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Reconceptualizing Defense as a Special Type of Problematic Interpersonal Behavior Pattern: A Fundamental Breach by an Agent-in-a-Situation

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This article begins by identifying three key features of the traditional approach to defense (its internal focus, emphasis on self-deception, and mechanistic nature) and shows how these features reflect ideas from our philosophical tradition. It then presents an interpersonal reconceptualization of defense, which is guided by an alternative philosophical perspective based on what Merleau–Ponty (1962) referred to as "involved subjectivity." This reconceptualization, or theory of "interpersonal defense," calls for viewing defense primarily as interpersonal behavior, attending to the functional role it plays in ongoing interactions, and recognizing that defensive behavior is a special type of problematic interpersonal pattern. Interpersonal defenses often are quite effective when it comes to avoiding clear-cut versions of feared interaction outcomes, but they make it virtually impossible for clear-cut versions of wished-for outcomes to occur, promote indirect versions of feared outcomes, and lead to highly distorted forms of wished-for consequences. They are characterized by a failure in how individuals integrate their behaviors in the context of interactions in which they are engaged as participants. This is a breach precisely in what the alternative philosophical perspective takes to be the core of human behavior. Defense represents a struggle against the person's fundamental involvement in the world, and viewing it in this light helps us understand concrete features of the phenomena of interest. Implications of the theory of interpersonal defense for research and practice are discussed, including using discourse analysis to operationalize defensive behavior. The article concludes with the suggestion that the basis for defense involves a "fundamental fault-line" in human nature which concerns a delicate balance between integrating our actions in the contexts that make up our lives and attempting to control constraints of those situations.

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The concept of defense is a central tenet of psychoanalytic theory. It is, arguably, one of Freud's most important contributions. Moreover, in our culture it is part of our everyday thinking about ourselves. Nevertheless, I believe that the promise of this concept by no means has been fully realized.

In the field of psychology outside the psychoanalytic quarter, defense has not received the attention it merits in theories about personality functioning and psychopathology. Defense also has been neglected in clinical work that is not dynamically-oriented. Furthermore, I believe that psychoanalytic adherents have not developed a full understanding of the role played by defense in their own theoretical formulations or in their approach to clinical practice. In addition, although there have been a number of useful research efforts in this area (e.g., see Cramer, 1991; Vaillant, 1986), there is general agreement that efforts to study defenses have been limited in significant ways and that there is a need for new research methods (e.g., see Andrews, Pollack, and Stewart, 1989, p. 455; Horowitz, Milbrath, Reidbord, and Stinson, 1993, p. 278; Perry and Cooper, 1989, p. 444; Vaillant, 1992a, p. 14; 1994, p. 48). Defenses have proven to be very difficult to measure and the yield from numerous attempts to understand the role they play, while certainly not negligible, has been disappointing.

In part, these limitations simply reflect the fact that the concept of defense refers to complex processes that are genuinely difficult to understand. I believe they also reflect fundamental problems in the approach taken to this work. Basic features of the approach reflect implicit commitments to a philosophical perspective that is misleading — even though its influence can be seen not only within the domain of psychoanalytic thinking, but throughout the field of psychology.

In what follows, I will identify what I consider to be the key problematic features in how defense has been conceptualized and show how they reflect central ideas from our philosophical tradition. I will then present a different philosophical perspective, which takes what Merleau-Ponty (1962) referred to as "involved subjectivity" as its fundamental commitment. This philosophical perspective offers a novel view of the basic nature of human behavior, which provides the foundation for reconceptualizing defense. It leads to locating defense in the world by viewing it primarily as interpersonal behavior, in contrast to the intrapsychic focus of the traditional approach to defense. This reconceptualization, which I will refer to as the theory of "interpersonal defense," throws light on the phenomena related to defense in a number of ways. It directs our attention to the fascinating and complex functional role played by defense in ongoing interactions. It also provides a new way of thinking about intrapsychic defense mechanisms, which are included in the model but reconceptualized in terms of the role they play in the context of patterns of defensive interpersonal behavior. Most impor-

tantly, the reorientation in approach provides the basis for characterizing defensive behavior as a special type of problematic interpersonal pattern. In fact, *defense involves a breach precisely in what the philosophical perspective takes to be the core of human behavior. Defense represents a struggle against involvement in the world, even though this involvement lies at the heart of what it is to be a person*. Viewing defense as a basic breach of this kind makes it possible to understand key aspects of the concrete phenomena of interest. In the final section of this article, I will suggest that the vulnerability for committing breaches of this sort is itself linked to a basic feature of human nature — a "fundamental fault-line" related to a delicate balance between integrating our actions in the contexts that make up our lives and attempting to control the constraints of those situations.

To be sure, the theory of interpersonal defense differs markedly from familiar approaches to defense, especially those based on classical psychoanalytic theory. Nevertheless, clear lines can be drawn connecting the approach that will be offered here to familiar views of the concept. First, the model of interpersonal defense directly builds upon what is probably the central insight in psychoanalytic theory about defense. This is the idea that key aspects of personality functioning and psychopathology concern a class of processes individuals employ in an attempt to deal with conflicts between wishes and fears because, in a sense, these processes play a protective function. In some measure, these attempts are effective, but very frequently, by their very nature, they ultimately prove to be maladaptive.

There is another connection to acknowledge as well. The theory of interpersonal defense reflects the influence of interpersonal and relational perspectives in psychoanalysis, especially the contributions of Horney (1939, 1945) and Sullivan (1953, 1954), who made important strides in shifting thinking about defense to the interpersonal domain. At the same time, I believe that in themselves these clinical/theoretical efforts have not been sufficient to make it possible to realize the promise of the concept of defense. I will attempt to show how the alternative philosophical perspective provides guidance for how to move ahead with ideas from these theorists.

Traditional Approach to Defense

According to the traditional approach, all defense mechanisms (e.g., repression, isolation, sublimation, and so forth) perform a common function. They come into play in response to inner impulses and external stressors in order to protect the ego from anxiety and guilt (A. Freud, 1936/1966). In this vein, for example, Cramer (1991, p. 3) noted "there is general agreement that the purpose of the defenses is to prevent other ego functions from being disrupted or disorganized by excessive negative affect, such as anxiety or

guilt." This leads to the first observation about how defense has been conceptualized, which is that the traditional approach has an *internal focus*. Defenses *regulate the person's inner psychological state*.

It is possible to identify another aspect of the internal focus of the traditional approach, if we shift consideration from the purpose of defense to the means by which that goal is accomplished. Supposedly, defenses themselves are *internal mental processes*. Hence, according to the traditional conceptualization, defenses are internal processes aimed at controlling inner experience.

Two other features about the traditional view of how defenses work should be noted. The first point is that a basic tenet has been that defenses function by keeping painful material out of consciousness. Supposedly, a hallmark of defenses is that they involve *self-deception*. Vaillant (1994, p. 44) pointed out that "defense mechanisms can alter our perceptions of any or all of the following: subject (self), object (other), idea, or feeling." In fact, contributors often write as if self-deception and defense were equivalent concepts (e.g., see Cramer, 1991; Vaillant, 1992a).

Another important point is that the traditional approach is based on a *mechanistic* conception of defense processes. The account it offers concerns simple operations performed on elemental objects rather than processes involving meaningful patterns. Defenses are considered to be mental mechanisms that "operate" on affects and ideas, which are viewed as mental objects. For example, repression is an operation that "banished the idea from consciousness while preserving affect," whereas isolation is considered to be the opposite operation that "spared the idea but banished the affect" (Vaillant, 1992b, p. 15).

Approach to Defense Reflects Traditional Philosophical Commitments

Both the empiricist and rationalist "wings" of the philosophical tradition are reflected in the approach that has been taken to defense. This is also true for classical psychoanalytic theory in general. In terms of the general theory, mechanistic ideas from empiricist philosophy are central to Freud's model of psychopathology, while notions from rationalism appear in his view of the role played by insight in psychotherapy. Shortly, I will turn to how this mix of strains of thought from the philosophical tradition is reflected in thinking about defenses, but first it is important to point out that it is possible to identify a single underlying perspective that characterizes both sides of the philosophical tradition.

Our dominant philosophical positions share a commitment to what Merleau–Ponty (1962) called the notion of the "uninvolved subject." According to this idea, thinking about the world, or the knowing relation-

ship, is primary. The task for philosophy is to explain how the subject comes to know the object, given that at the outset subject and object are *fundamentally separate* or unrelated. Disagreements about whether this distance between subject and object is bridged by special capacities in the subject or through a process in which the object plays the pivotal role lead to the familiar antinomies in the Western philosophical tradition. For example, in terms of epistemology, rationalist viewpoints hold that knowledge is an active process involving abstract understanding (forms, templates, structures, rules), while empiricist positions argue that knowledge is based on associations passively formed between percepts. In terms of views of the person, or subject, there is the claim that the subject is an active, autonomous, free agent and, on the other side, the position that the person is a passive automaton determined by the external world. With respect to questions about the basic nature of the world, there is the view that, fundamentally, the world is constituted by meaningful abstract entities and the opposing position that it is made up of essentially dead, meaningless "building block" objects and behaviors.

The three features identified above in the traditional conceptualization of defense — its internal focus, the key role it assigns to self-deception, and the mechanistic nature of the theory — are closely linked to the philosophical tradition. The internal focus of the approach is tied to the core commitment of the philosophical tradition, that is, the notion that subject and object, person and world, are fundamentally separate. On the one hand (in the traditional conceptualization of defense), there is a focus on an individual attempting to regulate his or her internal state through the use of inner mechanisms, rather than a perspective that focuses on a person trying to do things in the world (e.g., avoid certain outcomes in interactions with other people) by acting in certain ways. This closely mirrors the fundamental starting point of traditional philosophy (both rationalism and empiricism) with its view of an uninvolved subject employing mental procedures in order to understand the world so that the subject will come to have knowledge that X or Y is true about the world (the passive formulation is intentional because the traditional pictures involve a reflective stance, whether the mental procedures themselves are viewed as "active" or "passive"), rather than a view according to which a person, who is actively engaged in the world, does things in order to pursue a wide array of goals in his/her life — with gaining knowledge included among many other goals, and the goal of knowledge itself always embedded in the context of the other activities. In both cases (the conceptualization of defense and traditional philosophy), goals are defined in terms of the subject's internal state and there is a focus on inner operations that lead to these goals, in contrast to a very different perspective in which goals concern outcomes in the world and attention is directed to how the person acts in order to pursue those goals. Note that, as will be dis-

cussed below, these critical observations about an internal focus are *not* meant as a call for an "external" perspective.

The emphasis on self-deception in the traditional approach to defense is linked to one of the two wings of the tradition, rationalism. According to rationalism, knowing is a self-reflexive process in which the subject actively reviews and synthesizes the Mind's contents. In this position, there is a strong commitment to the idea that Mind is transparent to itself. This self-transparency gives a finality to knowing. It is as if self-transparency makes it possible for us to reflect on things from a removed vantage point. We are not lost amidst our thoughts because we can reflect fully on them. As Merleau–Ponty (1962, pp. 369–409) maintained, for rationalism, all knowledge is, at bottom, self-knowledge.

The traditional approach to defense also rests on a picture in which self-knowledge is assumed to be the desired and canonical state, although this link to the philosophical tradition is somewhat complicated. To be sure, rationalist philosophers do not talk about the breach of deceiving oneself by removing something from consciousness. Indeed, some phenomenological personality theorists reject the concept of defense precisely because they are committed to a version of idealist philosophy that insists on the finality of conscious experience and leaves no room for self-deception. For those theorists, self-knowledge is not only the canonical state, but the only possible state. Nevertheless, in the traditional approach to defense, pathology is clearly seen against the backdrop of the rationalist picture of what can and should be the case about a person's relationship to self. Defenses involve blocking off something from consciousness, and if it were not for defense the person would be transparent to him/herself.

The mechanistic nature of the traditional conceptualization of defense is linked to empiricist philosophy. The view that the psyche is a collection of mental objects (affects, ideas), which appears in traditional theory about defense, is an empiricist notion. Although many psychologists believe that empiricist philosophy rules out such intrapsychic entities, this is not true, as can be seen readily by turning to the classic empiricist tracts (for example, see Berkeley, 1710/1965). On the other hand, it is true that unconscious processes are not part of traditional empiricist philosophy of mind. But the point here concerns the nature of the models offered in the traditional conceptualization of defense. Those models involve mechanical operations on building block entities. While many psychologists who pride themselves for their "empiricist" proclivities reject the concept of defense altogether, it cannot be argued that this is because traditional theory about defense is not mechanistic. In my opinion, both the traditional approach to defense and empiricism can be faulted for ruling out of bounds accounts of human behavior in which complex, organized patterns play the central role.

Basis for a Reconceptualization

An alternative philosophical perspective provides the basis for a different approach to defense. This perspective is derived from the work of Merleau–Ponty (1962), Wittgenstein (1958), and Heidegger (1962). It is similar in important respects to American pragmatism (e.g., James, 1890; Peirce, 1878/1966). The presentation that follows draws on discussions of this perspective I have offered elsewhere (Westerman, 1987, 1989, 1993) and on a fascinating book by Dreyfus (1992).

The perspective is based on the idea of involved subjectivity. According to this idea, the point of departure for philosophy is the person involved in the world of practical activities as an embodied agent doing things in order to accomplish goals. Praxis, or practical activity, is taken to be fundamental. Unlike traditional philosophy, which takes the epistemological issue as the key question, the perspective does not start with an alienated view of a subject, with his/her interior experience, on one side and the world on the other. Instead, from the outset, the person is taken to be already engaged in the world, actively involved in practical activities within it. Involvement in practical activities provides the background for the knowing relationship. As Merleau–Ponty (1962) put it, life is lived, or real, before it is thought about. This basic viewpoint leads to a full-scale reorientation of fundamental philosophical commitments.

Because it focuses on practical activity, this viewpoint is *worldly* in contrast to traditional philosophy, with its emphasis on knowing viewed as a reflective, internal experience, but the alternative perspective is not "on the side of the world," in terms of the dichotomies we are familiar with from traditional philosophy. The viewpoint is *not mechanical*. Practical activity consists of action patterns that are *irreducibly meaningful*. It cannot be broken down into simple relationships between building block elements. Instead, it follows from taking the person's active involvement in the world of practical activities as our cornerstone that the significance of any individual behavior depends on the role that behavior plays in the context of the situation in which it occurs. This role depends on the person's present location in space and time, the social customs of his or her culture, and many other considerations about the meaning of the situation, including the person's goals.

Consider the rich complex of factors involved when one person makes a "kind" remark toward another person. The "same" comment can have dramatically different significance given the role it plays in a particular context, making it a wonderfully kind remark in one situation and even a hurtful comment in another. For example, a simple inquiry about how someone is feeling can be a considerate expression of concern, but the "same" inquiry would be odd and out of place in a context in which it was established that

the speaker already knows quite well how the other person is doing, and, in a third situation, the "same" remark would be annoying and quite inconsiderate if it were made at a time when it was clear that the other individual was riveted to a crucial and painstaking task that demanded his or her complete attention. Hence, the focus on praxis does not lead to an account based on "mere behavior," because practical activity is meaningful.

Given this view that considerations about meaning are crucial for understanding behavior, it may be tempting to shift over to the other wing of the philosophical tradition and imagine that the perspective of involved subjectivity must be "on the side of the subject." In the case of the example about making a kind remark, it might be argued that while the significance of particular behaviors goes "beyond" the individual behaviors in question (perhaps because the action plays a role in what are actually very complex practices related to supporting, not interfering with, someone engrossed in a demanding task), we can take the larger context into account by means of the representational models or abstract templates of rationalist philosophy. To be sure, it may seem obvious that we can take the speaker's purpose (to be kind, i.e., to promote the other's well-being) into account in such models, based on the view that goals are "mental" entities. Indeed, the currently dominant paradigms in psychology, cognitive approaches and information processing models, assume that we can explain even the most complicated cultural practices in terms of representational models.

But such rationalist explanations reflect the commitment of traditional philosophy to the notion of uninvolved subjectivity. They suggest that, fundamentally, the person in our example is a removed observer who can look down on the situation, understand its different elements and their structure, and "bring to" the situation calculations based on his/her understanding and goals — as if this understanding and the person's goals were ultimately separable from the situation.

The alternative philosophical perspective leads to a very different way of incorporating meaning and goals. Recall that according to the alternative perspective, *from the outset, the person is engaged in the world of practical activities*. This involvement comes first. It is the foundation for the knowing relationship. In our example, the person's practical familiarity with interacting with others in concrete situations, not removed, theoretical understanding, provides the basis for engaging in some new situation in a kind manner. To be sure, acting in a kind manner involves a complex capacity that prepares the person for behaving in a wide range of ways (in terms of specific behaviors) in a myriad of diverse situations about which many, many other aspects of practical activity are relevant (e.g., that other people can be engrossed in demanding tasks), but this ability is still practical and concrete in nature. Fundamentally, the person is a participant, not a removed onlooker. When

we reflect on things (which we certainly do at times), our understanding refers back to our practical involvement in concrete situations. Indeed, for the person in our example, the goal itself (to be nice toward some other individual) refers back to those situations. It is about ways of engaging in the world, not something "above" or "beneath" the world that the person "brings to" his or her interactions with people.

In fact, from the viewpoint of the alternative philosophical perspective, it is not possible to give a completely explicit, abstract account of practical activity. The meaning of what we do always goes beyond any such account to refer to the world in a way that cannot be fully captured in the model. The meaning of practical activity is irreducibly embedded in the concrete situations that make up our lives.

In order to clarify this view of practical activity, which differs dramatically from notions about human behavior based on our philosophical tradition, it is helpful to think about Archimedes' claim that he could move the world if he were given a lever, a fulcrum, and a place to stand. The philosophical tradition represents a similar attempt to find a place for the subject to stand outside the world. It locates such a position in the removed vantage point of a subject reflecting on an object of inquiry. But according to the alternative philosophical perspective, there is no removed vantage point. We can never get outside, above, or below our involvement in the world. Nevertheless, the person in our example is able (no doubt not always, but perhaps quite frequently) to negotiate the countless complexities involved in acting in a kind manner in many different situations. Practical activity is meaningful, but this is not because we refer to an abstract realm of meanings that lies behind the concrete situations that constitute our lives, although, according to the philosophical tradition, this appears essential to make what we do more than "mere" behavior. Instead, we approach any particular object or event "from the inside," that is, from our particular point within the world (particular location at a moment in time, individual history, general history, our bodies, our community, and so forth).

It follows from these considerations that practical activity is truly remarkable. Indeed, ultimately, it is mysterious. According to the alternative philosophical perspective, in its basic nature, human behavior is a miraculous kind of bootstrapping. *At the core of human behavior is a process that involves integrating specific actions in meaningful contexts. We act in ways that constitute meaningful patterns, even though, as agents involved in situations, our vantage point is inside those patterns, not looking down on them.*

One other idea should be presented at this point regarding how the alternative philosophical perspective contrasts with rationalism. According to the perspective of involved subjectivity, there is no question about the existence of processes of reflection such as self-awareness and conscious understanding

of objects of inquiry. The perspective does not challenge the reality of the "interior" life of the mind, but it argues that these processes always take place with respect to the background of our prior involvement in the shared world of practical activities. As suggested above, reflective understanding is never really "removed knowing" because it is linked inextricably to practical know how, that is, the kind of familiarity a participant, not an observer, has. One important point that follows from this is that we are *never transparent to ourselves*. Not only is self-transparency not the canonical state, it is impossible. We cannot step outside our involvement in our lives to understand from a removed vantage point how we are approaching things, because that involvement comes first and conditions how we reflect on ourselves just as it conditions our reflective understanding of anything of interest (see Westerman, 1989). This gives a philosophical basis for findings from empirical studies showing the clear limits of self knowledge (e.g., Nisbett and Wilson, 1977; Wilson, Hull, and Johnson, 1981). At a later point I will discuss how the theory of interpersonal defense includes the inner processes that play a central role in the traditional approach to defense, but reconceptualizes those processes along the lines suggested here.

Coordinating Actions in Situations

Two additional points should be made about the new perspective in order to complete setting the stage for introducing a different way to conceptualize defense. Both points have to do with the fact that actions involve coordinating many different aspects of a situation. Even though coordinating specific behaviors that occur in the foreground of what we do with the context in which they play a role always involves an extraordinarily complex process, in many cases we can do this with ease. But although we have the remarkable capacity to act in situations from the inside, it certainly is not the case that we engage in all the different practical activities that constitute our lives easily, or that things always go well. The complex nature of practical activity opens up the possibility for all sorts of problems.

The first point is a basic one, but it should be mentioned here. Situations can be quite difficult when they involve conflicting goals or when pursuing a desired goal might lead to undesired consequences. In my opinion, Freud recognized a key issue when he identified the conflicts between *wishes and fears* that often occur. It can be extremely difficult to engage in many day-to-day activities, including relationships with other people, in ways that integrate one's wishes and fears.

The second point is that these conflicts do not always merely involve what might be called a simple incompatibility between two elements, as would be the case, for example, if a person wanted to make a kind remark, but there was a lot of noise in the room (in which case the person might well shout,

even though shouting typically is not part of behaving in a kind manner). Because practical activity involves integrating actions in contexts *on the part of an agent who is involved in the situation him or herself*, there is the possibility of a special type of conflict.

I can explain this idea with a humorous example, because the special type of conflict in question often serves as the basis for jokes. Imagine a character, perhaps like one in a Woody Allen movie that portrays a rather dark but zany view of life. This character is down on his luck. Nothing is falling into place for him. As he strolls down the street, he comes upon an acquaintance who asks, in what appears to be a sincere effort to be kind, "How are you doing? I'm concerned about you. I heard you weren't feeling so good." Our ill-fated protagonist responds that he is feeling very lonely and wishes he could find someone to talk to. His acquaintance replies, "Good luck" and walks down the block. Our hapless hero looks puzzled for an instant, shakes his head, and walks away in the other direction.

The first thing to note about this example is that the initial comments by the acquaintance are what the philosopher Austin (1955) called a speech act. The question about how our hero was doing was not an inquiry about the state of affairs by a removed observer. Similarly, the statement of concern about hearing that the protagonist was not feeling well was not a self-report by a distant bystander about the bystander's feelings regarding an individual whose life he is viewing from some removed location. Rather, these initial remarks by the acquaintance constitute an action on the part of one participant in a social situation directed toward the other individual. In other words, his comments had the force, "I am concerned about you. I want to help you." The key point here is that once we recognize that these remarks were actions by an agent *involved* in a situation, not removed inquiries or self-reports, we see that there is a curious and, in this case, humorous failure of fit between the final reply ("Good luck") by the acquaintance and the context of the acquaintance's prior behavior. Somehow, a chance encounter that appeared to be just what our unfortunate hero was hoping for, turned out to be nothing of the kind.

The core requirement of behavior involves integrating actions in the larger contexts within which those actions play a role. This example highlights the fact that a crucial aspect of the "larger context" is that the person performing the action is a *participant* in the situation. Actions are performed by agents who have a connection to the situations in which those actions take place. Therefore, it is not only necessary to consider any given behavior in terms of its fit with events and the behavior of the other people in a situation, but it is also crucial to see how the behavior in question is related to the agent's position in the context, his or her behavior prior to the moment in question, and so forth. This brings us back to the central idea of the alternative philo-

sophical perspective, involved subjectivity. The fact that we must coordinate specific behaviors in the context of complex practical activities *in which we are involved* can provide the basis for humor, as is the case in this example, but it also creates the possibility for action patterns that are deeply problematic. This will become clear as we consider defensive interpersonal behavior.

Interpersonal Defense

In what follows, I will present an interpersonal, rather than an intrapsychic, conceptualization of defense called the theory of interpersonal defense. As noted above, it reflects the influence of interpersonal and relational perspectives in psychoanalysis, including the contributions of Horney (1939, 1945) and Sullivan (1953, 1954) in particular. It is also influenced by the interactional perspective of the Palo Alto group (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland, 1956; Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967). It will be clear from the outset that it also reflects the philosophical perspective based on involved subjectivity.

Interpersonal Action Patterns that Influence Relationship Outcomes

To begin with, the alternative philosophical perspective calls for an approach to defense that contrasts with the internal focus of the traditional approach. There are two points here. The first concerns the issue of what defenses are. The second has to do with their purpose. The philosophical perspective I am proposing takes practical activity, or praxis, as fundamental. Hence, with regard to the issue of what defenses are, it suggests an approach in which defenses are viewed primarily as meaningful patterns of behavior. How people behave is the central focus of attention. This viewpoint, coupled with the focus on interpersonal processes suggested by interpersonal and interactional theorists, leads to the idea that *defenses primarily are patterns of behavior in interpersonal relationships.*[1] In the traditional approach, defensive behaviors are considered to be mere markers of internal mechanisms of self-deception that block consciousness or perception. In the theory of interpersonal defense, the concept of defense refers primarily to what a person is *doing*, rather than to *internal* processes responsible for making sure that he or she *is not aware* of certain mental objects (affects or ideas). Patterns of defensive interpersonal

[1]The philosophical perspective calls for considering what people do in terms of their involvement as active participants in the world. "What people do" includes, but is not limited to, their behavior in interpersonal relationships. The focus here on interpersonal relationships derives from the interpersonal/interactional contributions in psychology. The philosophical perspective provides a particular approach for pursuing the present interest in interpersonal behavior.

behavior are very complex. I believe that, in good measure, they have not been identified and well described to date by those interested in defense because their main focus has been on internal processes. In addition, existing frameworks for conceptualizing interpersonal behavior are not adequate because they do not include a focus on meaningful behavior patterns.

Taking praxis as fundamental makes central a view of the person doing things in order to accomplish goals. This leads to another key feature of the approach, which is the idea that defenses are *attempts to influence interpersonal events*. That is, they play a *functional role* in interpersonal relationships. This is the second basic contrast with the internal focus of the traditional conceptualization. In both the traditional approach and the one offered here, the purpose of defenses has to do with responding to conflicts between wishes and fears. In the traditional approach, defenses are viewed as responses to such conflicts that are designed to regulate a person's internal state by minimizing the experience of anxiety and guilt. In contrast to this, in the theory of interpersonal defense, defenses are considered to be attempts to influence what occurs in interpersonal relationships with respect to wished-for and feared outcomes. I will have much more to say about how defensive interpersonal behavior "feeds forward" to impact relationship events in what follows.

Note that the insistence on focusing on practical activity, that is, how people behave in relationships and the impact their behavior has on interpersonal events, does not mean that the theory of interpersonal defense is an "external" model about "mere" behavior.[2] For one thing, the approach includes internal processes, although the role they play is conceptualized in a new way (more on this below). More importantly, according to the philosophical vantage point that guides the present approach to defense, what people do is comprised of what Wittgenstein (1958) referred to as rich, meaningful "grammars," or patterns, of action. These patterns are much more than the behavior strings of a behavioral account. As discussed above, the fundamental philosophical perspective goes beyond a mechanistic approach. It does this by including the subject — not by going "inside" the subject as in rationalism, but by placing the subject in the world. This will provide a new way to conceptualize the behavior patterns that constitute interpersonal defense. It will enable us to see how these patterns represent a particular, highly complex way of pursuing goals related to wished-for and feared relationship outcomes.

[2]See Westerman and Steen (1998) for an extended discussion about how the theory of interpersonal defense exemplifies an approach to psychological phenomena that goes beyond the inner–outer polarity which characterizes our philosophical tradition and most work in psychology.

An Example from a Clinical Case

I can illustrate these points about focusing on interpersonal behavior, the functional role played by defense, and the nature of interpersonal defense processes with an example. The example concerns a patient who entered treatment with a new therapist after her former therapist moved to another part of the country. She was in therapy due to a variety of problems, including depression and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Her relationships were fraught with problems, though they were quite limited outside the context of her workplace. The patient had a wish to be taken care of and nurtured. She was also afraid that if she pursued this wish, she would be repudiated and rejected by others for being weak, needy, and overly demanding.

I can illustrate her defensive pattern with the following exchange in her new therapy regarding the end of her first treatment:

Patient: Can you help me come to terms with my therapist leaving?

Therapist: How did you feel when she told you she was leaving?

Patient: I wanted to end my therapy with Dr. X the right way. I listened to what she [the former therapist] said to figure out what I should do, but I didn't do a very good job.

Illustrating Basic Points of the Approach

Several comments should be made at this juncture before proceeding with the discussion of this example. To begin with, the sample exchange is a brief excerpt. It may appear to be a rather simple dialogue. One of the main goals of the discussion that follows is to show the rich complexity that goes into even such an apparently simple exchange. I will first use the example to clarify the basic points of the theory of interpersonal defense that were presented above, but I will then pursue consideration of the example at much greater length with a detailed analysis that will introduce and explain a good number of additional features of the model. Note that the example illustrates the points that will be made; it is not meant to prove those claims. No single example could demonstrate the validity of this set of complex theoretical propositions. Along the same lines, it is also important to note that the analysis of the example is not self-contained. It draws heavily on extensive knowledge of the patient that goes well beyond the excerpt itself (e.g., as already mentioned, recognizing that the patient's wish was to be taken care of and nurtured and that her fear concerned rejection for being needy and demanding).

Turning to the case, let us consider it in terms of the first two points presented above about the theory of interpersonal defense. According to the

first point, in order to pursue our interest in defense in this case, our primary focus should be on the patient's pattern of behavior as exemplified in this brief exchange. We should treat it as our main interest, rather than accord it secondary status as an indicator of internal mechanisms of defense as traditionally conceptualized. One positive consequence of proceeding in this way is that it makes it more likely we will recognize that the brief exchange presented above represents an example of a pattern that was characteristic of this patient's behavior at many other moments in therapy and in her other relationships. The behavior pattern included requests for assistance and shifts to a highly intellectualized, critical stance aimed at "self improvement" in which she reviewed and negatively evaluated her behavior. For example, shortly after the remarks presented above, the patient made another request for help about being uneasy about the end of her prior therapy. The therapist asked her once again how she felt about her former therapist leaving. The patient responded, "Well, scared . . . . It doesn't make any sense to feel that way. I know I shouldn't feel that way." Another benefit of focusing directly on the patient's pattern of behavior is that it leads us to examine the behavior pattern carefully rather than to quickly turn attention to conjectures about internal mechanisms. As I will demonstrate below, this makes possible important discoveries about the nature of the interpersonal processes.

According to the second point in the theory of interpersonal defense, defenses are attempts to influence relationship events. In the example, the patient's defensive pattern represented an attempt to pursue her wish to be taken care of and nurtured and also an attempt to avoid the feared consequence of being rejected because she was too needy and demanding. She pursued her wish by requesting help coming to terms with the end of her former therapy. Her pattern of behavior also represented an attempt to avoid the consequence she feared because her "self-improvement" stance showed that she was trying to handle her difficulties herself and, therefore, that she was neither weak nor demanding.

The Complex Functional Properties and Nature of Interpersonal Defenses

In fact, the functional role played by this patient's defensive pattern was far more complex than is suggested by the preceding comments. In what follows, I will offer a detailed analysis of this example of interpersonal defense. The analysis will map out the functional properties of this defense and it will also provide a characterization of the pattern. The discussion will bring us full circle, because I will show that there is an intrinsic connection between the kinds of patterns that constitute interpersonal defenses and fundamental processes identified by the alternative philosophical perspective.

Impact of defensive pattern on feared outcomes. The first point is that, *in certain respects, the patient's defensive pattern was very effective with regard to the goal of avoiding her feared outcome*. For example, following her comments about how she wanted to end her prior therapy the "right way" but did not do a very good job of it, her new therapist might well have responded by asking the patient about how she had attempted to come to terms with the end of her former treatment based on what she gathered from her prior therapist's remarks. By contrast, it would have been very unlikely that the therapist would respond to the patient's remark by offering a critical evaluation of how the patient felt about her therapy coming to an end (e.g., "You felt X [say, scared or angry]?" — said incredulously and critically). In fact, there would be no place for such a response following the patient's comment about ending her therapy the right way, because the patient did not indicate what her feelings were. Compare the patient's actual response with a nondefensive remark like, "I was really angry . . . furious." Following such a nondefensive bid, it would be more likely that the new therapist might respond in a way indicating he believed there was something wrong with how the patient felt about the end of her prior treatment — perhaps with the challenging/critical reply, "How could you be furious at Dr. X? You knew she had to move." Note that although most therapists would not respond this way, people the patient knows in other, non-therapy, contexts might react in just this manner. Furthermore, even if the new therapist actually would not respond this way, the patient may still view this reply as a likely one that needs to be avoided. It should also be noted here that, unfortunately, therapists do sometimes respond to their patient's attempts to take an open, nondefensive stance in ways that confirm their patient's fears, although most often they do this in ways that are more subtle than the hypothetical negative reply suggested here.

Not only did the patient's defensive pattern make it less likely that others would respond to her in the ways she feared, but it worked to avoid the outcomes she feared in another way as well. The defensive pattern also served to *redefine the significance of any critical remarks made by other people*. This is a second feature of the functional role played by defensive behavior identified by the theory of interpersonal defense. For example, if at some point in the exchange under consideration the therapist commented, "It sounds to me like you were angry," the force of any criticism implied by this comment (even if no criticism was intended, but only was perceived by the patient) would be muted by the patient's self-improvement stance of calling her own behavior into question (e.g., "Well, yes — like I've been saying, that's the problem. I know it's no way to react"). Therefore, the patient's behavior worked against the consequences she feared by reducing the likelihood that the new therapist would find fault with the way she felt about the end of her prior therapy and also by redefining the significance of any critical comments the therapist might make.

It will prove useful to consider further *how* the patient's defensive pattern worked against the feared consequences. To answer this question, one might focus on the patient's comment about how she failed to end her therapy in the right way. But the patient's self-improvement remarks are *not defensive in themselves*. To be sure, it is unfortunate that the patient took a critical, striving stance about how she failed to be the way she "should be," but from the perspective of the interpersonal defense approach, by itself this stance does not constitute a defense. This is a crucial contrast between the position presented here and the traditional approach to defense, even when investigators depart from that approach in some measure by examining interpersonal behaviors.

In order to understand the role played by the comment about not ending therapy the right way, it is necessary to consider it along the lines suggested by the example about the poor soul for whom nothing was falling into place. Recall that in that example an acquaintance expressed concern about how the protagonist was doing. When our unfortunate hero responded that he wished he could find someone to talk to because he was very lonely, his acquaintance replied "Good luck" and walked away. One important step in the analysis of this vignette was recognizing that the acquaintance's remarks were not removed comments or inquiries about the state of affairs, but actions by an agent in a social situation. Furthermore, in order to understand the significance of those actions, it was necessary to consider how they related to the larger context in which they took place. Most importantly, this example illustrated the fact that a central feature of the larger context was that the person acting in a particular way was a *participant in the situation*.

In the clinical example, it is also important to recognize that the patient's self-improvement remark was not a statement by the patient evaluating her behavior from the standpoint of a removed (albeit harsh) "guide," but a *bid made by the patient in her relationship with her new therapist*. Once we recognize that her bid was an action by an agent in a social situation, it becomes possible to consider her remark *in the context of how she related to the therapist at other points in time*. The crucial thing to recognize is not that the patient took the self-improvement stance, but that she did so after attempting to elicit help from her therapist and after the therapist responded to her request. Because she made her self-improvement comment *at this juncture*, her remark *did not fit in a straightforward manner with the overall pattern of the exchange*.

Given that the patient attempted to elicit help from the therapist and the therapist responded, why did the patient respond by offering her comment about not doing a good job ending her therapy? Our analysis based on recognizing that the patient is an *agent-in-a-situation* raises this question and it also suggests an answer. The patient's self-improvement comments are included in her pattern of behavior, even though they do not fit with the other ele-

ments, because they make it possible for her to pursue her wish while attempting to avoid the negative outcome she fears — that is, because in the overall pattern those elements serve a defensive function. The role they play (not the only role, but a crucial role) is to make it possible for the patient *to ask for help without engaging in a straightforward manner in the pattern of behavior of asking someone else for assistance*. By contrast, she might have responded to the therapist's attempt to offer help by directly answering his question and expressing how she felt about the end of her prior therapy. But if she had responded in this way, it would have been clear that she was very distressed about her first therapy ending and that she wanted her new therapist to take a caring, nurturing role toward her. This would open up the possibility that her new therapist might reject or repudiate her for being weak and demanding, that is, her feared outcome.

Unintended consequences related to the patient's fear. The preceding analysis begins to illustrate the functional role played by defensive patterns with respect to feared outcomes. It also begins to explain the complex processes involved in defensive attempts to avoid those outcomes. In addition, we can begin to see how the basic philosophical perspective, with its idea of the person as an agent-in-a-situation, throws light on these complex processes. But the situation is very complicated and there is much more to recognize about the meaning of the patient's defensive behavior pattern. When we consider the patient's comment about how she ended her former therapy from a perspective in which we realize that she is a participant in a relationship with her new therapist, it also becomes clear that, *in a sense, her defensive pattern is likely to lead to the outcome she fears*.

In the context of the overall pattern, the very elements that represent an attempt to avoid the fear (the patient's remark about how she failed to end her therapy the right way and her critical, self-improvement stance in general) may well lead the patient's new therapist to react to her as someone who *is* weak and demanding, because the patient behaves as if she expects to be helped without directly responding to the therapist's efforts to help her, that is, without contributing to the process. In other words, *in an important although less clear-cut sense, by acting in the way she did at the juncture following her request for assistance and her therapist's response to that request, the patient, in fact, was engaging in this relationship in a demanding, needy manner* even though in another, more obvious sense her self-improvement remark suggests that she was not needy or demanding because she was working hard to handle her difficulties herself.

If what most immediately appears to be a readiness on this patient's part to take care of her own difficulties actually represents an element in a pattern of participating in relationships that can be characterized as demanding and needy, then this will also have an impact on those relationships. Keep in

mind that the patient's self-improvement comment should not be viewed as the "end point" of the pattern. Instead, the shift to this stance itself gave way at other moments to requests for assistance which, in turn, were followed by other self-improvement remarks, and so on. It is also important to note, once again, that this interpersonal pattern characterized the patient's behavior in many other relationships, not only in the context of her therapy. This constantly repeated way of relating to others did not lead to clear-cut versions of the outcome she feared (e.g., "You never try to deal with your own problems. You always expect me to take care of you"), but it did result in indirect, or not clear-cut, examples of others reacting to her as a needy and overly demanding person. The people in the patient's life became frustrated with her. Without clearly rejecting or repudiating her, they often expressed their frustration in subtle ways, e.g., by shifting topics when speaking to the patient about her difficulties or by claiming that they were too busy to spend time chatting when they saw her in the hallways at work. Therefore, the patient's efforts to avoid the relationship outcomes she feared promoted those very consequences, albeit in ways that could not be identified immediately and obviously as such. Because of the functional role they play with respect to indirect versions of feared outcomes, interpersonal defenses are self-fulfilling prophesies.

Impact of defensive pattern on wished-for outcomes. Hence, the patient's defensive pattern worked for the most part to avoid clear-cut occurrences of her feared outcome and it also led to the indirect appearance of that outcome. In order to understand these aspects of the functional properties of the patient's defensive behavior with respect to her fear, it was necessary to consider her behavior from a perspective in which we viewed her as an agent-in-a-situation. A similar analysis can be offered regarding the functional properties of the patient's defensive pattern with respect to her wished-for outcomes. Again, the discussion will include both clear-cut and more subtle consequences and it will show how the basic perspective of involved subjectivity provides a way to understand these processes.

The first point here is that, in contrast to the effect it had reducing the likelihood of clear-cut occurrences of the fear, the patient's defensive pattern was *not effective as a way of promoting her wish to be taken care of and nurtured, at least with respect to clear-cut outcomes of this sort.* As noted above, a likely response to the patient's self-improvement remark would be for the therapist to inquire about how the patient had attempted to deal with the end of her first treatment based on her prior therapist's suggestions. Compare this situation to what might have occurred if the patient offered the following nondefensive bid rather than the remark she did make: "I was really angry — furious." Although, as discussed above, this nondefensive response would have increased the likelihood of a clear-cut occurrence of the feared outcome

as compared to the self-improvement remark, the nondefensive bid *also* would be more likely to lead to a wished-for response (e.g., "It must have been really upsetting — You were in therapy. It meant a lot to you and then your therapist tells you she was going to move").

Therefore, the patient's defensive pattern worked against what she wished for in the sense that it reduced the likelihood that her new therapist would assume a nurturant, caring role toward her. In addition, when the therapist did respond to her in this manner, *the positive force of his behavior was muted because the patient's defensive pattern worked to redefine the significance of such actions on the therapist's part*. For example, given the patient's self-improvement stance, when the therapist attempted to offer support to the patient by validating how she felt about the end of her first therapy, these responses seemed off-target because her "goal" was to learn how to do things the way they "should be" done. If the patient alluded to feeling scared and the therapist replied, "It sounds like it was scary," the patient might well have responded, "I've got to find a way to stop reacting like that." Therefore, not only did the patient's pattern of behavior reduce the likelihood that her therapist would nurture and take care of her, but it also redefined the significance of any positive behavior by the therapist that did occur in such a way that it was virtually impossible for the patient's wish to be realized in a clear-cut manner.

As was the case when we examined the functional role played by the patient's defensive pattern with respect to her feared outcomes, it is useful to consider *how* her behavior impacted her wished-for consequences. Again, we could approach this question by focusing on individual elements in the patient's pattern of behavior and note that the patient's requests for help with coming to terms with the end of her prior treatment represent attempts to obtain the nurturance she wanted. Moreover, her self-improvement remarks might also appear to work in a similar direction. Although it is unfortunate in many respects to take a self-critical, striving stance about how one has failed to deal with issues in the "right" manner, this stance *can* function as a way of requesting help in certain situations.

Therefore, considered in isolation, these elements of the patient's interpersonal pattern represent attempts to pursue her wish. But in order to understand the role they actually play, it is necessary, once again, to recognize that the patient is an agent-in-a-situation. The behaviors in question are not just actions, but actions at particular points in time by a person who is involved in a relationship, that is, by someone who also has behaved toward the other individual in particular ways at other points in time. When we consider the exchange from this perspective, it becomes possible to explain why the patient's interpersonal pattern actually worked against the occurrence of clear-cut instances of her wished-for outcomes, even though its elements appear to work toward that outcome.

Again, the key point is that the elements do not fit together in a straightforward manner. If the patient simply was attempting to pursue her wish to be nurtured and taken care of, then why did she follow her request for assistance and the therapist's attempt to respond to her request with a comment indicating that she viewed the matter as something she should come to terms with herself?

It is one thing to take a critical, striving stance about failing to be the way one "should be" (and, by themselves, such comments sometimes function as requests for help), but it is another thing to strike such a stance precisely when one has requested help and the other person has responded to that request. In this situation, the self-improvement remarks by no means function simply as efforts to try to solve one's problems oneself *or* as attempts to get assistance. Rather, they play a more complex, problematic role. The patient's pattern of behavior includes self-improvement remarks at certain points in the exchange although they do not fit at those points, because this makes it possible for her to pursue her wish while also attempting to avoid the outcome she fears by demonstrating that she is ready to deal with her problems herself and, therefore, not needy or demanding. *But it is not possible to be nurtured and taken care of if after expressing a wish for assistance, one does not accept and follow through with another's efforts to help,* notwithstanding the fact that by accepting and following through with those efforts a person makes it clear that there is something he or she needs and that the person is looking to the other for help — which opens the possibility of being rejected or repudiated for being needy and overly demanding. Therefore, the patient's defensive pattern made it extremely unlikely that her wish would be realized in clear-cut ways.

Promoting distorted versions of the wish. As was the case in the analysis about how the patient's pattern related to her fear, the situation is quite complicated with respect to her wish. Although the defensive pattern worked against the clear-cut realization of the patient's wish, it also *led to her wished-for outcome in a distorted form.*

When we view the elements of the patient's behavior as parts of a pattern engaged in by an agent-in-a-situation, we can explain why it worked against the patient getting what she wished for in her relationships. Her behaviors did not fit together to constitute a straightforward attempt to obtain help or nurturance. But this does not mean that these elements "canceled each other out." Recall that the pattern was constantly repeated. A request for help was followed by a self-improvement comment, but this remark, in turn, was then followed by another bid for assistance. Even though the pattern went on to include another self-improvement remark (and so on and so forth), the overall effect is not zero. Any given self-improvement remark did not simply "undo" one of the requests for help, because the self-improvement comment was made by an agent-in-a-situation who made the earlier bids for help and

who then kept returning to new requests for assistance. This, too, is a real, albeit subtle, aspect of the meaning of the patient's behavior, which itself was a way of relating to others — a way of relating that involved repeatedly asking others for help while making it impossible for them to respond successfully to those requests. Instead of constituting a straightforward request for help, this way of engaging others amounted to a contorted effort on the patient's part *to get others to struggle to take care of her.*

As noted earlier, other people found the patient's defensive behavior extremely frustrating. Many people avoided her, but some persisted in their efforts to help. In these cases, although the patient's defensive pattern made it virtually impossible for her to get what she wanted (the clear-cut realization of her wish to be taken care of and nurtured), her way of relating to others led them to engage in this struggle to help her — a distorted version of her wish.

A Fundamental Breach

This example illustrates how it is not possible to understand interpersonal defense simply by considering the elements that go into defensive patterns. In order to understand the real significance of individual behaviors in the example, it was necessary to recognize that the person behaving in these ways was an agent-in-a-situation. We did this by examining how the patient's behavior was organized over time. When we did this, it became clear that the elements of her behavior pattern were organized in a curious manner, which constituted a particular, problematic way of pursuing a wish while trying to avoid a feared outcome.

Hence, at the heart of defense we find a process that refers directly to the basic characterization of human behavior in the alternative philosophical perspective. According to that perspective, all actions must be understood in terms of the role they play in the context of the situations in which they occur, and a central aspect of that context is that the person performing the action is a participant involved in the situation. This is true about all actions, including both defensive and nondefensive behavior, but in the former case the meaning of individual elements (which includes how they impact wished-for and feared events) hinges on the fact that at crucial junctures individual behaviors do not fit with the overall context in a straightforward manner. This is perhaps the single most important way in which the alternative philosophical perspective points to a new approach to defense. Its basic insight about human behavior provides us with a framework in which the phenomena of interest can be characterized as a fundamental breach.

Costs of Fundamental Breach With Respect to Interaction Outcomes

When people behave defensively, they are engaged in a desperate effort that concerns the most basic level of what is involved in being a person. In

order to pursue a wished-for outcome in a way that will not lead to a feared consequence, a person fails to integrate his or her actions in situations in a manner that truly fits in the contexts in which the person is involved — in particular, the person's actions do not fit with the context of his or her own behavior over time as a participant in a relationship. This desperate effort leads to some desired results. The breach makes it less likely that feared outcomes will occur in clear-cut form, because it derails patterns of interaction in which pursuit of the wish might lead to the feared outcome. But there are great costs associated with this way of behaving.

First, interpersonal defense leads to unintended, undesired interaction outcomes. As we saw in the clinical example, defensive behavior makes it virtually impossible for clear-cut instances of wished-for outcomes to occur because, for an involved subject, in order to obtain what one hopes for in a relationship it is necessary to act toward others in ways that create the *patterns* of behavior involved in pursuing a wish. Interpersonal defense includes isolated behaviors related to pursuing a wish, but just as the breach derails patterns of interaction in which pursuit of the wish might lead to what one fears, it derails patterns of exchange involved in truly realizing wished-for outcomes.

The negative impact on interaction outcomes occurs in another way as well. Ultimately, it is always the case that the person *is* involved in the situation. Therefore, the significance of his or her actions depends on how they relate to the overall context, whether or not those behaviors fit in a straightforward manner. If a person fails to integrate his or actions in the context of that person's own behavior as an agent-in-a-situation, then this breach becomes a key feature of *how* the person is involved in the situation. It will be reflected in the meaning of the person's actions. As we saw in the clinical example, the breach leads to a self-fulfilling prophesy. It actually promotes the occurrence of indirect versions of the feared outcome.[3]

Undermining One's Role as a Participant in a Relationship

In addition to the impact interpersonal defense has on concrete interaction outcomes, it is costly in another sense as well. Even though a person is always involved in the situations that make up his or her life, defensive patterns of behavior *undermine* one's role as a participant in a relationship, a participant who has certain wishes and fears. That is, in an important sense, the person is not fully engaged in the world and in his or her life.

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[3]In the example, we saw that a defensive breach also promotes highly distorted versions of wished-for outcomes. In a sense, this could be described as a desired result, but it falls well short of a true realization of the wish. Also, it is an unfortunate upshot of defensive behavior because it serves to maintain the pattern.

I can explain this point by considering it in connection with the observation frequently made by clinicians that patients fail to "take responsibility" for their lives. This discussion will help clarify the claim that interpersonal defense constitutes a breach of a fundamental sort. It will also throw light on the view that patients fail to take responsibility. Comments along these lines often amount to a vague, unclear charge.

In the clinical example, as in many other cases in which internalizing defenses play a prominent role, the suggestion that the patient is not taking responsibility may seem off the mark. Patients who place responsibility and blame on themselves appear to be assuming *all* responsibility. In fact, it is possible to take an internalizing stance in a way that does or does not constitute taking responsibility in the sense that is of interest here. In the example, the patient did not take responsibility for her wish to be taken care of and nurtured. If she had, she would have responded to her new therapist's attempts to help her by expressing her distress and letting him know that she wanted him to take a nurturing role toward her. Instead, the patient pulled back from continuing such a pattern by means of her self-improvement comments. In this case, behaviors that appear to be examples of attributing responsibility to oneself play a very different role. They represent efforts to pursue a wish in a way that *makes impossible* a feared consequence that might result from attempting to realize that wish. But, as discussed earlier, this way of attempting to avoid the feared outcome actually made the clear-cut realization of what the patient wished for extremely unlikely. It undermined *her own wish* to be nurtured. Therefore, the patient was not taking responsibility for her life in the sense that she failed to behave in a manner that was true to her wish, notwithstanding the fact that her way of failing to be true to this goal included extreme attributions of responsibility to herself.

The patient might have avoided the feared consequence in a very different way. Out of a sense that others always would reject or repudiate her for being needy and overly demanding so long as she pursued her wish to be nurtured, she could have renounced this wish and resigned herself to a life in which she did the best she could to deal with her problems herself. We can say that in making such a shift the patient would be taking responsibility for her fear. In fact, the patient did not do this. She attempted to avoid the feared outcome — indeed, to make it impossible — but without renouncing her wish. By no means did she steadfastly assume her self-improvement stance. Again and again, she returned to making requests for assistance. These requests *invalidated her own stance* of dealing with her difficulties herself.[4]

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[4]Other possible ways of behaving nondefensively involve a straightforward compromise between wishes and fears. This is very common. Behavior patterns of this type do not involve entirely renouncing the wish. Instead, they pursue wished-for events in a way that lowers the

These considerations illustrate what is involved in "taking responsibility" for one's life. It is not an abstract matter of making commitments from some removed vantage point, that is, making the choice to care about and value certain things as opposed to "remaining" uninvolved (which, of course, reflects the view that the person is uninvolved at the outset). It involves taking responsibility for the wishes and fears one already has, and for the fact that one is involved in situations in which acting in certain ways has certain implications. Patterns of interpersonal defense constitute failures to take responsibility in this sense. The maxim is true about how, ultimately, it is not possible to avoid responsibility. However, this is not because choosing not to take some action (supposedly, to "remain" uninvolved) is still a choice, but because as an agent *involved in the world* a person is always already engaged in pursuing certain goals — notwithstanding the fact that defensive behavior represents an attempt to "undo" this connection.[5]

Struggling Against Involved Subjectivity

These remarks further clarify what was meant above about a fundamental breach. When an individual behaves in a defensive manner, it is as if he or she is refusing to accept the reality of involved subjectivity, the central tenet of the alternative philosophical perspective. Of course, this is not to say that defense involves a theoretical disagreement. Rather, it is a concrete and desperate effort to fly in the face of a basic feature of the nature of life. Clearly, this view of defense differs from the traditional approach, which suggests that, fundamentally, defense involves refusing to accept the truth as one would see it from the (supposedly fundamental) position of removed subjectivity (that is, engage in self-deception). *In the perspective offered here, the opposite of defense is not self-transparency. It is a proper alignment, or patterns of*

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risks of feared outcomes occurring, but also reduces the likelihood that wished-for outcomes will take place. These patterns are quite different from defensive patterns. In the case of a compromise of this sort, one pursues the wish in a way that takes feared consequences into account and attempts to avoid such outcomes. The wish is pursued in a way that reflects an acceptance of the possibility that it may not be realized. By contrast, defensive behavior does not tolerate the fear. It attempts to make it impossible. Also, it is characterized by an insistence on obtaining wished-for results, although it actually makes it virtually impossible that clear-cut wished-for outcomes will take place. Compromise behavior patterns also differ from defensive patterns in that their elements are organized in ways that fit together. They do not involve a breach.

[5]It is possible to draw a connection between these remarks and a notion advanced by the Palo Alto group by suggesting that defensive patterns constitute a way of being in a relationship that can be characterized, paradoxically, as an attempt to avoid being in a relationship (Bateson, 1972a; Watzlawick et al., 1967, p. 73).

actions that fully integrate one's wishes and fears in the context of an interpersonal relationship as one engages in that relationship over time. It is a stance that embraces the reality of being an involved subject.

At the outset of this article, I referred to Merleau–Ponty's (1962) dictum that life is lived, or real, before it is thought about. He offered this comment over against the commitment of Western philosophical thought to the view that the knowing relationship comes first. The foregoing remarks suggest that we can offer a parallel dictum that extends Merleau–Ponty's point to the moral sphere of human action and goals: life is lived, or real, before it is what we wish it to be and before it is something other than what we fear it to be. When a person acts defensively, he or she is struggling against this basic fact of life by trying to *insist* that his or her life *must* be something other than what he/she fears and that it *must* be what he/she wishes. Ultimately, these efforts fail because, in reality, for every person there are many moments in many situations when, in fact, it is not possible to pursue particular wishes without opening up the possibility of certain feared outcomes. As discussed above, on the immediate, concrete level this means that a defensive stance will lead to unintended negative consequences. It also means that although, fundamentally, every person is an involved subject, when we behave defensively we undermine rather than embrace our involvement in the world and in our lives.

Another Illustration of Interpersonal Defense as a Fundamental Breach

These observations about how defensive behavior represents a fundamental type of problem that concerns basic issues about living one's life as an agent involved in the world are some of the key points of this article. In order to make sure these ideas are clear, I will illustrate them again and elaborate upon them with a brief consideration of another clinical example. I will especially use this example to clarify (1) how the basic perspective of involved subjectivity helps us understand the concrete phenomena of defense, and (2) how defense undermines one's involvement in the world, even though a person is always an involved subject.

This example is about the husband in a marital therapy case. The couple entered treatment at his insistence because he was unhappy about the lack of intimacy in their relationship. There was very little warmth and affection between husband and wife, no sexual relationship, and almost no physical contact of any sort (e.g., holding hands). They spoke to one another rarely, with the exception of discussions about practical matters.

The husband's defensive pattern appeared in an especially striking way in one session. On that occasion, he was talking about his wish that his wife would reach out to him. At one point, he said it would mean so much to him

if she would let him know that she cared. Often, his wife responded to his requests for more closeness either by saying she simply was not able to be emotional or by taking issue with some particular detail in her husband's remarks (e.g., by pointing out that she did a specific favor for him), but at this juncture she responded in a simple and open way by saying that she did care about him. At that point, her husband looked from his wife to the therapist and back to his wife and then said to her "Remember, we have a witness." This remark derailed what otherwise might have become a very different type of interaction. The wife responded by qualifying her comment, denying that she had implied anything about having feelings toward him ("When I said I care, I just meant . . .").

The husband's comment about a witness may seem like a strange remark. In fact, the exchange just described exemplified a common defensive pattern in the man's behavior with his wife and with other people as well. He would ask his wife to be warm and caring toward him, but when she did reach out in some way, he would challenge her response by questioning whether it was genuine or by saying that whatever she offered was not enough. In general, he took an externalizing stance, placing responsibility on his wife for what happened and what did not happen between them.

We can only understand the husband's remark about a witness if we recognize the *meanings* involved in his pattern of behavior. In particular, it is necessary to consider the complex functional role played by his behavior pattern with respect to what he wished for and feared might occur in his relationship with his wife. This man wished for an emotionally close, intimate relationship with his wife in which she would be warm and caring toward him, but he was also afraid that if they became closer, she would find him to be inadequate. This fear of being inadequate, or "worthless" as he later put it, was quite powerful, especially when it came to the personal (in contrast to work) sphere of life. It was most intense regarding intimate relationships with a woman. He was very unsure that he would be able to do his part in an intimate relationship with his wife. The husband's pattern of behavior represented an attempt to encourage his wife to reach out to him (his wished-for outcome) but, at the same time, it also represented an attempt to avoid the consequence he feared. By doubting his wife's sincerity and emotional capacity, always asking for more from her and, in general, taking a critical, challenging stance that placed responsibility on his wife, the behavior pattern worked against situations in which she might raise questions about his adequacy in contributing to an intimate relationship even though there was a basis for the husband's fear that his wife would find him to be inadequate. For example, he repeatedly failed to follow through with household chores he had agreed to do and he routinely came home late from work (without call-

ing his wife to alert her) notwithstanding his wife's repeated requests that he join her and their children at dinner.

As was true in the example about the patient whose first therapist moved away, it is important to consider *how* the husband's behavior worked against the outcome he feared. I just noted that the comment about a witness expressed doubt about the wife's emotional capacity. This is accurate, but a key point about this comment is that it is not defensive *in itself*. The husband's doubting remarks might well be described as "negative," "critical," or even "mean spirited," but voicing such a view of a significant other does not in itself reflect a defensive attempt to avoid a feared consequence. Focusing on the husband's doubting remarks in themselves works against understanding the meanings involved in his defensive behavior, recognizing the implications of his pattern for events in his relationship with his wife, and properly characterizing his defense — even though, as I noted above in the discussion of the other clinical example, that is the approach most investigators have taken when they do depart from the traditional view of defense in some measure by examining interpersonal behavior.

As I argued in connection with the other clinical example, interpersonal defense involves *patterns* of behavior that are problematic in a particular way. The husband's comment about a witness was not a removed judgment, as if his negative evaluation of his wife was based on a third-person consideration of the likelihood she would follow through on her statement about caring for him. Instead, it is crucial to consider the husband's doubting comments *in the context of how he related to his wife at other points in time as a participant in the relationship*.

The important thing to notice about the husband's remark about a witness is that it did not fit in a straightforward manner with the overall pattern of the exchange. If he really believed that his wife was incapable of emotional expression, then why did he ask her to reach out? Conversely, given that he did ask her and also given the fact that she responded, then why did he reply by questioning her emotional capacity? An analysis based on recognizing that the husband is an agent-in-a-situation raises these questions and also suggests how to answer them. While at first blush the husband's doubting comments simply may seem to express a negative evaluation of his wife, their real significance is to place the burden of proof on her and take the husband off the hook *at those times* when the question of what he is able to contribute to the relationship might come up. In other words, the witness comment is not simply a matter of the husband attributing fault to his wife, but doing so *at those junctures when the outcome he fears might occur as a consequence of his own pursuit of his wish*.

Once again, an analogy to Archimedes' boast about moving the world is in order. Like Archimedes, the husband is trying to find a place to stand that is

not "in this world" so that he can gain the "leverage" he needs to successfully pursue his goal in a way that definitely will not lead to the outcome he fears. In fact, the grammar of interpersonal interactions in which one person expresses a wish for greater intimacy is such that these requests might result in the other person raising questions about the first person's ability to contribute to their relationship. For example, imagine that the husband had responded nondefensively when his wife said she did care about him, instead of making his comment about a witness. He might have said "It makes me feel so happy to hear you say that." To be sure, as compared to the witness comment, such a remark would be more likely to lead to a positive exchange. But it is also true that his wife would have been more likely to respond to this hypothetical nondefensive bid, as compared to the remark about a witness, in a way that directly questioned the husband's adequacy. She might well have replied "But are you going to do your share in this relationship?" The only way the husband can *attempt* (but not actually succeed) to pursue his wish that will not lead to his feared outcome for certain is by failing to integrate his behavior in the contexts of the interactions in which he is engaged as a participant, especially the context of his own prior behavior as an agent involved in these situations -- by including certain elements in his pattern of behavior that do not fit with others. And that is what he did, for example, with his comment about a witness.

But, as discussed above, this constitutes a fundamental breach. It represents a struggle against the husband's basic involvement in the world. Ultimately, such a struggle can never be successful. The person always remains an involved subject. In the final analysis, one is still standing on the ground — and will be tripped up by the fact that one's toe is in the sand. Archimedes could not move the earth, because no matter what efforts he might expend, his feet were always planted on it. Similarly, the husband cannot find a way to pursue his wish that definitely will not lead to the outcome he fears, because he is a participant in a relationship who has a wish for greater intimacy in his marriage. Pursuing this wish opens up the possibility of the negative outcome he fears even though the husband's defensive pattern, that is, his attempts to sidestep the implications of being an involved subject, may well offer the benefit of avoiding clear-cut instances of the feared outcome.

In fact, living one's life in this way leads to profound negative consequences. As was true in the first clinical example, one sense in which the husband's defensive pattern had negative effects is that it led to undesired interaction outcomes. Just as Archimedes' efforts had to fail because as he exerted force in one direction with his lever, he also exerted force in the opposite direction as his feet pushed against the earth, there are unintended, undesired consequences of interpersonal defense. This can be seen quite

clearly if we consider the fact that the husband's defensive behavior actually promoted the outcome he feared, although in an indirect, not clear-cut form.[6]

When we recognize that the husband is a participant in a relationship, it becomes possible to realize that the very elements that represented attempts to avoid the fear (the witness comment and, more generally, his doubting stance) made it *more likely* that his wife would treat him as inadequate, because when she did respond to his requests for her to be closer to him, he did not follow through. For example, when the husband made his comment about the witness (which occurred right after he told his wife it would mean so much to him if she told him she cared about him and her open response that she did care about him), he was not doing his part to contribute to an intimate relationship. *That is, by acting in that way in that situation he, in fact, was falling short, i.e., being inadequate.* Indeed, over the long term, the wife did find her husband to be inadequate, even though for the most part this did not appear in a clear-cut way. Instead, it could be seen in the fact that she did not rely on him.

The second sense in which the husband's defensive pattern had negative effects is that it undermined his role as a participant in a relationship with certain wishes and fears. As I suggested in the discussion of the other clinical example, although, fundamentally, a person is always an involved subject, when an individual behaves defensively his or her connection to the world is "weakened." By analogy, we can note that if Archimedes went ahead and tried to move the earth, even though he would have to do this while standing on the earth (that is, remain earthbound), his efforts might well prevent him from keeping his feet firmly planted on the ground.

The husband in our example failed to take responsibility. This point is *not* based on the fact that he took an externalizing stance. To be sure, his doubting, challenging comments attributed responsibility to his wife, but in themselves these remarks do not represent failing to take responsibility in the sense of interest here. Rather, the husband's stance represents a failure to take responsibility in the same way that was true about the internalizing patient in the other example. Curiously enough, if the husband had not undermined his doubting comments with repeated requests for closeness, he would have been taking responsibility (in the sense meant here) for attributing responsibility to his wife.

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[6]In contrast to the first clinical example where I discussed the other ways in which interpersonal defense leads to undesired consequences (how it works against instances of wished-for outcomes occurring and also redefines the significance of positive behaviors by the other person when they do take place so that it is virtually impossible to realize one's wish in a clear-cut manner), the present discussion will be limited to consideration of this one aspect of the counterproductive functional role played by the husband's behavior because this will suffice to make the point.

The key idea is that the husband attempted to pursue his wish in a way that involved insisting on realizing his wish while trying to make the consequence he feared impossible, even though pursuit of the wish opened up the possibility of the feared outcome. By proceeding in this way, he lost all chance of solid footing and failed to embrace both his wish and his fear. If he had taken responsibility for his wish for his wife to become closer to him, he would have responded very differently when she said that she did care about him, perhaps by making the hypothetical nondefensive response suggested above, "It makes me feel so happy to hear you say that." Relating to her in this way would also represent taking responsibility for his fear in the sense that it reflected accepting that the feared outcome might result from pursuing the wished-for goal. Instead, the husband's way of avoiding the feared result (e.g., making the comment about a witness when his wife responded positively to his request) undermined *his own wish* for her to be closer to him. Alternatively, the husband could have taken responsibility for his fear in a very different way by accepting a sense of inadequacy about participating in an intimate relationship with his wife. As a result, he might have safeguarded himself from being found inadequate by dispensing with his repeated requests for closeness. These requests invalidated *his own doubting stance* toward his wife. By dispensing with them, he would also be taking responsibility for his wish, because his stance would constitute renouncing the wish.

Things might not have worked out well if the husband had proceeded in either of these ways. If he pursued his wish in a nondefensive manner, his wife might not have responded positively to his efforts to create a closer relationship. Certainly, if he renounced his wish, this might well have safeguarded him from the outcome he feared, but realizing his wish would be unlikely (although not completely impossible — his wife might have felt safer with him and more ready to approach him). By all means, behaving nondefensively opens the possibility of unfortunate outcomes (while it also makes possible genuinely positive outcomes related to realizing wishes and/or avoiding feared consequences in a way that is not true at all for defensive interpersonal patterns). The point here is that if the husband approached his wife in a nondefensive manner, no matter how things worked out, he would have been on much more solid footing in terms of fully embracing his role as a participant in their relationship with certain wishes and fears. When a person behaves nondefensively, he or she acts in a manner that fully accepts the fact that for involved subjects having a wish and pursuing it involves making possible certain feared consequences and having a feared outcome and protecting oneself from it involves foregoing certain desired possibilities. Looking at this issue in a somewhat different way, we can also say that when a person behaves nondefensively, he or she accepts the fact that as an involved subject the elements that make up the person's patterns of behavior

must be integrated with his or her behavior as an agent-in-a-situation at other points in time or else their force as attempts to achieve wished-for goals and avoid feared outcomes will be invalidated.[7]

In sum, this example illustrates once again how defense involves engaging in a pattern of behavior that is problematic in a fundamental way. When a person behaves defensively, he or she is refusing to accept the reality of being an involved subject. This example also offers another illustration of the profound costs associated with such a struggle. It leads to undesired outcomes and it involves undermining rather than embracing one's participation in life.

Implications for Research and Practice

The theory of interpersonal defense offers a new perspective. It contrasts with the internal focus, emphasis on self-deception, and mechanistic nature of the traditional conceptualization of defense. Instead, it calls for a focus on what people do, attending to the functional role played by defensive patterns in ongoing interactions, and conceptualizing defense in terms of how individuals integrate their interpersonal behaviors in the context of interactions in which they engage as participants. This reorientation in basic approach to conceptualizing defense has many implications for research and clinical practice. Here, I will offer a few remarks to point out some of the main implications of the model, but it goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss these implications in detail.

I will start with suggestions for research. The theory of interpersonal defense offers a new response to a problem that has been identified repeatedly by investigators in this area — how to operationalize defenses (Andrews et al., 1989, p. 455; Horowitz, Milbrath et al., 1993, p. 278; Vaillant, 1994, p. 48). The approach calls for focusing directly on interpersonal behavior and it provides a framework for how to do this. According to the approach, interpersonal defense involves a breach in how an individual organizes his or her behavior as he/she engages in a relationship over time as an agent-in-a-situation. This idea provides direction for how to build on the seminal interpersonal and interactional perspectives of Horney (1939, 1945), Sullivan (1953, 1954), and the Palo Alto group (Bateson et al., 1956; Watzlawick

[7]I should note that relating nondefensively to another person is not an all or nothing matter, as the two alternatives offered above might suggest. It is possible to embrace certain aspects of a wish in certain situations, while foregoing others. For example, the husband might have pursued his wish for having intimate conversations with his wife, while putting aside requests for holding hands in public. But the key point holds: behaving nondefensively involves embracing the fact that for involved subjects, pursuing some aspect of a wish makes possible certain feared consequences and attempting to protect oneself from feared outcomes in certain situations involves foregoing some desired outcomes.

et al., 1967). Those contributions also direct attention to problematic interpersonal processes, but they have not provided an adequate basis for operationalizing these processes.[8]

Several lines of recent research have begun to study defense along these lines by employing techniques of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis, which was developed by researchers studying the pragmatics of language use, examines the relationship between the turns in an interaction (e.g., Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976; also see Westerman and Havstad, 1982). Such problematic discourse phenomena as unmarked shifts of topic provide a way to index defenses as conceptualized in the theory of interpersonal defense. In psychotherapy research I have conducted, discourse-oriented measures of "patient coordination," which assess how a patient relates his or her contributions to the therapy exchange with the therapist's contributions and with the patient's own prior contributions, showed robust relations with improvement and conformed to a number of other predictions about defensive patient behavior (Westerman and Foote, 1995; Westerman, Foote, and Winston, 1995; Westerman, Frankel, Tanaka, and Kahn, 1987; Westerman, Tanaka, Frankel, and Kahn, 1986). Horowitz and his colleagues (Horowitz, Milbrath et al., 1993; Horowitz, Stinson et al., 1993) also used a discourse approach to study patient behavior in therapy, assessing defense in terms of discourse-defined measures of "dyselaboration" and "elaboration." Also, Kobak and Duemmler (1994) developed a method for studying problematic discourse processes in terms of violations of Grice's (1989) conversational maxims, which led to interesting findings about interpersonal behavior in relationships with secure versus insecure attachments.

To be sure, this research only constitutes a preliminary investigation of defense along lines compatible with the interpersonal defense approach. Further research making use of discourse-oriented methods is called for to provide ways to characterize and identify processes of interpersonal defense. Nevertheless, the studies just cited suggest that these methods hold considerable promise as a basis for developing measures of degree and type of defen-

[8]Comparisons between the theory of interpersonal defense and the perspective developed by the Palo Alto group are especially interesting in certain respects, because both make use of explicit consideration of philosophical viewpoints. The Palo Alto group was very interested in the idea that individual behaviors must be understood in terms of the role they play in the overall pattern of interaction, but they conceptualized this in terms of a formalist theory, Russell's Theory of Logical Types (see Bateson, 1955, 1972b; Watzlawick et al., 1967). I believe their commitment to this rationalist philosophical perspective played a crucial role in limiting their ability to develop an adequate approach to operationalizing problematic interpersonal processes. In any event, their suggestions about examining discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal communications as a way to operationalize double binds (Bateson et al., 1956) had little direct connection to their basic theoretical model and led to highly inconsistent empirical findings (e.g., see Lessin and Jacob, 1979; Olson, 1972).

siveness to be used in studies of individual differences and for operationalizing defense in experimental investigations of processes involving interpersonal defense.

Other implications for research follow from the idea that defenses are attempts to influence interpersonal events. As noted, due to its internal focus, the traditional conceptualization points away from considering the ways defense impacts interpersonal relationships in favor of a focus on how it regulates inner experience. As a result, there has been almost no research investigating how defenses affect relationship events. There are some exceptions. For example, the Defense Mechanisms Rating Scales are based on some interesting observations about how certain defenses (e.g., hypochondriasis) affect other people (Perry and Cooper, 1989). Nevertheless, such considerations are rare in the research literature. Even in the case of the research by Horowitz and his colleagues (Horowitz, Milbrath et al., 1993; Horowitz, Stinson et al., 1993), which recognizes the importance of defensive interpersonal behavior and makes use of a discourse approach, there is a commitment to the idea that the purpose of defense is regulating internal states, not relationship events. Actually, this appearance of the internal focus is not surprising given that the approach taken by Horowitz and his colleagues is based on integrating psychoanalytic theory and cognitive science. *Both* of these theoretical perspectives have an internal focus. By contrast, the view that defenses play a functional role in interpersonal relationships is central to the theory of interpersonal defense. Furthermore, the approach includes a set of specific hypotheses about how interpersonal defenses feed forward to affect wished-for and feared relationship outcomes for both clear-cut occurrences and more indirect, not clear-cut, versions of these outcomes. These feed-forward effects could be investigated in observational studies of sequential dependencies between interpersonal defenses and wished-for or feared relationship events, or by means of structured interaction paradigms in which defensive behavior is experimentally manipulated. A discourse-oriented approach could be taken in such investigations.

The issue about feed-forward effects is quite important. If the theory of interpersonal defense is on the right track, it will not be possible to develop an adequate understanding of defenses without studying the functional role they play in the world. Otherwise, one is attempting to understand processes aimed at achieving certain goals without taking into consideration this fundamental feature of the phenomena. Studying the functional role played by defense is also important because it may well be that defense contributes to the development and maintenance of psychopathology precisely because it feeds forward into ongoing relationship events. These effects may result in cycles of interpersonal behavior that play a key role in many psychological disorders (see Wachtel, 1994).

Although it may not be apparent, these ideas about research, especially the suggestion about employing a discourse approach, reflect implications regarding research methodology that follow from the philosophical perspective based on involved subjectivity. Taking the person's active involvement in the world of practical activities as the cornerstone, instead of the knowing relationship between a removed subject and an object of inquiry, leads to very different views about the kind of understanding we can achieve regarding human behavior and appropriate methods of investigation. In general, we know things "from the inside," not as removed onlookers. And this certainly is true when it comes to human behavior, or practical activity, itself. It is not possible to reduce our understanding of behavior down to a mechanical, object language free of meaning, nor is it possible to "reduce it up" to an abstract, formal account that gets beneath or behind the concrete richness of events in the world. These two models of knowledge, which reflect the poles of the philosophical tradition, share in common a commitment to the possibility of formulating completely explicit, determinate accounts, the kind of understanding one could acquire from a position removed from the object of inquiry (see Dreyfus, 1992). According to the alternative philosophical perspective, however, it is not possible to get to the bottom of things using either of these strategies — or in any other way. Instead, as participants rather than observers, we understand human behavior in terms that are both irreducibly meaning-laden and concrete.

One implication that follows from these considerations when it comes to research methods is a rejection of operationism, the attempt to study behavior by means of completely specifiable procedures for examining brute, building-block events. Methods should be interpretive in nature. They should refer to natural language characterizations of behavior (and, hence, meaning) or to technical terms which themselves are ways of referring to meaning rather than efforts to explain it away. An example of a natural language characterization would be coding interpersonal behavior in terms of the category "attempt to elicit nurturance." A category Horowitz employs for studying his dyselaboration construct called "shift of topic" is an example of a technical term that provides a useful way to work with meaning instead of explain it away (Horowitz, Milbrath et al., 1993; Horowitz, Stinson et al., 1993). Clearly, in order to determine whether a response is a "shift of topic," one must consider the topic of the response in the present context (its meaning) in relation to the topic of the exchange up to that point.

The suggestion about employing interpretive approaches does not imply that an investigator conducting a study is free to draw whatever conclusions he or she prefers. The alternative philosophical perspective definitely points away from this idea because an investigator is also a participant in the world of practical activities. The notion that interpretive inquiry is arbitrary actu-

ally reflects a variant of traditional philosophy — the idea that the subject is a detached onlooker who "chooses" how to view things. The alternative perspective also points away from the idea that an interpretive method is limited to informal procedures. In fact, it leads to the conclusion that systematic investigations based on clearly defined behavior codes (but not meaning-free, brute categories) and well-designed experimental paradigms play a crucial role in efforts to learn about human behavior (Westerman, 1980, 1987; Westerman and Steen, 1998). Such investigations provide ways to study theoretical claims that may or may not be true, e.g., that patients with certain problems breach the requirement of integrating the elements of their interpersonal behavior with the overall pattern of their interactions in a particular way, or that interpersonal defense really does promote indirect versions of feared consequences. In addition, although systematic empirical inquiry cannot serve to reduce theoretical claims to simple building-block events, it does make it possible to specify concretely what such claims really mean, e.g., providing a *rich concrete characterization* of a problematic pattern typically employed by patients with a specific problem rather than an abstract description.

I have suggested using a discourse-oriented approach in research on interpersonal defense because it represents an excellent example of pursuing research along the lines just described. Discourse analysis provides a way to examine defensive behavior that does not focus on the occurrence of individual behaviors. Instead, it represents a method for examining those behaviors in the context of the patterns within which they play a role, and it does this in a way that gives a central place to considerations about meaning. For example, it is only possible to determine whether one turn in an interaction "incorporates" (elaborates upon) what has been said up to that point (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976) or if it represents a defensive breach as described in the present article by considering the meaning of behavior, not by trying to obviate the need for interpretation. At the same time, a discourse approach makes it possible to identify specific concrete forms the phenomena of interest take (e.g., "incorporation," "shift of topic").

Turning to implications for clinical practice, the theory of interpersonal defense provides suggestions for how to revisit a basic idea long-maintained by psychoanalytically-oriented clinicians. This is the view that consideration of defenses can contribute greatly to assessment and treatment. For example, defenses play a prominent role in dynamic formulations of cases, both in the parts of a formulation that characterize a patient's problems and also in the component aimed at predicting how those problems will impact the treatment process (Perry, Cooper, and Michels, 1987).[9]

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[9]Here, it is interesting to note, however, that research-based attempts to systematize dynamic formulations may be weakest precisely with regard to how they include defenses (Barber and

Given its focus on feed-forward effects, the theory of interpersonal defense is well-suited for the purpose of helping clinicians understand this double role that defenses play. As I have just suggested, the hypotheses regarding the self-defeating ways in which interpersonal defenses lead to unintended, undesirable outcomes offer a model for understanding how these recurring, problematic patterns of interpersonal behavior contribute to the development and maintenance of psychological disorders. Therefore, a clinician can use the approach to enhance his or her assessment of a case. The approach also provides a very direct way to think about how a patient's defenses might impact treatment because, as we saw in the clinical cases discussed earlier, these interpersonal patterns frequently appear in the context of the therapeutic relationship itself.

Along this vein, I believe that the theory of interpersonal defense provides a way to think about transference phenomena. A clinician can use the model as a framework to understand how a patient's interpersonal behavior leads to similar disappointments and frustrations in the therapeutic relationship as in many of the patient's other relationships. In fact, the hypotheses about feed-forward effects can provide a way to explain how a patient's stance may well lead the therapist to behave in a counterproductive manner the patient finds all too familiar.[10]

If defense processes play a role in patient's problems and in how patients approach the treatment context and if we conceptualize these roles in terms of the theory of interpersonal defense, this certainly has implications for interventions. To be sure, it is a complicated matter to determine what these implications are. I will offer two remarks about this issue here (also see Westerman, 1993). The internal focus of the traditional conceptualization of defense and its emphasis on self-deception in particular point toward the use

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Crits–Christoph, 1993). I believe that the traditional conceptualization of defense makes it unwieldy to incorporate the basic notion of defense in these efforts because that approach does not address the role defenses play in an ongoing relationship, but this role is of central relevance for understanding how defenses are involved in a patient's difficulties and how they will affect treatment.

[10]I also believe the theory of interpersonal defense can contribute to our understanding of alliance phenomena. Numerous studies have demonstrated that patients' contribution to the alliance is associated with outcome in therapy (Horvath and Symonds, 1991), but basic questions remain unanswered about how to characterize alliance phenomena and how they impact outcome. Along with many other contributors, I believe the concepts of the therapeutic alliance and transference refer to highly overlapping phenomena. In contrast to other investigators who hold this position (e.g., see Horvath and Luborsky, 1993, p. 562), however, I do not believe the primary reason for this overlap is that both involve interpersonal patterns derived from early childhood experiences. In my opinion, the main reason is that the processes of central clinical relevance identified under both headings involve defensive interpersonal patterns.

of interpretation. The theory of interpersonal defense, on the other hand, leads to the idea that interpersonal, "enacted" intervention strategies will often be the most effective way to respond to a patient's defenses. This implication of the theory may make the idea that it is important to take defenses into account when formulating intervention approaches more congenial to non-analytically-oriented clinicians. Another point is that this suggestion about "taking defenses into account" does not necessarily imply that interventions should be aimed at changing defensive patterns. In fact, I believe a useful typology identifies three kinds of interventions: interventions that attempt to change defenses; those that take defenses into account as they attempt to promote other changes, but do not attempt to change the defenses themselves (that is, interventions that "undermine" defenses); and interventions that simply ignore defenses. Both the first and second type of intervention can make important contributions to effective therapeutic strategies.

Reconceptualizing Inner Processes

I will turn to an issue concerning theory and research for one final remark about implications. As noted at many points above, the theory of interpersonal defense contrasts with the internal focus of the traditional conceptualization of defense, which includes an emphasis on intrapsychic mechanisms of self-deception. According to the basic philosophical perspective of involved subjectivity, it does not make sense to view defense, fundamentally, as a departure from the canonical state of self-transparency, because self-transparency is not the canonical state — indeed, it is a state that is impossible to attain. Nevertheless, as noted near the outset of this article, the philosophical perspective does not reject the existence of inner events. Also, while self-transparency may never occur, people are aware of their thoughts and feelings in different ways and to greater or lesser degrees. No doubt, how we understand ourselves, perceive others, and so forth play roles in defense and these processes should be part of a complete model of defense.

The theory of interpersonal defense does not call for rejecting the traditional ego mechanisms of defense, but it suggests that we reconceptualize those processes. According to the philosophical perspective, inner processes in general exist, but it is important to recognize that they play a role within the context of practical know how. Similarly, *the theory of interpersonal defense incorporates intrapsychic processes by directing attention to the functional role these processes play in ongoing relationships*. This point begins with the observation that when an individual makes use of denial, projection, excessive self-doubt (turning against the self), or the other ego mechanisms of defense, this makes a difference in what happens in that person's relationships with others. But

according to the reconceptualization, these effects are not by-products, or indirect consequences, of efforts to regulate the individual's internal state (as in the concept of secondary gain). Rather, the internal mechanisms develop and are maintained because of the role they play in interpersonal relationships. In other words, their existence is guided and supported by feedback regarding how they influence events in the world. Just as is true in the case of defensive interpersonal behavior, to say that internal processes play a functional role does not imply that the links between these processes and the ways they make a difference in interpersonal relationships are simple and direct or that they are truly effective with respect to obtaining desired goals. Without doubt, the ways in which these inner processes contribute to defenses are quite complicated and self-defeating in the long run.

Note that reconceptualizing inner processes in the way suggested might explain research findings challenging the old maxim about an association between psychological health and self-knowledge (see Taylor and Brown, 1988). While these results are confusing in terms of notions about self-deception and self-transparency central to the traditional approach to defense, they are not puzzling from the perspective here suggested because assessments of self-knowledge do not examine the role played by subjects' self-understanding in their ongoing behavior. According to the reconceptualization, in a given case, the "same" self-understanding could be linked in either constructive or maladaptive ways to the person's patterns of behavior. It should also be noted that this reconceptualization of internal processes, and the theory of interpersonal defense in general, are similar in several respects to current views of emotion advanced by investigators developing a functionalist approach in that area. Those investigators view emotions as organized patterns of action aimed at achieving a person's goals. They consider the internal experience of feelings to be only one part of emotion and conceptualize these subjective experiences in terms of the roles they play in the action patterns (Campos, 1994; Campos, Campos, and Barrett, 1989; Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, 1988, 1990; Greenberg and Safran, 1987; Safran and Greenberg, 1986; Westen, 1985, 1986).[11]

[11]I have discussed the idea about reconceptualizing internal processes in several other places (Westerman, 1987, 1989; Westerman and Steen, 1998), including a brief consideration of this idea in connection with the case example about the patient whose first therapist moved away (Westerman, 1993, pp. 194).

Concluding Remarks: A Fundamental Fault-Line

I have characterized the use of interpersonal defense as a "desperate struggle" that has enormous costs. These costs include the ways defensive behavior leads to a set of unintended negative consequences (actually making it unlikely that wished-for results will occur in a clear-cut way and promoting indirect versions of feared outcomes) and how it undermines a person's involvement in his or her life. Given this, one might ask why people engage in these desperate efforts.

Certainly, one answer to this question is that people act in this way in order to pursue what they wish for in a manner that avoids feared results. As I have argued above, defenses can be quite effective in avoiding feared outcomes, at least with respect to clear-cut occurrences of these outcomes. In addition, they often lead to distorted versions of wished-for outcomes. We can also add developmental considerations to this answer. It may well be that individuals initially make use of interpersonal defenses in childhood because these patterns of behavior are the most effective ways to respond in certain difficult family situations. Some people may then go on to employ these patterns of interpersonal behavior in other contexts, notwithstanding the fact that they are no longer (relatively) effective.

A response along these lines, which suggests that employing interpersonal defenses represents a costly "mistake," probably goes a long way to answering the question. Nevertheless, I believe there is more to this issue. I will conclude by offering some speculations about the basis for defensive behavior. I will suggest that not only does interpersonal defense represent a breach that takes place at the core of human behavior, but our vulnerability for committing breaches of this sort is itself linked to fundamental features of human behavior.

The question about why people behave defensively can be related to another, very general issue. Earlier, I suggested that when a person behaves in a defensive manner, it is as if he or she is refusing to accept the reality of involved subjectivity. This observation suggests drawing a parallel between interpersonal defense, on the concrete, personal level of day-to-day behavior, and the traditional conceptualization of defense and the philosophical tradition it reflects, on the level of theory, because these theoretical positions also involve a rejection of involved subjectivity. We can repeat our question at the theoretical level and ask: Why do traditional philosophy and theory in psychology fail to acknowledge involved subjectivity? Here again, it is possible to argue that theories based on the notion of the uninvolved subject are simply "mistaken," although, to be sure, if this is a mistake it is certainly a big one. However, Merleau–Ponty (1962) considered this question and concluded that the notion of the uninvolved subject, while misguided, is not

simply an error. His views on this issue about philosophical commitments throw light on our question about defensive behavior.

Merleau–Ponty argued that the basis for the philosopher's idea of the uninvolved subject lies in the very nature of human behavior. At its core, human behavior is comprised of actions that are embedded in the world of practical activities. There is not a person on one side of a divide acting with respect to the world on the other side in order to achieve some goal the person brings to the situation. In fact, as I have indicated above, according to the philosophical perspective of involved subjectivity, a person's goals themselves are defined and limited by a preexisting involvement in the world (see Westerman, 1987).

Note, however, that this emphasis on a fundamental connection to the world does not imply that the "fit" between a person and the contexts in which that person leads his or her life is a seamless one. To say that, fundamentally, a person is involved in the world is to say that we live our lives from within the world, that we are a part of the world, not separated from it, but it also means we act as participants *with a particular vantage point* in the world — a particular perspective that reflects such things as individual history and specific location at a moment in time. Hence, although involvement in the world defines and limits human behavior, it does not do so completely. It provides a framework or context with respect to which actions and goals have their place, but this is by no means a matter of "plugging in" behaviors to ready-made slots. People are not always ready to act in ways that smoothly fit in the situations in which they are involved. Looking at it the other way, when a person has a particular goal, events in that person's life may well not line up with obtaining that goal. Indeed, it is precisely because the fit between person and world is far less than a perfect one that pursuing wishes often opens up the possibility of feared outcomes. Going back to the example about making a kind remark, we can see that the fit is not seamless by considering such a commonplace event as wanting to offer such a comment but having to contend with the fact that the room is extremely noisy.

The ability to coordinate specific actions with the contexts in which people participate involves dealing with this lack of fit between goals and situation. In the example just mentioned, the individual might raise his or her voice making sure that the tone of the remark is not strident notwithstanding its volume. To be sure, this example just scratches the surface of our abilities for coming to terms with the lack of perfect fit between goals and situations. In fact, human behavior is characterized by a wide range of truly remarkable capacities along these lines. Hence, *to a point,* it is as if we can find Archimedes' place to stand, a position from which it is possible to move the world. As Merleau–Ponty (1962) put it, our involvement in the world gets "covered over." The very nature of how we organize our behavior involves taking into account and struggling to control and, in a sense, "undo" that connection.

We do not, in fact, move the world, but rather some small set of events within it. And we do not actually do this by finding a place to stand outside the world. Instead, we develop increasingly complex ways of dealing with specific situations in terms of our place within the world overall. The person offering his or her kind remark in a loud voice but not with a strident tone is still very much acting as an agent involved in the world. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that in its basic nature human behavior involves "covering over," even if not actually undoing, our involvement in the world.

There is a delicate balance between participating in situations in a way that covers over our connection to the world "as if" we were separate from it, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the fundamental fact that we are agents involved in the world and that, therefore, we must integrate our actions with the contexts that make up our lives. Indeed, this delicate balance can be described as a *fundamental fault-line in human nature*. When things are going well with respect to this balance — which does not mean, necessarily, that an individual is achieving his or her goals — a person actively takes his or her place, that is, pursues the goals of an agent with a particular vantage point in ways that fit with being part of the world that defines and limits the person's life. In this case, "fitting with" will no doubt include challenging and struggling against certain aspects of the situations rather than just "going along with" things, but there will not be a violation or breach of that person's involvement in the world. The individual's feet will still be firmly planted in his or her place in the world, even though this will include complex patterns of behavior that represent anything but acquiescing to the immediate constraints of specific situations.

But the fundamental fault-line also opens up the possibility of "going astray," as Wittgenstein (1958) would say. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that the process of "covering over" is the basis for the fundamental commitment in the philosophical tradition to an alienated view of subject and object as essentially unrelated. In other words, the commitment of the philosophical tradition to the notion of the uninvolved subject is not simply a "mistake." It is a misguided view at the level of theory based on real features of human behavior, specifically, the fact that our concrete actions are organized in ways that attempt, in a sense, to take account of and undo our connection to the world.[12]

[12]Wittgenstein (1958) had a similar idea about the basis for misguided philosophical ideas. He was very interested in language. For him, language does not involve a removed subject talking about the world, but a set of organized behaviors inextricably linked to actively participating in it. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein was intrigued by the observation that the ways in which we engage in the world of practical activities itself sets the stage for neglecting our connections to those situations, and that this is reflected in language. As he put it, we are easily misled by everyday language. For example, when philosophers (and lay people as well) consider state-

The fault-line does not only lead to problems at the level of theory and philosophy. It also provides the basis for difficulties in the concrete, personal realms of life. In fact, the risks may be especially great when it comes to interpersonal relationships. The process of covering over certainly takes place in that domain. People behave in their relationships with others in ways aimed at achieving their goals (obtaining what they wish for and avoiding feared outcomes) by taking into account refractory, troublesome aspects of the relevant situations. This is where the fault-line comes in. Frequently, we pursue our goals by means of actions that are integrated in a straightforward manner with how we have been participating in the relationship up to the point in question and with other features of the situation, even if those actions reflect attempts to influence and change how things will go in the future. But, as we have seen, our remarkable capacities for struggling against aspects of the interpersonal situations in which we are involved also can take the form of pursuing goals in the problematic manner that characterizes defensive behavior. In these cases, the processes of covering over not only represent attempts to take account of the person's connection to the world, but they breach that connection in a desperate effort to find some way of acting that will *insure* that certain outcomes *must* result (wished-for outcomes definitely will occur and feared outcomes will not take place). In other words, defensive behavior represents an attempt to find Archimedes' place to stand, a way of behaving in a relationship that fully undoes the constraints of being a participant in the relationship.[13]

As we have seen, ultimately, such efforts will not prove successful. A person is an agent-in-a-situation. It is not possible to find a place outside the situation that actually undoes our connection to the relationship, the responsibilities inherent in being a participant who has taken a certain stance in the relationship at an earlier point in time, or the concrete reality

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ments like "I believe that X," it is very tempting to move away from appreciating that these utterances, fundamentally, are speech acts by means of which a person does something (telling someone else that the speaker can be expected to act in certain ways, announcing that the speaker will defend his point of view, and so forth) and to think, instead, that statements of this type basically are reports of "internal mental states."

[13]The parallel suggested here between defensive behavior on the one hand and the traditional conceptualization of defense and traditional philosophy on the other raises yet another issue for speculative consideration. This is the question of whether traditional theoretical approaches in psychology and philosophy can be characterized as "defensive." While this is a very difficult (as well as sensitive and curious) question to consider, I believe there may be something to this idea. When at the level of theory a person views human behavior and life in general from a perspective based on the notion of the uninvolved subject, he or she is attempting to understand and control things (the wish) in a manner that *insists* these efforts *must* not lead to discovering that there are limits to what we can know and what our possibilities are as human beings (the fear).

that in most cases pursuing wished-for outcomes opens up the possibility of feared consequences. A person's feet are still lodged in the situation, notwithstanding all kinds of complex attempts to free them. As a result, defensive behavior does not work. It leads to unintended consequences. We have also discussed how, unhappily, acting in this way does violence to one's connection to the world. Although defensive behavior does not "undo" the connection, it does undermine a person's involvement in his or her life and in the world.

These remarks about the basis for defense do not address the important issue of why the fault-line remains solid for some people in some situations while other people in certain contexts go astray when it comes to the delicate balance between the processes of covering over our connection to the world and integrating our actions with the contexts in which we are involved. No doubt, it would be necessary to consider environmental and constitutional factors to answer that question. But the suggestion here is that in order to address that issue and to advance our understanding of processes of defense in general, it may be useful to recognize that the vulnerability for engaging in defensive behavior and, therefore, the vulnerability for acting in ways that undermine the extent to which a person is truly involved in his or her life and in the world, is inherent in the very way in which we are involved in the world as agents-in-a-situation engaged in the world from a particular vantage point within it.

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