



# Psychology

This is an experiential course designed to help students become more aware of themselves as unique individuals. Using their own experiences as a guide, students are encouraged to be scientists in the process of exploring themselves and their place in the universe as they examine such topics as love, beauty, joy, spontaneity, and self-actualization.

The following books are needed for this course:

*Oak Meadow Psychology Syllabus*

*George Orwell's 1984*

# Oak Meadow Psychology

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# Psychology ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ Lesson 1

## ***AN INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY***

### ***WHY STUDY PSYCHOLOGY?***

Perhaps the simplest reason for studying psychology is that we are in the midst of a psychological revolution. Aldous Huxley has said:

*We have had revolutions, we have had political, industrial, economic, and nationalistic revolutions. All of them, as our descendants will discover, were trivial by comparison with the psychological revolution toward which we are rapidly moving.*

-Huxley, 1971

Psychology comes from the root words *Psyche*, meaning ‘Mind’ or ‘Soul,’ and *Logos*, meaning ‘Knowledge.’ So psychology is the Knowledge of the Mind or Soul. Historically, humankind has acquired knowledge through three very important ways:

1. Revelation - Direct communication from God or Spirit.
2. Tradition- As handed down by our parents, our governments, our schools, our churches and other institutions.
3. Philosophical Speculation - Great thinkers sitting and speculating about what Mind is and asking such questions as “if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?”

Since science has burst upon the scene we have yet another way of acquiring knowledge. It is called Empiricism, or knowledge based on experience and systematic observation of that experience. To contrast the old philosophical approach that psychology grew out of and the new scientific approach, Sir Francis Bacon, a 17th Century philosopher, writes:

*In the year of our Lord 1432, there arose a grievous quarrel among the brethren over the number of teeth in the mouth of a horse. For 13 days the disputation raged without ceasing. All the ancient books and chronicles were fetched out, and wonderful and ponderous erudition, such as was never before heard of in this region, was made manifest. At the beginning of the 14th day, a youthful friar of goodly bearing asked his learned superiors for permission to add a word, and straightway, to the wonderment of the disputants, whose deep wisdom he sore vexed, he beseeched them to unbend in a manner coarse and unheard-of, and to look in the open mouth of a horse and find answer to their questionings. At this, their dignity being grievously hurt, they waxed exceedingly wroth, and joining in a mighty uproar, they flew upon him and smote him hip and thigh, and cast him out forthwith. For, said they, surely Satan hath tempted this bold neophyte to declare unholy and unheard-of ways of finding truth contrary to all the teachings of the fathers. After many days more of grievous strife the dove of peace sat on the assembly, and they as one man, declaring the problem to be an everlasting mystery because of a grievous dearth of historical and theological evidence thereof, so ordered the same writ down.*

Empiricism maintains that humankind might best be understood by observing humans and their behavior. One of the great philosophers of that period, John Locke, suggested that there is no basic human nature, that our minds at birth are a *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate,” and all that is written on it will be written by experience. Thus, if you know the individual’s experience, you understand the individual. This position did not lead, however, to any truly systematic observations of man under controlled conditions. It led, by and large, to a great deal of armchair speculation, mostly based on casual observations.

Locke’s view is carried on today in modern psychology by a school of thought called Behaviorism. We will learn about it later. But for now let’s continue with a brief history of psychology.

## *A BRIEF HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY*

With the advent of empiricism, psychology was born. In 1879 Wilhelm Wundt established the first laboratory for the scientific study of psychology in Leipzig, Germany. Wundt hoped to discover the basic building blocks of mind or consciousness much as a physicist would discover the basic building blocks of physical matter. His idea was that you could take some object in the physical world, present it to a trained observer, and have him or her describe the basic fundamental elements of their conscious experience. For example, if you presented a red ball, the individual might say, "I see redness, I feel weight, I see roundness." This method of looking within one's conscious experience is known as introspection. Once you are able to analyze the conscious compound (in this case a red ball) into its basic elements (redness, weight, roundness) you can investigate the laws that bind these elements together into complex conscious experiences. Wundt maintained that developing a science of conscious experience is no different from formulating a science of physical reality. Once you have found the basic building blocks of which the world is made, and have discovered the laws that hold them together, you have constructed a science of physics or chemistry. Likewise, once you have discovered the basic building blocks of conscious experience and the laws that bind them together, you will have constructed a science of conscious experience.

- 1. What do you think of Wundt's ideas? Can mind or consciousness be studied in the same way we would study physical matter?**
- 2. What do you suppose Wundt and his followers (called Structuralists because they attempted to find out how mind is structured) found in their experiments with introspection? Why might it be difficult to break consciousness down into its basic parts?**

The next major development in scientific psychology was a school of thought called Functionalism and it was originated by William James, an American psychologist who founded the first psychological laboratory in the United States about 100 years ago.

James believed that the purpose or function of both our mental processes and our behavior was to help us to adapt to our environment. James also used introspection but in addition he looked at people's behaviors as well as their conscious experiences. But James captured the essence of the problem of the physical versus the psychological realities that Wundt missed. He recognized that each individual's conscious experiences, although containing similarities, were in fact quite different and unique—much like the fact that although our physical bodies are similar to an extent, no two individuals' fingerprints are the same.

Rather than seeing consciousness as something that can be broken down into basic building blocks as Wundt suggested, James saw it as a “stream of thought,” continuous in its flow, like a river or a stream. In his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James says that the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance and that union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end. He goes on to say that prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof - be that spirit “God” or “Law” - is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

- 3. What do you think of James' view of consciousness as a “stream” of continuous thought? Where might this stream originate from?**
- 4. Do you think that thought originates in the brain? Have you ever observed your own consciousness, as in meditation? If so, what was your experience like?**
- 5. Following is a brief exercise in meditation. Do it for 2-3 minutes and write about what you experienced.**

Find a quiet place where you can sit without being disturbed by outside noises. Sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight and your eyes closed. Begin to focus your attention on your breathing, watching the air come into your body and leave it with a flowing, smooth movement. Keep your attention focused on your breathing and if your attention starts to wander just calmly bring it back to the continuous flow of air entering and leaving your body. Do it for as long as you are comfortable but no longer than 5 minutes.

What did you notice about your thoughts as you did this exercise? Was it easy or difficult to keep your attention on your breathing? Was the exercise a pleasant one or did you find you were uncomfortable?

Later we will explore meditation more deeply. It is currently being used by many psychologists to help people to deal with the many stresses of living in this modern world. It has been proven to be an extremely valuable tool.

With the coming of modern technology, introspection was given up in favor of more objective ways of studying what now came to be known as human behavior. John B. Watson, in the early 1900s, decided to throw out the concept of “mind” or “consciousness” altogether and just look at people’s behaviors. He felt that mind was just too elusive a concept to study scientifically and he ushered in one of the mainstream schools of psychology still in existence today. That school is called Behaviorism and it follows the old philosophy of John Locke who thought we came into the world as “blank slates” to be written on by our environment and our experience of it.

Watson compared people to simple adding machines (computers were not yet invented). On an adding machine you press a button and out comes a response. With people, Watson thought, a stimulus input comes along, presses a button in your brain, and out comes a response. The inputs, to Watson, were controlled by the environment and the responses were controlled by your genes (what you have inherited from your parents and ancestors) and by past learning. Your thoughts and feelings were just by-products of a Stimulus-Response process over which the individual has little control. To Watson, people have no more voluntary control over their actions than does an adding machine, and just as you wouldn’t bother asking an adding machine to explain its actions, you shouldn’t bother asking people to explain theirs. In fact, Watson was so certain that the environment shaped the destiny of the individual that he proclaimed:

*Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own special world to bring them up in, and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief, and yes, beggarman and thief.*

-Watson, 1913

- 6. Do you agree with Watson that we are shaped by our environment? Are we helpless victims of external stimuli to which we can only react in a way limited by our genetic inheritance? Can a child growing up in the ghetto, surrounded by poverty and lack of opportunity, escape the destiny that the Behaviorists see for him or her? How?**
  
- 7. Do you think “mind” is a useful concept for psychologists to study or, since we can’t really see it, should we dispense with it as Watson suggested and just study human behavior which we can see? Give reasons for your answer. (You might want to consider the concept of electricity and how it lights your home in spite of the fact that you cannot see electricity itself, but only its results).**

Although Behaviorism has remained the most favored viewpoint within psychology as a science, it has recently been challenged by another viewpoint that forms a second mainstream school of thought within psychology. This viewpoint objects to the very idea of viewing humankind scientifically. It is called Humanism and its major proponents are Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, about whom you will learn. Humanists believe that something is lost when you try to study people totally objectively as Science tries to do. Since we are ourselves the subject of study we cannot ever be totally objective. To the Humanist, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and we will never understand ourselves by reducing ourselves to test tube measurements. The essence of what it means to be human is lost when we attempt to study psychology in the same way we study the physical world, objectively and with measurements.

Humanism concerns itself with such things as love, beauty, joy, spontaneity, self-actualization and things that do not lend themselves to measurement and laboratory experimentation.

Actually, Humanism is not as much a school of thought as it is an *attitude* within psychology. Basically what Humanism says is that we are growth oriented, altruistic, loving and creative in our essence. We are here for the purpose of self-discovery and self-expression and each of us is unique and important to the universal scheme of things.

As the third major force within psychology (the second one being Psychoanalysis, about which we will talk later), Humanism encourages each of us to be scientists in the truest sense of the word, by exploring ourselves and our place in the universe, using our own experience as the measure rather than looking to external measures. It is in this spirit of self-exploration that psychology can truly make its grandest contribution and it is with the Humanist viewpoint that your textbook was written.

This brings us to the second reason for studying psychology (as you may recall in the Introduction, the first reason had to do with the ongoing psychological revolution occurring today), and to the second lesson.

# Psychology ~~~~~ Lesson 14

## *DEFENSE MECHANISMS*

In this lesson we are going to focus on defense mechanisms. Although defense mechanisms are used by all of us to varying degrees to protect us from seemingly intolerable psychological stress - fear, anxiety, disappointment, anger, rage, etc. - it is important to remember that using defense mechanisms is, in fact, defensive behavior. Defensive behavior can be quite the thing to do when confronted with an enemy that would do us harm, but when our actions become so defensive that we not only block out the enemy but friends and potential helpers to our growth and development as people as well, then we are using the defense mechanisms excessively and harmfully. Defensive behavior, like any behavior, can become habitual and lead to a deadening and blunting of life. When the individual is so exhausted from constantly using energy to protect or defend a self-image, a concept, or a belief, then that leaves little energy left for creative self-expression.

Therapists who work with neurotically emotionally disturbed people often find that these people experience a tremendous amount of relief when they can finally let go of defensive behavior. First, however, they typically undergo a lot of anxiety that is the result of attachment to a certain self-image. When they are able to realize that their self-image is just that, an image, and one that is partially based on reality and partially based on illusion, then they are able to become less attached to it and consequently become a lot more flexible in their behavior, thereby allowing themselves more freedom and ultimately more energy.

**REPRESSION:** Repression is often referred to as motivated forgetting, reduction of anxiety being the force. We forget the past or parts of it by either distorting or erasing our memories. Tension of the muscles, changing breathing or heart rates can go ignored when we try to repress the present. We repress the future when we deny desires, hopes, or plans.

Repression does not eliminate feelings, it merely disguises or hides them. Often this masked repression becomes evident in other ways. Repressed anger, for example, becomes disguised as sick or malicious humor. Repression is often the body's way of protecting itself from psychological pain.

**PROJECTION:** Anxiety is also reduced via the unconscious mechanism of projection. This usually occurs when an individual seeks to blame others for their own feelings or behaviors. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung focused on projection in much of his work. He identified three components or personalities that are rejected and then projected onto others. The *shadow* represents our dark side, that part of us which we consider dangerous, or inferior. The *animus* is the masculine, assertive side and the *anima* is the feminine, passive component. A man will project his anima onto a woman; a woman, her animus onto a man. When we project our shadow onto others of the same sex, it is they, not we, who are inferior, silly, stupid or evil.

**RATIONALIZATION:** Rationalization occurs when we seek to defend ourselves against threats to our self-esteem by justifying, making excuses or outright lying. This is yet one more way to escape anxiety as we use rationalization as a means to smooth out the rough edges in our lives.

**REGRESSION:** Pouting, whining, rebelling against authority, driving recklessly, destroying property, or throwing tantrums are all acts of regression; attempting to avoid adult responsibilities and choices by reverting to childish behavior. Displacement is another means of regression, when an individual redirects his or her anger, resentment or fear onto another weaker individual.

While we have all used one or more of these defense mechanisms at one time or another as a spontaneous, unconscious attempt to thwart any threatening situation in which we feel out of control, it is when a person relies solely on these modalities that they become distanced from their true self and with those around them.

- 1. Give a real life example of each one of the defense mechanisms - Repression, Projection, Rationalization, and Regression.**
- 2. Other very common defense mechanisms are Displacement, Reaction Formation, Adjustment by Ailment, and Fantasy. Read the following descriptions of these defense mechanisms and answer the questions afterwards.**

## *DEFENSE MECHANISMS*

Excerpted from *Psychology and Personal Growth* by Abe Arkoff

### **ADJUSTMENT BY AILMENT**

Sometimes, without any conscious pretense, we may feel ill even though the doctor can find nothing physically wrong. Or perhaps we feel more ill or more incapacitated than we should from a particular ailment. Or we get well more slowly than we should.

The relatively non-insightful use of illness, imaginary or real, as a way of averting anxiety is called *adjustment by ailment*. Unlike malingered conditions which are deliberate pretenses, adjustments by ailment imply no conscious deceit. In this latter defense, the individual is unaware of the psychological implications of her or his behavior.

In actual practice, however, it may be difficult to distinguish between malingered and adjustment by ailment. Some situations appear to contain elements of both, and an act of malingered may gradually shade into adjustment by ailment as we slowly convince ourselves that we are indeed as ill as we were pretending to be. For example, we may be searching for an excuse to avoid attending a trying social or professional function. If we were ill, we tell ourselves, we wouldn't have to go. Well, we already feel a little upset. The more we think about it, the more upset we become. Finally, we decide that we really are sick; we thus spare ourselves the pain of going to the function as well as the pain of admitting that we didn't want to go.

In anxious states the body's functioning is upset, and it is easy to imagine illness. An upset cardiovascular system may convince us that we have heart disease or at least a severe headache. An upset digestive tract may lead us to believe that we have a stomach ache or indigestion. Overwhelmed by problems, we indeed feel tired, worn out, and sick. Describing a trying experience, we may say, "I was just sick about it," and mean it both figuratively and literally.

This defense protects us from threats in various ways. We may use an imaginary ailment to take our attention away from an anxiety-provoking problem. We may use the “ailment” as an excuse to avoid in unpleasant situation or, once in the situation, to get out of it with no loss of face. Sometimes an imaginary ailment serves to attract the attention and sympathy of others. And occasionally we employ it to punish ourself and rid ourself of feelings of guilt.

Simulated ailments may help us to handle difficult situations but, to the extent that they are successful in doing so, they make it unnecessary for us to face our real problems and attempt to solve them. With extensive reliance on this defense, we may become a chronic “psychological” invalid. Not only psychological problems but real medical problems as well may go unattended because of the masking effect of imaginary ones.

## DISPLACEMENT

Some of our behavior is threatening because of the people that it is directed toward or because of the particular form that it takes. Assuming that we express an impulse only in certain ways and only toward certain people, we may escape anxiety.

In *displacement* there is a shift of thought, feeling, or action from one person or situation to another. Displacement occurs because the original impulse causes or would cause considerable anxiety. Consequently, there is a shift to a neutral object or to one that is more vulnerable or less dangerous than the original...

Sometimes the new object is similar to the original; the two may stand for each other or be identified with each other in some way, and the new object symbolizes the old one. For example, the little boy who is angry with his mother may trample her flower bed instead of attacking her directly. Or he may take his feelings out on his teacher if she in some way reminds him of his mother and is more vulnerable to attack.

Sometimes, however, the similarity between the new object and the old one is quite subtle and can be understood only by a person with a good deal of psychological training. Occasionally, on the surface at least, there appears to be no relationship. Occasionally, too, displacement seems to be a diffuse process in which the troublesome impulse is channeled to many new objects with little apparent rhyme or reason.

It has already been noted that the aggressive impulse is one that is frequently diverted or displaced. Other processes that commonly undergo displacement are fear, love, and attention.

Fears may be displaced in the same way that aggressive impulses are. People who are constantly worried about little things which appear to constitute no danger may actually be concerned about something more important which has been repressed. A child who fears his father, a person with whom he must be in constant association, may displace this fear to animals. A woman who hates her husband and fears that she may do him violence may instead express a fear of knives and other sharp instruments.

The people whom we wish to love and be loved by do not always respond. In this event, we may displace our love and affection to someone else. For example, a boy who is unable to establish a satisfactory relationship with his father may turn his affection to a teacher, a scoutmaster, or some other adult male. Sometimes a person who has been jilted by a lover finds and quickly marries someone else on the rebound. Some forms of self-love appear to be displacements: constantly rebuffed by others, a person may remove all of his affection to himself...

Sometimes we make doubly sure that upsetting problems stay out of the focus of attention by keeping ourselves busy with other activities. A man who is having difficulty with his home life may displace his attention to his work; in fact, he may throw himself into his job with such vigor that his friends mistakenly attribute his adjustment difficulties to overwork. In the same way, a woman who is having trouble with her roles of wife and mother may busy herself in social or professional activities. Many people look forward to their vacation as the time when attention can be diverted from the bothersome problems of the everyday environment.

Through the use of displacement, we are able to discharge our feelings in acceptable directions. Positive and negative feelings may be separated and applied to separate objects. Positive feelings may be displaced to objects that will accept and respond to these feelings. Negative feelings may be diverted from important and dangerous objects onto those which are unimportant and vulnerable. In this way, we may love some things, hate others, and not be torn by ambivalence...

Unfortunately, insofar as displacement involves negative feelings, one relationship may be improved at the cost of another. Although the second object is more vulnerable than the first, it may be an important one nevertheless. For example, the employee who displaces feelings of hostility from his office to the home environment ensures the safety of his job at the expense of vital family relationships...

## REACTION FORMATION

When we sense things in ourselves that are threatening to our self-esteem and general welfare, we may attempt to convince ourselves and others that these things are not so. One way that we can accomplish this is by accentuating opposite qualities. We strive to feel, think, and act in ways that are sharply in contrast to the ways that we tend to feel, think, and act.

*Reaction formation* refers to efforts to inhibit, mask, or overcome certain impulses by emphasizing opposite ones. Using such behavior as a defense against threat is very common. Sensing fear, we may attempt to act very brave. Sensing weakness, we may attempt to be tough and hard-boiled. Sensing unacceptable dependence, we may make a great show of rebellion. Sensing anxiety-provoking affectionate feelings, we may react by being very cynical and take a cool and jaundiced view of human beings...

A person who is strongly tempted by unacceptable sex needs can react against them by being extremely puritanical. He may prevent any sexual expression in himself and avoid almost all association with the opposite sex. Furthermore, he may criticize others who engage in any sexual activity, no matter how mild; sometimes he may even attempt to prevent them from doing so. Whether his activities are ostensibly on his own behalf or seemingly on the behalf of others, they are designed to help him keep his own forbidden impulses in check.

Sensing unacceptable aggressive urges in himself, a person can react against them by being very kind. Such a person will appear to be extremely polite, deferent, and solicitous about the welfare of others. He may be unable to be aggressive even when aggressive actions appear to be quite appropriate. His behavior is dedicated to keeping his hostile impulses under control.

A reaction formation toward selfish tendencies may be manifested in extreme generosity. Stinginess and avarice may be repressed and replaced by magnanimous actions. In this patterning the person will feel compelled to give and be generous; he must constantly demonstrate to himself and others that he is not the self-seeking person he inwardly suspects himself to be.

Reaction formations are characterized by their extreme and compelling strength. As was noted, reaction formations to sex may be manifested in very puritanical behavior, those to aggression may produce excessively mild and gentle actions, and those counteracting selfishness may compel great generosity. In each case the individual will be unwilling and unable to modify his position. The force of the reaction is necessary to prevent the original impulse from breaking out of control into open expression.

Reaction formations may show inconsistencies and imperfections. Sometimes the forbidden behavior and the reaction behavior exist side by side. For example, a person who has reacted strongly against a tendency to be dirty and disorderly may still engage in certain activities or have certain places in which he is very messy.

Sometimes, too, a reaction formation will break down, allowing the original impulse free expression. A child who has always been extremely polite and well behaved may be caught in acts of extreme cruelty toward animals. A man who has always seemed extremely mild in his actions may suddenly lash out in some verbal or physical aggression. A woman who has spent a good deal of her life attacking certain patterns of behavior may suddenly be found to be engaging in this very behavior.

Reaction formation plays an important part in the socialization process. Generosity, kindness, orderliness, and many other personal qualities that are valued in our society are not natural expressions of the child; they are partly formed in reaction to earlier, diametrically opposite patterns of behavior. The small child, for example, has little concept of cleanliness; it is through constant training that he develops a dislike for dirt, a disgust for filth, and a loathing for his bodily wastes.

It is interesting to observe reaction formations in the process of development. One might note, for example, a sudden shift in a child from attraction to dirt to aversion to dirt. A little girl who formerly played in her dress until it was filthy suddenly becomes sensitive to the smallest spot. Any garment that is the slightest bit dirty must be immediately removed. Little by little, her actions may become modulated so that she learns to be clean but not excessively so.

Severe, unmodulated reaction formations distort our lives. We need to be clean, of course, but we should not need to be always immaculate. We should be generous, but we should not feel compelled to give. We need to be kind, but we should be able to express hostility when the occasion seems to warrant it. In general, we should not be strangers to any of our impulses; instead of attempting to seal them off, we should learn to know them and express them in the ways we value...

## FANTASY

The world we live in, reality, leaves much to be desired. Our efforts may help to change it. Or we may change our perceptions of it and somehow see it as a more desirable place. Or we may be able to escape it for a while by constructing a private and more satisfying world.

*Fantasy* refers to imaginary constructions. It includes make-believe play, reveries, and daydreams. Novels, movies, plays, and similar literary and dramatic works might be considered to provide the individual with ready-made fantasy experiences.

As a defense, our fantasy life provides us with an escape from the dangers, threats, and boredom of the real world. In our fantasies we can meet our unmet needs and reach our unreach goals. We can picture ourselves as a different sort of person and the world as a different sort of world...

Fantasy is a very common pursuit at every age. The child acts out his fantasies. His play is filled with make-believe. He pretends that he is the person he would like to be, living in a world he would like to live in. He becomes his father, a cowboy, a spaceman, or a ferocious animal. He finds himself on the Western plains, high above the earth, or deep in the jungle. In his play he escapes the limitations of being young and weak and small and under the domination of adults.

As we grow older we increasingly daydream our fantasies rather than act them out. We not only create new experiences, we also relive old ones that have been enjoyable. Sometimes our fantasies are previews of events which are to occur in the future; certainly part of the pleasure of vacation, a trip, or a party is in its anticipation.

In later maturity, many daydreams tend to be re-creative ones. In his fantasies the elderly person may live again happy experiences out of his past. Even these daydreams have elements of creativeness; in memory some old experiences become more satisfying than they were in actuality.

“Conquering hero” and “suffering hero” are two common types of fantasies. In conquering-hero fantasies the individual imagines that he is the master of some situation. He is a famous athlete, a brilliant student, a great lover, or a fascinating conversationalist. He is applauded, acclaimed, and sought after. In fantasy he may reenact an old experience, but this time he says and does all the things that he failed to say and do during the actual experience.

In conquering-hero fantasies a person may have the experiences that are not forthcoming in real life. For example, a youth who is hungry for heterosexual experience may imagine a relationship with some girl who has caught his eye. He may daydream about asking her for a date and then conjure up the conversations they would have, the dances and parties they would attend, and the affection they would share. In the same fashion, a single woman may daydream that she is married, has a handsome and considerate husband, attractive children, and a nice home.

In suffering-hero fantasies the individual imagines himself to be the victim of some situation. He sees himself as undergoing great hardship or suffering adversity. He is cold and hungry, unloved and unwanted, or destitute and outcast.

He may be wounded, dying, or dead.

In fantasizing oneself in such pitiful circumstances, a person becomes a figure who is deserving of the sympathy and commiseration of others. At the same time he is worthy of their admiration for carrying on so well in the face of such circumstances. Elements of revenge may also be present since now certain people will be very sorry that they did not treat the person better in the past. Suffering-hero daydreams are common in children who are having difficulties with their parents.

When life is uninteresting and frustrating, fantasy permits us to escape into a dream world where exciting things occur and difficult goals are reached. In fantasy we can relive the pleasant experiences of the past (sometimes making them even more pleasant than they really were), and we can live in advance the anticipated pleasures of the future. Creative thinking and fantasy are closely related; representing our needs, activities, and goals in fantasy may be the first step to instituting them in reality...

Fantasy becomes detrimental when it becomes a substitute for reality achievements. Compared with the ideal goals available in fantasy, the small rewards possible in the real world may seem hardly worth the effort. Fantasy can rob a person of large amounts of time which otherwise might be applied to real-life pursuits...

- 3. Displacement is one of the most common of the defense mechanisms used at times by all of us. Give an example in your own life of using displacement.**
- 4. Reaction Formation: Can you think of any people in the media who might represent the use of reaction formation? Any time an individual's reaction to something is too intense, one can suspect this defense mechanism is in operation, and they are feeling inside just the opposite of what they are saying. Shakespeare captured this defense mechanism very well in his famous line "Methinks the lady doth protest too much."**
- 5. What are the positive aspects of fantasy as a defense mechanism? The negative aspects?**
- 6. What are some of the dangers of using adjustment by ailment as a defense mechanism? The film "The Big Chill," made in 1983, is a classic portrayal of many of the defense mechanisms people use to cope with anxiety. If you have access to this film via video, see it and write a paper about the defense mechanisms used by each of the characters. If you do not have access to the film, use another film (e.g., "Breakfast Club" or "Summer School") or some other examples of the defense mechanisms in operation.**

To summarize important points on defensive behavior:

- We are constantly flooded by stimuli arising in our environment and from within ourselves.
- We cannot respond to every stimulus. We cannot express every impulse. We find some of the stimuli in the environment unpleasant, painful, and threatening. If these stimuli are too threatening, we may attempt to defend ourselves against them.
- Impulses arising from within ourselves also can prove threatening. We may have bothersome thoughts and distressing feelings that we seek to inhibit or modify. We may seek to get control of ourselves so that we will not do something we are tempted to do. We may deny the impulse or attempt to modify it. Or perhaps we have already done something which has filled us with guilt and remorse. We may attempt to alter the memory of it in some way and see it differently so that we can live without anxiety.
- Certain patterns of behavior that we employ for protection against threat or anxiety are called defenses. They are sometimes called “defense mechanisms” and they do tend to operate in a machine-like, mechanistic or automatic way. Sometimes they are referred to as “ego defense mechanisms” since they serve to defend the ego or self-concept from threat. Used in moderation they are probably useful. We cannot, unfortunately, be open and vulnerable and undefended in an environment that is sometimes hostile and potentially harmful. On the other hand, if we are too defensive and use the defense mechanisms to excess, we lose sight of our authentic self and we lose the ability to connect with others in a meaningful way. Monitoring our own behavior so that it does not become excessively defensive and altering our self-concept in a positive direction when it does, are important steps to a more creative and fulfilling existence.