of life to lose weight to be sexier. The same drive for child-like dependency that leads to procrastination may be directed differently and push us into over-learning for exams.

Time involved

If you are psychologically ready for this open-mindedness, then little else needs to be done. You will apply what you read about others to yourself; you will wonder if friend's and stranger's problems and urges exist in you too; if you look for unconscious factors, you will find them. If you are resisting the idea, then you may never see many unconscious factors in yourself or in others. But you will have to continue working hard to deny the evidence for the unconscious discussed in the next section.

If you attempt to examine all the causes of a problem, as described in steps three and four, it should only take half an hour to come up with the initial list. But if you read or talk to people and ponder extensively about the causes, then a few hours will be needed. Once the list is pretty complete, the assigning of weights won't take but a few minutes, just give a quick gut response; maybe ask a friend or a counselor; no one knows the truth.

Common problems

The major barrier is rejection of the idea of having illegal, immoral, sinful, gross, mean, selfish impulses lurking inside you without your

awareness. You won't look for these influences if you don't believe in them and/or find it too embarrassing or painful. If your resistance to these ideas is quite high, there may be some wisdom in your reaction; frankly, I wouldn't push it too much.

Actually, the evidence for unconscious factors is compelling. In the split-brain studies, these people clearly have perceptions, responses, motives and emotions that escape their awareness. Under hypnosis, people can do things they don't remember and they can carry out post-hypnotic suggestions without knowing why. In multiple personalities, one personality is often not aware of all the others. We all use defense mechanisms. No one would deny that playing, partying, sleeping, listening to music, watching TV and so forth are used sometimes to avoid and forget unpleasant duties; yet, we aren't always aware of what we are doing. We often do not realize that our own irrational ideas cause many of our emotions. Therapists repeatedly find unconscious motivations and "unfinished business." All of us are at times puzzled by our own behavior and feelings. We frequently forget the way we originally learned to respond, think, or emote in a certain way; in a sense, the causes become "unconscious" as we forget. No one can deny these facts, but some people will still refuse to face and look into their unconscious.

Freud would also quickly point out that the unconscious is very clever. It might easily persuade you that your unconscious factors are of little importance day to day, hardly worth thinking about.

Some therapies, such as Gestalt and Psychoanalysis, assume that once you have discovered some force in your unconscious, you will automatically handle the force in a healthy manner. Almost as though the unconscious drive loses its power once the owner becomes aware of it. This may not be true. We need to know much more about handling these vile impulses we all have.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

I know of no solid objective evidence of the benefits of uncovering unconscious motives and traits, relative to the benefits from non-insight methods. Yet, thousands of therapy patients feel that gaining understanding of their feelings and behavior has helped them to change and feel better. In the process of going through training to become an insight-oriented therapist--and while doing therapy--one gradually accepts the idea of unconscious factors. We psychologists haven't yet proven that insight therapists or their patients are more aware of their unconscious or more able to handle personal problems than others. In fact, Ellis (1987) says we keep on fooling ourselves even after therapy. This denial of the truth may, in some instances, actually help us feel better about ourselves (see discussion in the introduction to this chapter). So, there are potential dangers in becoming aware and in remaining unaware.

What is certain is that a single reading of this method will not throw open all the doors to deep, dark secrets within you. The unconscious will not reveal its secrets unless it is safe to do so. Uncovering the unconscious is a long, complex, unending process. In therapy it can sometimes be upsetting. Only a therapist should be trying to force open doors to another person's unconscious, for instance by expressing hunches about what is hidden in the client's unconscious. Friends and non-professionals should generally stay out of this. But we can push open our own doors without much danger. If the "secret" would be terribly upsetting, you just won't be able to open the door yet. To some people exploring the unconscious is a great adventure. It is a vast, fascinating world.

Case illustration

About 25 years ago I was 20-25 pounds overweight. As part of my very first self-help project, to lose weight, I listed the causes of my overeating. The first 11 factors were environmental factors, like having lots of food around, and learned habits, like having a "sweet tooth," poor eating habits--candy bars--during the day, a family tradition of a big supper and snacks in the evening, and a drink as a way of socializing. Then there were 5 or 6 unconscious factors, e.g. to displease my wife, to avoid other women, to allay anxiety and feel well nourished, to be "big" and make myself more imposing, and to kill myself with a heart attack. I lost the weight primarily by joining Run For Your Life. Yet, I should have considered the unconscious factors more seriously since I was both divorced and had heart trouble a few years later. The main point is, however, that even in such as commonplace area as eating, there are several possible unconscious factors.

Self-Awareness



Gestalt methods of increasing awareness

Fritz Perls (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951; Perls, 1971, 1972, 1976), a psychoanalyst, spent a long lifetime helping patients and group members become more aware of their potential to discover and change parts of themselves. Unlike Freud, Perls did not look for childhood causes of behaviors or feelings. He looked for ways for the patient to find and re-own unconscious *feelings*, wants, and behaviors. He wasn't concerned with why these things were hidden. He simply assumed you needed to have "all the facts"--full awareness--in order to cope with life.

If you have shoved important, painful experiences and feelings out of your conscious, and they now operate unconsciously, how can you

possibly make intelligent decisions and adjust to the situation? You don't see things realistically; you don't know your own needs; you don't respond appropriately. Gestaltists try to help people work through their "unfinished business." This means becoming aware of old hurts, fears, needs, and resentments which are still alive but buried in your unconscious and which continue to distort your view of reality. Fritz Perls and other Gestalt therapists developed several methods (experiences) for increasing awareness of these repressed emotional experiences that secretly disrupt our lives, carry over the past into the "here and now," cause neuroticism, interfere with decision-making, etc. Some of these methods are described here for you to try.

Like all insight therapies, Gestaltists emphasize "know thyself" and "the truth will make you free." Yet, Gestaltists don't ask their patients "*why* did you do that?" because it arouses defenses and encourages rationalizations. Instead, they ask their patients to experience all of their selves, to accept all their alienated parts (as in method #1) and, thus, become whole--a gestalt. Similar to Freud's assumption that insights will automatically be used, it was an Gestaltist notion that we humans will intuitively make good decisions *if* we are playing with "all our marbles," i.e. if we really are aware of the "unfinished emotional business" and unconscious drives that are going on inside of us. Thus, a basic principle of Gestalt therapy is to let your natural wisdom or intuition flow--stop thinking about what you "should do" or "should have done" and do what "feels right." Gestaltists suggest other healthy attitudes: (1) assuming responsibility for all of your self--your traits, decisions, feelings, and actions, (2) being your true self, your own person, independent--not conforming to others' expectations, and (3) living in the here and now--not regretting the past, not obsessing about why we did something, not trying to plan and control everything in the future, but being in touch with our feelings and what is going on right now around us.



I do my thing, and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you. And I am I.
-Fritz Perls



Gestaltists, while stressing self-responsibility, feel that self-help procedures and techniques are of little value. Why? Because they believe that self-improvement pits one part of you, the part that wants to change, against another part, the part that wants to remain the same. So even if self-help methods force a change over the resistance of another part of you, such as weight loss or being more assertive, you are likely to revert back to being over-weight or passive after the self-help project is over. Instead, Gestaltists suggest getting to know both the "I want-to-improve" and the "I-don't-want-to-change" parts

very well, and then doing what feels right. By not pushing for self-change, Gestalt therapists help each client find his/her unique barriers to self-improvement. Once the emotional barriers are known, the problem resolves itself. (I believe they have a point, but we still need methods for getting in touch with our conflicting parts and unfinished business.)

Purposes

- To increase your awareness of three "worlds" where your consciousness spends time: the outside world, the inner world of feelings, and another inner world of plans, memories, and thoughts.
- To help you recognize the pockets of "unfinished business" in your garbage bag, so you become more rational and effective.
- To teach you some techniques for gaining greater awareness of unconscious feelings and needs. Gestalt therapy is not technique-oriented, it is process-oriented. But there are techniques or "experiences" which aid the process of insight and awareness.

Steps

STEP ONE: What is the focus of your awareness? Becoming more aware of the full range of experiences possible in the here and now.

You realize, of course, that hundreds of things are available for you to attend to at any moment: sensations from all your senses, observing the environment or your actions or emotions, having fantasies, memories, plans and many other thoughts. You notice very little of all that is available. This selection process is instantaneous, constant, and mostly unconscious. Let's see if we can clarify for you what you tend to focus on...and what you exclude from awareness.

Begin by observing what you become aware of during two minutes of "quiet time," i.e. no TV blaring, no loud music, no one nude walking by, no pressing physical needs, no demands to decide what to eat for supper, and so on. If you need a little structure, then say to yourself, "At this moment, I'm aware of..." or "Here and now, I notice...." Please, do this exercise (two minutes) before reading on.

Now, ask yourself: Which of the three possible worlds did I focus on the most? (1) Cognitive world: inside your head--thoughts, fantasies, problems, plans for future, remembering the past, etc. Did you rehearse dealing with some situation? (2) Affective world: inside your body--physical sensations, emotions, and feelings. Did you notice your physiological responses, such as heart rate, nervousness, muscle tension or twitches, tiredness, upset stomach, sweating, etc.? (3) Outside world: the environment--sounds, sights, temperature, observation of events or other people. Did you attend to distant noises, to objects you had previously overlooked? Which world did you focus on the least?

Gestaltists believe we live too much in our heads and avoid sensations in our bodies. Thus, the saying, "lose your mind, gain your senses." In our culture we tend to disregard what is going on in our bodies (that is why Gestalt therapists pay so much attention to the patient's gestures, mannerisms, and body language) but do an excessive amount of head-tripping, i.e. trying to reason, plot, manipulate, and self-help our way out of a problem. Without being clearly aware of the complex and conflicted feelings in our body and in our "unfinished business," our coping will be impaired. Awareness is not easy to gain, however.

Your task is to become open to all feelings and sensations in you, to perceive the environment in detail, to be a fully experiencing person. Start practicing increasing your awareness. Try to see and note details in a familiar situation you never noticed before. Notice facial expressions, eye movement, body language, tone of voice, the little ways we signal "it is your turn to talk" or "it is time for me to go." Notice your hand gestures, eye movements, physiological and emotional responses, your feelings when touched or challenged, etc. Review your history and try to uncover the origins of your feelings and reactions to certain people or situations--look for the "unfinished business." Also, practice describing in detail an interaction you have recently had with someone. Note what is easy for you to focus on and describe, and which aspects of the situation you tend to neglect or avoid. A friend can help you realize what you overlook.

Bodily sensations and body language are peep holes into our hidden conflicts and feelings. So you can see why, as the patient is talking about a concern, Gestalt therapists are constantly commenting, "What are you feeling?," "What is your foot doing?," "Your hand is making a fist, what is it feeling?," "What does it mean when you stretch like that?," "Stay with the feeling of guilt and see where it leads you," "What do you want to happen?" and so on. There is no reason why you can't constantly ask yourself, "What is going on inside me?" and, thus, become more self-aware.

It is also important to observe any resistance you have to increasing your observational powers and your awareness. Are you uninterested or bored with practicing to increase your awareness? Are you made anxious by these tasks? Are you saying, "I'm perceptive and aware enough!?" If you are resisting, you probably do tend to avoid facing some unpleasant feelings. The feelings, people, and situations in the past that most upset you are probably your "unfinished business"--the ones that are inhibiting you from being a fully and accurately experiencing person every moment of your life.

Another purpose of these Gestalt exercises is to clarify for you the difference between (1) having an immediate experience--having the feelings fully here and now--and (2) giving a "clinical" description--unemotional, cold and cognitive--of the feelings to a friend. I notice when I share a painful experience (divorce, a troubled child, a failure) with a group or friend, even though I am genuine, completely honest,

and feeling very emotional inside, it frequently sounds like I'm describing a patient. This distancing--called intellectualization--is another way of avoiding intense emotions, and maybe a way of gaining some control over threatening feelings, such as crying. Notice the difference between saying, "I feel really angry--my arms are tense, my stomach has a knot in it, I'm perspiring and thinking 'What an SOB _____ is'" and saying, "Most people would find _____ quite irritating." If I or any person denied and intellectualized all the time, never directly experiencing or seldom admitting the feelings, it would surely reflect "unfinished business" and reduce awareness and coping skills in certain situations. Keep in touch with all your parts.

Beyond attending to body language, feelings, and wants, Gestaltists prescribe learning experiences or homework, such as having a group hold, comfort and feed an inhibited, aloof, unemotional man (to get him in touch with childish dependency again), having a dependent woman with a weak, whiny voice to talk like a little girl (to recognize how her helplessness is used), having a shy, self-depreciating person walk around the room like he/she had just gotten an A in a tough course (to recognize and accept feeling proud), having group members imagine being an animal (to see if the choice reflects personal traits or wishes), having a shy person gradually explore being more sociable, and so on (Gilliland, et al., 1989). Gestaltists also make use of dreams (see method #6), imagination (next step), guided fantasy (method #5c), looking for the opposites (next step), the empty chair (see step 3), and many other techniques for finding parts of ourselves. Most of these things you can do yourself.

Being aware is not just noting the details of what is happening for a few minutes; it is a continuous way of life. It is an openness to everything around you and within you. It takes practice. Explore your worlds--all three of them--and observe details: "stop and smell the roses;" see the lines and movement of a familiar face; analyze the pain of rejection into fear, sadness, remembered joy, anger, hope, etc.; when you are attracted or annoyed by someone ask who or what he/she reminds you of, and on and on.

After this exercise, some people report feeling as though they had never fully experienced themselves before, saying, "I never realized there were so many feelings and sensations inside my body--heart beating, muscles tensing and twitching, myself touching and scratching, eyes blinking, breathing, eyes tiring, pants tightening, body relaxing, all intermingling with a constant stream of emotions."

STEP TWO: Looking for the opposites. Thinking more freely.

This experience is based on the assumption that everything has an opposite. In order to know happiness, one must have known sadness. In order to recognize greed, one must know there is another way--generosity. The Gestaltists believe that we are often aware of one feeling or wish or urge to respond a certain way, but unaware of other feelings, wishes or urges, including the opposite of what is on our

mind. Remember the example of both wanting and not wanting some self-improvement. The objective is to become aware of all your parts and the conflicts among these competing urges and wishes, and in this way free up your thinking.

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) suggest imagining things in alternative or opposite ways. Examples: If you are short, imagine being tall. If you are honest, imagine lying. If you are a giving, loving person, imagine being in dire need of help and love. If you are a man, imagine being a woman. Imagine what might have happened if you had said "yes" instead of "no" in some important decision. If you believe something strongly, imagine it isn't so. Imagine disliking a person you ordinarily like or love. Think about the possibility that one person's gain is likely to be somebody else's loss, such as your getting a new job may mean someone lost the job and/or others failed to get the job, or the more of the company's profits go to the executives, the less money there is for the clerks' and janitors' wages, or the steel in your new car may have come from a defaced mountain side, or your beautiful furniture means a tree was cut, or your lobster dinner means the death of an animal and less money to reduce world hunger, and so on.

Other examples to practice: If you feel inferior, ask if you don't also feel superior. If you believe you are attractive, look for ways you think you are unattractive. If you are always sweet and nice to others (lots of southern hospitality), search for your resentment and distrust of others. Take a common fantasy, say being committed and devoted to someone, and look for urges in the opposite direction, say to use and dump him/her. If you daydream about being a failure, look for signs of your potential. If you dream of being great, look for frustrations in your everyday life. Reverse roles with your spouse or parents. Be flexible. Loosen up. Use your imagination and let your feelings flow with the fantasies.

Next, these authors suggest you focus on some specific troublesome situation. First, get in touch with your usual ways of perceiving, acting in, and feeling about that situation. Do this long enough so that your current views and reactions are clear. Second, completely reverse the situation, i.e. imagine the opposite views (if you see it negatively, view it positively), the opposite actions (if you are quiet, be active), and emotions (if you are angry, be indifferent). Third, after experiencing both ways of seeing and reacting to the situation, try to find some "middle ground." If possible, stand on this middle ground between the two opposite reactions without judging either extreme. Give equal attention to each way of reacting, view each in detail with sensitivity and appreciation. This is called "centering."

The intent of this exercise is to free up your thinking and expose you to different alternatives, factors, and relationships you had not seen before. With this greater awareness should come clearer understanding and better solutions. Perhaps you will also gain some

insight into your resistance to thinking flexibly and seeing the opposites. Did you experience anxiety, disgust or boredom while searching for any of the opposites? These reactions might be clues to fears that keep you from seeing things differently or from re-claiming the parts of yourself you have disowned. Self-awareness is very important.

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman cite several case illustrations, including a young man who was eagerly awaiting his wedding date. His fiancée was studying abroad. He missed her terribly and spoke glowingly of his bride-to-be and of marriage. His therapist asked him to go look for the opposites. He resisted but finally acknowledged she had some faults that might spell trouble in the future. Also, he had some financial worries, many demands on his time, and an interest in dating for a few more years. For the first time, he got in touch with some important feelings that had been drowned out by his positive feelings. He still decided to get married but realized these other feelings needed to be dealt with too.

STEP THREE: The empty chair technique: a simple means of exploring your feelings.

When you go see a Gestalt therapist, the office will usually have an extra chair--an empty chair. This chair serves an important function. The therapist may ask you to imagine holding a conversation with someone or something imagined to be in the empty chair. Thus, the "empty chair technique" stimulates your thinking, highlighting your emotions and attitudes. For example, the therapist may say, "Imagine your father in this chair (about 3 feet away), see him vividly, and, now, talk to him about how you felt when he was unfaithful to your mother." There are innumerable other people, objects (your car or wedding ring), parts of your personality (critical parent, natural child, introversion, obsession with work), any of your emotions, symptoms (headaches, fatigue), any aspect of a dream, a stereotype (blacks, macho males, independent women), and so on that you can imagine in the empty chair. The key is a long, detailed, emotional interaction--a conversation. You should shift back and forth between chairs as you also speak for the person-trait-object in the other chair. This "conversation" clarifies your feelings and reactions to the other person and may increase your understanding of the other person.

If you imagine anything in the other chair that gives you difficulty, e.g. a person upsetting you, a hated assignment, a goal that is hard to reach, a disliked boss or authority, a temptation to do something wrong, keep in mind that this person or desire is really a part of you right now--it is *your* fantasy, *your* thoughts. You may disown it, even dislike it, and think of it as foreign to you, like a "mean old man," "the messed up system," "Bill, the self-centered jerk," "a desire to run away," "the boring, stupid book I have to read," etc., but obviously the things said and felt by you in both chairs are parts of you here and now. Your images, memories, emotions, judgments, expectations about the other person or thing are yours! You have created this

image that upsets you (although it is probably based on some external reality). And this conflict exists inside you; it's of your own making; it's yours to deal with.

As long as you believe, however, that the trouble lies with someone or something else--your family, the stupid school, society, "men"/"women," not having enough money, your awful job--you will do very little to change. You just complain and feel frustrated. Someone else is seen as responsible for solving *your* problem. As Fritz Perls would say, "That's crap! Assume responsibility for your own difficulties, own them, explore them--all sides, feel them to the fullest, then make choices and find your way out of your own messes."

The Gestaltists (Stevens, 1973) point out that we are usually identified with only one side of an internal conflict. If we can get in touch with both sides--own both views--the difficulty can be resolved without force, the solution just unfolds naturally. Some examples may help: As mentioned before, in self-improvement what you want to be often conflicts with what you are. Forcing yourself to improve involves becoming preoccupied with changing and/or with failing. You are unable to fully experience and accept what you are here and now. If, instead, you were able to experience all your feelings and conflicting wants, then reasonable choices will supposedly be made to meet your needs without "force," "will power," or "determination." I doubt that awareness always results in effortless resolution of conflicts and growth, as Gestalt therapists claim, but certainly it is more helpful to be aware than ignorant.

Another common conflict frequently emerges if you imagine yourself in the empty chair and try to describe yourself. Try it... Notice if your description became critical. Gestaltists refer to a part of our personality called our "top dog" and another called our "under dog." The top dog is critical, demanding, controlling, pushing for change; the under dog feels whipped, pushed around, weak, resentful, tense and undermines top dog by playing helpless, "I can't do that. Can you help me?" It is important to know both parts well. You are responsible for both. Their differences can be worked out; both are trying to help you.

Few Gestalt methods have been evaluated but a small recent study suggested that the empty chair technique is effective (Paivio & Greenberg, 1995). We need hundreds of more studies of specific self-help or therapeutic methods.

STEP FOUR: [Accept responsibility for the choices you make.](#)

Begin this experience by completing these sentences with several responses:

1. I had to _____, _____,
_____.
2. I can't _____, _____,
_____.

3. I need _____, _____,
_____.
4. I'm afraid to _____, _____,
_____.
5. I'm unable to _____, _____,
_____.



Do this before reading on; otherwise, you are likely to miss the point.



Now, go back and try substituting these words for the five beginnings above:

1. I chose to...instead of I had to...(*whatever you filled in above*)
2. I won't...instead of I can't...(*whatever you filled in above*)
3. I want...instead of I need...(*whatever you filled in above*)
4. I'd like to...instead of I'm afraid to...(*whatever you filled in above*)
5. I'm unwilling to work hard enough to...instead of I'm unable to... (*whatever you filled in above*)

Do you see how you might actually be denying the responsibility for many of your choices, wants, fears and weaknesses? It is important to see how this kind of thinking (and subtle use of certain words) can contribute to us feeling less free, less able, less satisfied with ourselves. In this way, we start to believe we have few choices and little power. We become unrealistically weak and passive. In reality, we often (but not always) have many choices and much power. Fritz Perls was a crusty old man who had little patience for people who "played helpless" to manipulate others. He would say, "Grow up and wipe your own ass." That puts it bluntly.

STEP FIVE: Working through unfinished business: Uncovering the repressed feelings that still mess up your life.

Just as you are almost always thinking something, you are almost always feeling something, even though you "don't pay it much mind." Furthermore, what you are now feeling is influenced by emotional "leftovers" from previous experiences. Gestaltists don't analyze "unfinished business," they suggest you re-experience it, to get in touch with the "leftover garbage." Examples: a middle-aged woman, who distrusts men excessively, discovers that the "garbage" from an irresponsible, rejecting father is still active. A 55-year-old man, who is tense and sensitive to criticism, realizes that guilt about not providing better for his ailing parents is very alive. Just like behaviors, feelings come from somewhere.

To understand emotions it is also important to realize that one emotion sometimes conceals another emotion. Examples: mild emotions may cover up strong ones--as we saw in chapter 6, boredom may conceal depression, disinterest in sex may conceal anger, withdrawal may hide self-deprecation. We all realize that how we see others or the world often reflects how we feel about ourselves. A person who feels capable is usually optimistic about others. If we think we are deceptive and dishonest, we are unlikely to trust others. Intense emotions often cover up other strong emotions; current emotions often hide old ones; emotions often thinly veil a strong need or want.

Muriel Schiffman (1971) describes an experiential technique for uncovering the repressed "garbage" that is smelling up your "here and now." Try this sometime when you have a *strong unwanted emotion*, perhaps sadness, anger, loneliness, insecurity, etc. First, let yourself go and *feel the emotion* full strength, no matter how unreasonable, immoral, dangerous, or crazy it is. (Emoting privately--yelling, crying, writing, fantasizing--doesn't hurt anyone.) Second, *go looking for concealed emotions*, asking, "Do I also feel something else?" Remember the classic examples of intense emotions: crying hides anger, dependency suppresses anger, excessive smiles conceal depression, physical complaints belie anxiety, anger overshadows fears, feelings for one person are displaced to another, and so on. Third, also *investigate your bodily sensations and your emotions for more subtle additional feelings*, e.g. some anger that your friend doesn't lift your sadness, a slight satisfaction when someone fails, a touch of jealousy when you are left alone, a flicker of sexual arousal when you hear of a sexually immoral act, a touch of resentment when you concede to or do a favor for someone, etc. Explore these other feelings and see where they take you.

Fourth, *ask yourself, "What do these current feelings and the situation remind me of in the past?"* Have I been here before? What was my most intense similar experience? What was my earliest similar experience? What do the current words, actions, looks, feelings, etc. make me think of? *Re-live the earlier experiences* over and over until the strong emotions are drained and you can see more clearly the connection--the wholeness--between the past experience and the current feelings. Don't try to intellectually understand the previous experience, just try to get in touch with all the leftover emotions and memories still in your garbage bag. Schiffman suggests four good ways to uncover hidden feelings: (a) talk to friends about current and previous situations, (b) write out your feelings and read them later to see what memories come to mind, (c) while alone re-experience current and previous situations in vivid fantasy, and (d) what she calls "sneaking up on the hidden feelings," where you take any strong emotion, say from a film or a book, and ask, "What other feelings (besides the strong emotion described in the book) do I have?" and "What real-life experiences does this emotional scene remind me of?" Experience these uncovered feelings fully, become aware of how they are still influencing your life.

Fifth, after using this procedure several times (in a couple of weeks), ask yourself if there is *a pattern to your garbage*. Examples: Does anger usually follow my feeling guilty? Do I resent submissiveness like I saw in my mother? Do I feel like I should rescue all men who use drugs like my favorite brother? Do I usually cry instead of getting mad? Do I turn "cold" instead of dealing with the problem? Do I frequently displace my anger? Do I deny the same emotion over and over again?

Once aware of your "unfinished business," you can make use of this information to control your unreasonable reactions. The next time you over-respond emotionally, remind yourself of the emotional garbage you bring to the situation. Say to yourself, "it's not the orders from the boss that are bugging me, it is my resentment of my dad's criticism" or "I'm responding to that woman as if she were my mother" or "just because I was dumped by _____ doesn't mean _____ will dump me."

Time involved

Opening our minds to many hidden experiences and feelings-- developing a new experiential world-- is time consuming, surely weeks or maybe months. Some of the techniques, like the empty chair used in a specific situation, may take only 10 to 30 minutes, but several techniques will need to be applied to scores of different emotions and upsetting situations before great new awareness characterizes much of your life. Attending to the "here and now" and working through "unfinished business" is never ending. So, get started.

Common problems

It would be foolish to assume that painful experiences repressed because they hurt a lot could be easily uncovered doing a playful exercise for fun. To "*work through*" a conflict you probably need to be quite frustrated with a part of your life and determined to understand what is going on. Even then, insights may not come easy or ever.

Some people do not have the psychological mindedness or imagery necessary to explore the unconscious for hidden feelings. Also, Gestalt therapists are directive--they tell the patient what to do to gain awareness. The techniques may not work as well when they are book- or self-directed. On the other hand, Gestaltists emphasize being self-responsible. But no one is in complete control of his/her repressed emotional life. Don't demand or expect too much from these methods. Lastly, there are two problems with the notion that awareness is curative: (1) there is no scientific proof that knowing all the feelings inside you will automatically lead to superior adjustment and (2) if awareness does not necessarily improve adjustment, some people may become absorbed with just uncovering hidden feelings, sort of perpetual psychological wallowing in emotional garbage, and neglect making actual self-improvements. So, the other psychological self-help techniques might be needed after all.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Gestalt therapists are more artists than researchers. Clinical experience and many case studies testify to the effectiveness of their methods, but there is little objective research on Gestalt therapy. Hardly any research exists on the self-application of Gestalt techniques. However, their books are interesting, popular reading and recommend self-application. The techniques are intriguing to most people.

Uncovering always involves some risks (presumably not as many as leaving the feelings hidden). Because our garbage is inevitably distasteful to us, rubbing our noses in it via new awareness may be, for some people, a very emotional experience. Remember: increased awareness may include increased self-criticism. Gaining insight is the kind of experience that may best be done with a therapist. So, if you become upset, it certainly suggests you need to get the unfinished business cleared up, but with an experienced counselor's help in uncovering and then cognitively and affectively integrating the new awarenesses. The risks are no greater, however, than for most other methods.

Self-Understanding

Autobiography, diary, intensive journal, and psychological readings

There are thousands of helpful psychology books. Books are often used by therapists in a kind of therapy called bibliotherapy, in which patients read and discuss psychological material in a group or with the therapist (Fuhriman, Barlow, & Wanlass, 1989). Therapists of all persuasions recommend selected readings to their clients. Undoubtedly, we discover new things about ourselves by reading of others' experiences--their thoughts, feelings, dreams, needs, altruism, emotional problems, destructive urges, relationships, and frustrations. We are similar in some ways to every other person. There may, in fact, be a slight tendency in us to do almost anything anyone has ever done (see method #1). Their emotions are our emotions. Their urges our urges. Their insights become our new awareness. To know ourselves, we must know others of "our own kind" intimately. Much of that knowledge is in books and available to us, if we are open-minded.

All that Mankind has done, thought, gained or been, it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books
-Thomas Carlyle



Keeping journals and diaries help us pull together useful information from books, from observing events in our own lives, from talking with others, from our own thoughts, dreams, feelings, and internal drives. I especially encourage students to take personalized notes while they read useful psychology books. But I *discourage* writing a summary (like for an exam) of what they have read; you aren't preparing to take an exam; instead, write down *exactly how you can use* the information you have just read. Knowledge that is used is of much more value than stored knowledge; in fact, if you don't use new information within a couple of days, it isn't likely to ever be used and you may not store it for long. A journal is an excellent place to figure out how to improve yourself and your life. Daily diaries can serve you in many other ways, most of these ways are quite conscious but by thinking and writing in a diary we gain new ideas and a different perspective. Certainly intimate diaries provide fascinating insight-laden reading weeks, months, and years later. Journals can involve in-depth probing, as you will soon see.

Therapists frequently take a careful social history, like a biography, before undertaking therapy. Knowing the background, the possible causes, facilitates finding the cures (see chapter 2). Books, such as John Bradshaw's *Family Secrets*, can guide your exploration for two or three generations back. It is amazing how often our problems are rooted in the problems and traumas of our parents' and grandparents' childhood. We can only know ourselves by knowing our family history. Writing an autobiography, incorporating your family history, greatly increases your awareness of the events underlying today's events and feelings. It can be fascinating and healing. The knowledge can also be a wonderful legacy to your children.

Many writers of autobiographies have commented about the powerful emotions, insights, and finally personal relief from re-living stressful periods of their lives, e.g. Steinum, 1992. Wegscheider-Cruse (1992) guides you through the process of writing your own history. Rico (1991) documents the value of self-healing by writing your way through a crisis, much as you would do when keeping a diary. Since 1985, James Pennebaker has done a remarkable series of laboratory-based studies assessing the value of writing about traumatic events in your life. The results document the emotional and physical health benefits from putting emotional upheavals into words. The researchers have also been surprised that serious traumas have occurred in 50% of the lives of even young, upper-middle class college students. The young people have been willing to openly write about deaths, rape, family violence, suicide attempts, drug problems, and other horrors. In a study with Joshua Smyth, Pennebaker found that writing about

emotional crises resulted in much fewer visits to the Health Service. The process of "writing your deepest thoughts and feelings" seems to translate the disturbing and often chaotic experience into language that tells a coherent story. This story-telling thought process seems to be the key to gaining mental and physical benefits. Apparently the written "story" changes how the person organizes and thinks about the trauma. In some of the studies, the writing was done for 15-30 minutes per day for 3-5 days. The writers were encouraged to also relate their stressful experience to their childhood, relationships, who they are and want to be, etc. As the stories became more insightful and understandable over time, the benefits increased. Keep in mind that this experimental form of self-treatment takes little or no professional time and is something you can do at any time. Lepore and Smyth (2002) have summarized this interesting and important research about expressive writing.

Some cautions are in order, however: trauma sufferers remind me that learning to cope with old traumas takes a long time, not just 100 minutes. Also, if remembering a trauma still makes you distraught ("re-traumatized"), it is wise to have someone, a friend or a therapist, with you during this writing process. Also, for some people, especially those whose experiences haven't been believed before, an especially important part may be sharing the traumatic memory with someone who will listen carefully and care, be very supportive, and reassure you that they believe your description. Surely another important part is to come to believe in some detail that you now know how to handle that trauma and others equally challenging. All this learning takes time.

Later, in this section, we will discuss the value of writing a journal, seeing clearly your "life script," and finding meaning in your life via personal myths (Valley-Fox & Keen, 1992).

These methods--reading books, writing your history and autobiography, keeping a journal--are serious, time-consuming, long-term, down-to-earth, and reasonable efforts. Doing all three would require great, sustained effort which may amount to a change in lifestyle. Ask yourself if you are motivated to undertake any of these long-term tasks. A dedicated self-helper and aspiring psychotherapist will be.

Reading psychology books and keeping a journal do not deal with unconscious factors exclusively, of course. But read Freud and see if you don't uncover your Oedipus/Electra complex or some other sexual experiences in childhood. (I clearly remember at age five being fascinated by my mother's breasts and hoping she would come and help me take a bath.) Write your history, consulting with your parents and siblings, and see if you don't view your childhood differently. If there has been friction with a parent, try to see "where they were coming from." Keep a journal for several weeks and observe to see if you have cycles (PMS or reoccurring relationships or high-and-low productivity) or if you experience the same emotion over and over. These are useful insights.

Purposes

- To benefit via reading from the knowledge gained through research and therapy.
- To understand the influence of your family and your childhood on your current life by reading and doing an autobiography.
- To use a journal to detect changes and connections that might otherwise go unnoticed, e.g. improvements, backsliding, events or thoughts that bring on problems, payoffs following certain actions, etc.
- To get in touch with internal forces that influence many aspects of your life.

Steps

STEP ONE: Write your autobiography. Decide what psychological mysteries you'd like to solve and what self-improvements you'd like to make.

Many people say, "My life is dull. I'm just ordinary." But I've listened to thousands of life histories and I've never heard an uninteresting life *if* the person is willing to honestly share his/her soul--the details and depth, the joy and the pain, of the self. A Gestalt therapist, Erving Polster (1987), has written a book, *Every Person's Life is Worth a Novel*. It says you are interesting; please believe it. Reading this book or autobiographies should inspire you to write your own story. Not only would writing an autobiography be a therapeutic experience for you, it would also be fascinating and helpful to your children and grandchildren. Indeed, a question and answer outline for just such a book is published by Kamen (1987) called, *A Grandparents' Book: Thoughts, Memories, and Hopes For a Grandchild*. What a wonderful idea. However, keep in mind that writing your history for others, is a very different process from writing privately for self-understanding and self-improvement. It is the latter we will focus on.

I can not emphasize too much the importance of knowing the psychological background of your grandparents--what was their childhood like? How were they treated by their parents? What were their hopes and aspirations, successes and failures? How did your mother/father get along with their siblings and what roles did they play--hero, scapegoat, lost child, victim...? Were there abuse or deaths or traumas in their histories? Under what circumstances were you born? How did you get along with your siblings and what role did you play? (See Blevins, 1993.) What kind of relationship did your parents have? Remember that building trust is an important aspect of coping psychologically. To trust and feel secure we must be saved many times when we are small. If we experience serious psychic traumas, we may become unglued, e.g. we may repress or forget the experience *or* believe similar burdens are our role in life *or* seek futilely to repeat the trauma over and over in hopes we can work it out with a wonderful ending. Bradshaw (1994) will take you deeply into the psychological morass of your family history, especially the

consequences of any addictions or abuse or sickness. Such a guide is important. The chances may not be very high that big awful secrets will be uncovered in your past, but when addiction, crime, psychosis, infidelity, brutality, etc. are a part of your background, you can bet it has had a significant but often hidden impact on your life. You have a right to know. A probing history is a major undertaking and an important introduction to your autobiography.

One of the more helpful brief procedures for letting a small group get to know you is a "life graph"--a line drawn year by year showing the highs and lows of your life. Ron Konzak (nd) has a book and a nine-foot graph for such a history (a blackboard works well). He says it helps you understand yourself better; I saw the life graph as primarily a way to disclose to others the most important events and stages of your life. Friends or group members will not read your 100-page autobiography, but they will attend carefully to a 15-minute graph of your ups and downs, and use that information to understand, empathize, and help you as best they can.

Your reading and writing of reading notes, an autobiography, and/or a journal will be more profitable if you have some *specific* self-understanding or self-change goals in mind, perhaps only 3 or 4. Thus, this method begins with an autobiographical review of your life which will help you decide where you want to go from here. But first, make a tentative list of some things you might want to understand better about yourself and make another list of things you might want to change about yourself. Pay particular attention to these areas (and others that occur to you) as you write your autobiography. For each "mystery" and each "problem" make up a work sheet for ideas, books to read, possible explanations, possible self-improvement approaches and so on. You will be "researching" your problem.

Peter Madison (1969), author of *Personality Development in College*, offered for several years a college course in personality development based on an autobiography, a daily journal, and readings about case studies. The outline below for an autobiography comes from his experience. But first some comments about writing a life history (for personal insight). Try to focus on the events that have emotional significance for you, events that influenced your behavior, feelings, and values. Don't list where you lived or went to school or what organizations you belonged to (it's not a resume), unless these facts had impact on your self-concept, goals, reactions to others, etc. In fact, some of the most important factors in your development may be *things that did not happen*. not having love, not having friends, not having parents who attended to your school work (or non-work), not having responsibilities, not having dates, not having career plans, not having anyone to share personal feelings with, etc. Include these. Sometimes little things make a difference: mom talking to you about sex, dad teaching you to drive carefully, long talks with your sister, childhood sexual experiences, liking a teacher, and so on. Lastly, it is important to be frank and to give details. Yet, keep in mind that others may find your writings, so consider using a code name for yourself and

others. Keep this information in a safe, private place. Sometimes very secret events can be recorded in vague, non-specific terms, so only you can understand clearly. One should be cautious.

This is Madison's suggested outline for an autobiography:

1. *A general introduction of yourself*: who you are, something about your family and your position in the family, other important people in your life at this time, and so on.
2. *Early childhood memories*: outstanding events without regard to order, any "peak" or "awful" experiences. Just describe a few events at this point (see later topics), don't analyze for significance.
3. *Unusual childhood ideas* or misconceptions: we all have had some strange ideas, such as who are our real parents, how are babies made, what is death, what caused parents to drink or fight, what does it mean to "go to work," what does "going crazy" mean, etc.
4. Your *self concept* as a young child: how you felt about yourself, abilities or weaknesses you assumed you had, how you thought others reacted to you (loving? trusting? critical? competitive?). Were you self-confident or nervous? When you made a mistake, was your reaction "I'm terrible" or "I need to work harder?"
5. *Significant others* in your original family and present situation: for each person, including siblings and others in the household, describe the general nature of the relationship, earliest memories, and feelings for each other then and now. Relationships are the essence of our lives.

Similarly, Bentz (1989), who has written about *Becoming Mature*, asks women to write about significant others in different stages of their life, e.g. preschool, 6-12, 13-18, 19-25, and 26+. What did each person think of you (attributions) and expect of you? How did you react to those attributions and expectations? What impact did they have on your life? What effect did organizations, such as scouts or sports, and institutions, such as church, have on you? Then, with Bentz, these autobiographies were discussed in groups, where each person learns to understand and control the "voices" from the past that influence her adult life.

6. How you handled *life's developmental crises*: considering each of the stages of personality development in Table 9.1 and moral development in chapter 3, describe how and how well you got through those critical periods.
7. *Describe yourself* from different perspectives: how do others view you, e.g. the opposite sex? your teachers and bosses? your peers? What do you think you're really like? Ideally, what would you like to be like? Do you express feelings or suppress them? Do you take risks or play it safe?

8. How you *resemble and differ* from your parents and other members of the family? Make physical, personality, attitudinal, values, and behavioral comparisons.
9. *Family relations*: How did your parents relate to each other? Were you dependent or independent as a child and teenager? How do you relate to your spouse? How did your parents relate to you and your siblings? How do you relate to your children? How did your siblings get along? How do your children get along?
10. How do significant others see *your future*?
11. *Sexual history*: Early memories, how you learned about sex, attitudes (early and later) toward sex and toward both sexes, temptations, good and bad experiences.
12. *School and work history*: parents', friends' and your attitudes about school and your career. How much of your time goes into work and how much into fun? Is that about right?
13. *Friendships, loves, and social life*: throughout your life, including early friends, your "gang," first love, sports, religious activities, co-workers, best friends, lovers, etc. What kinds of communities did you live in?
14. *Crises, regrets, and peak experiences*: describe your three greatest crises and three most wonderful experiences. What would you have liked to have happened differently in your life? What did you need you didn't get?
15. *Future changes you would like to make* in your life: describe your major goals in one, five, ten and twenty years. What self-improvements are needed to achieve those goals? Which self-help projects should be started first?
16. *Reactions to writing the autobiography*: before, during, and after doing the writing.
17. *Realistic expectations*: not what you hope will happen in your life, but what is most likely.
18. *Life graph*: summarize your life by plotting year by year the ups and downs of your life from birth to now. Note on the graph, using little symbols or phrases, the causes of the "highs" and "lows."

A book by Leman and Carlson (1989), *Unlocking the Secrets of Your Childhood Memories*, might help you find the significance of your childhood experiences. Also, if appropriate, ask a parent, sibling, or close friend to review a rough draft of your autobiography. Get their views and reactions--that is likely to be revealing. Add these other opinions to your write-up.

Writing the autobiography, a major undertaking, should put your life in perspective and help you see the major directions you are moving in--or where you aren't making much movement. You will probably find some other areas of your life you would like to understand better. Add them to your list of mysteries.

STEP TWO: Keep a daily diary: Record significant experiences, causes of problems, progress in self-improvement, and what self-help

methods work. Use an "intensive journal" to connect with the deepest processes guiding your life.

Wouldn't it be fascinating to read, when you are 60, the major events of every day of your life? Diaries are also excellent ways of recording your progress in a self-help project which may not be obvious otherwise. Record your daily successes and your failures (see chapter 2). Recordings done immediately following a self-improvement effort are also good places to figure out what you did right or wrong, i.e. what self-instructions worked well and what self-defeating thoughts undermined your efforts, etc. Insight into the causes of a behavior or feeling can be gained by using a diary for a "behavioral analysis" (see chapters 4 and 11) in which you note the antecedents and consequences of the target behavior. *Avoid recording just a schedule of your activities for the day.* Self-help journals focus on your self-help efforts and goals, on your relationships, and on your feelings. Journal writing in which you pour out your anger, fears, frustrations, disappointments, etc. has been found to reduce anxiety and depression as well as improve your health. It is best to write in your diary every day, getting the pent up feelings out as soon as possible. Diaries can, obviously, serve many purposes.

Another type of journal seeks much deeper insight and guidance; it hopes to *find* life's meaning and goals, not to give it meaning or achieve goals. Let's discuss the latter kind of journal at length.

Ira Progoff (1975) has years of experience teaching people to use *a special journal to gain insight into the unfolding process of life*, into the unconscious creative and spiritual forces--the "inner resources"--within us. How does he do this? He speaks of trusting in the self-healing wisdom of life. He believes every life has purpose and meaning--"something is being worked out within us"--even though it is unknown to us and unaided by our intellectual minds. He tells of decisions, which can't be made by conscious thought, being formed by a mysterious "vital force" in each life.

His journal "workshops" are not for talking and interacting; they are quiet places to explore alone your deepest and most intimate awarenesses and write them down; they are "working-in-your-journal shops" that focus on your history, friendships, conflicts, love, spiritual experiences, repeated dreams, moods, hopes and so on.

In the first step, you concentrate on the current or recent (last few years) stage of your life. Make *brief notes* of the major happenings in a section of your journal called *The Period Log*. Do not give details, don't analyze or try to understand. At least make cursory notes about your memories of recent (a) relationships--just jot down names, (b) work situation, (c) health, (d) social group and activities, and (e) any dramatic or especially meaningful event. You will return to these topics. Limit yourself to an hour or so.

Now you turn to a different process, called "*twilight imaging*," in which you use a meditative-feeling mode. The idea is to reach a deeper-than-conscious level where our intuition, hunches, inspiration and a different awareness resides. A state between sleeping and waking, like a mild hypnosis, is sought. Sit quietly, close your eyes, calm down, and merely behold, don't direct, whatever experiences occur to you about this current or recent phase of your life. Images, symbolic impressions, emotions, and inward intuitive awareness are all recorded briefly afterwards in the *Twilight Imagery Log*. Take 30 to 40 minutes.

Next, take the two views of this phase of your life--the consciously recalled memories from (1), the *Period Log*, and the impressions that come unconsciously from your inner depths in (2), the *Twilight Imagery Log*, and put them side by side. Do they agree, complement each other, or give a different picture? Don't critically analyze the differences with your conscious, intellectual mind; merely *feel* the tone of each. Don't value one view over the other; together they form a more complete message; absorb it, unconsciously form an *inner correlation* between the two views. Don't be judgmental and don't jump to conclusions about your future. Just realize we are at a critical point between our past and our future. The combined conscious and unconscious views give us, as Progoff says, a way of knowing where we are in the unfolding of our lives and getting a clearer, broader view of the path our life is trying to take.

Keep a *Daily Log*. This is another part of the total "intensive journal." We need to stay in contact with the movement of our lives. The best way is a diary focusing on whatever is going on inside of us. Take time each day, if possible, to close your eyes, relax and review the day. Then, record briefly the major external events of the day but concentrate on the internal experiences--mental thoughts and fantasies, mood and emotions, and especially dreams (cross reference to the Dream Log) or spontaneous insights during the day. Don't be embarrassed about what you write; don't worry about grammar or writing style or organization. Don't use polite language; use your everyday mental language. No one else will read it, but you will use it later, and it needs to be completely honest. Finally, take a few minutes to review this day in this manner and record it in the log.

Steppingstones of our lives. By understanding our life history, especially the main junctures along life's road, we can feel the speed and direction of movement in our lives. This helps us make decisions at future crossroads. Just as an explorer leaves "markings" through the mountains, each phase of life has its markers. They reflect the complex, hidden forces that unfold our meaning.

Again, begin by relaxing, closing your eyes, and trying to sense--feel, not think--your life passing before your mind's eye. Let it happen, don't *try* to remember. Using short phrases or a single word, record your first list of steppingstones (no more than 10 or 12). My example: Born helpless, secure love, sure of God, social addict, serious student,

lost God, loving Dad, proud program developer, divorce, low times but writing, new life-new hope. Focus more on your subjective experiences which have meaning rather than on a chronology of events. As you read your steps to yourself, how do you feel? Record that too.

It is obvious that different steppingstones would occur to you each time you did it. So, now or a few days from now, imagine two, three or more such lists. They each disclose threads woven into your life. Put several lists side by side and absorb them--get a feel for the steppingstones of your life. These spontaneously created lists of "markings," reflecting facets of the inner flow of your life, may reveal unseen directions of movement and provide guidance for your next phase of life.

Exploring phases of your life. Work with only one phase at a time. Look over the steppingstone periods you have just listed and select the most significant and meaningful period, a time of many possibilities and decisions. If it is still affecting your life, all the better. Relax, sit quietly, close your eyes, drift back to this time in your life. Don't try to recall events, don't try to organize your memories in order, just re-live, re-experience some of those times. "It was a time when..." What kind of person were you? How did you feel? Your attitudes? Your relationships? Your work? Your health? Relationships with groups (family, religion, peers)? Major events? Remember any dreams or twilight imagery or inner wisdom gained? What major decisions were made or not made? Record your recollections without pride or shame in the *Life History Log*, and cross reference them to other sections of the journal. Explore as many phases as you like.

Roads not taken. Looking at the last two steps, it is possible to recall and describe the intersections--the major decision points--in certain phases of your life. Those choices shaped your life. Why review those choices now? Because at every fork, one road wasn't taken. Some opportunities were open to you, perhaps very appealing ones, but they weren't taken. The idea here is not to worry about "what might have been" or to do "Monday-morning quarterbacking;" the purpose is to recognize the un-lived possibilities rather than "forget about it." Besides, the untaken roads may not be washed out--the opportunities may still be there, the ideas might even be more practical now than before, if you would only consider them again. In other instances, with hindsight you can see that the road not taken would have been a disaster and you can count your blessings. Or the road might have been wonderful--but there is no going back. Record in your journal the choice points and see what might have happened on the untraveled roads. If the outcome looks appealing, ask if the option is still open. Your future is for you to make.

Continue reconsideration of past and future. Continue attending to a certain Steppingstone period, letting experiences float into your mind and unfold. Record each image in the *Life History Log*. Repeat this experiencing and recording over and over again. They can be brief recollections or long, detailed ones. In the process, as you re-live

times of decision-making or being forced to go a certain direction, try using Twilight Imagery to explore the road untaken, i.e. imagining the many possibilities missed. Thus, there is also a constant shifting back and forth between recording your past and, whenever we remember a choice point, imagining possible futures. In this way we intuitively reconstruct our life histories--our autobiography--and change our future. It is a long process and a very different autobiography from the one in step one.

Dialogue with persons. After getting a feel for your past and for the directions your life is moving in, make a list of 5 to 10 of the most significant people in your life. They may be liked or disliked, current, past, or promising relationships. The person may be close by or distant, living or dead but still important. Select one to work with first. Write down his/her name and the date. Write a brief uncensored description of the relationship: current situation and feelings. Read it; record your feelings. Now, this is important: Sit silently and *get in tune with that person*, walk in his/her shoes, empathize, sense what he/she was/is secretly striving for. As a part of this identification with the other person, review his/her entire life, list (a word or phrase) his/her Steppingstones. Feel the life-long movement, the underlying flow of his/her life. Close your eyes, give yourself over to Twilight Imagery, do not conjure up the images, just record them. See the person before you, feel deeply in touch with your self and with his/her self, converse with him/her without restrictions. Record the dialogue automatically. Afterwards, record your feelings during the dialogue. Then read it and record feelings again. Later Twilight conversations and real-life interactions with the person can be recorded in the same place in the journal. These lengthy dialogues clarify the surface, conscious experiences and, supposedly, expose us to a "deeper-than-conscious" level of awareness of the problems and the potentials. Try it and see if the dialogue contains new knowledge which improves the relationship (or your feelings about it) and alters the future.

Dialogues with your work, your body, important events, and social groups. The same procedure as used with persons can be used with an infinite number of things or situations. You simply get in touch with the history of your work or some project, of your body, of certain situations, of your race or nationality...list its Steppingstones (history). As you fantasize about the background, the purposes and needs, the essence of your work or body or some group or an event unfolding, it seems to have a life of its own, similar to a person. In Twilight Imagery you can talk with it as if it were a person. Use the same sequence for all dialogues:

- (a) describe it: your body, work, event, etc., record your feelings,
- (b) identify its many Steppingstones--its background or history,
- (c) using Twilight Images have a dialogue with it, record this,
- (d) read the dialogue back to yourself, record your feelings,
- (e) have several daily dialogues, gain insight and grow.

Understanding your dreams. Progoff believes that dreams reflect the on-going imagery, life-force, and wisdom within our unconscious, but dream-messages are so symbolic that one dream can not be interpreted to tell us how to live. Instead, he feels a series of dreams (both night and Twilight) simply hint at which areas of our lives need to be examined more carefully. So, dreams usually lead to dialogues with people, some situation (event), a social group and so on. It is through these various dialogues that the underlying message of the dreams is ordinarily discovered, as described below.

Understanding dreams involves many steps. (a) Start by writing in your *Dream Log* a history of all your dreams. Record your earliest dreams, good and bad dreams, nightmares, telepathic dreams, repeated dreams, sexual dreams, and especially all your recent dreams. Don't analyze them. (b) Next, while looking over the Dream Log, sit quietly getting in touch with your dreams until a particular dream draws your attention. If the dream is already in the Log, try to reconstruct the entire series of dreams before and after the main dream. A series of dreams is desirable. If the dream has not been recorded in the Log, do so and try to remember the entire series. (c) It is thought that dreams are connected and all part of the life-force directing our lives and fulfilling our potential. Therefore, you try to identify with the entire series of dreams that have sought your attention. Read about the series of dreams two or three times, feeling their inner movement until you become part of the forces producing the dreams. Close your eyes, let yourself be carried along and the dreams will continue themselves. This is *Twilight Dreaming*, you aren't asleep nor awake. Part of the dreams may reappear but you do no guiding; let the Twilight Dreams occur; when done, record the Twilight dreams in the Dream Enlargement section (only dreams go in the Dream Log). Read your description and record your reactions to the Twilight experience. (d) Since dreams (night and Twilight) hint at other topics that need to be uncovered, you must follow their leads, e.g. if a person is in the dreams, dialogue with him/her or if the dream involves work, dialogue with work, and so on. That is where we find the meaning of our dreams. (e) You have contacted two forces in your life--the stream of consciousness (every day events) and the unconscious stream of life-forces (reflected in dreams). Using your Steppingstones to get in touch with the conscious stream and your Dream Log, the series of dreams, and Twilight dreams to get in touch with the unconscious stream, place these moving forces in your hands, one in each hand. Ask, "What do the two parts of my life want to say to each other?" Let them converse. When finished, record your feelings, any ideas or insights, and all hints as to where else to dialogue and look for more meaning in your life.

Inner Wisdom Dialogue. We'd all like to know "the ultimate truth." Some turn to religion, some to science, some to personal growth. Consciousness and "inner knowing" are assumed to be expanded by working in your journal, shifting from one section or part of yourself to another. Supposedly, according to Progoff, we know more intuitively than rationally. The previous dialogues (8 and 9) bring this intuitive wisdom into everyday use. This step is another dialogue to bring us

"knowledge beyond understanding," especially spiritual and philosophical wisdom. First, look over your life history and *list your Spiritual Steppingstones*, e.g. early religious experiences, family values, friends' influences, changes in beliefs and faith, being baptized or first communion or bar mitzvah, being involved or distant from a higher power, feeling loved or unloved by God, troubled by death, discovering some truths in a book, etc. Number them in chronological order. We are seeking an awareness of the process underlying our spiritual history so we can carry on a dialogue with that process. Second, review the Steppingstone phases and record the names of people (acquaintances or great minds) who philosophically influenced you the most in each phase. Third, for the dialogue select one person you respect highly and with whom you can be comfortable. Don't expect every dialogue with a wise person to be profound, just start a relationship. Fourth, sit quietly with eyes closed, relax, feel the presence of the wise person, sense his/her knowledge and experience, imagine him/her, with Twilight Imagery feel the flow of his/her life. Then, talk to each other. Tell him/her how you feel about his/her life; describe your relationship with him/her; ask a question. Wait for a response, be patient. Carry on a conversation. Continue asking questions and sharing. Fifth, when over, record it faithfully. Later, read what was said and record your feelings. Similar dialogues can be had with the same person many times and with many wise people. Progoff (1980) explores spirituality even further.

Looking forward. This journal started by looking back, now let's look at the future. Sit quietly with eyes closed thinking of all the experiences you have had with the Journal exercises (look at the journal if you like). Feel the wholeness, the direction, the vital force of your life. Call on Twilight imagery and see the future flowing out of your complex but directed past. A statement, a vision, a hope, a list of possibilities, whatever it is; record it.

Continue using a journal. Every day or every few days make an entry in the Daily Log. This is the on-going movement of your life. Progoff says direct attention to problems rarely solves them, instead solutions come "as though by themselves" from some internal source of wisdom. The Daily Log and the Dream Log lead us to the topics that need to be talked about--the dialogues with people, projects, events, society's expectations and so on. Here, in the dialogues, we get our insights. A journal increases an awareness of your history and your potential because "...each of us can become an artist-in-life with our finest creation being our own self."

I have concentrated on Progoff's journal techniques, but there are others for adolescents, for a spiritual quest, and for connecting with the self (Adams, 1990).

STEP THREE: Reading psychology books and articles; watching TV talk shows and videos.

Naturally, being a professor and a writer, I value books. I have read thousands of self-help books and my students have read and evaluated thousands more. Many students have told me that certain books (including mine) helped them and I believed it most of the time, particularly if they *actually used* the information within a day or two. But that is not a reliable evaluation (at least, not of my book since some students say what they think the teacher wants to hear). The truth is as many as 1/3 of my students were not motivated to read self-help material, suggesting it doesn't do them much good (or they don't have any improvements they hope to make at the moment). Reportedly, only 10% of self-help book buyers read beyond the first chapter. If that is true, a lot of money is wasted.

Unfortunately, as mentioned in chapter 1, relatively little hard core research has evaluated the helpfulness of textbooks, popular psychology books, self-help books or articles, support or helping groups, workshops, credit classes, great literature, TV talk shows, psychological films, audio or video tapes or any other form of psychological education. Yet, some surveys and interviews tell us something about self-help literature (Simonds, 1992). For example, women buy slightly more self-help books than men; women choose more books dealing with love and stress; men pick up more books about motivation and self-improvement. About 2/3rds of us say we know at least one "really good self-help book." Almost no one feels they have been harmed by a self-help book; they just stop reading if they don't like it. Almost 85% of readers and 93% of psychologists (therapists) consider self-help books helpful (Starker, 1989). That is rather impressive. You also need to remember that assigning readings to clients (bibliotherapy) has been found to be almost as effective as psychotherapy, but neither are nearly as effective as one would hope.

Honest scientific evaluation of self-help material is certainly needed but it is an enormous task with little monetary payoff. Making money almost always takes priority over discovering the truth. Researchers are just starting to seriously compare psychotherapy with a self-help or educational approach. Although this is a threat to my profession and its high paid psychotherapists (me too), it is important and reasonable to do. Fuhrman, Barlow, and Wanlass (1989) have reviewed the research evaluating bibliotherapy (in this case great literature was often the readings, not self-help material). The findings were mixed--some successes, some "no significant results." Yet, without research, people buy millions of self-help psychology books in hopes of getting help, largely on the basis of glitzy advertising, exaggerated claims ("phenomenal breakthroughs," "a best seller"), and catchy titles on glossy book covers. Selling books is big business. Publishers aren't scientists, they have no data indicating which manuscripts are helpful. Selecting a book for publication is an intuitive judgment by a person untrained in psychology. Thus, another truth is that an ineffective book is just as likely to have a huge advertising campaign as a helpful book.

So, without objective evaluations, how do you know what book to buy? I'll try to answer that question a little later.

Unfortunately, humankind has not yet determined what information is useful with specific problems *and* has not yet developed a way to quickly deliver useful information to a person in need of help. We surely will soon. Such an information system would not be an impossible task, no more difficult than going to Mars or mapping the genes. Suppose, eliminating duplication, there are several million bits of useful psychological information, such as I have started to collect here. Also, suppose almost all personal and interpersonal difficulties could be classified into 1,000 common problem areas, such as procrastination by high school males, severe self-criticism by 11 to 15-year-old females, etc., etc. It shouldn't be too difficult to compile in a computer the most helpful 10-50,000 bits of information for this specific group of people... or at least an up-to-date reference list of the 25 best books, articles, films and videotapes for each specific problem. Wonder why that isn't being done? Partly, I think, because we, as a society, have little appreciation of how complex human thought, feelings, behavior, and interactions are. Partly, because the current marketing system doesn't make money by evaluating and collecting together useful knowledge.

Since I believe human life is so complex, there is no other way currently to gather together the needed information, except in a book or, more likely, a series of books (or disks or CD-ROM). You can't put everything a person needs to know to cope with life into a one-hour talk show or one computer disk. That is why I am drawing from hundreds of books and citing hundreds more. It is the best our species can do for now. We will do much better in the not-too-distant future.

The situation today is very unsatisfactory (see chapter 1). Most self-help books deal with only one problem (out of hundreds or thousands of human concerns) using only one theoretical approach. Most new books (there are 2000+ self-help books published every year) never get to most bookstores and the few that make it to the stores stay on the shelves for only a few months. Money is made by the rapid turnover of books. Several similar books suddenly pop up in areas editors think will be "hot topics." Rarely is a good self-help book well advertised for long. Public libraries don't even buy many of these specialized books. So, it is almost impossible for an ordinary person to find the information he/she needs when troubles strike. Even I, after 25 years of working in this area, have difficulty finding the best book available for a specific problem. There is certainly little help locating books, especially good old books (see Santrock, Minnett & Campbell, 1994; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1994; Katz and Katz, 1985 for help). Likewise, with TV talk shows, while they are a potentially great educational tool, you can't get them when you need them! What are your chances of seeing a show covering a topic you need that day? Very low! Can you get a videotape of a show shown last year on the problem you have today? No. The distribution of knowledge to hurting people is very inefficient. We'd rather make profit than help people.

One can't use what one doesn't know. But increased self-scrutiny brings more self-assessment... and more self-understanding.

So how can you find knowledge to deal with your own problems? I'd start by skimming the chapter(s) in this book covering your problem. It selects the best from among thousands of books and should give you some good references. If you need more information, call or go to a large public library because it probably has a computerized card catalog that will help you find some self-help books in your specific problem areas--and the books are free. Usually, a library's selection of self-help books is very limited, however. They often have 20 books on the same topic, e.g. dieting or stress management, and none in 20 other problem areas. Libraries also have very old, out-dated books; I'd avoid most books written before 1970, unless they are in specialized areas or classics. I'd question even those written before 1980, although I've cited several. Local bookstores, of course, stock several self-help books, but only a few of the thousands of new publications and hundreds of old classics. Bookstores are clearly designed to serve the needs of the publishers, and only incidentally do they serve the needs of a person needing information. Since reading a book can be time consuming (and may give poor advice), select your material carefully...if possible skim 2 or 3 books for readability, specific advice (generalities don't help much), religiosity (avoid books that suggest turning every problem over to God; that's not *self*-help), and for references to other work (be skeptical of any self-help book which doesn't give credit to its sources of information). More guidelines to *buying* self-help books are given at the end of this section.

As suggested in method #1 in this chapter, read psychological case studies asking, "Could this be true of me too?" And if you answer "yes," which should be much of the time, then there should be a place--a notebook or journal--where you record information relevant to your particular concerns. There is so much information today that it is not valuable per se; information is valuable if it is relevant to a problem and used.

University libraries and academic psychology books are usually useless for the non-professional. Most psychology textbooks, such as Theories of Personality, Psychology of Adjustment, Abnormal Psychology, etc., are general and descriptive, not prescriptive. They don't tell you much about how to deal with personal problems. Even when they are application oriented, they usually tell a therapist how to help a patient rather than helping the person with the problem help him/herself. Psychology textbooks are theory and research oriented, interesting but not very personally useful. Textbooks have slick

pictures and are well done because they are profitably sold to a captive audience; they are expensive; they can be found in abundance in college libraries but few useful self-help psychology books will be there.

On the other hand, popular self-help psychology books are more explicitly helpful than textbooks, although based on the same research as textbooks. They are also easier to read, more interesting, and cheaper--not so slick, fewer colored pictures. Finding a good one is the problem. Read (on the book cover) about the author's training and experience. Be skeptical of books written by writers or journalists (who have often merely interviewed several people with a specific problem to write a book). Look for explicitly self-help books, not manuals for therapists. Choose material written by well *trained therapists with many years of experience* dealing with the kind of problem you have.

I will not cite more books in this section (see chapter 9 for books on self-understanding and understanding relationships). Instead, I have carefully searched for 25 years for the best books and summarized them throughout this book. I should, however, comment about Kaam and Healy (1983) and Fuhrman, Barlow, and Wanlass (1989) who advocate reading the great literary masterpieces for self-knowledge and psychological insight. That is a popular idea. It may be valid, but my reservation is that the masterpiece writer's fantasy may not accurately reflect the "lawful" behavior or thoughts of ordinary people. Fiction is a break from reality, not reality. For self-help, you need to know reality, the truth about behavior that is applicable to you. A novel's characters are, of course, made to *seem* real, but they almost certainly do not behave like you (or anyone else) would or should in the same circumstances. For example, authors may labor hours crafting a clever two-minute conversation. In short, great literature may only seem true-to-life but really not be realistic. On the other hand, a honest biography or autobiography describes *actual* "lawful," *not imagined*, human reactions to specific circumstances. With this caution in mind, you can get bibliographies for specific problems from Dr. Fuhrman, et al. (1989) at the University of Utah, e.g. identity struggles, loneliness-intimacy, alienation, feeling inadequate, death, freedom, meaninglessness and others.

Videotapes and TV talk shows are potentially a fantastic source of information about interpersonal problems and abnormal behavior, if they, like books, were available when you need them. They deal with interesting, real-life experiences and are often infused with current scientific information and expert opinions. What an opportunity to learn useful psychology! However, let's be realistic. There are usually 10 minutes or less of useful, factual information on each 1-hour show, considering the commercials, an introduction, a lengthy case presentation or two, brief advice from an expert, questions from the audience or on the phone, continuous questions or comments by the host/hostess who may challenge the expert, etc. And we only get *one* expert's opinion. The talk show format entertains us and displays the host and advertisement much better than it helps us cope. But, in

spite of these limitations, talk shows have probably done more than anything in the educational or entertainment system to increase our psychological enlightenment. That's really sad. Someday, perhaps half of our K-12 education will be psychological--understanding ourselves and others, developing a philosophy of life, controlling our emotions and behavior, learning to find and give love, caring for all people, animals, and the earth (see chapter 1). Encyclopedic computers, interactive video, helping groups (local or on internet), therapists, instructors, peer counselors, and books will be a part of that education.

A book, *Reel Life/Real Life: A Video Guide for Personal Discovery* (Fourth Write Press, 800-900-REEL), claims that seeing a video or film about your personal problem is good therapy. The authors recommend specific movies for specific problems. If you are looking for useful books for children with specific problems, such as child abuse, sibling rivalry, divorce, friendships, eating disorders, shyness, fears, etc., check to see if your library has the latest edition of *The Bookfinder* (hard copy or CD-ROM).

Although outdated already, the best source of advice about self-help books is Santrock, Minnett & Campbell (1994). They surveyed 500 psychologists asking them to evaluate 300 self-help books in 33 categories. The professionals were also asked to list other books they knew of in those categories. I have cited this valuable reference and the recommended books throughout this book. These authors give eight guidelines for selecting a self-help book:

1. Don't buy a book by its cover or by its advertisement.
2. Don't buy a book that makes too-good-to-be-true claims. Self-help is usually not an easy, quick, sure process.
3. Buy books based on scientific knowledge and/or extensive clinical experience. Be skeptical of books based on only the writer's opinions; question testimonials for a book; doubt the author with only limited experience in one problem area or with only one treatment method. How can you identify science-based books? Look in the bibliography for scientific references; check the contents for descriptions of sound research findings or extensive professional experience.
4. Buy books that recognize that the causes of problems are complex and that the same solution probably won't work for everybody. If only one solution is proposed, don't buy it.

5. Buy self-help books that focus on specific clearly described types of problems and provide detailed explicit solutions to the problems. As stated in 4, a few simple ideas or methods of change will not solve all problems in all people. Likewise, be cautious when an author explains almost all problems as having the same causes, such as harsh parents, a hurt inner child, addictive habits, codependency, unassertiveness, unconscious motives, stress, past lives, etc.

6. Don't be swayed by slick writing and psychobabble. Vague psychological phrases are to impress you, not to help you. Examples: "get in touch with your feelings," "become motivated to...", "show the real you," and "don't give off bad vibes." These phrases don't give the detailed instructions and sound strategies that one needs to cope with real problems. Likewise, don't settle for just juicy, fascinating case descriptions or emotional cheerleading. Sound self-help advice involves more than well written literature; it must give you proven methods.

7. Most good self-help books are written by highly experienced mental health professionals. Be skeptical of journalists, novelists, professional writers, New Age writers, and other people from other professions, such as CEO's, salesmen, lawyers, and ministers. A writer who is a mystic, psychic, yoga, etc. should sound an alarm. Also, anyone should be avoided, professional or not, who is anti-scientific and claims to know more than the current mental health professionals and researchers. Of course, having a doctoral degree and 20 years of therapy experience doesn't guarantee that you are wise.

8. Pay attention to the books or tapes recommended by mental health professionals who are not being paid for their opinions. Also, note a friend's comment that he/she profited from reading something, especially if the change is obvious and lasting.



Please note the warning about certain self-help books given below.



STEP FOUR: Use your increased understanding to self-improve immediately.

Unused knowledge is of little value. Therefore, try to immediately incorporate new information into your planning or carrying out of a self-help project (see chapter 2). Perhaps an "idea book" for future projects (as a helpee or a helper) is a good idea. Much knowledge never gets used.

Time involved

Obviously, all three--autobiography, journal, and reading--could involve thousands of hours. But they could still be beneficial if limited to only 15 to 30 minutes a day.

Common problems

There are many stumbling blocks. The first is time. While these approaches may sound interesting and worthwhile, few people are disciplined enough to complete an extensive project, like an intensive journal, involving hundreds of hours. We procrastinate. Another stumbling block is diminishing returns. The first hours on a journal or reading may be novel and very rewarding but you may profit less and less with time (or feel you do). We need payoffs. Another barrier is our reluctance to self-disclose or even admit problems to ourselves. The personal benefit from any of these methods depends on seeing the connection between your history, journal activities, or reading *and* your daily personal life. Also mentioned above is the difficulty finding useful information.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Little scientific evaluation of these kinds of self-analysis has been done. Yet, 30-40% of therapists believe it is helpful to provide reading material to their clients and they do so. If these methods can, in fact, replace some of the time spent in therapy--or even replace therapy in some cases, they are far cheaper than therapy (\$75 to \$125 an hour). Informed people must demand more useful, proven knowledge about self-understanding and self-direction.

There are possible pitfalls. Readings, writing an autobiography, or doing a journal could yield few benefits and be a waste of time. You could even be distressed by the self-probing or by the reading material. It is certain that increased insight includes negative, embarrassing information about your true self. In addition, you may falsely assume you have negative traits and awful psychological disorders. Medical students are notorious for developing the beginning symptoms of the diseases they are studying. Psychology students do the same thing when reading Abnormal Psychology. When you ask yourself if you have schizophrenic, hostile, psychopathic, psychosomatic or other sick tendencies, that is surely stressful (but it can also be insight producing and healthy).

A WARNING needs to be given to self-help readers who do *not* clearly remember any sexual abuse: In an effort to help people uncover repressed traumatic events in their childhood, some books have suggested something like this: "if you or your child are having these specific symptoms (one book lists 19 signs, including being too trusting or distrusting, liking sex too much or too little, homosexual tendencies, nightmares, and masturbation), even though you/he/she don't remember being abused, you/he/she probably were." Wow! What a misguided statement in otherwise helpful books. Ask yourself: Couldn't something else besides sexual abuse cause masturbation, distrust, nightmares, and those other signs? Of course! No one knows enough about any psychological problem to be able to imply that "this is probably the cause." Moreover, a percentage of humans, adults and children, are so suggestible that "memories" from childhood can be created by psychology books, therapists, movies, TV, our own dreams, hypnosis, crime reports, talk shows, novels, etc., etc. (See *Newsweek*, April 19, 1993, and Gardner, 1993.)

Loftus (1993) carefully documents a variety of ways in which *false* memories of abuse have been created by "therapeutic procedures" designed to uncover sexual abuse and other trauma supposedly causing the client's problems. That is a serious matter. How often do therapists go searching for these "repressed" memories of sexual abuse? Polusny & Follette (1996) and Poole, Lindsay, Memon & Bull (1995) report that almost 70% of Ph.D.-level psychotherapists have used at least one special procedure to search for forgotten sexual abuse. For instance, 47% of the therapists had used dream interpretation, 27% had used guided memory, 33% had recommended you-can-remember books, 29% had referred the patients to a sexual abuse survivors group, and a smaller percentage utilized hypnosis, age regression, family photographs, and other methods. The important point is: science does not know how many of these "recovered" memories actually happened and how many didn't happen but were implanted by the therapist or by case studies or by fiction writers or movies, etc. If you feel you have been falsely accused of sexual abuse, call 1-800-568-8882 at the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, Suite 130, 3401 Market St., Philadelphia, PA 19104. The American Psychological Association in Washington, D.C. also has a brochure about sexual abuse memories.

Current data indicates that people commonly remember being abused if it occurred; yet, between 20% and 40% of abused women forget their sexual abuse memories for a while and then later remember the experience. Therefore, it was not entirely unreasonable for self-help books, such as Bass and Davis (1988, 1992), to probe (briefly and very tentatively) for forgotten memories of abuse. In fact, *if* the reader has forgotten aspects of being abused, deeper probing might be justified (preferably only by an experienced therapist) but only *if* the prober knows for certain that some abuse actually happened. But *if* a person does *not* clearly remember being sexually abused, there is a very serious risk of the repeated probing (or suggesting) leading to the creation of false memories (Hyman, Husband & Billings, 1995). Therefore, if you are a woman and unaware

of any sexual abuse, it is currently good advice to avoid groups and psychotherapists (and hypnotists) who find repressed sexual abuse in almost every case they see.

If you want to learn more about repressed memories, read the above references, especially Loftus. Also, look at new material, such as Terr (1995) and Schacter (1996). This is a hotly debated complex area; there is much we don't know but we know that human memory, even for yesterday not to mention early childhood, is easily influenced and often inaccurate.

Recognize Unconscious Forces

Freud said, "The child is father to the man." Our childhood experiences stay with us; our "inner child" is there for a life-time (Missildine, 1963). Eric Berne (1964) described a special form of childhood influence, the "life script." It is a life-plan--a set of injunctions, decisions, and expectations--developed by us when we are about 5 or 6, that spells out how we feel towards ourselves, towards others, how we interact with others and what we expect out of life. Thus, getting in contact with our childhood and the inner child's continuing role in our life are important. In the 1970's, Transactional Analysis (TA) became a major self-help method; it was a fad. Unfortunately, some people thought this method would make it easy to identify and change deeply ingrained beliefs and scripts. Some helpers gave instant analyses of "games" or "scripts" to hurting people and thought that was all that was needed. And troubled readers assumed that once they knew their destructive script, they would feel and behave differently. Often, they didn't change or felt worse. Yet, TA has a lot to offer the self-explorer.

All of us respond to the world--the present situation--in accordance with how we see it. We may take a "scientific" view of the world (e.g. we believe in a complex 5 billion year evolutionary history of the earth) but others may believe the world is a miraculous act of God done in seven days. Myths are simply those stories and beliefs that provide meaning and direction to a person's or a nation's life. Some beliefs are learned very early in life and become part of the inner child's life script; others are learned much later in life. For example, some nations have believed that kings are born to become gods or to inherit special rights; other nations believe in letting the most powerful person rule; others believe in voting for a leader. Some nations believe property and land can be owned by one person and even passed on to their children; others believe that no one can claim exclusive rights to a piece of the earth; others think wealth should be willed to the most needy, not to well-provided-for children. Some parents believe children should be supported through graduate school; others believe children should become self-sufficient by age 6 or 8. Some families

think women should be cared for and protected by men; others believe women should be equals, including the responsibility for earning a living and fighting in wars. Nations and individuals have "isms" they will die for: communism, capitalism, superior racism, religious fundamentalism, etc. None of the above ideas is supported by scientific evidence that it will produce greater fairness or happiness; the ideas are merely theories substantiated only by wishful thinking and myths--unsupported beliefs. These cultural-political-economic-social beliefs, plus 100's more, are subtly infused into our lifestyle. Thus, to understand ourselves, we can by this method uncover and reassess the life-directing myths-values-brainwashings we have unwittingly absorbed.

Three methods are lumped together here--recognizing the inner child of the past, analysis of life position and life script, and understanding the power of myths--because they illuminate our present difficulties by shedding light on our past.

Purposes

- To explore the hidden connections between your childhood and your current adjustment and needs. To find your "inner child" of the past.
- To help you get a clearer view of your self-concept and inner critic, the roles you play and want others to play with you, your natural and adaptive child, and, thus, your life position and life script.
- To identify how myths influence your conception of the purpose of life and your views of your role within the family, at work, and socially.

Steps

STEP ONE: Discover the "inner child" from your past by remembering how your parents treated you.

Missildine (1963) published an interesting book about the impact of childhood experiences on our adult lives. He suggested that we all have an "inner child," reflecting the atmosphere in our childhood home, and an adult part, which tries to forget the past and live only in the present. The inner child influences almost everything we do and feel as adults; it can't be discounted and just forgotten. His book is filled with case histories showing how early experiences intrude on our work, relationships, emotions, adjustment and self-concept as adults. See Table 9.2 for several illustrations. Missildine felt that these early experiences were remembered quite well, often vividly. They are, therefore, not exactly unconscious factors. On the other hand, many people minimize the influence of these powerful forces, so their destructive effects are often overlooked. For example, adult children of alcoholics can clearly remember the drunken mother's or father's embarrassing behavior and insults, but they frequently do not realize the connection between their childhood and their current high anxiety

or caretaker role or perfectionistic needs. Weinhold (1995) provides a guide to discovering dysfunctional family traits and their impact on your inner Child; that is the first step to healing the hurt inner Child.

Table 9.2 may be used in either or both ways, i.e. (1) identify the kind of parenting you experienced as a child, and then ask if you fit the suggested possible outcomes. Or, (2) identify your current personality traits or problems, and then ask if your parents parented in the suggested ways. Knowing how you got to be the way you are is a good first step towards gaining insight and changing.

STEP TWO: Finding your life script.

Chapter 9 dealt with "Understanding Yourself and Your Relationships." The parent, adult, and child parts of our personality are described there. Also, life positions, games, and life scripts are discussed. Our task here is to more clearly identify *your* life script and to find ways to change it, but in order to do this please refer to the important information in chapter 9.

Although our life script develops by age 5 or 6, it is a complex process. Parents and others gave us useful, growth-promoting messages and models: Be nice, don't hit, be responsible, think of others, etc. Sometimes parents modeled undesirable behavior: Hitting and yelling at each other, lying, being selfish, etc. Providing more inconsistencies, we were rewarded for good--and bad--behavior and punished for bad--and good--actions. We were evaluated: You are a good kid, dumb, clumsy, gentle with sister, strong, cute, fat, fun, a pain in the neck, etc. Parents had certain expectations of us: You will be in trouble when you go to school, you'll have lots of friends, try to be an athletic star, etc. We learned to give ourselves both possible and impossible self-instructions: Be great, do your best, always do what others want, always be strong, etc. Perhaps, one or both of our parents' child or parent ego state might subtly have given us destructive instructions: Don't outdo me, don't grow up, don't be a child, don't love, don't be sexual, don't think for yourself, etc. We learned to trust or to dislike others; we felt good or bad about ourselves. Out of that welter of cognitive-emotional processing comes our personality. No wonder we have such mixed feelings about our life roles. Chapter 9 gives more details.

From day one, we all are trying to get along the best we can in this complex, contradictory, confusing world. We, as young children, decide how to live. The whinny, sickly child gets attention; the mean, strong-willed, rebellious kid gets his way; the conforming, quiet child is appreciated; the good kid is loved. We learn to expect to be winners or losers. These are all preschool choices...and they influence us for an entire lifetime. But the scripts can be rewritten when we get older and wiser. Just as with any self-help effort, it is important to make specific decisions about exactly what behaviors, feelings, ideas, or interactions you want to change. Transactional therapists usually draw up a contract with the client, stating what the client wants to change and

what he/she is going to do in order to change. Eric Berne said, "My business is turning frogs into princes."

Although we tend to be an OK winner (a hero) or a not-OK loser (a villain or a victim), one person may sometimes play several scripts, e.g. a person may be a tough, villainous boss at work, a quiet, dominated victim at home, and a heroic rescuer on the volunteer fire department or domestic violence crisis team.

Understanding your life script(s) and using that concept to improve your life involves several sub-steps: Use chapter 9 to get in touch with your ego states and decide how powerful each one is in you. In the following steps of this method, you will first assess how you feel (OK or not OK) towards yourself and towards others, i.e. your Life Position, then you will identify more about the games and roles you play. Based on this information, you will be able to write out your Life Script (or different scripts in different situations). Later, by comparing the Script of the 5-year-old inside you with the goals and values you have as a reasonable adult, you can re-write your Life Script and specify the changes you need to make in order to get what you want out of life.

Your life position

Do you feel OK or not OK about yourself?

By reading in chapter 9 about the parent, adult, and child, which do you think is the strongest (most influential) part of your personality? which is the weakest part? Dusay and Dusay (1979) have a test for measuring the parent, adult and child, if you are interested.

- If you answered that your strongest part is the adult, the natural child, or the nurturing parent, you are inclined to feel positive about yourself. Rate yourself + or ++, depending on the strength of your positive feelings.
- If your strongest part is the critical parent or adaptive child, you may feel negative about yourself. Rate yourself - or --, depending on the strength of your feelings.

Remember your parents' early messages (consider the examples given above): what were you told, what was his/her tone, how were you handled, did the comments and actions "make" you feel good or bad about yourself?

- If you got more positive messages, rate yourself + or ++.
- If you got more negative messages, rate yourself - or --.

Think back on your parents' messages to you as a grade school student and as a teenager: How did they feel about your looks? your ability? your morals? your friends? your ability to relate to others? your future?

- Rate these messages as --, -, 0, +, or ++.

In method #1 of chapter 14, there are detailed instructions for assessing your self-concept by listing your positive and negative traits. Are you frequently sad? Sad people often feel "not OK" relative to others.

- Rate how you rationally evaluate yourself: --, -, 0, +, ++.

Also, consider your internal critic (method #1, chapter 14) and your critical parent (chapter 9): Do you put yourself down, like Sooty Sarah? Do you remember receiving destructive injunctions, as described in chapter 9? Is your true secret opinion of yourself very different from your expressed opinion?

- Rate how you really feel about yourself: --, -, 0, +, ++.

Conclusion. Review the five ratings above and decide if you feel OK or not OK about yourself.

Final Rating. --, -, 0, +, ++.

Do you feel OK or not OK about others?

What are your memories as a young child about your parents? Did you generally expect help, love, concern, acceptance, support, etc. *or* anger, punishment, indifference, unpredictable moods, "I'm busy," etc.?

- Rate your reactions to your parents: --, -, 0, +, ++.

What messages did you get as a young child about others? Were others (teenagers, casual acquaintances your age, people your parents' age, old people, strangers, "our kind" and "their kind," etc.) considered concerned or indifferent? kind and trustworthy or mean and deceptive? fair and generous or unjust and selfish?

- Rate others in general (early): --, -, 0, +, ++.

As a teenager how did you feel about others (not close friends)?

- Rate others in general (teen years): --, -, 0, +, ++.

In recent years how have you felt about others (casual friends, teachers, supervisors, co-workers, business people, politicians, professionals, parents' friends, and people in general)? Do you trust or distrust them, like or dislike, expect to be understood and accepted or not?

- Rate others in general (recent): --, -, 0, +, ++.

Are you frequently mad? This "racket" (which means one of your most frequent occurring emotions) of anger is likely to reflect a "You're not OK" life position.

- Rate how negative you seem towards others: --, -, 0, +, ++.

Conclusion. Review the five ratings above and decide if you feel negative or positive about others.

Final Rating. --, -, 0, +, ++.

Now, looking at the final ratings in (1) and (2) above, it should be clear which of four life positions you are in:

| | | |
|-------------|-------------------|--------|
| | <u>Others are</u> | |
| | OK | not OK |
| <u>I am</u> | | |
| OK | _____ | _____ |
| not OK | _____ | _____ |

Your life position is a crucial factor in the games you play and in your life script. Problems are associated with all three of the not-OK positions. Only "I'm OK, You're OK" position is a "winner."

Games we play.

What games do you play? What roles do you play? What themes thrill you? What is your Life Script?

Read about games in chapter 9 and decide if you play games to affirm that others aren't OK or that you aren't OK. You're not OK games include "Yes, But," "Rapo," NIGYSOB, "If It Weren't For You," "Blemish," etc. I'm not OK games include "Kick Me," "Wooden Leg," "Schlemiel," "Poor Me," etc. (Remember also that there are many ego boosting games which either reflect an I'm a non-winner or an I'm Superior attitude, such as the "Education Game," "Power Struggle," "Ain't It Awful," "Cops and Robbers," etc.)

Games confirm our beliefs, e.g. that I will mess it up or others will let me down. Those beliefs may be painful, yet they are paradoxically reassuring when your views are proven correct over and over that you are not OK or others are not OK. Moreover, the transactions (pay offs) in the game give you some temporary satisfaction, some pleasure. Games are our Child's way of getting attention and saying, "See, I am *too* OK," even if the game involves self-put downs, being mean, blaming others, or failing.

From your games you can get a good idea of some of your basic emotional needs--your unconscious, sickish motives: to put down others because you dislike or distrust them or to put down yourself

because you dislike yourself, to prepare for failure, to fend off criticism by others, to seek sympathy and nurturance, to avoid responsibility, to try to hurt those who have hurt you, or to have some other motive (see method #1 in chapter 14). What seem to be some of your games? or your destructive motives?

There are three major roles in stories--hero or heroine, villain, and a victim (or according to Greek Drama--rescuer, prosecutor, and victim). We tend to see ("feel" is more accurate) ourselves in one of those roles. If you can uncover which role has the greatest emotional appeal for you, you are closer to finding your life script.

"The Parable of the Eagle" by James Aggrey (1959) is helpful in sorting out those roles. As you read this story, notice your feelings. Which character do you most identify with? The eagle who is being held down and controlled but is confused about escaping (the victim)? The person who seems to care but holds someone back, perhaps by being dominant and/or over-protective (the villain)? The naturalist who helps others grow and become their true selves (the hero/heroine)? Read the parable:

"Once upon a time, while walking through the forest, a man found a young eagle. He took it home and put it in his barnyard where it soon learned to eat chicken feed and to behave as chickens behave.

One day, a naturalist, who was passing by, inquired of the owner why it was that an eagle, the king of all birds, should be confined to live in a barnyard with the chickens.

"Since I have given it chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it has never learned to fly," replied the owner. "It behaves as chickens behave, so it is no longer an eagle."

"Still," insisted the naturalist, "it has the heart of an eagle and can surely be taught to fly."

After talking it over, the two men agreed to find out whether this was possible. Gently the naturalist took the eagle in his arms and said, "You belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly." The eagle, however, was confused; he did not know who he was, and seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again.

Undismayed, the naturalist took the eagle, on the following day, up on the roof of the house, and urged him again, saying, "You are an eagle. Stretch forth your wings and fly." But the eagle was afraid of his unknown self and the world and jumped down once more for the chicken feed.

On the third day the naturalist rose early and took the eagle out of the barnyard to a high mountain. There, he held the king of birds high above him and encouraged him again, saying, "You are an eagle. You belong to the sky as well as to the earth. Stretch forth your wings now, and fly."

The eagle looked around, back towards the barnyard and up to the sky. Still he did not fly. Then the naturalist lifted him straight towards the sun and it happened that the eagle began to tremble, slowly he stretched his wings. At last, with a triumphant cry, he soared away into the heavens.

It may be that the eagle still remembers the chickens with nostalgia; it may even be that he occasionally revisits the barnyard. But as far as anyone knows, he has never returned to lead a life of a chicken. He was an eagle though he had been kept and tamed as a chicken.

It is a nice story about self-actualization--reaching your potential. Winning is gratifying but... the question here is: Which role do you most identify with emotionally? The captured, restricted, dependent, afraid, victimized, self-doubting eagle? The limited care-giving but not deeply concerned, controlling, pessimistic, suppressing man who penned up the eagle thinking he knew what was best for the eagle? The empathic, supportive, optimistic, encouraging but not dominating naturalist? And, what roles do other people, in your opinion, most often play?

Which role has the most appeal to you (not cognitively but feeling-wise)? The victim?_____ The villain?_____ The rescuer?_____ The victim role reflects a "I'm not OK" position; the villain role reflects a "You're not OK" position; the rescuer may reflect a "You're OK" position.

Karpman (1968) suggested that roles in games were like the changing roles in Greek Drama: The hero/heroine may become a prosecutor who wants to change the villain or help the victim so badly that he/she becomes aggressive (instead of assertive) and ends up being the victim of a counterattack. Likewise, sometimes the rescuer promises to "help" so much (and can't deliver), ending up feeling used and an unappreciated victim. A person pretending to be a helper often ends up blaming the victim for the problems or taking advantage of him or her. The moral is: *Watch out* for game hooks, such as "I'm going to tell you straight..." (then you are blown out of the water), "You poor thing, let me help..." (then he/she takes over), or "You are so good at this..." (then you are asked to do more things for him/her). Just say "no" to the game player... and don't be a game player yourself.

In an impossible situation, what would you do? This question provides another way of detecting how your Child unconsciously feels towards yourself and others. Suppose your life became such a terrible mess that there were only three ways out: kill yourself, kill someone else, or go crazy. Which would you impulsively (not rationally) choose? Choose now. Suicide implies that you feel less OK about yourself than others, while killing others implies they are seen by you as less OK than you. It isn't clear what going crazy means in this situation (usually it is interpreted as being a hopeless position, i.e. I'm not OK and you're of no help either, but in this case it may be the choice of a person who feels OK and that others are OK too.)

Another clue to your roles and script is your favorite childhood story. It probably became your favorite because it meets your basic needs or touches on some fundamental truth or injunction for you. It may be a fairy story, children's story, movie, TV show, novel or whatever. What was or is your favorite? Do you have several favorites? If so, is there a the general theme? What psychological need or motive does this theme satisfy?

In the same way, try to remember your favorite daydreams as a child. Who did you rescue or try to please in these fantasies? How did you try to please or impress others? Who did you dislike and want to hurt? What does this tell you about basic unconscious (not nice) needs?

- What is your earliest memory? Does it strike an emotional chord in you, suggesting special significance?
- What was your parents' main advice to you? Does it still have meaning to you?
- What kind of scenes in movies or on TV are most emotionally moving for you? As a child how did you respond to the violence depicted in movies, TV, and cartoons? Did you enjoy the aggression or were you repulsed by it?
- If your life were made into a play, what kind of play would it be? A comedy of errors? A fantastic adventure? A soap opera filled with romance, deception, and rejection? A drama of achievements? A series of sad disappointments and tragedy? A satire in which you cleverly put down others? A boring, meaningless, pointless play?
- How will the play of your life end? How long do you expect to live? Will you die quietly or in a blaze of glory, loved or alone, heaped with honors or condemned? How would you like to die? What would you like your tombstone to say?

In summary, considering your favorite childhood stories, daydreams, and current shows, does there seem to be a general theme? What arouses your emotions and makes you cry, mad, proud, or happy? What sets off your stronger needs and motivations? Are you touched by misfortune? If so, what kind? Do you identify more with the winner or the loser? Are you excited by overcoming obstacles to accomplish great achievements? Are you moved by love and devotion?

Does it feel good to defeat or humiliate the bad guys and/or the establishment? Do you enjoy putting down others? Are you more interested in fun, music, comedy, or sex, i.e. natural child or self-oriented, than nurturing parent or others-oriented? Do you prefer exciting adventure, danger, and violent shows? Does controlling and manipulating others have a special appeal?

Write out your Life Script. We have just considered your views of others (OK or not OK) and yourself (OK or not OK), the psychological needs driving your game playing, and the roles and pay offs that satisfy your unconscious needs. All of these experiences and exercises should help you get in touch with the emotions and motives that underlie your life script. Read about scripts in chapter 9, many examples are given.

According to Eric Berne (1973), there are three kinds of scripts: losers, non-winners, and winners. A *"loser" script* has an unhappy ending; it may have been started by parental injunctions, such as "Don't be too cute and take attention away from me," "Don't stay around me, you irritate me," or "Don't be smarter than I am." This is your parents' Child ego state talking, not their conscious Adult ego state. The person with a loser script may rationalize the failures in his/her life by frequently saying, "If only such and such hadn't happened," "Someday it will be better" (but someday never comes), "I can't do that," and so on. To turn ourselves from "frogs" into "princes/princesses," we have to recognize the injunctions, ego states, life position, games, and scripts. Your Adult has to be in control and develop your best selves. You have to kiss all your warts and frogs yourself.

A *non-winner* was referred to as a "happy frog" who never quite becomes a prince or princess. Berne said the toughest part of his job as a therapist was telling people there is no Santa Claus, no magical solutions, no free lunch. Non-winners are also rationalizers and deniers, saying, "things will be better after...", "things aren't as bad as they could be," "things didn't turn out well, but at least I tried," etc. Some people have to become more unhappy and do more self-helping before they become a prince/princess.

Winners learn to reject the destructive "witch messages" from his/her parents' Child ego state. They use their Adult ego state to re-write their life script, if needed, making wise decisions about life goals, relationships, time management, values, tolerance of others, self-acceptance and so on.

Eric Berne, like Freud, was a "winner" in his work. He worked hard to "make something of himself" and when others opposed his theories he became an outstanding authority by establishing his own method of treatment, Transactional Analysis. He let his "Natural Child" devise clever names for games, his "Little Professor" analyze the pay offs, his "Adaptive Child" keep everything organized and so on. Berne, the person who helped turn the psychoanalytic world towards

interpersonal relationships, was not so fortunate in actual relationships; he may have had a loser's script in that area. He avoided intimacy, distrusting women and suffering through three divorces. With love escaping him, he died of a "broken heart" (Steiner, 1975). So, even a relations expert may succumb to a loser's script. Don't underestimate the power of your childhood messages.

Write out a brief description--two or three sentences--of your life script or perhaps two or three of them. See chapter 9 for examples. At this point, these descriptions are probably just guesses, we can't know our unconscious motives for certain. But, if your hunches about your parental injunctions and scripts can help you avoid depression,

Changing your life script

Gilliland, et al. (1989) tell about treating a woman who was depressed, insecure, attractive, and flirtatious but dependent on and submissive to her husband. As a child she was given certain injunctions: don't grow up, just be cute and obedient, don't think for yourself, don't feel confident or angry. These became "tapes" playing over and over within her Parent ego state. Furthermore, she gave herself certain driver messages: be perfect, please others, and act happy. The therapist helped her see how her revered but controlling father had given her these messages as he tried to shape her into a "daddy's little girl" who would quietly take care of the family and her alcoholic mother. TA therapy involves game and script analysis, much like the steps we have just gone through. This patient was encouraged by her therapist to ask herself how such a spoiling, loving, and worshiped father could have made her feel weak and dependent, when she was really the woman of the house. She began to see that her father was far from perfect and wonderful; he had used her, just as her wealthy husband does. In fantasy she told her father how angry she felt about being kept a "nice little southern belle" who couldn't think or be open about her feelings and become an adult.

Treatment or self-help with such a person is an emotional experience, not just an intellectual exercise. Neither is it a matter of will power. You can't just say, "I'm not going to be scared...sad...dependent." All of us have to deal with deeply ingrained messages recorded in our Parent ego state. We also have to deal with our Child ego state, which involves the emotions, games, and scripts of a five-year-old. In this case, the Child is saying, "I want to go out, play around, and have a good time," "I must be pleasant and submissive in order to be loved and taken care of," "I could do all sorts of things if it wasn't for my husband...my children...," "It is crucial that men find me attractive and that I have some control over them that way," and "One way to get your way is to lie to men: 'Gee, you're a wonderful _____!'" All these needs and games had left this patient sad and empty. But since many of the messages or injunctions from our parents are subtle but ever present so we are unaware of them, how can we change? We must start with the feelings we know--our sadness, our need to please others, our insecurity and dependency,

our anger, and so on. Then we must work backward to the early Parent messages. Harris and Harris (1985, pp.69-89) call this a "Trackdown." It involves several steps:

- Being aware of our feelings, our current hurt: sad, mad, bad, dumb, clumsy, guilty, afraid, a failure, unlovable, selfish, hopeless, etc.
- Remember, it is the little 5-year-old girl or boy inside that hurts. She/he still lives within our billions of memory cells.
- Figure out, if you don't already know, what recently set off the hurt feelings.
- Ask yourself what childhood experiences this feeling or hurt makes you think of. What old pains are mixed up with our current reactions? The old lessons from our parents may not apply now. Become aware of what your Parent ego state is saying (repeating a parental message) and of how your Child is responding. Examples:

| Child's reaction | Parent message |
|-------------------------|---|
| Feeling like a failure. | "You messed up again." "Just stop trying!" "Don't you ever finish anything?" "Sloppy!" "3.8 is good, but why did you make this B?" |
| Sad, disappointment. | "You can't depend on people." "They don't want <i>you</i> around." "You always want too much." |
| Feeling pressured. | "You'll be punished if you defy me." "Don't overlook any opportunity." |
| Confused, stressed. | Parents never gave a straight answer-- "Pick the right friends but don't be too picky." "Sex is wonderful but not before you're 20." |
| Alone, distrusting | If a friend rejects you or if a parent leaves or dies, the child may learn, "Don't let anyone get close again." |

Note that all injunctions were not actually spoken directly by the real parent. Children misunderstand or make up their own destructive messages. What might a child remember from being told "don't hit your brother?" Quite possibly something like "I do things I shouldn't; I'm bad" or "Acting on your feelings gets you in trouble; so, don't feel." These conclusions were probably not intended by the parent. Certainly these self-created messages would be hard to "track down" as an adult.

Figure out what you can do differently. Just knowing these Parent tapes are messages from your *distant*--no longer relevant--*past*, works wonders in preventing irrational emotions. Refuse to let your own old Parent tapes control and upset your life. Talk to a friend; see a therapist. Also, refuse to act in ways that hook others' Critical Parent (e.g. by being irresponsible or weak). And, if you are being bossed around by someone's Parent, refuse to let your Child "collect stamps"

(build up anger or self-pity) which could then be cashed in for a temper tantrum, a drunken party, an affair, a nervous breakdown, a suicide attempt, or some other guilt-free, pity-seeking crisis. Perhaps you could rationally negotiate and reconcile with the person who set you off (see chapter 13). This whole process enables you to know your Parent ego state better, so you can instantly recognize its tapes.

The depressed-dependent patient described above came to recognize the Parent messages from her father... and how her husband took the same demanding, "I'll take care of you," chauvinistic approach. She decided to see her father for the dominant manipulator he was and to acknowledge her own abilities and goals, i.e. to shift control from her Child to her Adult. She confronted her husband about doing his share with the children and spelled out what she wanted to do with her life, like going to college, having a challenging career, and renewing old friendships. In short, she tracked down her enslaving Parent, saw her Child's feelings for what they were, and wrote herself a new winner's script. You can too.

Finding new ways of interacting, new ways of living a new script

Uncovering your Parent's tapes and the Child's games is an emotional process all right but *knowing how* to do the uncovering is an intellectual-cognitive process and so is figuring out what to do with your life. Chapter 3 will help you think about your values and goals in life, which in turn determine with whom and how you interact.

Chapter 9 discusses avoiding games. It is important to withdraw from people who hook us into harmful, unhappy relationships. Have your Adult honestly evaluate "Is this relationship good for me?" If not, avoid put downs (yours and his/hers); in fact, sooth the other person's Child and give an honest compliment, if you can. Don't be a prosecutor, rescuer, or victim; stay in your Adult and control your seductive or whiny Child and your critical Parent; remember "I'm OK, You're OK." As the Gestaltists would say, "Stay in the here and now," don't bring up the past. Most importantly, develop other friendships and remember the bad times, so you won't keep coming back to a bad relationship (Harris and Harris, 1985, pp. 217-219).

Other parts of this book could help: chapter 7 may reduce the anger, chapter 8 the dependency, and chapter 10 the infatuation. Also, chapter 13 may help with confrontation and negotiation, while chapter 14 deals with the overly harsh self-criticism of the Parent ego state.

Besides our Parent, we also have to handle other people's Parent which may direct criticism at us (You're not OK) or be overly controlling. Harris and Harris (1985, pp. 220-233) suggest several ways of coping with a person who is dominated by his/her own Parent ego state: realize he/she was usually raised by stern parents who demanded conformity, no Child's play. Such a parent "makes" us feel oppressed or belittled. But, underneath the other person's facade of

bravado and domination is a scared Child and an insecure Adult. Realize how we hook such a person's Parent--by being rebellious, sloppy, late, weak, lazy, whiny, passive-aggressive, or, in short, by letting our Child take over (so put your Adult in charge and stop doing those things). Realize the Parent doesn't think, it only plays authoritarian tapes over and over, so if you are going to reason with such a person, *your Adult will have to talk with his/her Adult*. Thus, telling this person he/she is a "obnoxious, closed-minded, arrogant tyrant" or "coming out of his/her Critical Parent ego state" isn't going to help. But saying to a parent, "You feel strongly about what I should be doing. How did you come to this conclusion?" or "Why don't you write down these ideas?" or "How are *we* going to decide what to do *next* Thanksgiving?" or "You have a point there but I see it a little differently" may work by engaging his/her Adult and pacifying his/her Parent. Compliments, moving closer, empathy responses, awareness of his/her Child's needs and hopes may provide a way to lessen the tension and hostility. Clearly, these first aid measures do not provide the Parent-dominated person, who is giving you a hard time, with great insight and a new personality but these steps may help the immediate situation. See handling difficult people in chapters 7 and 13.

The most important task, however, is to act out--to live--the new script. Like any other change, this requires setting specific behavioral, emotional, skill, and cognitive goals. The "reframing process" discussed in the next section may be helpful in overcoming your resistances to change. Remember, your original life script was perpetuated by constant needs, urges, and messages coming, supposedly, from the depths of your psyche. You do not have these automatic, constant reminders helping you do what you have rationally decided you want to do with your life, not unless you have learned to use your brain to constantly remind you to attend to the values and goals you want to achieve. It isn't easy to remake a life. But there is always help: Young and Klosko (1993) recommend a variety of cognitive techniques to deal with many problems, such as low self-esteem, phobias, anger, poor relationships, stemming from childhood patterns.

STEP THREE: [Understanding the myths or stories we live by.](#)

There are two fundamental ways of understanding the world: by believing what we are told or by making our own observations. One involves listening to the opinions and stories of parents, teachers, preachers, politicians, bosses, experts, authorities, etc. and then using these views as a basis for our own personal beliefs. The other way involves observing the world ourselves, i.e. being our own scientist--careful observation of facts and causal relationships. Scientific observations can be repeated and proven by others. Personal opinions far out number verifiable facts about human life, thus far. But even though scientific information is gaining more of a role in our view of life, most of our life is lived according to fairy tales, sometimes called our personal myths. For example, many people have a clear but very

unrealistic or unscientific picture of what their future will be like, what kind of person they will marry, how their kids will turn out, and even some idea about when and how they will die. That's our myths, not science. These unfounded beliefs can be very confining.

Likewise, many of our opinions about life in general reflect our cultural inheritance, the stories and assumptions we are told and believe, not what we have experientially or experimentally found to be true. Examples: the Hindus worship cows, we eat them. Chinese eat dogs, we don't. Certain Indians destroy wealth, we covet it. Families assign work on the basis of what is believed to be sexually appropriate, not experimentation with who can do the best job--girls baby-sit and help cook, boys mow lawns and wash cars. Some families expect to be wealthy leaders, others expect to be poor. Each person's place is set by the family script--Larry is the good student, Linda is the little mother, Barb is the cheer leader, Bruce is the loner, etc. If anger and violence are used by parents to threaten children and by heroes on TV to right wrongs, the children will use angry threats to intimidate other kids without investigating what works best. We live submerged in a sea of unproven beliefs.



The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie--deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth--persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.

-John F. Kennedy



Joseph Campbell (1949) felt myths disclosed--via stories--the great mysteries of our internal world, i.e. our psyche. Myths, like therapy, books, and dreams, can be used to gain insight into our unconscious motives, needs, fears, wishes, conflicts, etc. The implications of our myths aren't based on scientific knowledge; it is "wisdom" of the ages, however, waiting to be tested scientifically. Campbell summarized a common myth from many cultures about a hero or heroine: he/she undertakes some task and soon faces a challenge. He/she accepts the challenge, a "call to adventure," and soon faces many tests, often a shadowy presence or a strange but vaguely familiar force. The "obstacle" may be a strong, controlling, punishing female or a tempting but unattainable woman. It may be a stern, demanding, physically threatening male. The test may be a difficult moral dilemma (like serving your family or living your own life). Sound familiar? In the myth, the hero or heroine overcomes these obstacles, gains esteem and spiritual power, and generally improves and enriches the world. Campbell sees each of us as the hero or heroine of our own story. Each of us has the wondrous opportunity to explore the unconscious psychic world within--to "know thyself," to know that all the heroes/heroines and God/Goddesses that ever

existed are somewhere within us too (Fagan, 1989). Or we can refuse to take the adventure.



...the heroes of all time have gone before us... we have only to follow the thread of the hero's path... where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.
-Joseph Campbell, 1949

Where there is a way or path, it is someone else's footsteps. Each of us has to find his/her own way... Nobody can give you a mythology.
-Joseph Campbell, 1987 (cited in Feinstein & Krippner, 1988)



We also accumulate myths or stories about heroes and villains which support our beliefs and ethics, which give our life meaning. As Keen (1988) says, "Myth is... the unconscious information, the program that governs the way we see 'reality' and behave." In general, myths are a conservative influence keeping things the same--honoring our forefathers and old heroes. However, a powerful force for changing a society is to change the stories (movies, books, TV) told to each other. We change ourselves by changing our heroes and our beliefs (see chapter 3 and later in this section). A critical step in coping with a changing future is to become aware of our life story and the myths that have governed our life thus far, including an awareness of the unwitting assumptions and unconsciously determined habits involved. We may need new beliefs. That is the focus of psychotherapy, especially Freud's and Jung's analysis, Adler's early memories, and George Kelly's personal construct theories. Likewise, this self-help method uncovers personal myths *and* attempts to provide us with a way to change.

Feinstein and Krippner (1988) take a broad view of myths. To them, your unique personal myths developed gradually as a result of many factors, including stories, e.g. Rambo or Gandhi, told within our multi-media culture, family values, peer pressure, religious teachings, and perhaps even genetic predispositions (as in Jung's collective unconscious or emotional predilections). These complexly determined views influence how we see the world, how we handle new information, how we decide on our values and purposes in life, how we relate to the mysteries and "powers" around us, and generally how well we deal with life. By understanding your own highly complex and quickly changing system of beliefs, you can supposedly become more in control of your life. There is no scientific evidence of increased self-control via this method, but it is a personal myth--a belief--of the writers cited here.

I will summarize two self-help methods, the first is a simple article by Keen (1988; later supplemented by a book by Valley-Fox & Keen, 1992) and the other is an involved book by Feinstein and Krippner (1988). Both use many *fantasies to tap your underlying belief systems or myths*.

Keen suggests these steps to finding meaning in your life through storytelling:

1. Answer the old question, "Who am I?" Give 10 answers. And, "What would I like to be that I'm not?" Give 10 answers. And, "What would I not want to be?" Give 10 answers. These answers reflect many of the hoped for (hero) and the dreaded (villain) stories in your culture, your family and your life.
2. Draw your "life line"--the highs (paradise) and lows (paradise lost) of your life from birth to now. Sketch on the line the five major events of your life.
3. Draw a floor plan of your childhood home(s). Who lived there? What were they like? How did they relate? What were the moods and the feelings, the joys, the fears, the frustrations, the rules, the conflicts, the intimacy? What does this tell you about your expectations about life?
4. Draw a map of your hell. Who would you put there and why? Family, "friends," and other people who have hurt you. People with traits you dislike--arrogance, meanness, greed, ignorance, prejudice, cheating, lying, grossness, etc. People in history or stories who seem especially evil or disgusting to you.
5. Draw a picture of your heaven. The greatest people in history and in your life. Show what they have done--shown courage, forgiven, loved, been brilliant, been fun, given help, lead, patiently been there, shared wisdom, etc.

By contrasting (4) and (5), it will be clear what your personal mythology considers good and bad, right and wrong, the worlds of light and darkness, things to strive for and struggle against.

6. What needs to happen to make my life complete? What ideals and potentials have I not met yet? What promises have I made? Draw a picture of where you would like to be in ten years, indicating your goals, who you will be with, your work, the circumstances surrounding you, your feelings, etc.
7. Tell your story to others and think about your strengths and the positive parts, enjoy and think about their stories, and make plans to accomplish as many of your dreams as possible. Make your life one hell of a story.

Feinstein and Krippner (1988) suggest exploring the beliefs of your forefathers (or mothers for women). Start by identifying with your great-great-grandfather (mother if female) and asking (as though you were them): What concerns you? What gratifies you? What is your work? What is your position within society? What are your strengths

and problems? What are your ideas about God(s)? The idea is to recognize that many of your core beliefs and attitudes today may have a long, quite understandable history of being "passed down" to each new generation. Also, one may begin to see that beliefs, which were very functional 100 years ago, are no longer serving you well. Follow the same procedure with your great-grandfather (mother), grandfather (mother), and father (mother).

The idea is to find your myths that are harmful. There are probably endless examples within anyone's lifetime of old beliefs out-living their usefulness. A child who is told he/she is dumb may never test out his/her level of ability in school. A favored child may continue to expect the whole world to cater to his/her needs. A rejected person may avoid new love situations. An adult child of an alcoholic may continue to feel super responsible for everyone in his/her family. A workaholic may think of little else but work until a heart attack brings him/her to the brink of death. A religious person may think God is always right and responsible for everything that happens until his/her teenaged child dies. A perfectionistic, self-critical person may continually feel like a failure and suffer psychosomatic problems or depression. A sweet, compliant, overly giving person may keep smiling and serving others because "that is how mothers... fathers... nice people behave" until she/he is ignored and even cruelly dominated by greedy "takers."

Similar to section 11 of Progoff's journal (see method #3 above), Feinstein and Krippner recommend that every person develop an ongoing relationship with an "Inner Shaman"--a wise guide to understanding your unconscious motives, tapping your internal wisdom, and revising your personal mythology to meet new situations. Your Shaman might be Mother Nature, Aristotle, Confucius, Jesus, a wise old man, or anyone you respect highly. It is a way of increasing your insight.

Humans seem to have a compelling need to understand, to know, to predict. In the absence of scientific knowledge, all of us have an "inner story" that helps us explain the past, understand what's happening now, and anticipate the future. As a way of discovering how parts of that inner story may be creating problems, you are asked to imagine three scenes from your life: a paradise, paradise lost, and paradise regained. Note that many myths follow this sequence, including the story of Adam and Eve with Christian religion providing the way to regain paradise. Also, for some people childhood was blissful, adulthood a grind, and they long for a return to the past (or to glory in heaven). Likewise, some psychoanalysts believe that being in the womb was paradise and the religious drive is our attempt to return to an ideal place. The basic self-help idea here is to vividly imagine (1) a wonderful time of your life, (2) a painful, unhappy, stressful time of your life, (3) a time when happiness and peace was regained, and (4) the hopes and principles that have guided your quest for a better life, i.e. what have you done to make your life better? Record these fantasies in a journal. Careful study of these extensive, elaborate

fantasies can clarify your life story and some of your major disappointments.

Still, many of your conflicts or problems in life will not be touched upon by imagining paradise, paradise lost, and paradise regained, so at least make a list of (1) your self-defeating behaviors, (2) your unwanted emotions, thoughts or urges, and (3) your symbolic hints of trouble (in dreams, psychosomatic disorders, repeated conflicts for unknown reasons, difficulty thinking positive about the future, etc.). Each of your problem areas could be analyzed further, as in the next several paragraphs.

Self-help methods for finding your myths

Take one problem area at a time and try to understand more about its origin by imagining one of your earliest experiences in this area. Do this by first identifying the primary emotion associated with this problem area. Second, imagine this feeling flowing through your life like a river. Third, imagine being in a boat so you can make your way upstream until, on the bank of the river, you can see yourself re-enacting, as in a play, one of the first times you ever experienced this emotion. Fourth, ask yourself if this fantasy helps you understand the feelings you are having now (e.g. who else is there? What was done? Did your emotion yield a payoff? Are you still expecting the same things you did as a five-year-old?). How did this early experience influence your self-concept, your views of others, your values, your life?

Feinstein and Krippner believe that trouble spots in our lives usually involve *conflicting myths--our old myth that isn't working well and a developing new myth*. Sometimes this new counter-myth is immediately adopted, as when a faithful spouse impulsively has an affair or a compliant adolescent suddenly rebels. But most of the time this shift from one life style to another is gradual and full of complex conflicts, as when it takes months to change one's religious beliefs or to give up being a workaholic so you can become involved with your family. It is wise to realize there is some wisdom in both myths--the old way and the new view. Hopefully, your decisions will make use of the best of both. How to do this:

1. Make up a fairy tale about your *paradise lost*. First focus on a good (or better) time of your life, then on an awful time (related to the specific problem you are now trying to understand and improve), and then on your ongoing search for a way out of the mess. Make it a long, fanciful (magical, make believe characters), free-flowing daydream. This helps you, through symbols and fantasy, to identify your paradise lost and your image of the paradise you hope to regain through your "quest."

Throughout their book, Feinstein and Krippner provide two extensive case illustrations, one of a tough, fervently

independent woman who both wants to be totally self-sufficient and alone, *and* wants to be a nice, gentle lady respected for her brilliance and creativity. The other is a perfectionistic, demanding, stodgy man who *also wants* to be free, spontaneous, loving, and relaxed. Both produce fantastic fantasies reflecting their personal mythologies.

2. Use fantasy and a pillow to heal some of your old wounds. Imagine yourself as you were during the period of painful loss or failure. You may be very young, an adolescent, or an adult. Pretend the pillow is you at this earlier time and you are hurting. Hug the pillow, comfort the former you, love yourself. Imagine your Inner Shaman or God coming and touching you and your former self (the pillow) and healing the wounds made by the earlier experience (the paradise lost). Ask the healer for advice.
3. Have another fantasy that provides a hero or heroine some solution to the problem you are working on. This hopefully will guide your "quest" for new ways of coping. This can either be a fantasy of flowing back on your paradise-lost river and finding some *good* feelings that provide relief from the problem (and seeing how the positive feelings happened earlier) or making up another long, detailed fairy tale about magical, creative, ideal solutions--a vision--to this problem. This is your new myth... but it may not be realistic at all.
4. You now have an old, out dated view in conflict with a new, exciting, scary view or solution. The old myth is familiar but causing you grief (so you may quickly reject it). You suspect the new way has hidden mine fields but it is so attractive you are tempted to impulsively try it. If you can work out a reasonable solution or plan cognitively, perhaps you can avoid foolish impulses.

(a) Find a motto that fits your old and the new myth.

Examples:

Old Myth

I want to be Mother Of The Year!

I must be the best, no time to play.

Having fun is all that counts.

New Myth

Doing something with my life is important too!

Better to balance work with fun.

Have long & short-term goals.

(b) Name the character that symbolizes each myth.

Examples:

| Old Myth | New Myth |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Devoted mother or Susie Homemaker | Career woman or Superwoman |
| Super achiever | Smell the roses; get to know your kids |
| Party animal | Likable serious student |

(c) List the characteristics, actions, thoughts, and feelings associated with each of these characters (which reflect the myth).

(d) In fantasy, play (with feeling) both roles and have these two characters get acquainted with each other. Let them discuss and *understand* the differences between them (reflecting the differences between the two belief systems). Try to improve the communication between the two characters; they need to talk. Ask your Inner Shaman to also help both characters find ways of changing a harmful personal quality, e.g. self sacrifice, competitiveness, impulsiveness, stubbornness, over-confidence, anger, laziness, compulsiveness, pessimism, insecurity, etc., into a constructive trait. These changes help you integrate the old and the new myths. Finally, have the two characters discuss possible compromises; ask the Inner Shaman to mediate. Try to extract the wisdom from both myths.

(e) Imagine how the possible compromises and solutions would work out in real life. What promises the best future? Imagine carrying out the best solutions. You are more likely to do what you have thought of doing.

(f) Challenge your irrational self-statements (see method #3 in chapter 14) and replace them with rational, supportive statements. Establish some ritual every day that reminds you to act out your new, carefully considered myth. Use contracts, reinforcers, and support from friends.

The writers above all emphasize the influence of handed down myths. McAdams (1993) emphasizes that we are powerful makers of our own stories or guiding myths. Cultural myths aren't our guides, we are! And, if we are going to understand ourselves, we must know our own "life story" based on our memories, our situation, and our vision of our future. The way we see our own life is a compelling force directing our future. Yet, these forces may or may not be realistic nor optimal for us. We need to be aware of these forces and prepared to change the detrimental drives and restrictions if need be.

A couple of simple examples may help: you have a story of your life or of your marriage. As you get more depressed about life or more discouraged about your marriage, the stories become more and more biased, i.e. pessimistic or self-critical or blaming of the spouse. It is possible to "rewrite history," making your new story more positive, more hopeful, and less blaming, but still accurate. Our view of history has a powerful impact on our future.

Time involved

All three methods--Looking for the inner child, Script analysis, and Myth analysis--are very time consuming, perhaps 20 to 100 hours. Part of it depends on your resistance to speculate about unconscious motives. But reading a couple of good books going beyond these summaries would be an adequate introduction. Better yet, take a few hours and try out some of the exercises. If recognizing these subtle, unconscious forces inside you is helpful, perhaps this awareness will become a way of life for you.

Common problems

There are no easy ways to uncover the unconscious. These three methods deal with well entrenched, early, long forgotten childhood experiences and attitudes that permeate the family. Moreover, these uncovering procedures are vague, unresearched, and without simple rules for interpretation. And, besides, most of us may have many inner children fighting over many conflicting scripts and myths, which makes self-understanding more difficult.

It is interesting that insight therapies frequently utilize explanations from the therapist, from group interactions and discussions, and from group exercises. Perhaps because many of us refuse to uncover our unconscious by ourselves, even if we put in the time. As mentioned, many students reject the idea of their lives being governed by scripts or myths, we want to see ourselves as being rational. So perhaps many of us genuinely seeking insight need therapists and groups and confrontations. Research is needed to tell us who can do these things on their own and what type of person needs help.

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Since TA is based on psychoanalysis, which has survived the test of time for 100 years, it has an authoritative basis--it intuitively fits with many peoples' clinical experience--but not much scientific basis. By contrast, uncovering the inner child and certainly personal mythology are much less studied and less agreed upon clinically. An advantage is that all these unconscious-oriented theories can offer an explanation for all kinds of self-defeating, crazy behavior which can not easily be accounted for by simple environmental factors. The trouble is that unconscious factors can be made to "explain"

everything but scientific proof of unconscious concepts is hard to come by. Of course, explanations can be helpful without being true.

Many TA-psychoanalytic "explanations" are hard on parents, blaming them for "witch messages" that mess up the child. We have to remember that parents had parents and a childhood too. And, remember: everything is lawful. Perhaps feeling responsible for ourselves and less of a slave to the past would lead to more self-growth.

Insight therapies are about as effective overall as learning-behavioral-cognitive based therapies. Unfortunately, there have been *no* evaluations of the impact of the best-selling books by Berne, Missildine, Harris & Harris, James & Jongeward, etc. Yet, there have been many thousands of faithful believers.

A major advantage of these methods for dealing with the unconscious is that they attempt to deal with the complexity of human feelings and interaction. If human behavior were simple, it would be clear exactly why everyone does everything. The concept of unconscious motives at least encourages us to explore for many voices and conflicting urges inside. Yet, even unconscious concepts may be far too over-simplified. Examples: having a global judgment of "I'm not OK," being fixated at the anal level, having an "I'm a weak, sickly, dependent child" life script, believing sexual urges account for most of our interactions, believing that feeling OK or not OK account for most of our interactions, etc. Not likely!

It has to be assumed that there are certain dangers inherent in attempting to uncover the unconscious, perhaps stress, lowered self-esteem, increased self-deception, etc. Yet, surely refusing to peak at one's own unconscious invites even more problems. One should realize that some people become overly absorbed with their unconscious motives and thoughts. Deep "understanding," approaching obsessive mental voyeurism, can, in some people, replace changing bad habits, modifying emotions, and improving relationships. Other "insight freaks" become obnoxiously insistent on "analyzing others," explaining the games you are playing, telling you their sordid past is probably true of you too, etc.

Lastly, especially for people who are earnest about exploring myths, it seems quite possible that a careful study of myths around the world, many of which in ancient and primitive cultures closely resemble our own modern religions, will raise some doubt about our own personal God being the only true and omnipotent God. Humans everywhere have invented thousands of Gods and mystical forces or powers to explain the unknown, just as each of us has adopted and adapted beliefs we have heard to make up our own "inner stories" or explanatory myths. Of course, the "danger" of questioning our own God is real, although most agnostics have found that the idea of a God fades very slowly, often taking years. God isn't destroyed by raising a few doubts one evening. On the other hand, questioning some of our

religious myths may provide an opportunity to challenge some occasionally harmful ideas (e.g. God is on our side in this war, God is white and male, some of my sins are unforgivable, women are supposed to be subservient to men, masturbation and birth control are wrong, God wants me to give everything to the church, etc.). Most therapy and self-help methods painstakingly avoid questioning religious beliefs, unless it can be done subtly (I suspect the implications of mythology are unseen by many religious folks). Dealing with religious beliefs is tricky business; some myths, religious or otherwise, are helpful, maybe even critical to many lives; other myths are probably harmful. How does a thinking person know which is which, without questioning all of his/her myths?

Case illustration of script analysis

Fanita English described a case which illustrates a life script. Stella had a series of failed love affairs. She did know why. One lover went to Europe; another was a "rat;" a third couldn't hold a job and she soon considered him a "bum."

What was Stella's history? Her mother had not wanted a baby, partly because Stella's father was alcoholic and unemployed but also because her Child ego state disliked caring for a baby. Yet, she was especially attentive to Stella when she cried or was sick. As a young child, Stella knew that getting love and cared for depended on pleasing her mother. She learned to get "strokes" by crying, being sick, and unhappy. Also, Stella soon realized that her mother resented any closeness she had with her father and enjoyed their fighting. So by age five, Stella's life script went like this: "I am a lonely, unhappy, sickly, hateful little girl." That is, she knew she must cry, be sick, and reject attentive men in order to keep mother's love. Unfortunately, the script continued year after year, even when she no longer lived with her mother.

Being unhappy and sickly, Stella went into a therapy group. There she started understanding her script. Her favorite fairy tale was about a beautiful girl held prisoner--and away from a visiting prince--by a witch. In college literature class, Stella enjoyed a myth about a god who fell in love with a nymph and then asked a witch to give the nymph a love potion. Instead, the witch turned the nymph into a monster anchored to rocks by the sea screaming at the passing sailors. As Stella understood more clearly why she had strong urges to alienate men (by being a cynical monster) and why she needed to be unhappy, she realized she must change her life script. So, she did, and so can you.

Self-Analysis



There are many ways to gain insight, to glimpse a little of our unconscious. Freud himself faithfully set aside time each day for self-analysis, a time to explore his own motives and childhood influences. I have selected a few of the best methods and briefly described how you can use them. They include: (a) psychological testing, (b) projective techniques, (c) guided fantasy (including "Momma and I are one"), (d) feedback from others, (e) reframing, (f) focusing, (g) free association and word association, (h) catharsis and abreaction, (i) early memories, and (j) other methods. These methods are grouped together because they serve the same purpose (insight) but they are not used together. They stand alone; thus, there are no steps.

Psychological testing: online testing

Most of us want to know how we measure up. There are thousands of paper and pencil personality, interest, and aptitude tests (Buros, 1990); some were already discussed in chapter 14. Taken honestly, tests are about the only objective way to compare yourself to others, in terms of depression, dependency, personality traits, prejudice, self-efficacy, optimism, self-monitoring, the use of ego defenses, etc. On some dimensions, we may have a fairly accurate impression of how we feel, say how depressed we are, but we may not know how our level of depression compares to others' sadness. That is useful information. In many areas, we have little or no idea of our own condition, e.g. many people do not know if they are internalizers or externalizers (see chapter 8) or if they are much more cynical than they realize. Since you were unaware of these characteristics, as you are your blood pressure, these aspects of your psychological health could be called "unconscious."

To complicate matters, we may be somewhat different people in different situations and we are certainly seen differently by different people, such as our spouse, our best friend, our boss, our co-worker, our child, etc. It would be helpful to know about these differences. Harary and Donahue (1994) provide this feedback, using the Berkeley Personality Profile which is part of their book. They measure the "Big Five" personality dimensions: (1) Expressive Style--introverted to extraverted, (2) Interpersonal Style--inconsiderate to generous, (3) Work Style--lackadaisical to dedicated, (4) Emotional Style--calm to intense, and (5) Intellectual Style--traditional thinking to seeing things differently. Then the same five dimensions are assessed from different viewpoints: how *you* see yourself inside, how you think others see you, how you would like to be, how you see yourself in different roles (spouse, worker, friend), and, finally, how *others* actually rate you on the same dimensions. The entire book focuses on how to interpret and use this information to self-improve and relate better. It is easy to understand.

In a similar way, another book (Hirsh and Kummerow, 1989) utilizes the Myers-Briggs which measures Jungian personality types

(see chapter 9) and provides extensive interpretations for the laymen. The book provides the test, the scoring, understanding of the scales, and help in making use of the Myers-Briggs scores for personal insight, planning, and changing. It does not compare your self-description with other people's opinion. It may be a little more difficult to understand and use than the Berkeley, but the Myers-Briggs is a longer and more reliable test and perhaps more psychologically sophisticated. The Myers-Briggs is taught in Schools of Business and used widely by personnel departments and others in industry.

Where can you find and take other psychological tests? There are several collections of brief mental health and personality tests which measure a wide variety of factors: anxiety, depression, anger, introversion, risk-taking, assertiveness, self-esteem, attitudes towards others, even your unconscious, and many other traits. I recommend Cormier (1993) and Janda (1996), but other good books are by Oldham & Morris (1990), Cohen & Gladstone (1994), and Fensin & Ryan (1990). Greene and Lewis (1983) test your aptitudes and hidden talents in 8 or 9 areas, such as speed and accuracy of thinking, learning a language, scientific thinking, problem solving, artistic ability, social skills, etc. They also advise you about what kind of work you would do best. DuBrin (1989) has a self-sabotage questionnaire, followed by suggestions for handling self-defeating behavior on the job. A psychiatrist, Christ Zois (1992), has written a book that focuses more on measuring your unconscious defenses, i.e. the ways you hide buried emotions from yourself (psychological defenses are described in chapter 5). He then helps the reader see how to use that information in order to solve some of his/her problems, with a special emphasis on Short-Term Therapy.

Tests can, sometimes, also be obtained by talking to a school or mental health counselor. Scholastic aptitude and interest tests, of course, are routinely given in schools. These tests are easily interpreted. You should realize, however, that many counselors would be reluctant to assist you obtain personality tests because most personality tests are restricted to "professional use only." Many of these psychological (pathology or personality) tests would be difficult for a non-professional to interpret. Furthermore, most counselors believe the interpretation of test results to the testee should involve extensive discussion or therapy with a professional, which they may be unwilling to engage in. These are valid objections. My recommendation, if you are really interested in taking some tests, is to approach a counselor and ask if he/she would be willing to administer, score, and interpret for you the tests that you want. This will cost you \$200 to \$500 or more, however.

Some of the "professional" tests available from a psychologist would be quite understandable after a few hours of reading the test manual. For example, the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule is easily understood and measures the relative strength of 15 of your needs, such as achievement, submissiveness, nurturance, succorance (being taken care of), heterosexuality, hostility, and so on. The

California Personality Inventory is another easily used test that measures several traits. Attitude tests are mentioned in chapter 14 and are usually easily understood. The brief summaries of personality tests scattered throughout this book are not long enough to be reliable. If any of the results concern you, however, you should see a psychologist who can give you a more thorough examination.

Online Testing

In the last couple of years, several psychological testing sites have appeared on the Web. Automated or computerized testing has been developing since the 1960's, so adapting it to the Web is pretty easy. A good review of the characteristics, advantages, limitations, and risks of online testing is or will soon be available (Barak & English, 2000). In general, most of the Web sites offer free, brief, non-professional "pop" or screening tests of unknown validity; they usually give you immediate feedback. As with most free things online, the testing is also a come-on to some profit-making product or service—books, e-therapy, more individualized testing for a fee, etc. Although not a basis for seriously diagnosing individual problems, many of the brief tests are interesting and may create useful curiosity and motivation to learn more. Here are some of the Web sites.

The American Psychological Association simply provides links to various [Psychological Testing Services](http://www.apa.org/science/faq-findtests.html) (<http://www.apa.org/science/faq-findtests.html>). Although growing every month, there are currently 16 general testing resources sites listed, plus 18 sites that offer online tests and interpretations (most of these tests are intended to provide information to consumers but some of the sites provide an automated testing service for psychologists who refer their patients to the site). Another large site also searches the Internet for [Personality Tests on the WWW](http://www.2h.com/personality-tests.html) (<http://www.2h.com/personality-tests.html>). They link to 20-25 short personality or relationship tests. While search engines will also find similar sites offering psychological tests, these two sites will provide better, cleaner leads (fewer ads) and some initial evaluation.

One of the more impressive testing sites, thus far, is the popular [Queendom.com](http://queendom.com/tests/) (<http://queendom.com/tests/>). Within an almost overwhelming clutter of ads, several free tests are offered, each followed by a brief, simple interpretation of your answers and then a list of related self-help books for sale. Consumers are told that the tests cannot replace professional diagnosis and care, but links are given to Web sites where counseling is available. Thus, the site visitor starts with a self-assessment and then is given the options of purchasing books or counselors. There are 10 to 20-minute tests for: anxiety, depression, self-esteem, introversion, burnout, pessimism-optimism, and several coping/social/communication skills, such as assertiveness, leadership, sales ability, emotional IQ, attachment, and others. They appear to be slightly better but similar to the "pop" quizzes you find in the Sunday Supplement. Still, these tests may "get you thinking."

Given our innate interest in comparing ourselves to others and the potential to sell products and services through free testing, several testing Web sites are available. A large site is: [Personality and Psychological Tests](http://www.quincyweb.net/quincy/psychology.html) (<http://www.quincyweb.net/quincy/psychology.html>) which offers a number of brief tests; some of these tests are also available on other Web sites. Another large site is [Concerned Counseling](http://www.concernedcounseling.com/testsintro.htm) (<http://www.concernedcounseling.com/testsintro.htm>) . They provide a variety of personality tests and many ratings for estimating the severity of problems. This site seems to especially collect “Purity Tests” (asking: how many of these sexual things have you done?)—my problem, besides a concern with confidentiality, was that I wasn’t sure what a high or low score meant, if anything

There are two sites which have invested considerable time in attempting to develop a more comprehensive personality test, not just a collection of vaguely related quizzes: [Keirse Character and Temperament Sorter](http://keirse.com/index.html) (<http://keirse.com/index.html>) and [Organizational Diagnostics Profiler](http://www.od-online.com/app/profiler-intro.asp) (<http://www.od-online.com/app/profiler-intro.asp>) . Both give you a brief report and then try to sell you more. The Keirse tests (38- and 70-item) have similarities to the [Myers-Briggs Types](#), but measure different descriptive dimensions and use terms, like extroversion, differently. So, as with the Myers-Briggs, to understand this test you are essentially required to learn a personality theory (and “why not?” since personality is a complex concept). The Keirse measures four basic character types: Artistic (sensation seeking), Guardian (security seeking), Idealist (identity seeking), and Rational (knowledge seeking). Each of these four basic types is further divided into 4 specific “Personality Types,” depending on other characteristics. For example, the basic Guardian type includes the Provider, the Protector, the Supervisor, and the Inspector. The Organizational Diagnostics Profiler, using 50 questions, merely measures a few common characteristics: extroversion, agreeableness, thoroughness, openness to experience, and emotionality. Besides giving you a score on each dimension, however, there is considerable discussion of the interpersonal implications of your scores, especially in the work environment and in love relationships. Both of these Web sites require some work and thought, but they should increase your self-awareness.

Although psychiatrists are not trained in psychological testing and rarely use sophisticated tests, there is a Web site providing [Psychiatry Information for the General Public](http://www.med.nyu.edu/psych/public/) (<http://www.med.nyu.edu/psych/public/>) . The tests are very short-- 10 questions—and your answers are crudely evaluated and summarized. If the test taker mentions any significant symptoms, s/he is advised to see a psychiatrist (links are provided) or to read more on Web sites at NIMH. These “screening” quizzes are oriented towards diagnoses: anxiety, depression, ADHD, sexual disorders, and personality disorders. They are crude little tests but the symptoms you mark as serious deserve your attention.

Lastly, there are several IQ testing sites; two are: [Self-Discovery Workshop](http://www.iqtest.com/index.html) (<http://www.iqtest.com/index.html>) and [What's Your Emotional IQ?](http://www.utne.com/interact/test_iq.html) (http://www.utne.com/interact/test_iq.html) The Self-Discovery test measures the usual IQ, i.e. academic potential (it is timed...38 questions in about 13 minutes). It claims to usually yield an IQ within 5 points of a professional IQ test. Your general IQ score is given to you free and a "complete intelligence profile" is offered for a small fee. Goleman's Emotional IQ test is simply ten multiple-choice items asking how you would cope with specific problem situations. After answering, you are told the "right" answers and invited to buy [Goleman's book](#) if you want more social-emotional smarts.

Cautions: you need to keep in mind the limitations of today's online testing. The personality/adjustment tests available now are largely dependent on self-reports, which are subject to many errors—you may unconsciously deny problems and disorders; you might unwittingly exaggerate the severity of your symptoms; you may consciously attempt to look especially good or bad; you may misunderstand the test instructions or the questions. A good diagnostician would use tests covering a wide range of aptitudes, skills, emotions and behaviors, as well as other kinds of tests, like performance or situational/behavioral tests, not just self-report tests. Most importantly, keep in mind all the other information a therapist would utilize in making a diagnosis and understanding the problem situation. She or he would carefully consider all your strengths and current symptoms as well as all your recent and long-term history, including your family history, medical history, social history, school and work history and so on. Diagnosticians often interview parents, spouse, and others as well. They, of course, ask questions and attend carefully to your comments and behavior during an interview before making a tentative diagnosis. So, as of today, a few brief tests, such as the ones online, are a small part of a careful diagnostic evaluation of your problems.

Researchers George Dudley and Bill Gordon at [Behavioral Science Research Press](http://www.bsrpinc.com/) (<http://www.bsrpinc.com/>) have also voiced warnings about current online testing. They say that many of the online testing services are over-hyped and under-developed scientifically. Certainly, invalid test results could be believed, quite influential, and very harmful. This Web site provides several guidelines to help you separate the highly competent test developers from the flim-flamming "cyber-quacks." Before you change your life plans based on the results of just one or two brief tests, investigate the quality of the tests and the test makers. Also, seek collaborating evidence and the opinions of others.

However, the day is not far off, in my opinion, when a comprehensive, sophisticated 3 or 4-hour battery of computer interpreted psychological tests will be available online which will be just as valid as 3 or 4-hour intake assessments done by experienced psychiatrists/psychologists. A customized test battery individually administered by a psychologist would cost you \$500 to \$1000. But

when psychologists develop and improve comprehensive testing online with a computerized and personalized interpretation, the cost should be less than \$100, maybe less than \$50. That does not exist now. Hopefully, when such a system is available, everyone will have an "annual psychological check up" for better mental/emotional health, just like they have their annual physical. Makes sense to me.

Next, we will discuss tests of a special kind which focus on our unconscious motives.

Projective techniques

We all see different things in the same picture because we have different past experiences, needs, feelings, attitudes, and hopes for the future. Our own unique emotional reactions influence how we see things; thus, projective tests give us a chance to discover our projected, often unconscious, needs and feelings. For example, suppose almost all of the stories you made up to a series of pictures involved trying to achieve high goals or receiving awards. Surely such stories suggest a strong drive to excel. Suppose all the older women shown in a series of pictures were seen by you (and not others) as being cold, demanding, angry, and belittling. Surely one would wonder about your relationship with your mother.

The "draw-a-person" has been used by clinicians for decades as a projective test. Try it. Get a large sheet of unlined paper and two or three colors you like and two or three you dislike. Draw yourself or your family. Do *not* use the colors because they are appropriate, like black for shoes, but use colors according to how much you like or dislike a particular part of your body or according to how much you like or dislike someone in the family. An alternative is to make an abstract drawing of yourself or your family.

There are several ways to interpret such drawings. First of all, artistic skill doesn't count but general demeanor and facial expression, such as strong or weak and happy or sad, are important. Also, the overall size of the self-drawing may reflect positive or negative feeling (little means insignificant). There are several books written about the interpretation of drawings (Keys, 1974; Machover, 1974), but I'll leave you on your own. One of the best methods is to share your drawings with a friend or a group. It is a good way to self-disclose and to get other peoples' reactions to your drawings as well as to your interpretations of your own self-portrait.

Of course, art is used as a therapy, as well as a way to understand the person (Furth, 1988).

Instead of drawing your own picture, another projective procedure is to make up a story to almost any picture with people in it. Clinicians use a series of standard pictures called the Thematic Apperception Test. Any picture will do. Select several pictures, then make up a *complete* story about each one, i.e. describe what the people are doing

and feeling in the picture *and* tell what happened before the picture (what led up to this scene) and what will happen later (the outcome of the story). Make the story as good and dramatic as you can. Be sure to include how the people are feeling towards each other. You probably need to write the stories down, otherwise parts will be forgotten.

Especially if the picture is vague or ambiguous, very different stories will be made up about it by different people. For instance, suppose several people looked at a picture of a young boy looking at an open book. Some people would see the boy studying and going on to become a great scientist (achievement needs). Others would see him as dreading his homework because he can't understand it (insecurity). Others think he is really not reading but procrastinating and dreaming about playing football. Others speculate he is reading a story instead of mowing the lawn as he was told to do. Still others would suggest that there is really a comic book inside the textbook or that he is reading his first dirty book. Don't you suppose that what each person sees in the picture reflects something in them? Try it.

Guided fantasies

Instead of looking at a picture, one can imagine being in a certain scene and then observe how you react in that situation. Such fantasies reflect expectations and needs inside of you, some conscious and some unconscious. Unquestionably cave people told stories and asked, "What would you do in this situation?" But Max Hammer (1967) described this as a therapy technique several years ago.

Scenes commonly used by therapists and group leaders include: being in a grassy meadow on a warm spring day, going deep under water in a murky lake, climbing to the top of a high mountain, exploring a strange house or your childhood home, opening the door to a room that contains something very valuable to you, exploring inside your own body trying to find where your mother resides, imagining the layers upon layers that make up your "self," being a three-weeks-old baby and cared for by your parents, discussing a personally significant question with a very wise person, having only three days to live, and on and on.

Interpretations of all guided fantasies are tentative, very speculative, merely food for thought. For example, how you feel in the meadow may reflect how you respond to being alone, what you find in deep water or the basement is supposed to represent your unconscious, going to the mountains is supposed to represent approaching God, and so on. No one knows what your fantasies mean. No one would doubt that your fantasies show something about your inner most workings.

Here is my favorite guided fantasy. I've done it hundreds of times. Try it now, as you read it. Relax, get comfortable, allow 15 minutes or so for this exercise. (1) Imagine it is a warm spring day. You are walking in the country where you have never been before. You are on

a path leading towards a big forest. The path enters the woods; take it and see what you find there. How do you feel inside the woods? Take a couple of minutes; notice what you do inside the woods. [Pause] (2) You notice that the path takes you along a small stream which flows into a beautiful lake with a fantastic beach. Spend some time at the lake. See what you do. How do you feel? What happens there? [Pause] (3) You continue walking on the path beyond the lake. It goes through farm land with fields on each side. In the grass along the path, you find a bright shiny object. Find out what it is. How do you feel about it? Do something with it so you can continue on. [Pause] (4) Further along the path you approach a house. What kind of house is it? How do you feel about going near a house? What do you do there? [Pause] (5) After walking on the path a long time, you are in a remote area. There are no houses or fields, just scrubby bushes and old logs. All of a sudden there is a bear right in front of you! What does it do? What do you do? How do you feel? What kind of bear is it? What happens? [Pause] You are able to handle the situation with the bear. You feel fine now; the bear has gone away and won't be back. You might want to go on and have more fantasies like those mentioned above. Eventually, when you have finished your imaginary journey, you should imagine going back the same trail--pass the remote area, the house, the shiny object, the lake, and the woods--and then coming back to the here and now.

What do the unique and specific fantasies you have just had mean? Perhaps nothing. Any interpretations are merely speculations, but there are some interesting possibilities for you to consider. If these suggestions seem ridiculous, that's fine, enjoy the humor in it. But if these ideas seem to "strike a cord," then give it some more thought: (1) Your reactions going into the *woods*--positive (wonderful and beautiful) or negative (dark and threatening)--may indicate what you expect from *life*. (2) What you do on the *beach* may reflect your feelings about *sex*, e.g. you may get all excited, take off your clothes, jump in, and have a ball or you may abstain thinking the water is dirty, unsafe, or frigid. (3) The bright shiny *object* represents *love*, so note if you think it is something precious which you will keep forever or if it is disappointing and you throw it away, like an old rusty hub cap. (4) The *house* may indicate how *materialistic* you are (it may be a mansion or an old shack) and your comfort about approaching the house may reflect your *trust* of others and/or your feelings about family life. (5) How you handle the *bear* may be similar to how you handle problems or *crises* in life. For instance, I see a huge bear and run like hell. Foolish as that is, perhaps running is exactly what a person who obsesses with problems (and spends 25 years gathering problem solving methods) would do. Interestingly, some people deny problems by seeing the "bear" as a cute little harmless bear cub. I hope it is obvious that these "interpretations" should not be taken too seriously. Have fun, share your fantasies with others.

The stories you like and how you respond to a fable or parable says something about you (see the eagle-raised-like-a-chicken story in method #4 above). Malamud (1973) describes this scene: You are in a room which contains a bird cage with a bird in it. The bird is excited

and saying something to the cage. What? The cage answers. Listen to the conversation. What are the bird and the cage saying? [Pause] Now, the bird begins to frantically try to get out of the cage. What are they saying? [Pause] Finally, the bird breaks out and flies away. They continue yelling at each other. What are they saying? [Pause] Now, a strange thing happens, the bird flies back into the cage. For the first time, as an observer, you feel like saying something. What do you want to say? [Pause] After you have finished, the bird looks you squarely in the eye and says... [Pause]

Many of us have been in many cages--a job, a class, a relationship, a family, a handicap, a string of bad luck--and we bring those experiences into this story. Perhaps you are being held captive now and have had little awareness of it, until you projected yourself into the story.

One more idea about fantasies. For 25 years, Lloyd Silverman and his colleagues have done a large number of experiments which suggest a subliminal stimulus (a drawing and/or a few words) can influence how logically schizophrenics think, how well we perform (throw darts), our sexual orientation, how much patients profit from therapy and so on (Silverman, Lachmann & Milich, 1982). It is especially amazing because the words are presented several times but for only 4 milliseconds each time--which is just a blur of light to our conscious mind. It is also amazing because the words express an unclear and complex thought, "Mommy and I are one." Perhaps most amazing of all, Silverman speculates that this blur of light triggers off specific unconscious fantasies! And it is those supposed fantasies, for which there is no evidence at all (neither awareness nor brain activity), that are assumed to influence our thinking, actions, feeling, etc. Amazing, indeed. In other words, we have fascinating data and one far-out theory but we don't know what is really going on.

Needless to say, there is much debate about these experiments (see Balay and Shevrin, 1988). What is very clear, however, is that these effects, fascinating as they are, are not "robust," as the scientists say, i.e. the experiments frequently can't be repeated. That's a serious problem. Also, another thing, how many of you have a tachistoscope (an expensive device that flashes images very quickly)? Very few. So, why am I talking about this stuff? Because there are too many findings to dismiss and because the idea of having certain kinds of fantasies to achieve certain results may be useful. Unfortunately, science isn't yet of much use to you on this matter.

Silverman is trying to prove Freudian theories. Silverman's theory is that "Mommy and I are one" triggers unconscious fantasies, an universal wish to be secure, cared for, loved, and safe with our mothers, perhaps even a fantasy of oneness with her in the sense of being so young that we don't yet know the difference between her and us (called symbiotic fantasy). Furthermore, the theory says that having these unconscious symbiotic fantasies is helpful in almost every way. Silverman called this *unconscious* merging-with-mother fantasy

an "ubiquitous therapeutic agent," meaning it facilitates psychotherapy (and dart throwing!). Maybe. It can't be proven. It would be easier to prove a connection between *conscious* fantasies and improved performance or feelings. And, maybe, the results would be more powerful, more dependable, more useful.

Perhaps "Mommy and I are one" presented for 4 milliseconds, i.e. unconsciously, is the only way to arouse symbiotic fantasies...but I doubt it. Perhaps the conscious mind can prompt an unconscious fantasy as well as a too-brief-to-see stimulus. Perhaps the symbiotic fantasy doesn't have to be unconscious. Perhaps a pleasant fantasy of being held and stroked or bathed and fed or nursed and loved would work just as well. Why not try it and see? Scientists: get busy! Straighten this out!

Feedback from others

It hardly needs to be said that friends, family, co-workers, supervisors, counselors, therapists and others can give you insight into behaviors and attitudes you are not aware of. In chapter 13, there is a method for checking out interpersonal hunches (just ask!). This method will also reveal the impressions you are unknowingly making on others (if others will tell you). Feedback from others may be particularly helpful if they have observed you extensively, e.g. let them read your diary or listen to daily recordings you have made about your problems.

My personal belief is that an open, frank, and constructively confrontive group, like a good encounter group, a psychodrama (see role-playing in chapter 13), or a mutually helping group, is one of the best ways to get useful feedback. Groups of friends or social groups have to live with you; thus, they will usually avoid telling you the truth, especially the negative feedback.

Reframing

The meaning we attach to any event depends on how we see it. If we get a scholarship to MIT, it may mean a wonderful opportunity or that we have to leave our boy/girlfriend. If you over-eat, it may be seen as a bad habit or as a way of reducing anxiety. Many therapies try to change how we think about things. Chapter 14 covers several such conscious methods (also frequently called reframing). This section suggests a way of gaining the help of the internal part of you (perhaps your Child or Parent) which *unconsciously* causes you to do something you don't want to do or prevents you from doing something you want to do. Bandler and Grinder (1982) called this "reframing;" Mann (1987) called it a "Power Generator;" Virginia Satir, Carl Whitaker and others refer to a related process as "relabeling." This is the procedure:

1. Have in mind the behavior you desire. Then, attempt to get in touch with the part of you that is responsible for the unwanted

- behavior or the resistance that interferes with your desired behavior.
2. Work out a way of communicating with the responsible part, preferably using words but if that isn't possible, bodily signals, like movement of a finger, in response to questions will work. Be kind, patient and respectful to the part, assume that the part has some positive intention. Make a distinction between the behavior, which may be harmful to you, and the intention of the responsible part.
 3. Ask the part what it is trying to do for you. This is the crucial step in reframing. Once the intention is known, ask the part if it would consider achieving its purpose in some other ways. It might be obvious how to achieve this purpose in a better way. If solutions are not easy to come by, ask the part to use its creativity (or to seek help from a creative part of your personality) and come up with alternative ways of achieving its purpose.
 4. When alternatives have been thought of, including continuing to do what you have been, ask the responsible part, the conscious self, and other parts of your personality to agree upon the most acceptable way to cope. Make sure no part objects. The idea is to minimize the resistance from all the parts and maximize the support.
 5. Help the part responsible for the to-be-changed-behavior to plan the desired changes--it must be in full agreement. Establish times and places for the new behavior (have environmental or cognitive "signals" to prompt the new behavior or feelings), and mentally rehearse putting the plan into action. Then, do it!

Examples: the jealous person may start giving fun-loving attention to his/her lover instead of suspicious, controlling, critical nagging; the over-eater may substitute self-praise for food; the angry person may substitute assertive problem-solving for bitterness, etc.

Let the body talk (Focusing)

To understand this method, called focusing, you must first recognize that it involves another way of knowing. Like Gestalt therapy, this method avoids reasoning and using the mind to figure things out. But unlike Gestalt, this method also avoids "getting in touch with feelings" and expressing intense emotions. So what does this method use? Body sense or "wisdom of the body" or what Eugene Gendlin (1978), inventor of the method, calls "felt sense." The method involves *focusing on the "felt sense."* His new book for therapists will soon be published (Gendlin, 1996), but a student of his has also written a self-help book about focusing (Cornell, 1996).

"Felt sense" is not well understood or identified in our culture. That's why Gendlin coined a new word for it. Let's get a feel for this extra-sense. Actually, you already know this feeling well in some situations. "Felt sense" is a special kind of internal, natural, bodily-felt

awareness. It is a physical experience, not a mental or emotional one; it is what your body really feels. An example of a "felt sense" is the vague, general sense you have of (a) some situation, say loosing a relationship, (b) some event, say a serious accident, or (c) someone, say your mother. For example, in the latter case, it doesn't involve a mental list of thousands of physical features or behavioral traits or past experiences you know about your mother; that is too much to think about at one time; your "felt sense" of your mother is your global sense of "all about Mom." Vague and non-specific as it is, you will never confuse the "felt sense" of your mother with a "felt sense" of someone else. It doesn't involve all the emotions you have ever felt towards your mother nor even the one dominant emotion you have recently been feeling towards her; it is a vague sense of your mother that is broader than a single emotion. This "felt sense" of your mother entering the room, however, may change your behavior immediately and without conscious planning.

Psychological-emotional problems often exist on this deep, unconscious, bodily-felt level and these problems must, according to Gendlin, be corrected on this level. When you make a change towards awareness or a solution, i.e. when progress is made inside, there is a detectable "*felt shift*" or a satisfying "body shift." The body seems to know what makes sense and there is a noticeable easing or loosening up--a bodily change or shift. Gendlin's example of body shift is a good one: first, suppose you are shopping and you sense you have forgotten something but can't remember what. Your body knows more than your mind, in this case. Next, you may think of certain things you actually have forgotten but you know they aren't "it." Instantly, as soon as you think of it, say toothpaste, you know for sure and may sigh, "That's it!" There is a noticeable physical sensation, a reduced tension or a certainty we all know. All of this awareness is your "felt sense" about the situation; the bodily relief and certainty immediately after remembering is your "felt shift." A change in your "felt sense" changes you and how you feel. Your "felt shift" is valuable for it says "you're on the right track." Look for it. Get to know it well. You can use it for insight and self-understanding in many ways.

Gendlin believes he has discovered how people change. By letting the body talk and listening to its wisdom, people can help themselves. By doing essentially the same thing in therapy, many patients get better. Gendlin says he can tell within the first couple of sessions of therapy if a person uses his/her "felt sense" and will successfully change. Thus, focusing on the "felt sense" comes natural to some people, but if "you ain't got it" already, the effective method isn't taught in most therapy. Yet, focusing on the "felt sense" can be taught rather easily, and, unlike therapy, it feels good. Gendlin teaches his patients how to do this (see below).

Gendlin is a very experienced therapist. It was his opinion (before the Cognitive Therapy movement) that cognitive (problem solving) attempts seldom solve emotional problems. He says ruminating about some upsetting experience frequently doesn't help and sometimes

makes it worse. Likewise, developing a clinical explanation of why you are upset doesn't help. The solution to overwhelming emotions is not a head trip (see Gestalt techniques in method # 2). Freud also knew very well that no one ever makes great therapeutic changes just by intellectually recognizing "I probably had an Oedipus Complex." True helpful insight into the Oedipus situation involves remembering and "working through" real episodes of strong attachment to mother, longing for her closeness, getting in touch with your animosity towards father, and lots of fears, urges, guilt, and frustrations. It is uncovering these strong, taboo, *emotional* experiences, which are still stored in our bodies, that are shoved into the unconscious, not some intellectual concept or explanation, that are curative.

When the "felt sense" of any situation, event, or person is *focused* on, it has the power to change. When your "felt sense" about a situation or problem changes, then you change. Many therapists would agree with Gendlin that there may be great wisdom in the body, if we will listen to it. It will tell us what is wrong, even when our head can't figure it out. In my opinion, focusing isn't the only fruitful method for tapping unconscious wisdom, but it is worth a try.

Gendlin suggests the following steps:

- *Find your concerns.* Relax and slowly use your "felt sense" (not your mind or your feelings) to identify several concerns. The concerns may be events, situations, physical problems (headache, fatigue, tension), or persons. Do not probe or elaborate on these concerns at this point. Don't list all your problems, just what is bugging you now. (One or two minutes)
- Select your main concern and *get a "felt sense" of it.* First, use your body or felt sense to select your main problem at this time to focus on. Do not try to figure out the problem; do not concern yourself with all the complex factual details and do not dwell on the intense or mixed emotions you might be feeling. Instead, stand back from the problem, avoid obsessing about it. Second, again using your "felt sense" (not your mind), try to get a vague, intuitive, holistic but unclear sense of *the whole problem*. Don't cognitively analyze or solve the problem. Instead, try to sense what this whole problem feels like. (A couple of minutes)
- *Find a tentative "handle."* Use your "felt sense" to find a word, phrase, or image that fits exactly the "felt sense" you have of the problem. You want a phrase that captures the basic emotional quality of the problem; get a "handle" on it. The descriptive words should reflect the "bodily sensed" nature of the problem; they might be words like pushed around, scared, really attracted, sad, oppressed, pulled different directions, confused, jealous, discouraged, very peaceful, and so on. (A minute or so)
- Repeatedly *compare your "felt sense" of the problem with the descriptive words*, the "handle," you selected. Often the "felt sense" will change as you dwell on it, so change the descriptive

words. Keep shifting back and forth until the "handle" seems to fit the problem perfectly well. Don't mentally ask, "Is this right?" but rather look for the bodily signal--the "felt shift" that says "this is right." Relish this accomplishment. (Just a couple of minutes, unless your "felt sense" of the problem keeps changing, which is good, then it may take three or four minutes.)

- Ask your "felt sense: " *What* is it about this whole problem or situation that *causes me to have this overall feeling quality (the "handle"?)*? Wait patiently for an answer. Beware of quick, well rehearsed self-lectures and pseudo-intellectual explanations; you've heard these ideas before; tell your "Freud" to go away. Listen to your body.

If that basic question doesn't fit or work, try questions like this:

- What is really so bad about this situation?
- What about this quality (the "handle") that is so terrible?
- What needs to be done so you (or the "felt sense") will feel OK?

Don't ask your mind to answer these questions. Don't let your inner critic upset you; don't awfulize. Stay calm, concentrate on looking for answers from this new source of wisdom you are investigating. Stay with your "felt sense" until you get an answer which seems right (you will feel the "felt shift").

- Carefully *attend to any answers* or images or solutions from your "felt sense" that give rise to the bodily sensation of "that's right" or "that fits." These insights are instantly relieving, they change you automatically and your body feels better right away. The new awareness may need to be acted upon by using conscious self-help efforts also. But, on the other hand, you don't have to agree with the "felt sense" nor follow its advice. It may ask for the impossible. Just listen.
- Decide if you want to *go another round of "felt sensing"* a problem, giving it a "handle," and asking the body to help you understand your feelings or possible solutions. Often the next focus is on your last body-wisdom--the answer or view or feeling given you by your "felt sense." That is, you now "felt sense" your last "felt sense" that produced a "felt shift." The sequence from one "felt sense" to another is not logical or orderly, it just happens. You keep on trying to get under or get into the last "felt sense" until the problem is resolved. Or until you want to take a break.

Focusing is not stressful and hard work. Yet, it takes lots of practice to learn to focus. It is honest talk with your body, something most people don't do much. It is not an instant cure. Like meditation,

it may take a few minutes a day for several weeks to make progress on a difficult problem.

The nature of the problem changes with each shift or feeling of "that fits," i.e. putting the puzzle together keeps changing the picture you have of the problem as other facets come into focus. This isn't troubling because you learn that seeing a new part of the problem is the next step to solving the problem...and putting in little pieces of the puzzle feels good.

A case illustration will help

Gendlin (1987) describes the focusing process done by Peggy, a mother of a 5-year-old son and a part-time teacher. Her husband, John, worked at a bank and on this day had come home thrilled about being promoted. He was so excited; he broke one of her best pieces of china. She was very mad and ran upstairs crying.

Trying to calm down, she tried to see the problem as trivial but that didn't work. She tried to figure it out: she was very tired! That didn't help either, she was still upset. She decided to relax and try focusing. Step (b): She started by getting a "felt sense" of her big scene over the broken china. Step (c): After a minute or so, she asked the "felt sense" to name itself--to find a word or phrase to describe the total experience. That didn't seem hard: "mad at John." Step (d): She compared the "felt sense" (event) with the handle (mad) and there was a little "felt shift." Step (e): She asked the "felt sense," "What is making me so mad?" The answer she got was: "The broken china isn't it so much as John's jubilation--he's so damn cocky." Step (f): Wow, a big "felt shift" came with that, so she knew the "felt sense" had that right.

Step (g): She wanted to pursue this feeling more, so she went back to step (b) and got a whole sense--a "felt sense"--of John's joyous, prideful reaction. Step (c): It took some time but the "handle" that came to her was "jealousy!" Step (d): She compared the "felt sense" (John's jubilation) with the "handle" (jealousy) and got very little "felt shift." She thought she could find a better "handle" but all that came to her was "sort-of-jealous." There was a little more "felt shift." Step (e): She asked the "felt sense:" "What about John's happiness and cockiness leads to the sort-of-jealous handle?" Step (f): She waited...the answer came, "It isn't jealousy as much as it is feeling left behind." "Aha! That's it," she thought and there was a clear, strong change in her body.

Step (g): Peggy decided to spend some more time on the "being left behind" problem so she went back to step (b) and focused on the "felt sense" of that situation. Again she worked through steps (c), (d), (e) and (f) for 10 more minutes. Of course, she didn't solve all her problems of being a full-time mother and a frustrated professional, but she certainly felt better. Her problem looked different to her now. It had little to do with broken china. It had more to do with John helping

with the child care and her developing more teaching skills so she would get more recognition. She went down stairs a changed person and they had a nice talk about home responsibilities and exciting futures for both of them.

Free association and word association test

Freud first used hypnosis to uncover the patient's unconscious feeling and conflicts. This wasn't entirely satisfactory, so he switched to free association. For the last 80 to 90 years, Psychoanalysts have instructed their patients to lie on the couch and talk about whatever comes to their mind, regardless if it is logically connected to the previous topic or if it seems related to their troubles or not. The patient is free to say anything. The therapist will probably not react at all, certainly not negatively. In effect, the patient is also relieved of his/her responsibility for what he/she spontaneously discloses. Under these conditions, perhaps, the internal "censor" of the unconscious will relax so unconscious material can emerge, at least symbolically. Psychoanalysis may take 300 to 500 or more hours; that is a lot of associations. Actually, very few therapists use free association today, it takes too long at \$75-\$150 an hour.

It is unlikely that you will want to take 500 hours over the next year or two to do a self-psychoanalysis by recording your free associations. Yet, it was seriously recommended by Karen Horney (1942). It would not be unlike meditating daily; it is sort of letting the body speak; it would involve a study of your entire life by listening to your associations and thoughts about events in your life; it would allow emotions and forgotten memories to surface.

A more practical modification would consist of recording only a few hours of free association on a tape recorder. It is very informative and enlightening to listen to yourself (see chapter 12). It may be even more helpful if you listen for the more emotionally laden or suggestive sections and then express these ideas over and over again with more feeling. In this way, you can sometimes find and fully express the hidden feelings. That is the purpose of Psychoanalysis: to uncover the unconscious which always has strong negative emotions attached (see the last section on dream interpretation). It would also be helpful if you shared your associations with a small helpful group and got their input.

To do a word association "test" you need someone's help. Single words are presented to you (you must not know what the words will be) and you respond as quickly as possible with the first word that comes to your mind. Words thought to be emotionally significant to you are scattered among common words. The significance of your response is judged subjectively--sort of clinical conjecture about the specific word you blurt out. Also, some significance is attached to how long it takes you to respond. A long response suggests some kind of emotional blockage.

Catharsis-abreaction

Freud reported that his free associating patients occasionally experienced such an emotionally intense and vivid memory that they almost relived the experience. This is like a "flashback" from a war or a rape experience. Such a stressful memory, so real it feels like it is happening again, is called an abreaction. If such a disturbing memory occurred in therapy or with a supportive friend *and one felt better--relieved or cleansed--later*, it would be called a catharsis. Frequently, these intensely emotional experiences provided Freud a valuable insight into the patient's problems. That isn't surprising, e.g. if a woman who abhors all flirtatious and sexual activity suddenly remembers (with intense crying) being brutally raped when she was 8 by her older brother, it would be impossible to deny that there is a possible connection between the rape and her current attitude towards sex. Freud saw his patients have these kinds of emotional memories and then feel better (and eventually act differently sexually). Hence, the theory that repressed traumatic experiences cause neurosis. And the advice: uncover the trauma.

The idea that painful, abusive experiences need to be uncovered (remembered) before treatment can progress is not just an old notion; most therapists today believe uncovering such memories is at least moderately helpful. The detailed procedures (and the safe-guards) for catharsis or venting or discharging emotions are given in method #8 of chapter 12. Be cautious when dealing with any strong emotion. And, be skeptical of any traumatic memory, especially if it is recovered in a way (books, therapy or groups) or under conditions that might be suggestive (see warning about psychological readings given above).

Early memories

Over 50 years ago, Alfred Adler (1931) wrote that our earliest memories give us insight into our "life-style," i.e. they represent "the story of my life." This is because our earliest memories reflect our original view of life. Our life-style has three parts: (1) *Beliefs*: What am I like? What are others like? What is the world like? (2) *Motivation*: What do I want? What do I expect? What is my place? Our goals are unique and based on the meaning we give to life. (3) *Choice*: How to reach my life goals (or how to stay in my place)?

Very often we don't change very much between ages 2 or 3 and 20... or 60, perhaps because our 2 or 3-year-old self still lives within us. Our beliefs, motives, and choices as a 3-year-old may still be operating inside us quite unconsciously. The purpose of this method is to see if you are still behaving and emoting according to the basic beliefs and motivations you had as a child. A recent book may help you understand your childhood memories (Leman and Carlson, 1989). They say that the earliest memory is an accurate picture of you *as you really are* today. For example, if your earliest memory is about messing up or being criticized, then you may still feel insecure (afraid of messing up again). This fear may cause you to be too scared to try to succeed *or* to be an anxious perfectionist to try to avoid failure. Your early memory reflects the central insecure aspect of your personality and how you try to cope with the insecurity. If you believe others are always trying to

make you look bad, your early memories are likely to be humiliating experiences.

There are several ways to obtain the early memories. First, simplest of all, just ask your self, "What is my earliest memory?" Second, since certain kinds of memories are more helpful than others, more complex instructions might be given, for example:

What is the first thing you can remember...something before you were eight, something that happened only once (or you can remember a particular time this thing happened), something you remember very clearly yourself (not something you have been told you did)? Write down your description. When finished, be sure your feelings during the experience are clearly expressed. Preferably, write down, in a similar way, three early memories.

Examine your early memories by asking: Who is present... and who isn't? What are the peoples' basic feelings? What is the world like? nice or hostile? exciting or dull? What is your role or action? helpful or mean? strong or weak? successful or failing? Do you feel alone or close to someone? What are you feeling? happy or sad? calm or scared? proud or ashamed? What is your motive? to help, to get attention, to exert power? What is the basic theme in each memory?

Finally, by analyzing your three memories, try to infer your original (at age 2 to 5) self-concept, world image, view of others, your goals, your ways of achieving those goals, your strengths, and your weaknesses. Then ask yourself: Are these things still true of me?



The next two approaches (third and fourth) are interesting; both attempt to tie the early recollection to the present.



Third, based on work by Willhite (1978), it is assumed that the sequence of emotions in the early memory reflects the person's expectations about life-his/her emotional modus operandi. Thus, as illustrated below, every segment of the earliest memory is numbered and written down (see column A). Beneath each segment of the early memory, write down the primary emotions actually experienced during that segment. In column B, write down the activities and emotions you would have liked to have happened during this segment of the early experience, i.e. your ideal experience. Finally, in column C, using the same number of segments as in column A, describe your actions and feelings in a current interpersonal problem. The Willhite method (an example):

| A | B | C |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Memory of what happened</u> (feelings) | <u>Your ideal</u> (feelings) | <u>Current problem</u> (feelings) |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Playing ball with father (nervous--not very good) | Playing with father (fun, close) | Talking with wife--don't want to. (being considerate but uneasy) |
| 2. Using big padded ball (a fact--conceals feelings?) | Throwing ball easy (trusting, caring) | Trying to avoid an argument (afraid of a fight) |
| 3. Throwing to each other (afraid of messing up) | I drop the ball (disappointed) | |
| She changes topic & "got me" (tricked, vulnerable, angry) | | |
| 4. See dad's not having fun (concerned, fear) | I run to get ball (proud, confident) | I see: I just lost the argument (disappointed, shot down, fear) |
| 5. He's teaching me! Not playing (inferior, looked down on) | Laughing, good time (accepted, happy) | Feel my efforts were useless (inadequate, despair) |
| 6. It's his job to help me (a fact--hiding something? Denying being angry?) | We start talking (worthy, trusting) | She seems to always be right (frustrated, angry) |
| 7. I don't know how to be better (helpless, lonely, inadequate) | Dad listens to me (understood, content) | I want to get away from her (useless, inadequate, alone) |
| 8. [Overall feeling] (I'll never be able to do it well enough) | [Overall feeling] (loved, close) | [Overall feeling] (She always wins, I lose; inferior, rejected, unloved) |

The first step in interpreting your early memory (column A) is to look at the last couple of segments (6 & 7) and the overall feeling (8) to see how life is viewed. As seen in column A, this person ends up feeling like a loser, inferior, and helpless. But, by looking at segments 4, 5 and 6, it is clear that the goal is to avoid taking responsibility for what happened (*dad* makes me feel inadequate). Often the feelings in the early memory reflect the person's basic expectation of what life will be like and a major determinant of his/her life-style, e.g. "I'm no good and if I assert myself, I'll be rejected, BUT IT'S ALL SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT."

↔
Emotions cause behaviors that confirm our beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world.
↔

The second step is checking to see if the sequence of emotions (and outcome) in the early memory is similar to the emotional sequence in current problems (column C). Are you following an old script? In this case, you can see that the same old drama--a self-put down or a "Kick Me" game--is being played. He sees himself as trying real hard to be good to his wife but SHE changes topics putting him down in an argument. Thus, his feeling inadequate and angry is HER FAULT. And, he ends up feeling ineffective, unloved and abandoned, just like when he was three years old and played with dad. He is still trying to solve his problems in the same old ways. We all may be doing that sometimes.

Of course, the purpose is to give up the self-defeating life-style and get your life more like you want it to be. So, the idealized early experience (column B) provides another sequence of emotions that this person might try to substitute for the current problem's sequence. This person needs to take more responsibility for being easygoing, fun loving, intimate, accepting, trusting, empathic and more confident, so he can end up feeling close to others and loved, instead of a loser. He has a lot of work to do but his early memories may help him get started.

Fourth, other therapists (Colker and Funk, 1981) have combined early recollections with psychodrama. First of all, the person's early memory is connected with current problems by first asking him/her to describe a recent difficulty; second, describe a similar episode in Jr High or High School; third, describe an early childhood memory related to the problem. The Willhite method is also used, so the psychodrama group has memories, how-I-wish-it-had-been, and other current concerns to "act out" or role play (see chapter 13). By re-enacting the memories and problems, the emotions become more vivid, more obvious, and easier to handle. A therapeutic group can then discuss and rehearse better ways of emoting and handling the problems.

Other self-help methods, helping groups, therapy

Passing mention should be made of meditation (see chapter 12) as a means of gaining insight. It is considered by some people to be a major method. Certainly, the other methods in this chapter contribute to "self-analysis," the title of this section. Also, all the chapters from 3 to 10 are oriented towards increasing our cognitive understanding of common problems, which addresses our unawareness attributable to ignorance (not what we ordinarily call unconscious). Another part of our unawareness may be attributable to our unconscious, as in defense mechanisms (chapter 5) or self-deception as in procrastination (chapter 4), values (chapter 3), and denial of emotions (chapters 5-8). This chapter buttresses the other chapters in addressing these latter kinds of blind spots.

I have spent a lot of time in helping, encounter, or support groups--hundreds of them over a period of 30 years. My experience in groups has been very positive. It is scary (sometimes) but usually very helpful to share your problems with a concerned group. They ask you things you hadn't thought of; they share their relevant experiences with you; they suggest actions and viewpoints you had never considered. One more thing I want to make perfectly clear: I had more professional credentials than anyone else in

those groups, but the meaningful experience, the wisdom, and insight did not usually come from me! Ordinary people, who have had real life experience, are wonderful sources of knowledge. Knowledge in this case isn't from reading research and books; it is from watching and experiencing real life-- which is the true laws of behavior in action. See the discussion of support groups in chapter 5.

This book is not about psychotherapy, but I would be amiss if I did not remind you that the principle means of gaining self-awareness and insights today is talking to a well trained, experienced, and empathic therapist. Too often we do not recognize ourselves when we read about problems like ours in a book. Surely we will learn more about writing insight-producing but safe books.

Time involved, common problems with these methods, and effectiveness

You could try out most of the self-analysis methods in this section in an hour or two. But to use any of them effectively as a means of gaining insight into your ongoing unconscious processes, it would take time each day, perhaps an hour-a-day, like Freud. Serious self-discovery within the unconscious is an endless task, so maybe it should be called a life-style, rather than a self-help method.

Memories and emotions are probably in our unconscious because they make us feel awful and ashamed or because they make us feel tense and uncomfortable. Bringing such an unconscious thought or feeling to our awareness is likely to be stressful, something to be undertaken with some caution. These uncovering methods are not the "royal road" to everyone's unconscious; they don't always work and sometimes when they "work" they yield false information. If you can't get results by yourself or if you fear what might happen by yourself, these are good and sufficient reasons for getting professional help.

Very little is known scientifically about self-analysis of unconscious material. I "believe" some people can do it with little training and guidance (such as this chapter); they have a talent for finding hidden causes for their feelings. For many, though, the greatest barrier is their resistance to trying things that seem "silly," such as telling stories to pictures, drawing pictures, sharing fantasies, free associating, or letting the body talk. Actually, therapists also vary in terms of their readiness to try some new techniques for insight. I like the more adventurous type. Neither therapists nor self-helpers have any scientific basis for predicting which methods will work best for you. It is an art.

On the other hand, it is my opinion, also based on much experience, that the most productive therapy hours are when the patient is emotionally upset, often in a crisis. The emotions pour out. Old related memories flood back. The hurting patient doesn't try to impress the therapist or to keep him/herself under control; he/she just blurts out the feelings as they flood into his/her mind. This is a truly insightful time. When the patient is in such a state, the therapist doesn't need skill or methods or techniques; he/she just needs to

listen and care (and remember what was said, so the new insights can be capitalized on later). So, I believe, exposing ourselves to emotional experiences and memories (a part of many of the methods in this chapter) may help us be more insightful and able to get in touch with other emotions.

Dream Analysis

People have always had an interest in dreams. The Babylonians, 5,000 years before Christ, had a Goddess of Dreams, Mamu, and a book for interpreting dreams. The Egyptians, in 3,000 B. C., also had a God of Dreams, Serpis, and learned men, like Joseph in the Bible, were dream interpreters. They even had self-help techniques for inducing certain dreams. They may have thought, as we do now, that dreams satisfy some of our psychological needs and change our mood.

During the Dark and Middle Ages when alchemists were trying to turn lead into gold, etc., many ideas were proposed about good and evil forces, human thoughts, and dreams. Generalizations were made, such as "things must fall apart, decay and rot, before a revival of new healthy growth is possible," "opposites, like love and hate, try to escape one another, but also seek a balance," etc. The alchemists thought in terms of *three worlds: the black, the white, and the red world*. *Black* is darkness, evil, despair, ruins, the crude unconscious taking over our minds... *White* is the eerie, uncertain light of the moon, the twilight zone of lunacy, irrational thoughts, things changing, slippery, some hope... *Red* is the bright light of the sun, new life, things in order, ability to see clearly, rational, willful control, morals, growth, laughter... Each section of a dream and each object comes from one of these worlds, supposedly.

Now, about 1000 years later, many dream interpretation books, especially those by Jungian analysts, are *still* using these alchemy ideas to understand the symbolism in dreams. There is no science here; there is a lot of mystical, religious fantasy. Examples: The *black* world's symbols--death, wounds, violence, confusion, chaos, black cats, witches, sewers, sinister figures, "disgusting" pornography, physical and sexual abuse, etc. The *white* world's symbols--going crazy, shimmering surfaces, falling, snakes, night animals, street people, being drunk, healing the sick, taking drugs, lying down, being chased, eroticism, voyeurism, sex changes, pregnancy, etc. The *red* world's symbols--a bright light, new growth, keen-sighted animals, computers, schools, scientists, food, exercise, powerful people, male and female genitals or similarly shaped objects, romance, making love, etc. You can train yourself to think in these terms; there is no proof but perhaps the above objects and acts are associated with your underlying emotions of bleak sadness (black), scary confusion (white),

and productive joy (red). At least, the archaic symbolic interpretations may cause you to think. But don't take them too seriously.

During the middle ages, Christian theologians were obsessed with sex (see chapter 10) and sin. They were deadly serious. Dreams were thought to be the travels of our souls outside our bodies during the night. Certain church authorities preached that the devil was responsible for dreams. In fact, your dreams might have been interpreted by churchmen to indicate if you were chaste or lustful. And if you were seen as lustful, and if you were a woman, and if there was any hint that you might have had sex with an evil character (the devil) in your dreams, you might have been burned alive (Van de Castle, 1971). Males' explanations of dreams have a fascinating history (but it tells us more about *men* than about dreams).

There have been many reports that dreams have led directly to great novels, musical compositions, scientific discoveries, and political-military decisions (surely dreams have also led to terrible blunders too, wonder why we don't hear about those?). Dreams have also often been regarded as messages from gods or the devil; no wonder they are considered important. However, as we will see later, current science suggests that dreams do not have much meaning.

Hopefully, you will not take your dreams as seriously as some alchemists, some generals (Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Genghis Kahn), some dictators (Hitler), or some religious folks and witch burners have. But while we hardly know more about the meaning of our dreams than the Babylonians 5,000 years ago, it is possible that dreams reflect our traumatic memories, our needs, and our unconscious "thoughts." So, dreams are thought to tell us something about ourselves we did not know. But the truth is: we don't know for sure why we dream almost two hours every night or what the dreams mean. We know dreams are strange; impossible things happen there. We can only speculate as to why (and we do here). We need to know more.

Freud did not believe in a god, but he still attached great significance to dreams. Freud said dreams were a peep hole (well, really he said a "royal road") into our unconscious which directs much of our lives... and our dreams. The unconscious was made up of forbidden childhood wishes (e.g. to do away with little brother), intense impulses (let's zap Dad away too), our strong needs for love (and sex, whatever that means to a 4-year-old). Freud thought dreams were venting our emotions or fulfilling our unconscious wishes, except we had to conceal the really awful stuff (like wanting to have Mommy all to ourselves), because such thoughts would wake us up. Thus, for insight Freud thought analysts needed to separate the surface or manifest dream content from the repressed forbidden feelings and urges, which were the real causes of our problems. That is what "dream analysis" involves, i.e. figuring out the symbols, the distortions, the displacement, and the reversal of feelings (all designed to hide the real purpose of dreams and calm us down so we can

continue to dream about these awful, shameful emotions and needs). Step 3 describes self-analysis of dreams.

Science has discovered that mammals and birds have REM (rapid eye movements that occur with dreams) sleep but reptiles do not, so the dreaming every 90 minutes is a natural biological rhythm. While the eyes move vigorously (the movement can easily be seen through the closed eye lids), the rest of the body is usually quiet. Even a 6-month-old fetus has REM sleep. But for the first ten years of life, children's dreams (as distinguished from nightmares) are different from adults' dreams; their dreams are simple, usually unemotional, and children do not usually put themselves into their dreams (Begley, 1989). Adults are almost always involved in their own dreams. Since 1952 when REM was discovered, thousands of sleepers have been awakened by researchers and asked, "What were you dreaming?" Dreams last 10 to 40 minutes. Men and women have about the same emotions as they dream. The longer, more vivid and dramatic dreams are early in the morning, shortly before awaking. Actually, most of our dreams are common-place and dull. We remember and talk about the more interesting ones. More dreams involve being passive or playing than involve work or studying.

Many more unpleasant emotions, especially fear and anger, are expressed in dreams than pleasant emotions, although *sexual arousal is frequent* during dreams (Scarr and Vander Zanden, 1984). It is a bit puzzling to wake up from a scary or sad or violent dream with an erection. In contrast with our frequent sexual arousal, only an occasional dream is X-rated. Nightmares occur more often in sensitive and creative people (Chollar, 1989); they are different from dreams or non-REM experiences (non-REM "experiences" are short, simple, and seem to us more like thoughts than dreaming). Bettelheim found that he and other prisoners of German concentration camps had dreamed of food and escape while being brutalized, but it was only after escaping that the survivors started having nightmares about the atrocities. Decades later they were still occasionally having nightmares that they can not escape the horrors. Dreams and nightmares are fascinating to most of us. We are only discussing dreams here, not nightmares or non-REM experiences.

Quite a lot has been recently discovered about the physiology of dreaming. For example, during REM sleep, electrical activity from the brain stem surges into the motor and thinking areas of the brain. This led McCarley (1978) and Hobson (1988) to speculate that during dreams the cortex is working very hard to make sense out of the senseless nerve impulses it is receiving. Thus, a male might get an erection as a result of this brain stem activity (why 85% of the time?), then the thinking part of the brain concocts a fantastically beautiful, very explicit, and elaborate sexual dream with a specific person to explain the erection. As Hobson points out, you are still faced with the same problem Freud struggled with: why does the brain make this kind of sense--this particular image--out of an erection or some other nerve activity? Hobson believes our drives, emotions, early memories,

daytime experiences, and associations influence our dreams (just like Freud). Researchers have noted that even though a dream contains lots of visual images, the occipital lobe (where we see) is not as active as the frontal lobe (where higher thinking, emotions and personality are located). Also, if you wear red glasses all day for several days, your dreams start to be in red, suggesting that day-time experience becomes part of your dreams. On the other hand, a person who loses his/her sight may take 25 years before dreaming they are blind. Since most of us do not use smell and taste very much, perhaps that is why our dreams contain very few such images but lots of visual images. There is a lot we don't know.

Theories about the functions of dreams are contradictory. Recent studies have found that dreaming and learning are connected: people think better after a good night's sleep; they remember complex skills (Choller, 1989) and bedtime stories (Begley, 1989) better. However, another theory is that dreams have to do with forgetting or, more specifically, with dumping useless information from our brain during sleep, like "purging" the big computers (Milnechuk, 1983). The exact connection between dream images and erasing or enhancing our memory is unclear. Once out of REM sleep, it is hard to remember the dream we just had. So hard that even extremely vivid and traumatic or unusual dreams are quickly forgotten. If you were *really* in a horrible auto accident or *really* had a torrid sexual affair, you wouldn't forget it within 15 minutes, would you? So dreams and forgetting (or repressing) are connected somehow. Maybe, as Freud said, the connection is because dreams are laden with nasty sexual and aggressive drives which our conscious mind wants to forget. However, new born infants spend 50% of their sleeping time in REM sleep (and they are learning and forgetting a lot) but I doubt if 3-week-olds are overwhelmed with taboo sexuality and hostility. Moreover, like babies, my Irish Setter spends hours in REM sleep and, yet, seems totally unashamed of her sexual impulses!

These puzzles and theories are interesting but they don't tell us much about the meaning of dreams. Clearly, dreams are not totally random chaotic neural activity but they may not be windows to the soul either. Robert Cartwright and Lamberg (1992) have a very different notion, namely, that our dreams reflect our major *conscious* emotional concerns. In effect, our dreams underscore our current problems, rather than hide or erase them. Also, according to Cartwright and Lamberg, the dream content, while symbolic, can, with a little thought, be easily associated with the things that are consciously worrying us tonight. The mind supposedly searches our past to find a person, situation, or symbol that fits the feelings that are pressuring us during our sleep. It is as though bad dreams are telling us: HEY, PAY ATTENTION TO THIS PROBLEM!

Langs (1994) has another idea; he believes that dreams are giving us solutions for important but repressed problems. He says the conscious mind, busy with coping, often passes on difficult emotional problems to the unconscious mind for solving. Dreams are a way for

the unconscious mind to give us its wisdom about handling emotional situations. Thus, the conscious mind needs to discover what problem the unconscious mind is working on and then decipher the unconscious's solution. Langs has a book and a workbook for understanding dreams. Other dream experts (Delaney, 1995; Garfield, 1994) are constantly publishing a new book for understanding or controlling dreams and problem-solving.

As some ancient tribes, Indian medicine men, yogi dream interpreters, and psychoanalysts believed, perhaps we should listen to dreams for insight and our emotional health. Humans have certainly wanted dreams to have meaning. But physiological psychologists are finding more and more evidence that dreams may merely be our cortex trying hard to make sense out of meaningless signals straying up from the midbrain during sleep. This possibility should make us cautious. Think of it this way: perhaps dreams are not highly significant camouflaged messages from our unconscious, but, in any case, dreams do reflect our concerns of the day and our memories. Also, our conscious speculation about why our cortex had the particular associations (resulting in a vivid, complex, fascinating dream) to the random signals may aid our self-understanding. Dream analysis could be for understanding our cortex trying to make sense of nonsense, instead of for understanding unconscious motives. For instance, wondering about the significance of what we see in a cloud or an ink blot may yield some helpful self-awareness, without our believing that the cloud was formed by a higher power specifically to send us a message. Consider this method a challenge, not necessarily a "royal road to the unconscious."

Purposes

- To gain self-understanding, especially about repressed feelings and basic needs or motives.
- To release or "discharge" some emotion by dreaming, e.g. fears or tension, anger, sadness or others.

Steps

STEP ONE: Learning to remember your dreams.

Most or all of us dream, usually about five or six times every night during REM sleep. But a dream, if it occurred in the first 3 or 4 hours of sleep, will probably not be remembered at all the next morning. Even if a dramatic dream occurred just prior to awakening, you may have trouble remembering the details a few minutes later, unless you concentrate on the dream and exclude other thoughts, like what you have to do today. A few people remember their dreams very well, most people don't. However, everyone can learn to keep a dream diary. (Since the day's experience has so much impact on our dreams, we should also keep a daily journal.)

To improve your memory of dreams, you could have a friend awaken you during REM sleep, preferably in the early morning when dreams are more vivid and emotional. Also, just having someone call you about 1 1/2 hours after you go to sleep, would help you recall the first dream which usually sets the theme for the night. It is more convenient, however, just to learn to record each of your dreams. How can you do this? Before going to sleep, tell yourself: "I will wake up at the end of each dream and remember the dream." When you are aware a dream is ending, try to remain partly asleep and "pull the dream together," remembering the dream's content and your feelings. In this half-awake state, it may help to make up a one-sentence summary of the dream. Then, record it. Garfield (1975) recommends keeping pencil and paper (or voice-activated tape recorder) at your bedside and taking brief notes (summary sentence or key words) during the night. By reviewing your notes and reconstructing your dreams *as soon as you wake up*, you will be able to write down more of your feelings as well as more about the characters and events in your dreams. It is important to note what is happening in your dreams when you are feeling most intensely. Give each dream a title. If only fragments of a dream are remembered, but it seems important parts are lost, try to think about the dream fragments before falling to sleep the next night. Often the key ingredients of the dream will be clarified the next night.

Cartwright and Lamberg have found that all 4 to 6 dreams during one night often deal with the same topic but have a different time perspective, one might deal with the present, the next might focus on a similar or related problem in the past, another might play out the problem in the future. Each dream is like a chapter in a book about this problem and sets the stage for the next dream. All the dreams in the nightly series need to be recorded in a dream journal or on tape. Furthermore, it is important to keep a record of your dreams over a period of days or weeks. One dream is not enough. Do *not* record just the juicier dreams; seemingly dull dreams may be significant. Most people have re-occurring dreams. They may be of special significance. Some people have serial dreams spread out over weeks or months that continue a story. All become part of a dream journal.

STEP TWO: Before "analyzing" your dreams, carefully observe how you feel--physically and your mood.

Since remembering and giving serious thought to your dream(s) may change your feelings or attitudes, it is important to conscientiously note your feelings prior to the analysis of a dream. Take a quick look around inside you... how does each part of you feel? What is your mood? Later, check to see if your feelings have changed. If so, try to discover what "made you" tense or gave you a headache or a knot in your stomach.

Looking for possible meaning

STEP THREE: Look for possible meaning in each element of the dream (or skip to step 5 if spending hours searching for dubious meanings doesn't interest you).

Before starting to decipher the dream, it is helpful to have the dream well in mind, at least outlined and maybe written out. Also, you will probably profit greatly from discussing your dream with someone or a group you trust and can be completely open with, perhaps a dream analysis group (Ullman & Zimmerman, 1985) or a therapist or an insightful friend, probably not a lover, a parent, or your minister. It is important to realize that the first reaction of a highly trained and very experienced dream analyst to a dream is usually: "My gosh, I have no idea what it means." (If a snap judgment about the dream's meaning does occur, the wise person might wonder if it is a mental trick to avoid the real meaning.) So, don't be discouraged by doubts. The whole process is like solving a great mystery with lots of detective work to be done to uncover the motivations--the unconscious wishes and the defenses--underlying the dream.

Here are several procedures for investigating the meaning of a dream (in method #3 we have already discussed Progoff's [1975] Intensive Journal technique):

1. Carefully select someone (or a small group) to work with you over a period of time--you can't keep a dream journal and analyze your dreams in a single hour or two. After step one of relaxing and surveying your body, feelings and mood, *describe your dream as if it is happening right now*. Be specific about *what happened* and what *emotions* you experienced in the dream. Tell it all as you remember it. No one should interrupt you or ask questions until you are through. Be blunt and honest. Be graphic; don't leave out gory or embarrassing details, that defeats the purpose. (Even if you are working by yourself, tell yourself or write out the entire dream.)
2. As you are telling your dream--and as others are listening to it--each person should also pay attention to parts of the dream that fascinate him/her, bore him/her, embarrass him/her, irritate him/her, make him/her want to confront or rescue the dreamer, remind him/her of some past experience or of something else about the dreamer, etc. These reactions may be resistance--drawing your attention away from upsetting thoughts and feelings. These avoidance reactions may be used to advantage by considering them as possible clues to some of your own conscious and unconscious feelings which may influence how you interpret the dream.

The point is: *Don't be in a hurry. Don't make snap judgments. Don't be judgmental or moralistic*, realize that "everything is true of everyone" (see method #1). Remember your unconscious parts are very different from your conscious parts (and the latter doesn't like it). Watch for avoidance tendencies--"I don't have time today," "I won't get anything out of it," "my partner can't help me with this." In reality, others can often see your unconscious motives better than you can, but a helper should never insist that his/her brilliant interpretation is right. The dreamer should take the lead in analyzing his/her own dream. He/she can ask for more ideas or stop the

analysis at any time. The helper can share associations and speculations when asked, but her/his major job is to keep the dreamer from "running away" from parts or implications of the dream.

3. After the dream is told, the listener(s) will probably want to ask questions about the dream content and the dreamer's emotions. This clarifies the dream and may remind the dreamer of parts he/she had forgotten or overlooked. Avoid speculating at this point about the meaning of the dream or about the dreamer's personal situation. That is the next step.
4. The first step in analyzing the dream should be *the dreamer relating the dream content to whatever is going on in his/her life around the time of the dream*. Several things need to be considered. First, some elements (people, actions, feelings) in your dreams are simply reflections of experiences you have had during the day. Freud called them "residuals" or leftovers. Some seemingly ordinary leftovers are significant, others are not. Some important leftovers are frequently overlooked; some trivial leftovers are given too much importance. The problem is: you can't trust your first reaction. The best one can do is to note the connection between the dream and a real life event, keeping it in the back of one's mind as you look for hidden feelings and motives. A common trick in dreams is that several events from the day will combine to form a composite happening, object, or person in the dream. This may be hard to recognize.

Secondly, my personal belief is that dreams are, in part, a means of releasing excessive leftover emotions from everyday life (keeping in mind that strong fears and scary experiences may linger in our memory forever, explaining the dreams of long ago traumas--see chapter 4). There is evidence for dreams soothing our emotions. Examples: if the sleeper is awakened whenever REM sleep occurs, so that he/she does little dreaming, the sleeper is tired and irritable the next day even though he/she got plenty of sleep. Likewise, if we have a series of troubling dreams that remain unresolved in our sleep, we wake up tired and grouchy. On the other hand, if we have several problem-oriented dreams which we successfully resolve during a good night's sleep, we wake up rested and in a good mood (Kramer, 2000). There also seems to be agreement that the more anxious one is during the day or the hornier one is, the more likely that these pent-up emotions will influence our dreams at night, right? It also seems very likely that dreams are sometimes quickly made up by the cortex to incorporate the emotions being discharged, just like our dreams incorporate external sounds, like a horn, or a pain in our body. Exactly how dreams relieve negative emotions is unknown (but dreams are complexly associated with both learning and forgetting).

Therefore, both *the emotions giving rise to the dream and the dream content (which surely isn't accidental) are important*. Thus, we should ask ourselves, "What emotions are left over from the day (or the long ago past) and being released?" and "Why do I have a build up of these emotions?" and "Why and how are these specific dream images connected with the expression of the built up emotions?" At least for me, in this way anxiety and other stressful dreams become easier to understand. Also, I can look for effective ways to handle the excessive emotions during sleep and during the day using self-help.

In short, the dreamer must consider and share both the little events of his/her day and the major emotional events of her/his life. Obviously, a recent death or accident, a break up of a relationship, a serious set back or failure, or some wonderful event, a big break, a new love, and so on may have impact on our dreams. A helper can't help without knowing those things. For example, a dreamer reported a dream similar to this to a group (Shuttleworth-Jordon, Saayman & Faber, 1988):

I'm in a huge empty church with a storm raging outside. The wind and rain burst through an old stained glass window. I am terrified but I can't get out. Then I think of calling _____ (the dream group facilitator) and find a phone, but whoever answered the phone wouldn't let me talk with her.

The group members asked several questions, such as "How did you feel before the storm?", "Do you attend a church like this one?", "Do you ever go to church alone?", "What are your religious background and current beliefs?", "Have you recently been through a storm?", "How did you find a phone?", "Who do you think answered the phone?", "How did you feel when you couldn't talk to _____?", and so on. The dreamer told the group about her recent divorce which wrecked her life, violated her "Christian upbringing" and "stained" her reputation. She had been feeling abandoned, alone, empty, crushed, scared, and helpless since her husband left her six weeks ago. There certainly seems to be a close emotional connection in this case between real life and the dream.

5. Because dreams involve symbols, condensation, and displacement, there are many hidden meanings. Understanding this helps you analyze your dreams. Just like poems and art, dreams constantly use symbols to hide our real feelings. For example, a calm scene which turns into a storm which threatens your family may symbolize your loving outside and your angry feelings towards them inside. In condensation a small part of the dream may represent a major, life-long psychological drive or conflict. Example: dreaming of receiving food and presents may reflect decades of feeling unloved or neglected and an enormous need for love. Displacement is a simple way of denying some motivation, e.g. dreaming that a friend is angry at you may be to hide that you are angry at him or dreaming that a stranger is attracted to your lover may reflect your insecurity about your lover's faithfulness.

In analyzing dreams the term "psychological conflict" is often used. It refers to the situation where there are strong motives or needs *and* barriers or resistance to fulfilling those motives or needs. Example: a person may feel a compelling need for attention but, at the same time, fear dependency and rejection. Thus, expect dreams to have several meanings on different levels and expect the motives to be complex and ambivalent.

6. Freud (1967) had his patients "*free associate*" to each separate element or part of the dream. Likewise, Bosnak (1988), a Jungian analyst, also associates to each part himself, along with the dreamer and 6 or 8 dream analysis group members. So one of the first questions for dreamer and helpers is: "What occurs to you when you think of _____?" (See examples

in next paragraph.) This yields lots of ideas, perhaps some "leftovers" from the day, some recent personal problem that may still be "on your mind," some childhood memory, some desire you are unaware of, some wish or intention in the future, some conjecture about the element's symbolic meaning, and so on (Jung, 1973). When a dreamer has an association to a part of his/her dream or has an opinion about what it means, it may be helpful for the dreamer to ask, "What part of me thinks this?" "Is it my logical part?... my child?... my internal critic?" The "theater of the inner world" is complex and so is the analyzer.

A dream from one of Bosnak's (1988, pp. 18-26) patients will illustrate the association process: Stella's dream started, "I was a prisoner in a plane with a glass bottom..." Note there are five elements here: *I, prisoner, plane, glass, and bottom*. Also, note the dreamer felt no emotions, she was very calm during the dream and while discussing it. To get started, Stella, her therapist, and, in this case, her fellow group members freely associated to each element...then to the elements shuffled in a different order...then to the entire sentence or dream scene. So it was asked, "What do I associate with being a *prisoner*?" Perhaps locked away or out of control or fears of mistreatment or frustrations or introversion or self-restraint.... Do the same with each of the other elements. Note that *glass* and *bottom* have several interesting connotations, e.g. glass makes things visible but untouchable "behind glass," glass can be beautiful but fragile, bottom can be the floor of the plane or human buttocks and sexual parts and so on. There may be hundreds of associations to these five elements--an upcoming plane trip, feeling hemmed in by relatives, and real life circumstances, which for Stella included a 10-year sexually active marriage until four years ago and social isolation since then. Finally, a dream analyzer might speculate that the whole scene symbolizes a person becoming especially scared by suddenly seeing something very frightening in her life. Or, a person anxiously flying high showing her beautiful buttocks. Or, a person uncomfortable with her sexuality who wants to stay on a high "plane" away from the real world. (Note: these speculations involve strong emotions in contrast to the calm dreamer.) All kinds of conjecture could come from just five elements in this brief scene. Then the dream analyzer has to gather evidence for each hunch. Finally, one believes he/she understands parts of the dream or gives up.

The rest of Stella's dream involved crashing in a dirty, foul city of derelicts where sex was rampant. She is repulsed by most of the pushy, obscene men but finds a gentle doctor (a white knight) she is attracted to, is willing to have sex with, and is hoping will save her from a filthy world. In fact, she becomes very sexual but remains very aloof, cultured, sensitive and pure. All of these objects and scenes would need to be "analyzed" too, just like the first scene.

7. Analysts assume that two other major factors influence dreams: the wishes or emotional needs and the defenses against recognizing those wishes. The interaction of these two forces results in "latent" (the true but hidden desires) and "manifest" (actual) content of a dream. In recent years dream interpreters have focused more on the manifest content and on the defenses, i.e. how each unique person censors or conceals his/her psychological needs. One example of the "censor's" work would be denial, such as when a desire ("I'd like to kill him") is turned into a fear ("he will hurt me") or a fear ("I'm

sexually inadequate") is transformed into a powerful dream ("I'm a fantastic gymnast"). Thus, you can always ask about your dreams: "To what degree is the opposite really true of me?"

Some analysts think the manifest content of our dreams identify our unconscious conflicts (Gelman, 1989). Edward Brennan cites a case of a single woman who dreamed of being chased by a man with a big knife. Rather than this being an Electra dream, Brennan says it may simply be a desire for a strong male partner, which is frightening, and, thus, turned into a nightmare. Such a dream is useful if the dreamer can see that it is her unconscious conflict, namely, fears and denial of her desire for a successful, capable partner, which leads her to date inept or good-image-no-substance men. Brennan says our unconscious conflicts appear in our dreams over and over again. We can see the conflicts if we look.

8. Some therapists say if we try to logically analyze a dream, we will fail. Dreams aren't logical. Another kind of knowing is needed. Several investigators (Jung, 1973; Progoff, 1975; Bosnak, 1988; Mahrer, 1971) have said *one has to and can return to the "reality of the dream." You re-enter the dream.* This is how you do it: you realize you are awake but you vividly get in touch with the dream; the dream continues on without any control from you-- it remains autonomous; you aren't "making up a story" and you aren't dreaming; you have the ability to focus on *both* the "real world" and the "dream world;" you are interacting with a dream that "has a mind of its own" in such a way as to understand it better. This was called "active imagination" by Jung. You start this process by observing a scene from the remembered dream so closely, so intimately that you can join the scene and soon you can relate to objects and people in the dream. Refer to Johnson (1989) for a recent description of active imagination. Refer to method #3 in this chapter for a journal approach to analyzing dreams.

Another patient of Bosnak (1988, pp. 86-102), George, illustrates this procedure. George's dream was of a water filled steel bowl with a rabbit in it. Dr. Bosnak asked George to try "active imagination" by imagining the dream scene and describing it in detail. The bowl was shiny and silvery-blue, something like a chalice. He could see (this is imagination now, not the original dream) the rabbit hopping around, comfortable and happy under water. It had a bubble of air around it. As George described the changing scene, he was surprised that the water started to run out of the bowl. This made the rabbit scared; it seemed to want to be stroked. George longed to touch the rabbit and although it was hard to put his hand in the water and his heart felt heavy, he did it... and the rabbit calmed down. The experience made George feel as though he had re-lived an emotional early childhood experience.

9. In "active imagination" you remain yourself and interact with things and people in the dream scene, but Perls (1971) and Mahrer (1971) recommend *identifying with and, in effect, mentally becoming each object or person in the dream*, especially the thing or person associated with the peak emotion in the dream. Thus, Perls says to "become" the dainty, fragile table or the sports car or the raging monster in your dream... note how you feel as that object or person, what do you say or do, what is your purpose (as that object or

person)? Every part of your dream is a part of you, projected into the dream. So, understand and own each part.

Mahrer recommends letting yourself be taken over by the strong feelings of the main character (or thing) in the dream. Then, let the dream continue, see what happens if the raw naked emotions are fully carried out. He observed that as people got in touch with the basic motivation, their attitude towards the motivation frequently changed. Or, the apparent motive gives way to a deeper motive. What is initially abhorrent or scary may become tempting or exciting (wish-fulfilling?); we may take a certain childish delight in thinking about carrying out some aspect of the initial motivation. Stay with the fantasy until you have experienced and explored the feelings to the fullest and to the end. Mahrer (1990) has developed this method into a complete method for self-change.

Example: Mahrer described being terrified by his own dream of a giant, shiny, scaly gorilla in a house of mirrors. The gorilla looked crazed with rage, very powerful and very angry. It was clear to Mahrer that the mirrors and shiny scales were "leftovers" from his experiences that day in a lighting fixture store where he had been overcharged. So, to understand his dream, he tried to identify with the angry gorilla and see what the animal felt and did (as the gorilla). It seemed like the gorilla was about to lose control and destroy everything. The gorilla pointedly looked at Mahrer in the house of mirrors but wasn't going after him. So Mahrer's fear eased and in its place he felt a glimmer of "Yea, go ahead!" It sounded like fun to be huge and smash the whole damn place. Mahrer recognized his anger at the manager was still intense and vowed to assertively handle the inflated bill the next day. He did (and he later told the manager that he had felt like smashing the store; the manager said he frequently felt that way too).

One of Freud's famous cases had a terrifying and repeated dream very similar to Mahrer's dream. The 27-year-old patient dreamed that a man with a hatchet was chasing him. Freud had him free associate to the dream. He remembered an uncle's tale about being attacked, but the hatchet didn't fit in. The hatchet reminded him of once hurting his hand and once hitting his brother with some object. Then suddenly a memory of when he was 9-years-old occurred to him. His parents came home late at night and he heard them having intercourse and panting and moaning. He thought they were being violent, which was reinforced when he saw blood on their sheets the next day. This memory in combination with the dream enabled the patient to see the connection he had long ago made between sex and violence. The patient could also see that his wish to be approached by another man (as his brother had done) was concealed by fear in the dream. Note: similar dreams may mean very different things (and different therapists look for different motives).

10. Finally, you must take the hints and hunches gathered during your "analysis" of the dream and pull it together into a feasible interpretation--or maybe two or three alternative interpretations. Keep in mind that one dream is never enough to base a conclusion about yourself on; you need to analyze several dreams. It will clarify your dream interpretation(s) if you break it into several parts, such as

- a. Life situation and leftovers from the day.
- b. Free associations to parts of the dream.
- c. Common themes and the motives suggested by those themes.
- d. Current, conscious psychological conflicts suggested by the dreams, e.g. dreaming a disliked boss dies in a auto accident.
- e. Life-long, usually unconscious psychological conflicts possibly implied in the dreams, e.g. realizing a childhood wish that a demeaning father would die or that "defying authority is the story of my life."

Using insights from dreams

STEP FOUR: Make use of the insights from your dreams.

By accepting your repressed emotions and secret wishes, you have "owned" a formerly rejected part of yourself. Most therapists believe this is healthy. The insights may result in immediate, constructive changes, but many people seem to gain insight (parts IV and V) but make no behavioral (part I) or emotional (part II) or skills (part III) changes in their life. Contrary to what Freud thought, it is very likely that specific self-help projects will be necessary to make full use of any insight.

It is important that a person not blindly accept an insight or solution inferred from a dream as being the truth for certain. Dreams should never be the sole source of a self-help plan. Our conscious, logical thoughts must also lead us to the conclusion that a particular solution to a problem is reasonable, the best we can do. We should never avoid the responsibility for our lives by saying, "I was told in a dream to do it." Dreams are not a dependable source of wisdom.

STEP FIVE: Try controlling your dreams to reduce unwanted feelings, to solve problems, or to feel better.

Perhaps uncovering the obscure, dubious "meaning" of dreams isn't all that important. Perhaps the real question is: Do your dreams help you cope or hurt you? Several dream therapists think so.

A respected research-oriented psychologist, Rosalind Cartwright, has for 25 years studied dreams of people in crisis. It is clear to her that dreams reflect our current concerns--our worries or crises. They are *designed to warn us* when something is wrong. Instead of revealing deeply hidden, childhood based traumas and wishes, dreams highlight the emotionally most important aspect of our lives yesterday (which may, of course, be related to an early trauma). It is also clear that *bad dreams hurt us*, they make us feel worse during the next day, undermine our self-esteem, keep our attention on unpleasant

events in the past, and make us feel helpless. A *good dream leaves us refreshed*, more confident there is a solution to our problem, more emotionally balanced, and with a better idea how our problems can be resolved in the future. So, the task is to have fewer bad dreams and more good ones. That is, change your dreams to improve your emotional life (whereas Freud was trying to do the opposite).

Freud thought dreams *concealed* our vile feelings; Cartwright thinks dreams *reveal* our current worries (sometimes more clearly than our thoughts). She says dreams are not hard to understand if you assume dreams are concentrating on your current emotional distress along dimensions that concern you the most, such as being good-bad, safe-dangerous, loving-anger, capable-weak, close-lonely, trusting-suspicious, active-passive, pretty-ugly, etc. Ask yourself: Why this dream? What emotional concern is it telling me to attend to? What are the main "feeling" dimensions? For example, when we are not coping very well with some situation, we often have bad dreams in which we do bad things, feel scared or helpless or lonely or hurt or angry, and generally deal with the situation poorly. Dream therapy and self-help involve using your dream diary and turning your bad dreams into good dreams. This process (R-I-S-C) is simple but may take 6 to 8 weeks to master:

Recognize you are having bad dreams (you feel worse afterwards). Ask: What dreams are most troublesome? Why? The content of your dreams may help you figure out the connections between your current troubles and earlier crises.

Identify the emotional dimensions of your dreams; these are your feelings that need to change, i.e. less anxiety, less anger, less helplessness, less shame, etc. Use the negative emotions and situations in your dreams to identify your real problems. Start working on them when awake too.

Stop the bad dreams by telling yourself before going to sleep that you can and will take control of the bad dreams. Self-instructions before sleeping might consist of: "My dreams are my creation not some external force. I don't need to scare myself," "I will become aware that I am dreaming," and "I choose to face and take charge of my scary dreams with courage." When you recognize a bad dream is starting, just tell it to stop. Wake yourself up if you must... or take charge of the dream.

Change the content and outcomes of your bad dreams. During sleep, when you stop a negative dream, ask that the dream continue but be more positive. With practice, you can do this without waking up. Prior to going to bed, plan ways to change the unwanted dreams into more positive dreams, e.g. practice making up several more helpful outcomes for your recent bad dreams. For instance, if you dream of falling, turn it into flying and land in a pleasant place. If you dream of failing, plan in advance how you could change the story-line,

i.e. rehearse dreaming that you are a more capable, more secure, more self-accepting, and just a happier, better adjusted person.

With positive, hopeful dreams you should be in a better mood the next day, more future oriented, more positive about life, and feel good about being more in control. You might even try out some new approaches to your problems in your dreams.

This procedure for changing our dreams is well worth trying, although there is very limited research to support its effectiveness. On the other hand, Cartwright cites many, many cases showing improved adjustment after the dreams change (and/or better dreams after the adjustment improves).

Other dream specialists believe we can self-help by learning to have certain kinds of dreams. Garfield (1975) says a dreamer can control his/her dream content to some extent by *repeating believable self-instructions before going to sleep*. Examples: one man discovered that he felt much better the next day if he had dreamed of his mother or an older woman. He did this by repeating several times before falling asleep, "dream of mother" or "dream of a nurturing, caring person." One person going through a stressful time of life might instruct him/herself to dream of calm, peaceful ocean scenes, while another person may need to dream of scary events and people (as a way of releasing some of the pent up anxiety). One has to find his/her own prescription.

A number of people routinely use another, but similar, form of dream control, namely, going back to sleep with the intention and vague self-instructions to change a dream that they don't like or makes them uncomfortable. After the dream is changed, they "feel better." Rather than just "avoiding" the scary aspects of the dream in this way, though, it may be wise to also explore the dream. Such analysis may reveal a serious problem which needs to be worked on during the day as well.

There is also an unique kind of dreaming, called "lucid dreams" in which the dreamer knows he/she is dreaming, very vividly, and can control the specific events of the dream and can also think clearly. *One set of self-instructions for lucid dreaming* given right after awaking are: "I will remember the details of my last dream and when I go back to sleep I will realize I'm dreaming. I will visualize my last dream until I fall asleep and this time I will know I'm dreaming and will be able to influence what happens." Repeat the instructions and visualizations until you fall asleep...and go back into your dream.

There are other instructions for producing lucid dreaming (Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1989). These include (1) asking yourself 10 to 15 times a day "Am I dreaming?" especially in confusing or emotional or dream-like situations. Also, try to imagine yourself dreaming, then ask the same question. The idea is to train yourself to consciously and habitually question the reality of your experiences; you are supposedly

also training yourself to think and reason while sleeping and dreaming. (2) Right before going to sleep, tell yourself to become conscious during your dreams. (3) Practice producing certain simple dreams, say taking a drink or kissing someone, by imagining these actions as you fall asleep. Eventually, you should be able to have lucid dreams, be aware you are dreaming, be able to control your reaction to a dream, be able to interact with the dream figures and understand your dreams (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990).

One fascinating possibility under dream control is confronting the dreams, especially nightmares (Delaney, 1992). The dreamer must be willing to *courageously take control within the dream*. You can't just be weak and terrified if you are being pursued by a masked murderer or rapist; you have to "take control" and suddenly wheel and spray him with mace, ripping off his mask to see who he is as he falls. Or, you can simply stop running, look the pursuer in the eye, and ask, "Who are you? What do you want?" You must become strong and assertive, i.e. take charge! This sometimes "cures" nightmares.

Other dream specialists say you should engage the dream figure in a dialogue, asking "What is your purpose?" or "Can't we just talk?" or "Can you help me with a problem I'm having?" Defend yourself but don't be mean to the frightening dream figure. Consider his/her criticism. Try to resolve your conflicts with the dream figure by talking. (Sometimes the dreamer can enter the body and mind of the dream figure--sort of "mind read"--similar to step 9 above. This is especially insight-producing if the dream figure represents an unconscious part of you or an unseen aspect of another person.)

In a similar way, the Greeks slept in the temples of certain Gods or Goddesses in an effort to have a healing or revealing dream. About 4000 years ago, Egyptians, wanting a visit during the night from a certain God, were told to "draw the God on their left hand, wrap it in black cloth that had been blessed, and talk to no one before sleeping." Today, we are told by dream books (Delaney, 1979) to do about the same: "think for several minutes about the details of the problem you want help with but boil it down to one basic question, writing it down. Continue thinking about this question until you go to sleep." This is called "dream incubation." Delaney says that the resulting dream is relevant to the question nine times out of ten, but it may not be what we want to hear.

Many people believe that *conscious* healing images (the pain is easing; the swelling is reducing; the grief is lessening) are health-promoting. And, there is fairly clear evidence that dreams influence our mood the next day. Therefore, self-instruction induced or self-controlled dreams might be quite helpful to you, if you can determine or discover what dreams you need to have.

Time involved

The process of remembering and briefly recording your dreams will take only a few minutes each night. But the "analysis" of a series of dreams, especially since it ideally might involve free association, active imagination, "becoming the thing or person," intensive journal dialogue (method # 3), or repeated discussions with friends as well as careful review of your psychosocial history and current situation, will take two to three hours each week for several weeks.

It requires less time to gain some control over your dreams and try to get them to be less stressful and/or more therapeutic. Still a couple of months are required for the Cartwright techniques.

Common problems

You have to be quite motivated to endure the unpleasantness and inconvenience of awaking the middle of the night and making detailed notes about your dreams. Besides, the payoff for dream analysis in terms of insight and behavior change is weeks or months later, if at all, so it is hard to sustain your interest in this method. On the other hand, some people find their dreams fascinating and well worth the time.

If some wish or emotion is really painful to admit, it will be quite easy for your censor, even while analyzing dreams, to lead your conscious mind away from the threatening awareness. Dreams may give us a peek at some aspect of our unconscious but that is no guarantee that we will explore those motives in great depth. That is why one should pay attention to the signs of resistance mentioned above (e.g. getting bored, forgetting to think about your dreams, quickly concluding a dream or an interpretation is unimportant and so on).

Effectiveness, advantages and dangers

Interpretation of dreams illustrates humans trying to understand themselves for thousands of years without objectively assessing the validity or usefulness of dreams. There are thousands, probably millions, of testimonials about dreams prophesying the future or supplying answers to personal problems. In contrast, there is no research comparing the adjustment of dream analyzers vs. non-analyzers or dream book readers vs. non-readers. (Cartwright did find that people who participated in dream research were more likely to stay in therapy and get more out of therapy.) Authorities, like dream interpreters, prefer to pretend they already know the truth and don't need to empirically investigate their hunches. It would be relatively easy to compute the accuracy of dreamed prophesies of actual events in life, and to compare them with the awake, rational predictions made in a similar area by the same person and/or by matched persons. But, it is hard to assess the validity and utility of insight into unconscious motives. How do we know what the symbols mean? How do we measure unconscious motives? How do we know if a dream interpretation is the truth? Obviously, we can't know for certain, but

what really matters is if the interpretation, right or wrong, helps us change. We can measure that. We might even be able to measure changes in specific adjustment situations, in emotional reactions, and in coping skills (see chapter 2 and method # 5 above). Wiser living should be the outcome of dream analysis.

Freud thought dreams were symbolic--sort of a private language made up by each of us (Jung says the collective unconscious provides the symbols) in order to express our unconscious feelings and wishes without having to consciously admit them to ourselves. But the same symbol may mean different things in different people. Example: if a person dreams of going to school naked, it may mean in one person that he/she wants to disclose certain secrets to others while in another person it may mean that he/she is experiencing a lot of anxiety and in still other people it may mean the dreamer is ashamed or proud of his/her body, and on and on. One of Freud's major goals in therapy was to break the patient's symbolic code so his/her unconscious but true wishes become known. This, of course, would seem to require the intensive study for a year or so of the history, psychological make-up, and current situation of one individual as well as the symbols. (No wonder there are no definitive research studies, yet, of Freudian dream analysis.) Such an intensive self-study is part of your task in using this method. If you do such an extraordinary self-analysis, then you may be able to research dreams more thoroughly than science has ever been able to do, thus far. The only measure of your accuracy and effectiveness in analyzing your dreams is an assessment of how much you improve your adjustment or life skills (if you can rule out all other causes--which, of course, is the rub). So, again, you are your own therapist *and* your own researcher. You can start tonight.

The advantages of the method are that everyone dreams and most people find their dreams interesting, at least occasionally. Some insight is possible, but there is a risk that one will attribute more significance to his/her dreams than they warrant. Remember, it is possible that the dream images are rather meaningless neuronal brain activity. This was discussed in the "general idea" section. Besides the dream context being of dubious significance, other disadvantages are the time involved, the long delay of most benefits, the uncertain effectiveness of the "dream analysis" work, and perhaps the psychological stress involved. Being upset by the dreams or their implications are the only known dangers. If this should happen, talk to a friend and/or divert your attention to something else. In general, however, I would assume it is less dangerous to cautiously explore the possible implications of our dreams (and daydreams) than to assume that dreams have absolutely no significance or utility at all.

Bibliography

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