

The Ego Defense Mechanisms

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1600-1700

Live ZOOM

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The Ego Defense Mechanisms: Objectives

At the end of this 1- hour lecture, the student will have a better understanding of:

- ▶ 1. Transference and Counter-transference and how either might impact treatment
- ▶ 2. The difference between positive and negative transference.
- ▶ 3. How positive and negative transference can color treatment issues.
- ▶ 4. Freud's Structural Theory and the roles of the Id, the Ego and Superego
- ▶ 5. The role of anxiety in causing defense mechanisms to be employed
- ▶ 6. The levels of defense mechanisms

The Ego Defense Mechanisms: Objectives

At the end of this 1- hour lecture, the student will have a better understanding of

7. Specific defense mechanisms, including:

Denial
Projection
Conversion
Splitting
Fixation
Acting out
Repression
Reaction Formation
Rationalization
Intellectualization
Isolation of Affect

Regression
Displacement
Undoing
Altruism
Humor
Sublimation
Suppression
Introjection
Identification

Note: This lecture and or the video(s) that accompany it contain content that may elicit uncomfortable feelings in some students.

The Defense Mechanisms

► Transference

- ▶ Patient Unconsciously projects his/her emotions / thoughts / wishes related to certain significant person(s) in the past onto the psychiatrist.
- ▶ Example: Patient unconsciously responds to a clinician in the same manner the patient responded to an authority figure from the past , such as a parent.

Ex: Patient distrusts her therapist because her own mother allowed her to be abused as a child by her step father.

Patient meets his male therapist for the first time. He immediately realizes that he does not like the therapist, but cannot explain why he has this feeling. It is later uncovered that both the therapist and his father have beards. His father beat him for no reason.

The Defense Mechanisms

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► Transference (continued)

- ▶ The physician–patient relationship is not entirely or primarily rational. Patients attach all types of wishes, expectations and sentiments onto their physicians. The majority of these remain unknown to the physician.
- ▶ Example: patient is angry for having to wait 2 hours in the waiting room to see her doctor. (This is not transference)
- ▶ However, imagine if this same patient were raised in a family with numerous siblings, each vying for the parent's attention and had to endure more than his or her share of delayed gratification. In such a case, sitting in the waiting room might stir up all sorts of painful memories and associated feelings, whether conscious or not, and would serve to intensify and color an otherwise legitimate resentment.

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ Transference (continued)
 - ▶ A. Positive Transference
 - ▶ A patient likes his doctor, adores him, etc. This is very helpful in having the patient follow the treatment plan. Will often allow the patient to trust a physician before they have objective basis for such confidence.

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ Transference (continued)
 - ▶ A. Positive Transference (continued)
 - ▶ Example:
 - ▶ A patient refuses to have an MRI exam. She is causing staff great concern and is delaying the MRI of others scheduled that day. A senior physician intervenes and permits her the time to express her concerns/anxiety about the procedure. At that point, she then says, “you remind me of my father. He was so wonderful to me.” She then permits the MRI to begin without further delay.

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ **Transference (continued)**
 - ▶ **B. Negative Transference**
 - ▶ Typically interferes with treatment strategies, as the patient and doctor are at odds.
 - ▶ A patient dislikes the doctor, resents him and his position of authority... for no objective reason.

The Defense Mechanisms

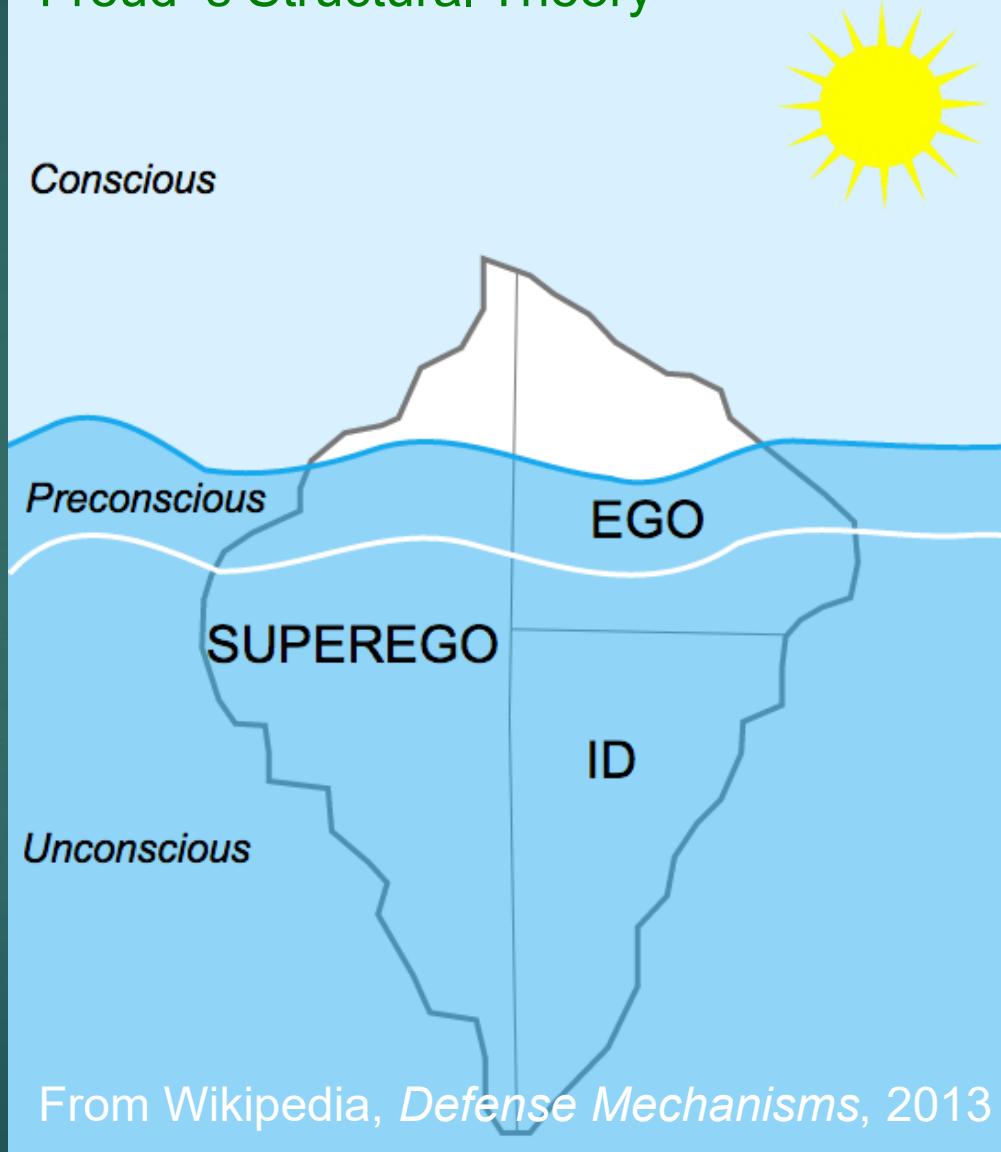
► Countertransference

- The physician unconsciously projects his or her own emotions from the past onto the patient, or onto the material the patient is presenting.
- Represents unresolved needs of the therapist
- Examples:
 - Clinician never questions what an attractive patient might say, because he has an unconscious desire to be liked/loved.
 - Physician feels himself becoming upset because a patient never does what he/she was told to do regarding the use of illicit substances. Actually, this is due to the clinician unconsciously being upset because his son will not listen to his father when told to do his homework and is getting poor grades.

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ Now let's look at Freudian Theories

Freud's Structural Theory



Psychodynamics



Homer
Simpson
is in a bit
of a [REDACTED]
quandary

The Defense Mechanisms

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- ▶ Psychodynamics
- ▶ Freud's Structural Theory
- ▶ Id: Psychic Representation of all biologic urges and drives-is present from birth
 - ▶ Hunger, Thirst , Sexuality
 - ▶ Id governed by the Pleasure Principle
 - ▶ Id tries to avoid pain and tries to achieve pleasure
 - ▶ Cannot tolerate any delay in gratification
 - ▶ Operates according to Primary Process thinking
 - ▶ A primitive form of wish fulfillment and magical thinking.

Examples:

- ▶ Create mental image of food when hungry
- ▶ Hallucinations of psychotic patients

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ Psychodynamics
 - ▶ Freud's Structural Theory (Continued)
 - ▶ Ego: (Note: The ego develops from the id, so it must address the demand of the id if it is to do its work properly)
 - ▶ Maintains an appropriate relationship with the environment
 - ▶ Speech,
 - ▶ Movement
 - ▶ Language
 - ▶ Concentration
 - ▶ Remembering
 - ▶ Reality testing
 - ▶ Attention
 - ▶ Judgment
 - ▶ Defense mechanisms

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ Psychodynamics
 - ▶ Freud's Structural Theory (Continued)
 - ▶ Ego: Based upon the Reality Principle
 - ▶ Allows Delayed Gratification
 - ▶ Ego operates according to Secondary Process thinking
 - ▶ Synonymous with realistic thinking and problem solving
 - ▶ Begins to develop by 6-8 months and established by Age 2-3

The Defense Mechanisms

- ▶ **Psychodynamics**
 - ▶ Freud's Structural Theory (Continued)
 - ▶ **Superego**: Moral Function of Personality
 - ▶ Begins to develop by age 5-6, in place by 10-11
 - ▶ **Conscience**
 - ▶ Self-punishment for forbidden thoughts / actions
 - ▶ Approval or disapproval of actions and integrity
 - ▶ Honesty and righteousness
 - ▶ Critical self-observation
 - ▶ Demand for reparation or repentance of wrong doing
 - ▶ Self-praise or self-love as reward for desirable thoughts or actions
 - ▶ **Ego Ideal**
 - ▶ Moral Perfection we strive for

The Defense Mechanisms

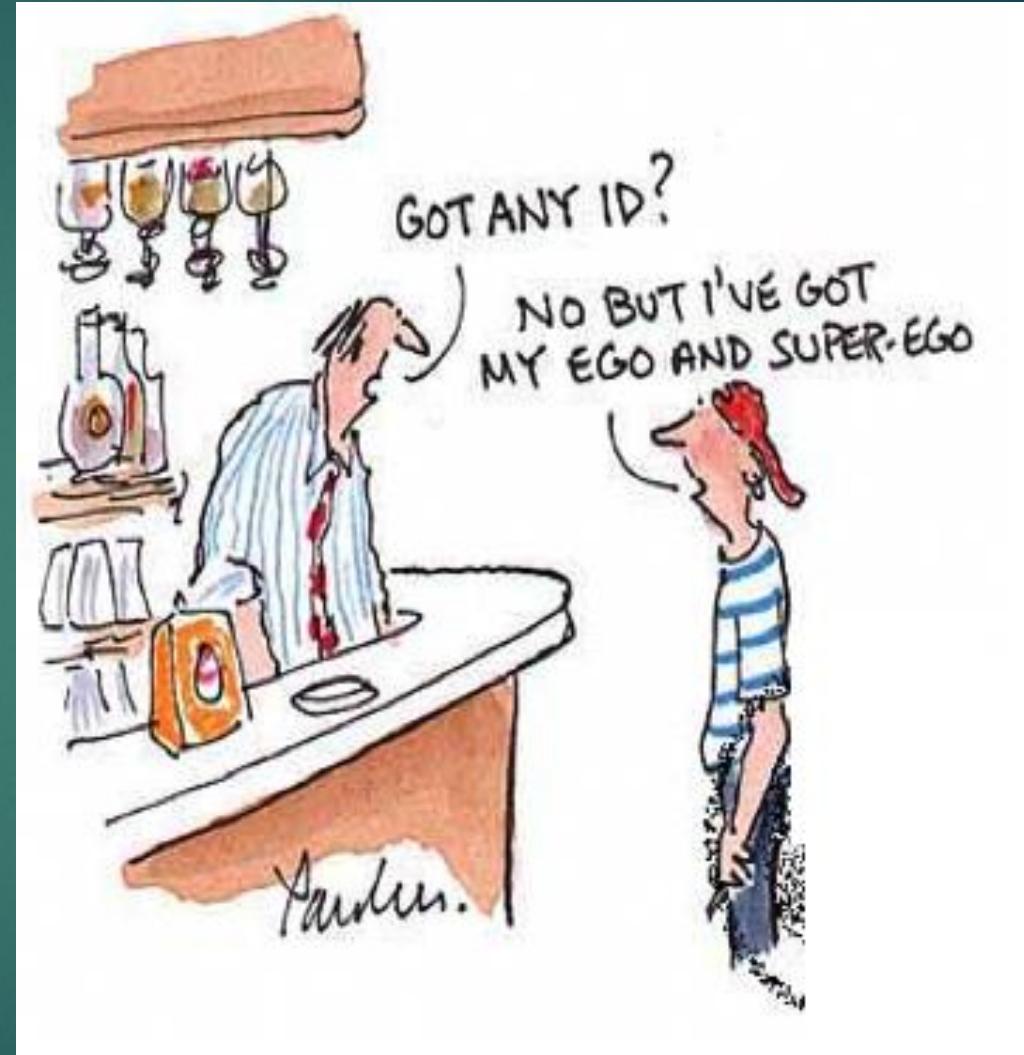
- ▶ Psychodynamics
 - ▶ Freud's Structural Theory (continued)
 - ▶ Anxiety Causes Intrapsychic Conflict
 - ▶ Conflict is Between Ego/ Superego/ Id
 - ▶ To Prevent Unwanted Actions/Thoughts Coming into Conscious Awareness:
 - ▶ Ego Defenses are Used

What's wrong with this cartoon?

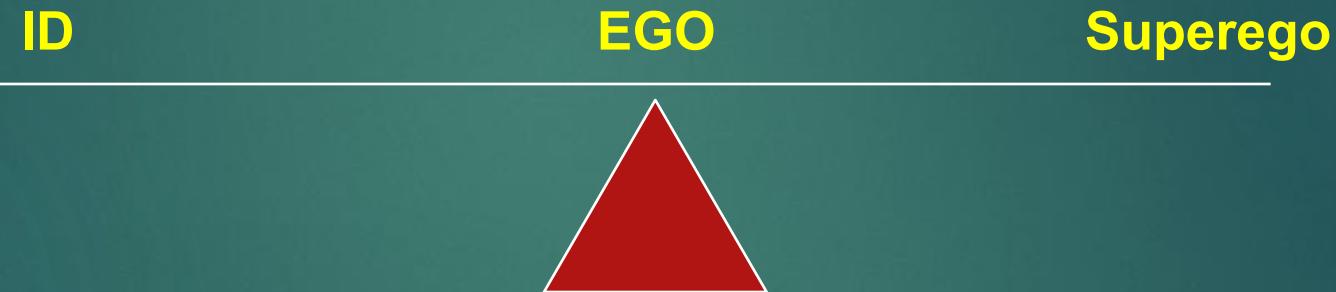
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Perhaps the Ego is
not doing its job?

Or is he lying?
There seems to be
plenty of Id.



**Things Are In Balance,
So, no Need for Defense
Mechanisms**



CAN I
BALANCE
STUDY AND
ENJOYMENT
AT TOURO?

THINGS
ARE OUT
OF
BALANCE



ID

EGO

Superego



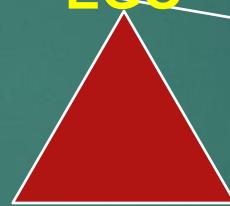
CAN I BALANCE STUDY AND ENJOYMENT AT TOURO?

THINGS ARE OUT
OF BALANCE

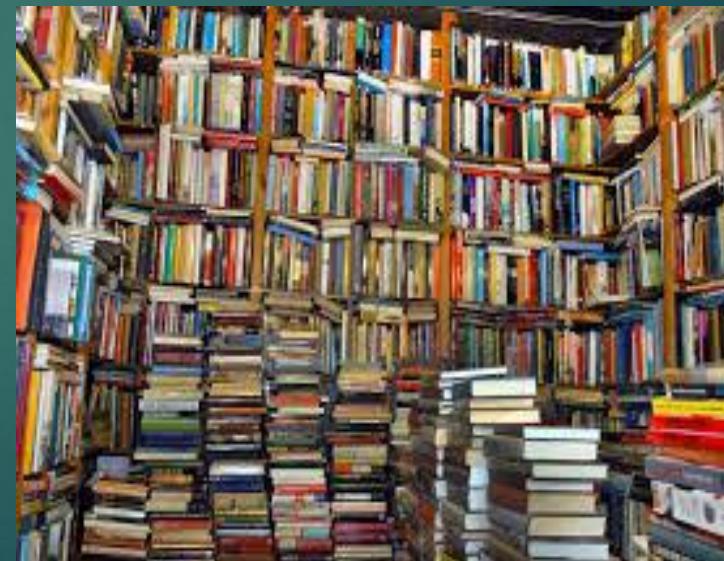
ID



EGO



Superego



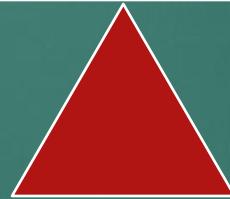
I actually can
balance
study and
enjoyment at
Touro!

THINGS
ARE IN
BALANCE

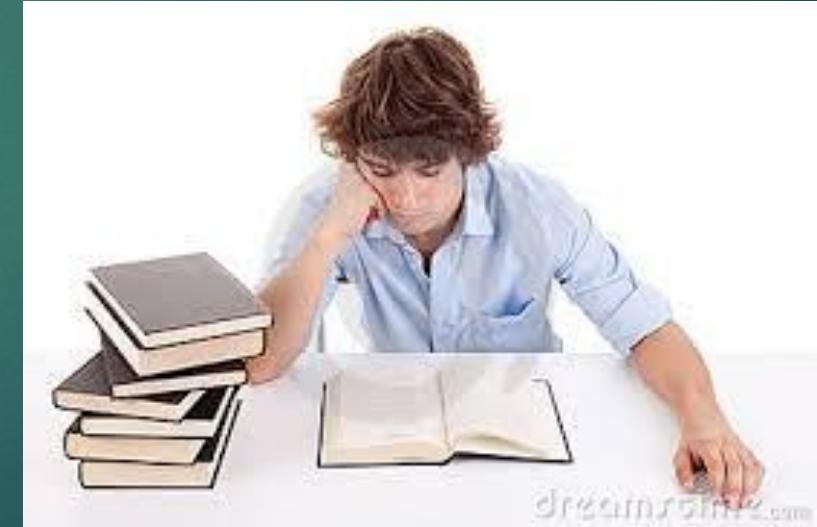
ID



EGO



Superego



Ego Defenses

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The Ego Defenses

George Vaillant, MD: categorization of defense mechanisms

- Level I - pathological defenses

(e.g., psychotic denial, delusional projection, conversion)

- Level II - immature defenses

(e.g., denial, projection, acting out)

- Level III - neurotic defenses

(e.g., intellectualization, reaction formation, displacement, repression)

- Level IV - mature defenses

(e.g., humor, sublimation, suppression, altruism, introjection)

Level I - Pathological Defenses

- Permit one to effectively rearrange external experiences to eliminate the need to cope with reality.
- The pathological users of these mechanisms frequently appear irrational or insane to others. These are the "psychotic" defenses, common in overt psychosis.
[some are on a spectrum from 'pathological' to 'immature' defenses]
- However, they are also found in dreams and throughout childhood as well.

The Ego Defenses

1. Denial

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- Facts of external reality are refused recognition (denied) in favor of internal wish fulfilling fantasies.
 - ▶ Involves a major distortion of reality.
 - ▶ Common in healthy children until about age 5
 - ▶ Common in a general medical practice.
- Note: This is not lying (as it is done unconsciously)
- Examples:
 - ▶ Physician undergoes brain surgery and learns he has a malignant brain tumor. Is convinced only had a mild stroke. Says that with rehabilitation, he will be fine in a few months.
 - ▶ 50-year-old physician ignores the classic signs and symptoms of a heart attack and continues to clear his driveway of snow.
 - ▶ Cardiac patient refuses to accept he had a heart attack and appears incredibly cheerful and serene after admission to the ICU (could actually be adaptive?...unless?)



DENIAL is not a river in Egypt

DENIAL

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BILL'S DENIAL OF THE END OF
SUMMER WAS GETTING SERIOUS...

The Ego Defenses

2. Projection

- What is emotionally unacceptable in the individual is unconsciously rejected and attributed to others.
- Attributes to others those objectionable character traits, desires, motives, etc., one wishes to disclaim.
- Involves distortion of reality.
- Plays part in prejudicial attitudes.
- Examples
 - ▶ A known bigot states, “that minority group is made up of individuals who are all lazy, immoral, cheap, dirty, etc.”
 - ▶ Mary tells her doctor that she is having an extra-marital affair. Subsequently, on each visit she feels, **without justification**, that the doctor now disapproves of her behavior.
 - ▶ Note: Often seen in individuals with paranoid personality disorder

Projection



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The Ego Defenses

3. Conversion

- Unconscious process in which internal conflicts are given symbolic external representation, such as paralysis, pain or loss of sensory function
- Examples
 - ▶ Husband is angry at his wife for not letting him watch the final minutes of the 49ers game. He begins to think he will simply give her a good punch to her head, to "wake her up to reality." He suddenly develops a "paralysis" of his right hand which prevents him from striking his wife.
 - ▶ Mother is told to come to the morgue to identify her dead child. Suddenly, while on the way, she tells her husband she is unable to see. She has become blind.

4. Splitting

- Primitive Borderline Personality Defense
- Others seen as All good or bad
- These individuals shift back and forth from liking to hating certain individuals based on what has recently occurred.
- Example
 - ▶ Patient tries to hit a psychiatrist after he tells the patient she cannot have a pass to go home for the weekend. Just hours before she had been overheard telling other patients that she is so lucky to have the best psychiatrist in the hospital taking care of her.
 - ▶ Kathy Bates in “Misery” sees James Caan as either all good or all bad.
 - ▶ Ex: after yelling at him for killing Misery Chastain, she ends the scene with, “I love you.”

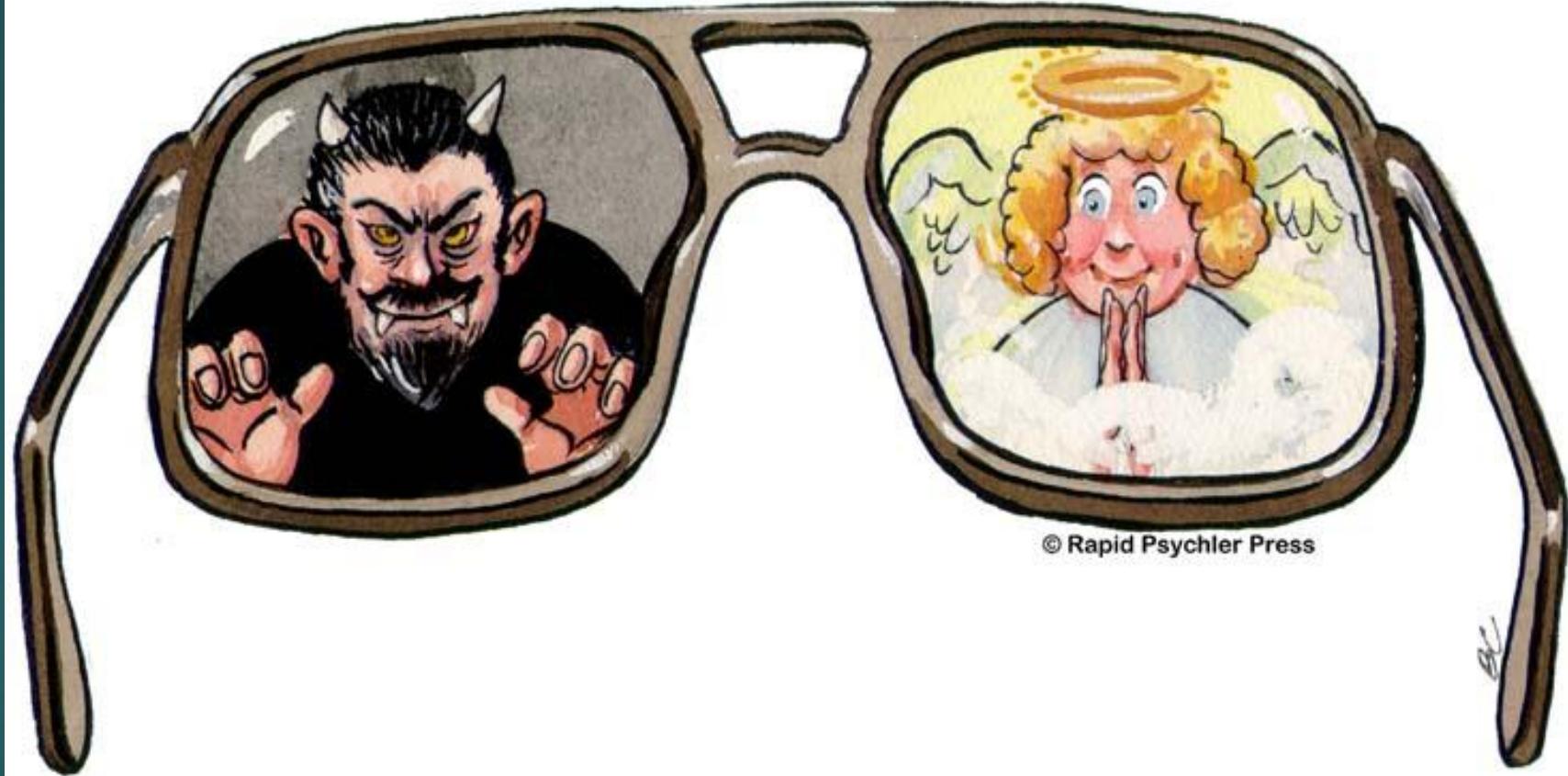
Splitting



All Black or All White

Brooklyn Bridge

Splitting



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BC

Black & White...But Not Splitting!

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Level II - Immature Defenses

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- Often present in adults. These mechanisms lessen distress and anxiety provoked by threatening people or by uncomfortable reality.
- Excessive use of such defenses is seen as socially undesirable in that they are immature, difficult to deal with and seriously out of touch with reality.
- These are the so-called "immature" defenses and overuse almost always leads to serious problems in a person's ability to cope effectively.
- These defenses are often seen in major depression and personality disorders.

The Ego Defenses

5. Fixation

- Persistent inability to give up infantile or childish patterns of behavior in favor of more mature ones.
- May occur due to excessive deprivation or excessive gratification at the stage where development has ceased
- Examples:
 - ▶ A young boy becomes fixated to his mother. As an adult he is not able to transfer his affections to another woman, which he should normally have been able to do.
 - ▶ A grown-up throws a tantrum (as he did as a child) when under stress.

The Ego Defenses

6. Acting Out

- Expressing thoughts and feelings in action rather than through words.
- Examples
 - ▶ Patient misses next appointment rather than talk about the anger felt after the cost per session was raised \$10.00 per hour.
 - ▶ Patient goes to worst part of town to purposely find people to fight with, rather than discussing feelings with therapist.
 - ▶ An 8 year-old child throws a temper tantrum when he is told he will not get ice cream for dessert because he did not clean up his room. He proceeds to lie on the floor screaming and kicking his feet.

Level III - neurotic defenses

- Fairly common in adults.
- Such defenses have short-term advantages in coping, but can often cause long-term problems in relationships, work and in enjoying life when used as one's primary style of coping with the world.

The Ego Defenses

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7. Repression

- A defense mechanism operating unconsciously, that keeps unacceptable ideas, feelings, fantasies or impulses from consciousness **or** that keeps out of consciousness that which has never been conscious.
- **Only** if repression fails...do other defensive mechanisms come into play.
- **Often confused with the conscious mechanism of suppression**, and with denial which is a reaction to external stimuli
- Ex A young boy is seriously injured by a pit bull. He represses the event. Years later he cannot explain his obvious fear of dogs

The Ego Defenses

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8. Reaction Formation

- An individual adopts affects, ideas and behaviors that are the **opposite** of impulses harbored either consciously or unconsciously.
- Trait that is the exact **opposite** of a person's **true feelings**
 - ▶ Within limits is an OK defense mechanism
- Examples:
 - ▶ Overly great concern for a sick mother may hide unrecognized feelings of hostility, jealousy, etc.
 - ▶ Person who is overly aggressive may be defending against deep rooted sense of insecurity.
 - ▶ Excessive moral zeal may be a reaction to strong but repressed asocial impulses.
 - ▶ Great tenderness to animals/people conceals sadistic impulses.

Reaction Formation

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**Spends all her waking hours
caring for father**

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**Who would have believed
as a child she disliked her
father?**

The Ego Defenses

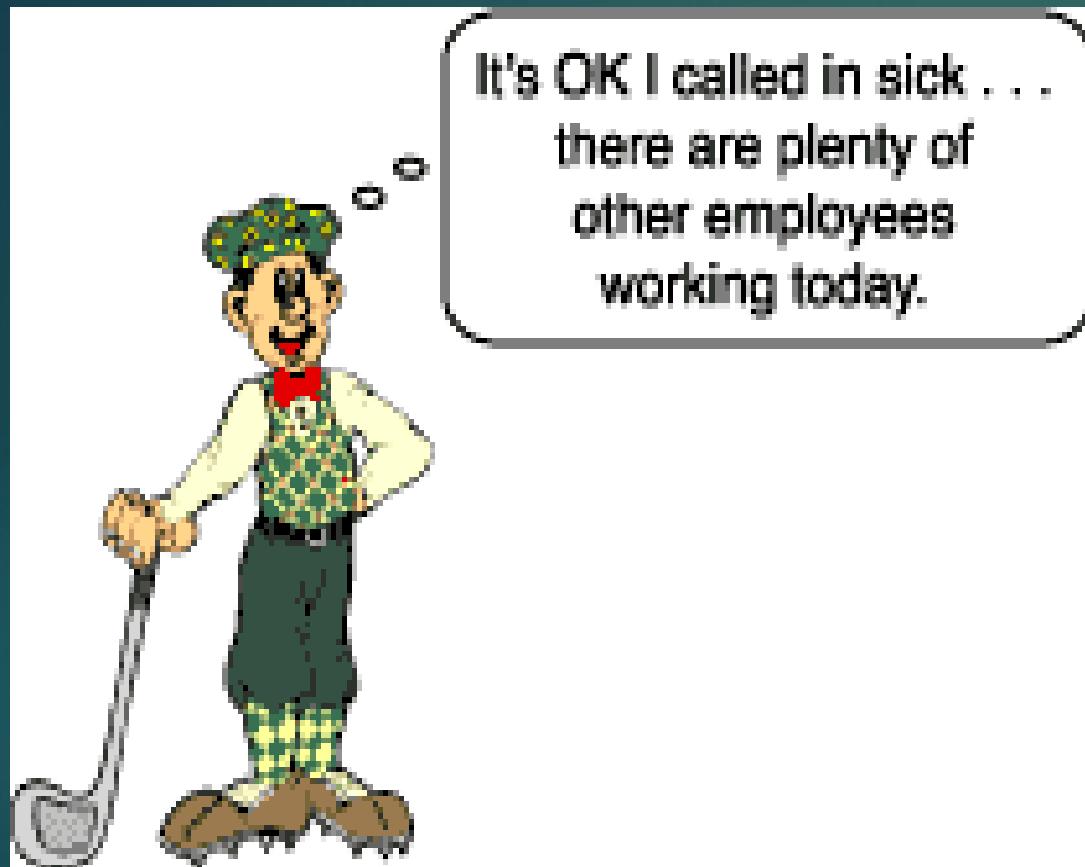
9. Rationalization

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- **Intellectual explanation** of behavior prompted by unrecognized motives.
- **Acceptable explanation** for a feeling is used to **hide the unacceptable** underlying motive or impulse.
- Individual tries to make consciously tolerable, by plausible means, feelings or behavior that otherwise would be intolerable.
- Note: This is **NOT** lying, as mechanism is not conscious.
- **Examples:**
 - ▶ I did not pass the psychiatry exam because Dr. Z. asked all the hard material (hides fact student did not study enough)
 - ▶ Obese man at party says he over-ate so as not to offend his hostess.
 - ▶ A man is passed over for a job promotion. Tells his friends it is no problem because he really did not want the job anyway.
 - ▶ A physician decides not to tell the family about a medical error he made that caused the death of their father. He says to a colleague, “telling them the truth would only make them feel worse”.

Rationalization of a Behavior

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If they would have just put the pins closer to where my ball landed, I would have broken par instead of my clubs

The Ego Defenses

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10. Intellectualization

- ▶ Individual engages in **excessive abstract thinking** to avoid confrontation with conflicts or disturbing feelings.
- ▶ Avoids feelings by taking refuge in thinking
- ▶ Examples
 - ▶ After an auto accident, the internal medicine resident helps treat a young woman in the ER. She dies from her injuries. He seems unaffected as he tells his colleagues that, “she died of a ruptured spleen, as well as a cerebral contusion with associated intracranial bleeding into the lateral ventricles,...”
 - ▶ A very ill man asks an oncology resident about his prognosis with metastatic pancreatic cancer. The resident replies by telling him about the rates of mortality in an article he read recently. (This serves to help the resident, but not the patient).

11. Isolation (of Affect)

Separation of an idea from the affect or feeling that accompanies it, but is being repressed.

Often helpful for physicians to utilize isolation of affect as it permits them to maintain distance and objectivity toward the suffering of patients that is needed to permit treatment to proceed

- Note: If isolation is used too rigidly and pervasively, a physician risks the danger of becoming unduly dispassionate and distant.
- Examples
 - ▶ Upon learning that his wife had been killed in a plane crash, Joe showed no outward signs of emotion.
 - ▶ Note: Must be careful person not simply stoic!
 - ▶ May be seen in obsessive compulsive individuals.

A Different Kind of Isolation

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Isolation at Alcatraz

12. Regression

- Loss of some development already attained, with reversion to lower level of integration
- More childlike types of behavior
- Done to escape anxiety by
 - ▶ returning to earlier level of adjustment where gratification was ensured.
- Often in clinical practice, if a patient has symptoms and incapacities that are disproportionate to the physical disorder that underlies them, it may be due to regression
- May be precipitated by fatigue, drugs, chronic pain, or any situation that deprives the individual of his/her autonomy.
- A good defense mechanism for a patient in a hospital
 - ▶ It permits care givers to more expeditiously treat a patient.
 - ▶ Unfortunately, some individuals while in a hospital are not able to permit such regression, or alternately regress to an extent that is problematic.

12. Regression (continued)

► Examples

- Child who has already been toilet trained soils himself after his sister is hospitalized with a serious illness
- Under stress, a student reverts to sucking his/her thumb.

13. Displacement

► Unconsciously, charged emotions, ideas or wishes are transferred from an original object to a more acceptable (*safer*) substitute

- Examples

► Husband yells at his wife over a trivial matter. Earlier in the day, his boss had told him he was incompetent and he said nothing to his boss.

► After being humiliated by the Chief Resident, a surgical resident becomes enraged at the interns and medical students for no obvious reason.

Displacement

Today this would be seen as domestic violence

The Honeymooners



After a tough day driving his bus, Ralph (Jackie Gleason) tells Alice (Audrey Meadows) how bad a cook she is, and how he will send her to the moon! (bang zoom)

The Ego Defenses

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14. Undoing

- Defense mechanism designed to negate or annul (undo) some unacceptable thought, wish or actual transgression of the past.
- Examples:
 - ▶ The neglectful parent showers presents on his/her children.
 - ▶ Mafia kingpin makes charitable donations to community programs to help the poor.
 - ▶ Small child with hostile wishes toward a sibling may hit and then kiss that individual.

Doing

You can get more with
a nice word and a gun
than you can with a
nice word.



Al Capone
American gangster
(1899 - 1947)

QuoteHD.com



EmillysQuotes.Com

*Don't mistake my kindness
for weakness. I am kind to
everyone, but when someone
is unkind to me, weak is not
what you are going to
remember about me.*

~Al Capone

Undoing



alamy stock photo

ESCAPE
www.alamy.com

An actual Al Capone Free Soup Kitchen during The Depression

Level IV - mature defenses

- Commonly found among emotionally healthy adults and are considered mature,
- They have been adapted through the years in order to optimize success in human society and relationships.
- The use of these defenses enhances pleasure and feelings of control.
- These defenses help us to integrate conflicting emotions and thoughts, while still remaining effective.
- Those who use these mechanisms are usually considered virtuous.

The Ego Defenses

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15. Altruism

- Healthy mechanism in which a person derives pleasure by performing service for others.
- Example
 - ▶ Surgeon with a thriving practice flies to Haiti to provide free emergency services to those injured after an earthquake.

Altruism



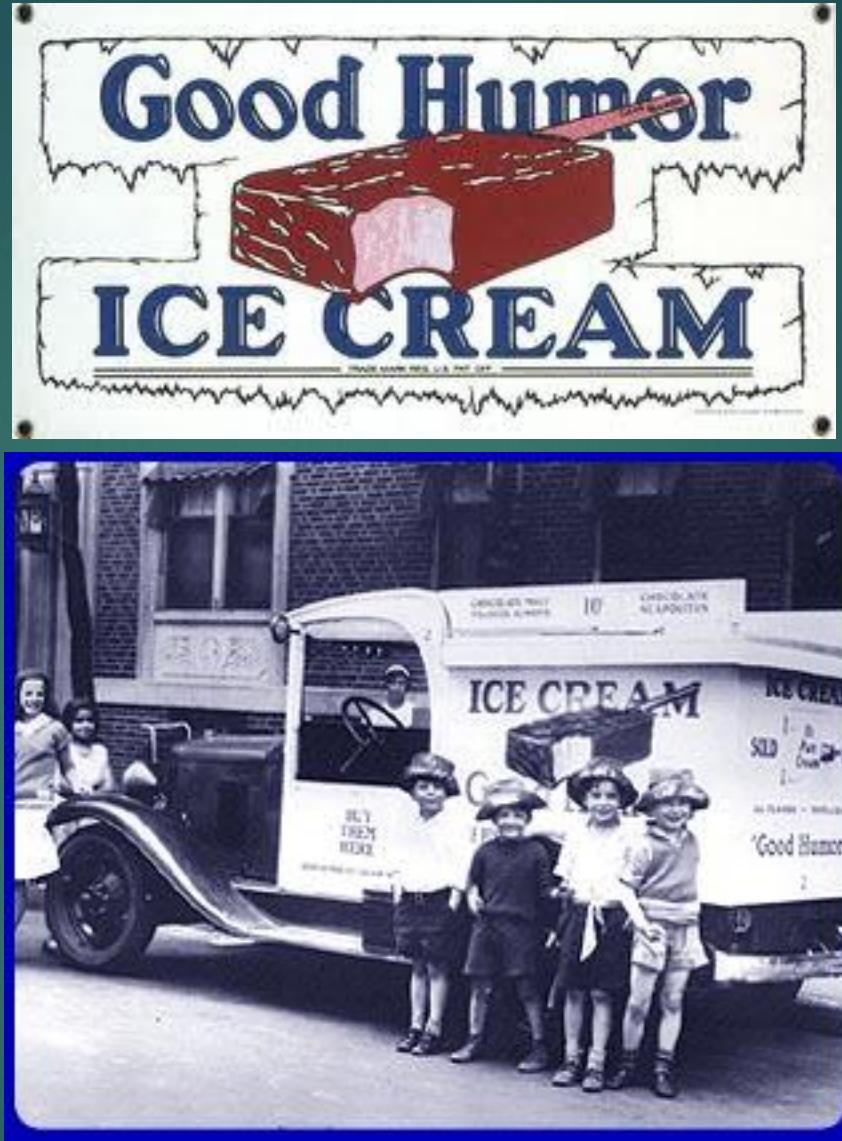
**Doctors Without Borders
in Haiti**

Animals can be Altruistic



16. Humor

- Healthy mechanism which allows expression of feelings, thoughts and conflicts in a way that makes reality more tolerable.



GOOD HUMOR TRUCK

The Ego Defenses

17. Sublimation

- ▶ Instinctive needs and unacceptable impulses find personally acceptable outlet and socially acceptable mode of expression
- ▶ Examples:
 - Small child channels aggressive drive into becoming a football star.
 - An individual with intense voyeuristic impulses becomes a photographer for Penthouse magazine.
 - A sadistic impulse to inflict pain can be sublimated into the socially acceptable and necessary practice of surgery. Surgeon can cut and “hurt” the patient in service of a higher goal.

Sublimation



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A Case of Failed Sublimation?



Judge Jackie
Glass...Swift
Justice



Died
4/2024

2008 sentenced to 33 years with
minimum of 9...released 2017

The Ego Defenses

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18. Suppression

- Partly Conscious!!
- Individual wishes to put something out of his / her awareness and is able to do so.
- Intentional repression of unpleasant conscious material
 - ▶ High school junior leaves the final exam in chemistry feeling like he failed. However he simply decides to try to forget it, and just have a good time at a party that evening. Despite his concern about doing poorly on the test he manages to have a reasonably good time at the party.
 - ▶ Later, however, after getting his failing course grade he remembers two dreaded words: summer school.

The Ego Defenses

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19. Introjection (turning against the self)

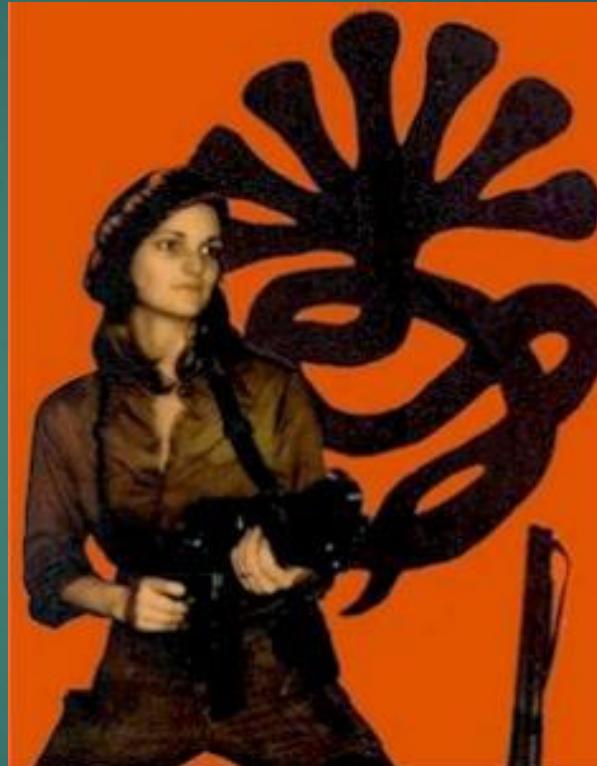
- Special form of displacement. Impulses and fantasies directed at someone else are self-directed instead. A common feature in some depressed patients who have been provoked and or wronged by another person but who do not display any anger overtly. Rather, they grow increasingly depressed.
- Such patients are often angry towards their caretakers but do not express such feelings publicly for fear of jeopardizing these important relationships. Instead, they **turn the rage onto themselves**. An individual can alleviate such depressive feelings by turning the anger outward with assurance from staff that such feelings will not alienate staff.

The Ego Defenses

20. Identification

- Modeling oneself after a significant other.
 - Also conforming to group values.
 - Usually a healthy type of defense / growth mechanism.
-
- Identification with the aggressor
(Stockholm Syndrome)
 - ▶ Concentration camp victims and terrorist hostages sometimes identify with their captors, taking on their characteristics and converting to their political points of view.

Who is this?



Was she forced
to join the SLA?

Or was it Identification with the Aggressor?

Patricia Hearst

