Inverse Psychological Projection

Yaniv Hozez[1]

1 Sigma Xi

Freud (1894) defined "psychological projection" as a defense mechanism wherein individuals attribute negative aspects of their personality to others, allowing them to overlook their own flaws and problems. The inverse form of this concept occurs when someone repeatedly, often angrily, advises others to ignore or pay no attention to someone or something. This behavior typically signifies the person's experience of inverse psychological projection: if their needs were disregarded in the past, it reflects in how they advise others. However, this advice is pertinent only in specific cases, such as trivial ridicule. If a mentally ill person insults someone's appearance, ignoring them may be the best response.

However, if the type of hurt involves causing harm (e.g., public humiliation, contempt, invasion of privacy, incitement, threatening behavior, discrimination, abuse, sexual or ordinary harassment, violence, annoyance) or if what was said had already hurt the other, advising to ignore or pay no attention to the mentally ill person disregards the inflicted damage. This defense mechanism might surface in individuals who previously struggled to cope with similar types of hurt or mental damage, or if their ego is provoked by the same issue. This stimulation might cause shame in acknowledging their ego, considering it socially inferior, or difficulty in empathizing with the other's hurt feelings (or containing their bruised ego).

As a result, they deny the problem's existence and advise others to ignore it. This action might aim to release their antagonism towards others or demonstrate superiority over the issue. Moreover, in contrast to classic psychological projection, in which a person attributes negative aspects of their own personality to others when they are unable to deal with these aspects (so they can ignore them), in its inverse form, a person attributes the quality that they would like to but cannot demonstrate/be able to succeed in (which relates to their ability to efficiently manage issues or problems that provoke their own ego), so that they can avoid dealing with these issues or problems.

In similar situations, inverse psychological projection might involve phrases like "I don't care what you think or say" or "Who cares what people think or say?" "I will not stoop to your level," "Don't let them influence you," "Don't give them the satisfaction," "Don't give them a platform," "They aren't worth it," or "What do you expect from them?" (one must distinguish between "expect" and "predict" as these two possess different responsibilities). Alternatively, when discussing a television show, one may say, "Who even watches it?" and in the context of social media, "Don't feed the trolls" or "Haters gonna hate."

The relevant discussion is not whether one should theoretically/logically be hurt by someone else's actions, but whether they were actually hurt by those actions. This is because the damage (for which it is indeed appropriate to pay attention to the person who had done those actions) is determined according to whether the victim was actually harmed by those

actions, and not according to whether anyone should theoretically/logically be harmed by them, which leads to the question: Shouldn't one address the damage someone else caused them (when the other person indeed inflicted harm) because they shouldn't be hurt by them in the first place? It doesn't make any sense. However, people may still advise others to ignore or pay no attention to someone who has harmed them. This advice, although irrelevant to the other's issue at hand, presents a contradiction.

Additionally, individuals might inadvertently project their negative emotions onto those seeking help. For instance, a hungry person tells their friend about their hunger, and the friend, also hungry, responds with something like, "Wow, you probably crave a good hamburger or a tasty pizza with olives and mushrooms." This response fails to address the problem of hunger and can worsen the pain of the person seeking help by reflecting their own hunger on their already hungry friend, thereby making them hungrier.

In the context of psychotherapeutic treatment, a therapist affected by this psychological projection struggles to show empathy towards their patients. This issue isn't one-sided; it impacts both the therapist and the patient. If, for example, a patient complains about distressing OCD thoughts, therapists should not dismiss these thoughts as insignificant, as this undermines the patient's challenging experiences.

Inverse psychological projection has unfortunately become a widespread phenomenon in today's society, observed in various everyday situations and social media interactions. This tendency is more likely to manifest in individuals whose ego satisfaction state remains unfulfilled.

Source: https://doi.org/10.32388/6YUGEC.6