

Sigmund Freud – Psychologist

and Confirmed Pacifist

Important Contributions

Freud on the Repression of Anger and Aggressive Instincts

Freud theorized that social pressures force one to repress our aggressive instincts. Over time this repression creates inner conflict until our repressed aggressive tendencies are given an opportunity to be expressed in the legalized violence of war. At that point, these instincts are as if “cut lose” and a person is able to fulfill their aggressive desires through war. If Freud is correct, there will always be a need for police and government military organizations to provide retaliatory capabilities as a deterrent to the expression of innate aggressive behavior.

A counterargument to Freud’s belief is that deterrence to aggression can be provided through positive means. That is, rather than deterring by negative consequences such as fines or imprisonment, the deterrence can be a cooperative symbiotic relationship, the benefits of which would be lost if the rules that sustain the cooperative relationship were violated. The more a society makes use of positive methods of deterrence, the less reliance there would have to be on police, jails, and military institutions.

Narcissistic Injury and Narcissistic Rage:

As defined by Sigmund Freud, narcissistic injury occurs when you take as a personal attack, an injury to a member of the group to which you belong. If someone attacks a member of your family, and you react as if it were an attack on yourself, you are experiencing narcissistic injury; and if, in your anger, you decide in return to attack a member of your aggressor’s family, (other than the person who was actually responsible for the original attack), you are engaging in a calculated form of “narcissistic rage” or what may be called narcissistic revenge. The group to which you belong, however, can be much larger than your family. It can, for example, be defined by the race to which you belong, your nationality, or your religious sect.

After 9/11, Americans who sought to take revenge against Muslims solely because the 9/11 hijackers were Muslim, and Islamic extremists who seek to kill Americans solely because they are Americans, are experiencing narcissistic injury and engaging in narcissistic revenge.

Once a conflict reaches this psychological plateau, the number of people that join the conflict can increase exponentially because revenge is being taken against individuals not initially part of the dispute. The individuals involved in the conflict no longer are seeking justice against the actual perpetrators, but are pursuing revenge against a group that has been stereotyped. In seeking such narcissistic revenge, the conflicting parties broaden the scope of the

conflict, drawing into the fray relatives, friends and associates who then experience feelings of narcissistic injury that motivate future attacks.

If we apply this understanding to the war in Iraq, we have a psychological model that helps explain why the insurgency the United States is battling defiantly continues to sustain itself and at times appears to be growing stronger. If this model is correct, the more insurgents and terrorists we kill, the more we create.

Freud on raising children:

Freud believed our expression of instinctive aggressive behavior is influenced by how we are raised, and that our parents play a crucial role in the attitudes we develop toward violence. His theories call into question the use of corporeal punishment and the influence violent games (such as modern-day video games) may potentially have on young people.