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Humberto Nágera M.D.

Psychiatry Professor, Univ. of South Florida

Professor Emeritus University of Michigan

Child, Adolescent and Adult Training Psychoanalyst

Director, The Carter Jenkins Center



Defenses and their use against aggression Part II and III

By

Humberto Nágera M.D.

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Aggression: Defenses

1) Repression:

- Aggression won't be available even when it is necessary to defend oneself or one's rights.
- May inhibit competition for jobs, girls, etc.,
- One knows it is repressed because it is not present, when it would be normal to show it, or there is a lack of participation in anything competitive like sports, etc.,
- Remember that appropriate forms of aggression are necessary for many reasons including survival *

Aggression: Defenses

2) Displacement:

- Child discharges his anger away from human objects by instead kicking the dog, the cat, a piece of furniture, etc. Adolescents and adults may put holes in the dry wall of the house by hitting it, or get the doors out of their hinges by throwing them forcefully rather than closing them normally, etc *

3) Reaction formation:

- Turns hate, cruelty, etc., into kindness, generosity, love, altruism. A certain degree of ego development is necessary before it can take place. Helps to build up a nice empathic personality and character. Useful defense. Once achieved, it does not require a constant expense of ego energy, like repression does

Aggression: Defenses

4) Sublimation:

- Excellent ego defense that turns negative aggressive feelings, into socially acceptable solutions, that are at times very well paid. Think of boxing and football for example

5) Negation:

- Must be distinguished from Denial in words. Here the patient is denying something with his words but he is aware that he is lying. Lying can be used defensively, particularly in certain conflicts with the external world (child lying to parents to avoid being punished), but is not a defense properly speaking since true defenses are unconscious ego activities of which the person is not conscious

Aggression: Defenses

6) Denial in words:

- Distinguish from Negation as mentioned
- Patient denies being angry for example but his words, tone of voice, attitude and manner shows it, (practically, smoke seems to be coming out of his ears !)

7) Denial in action:

- Person gives a gift or donation to a person or an institution that he is furious with instead of feeling his anger. It is commonly seen in other fears such as fear of heights (parachuting), or fear of death (car racing, joining the army, etc)

Aggression: Defenses

8) Denial in fantasy:

- Fantasy denies the anger or explosive episode, that took place where he went, by creating fantasies that he had not gone there, or to the meeting, or to see that particular person etc.,

9) Condensation:

- It may be combined with Displacement
- The anger, irritability, dislike, hostility, hate or what not) may be felt towards the wrong person (all being irrational) by making a condensation due to some similar traits i.e., blue eyes, race, nationality, accent, etc.,

Aggression: Defenses

10) Externalization:

- Implies moving the conflict in oneself to the outside, generally a person. For example I do not hate him, he hates me. Seen at times in very disturbed people.

11) Projection:

- Always preceded by externalization, but what has been externalized now comes back, as a threat to the self. He hates me and wants to hurt me, kill me, etc
- Very costly and damaging ego defense since it interferes with reality testing
- Frequently seen in very sick people including schizophrenics

Aggression: Defenses

12) Introjection or Internalization:

- What gets introjected depends in the parents character, personality and/or attitudes as well as the culture. As such it can be a positive ego building defense, but at times it may have negative characteristics depending on the quality of what gets introjected

13) Identification:

- Becoming like the other person, or only some aspects or characteristics of that person. Generally an ego building defense, but it depends on the nature of the identification. There can be cultural factors, such as extreme Muslims believing that Christians have to be converted either by the word or by the sword

Aggression: Defenses

14) Imitation:

- Letting your hair long like the Beatles for example, without necessarily knowing consciously the real reasons why they were forced to imitate them *

15) Identification with the aggressor:

- Can have benign and malignant forms for example doing to the dog what the dentist did to you (in the case of children)
- Some Jews, in concentration camps, identified with the Nazis (rarely though) because of the unconscious belief that their lives might be spared.

Aggression: Defenses

16) Regression:

- For example to the anal sadistic stage which may turn people into sadists, even sadistic murderers etc., due to conflicts at a higher level. It requires a previous fixation to regress to
- Can and frequently does contaminate their sexual life, so that they need to inflict pain to their sexual partners to get really sexually aroused. Some may turn into masochists that need to be abused, hurt etc., even in their ordinary life or in their sexual life

Aggression: Defenses

17) Withdrawal into fantasy:

- The ego is in control, but in fantasy the person he is angry with gets hurt, destroyed, killed, etc.,
 - Another example is that you fantasize not having gone there, but somewhere else, in which case the discussion, verbal abuse, aggressive act or violence would not have taken place. May alleviate guilt but is not effective since it happens after the fact.
- Aggression still available to the ego but conflictual

18) Withdrawal into the self:

- Thus avoiding conflicts, arguments, violence, hate etc., towards others but may lead to isolation. Cases of ADHD with a smart mouth can be a case in point.
- Very restrictive in ego terms

Aggression: Defenses

19) Withdrawal into passivity:

- Thus avoiding any potential conflict, competitive situations for jobs, girls, sports, etc. that may arise, anger, hate, hostility, fights or worse. Enormous restrictions of the ego is the price, though aggression may still be available, for example, for self defense

20) Passivity:

- Different from above, since it applies generally and at all times, while the above, is only in specific cases. Price is enormous ego restrictions

Aggression: Defenses

21) Turning passive into active:

- Someone that knows that he is terminal, in pain and or crippled, etc., and commits suicide (assisted or not)
- Is that a conflict? May be in religious terms but is certainly a defense against suffering, pain and death with all its conscious and unconscious meanings. Is this not otherwise a rational, even logical and adaptive normal decision?
 - Discuss Assisted Suicide (Death with Dignity) in various countries... Does religious people has the right to interfere with this decision? *

Aggression: Defenses

22) Rationalization:

- A common defense that tries different explanations to justify the aggressive acts or behaviors
- Can, and is used by individuals, groups or even nations. A very costly defense since it blurs people's ability to reason

23) Intellectualization:

- Given our knowledge, intellectual capacities and abilities, we can use all of them to justify our aggressive behavior or acts. We can use our knowledge, as well as socio-cultural and religious elements, thus showing the role that they have in the forming of our character, which once again shows the influence of the culture in us

Aggression: Defenses

24) Isolation of content:

- The affect is present but the event, situation, content, etc., that triggered it off is not connected to it. Something triggers the anger but the event that did it is not associated with it. *

25) Isolation of affect:

- The affect, i.e., aggression is not present or felt when it would be logical and expectable for it to be. On occasion may lead to a displacement, i.e., is expressed in relation to an event where it does not belong

Aggression: Defenses

26) Doing and undoing:

- Very typical of obsessionals. For example, the person explodes or is abusive to spouse during breakfast but that evening brings flowers to the wife, without in any way relating it to the incident in the morning

27) Splitting:

- Separates aggression to a part of the ego. It then appears on occasion but is hidden at others. Sort like a split personality. Damaging to the ego, that loses control of that affect. It only appears now, in conflict situations that trigger it off

Aggression: Defenses

28) Reversal of roles:

- May have something to do with people that were abused as children. Now they are the abusers, or some times, the abuse is the result of identifications with the aggressor

29) Reversal of affects:

- For example in war situations, where people may feel contented or even happy, when an enormous amount of deaths, or damage to the “enemy” has been inflicted through bombing cities, battles, etc with the sadness and empathy of the reaction to a natural disaster like the earthquake In Haiti *

Aggression: Defenses

30) Anticipation by provocation:

- Child may have destroyed something, or hurt an animal or a sibling, and then does something else to provoke punishment from his parents. It alleviates his guilt

31) Somatization:

- One's anger, hate, wish to be violent and hurt somebody, is substituted by some kind of symptom or malady instead

32) Overcompensation of feelings of inferiority:

- By becoming a bully at school for example

Aggression: Defenses

33) Making reparation:

- Somewhat similar to doing and undoing. For example donating money to a charity after an aggressive piece of behavior, anger, hateful feelings, etc., anywhere else

34) Turning aggression against the self:

- Seen very commonly in children in psychotherapy where they engage in dangerous activities bound to hurt them after they have been abusive, aggressive etc., to therapist *
- In some forms of suicide (or even in “Death with Dignity” cases), there might be an unconscious element of turning aggression against the self, that is hurting or even killing you

Aggression: Defenses

35) Delegation (Stone 1971):

- The “individual denies himself the fulfillment of aggressive wishes but concedes permission for it, to higher authorities such as the state, the police, the military or legal authorities” (Quoted by Anna Freud, 1972). He can thus enjoy the fulfillment of his aggression vicariously

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