

Chapter 6

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Chapter 6: Ego Defenses, Ego Expressions, Schemas and Hidden Agendas: High Roads and Dominant Networks

Understanding humans has for decades meant understanding their personalities. Understanding their personalities inevitably will lead us into Freudian, psychoanalytic understandings of character and personality disorders. The question becomes Can we utilize these insights to help us understand the egopathic personality? And in the process, can we avoid getting bogged down in the backwaters of “depth psychology?”

Ego expression is a concept that describes the behavior of simply expressing what is going on inside (after years of ego development). These expressions go from being “healthy” (self-actualizing behaviors) to unhealthy which are “aggressive” and “retributive” in nature. There are unconscious factors which cause unplanned behaviors to spring from the person. Yes, a cynical man might say, “Oh, she knows what he is doing.” or “Oh, he isn’t fooling anyone. He’s aware of his little games” and “he is making choices.” But in taking this attitude we begin to decrease the chances that we will be able to reach and help the egopath.

Protecting ourselves

Since the dawn of man there has been a gut level drive to protect ourselves. The early man who did not learn from a near miss with a saber toothed tiger was killed in short order because he did not accommodate the experience of being attacked into his emotional system. He was not watching, sleeping lightly, waiting, and planning carefully. He rushed headlong into his next hunt with no compensatory defenses and it cost him his life. His genes did not get passed on to a child. The man or woman who

learned from experience and be cautious, plan the attack, and take care not to put him or herself in the same precarious situation that taught the fear in the first place. This was the beginning of the ego defensive maneuver in the psyche of the human mind. And those that were wise enough, or intelligent enough, lived to have children with that tendency passed down to them. Now we are all beneficiaries of that learning process. But we do not experience it so much with wild, dangerous animals as we use it to protect ourselves from the hurt of a spoken word or the pain of an aggressive social maneuver. Here is the beginning of Freud's ego defensive mechanisms that we all employ. The egopath tends to employ them more often and more readily.

People in power will often use the ego defense of lying, misleading, deceiving, or "seeing things" the way they see them because it works to

1. get them what they want
2. protect them from what they're afraid of
3. aggress against someone they're angry at and uncomfortable with
4. Reject someone they find confusing, annoying, disruptive, not a "team player" (which means to an egopath "doesn't do things my way.")

Ego Expressiveness

Ego defenses are not always ego defenses. There are a lot of human behaviors that are called "ego defenses" which are really just expressions of a wounded ego. "Fatigue," for instance, is listed in "101 Defenses" as an ego defense. Getting tired is an ego defense? That doesn't make sense. There may be a lot more to the use of this word "fatigue" than first meets the eye. It is true that if we are carrying a lot of unresolved emotional baggage, we expend a lot of "psychic" energy. Maybe a better word is "mental" energy. We use up a lot of mental energy keeping those old memories and feelings at bay and that can predispose a person to fatigue. But are we talking about an "ego defense?" I will continue using the words "ego defense" but it is unfortunate because many simple expressions of the wounded human soul are not really "defensive" in any way. They just bubble up from within us because we experienced something uncomfortable many years ago and we never got therapy for it. I believe it is a continuum of behaviors. On the one hand you have very defensive behaviors and at the other end you have behaviors which spring from that unresolved pain from the past. And then there are many behaviors which fall in the middle, a combination of the two ends.

In his excellent book, *101 Defenses*, Jerome Blackman states "rumination" as an ego defense. "Rumination" means to mull over a memory of events in search of some answer or resolution to the confusing, hurtful interchanges. This is a good example of behavior that will naturally occur in a person who has suffered "traumail" in childhood. To frame this behavior as "ego defensive" is to increase the chances this person will be shamed in therapy for "willfully" engaging in this behavior when, in fact, it is a natural occurrence and should be treated as such (Wile, 1981).

Respect and Loyalty

Humans carry around in them a certain expectation that is seldom acknowledged and yet we are consistently tapping into it. We have an inner need for respect and loyalty. What is respect? It is the taking of another's needs, feelings, hopes, and expectations into account when deciding what to do or say. This is also a definition of loyalty, strangely enough. Egopaths love to blurt out whatever it is that comes to their minds. It takes altruistic consideration to stop and think if our words will hurt someone's feelings. Egopaths don't care if their words hurt others' feelings. This is most commonly seen with someone who has been given power and not been put through emotional intelligence training.

The person whose feelings were hurt then feels "disrespected" and feels the new boss, who may have once been their coworker, was disloyal. Is it important to show respect to our friends, coworkers, supervisees, children, parents, students, teachers, employees? Your easy answer is "yes." And yet over

and over in a millions situations all across American and around the world, people who crave respect will be mistreated and disrespected. Why is this?

This lack of respect comes from a bit of psychological noise inside the person who is flirting with becoming egopathic. This noise is unfinished emotional business from his or her past that has never been dealt with, never been healed. One of the most difficult concepts people have with psychology is this concept of the past affecting the present. And yet it is at the core of billions of acts of workplace incivility and thousands of acts of terrorism and brutal behavior in the workplace.

The movie “The Last King of Scotland” (for which Forest Whitaker won an Oscar) is about a man who kills many of his countrymen, Idi Amin of Africa. It is safe to assume that he must have been brutalized as a child. It is difficult to compare, Charles Roberts, (see page xx) a quiet young man living in small town America with the brash, bold, offensive Idi Amin of Africa. And yet their profiles must be similar. Both grew up to be cruel ruthless murderers. One was chronic and one was momentary. What variables create the difference? Our knowledge of developmental personology is still unable to give us definitive answers.

Holding Grudges

The concept of “holding a grudge” is not as simple as it seems. Holding a grudge means that a person remembers what someone did, feels resentful about it, and usually decides that a revengeful act is something the person deserves. Let’s examine the parts of this equation. First, the act of remembering is common and normal. You have heard someone say “I’ll forgive her but I won’t forget it.” This is almost laughable moment because the speaker is simply remarking on his brain’s ability to have a functioning memory. But there is more to it than that. The person is saying, “I’ll do the right thing by forgiving her but I really won’t forget the pain she caused and if the opportunity arises I’ll say or do something to get her back.” So this person really hasn’t forgiven the person if they feel this way.

The second aspect of the sequence above is “feeling resentful about” the slight or wound. Here again it is perfectly normal to feel resentful about someone hurting your feelings. Egopaths differ from normals in how much they feel resentful and how long they feel resentful and what they do with the feelings of resentment. A normal person will feel a level of resentment that is commensurate with the hurtful act and then begin to “let it go” or “forget about it” as time goes by. The egopath, on the other hand, has a Velcro style feeling about the woundedness. They not only remember it but also hold on to the feelings of resentment.

This concept of “holding on to the feelings” is a tricky one. Non-egopaths hold on to the feelings, as well. But they do it in a different way than egopaths. The difference is shown in the next segment of the sequence above, and that is in how they decide to get revenge or ‘retribute.’ The non egopath will decide to either have a talk with the offending party at some point or will throw themselves into a project of understanding the behavior and doing whatever it takes to prevent it from happening again (in a way that does not harm the offending party). The egopath, on the other hand, carries a deep seated need to exact revenge in a painful and damaging way on the offending party. As I said in Chapter Three, egopaths most likely were wounded very early in life which leaves them with this biologically based (in the brain) drive or need to “get the other person back and teach them a lesson.” (Pastor Graham, Powerpoint, 5/17/09)

And so it is, judging someone harshly for remembering a hurt or wrong is certainly not appropriate. Even judging them for “not forgiving” shows a lack of insight into human nature. The mature way to approach this conundrum is to remember that it is “the way” a person “remembers” and “doesn’t forgive” that makes all the difference in the world. We have to be able to examine whether a person is egopathically holding a grudge against someone or not. Only then can we justify working on this person’s lack of forgiveness.

Ego Defenses

Give a score of “1” for each of these ego defenses your egopath uses.

1. Garrulousness
2. Minimization
3. Avoidance
4. Justification
5. Compensation for deficiencies
6. Denial
7. Dichotic thinking (splitting): List all the others
8. Negativism
9. Compartmentalization
10. Displacement
11. Condensation
12. Rationalization
13. Devaluation: you see others as having less value or importance than they really do.
14. Transference
15. Inauthenticity
16. Apathy
17. Bullying
18. Hypervigilance

Dr. H was a psychiatrist. I did a psychological profile of Dr. H using the Hare P-SCAN, a screening device by Robert Hare, Ph.D. and Hugues F. Herve', M.A.. Dr. H scored a total of 17. That score is then divided by 3 which meant he only scored a 6. A person would have to score a 30 to be recommended for further testing of his personality. However, the Hare P-SCAN is not designed to screen for egopathy. I have included a short sample of what a screening device for egopathy might look like below.

A tentative list of egopathic attitudes and behaviors

1. Has difficulty focusing on what the target is saying for any length of time.
2. Seems to filter all that is said through a sub textual hidden agenda.
3. Seems to be unable to show emotion about the other's problems or successes.
4. Seems to have a double standard of morality. If it bothers him he is aghast at the other person's inconsideration. But if he does something that is equally inconsiderate, he always has a justification, and therefore is disdainful of the target's resistance.
5. Uses garrulousness to stay in control (talking without responding to the other's comments.)
6. Will do hurtful things to “pay you back” for what you did to him (when you were just setting boundaries.)
7. Remembers well what you did to cross him. He is will never let it go nor forgive you.

Egopathy is characterized by an identifiable set of behaviors.

1. The first and foremost characteristic of the egopath is the pervasive focus on the self. The egopath is filled with thoughts and plans to satisfy or protect his or her feelings or territory. There are four words in English that capture this sense of self focus: egoism, egotism, egocentrism, and narcissism.
2. The second way of identifying them is to notice how they are focused on themselves. For most egopaths this is not readily apparent. You may know the person for months or even years and never know this person is an egopath.
3. The third way to identify an egopath is to notice how they tend to be judgmental. Some little thing you are doing or did all of a sudden is so annoying to him.
4. An egopath is also identifiable by the way they move aggressively against you when they have tired of playing the façade of congeniality.

5. An egopath's true nature comes out when you try to remonstrate with them. A healthy person will stay calm and empathize when you confront them or question them. (few of us can do that) But an egopath will begin to show physiological signs of annoyance. He will begin to behave and show emotionality. He will become agitated. His words will begin to be short, emphasized, sarcastic, or they will escalate to the level of outright belittling or attacking.
6. When you try to react by setting boundaries, asking for a reprieve, or expressing disappointment, he or she is surprised and shocked that you would say such a thing about them as if they were completely innocent.
7. The egopath will react by being aggressively reactive in some way. They will move against you, move away from you, or move to harm you in some way that leaves you feeling abandoned and betrayed.

A Case of Egopathy in a Supervisor: Confirming and Confronting.

Can a person make it to a position of power, responsibility, and prestige and still have deficits of empathy? We don't have to reference Adolph Hitler to answer the question in the positive. From Emotional Intelligence by Dan Goleman to Studies of Sadistic Personality Disorder, there are countless examples and ample evidence from research that indicate a person can be high functioning and yet have difficulty feeling empathy for those under them.

Larry was a bright and handsome graduate student at a regional Texas university. He had been in a counseling program for 3 years and had successfully accomplished 45 out of his required 55 hour graduate program. He had been looking forward to his last three semesters of practicum before graduating with a Master's in Counseling. He was interested in pursuing executive coaching after graduate school since he had had a previous career in business.

His first-semester practicum professor began noticing counseling flaws early in the semester. She began to warn Larry that he needed to work on these counseling inadequacies if he were to pass the class. As the semester progressed, Larry worked diligently to correct his mistakes and learn the basic tools of competent counseling. But the complaints continued and Larry's anxiety began to ratchet up.

Suddenly his professor began complaining about poor performance on his counseling video tapes and finally told him he was not passing the class. She asked the other faculty to watch the tapes and they all wrote anonymous complaints about his technique. The professor called a meeting and, with another faculty member present, told him he had failed the class and he was invited to leave the program "and explore other career opportunities."

Larry had consistently been considered by his professors as a good student with a kind personality and an above average intelligence. He had attended a major state university in which he had been in an upper tier fraternity and was a Phi Beta Kappa. He had a pleasant personality and a kind disposition. But these attributes don't guarantee that a student has the potential to become a competent counselor. I suppose that his professor felt that he did not have those attributes. But wait, there's more.

This student was known fairly well by another counseling professor and this turn of events was shocking to her. She had taught Larry and felt he would make a good counselor.

Ego Defenses

The list of ego defenses egopaths use most often:

1. Agendizing: walking around with an agenda in order to avoid hearing or being responsive to another's needs, feelings, or point of view. An agenda is almost always hidden and so saying "hidden agenda" is almost redundant.
2. Self-satisfaction: feeling more satisfied with your work so you don't have to be interested in asking, learning, or listening to advice.
3. Denial
4. Garrulousness: talking over the other person as a way of dealing with the discomfort of hearing them

talk.

The conversation I can imagine an egopath having upon hearing about this book.

Honey, what is this book “Emotional Intelligence and Egopathy.” What is that... egopathy?

Jane: It’s a book that was recommended to me by a friend that said....

Jack: I didn’t ask that question, Jane, can’t you follow the question? I said what does that mean ... egopathy?

Jane: Okay, I’m sorry; I’m not sure exactly what it means, dear. All I know is that it is a book about people who are pushy, demanding, angry, and even cruel sometimes.

Jack: Well, that’s 99% of the population. How’s he going to write a book about 99% of the population. He’d have to title it “How everyone acts.” And since we know how every one acts it would be a completely useless book. Right?

Jane: Oh, Jack, I...

Jack: Don’t “oh, Jack” me, I hate it when you do that.

Jane: (Steps into the room) I think *that’s* egopathy, okay?

Jack: What? You’re driving me crazy with your avoidant conversational style and reacting like anyone would and you have the audacity to say “That’s egopathy.” I think that is a very rude thing to say. Maybe you’re... you have some “egopathy” ...a lot of it., did you ever think about that?

Jane: Jack, do you want to talk about the book and why I’m reading it or not?

Jack: No, to be quite frank, I don’t. Not if it’s going create such bullshit in my life.

Jane: It’s not the book that’s creating the bullshit, Jack, it’s you. And to “to be quite frank” I am getting very tired of it.

Jack: Well, so am I. Did you ever think about that? Maybe I’m getting sick and tired of it, too.

Jane: You asked why I was reading the book..

Jack: No, I didn’t...

Jane: ... and I’d like to tell you. Well, I’d like to tell you anyway. I’m reading it to get to know you better and hopefully it will help me know what to do about you. We can’t seem to have a decent conversation these days without arguing and I am not going to live like this anymore.

Jack: Well, then, stop arguing! You’re the one’s who’s doing it! I’d love it if you’d stop arguing with me.

Jane: (deep sigh and pause) Jack, the book is about people who drive other people crazy because of unfinished business from the past. Jack, you have old wounds that are causing you to be the way you are. Do you not...

Jack: What? What kind of bullshit is that? I do not have (sarcastic) “unfinished business from the past!” Such bullshit!

Jane: Okay, again, this is why I’m reading the book. I want to know what to do about you and your unbelievable attitudes.

Jack: Fine, just *fine*. I don’t want to ever hear about that book ever again. How much did it cost? I am seriously thinking about picking it up and tossing out the window. If a f... book is going to cause this much trouble in our house, we shouldn’t even have it in here. I don’t know why you buy such garbage nonsense in the first place. Now, please, can I can some peace and quiet to read the paper?! Is that so much to ask?

Nothing was accomplished in this conversation. Jack’s need to be in control and fight to be blameless is overwhelming him and his partner. After Jane reads this book she will begin to have insight about how to deal with Jack’s animosity and maleficence.