



Psychological Adaptive Mechanisms: Ego Defense Recognition in Practice and Research

By Thomas P. Beresford MD

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This book will demonstrate how to use novel, systematic method for recognizing psychological adaptive mechanisms (known in psychoanalytic theory as ego defenses) in clinical encounters. This clinical method is based in published theoretical and empirical studies of these mechanisms over the past 14 years as well as working with successive classes of mental health trainees of varying disciplines at the University of Colorado. The result is an approach that trainees both apprehend and find useful. This work will offer the mental health disciplines, and even wider audiences, a platform both for 1) clinical use in everyday practice, 2) continuing clinical studies of adaptive psychology as well as 3) direct application of psychological adaptive mechanisms theory in clinical research that will improve the diagnosis and treatment of persons with mental or emotional disorders.

This an important empirical model for understanding how humans adapt to the stressful experiences of their lives. They have developmental, biological, and evolutionary significance and all of these will be discussed in the book. Psychological Adaptive Mechanisms are observable behaviors that range on a developmental hierarchy from the Primitive defenses of normal early childhood and of major mental illness in adults, through the Mature defenses of fully functioning adulthood. They also serve to limit and to direct the human anxiety response, giving the "fight or flight" reaction to threat many more than those two classically described behavioral options. These mechanisms are likely transduced by the brain and, in providing wider ranges of adaptive behavior, most probably reflect an evolutionary selection towards greater flexibility of adaptation.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Tom Beresford has written a wonderful book for anyone interested in the complexities of the human mind. He brings superior teaching skills and thirty years of clinical experience together with the talents of a poet and the literary knowledge of an English professor. Each literary and clinical vignette used to illuminate unconscious coping mechanisms is a gripping, lucid, believable and compelling departure from what leads many of us away from "psychoanalytic" writing. This is a book for both beach and academic library reading." --George E. Vaillant MD, author of *The Life and Lives of the Harvard Grad Study*

"Tom Beresford shows us clearly that psychodynamic assessment can be carried out reliably on the basis of observable behavior. In his view adaptive mechanisms are flexible and creative means of coping as well as possible, rather than involuntary defenses. His positive psychobiological approach is lucidly described with insightful case histories and other examples from writers as diverse as Homer, Chekhov, and Shakespeare. Psychiatry residents and anyone else who wants to understand human motives will delight in its content and style." -- C. Robert Cloninger, MD, Renard Professor of Psychiatry & Genetics, Washington University & Author of *Feeling Good: The Science of Well-being*

"With *Psychological Adaptive Mechanisms* Dr. Beresford has presented to us a compassionate, humane, eminently readable and clinically useful labor of love. He gives us a generous mixture of clinical experience, systematic research, and poetry, helping the reader to see the poetry in each person's striving for growth and intimate connection. This book that grows out of his own teaching and clinical experience will prove most useful for trainees in all the mental health disciplines, both in the USA and abroad." -- Bennett Simon, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School (Cambridge Health Alliance); Training and Supervising Analyst, Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute.

"From the outside, Thomas Beresford may seem to have been living a double life. A trained poet and psychiatrist, he has continued to practice both activities, though one of them pays for the groceries. He himself must have felt the strains of this division. In this book, we see Beresford engaging the full range of his training and his loves. He deals with psychiatric issues, drawing on a lifetime of experience and research. His definitions of terms are concise and pointed. *Psychological Adaptive Mechanisms*, shrewd and engaging, has the feel of a work of personal adaptation. Anyone intrigued by Harold Bloom's assertion that he's not interested in Freudian readings of Shakespeare, but rather in Shakespearean readings of Freud, will want to embark on Beresford's fascinating intellectual journey." --Kenneth Fields, PhD, Professor of English and Creative Writing, Stanford University

"Following on the work of Vaillant, Dr. Beresford brings each defense alive through telling stories from history, literature, poetry, art and clinical experience, all jargon-free. In these vignettes, the leitmotifs of how

each individual recognizes stress, appropriates the need to deal with it, and integrates thought and feeling lead the reader to understand why each defense is less or more adaptive. Since we all use defenses, read this to find out what we are - often inadvertently - doing to or for ourselves in the process!"--J. Christopher Perry, MPH, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, McGill University

"For those in academia, as well as those with a serious interest in psychology, *Psychological Adaptive Mechanisms* presents a compelling argument that is well-written, well-outlined and well-supported...Beresford's writing is clear and understandable. This is an admirable book and I believe it's safe to say its worth will not be downplayed." -- Dan Berkowitz, *PsychCentral*

About the Author

Dr. Beresford is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Trained in psychiatry at The Cambridge Hospital/Harvard Medical School, he has focused his clinical and scientific career on the psychiatric problems that medical and surgical patients encounter, whether in adjusting to illness or in returning to normal brain functioning. His interest in psychological adaptive mechanisms comes from applying scientific methods to clinically relevant human behavior and brain function. He has developed both clinical and teaching methods to understand and use adaptive mechanism recognition with greater, and more practical, precision.

Dr. Beresford is internationally known for his work in alcoholism and liver transplantation where he developed a clinical method for evaluating alcohol dependent patients for this life saving procedure. His current projects include studies of psychological adaptive mechanisms in the differential diagnosis and treatment of medical/psychiatric disorders that include cancer. He also studies biological mechanisms that promote alcohol abstinence, and medicinal treatment of traumatic brain injury.

In addition to his medical interests, Dr. Beresford earned an M.A. degree in English literature from Boston College and won a Wallace Stegner Fellowship In Creative Writing (poetry) at Stanford University. Most recently, he held a Fellowship from the Council of Deans of the American Association of Medical Colleges

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