

The Projection Question

Sometimes what you hate in them lives in you. And sometimes they're just behaving badly.

There's an idea loose in internet shadow-work culture that everything you dislike in another person is secretly you. That's nonsense, and this room won't do it to you. Projection is real — sometimes an outsized reaction is pointing at something exiled in yourself. But sometimes your reaction is simply your values working correctly. This room asks the questions honestly and accepts either answer. About ten minutes.

ONE

What specifically are they doing?

Behavior, not character. Not "they're toxic" — what do they actually *do*? Interrupt, take credit, never ask a question, promise and vanish?

TWO

Is it actually violating one of your values or boundaries?

Check honestly: does this behavior cross something you genuinely hold — honesty, respect, reliability — or is it just a style you dislike?

THREE

Does this behavior remind you of someone else?

Sometimes the person in front of you is carrying someone else's bill. Who else did this — earlier, and with more power over you?

FOUR

Are they doing something you don't permit yourself?

The strange one, asked without judgment: do they take up space you'd never let yourself take, say no the way you wish you could, rest without earning it? Envy in a costume is a common source of outsized irritation.

FIVE

Is there anything here you recognize in yourself?

Not "am I exactly like them" — but is there a quieter version of this that's yours? A tell is when the same trait bothers you in some people and not others.

SIX

The honest verdict — both answers count

Read your answers and write the verdict. It's one of two, and neither is a failure: *"Yes — there may be something here worth examining,"* or *"No — my reaction is telling me this behavior isn't acceptable to me."*

The second one is not a lack of self-awareness. It's self-awareness working.

If the verdict was "something to examine," the Trigger Mirror takes one incident deeper, and the Shadow Work room has a whole exercise — The Mirror — built for exactly this. If the verdict was "this isn't acceptable to me," the Boundary Builder is the next room over.

IF IT STIRRED SOMETHING UP

Coming back down

Breathe in through your nose for four, out through your mouth for eight — longer out than in — for a few minutes. Then name five things you can see, four you can hear, three you can touch. Stirred-up feelings after writing like this are common and tend to pass; if they don't, that's information that this deserves more support than a page can give.

If you're in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, please don't work through it alone here. In the US, call or text 988 (the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or chat at 988lifeline.org — available 24/7. Outside the US, findahelpline.com lists helplines around the world.

A BLESSING ON THIS WORK

This work is a gift. Share it freely with anyone who needs it — print it, copy it, pass it on whole. It is not for sale, by us or by anyone, and it shouldn't be changed. Above all, keep the crisis lines and the words about seeking professional help exactly as they are — for someone, those may be the lines that matter most. It exists to help people heal, and to raise the vibration of the world. That will never cost anything here.

— Aether & Root · aetherandroot.com/inner-work