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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 a k a the self-object--deemed as undesirable and attributing them to someone else through placing these elements within one's perception of that someone else a k a 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.