CHAPTER III
PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES: II
DIRECT AND INDIRECT AGGRESSION

In the preceding chapter the basic hypothesis has been elaborated by considering certain factors which are presumed to influence the strength of instigation to aggression and the degree of inhibition of aggression. Additional factors that must be analyzed are those presumed to influence the direction of aggression.

In order to begin the task of describing the direction which aggression will be expected to take, it is necessary to make a further assumption: the strongest instigation, aroused by a frustration, is to acts of aggression directed against the agent perceived to be the source of the frustration and progressively weaker instigations are aroused to progressively less direct acts of aggression. A man who has just had his vacation plans disrupted by his employer will be expected, on the basis of this assumption, to be most angry at his employer but also somewhat more irritable toward the world in general.

The principle that the strongest instigation is to aggression against the agent perceived to be the source of the frustration finds a social application in war propaganda. Lasswell (83, p. 47) has shown that one of the techniques for making people aggressive toward the enemy during the

1. In the absence of an acceptable stimulus-response theory of perception, this assumption must be phrased in a somewhat unsatisfactory manner. It would seem that learning which response is the most effective in removing the frustration must be an important factor in building up the type of perception upon which the definition of direct aggression is based. It would also seem that the generalization posited in this assumption is analogous to the generalization of a conditioned response: the more direct acts of aggression will be those which are more similar, or more closely bound by associational ties, to the act of most direct aggression.
World War was to make them believe that this enemy was the actual or potential source of important frustrations. Further evidence, indirectly supporting this principle, is suggested by the fact that the subjects in the study by Doob and Sears (37) definitely reported acts of direct aggression to be much more satisfying to them than other forms of aggression.

A given frustration will instigate direct aggression. The next logical step is a consideration of the behavior to be expected when a strongly instigated act of direct aggression is prevented from occurring by a strong anticipation of punishment specific to that act. Since it is thus assumed that the act of direct aggression is strongly instigated, interference with this direct aggression constitutes in itself an additional frustration. And, according to the principles already stated, this additional frustration will be expected: (1) directly to instigate acts of aggression against the agent perceived to be responsible for the interference with the original aggression, and (2) indirectly to heighten the instigation to all other forms of aggression.

Obviously this vicious circle—frustration, aggression, interference with aggression, more frustration—tends to be repeated as long as successive acts of aggression suffer interference.² From this it follows that the greater the degree of inhibition specific to a more direct act of aggression, the more probable will be the occurrence of less direct acts of aggression.

When the argument is carried further, it is clear that, if all the acts of aggression directed at a given object are prevented, there will be a tendency for other acts of aggression, not directed at this object, to occur. A person may kick a chair instead of his enemy. In Freudian terminology, such

². Whether the instigation to aggression will continue to mount until some act occurs or will tend to die down until the instigation to aggression finally disappears should depend upon exact quantitative relationships beyond the scope of the present discussion.
aggression is displaced from one object to another.\textsuperscript{3} If, on the other hand, the prevention is specific to the type of act which would be direct aggression, there will be a tendency for other acts of different types to occur.\textsuperscript{4} An individual may bring a lawsuit against his enemy instead of attempting to murder him; thus a change in the form of aggression may occur. Although these two kinds of change are not necessarily distinct functionally, they will be discussed separately.

**DISPLACEMENT OF AGGRESSION**

The principle which has just been derived, that there should be a strong tendency for inhibited aggression to be displaced, is supported by a wide variety of observations from different fields of investigation. In turn, these observations are integrated and made more meaningful by the principle of displacement.

Superficially puzzling instances of behavior in which a tremendous amount of aggression suddenly explodes without apparent cause are often explicable on the basis of displaced aggression. A Southern girl whose life history was being studied had severely berated a porter who merely failed to have the exact change immediately on hand. Such behavior was exceedingly rare in this ordinarily mild-mannered girl. She herself was for some time most perplexed and dismayed by such a sudden, violent, and seemingly irrational outburst of temper. When questioned briefly, she revealed that on this

\textsuperscript{3} To be exact, one should distinguish between (a) that spread of aggression which is assumed to occur whether or not the direct aggression is inhibited, and (b) the displacement of aggression which, as has been deduced, should occur only when the more direct form of aggression is inhibited. Since few of the observations available to date have been so controlled that such a distinction can be made with any certainty, the term displacement will be used loosely here to cover both phenomena.

\textsuperscript{4} In the absence of specific data upon which to base principles that describe independently which of two types of action both directed at the same object will be the more direct form of aggression, the most direct form of aggression is dependently defined as the type of act which would occur in the complete absence of anticipation of punishment.
particular morning she had had a severely exasperating experience with her landlord, but had completely inhibited all aggressive tendencies toward him. As soon as this fact was called to her attention, she understood her own atypical anger toward the porter as displaced aggression.

On occasion, displaced aggression may have a somewhat happier fate and even serve socially approved ends. Lasswell (84) reports the case of a political reformer, part of whose zeal, the investigator believed, could be traced back definitely to basic hatreds against his father and brother. These hatreds were displaced to objects whose destruction was highly approved by the followers of the reformer. Some such displacements may be called sublimations.

A different type of evidence tending to support the principle of displacement is afforded by three simple exploratory experiments on aggression. In one of these, Miller and Davis (110) trained albino rats to commence striking one another, at the signal of a mild shock, in a manner similar to the way in which rats strike at one another when normally fighting. This behavior was reinforced by turning off the shock as soon as the rats were observed to strike one another vigorously. A small celluloid doll was then placed in the arena along with a pair of the trained rats; these particular animals tended to strike each other. Different animals, similarly trained, were placed one at a time in the same apparatus with the doll; these tended to strike the doll. A rat first attempted, in short, to strike the other animal, but when this was prevented by the absence of that animal it struck the doll.

In another study Miller and Bugelski (108) used an experimental situation to frustrate human subjects. The subjects were told that they were working in an experiment on cooperation and competition, and by proper urging they were instigated to do their very best. Then they were paired, one at a time, with a partner who, they thought, was just ano-
other subject but who was actually a confederate of the experimenters. During “coöperation” this partner caused the subjects to fail by bungling his part of all the coöperative tasks. During “competition” the partner caused the subjects to fail by succeeding well himself and making distracting remarks and invidious comparisons. A variety of other little annoyances, such as mispronouncing the subject’s name, were also provided. Immediately after experiencing this frustrating situation the subjects tended to rate their friends lower on a simple personality scale than did control subjects who had not been subjected to these frustrations. Since the friends had not been present and could not possibly have been to blame for the frustrations which the subjects had just undergone, the more critical attitude of the subjects toward their friends may be taken as tentative evidence for the spread or displacement of aggression.

A third experiment, also by the same writers (109), took advantage of a frustrating situation in a natural setting. By chance it was known that, as part of a general testing program, boys at a camp were going to be forced to sacrifice a portion of their leisure activity in order to take long, dull examinations composed of questions which, on the whole, were too difficult for them to answer. At the outset the boys were relatively unaware of what was in store for them. Later it became obvious that the tests were running overtime and were preventing them from making the strongly instigated response of attending Bank Night at the local theatre; thus they were compelled to miss what they considered to be the most interesting event of the week. In order to exploit this situation, so loaded with frustrations, all of the boys were given brief attitude tests before and after the main examination. Half of them rated Mexicans before and Japanese after the main examination. The other half rated Japanese before and Mexicans afterwards. As would be expected, the attitude
An apparently similar tendency is to be observed in the behavior of groups of Southern whites toward the Negro. The positive correlation between low economic indices and number of lynchings, cited in Chapter II, represents not only the variation in aggression with variation in strength of frustration but also the displacement of aggression to the Negroes. By no stretch of imagination could it be assumed that the lynched Negroes were the source of the frustration represented by low per acre value of cotton. That politicians as well as Negroes may be the target of displaced aggression is indicated by two studies which suggest that there is a greater tendency for rural districts to vote the incumbents out of office following years of poor rainfall than of good (10; 98). Since the politicians could not conceivably have been thought to be responsible for the rainfall, such a trend is perhaps an even more striking example of displacement than the well-known tendency for the public to vote against the party which was holding office at the onset of an economic depression. The processes involved in bringing about such displacements, to be sure, may actually be found to be quite complex.

**CHANGE IN THE FORM OF AGGRESSION**

In the foregoing examples, the chief emphasis has been placed upon the change in the object of aggression: rats struck at a doll when the partner they had been trained to fight was missing; a girl berated the porter instead of her landlord; strong but inhibited aggression against the father seemed to be at the root of a reformer's powerful instigation to organize political campaigns; boys missing Bank Night at the local theatre reacted unfavorably to far-away Japanese or
Mexicans; Southerners, frustrated by low values of the cotton crops, lynched Negroes; and citizens, frustrated by the weather, voted politicians out of office.

It will be remembered, however, that, when anticipated punishment inhibits direct aggression, changes may occur not only in the object but also in the form of aggression. A person restrained from actually shooting his enemy may imagine that he is shooting him. A clear-cut example of the indirect expression of aggression by the drawing of pictures occurred in the experiment on sleep-deprivation by Sears, Hovland, and Miller (143). Subjects were hired for the ostensible purpose of studying the influence of fatigue upon simple physiological functions and were then prevented from sleeping at all during one night. They were habitual smokers but not allowed to smoke. For long periods of time they were required to sit still without being allowed to amuse themselves by reading, talking, or playing games. They were led to expect a meal toward morning and then prevented from eating this meal by a “hitch” in the program. After being subjected to these and other frustrations, they manifested considerable aggression against the experimenters. But part of this aggression, as was indicated by later reports, was not expressed directly because of the social situation. Under these circumstances one of the subjects produced two sheets of drawings in which violent aggression was represented in an unmistakable manner. Dismembered and disemboweled bodies were shown in various grotesque positions, some drowned, some hanging, some merely stabbed and bleeding, but all portraying a shocking injury to the human body. Furthermore, when the creator of these pictures was asked, by another subject, who the people represented in the drawings were, he replied, “Psychologists!” And his fellow sufferers were all obviously amused.

Humor and ridicule are other very common forms of ag-
gressive behavior. Anti-Roosevelt jokes would seem to be a current example. Viewing these jokes as an expression of aggression, one would expect to find them most popular among the members of the class that feels itself frustrated, either actually or potentially, by Roosevelt's program of social change. And it is in this very class that such jokes seem in general to be the most highly developed. In line with the principle that the instigation to indirect forms of aggression varies with the degree of interference with direct forms, it seems that in fascist countries anti-government jokes are most virulent. Since speechmaking and other more direct means of giving vent to aggression against the state are extremely limited, a joke whispered secretly about the dictators has tremendous punch.

The reading of horror stories appears to be still another of the manifold forms which the indirect expression of aggression can take. Here both the object and the form of the response of direct aggression are changed. If the reading of such stories is indeed an expression of aggression, it is not surprising that their popularity, relative to other types of stories in pulp magazines, seems to have increased markedly following the increase in the general level of frustration produced by the depression.

SELF-AGGRESSION

A variety of ways in which indirect forms of aggression may be expressed when direct forms are inhibited by anticipation of punishment has been considered; the individual, moreover, is also capable of injuring himself. Freud (46) has observed that certain melancholics persistently blame

5. That the individual at whom the humor is aimed perceives it as aggression has been demonstrated in an experiment by Wolff, Smith, and Murray (188).

6. An observation of Mr. Rogers Terrill, Associate Publisher of Popular Publications, Inc. Obviously it is difficult to be certain that the trend was the product of a single factor.
themselves for faults that are not at all characteristic of them but rather of certain loved ones in the immediate environment. Such observations have led Freud to conclude that these individuals are really complaining not about themselves but about the loved ones who often can be definitely proven to have frustrated the patient. It appears, then, that self-castigation may be a displaced form of inhibited direct aggression. Psychoanalysts have evidence seeming to indicate that not only verbal abuse but also physical injury and even neurotic symptoms of illness can be expressions of aggression directed toward the self.  

Perhaps the most dramatic form of self-aggression is suicide. Here the frustration, as in the case of the “rejected lover,” for instance, is often very evident. It is interesting to note, in connection with the assumption that economic depressions increase the average level of frustration of the general population, that Thomas (170) has found the suicide rate to be higher during depression than prosperity.  

A shred of experimental evidence suggesting that much milder forms of self-aggression also may be correlated with frustration was secured in the experiment by Miller and Bugelski (108), in which a bogus partner for cooperation and competition conspired to frustrate the subjects. After their frustrating experiences, the subjects made many self-critical remarks. They also rated themselves lower on a simple personality scale than did control subjects who had not just been subjected to such frustration.  

Cases of aggression turned against the self are apt not to be simple, since a certain amount of more or less direct aggression against others is likely to be involved. The hysteric with an ambivalent attitude of love and hate toward members of his family may have symptoms which injure them as well

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7. In these cases the mechanism may be quite complex, involving factors such as introjection and guilt. For a more complete attempt to study the rôle of aggression in such behavior, see Horney (67) and Menninger (103).  
8. For a more detailed analysis of this problem, see Zilboorg (189).
as himself. In American society suicide may harm others as well as the self. Among the Tikopia suicide is, according to Firth (48, p. 177), the son’s method of revenge, a threat which constantly serves to prevent tyrannical fathers from becoming too unjust.

Illustrations have been presented indicating that aggression otherwise inhibited may be expressed against the self. From principles already stated, three deductions concerning such manifestations of aggression can be made:

1. It has been assumed that a frustration provides strongest instigation to aggression against the agent perceived to be the source of the frustration; therefore instigation to self-aggression should be relatively stronger when the source of frustration is perceived to be the self than when it is perceived to be some external agent.

2. It has been assumed that, when a given act of aggression suffers interference, this interference produces a further frustration which should tend to instigate new acts of aggression against the agent perceived to be responsible for this interference. Restraint by an external agent of an act of aggression, consequently, should instigate aggression against that agent; and self-restraint of an act of aggression should instigate aggression against the self. Therefore there should be a greater tendency for inhibited direct aggression to be turned against the self when it is inhibited by the self than when it is inhibited by an external agent.

3. Self-aggression is injurious to the self. Responses of self-aggression, therefore, inevitably carry along with themselves a certain amount of punishment. And it has been assumed that punishment tends to inhibit an act of aggression. From these two statements it follows that, other conditions being constant, self-aggression should be a relatively non-preferred type of expression which will not occur unless other forms of expression are even more strongly inhibited.
In general, these conclusions seem to agree with clinical experience, but opinion concerning them must be suspended until more specific evidence is available.

As a summary of the essential dynamics of the inhibition and displacement of aggression which may finally lead to self-aggression, the high lights of a case studied in detail by Mowrer (115) may be considered. A small boy in an institution displayed unusually strong aggression against adults. This took the form of biting, pinching, and hair-pulling. Under the severe discipline of the institution, this overt aggression was soon inhibited by expectation of punishment. Then the child began running after other children, biting them, pinching them, and pulling their hair. These manifestations of aggression were in turn eliminated, in fact so thoroughly that the child ceased biting altogether, even refusing to bite into solid food. Then the child commenced to pinch himself, bang his head, and to pull out his own hair. These actions were so injurious that he created bad sores on his body and two large bald spots on his head, and he finally had to be sent to another institution for treatment. Therapy consisted of removing frustrations, particularly those centering around toilet training and eating, and of attempting, by complete absence of threats, to remove the anticipations of punishment which were inhibiting direct aggression against adults. Under this treatment the child first expressed more aggression against adults and less against himself. Then, as the frustrations which seemed to have been the root of his trouble were lessened, his manifestations of aggression against adults began to weaken. The case appears to present a picture of frustration imposed by adults, aggression against adults, inhibition of this aggression and displacement of it to other children, inhibition of the aggression against other children and turning of it, still with much the same responses, against the self. During treatment this picture was reversed.
As aggression against adults became possible, self-aggression disappeared, and as frustrations were lessened, all aggression waned.9

**CATHARSIS: EQUIVALENCE OF FORMS**

It has been assumed that the inhibition of any act of aggression is a frustration which increases the instigation to aggression. Conversely, the occurrence of any act of aggression is assumed to reduce the instigation to aggression.10 In psychoanalytic terminology, such a release is called catharsis.

When the little boy whose case has just been described became able to express more aggression against adults, his instigation to other forms of aggression seemed to be so reduced that self-aggression decreased markedly. Similar dynamics seem to be exhibited in a case, also from life-history material, in which a wife frustrated her husband by withdrawing money for household expenses from their savings account. The money was being saved slowly and arduously through the husband’s rigorous self-denial of small luxuries. His wife’s careless dependence on the account to tide her over when she ran out of her supposedly adequate household budget constituted a serious frustration to the husband’s careful program of investment. Instead of being angry at

9. A somewhat different conception of the self-object relationship has been proposed by Rosenzweig (136) who has suggested that the reactions to frustration may conveniently be classified as “extrapunitive,” “intropunitive,” and “impunitive.” These three types of response are assumed to represent the major dimensions to which any frustration-reaction may be allocated. Rosenzweig’s “extrapunitive” type clearly corresponds to our overt object-directed aggression, and his “intropunitive” type to our self-aggression. The “impunitive” type does not correspond to any specific reaction pattern presented in the present book, but seems not only to involve change in both the object and the form of aggression but to be related to substitute response as well.

10. Presumably this reduction is more or less temporary and the instigation to aggression will build up again if the original frustration persists. Also the repetition of a mode of release may presumably produce learning of it. Throughout this hypothesis both the role of temporal factors and the influence of learning present problems acutely in need of detailed solution.
her, however, he berated himself. He said, "I don't blame you for not paying any attention to my wishes; they aren't worth worrying about. I'm no good to anybody anyway." Then he shut the door of his room and the wife heard him sobbing bitterly. Her abject apologies only brought more tears and self-recrimination. Nothing she could do was of any avail until finally she happened to say a few sharp words to him. This brought down an avalanche of vituperation on her head and afterwards the husband seemed to feel much better and could be comforted. Soon he cheerfully began to plan new ways in which the savings account could be restored.

In this instance aggression toward the self was evidently a characteristic direction for aggression to take. When a further frustration occurred in which the wife was clearly perceived as the frustrating agent, direct aggression was expressed. The "avalanche of vituperation" was presumably a much stronger aggression than would normally have been called forth by the "few sharp words" and was a response to the total instigation produced by the original frustration plus the later relatively mild one. This final aggression apparently served to reduce the strength of instigation to the self-aggression, since no further self-aggression occurred after the object-directed outburst.

One of the joint implications of the principles of catharsis and displacement is immediately obvious: with the level of original frustration held roughly constant, there should be an inverse relationship between the occurrence of different forms of aggression. This implication follows because, when any response of aggression is inhibited, its instigation should be displaced to the other responses of aggression; and, conversely, when any response of aggression is expressed, its cathartic effect should lessen the instigation to the other aggressive responses.

The clinical examples that have been cited as illustrations of catharsis also illustrate this principle of the inverse or re-
ciprocal relationship between the expression of various forms of aggression. The folk observation that people who are quick to anger are likewise quick to recover is, if true, an illustration. The validity of the principle is further supported by two rather slender threads of experimental evidence. In the sleep-deprivation experiment (143), the subject who made the gory drawing was rated as expressing the most overt aggression. In a self-administered algesimeter test he pricked (injured) himself with the least pressure of any subject. By contrast, another subject, who seemed to be slightly nauseated by the experiment, was rated as expressing the least overt aggression and, in the algesimeter test, he inflicted more injurious pressure upon himself than did any of the other subjects. Since only six men participated in the experiment, the evidence is naturally merely suggestive, and not at all conclusive.\textsuperscript{11} Further evidence was found in the experiment (108), already described, in which a bogus partner for coöperation and competition conspired to frustrate the subjects: there was a tendency for those subjects who gave their partner the lowest rating not to drop so markedly in their own ratings of themselves, the correlation between the ratings of partner and self being $-0.3$ (S.E. = ±0.1).

The phenomena of catharsis and displacement seem to point to a functional unity in the variety of reactions to which the label of aggression has been attached in this presentation. To the extent that the type of functional unity which has been illustrated occurs generally and to the extent that it is strong enough to make the relationship between two so-called aggressive responses closer than that between one such response and many other presumably totally different types of

\textsuperscript{11} It appears that there are positive correlations between the occurrence of various forms of overt aggression and between various forms of non-overt aggression. The reciprocal relationship is probably between overt and non-overt on the one hand and between self-directed and object-directed on the other and may not appear at all if the amount of frustration is not held constant.
response, the suggested usage of the word aggression seems justified. On the other hand, to the extent that the hypothesized functional unity is found, upon closer examination, to break down, the present use of the term "aggression" will have to be modified or abandoned.

SUMMARY

1. The strongest instigation aroused by a frustration is to acts of aggression directed against the agent perceived to be the source of the frustration, and progressively weaker instigations are aroused to progressively less direct acts of aggression.

2. The inhibition of acts of direct aggression is an additional frustration which instigates aggression against the agent perceived to be responsible for this inhibition and increases the instigation to other forms of aggression. There is, consequently, a strong tendency for inhibited aggression to be displaced to different objects and expressed in modified forms. Socially approved modifications are called sublimations.

3. Since self-punishment is necessarily involved, aggression turned against the self must overcome a certain amount of inhibition and therefore tends not to occur unless other forms of expression are even more strongly inhibited. If the amount of inhibition of various acts of aggression is held relatively constant, the tendency to self-aggression is stronger both when the individual believes himself, rather than an external agent, to be responsible for the original frustration and when direct aggression is restrained by the self rather than by an external agent.

4. The expression of any act of aggression is a catharsis that reduces the instigation to all other acts of aggression. From this and the principle of displacement it follows that,

12. Cf. the operational distinction between substitute response and aggression, p. 9, note 2.
with the level of original frustration held constant, there should be an inverse relationship between the expression of various forms of aggression.

5. It is the functional unity represented by the phenomena of catharsis and displacement that justifies attaching the label of aggression to the variety of responses considered in this theoretical presentation.