

Stress Bytes Newsletter

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"WHEN STRESS BITES, BITE BACK!"

THE NEWSLETTER OF ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.
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Beware of Fault-Finding in Others: It Says A lot about YOU!

There's a million (well, maybe a dozen) ways we defend ourselves from unwanted or unpleasant emotions. Who wants to feel bad, right? The ways we defend ourselves from experiencing these emotions are called ego defense mechanisms. We all use them to varying degrees. When they become problematic is when they create or maintain problems in your life that cannot be resolved, affect your health, maintain discrimination, or damage your interpersonal relationships.

Today, I'm going to focus on the defense mechanism called Projection. Projection is when you attribute or "project" your unwanted, unrecognized, or uncomfortable feelings onto another person or group of people. You think *they* are doing something or have a certain feeling that; in fact, *you* do not want to admit or feel *yourself*.

For example, you think your mate is angry with you, when you are really the one who is upset with

them. Or, you are feeling tempted to have an affair, and you suddenly find yourself feeling suspicious of or accusing your partner of unfaithfulness. Or you say "she thinks she is better than everyone else" then you are most likely projecting your own unconscious feelings of superiority onto that person. Or you categorize any ethnic or minority group as "lazy", "manipulative", "dirty" "over-sexed" or "dishonest."

Most of us are unaware that we are doing this, which is why defense mechanisms are said to be unconscious. What we may notice, if we are aware of our overall life themes, is a kind of psychological déjà vu. "This feels just like the time when ____." Or we look at the course of our lives and find the same patterns occurring over and over again in our romantic relationships. "Why am I always attracted to men who can't make a commitment?" "Why are all women so needy?" Maybe we keep quitting job after job because the boss is "too

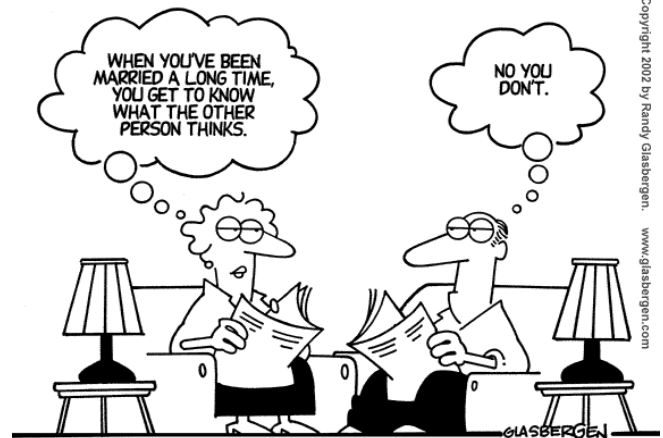
lazy/stupid and I have to do all his work." Taken to the extreme, projection can turn into paranoid thinking-- "Everybody is out to get me."

Face it; we all have negative aspects to our personalities. They only stay problematic if we are not aware of them. If we "hate" something in someone else, we usually hate it in ourselves and hate to admit or acknowledge we feel or act that way too.

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So the solution is to entertain the possibility that you are projecting.

To explore this, the next time you're find yourself complaining about someone else's personality or condemning any group of people for a certain characteristic, ask yourself, "What part of me is also like this that I am afraid to admit or feel?" This is called "owning" or "taking back" the projection. Believe me, it is a humbling experience, but one worth having because it allows you to be less judgmental, less likely to jump to painful conclusions, and less likely to keep creating conflict in your interpersonal relationships. It also allows you to claim "the power of the dark side" (to borrow a Star Wars phrase) and use it for good. Until you can admit and own your projections, they will run and sometimes ruin your life.

SOME TYPICAL DEFENSES THAT ALCOHOLICS OR ADDICTS TEND TO MAKE. YOU CAN SUBSTITUTE ANY ADDICTION INSTEAD OF ALCOHOL/DRUG.

- **RATIONALIZING** - I DON'T DRINK/USE EVERY DAY, I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM.
- **MINIMIZING** - I DON'T DRINK/USE HALF OF WHAT SAM DRINKS.
- **COCKINESS** - I GOT IT MADE, THESE OTHER FOLKS ARE LOSERS.
- **JUSTIFYING** - IF YOU HAD A WIFE/HUSBAND LIKE MINE, YOU WOULD DRINK/USE TOO.
- **PROJECTING** - YOU ALWAYS MANIPULATE TO GET WHAT YOU WANT.
- **BLAMING** - YOU DROVE ME TO DRINK/USE. IT IS MY JOB STRESS.
- **HUMOR** - THIS ISN'T SERIOUS. LIFE IS A JOKE.
- **INTELLECTUALIZING** - RESEARCH SHOWS I'M PROBABLY NOT AN ALCOHOLIC/ADDICT.
- **LYING** - I ONLY HAD A COUPLE OF BEERS, MAYBE THREE.
- **MANIPULATION** - IF YOU QUIT BITCHING, I'LL QUIT DRINKING/USING.
- **ACCUSING** - YOUR FOOLING AROUND KEEPS ME DRINKING/USING.
- **THREATENING** - GET OFF MY BACK OR YOU WILL BE SORRY!
- **JUDGING** - IF YOU DID THIS OR THAT RIGHT, THINGS WOULDN'T BE SO BAD.
- **EXPLAINING** - OH, I DRINK/USE BECAUSE I . . .
- **ANALYZING** - I STARTED DRINKING MORE BECAUSE OF _____, IT WILL SLOW DOWN LATER.
- **ARGUING** - I'M NOT AN ALCOHOLIC, I'VE NEVER GOTTEN A DWI OR . . .
- **DEFIANCE** - I DARE YOU TO PROVE THAT I'M AN ALCOHOLIC/ADDICT.
- **WITHDRAWING** - IF I DON'T DO OR SAY ANYTHING, THEY WILL LEAVE ME ALONE.



“You always complain that I don’t know how to show my emotions, so I made these signs.”

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What's Your Favorite Defense Mechanisms?

Defense mechanisms protect us from being consciously aware of a thought or feeling which we cannot tolerate. The defense only allows the unconscious thought or feeling to be expressed indirectly in a disguised form. Let's say you are angry with a boss because he or she is very critical of you. Here's how the various defenses might hide and/or transform that anger:

- **Denial:** You completely reject the thought or feeling.
"I'm not angry with him!"
- **Suppression:** You are vaguely aware of the thought or feeling, but try to hide it.
"I'm going to try to be nice to him."
- **Reaction Formation:** You turn the feeling into its opposite.
"I think he's really great!"
- **Projection:** You think someone else has your thought or feeling.
"That professor hates me."
"That student hates the prof."
- **Displacement:** You redirect your feelings to another target..
"I hate that secretary."
- **Rationalization:** You come up with various explanations to justify the situation (while denying your feelings).
"He's so critical because he's trying to help us do our best."
- **Intellectualization:** A type of rationalization, only more intellectualized.
"This situation reminds me of how Nietzsche said that anger is ontological despair."
- **Undoing:** You try to reverse or undo your feeling by DOING something that indicates the opposite feeling. It may be an "apology" for the feeling you find unacceptable within yourself.
"I think I'll give that professor an apple."
- **Isolation of affect:** You "think" the feeling but don't really feel it.
"I guess I'm angry with him, sort of."
- **Regression:** You revert to an old, usually immature behavior to ventilate your feeling.
"Let's shoot spitballs at people!"
- **Sublimation:** You redirect the feeling into a socially productive activity.
"I'm going to write a poem about anger."

** Defenses may hide any of a variety of thoughts or feelings: anger, fear, sadness, depression, greed, envy, competitiveness, love, passion, admiration, criticalness, dependency, selfishness, grandiosity, helplessness.

Adapted from <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/defenses.html>

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The Stress Doctor is IN!!!

“THE NICE THING ABOUT EGOTISTS IS THEY DON’T TALK ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.”

- LUCILLE S. HARPER

“THE PEOPLE WHO ARE REGARDED AS MORAL LUMINARIES ARE THOSE WHO FOREGO ORDINARY PLEASURES THEMSELVES AND FIND COMPENSTATION IN INTERFERING WITH THE PLEASURE OF OTHERS.”

- BERTRAND RUSSELL

“INTOLERANCE IS A FORM OF EGOISM, AND TO CONDEMN EGOISM INTOLERANTLY IS TO SHARE IT.”

- GEORGE SANTAYANNA



“Kathleen, I have a confession. I’ve been cold and indifferent with another woman.”

ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.

LICENSED CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

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MORE QUOTATIONS

“Pain (any pain--emotional, physical, mental) has a message. The information it has about our life can be remarkably specific, but it usually falls into one of two categories: "We would be more alive if we did more of this," and, "Life would be more lovely if we did less of that." Once we get the pain's message, and follow its advice, the pain goes away. “—Peter McWilliams, Life 101

“The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices -- to be found in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy, and a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own -- for the children and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is that these things cannot be confined to the Twilight Zone. “—Rod Serling