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Projective Musings on Political Alternatives of Projective Identification

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Title: Projective Musings on Political Alternatives of Projective Identification

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Abstract. This article describes interpretations of the projective identification construct.

The projective identification construct is used often enough in the academic area of political psychology to warrant significant attention by those seeking clarity, utility, coherence, parsimony, and the like in theory and its elements.

Projective identification may be used interchangeably with projection. In other words, the construct entails the unconscious intrapsychic process of removing elements of the self--actually the perception of one's self as the self-object--deemed as undesirable and attributing them to someone else through placing these elements within one's perception of that someone else as the object of that someone else.

Projective identification may also require that the someone else alluded to above identifies with the projection. In other words, the self-object of that someone else changes consciously or unconsciously within the psyche of that someone else. One possibility here is that there is not only very little resistance on the part of that someone else to being projected into but that there is actually an affinity for such a phenomenon. One might even contemplate that the someone else with such an affinity is a destroyer of souls in that others may approach a depletion in self-object components through direct or indirect association with the someone else. The "soul destroyer" also can become a chameleon with many potential roles to play.

A third alternative is that projective identification entails a self-validation of undesirable self-object components via a social comparison process. Here, one engages in periodic checking of the worthiness of components of one's self-object through the method of projecting these components into perceptions of others. One then identifies with these others coming full circle back to one's initial self-object components through introjecting these components into the self-object. The unconscious rationale might be that, if someone else is like this, I can be like this, too.

Given that the foundation of projective identification is the defense mechanism of projection and that defense mechanisms are methods to deal with psychodynamic conflict, one might even surmise that one's choice of interpretations of projective identification is itself projective. That projection is heavily implicated in political perception, decisionmaking, and behavior may be the case. That this also applies to the polis of academia may be as salient to political psychology. (See Eagle, M.N. (2000). A critical evaluation of current conceptions of transference and countertransference. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 17, 24-37; Grotstein, J. (1981). Splitting and Projective Identification. Aronson; Hanly, C., & Fitzpatrick Hanly, M. A. (2001). Critical realism: Distinguishing the psychological subjectivity of the analyst from epistemological subjectivism. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 49, 515-533; Horowitz, L. (1983). Projective identification in dyads and groups. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 33, 259-279; Ogden, T. (1979). On projective identification. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 60, 357-373; Torres de Beà, E. (1989). Projective identification and differentiation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 70, 265-274.) (Keywords: Projective Identification.)