

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCES

Introjection | Projection | Projective Identification

Autonomy is an important part of healthy relational interdependence. Autonomy and relational freedom, the freedom to be who we are in a closely bonded relationship, go together. Introjection/Projection, two defense mechanisms, often go together to undermine authenticity in satisfying relationships:

"INTROJECTION is the tendency to uncritically accept others' beliefs and standards without assimilating them congruently with who we are. These introjects remain somewhat alien to us, because we have not analyzed and restructured them, we passively incorporate what the environment provides. If introjects remain uninspected and operate below conscious awareness, our potential for safe, intimate relationships is reduced."

"PROJECTION is the reverse of introjection. In projection we disown certain aspects of ourselves by assigning them to the environment. When we are projecting, we have trouble distinguishing between the inside world and the outside world, smearing the boundaries. Those attributes of our personality that are inconsistent with our preferred self-image are disowned and put onto other people. By seeing in others the very qualities that we refuse to acknowledge in ourselves, we avoid taking responsibility for our own feelings and behavior. This keeps us resistant to change."

PROJECTIVE EMOTIONAL ENERGY: Introjects are often the energy behind projecting, according to Sue Lawson-Cauthon. The voices of our introjects motivate us to disown the parts of us that we project upon others resulting in a dance called:

"PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION is projecting something of yourself onto something external to you—and then become reactive to it. It is a very disowning thing to do to that part of you. When you react to that part of you which you have displaced you pull on the other to take some sort of ownership of your projection, which then validates the illusion that you are reacting to something external to yourself."

DIFFERENTIATION OF THE SELF: The developmental pursuit of personal autonomy is a "self differentiation" process. It is how, as maturing people, we own ourselves. Finally, as Sue says, "Disengage the introjects. Let them go. Doing so is a major move toward autonomy."