

Excerpts from
CHAPTER TWO
The Six Self-Protections
We Use to Deny Low Rank

It is not always easy to know when we have fallen into ranking and undervaluing ourselves even to the point of feeling worthless, because we each employ largely unconscious self-protections to keep us from feeling shame. The shame that follows a social defeat is, as the last chapter explained, registered in the brain in the same place as physical pain. No wonder we say that it hurts to be rejected or to fail and that we have found ways not to feel that pain. To know when we are undervaluing ourselves and by how much, we first have to remove our blinders.

We have six main self-protections: minimizing, blaming, noncompeting, overachieving, inflating, and projecting. These self-protections sometimes allow us to stay unaware of, or avoid, our worst feelings. But these mechanisms can cause as much trouble as the defeat response and the negative self-conscious emotions they are designed to protect against. For example, blaming others for our failings *when they are not to blame* will make us feel good only until we are faced with contrary evidence, as we almost surely will be.

Usually we are not aware that we are using self-protections. If the six self-protections we use to deny low rank we were aware of them, they wouldn't work. They are attempts to fool ourselves, and perhaps others, about our rank. "Who, me? I'm not feeling powerless and shamed." But because these self-protections have covered over some of the times when you have felt undervalued, you will have to strip them away before you can see, feel, and eliminate your feelings of worthlessness. As a bonus, not only will you be more aware of when you are using self-protections, but you will be able to identify when others are doing so. This awareness will help to keep you from assuming blame or feeling inferior to someone who is inflating his or her rank and from carrying the burden of others' undervalued selves.