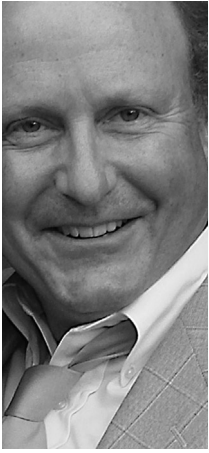


Sublimation

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You've heard of Freud. There is not another psychologist I could name that every one of you would be sure to have heard of, so we must deal with him. Freud presents all serious psychologists with a variety of important conundrums. The most obvious is his emphasis on the complicated, inappropriate, and unconscious relationships that he claims all children have with their parents. Pursuing this popular thread leads down the psychoanalytic rabbit hole into unconscious darkness so deep you are soon as blind as a groundhog. Similarly for Freud's view of cigars and pyramids. You can find whatever you want in psychoanalysis because it is entirely hypothetical.

But Freud was an intellectual giant and a pioneer in the field of professional psychology, and he harvested much of the low-hanging fruit. Freud articulated the profound idea of the unconscious mind in a way that was accessible to clinicians, academics, and also to the public. Freud identified and labeled a set of psychological operations that have become a part of all modern languages. *Denial, repression, projection, regression, neurosis, sublimation, and transference* are all from Freud. Freud did not identify *lying* as a psychodynamic conversion because lying is always conscious, but we also have to take that possibility into account in our dealings with others. It is impossible to understand people in a realistic way without resort to Freud's transformations, and lying. You recognize and interpret them in the people you interact with every day. You couldn't get by without these ideas.

Sublimation is Freud's term for the conversion of one form of psychic energy into another. For Freud this is always sexual energy, of course, but I prefer pointing to the remarkable fact that when your body and mind are stimulated by adrenalin you can experience this as either anxiety or exhilaration, which have very different consequences for your experience and behavior. I prefer to focus less on your childhood relationship with your parents and more on your present opportunity to channel your time and energy effectively into your painting, your business, your writing, your relationship, or your capers. Freud thought of each emotion as a sort of fluid that somehow builds up pressure in your brain until it is finally released, which is ridiculous. Your brain is a real-time generator of feeling, thought, and action; not a plumbing system. Even memory is not as substantial as it seems. Sublimation is the redirection of your energy, whatever its source, toward objectives that you can choose because they are healthy and appealing to you. Or not. Call me.

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