

DEVELOPMENTAL DYNAMICS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS DURING ADOLESCENCE

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ТА ДИНАМІКА РОЗВИТКУ ЗАХИСНИХ МЕХАНІЗМІВ У ПІДЛІТКІВ

Defense mechanisms are automatic, subconscious strategies that serve to protect the personality. These mechanisms are especially relevant during adolescence and serve to reduce the teenager's tension during the crisis period. According to psychoanalysis, adolescence is the period of sexual maturity. This period is a period in which the teenager experiences various emotional states in connection with the changes (physical, psychological, emotional) he undergoes. Therefore, on the one hand, the teenager discovers his identity, and on the other hand, he transitions to a period of new object relations, as a result of which he resorts to defense mechanisms to eliminate the various emotional states he experiences, anxiety, protect the existing ego state and maintain emotional stability. According to studies, immature defense mechanisms prevail during adolescence. With the development of analytical thinking, defense mechanisms such as intellectualization, humor, idealization, projection, etc. are considered characteristic of this period. Understanding the underlying functions of these mechanisms can provide deeper insight into adolescent behavior and mental health development. These mechanisms are shaped not only by individual psychological development but also by environmental and interpersonal influences. The article discusses the developmental characteristics of adolescence, the psychodynamic view of this period, defense mechanisms and their forms of manifestation during adolescence, and their replacement. Also, research studies conducted in different countries were analyzed, and the scientific basis for the relationship between defense mechanisms and age, gender, emotional state, risk factors, character type and temperament was presented. The aim of the article is to provide a psychodynamic analysis of defense mechanisms used during adolescence and to examine their psychological functions.

Key words: psychodynamic therapy, defense mechanisms, mature, immature, neurotic, adolescence.

Захисні механізми – це автоматичні, підсвідомі стратегії, що служать для захисту особистості. Ці механізми особливо актуальні в підлітковому віці та сприяють зниженню напруги підлітка в кризовий період. Згідно з психоаналізом, підлітковий вік – це період статевої зрілості. Це період, коли підліток переживає різні емоційні стани у зв'язку зі змінами (фізичними, психологічними, емоційними), яких він зазнає. Тому, з одного боку, підліток відкриває свою ідентичність, а з іншого – переходить до періоду нових об'єктних відносин, у результаті чого він вдається до захисних механізмів, щоб усунути різні емоційні стани, які він переживає, тривогу, захистити існуючий его-стан та підтримувати емоційну стабільність. Згідно з дослідженнями, у підлітковому віці переважають незрілі захисні механізми. Із розвитком аналітичного мислення характерними для цього періоду вважаються такі захисні механізми, як інтелектуалізація, гумор, ідеалізація, проєкція тощо. Розуміння основних функцій цих механізмів може забезпечити глибше розуміння поведінки підлітків та розвиток психічного здоров'я. Ці механізми формуються не лише індивідуальним психологічним розвитком, а й впливом навколишнього середовища та міжособистісних чинників. У статті розглядаються особливості розвитку підліткового віку, психодинамічний погляд на цей період, захисні механізми та їх форми прояву в підлітковому віці, а також їх заміна. Проаналізовано дослідження, проведені в різних країнах, та представлено наукову основу взаємозв'язку між захисними механізмами та віком, статтю, емоційним станом, чинниками ризику, типом характеру та темпераментом. Метою статті є психодинамічний аналіз захисних механізмів, що використовуються у підлітковому віці, та вивчення їхніх психологічних функцій.

Ключові слова: психодинамічна терапія, захисні механізми, зрілий, незрілий, невротичний, підлітковий вік.

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Introduction. According to psychoanalysis, adolescence is a repetition of childhood. That is, the experiences experienced during childhood are repeated during adolescence. The phallic stage is the period of the Oedipus complex, and this stage is especially repeated in adolescence. Simply, during adolescence, libido investments change their place, sexual and aggressive impulses are regulated within object relations. According to A. Freud, adolescence is characterized by separation and the mourning of object relations that are replaced by new ones. Thus, the teenager moves away from the incest relationship, that is, from the people who take care of him (father, mother). While searching for libido investments, on the one hand, the teenager also faces his own

self, experiences a return to his identity, thereby narcissistic and mature characteristics emerge in the teenager. For this reason, this period is considered a period of noisy, internal conflicts. In addition, the teenager's search for an object that is not incestuous during this period requires that his mental functionality be in order during this period. Also, during this period, the teenager asks himself «who am I? What is my role in society?» begins to discover himself by searching for answers to questions such as. Blos notes that during this period, the teenager's desire for new object relationships, his separation from his parents, indicates that there is a period of mental development and crisis at this stage [12, p. 147]. In the stage of separation and searching for a new object, the

teenager faces himself, discovers his identity, and on the other hand, the increase in sexual impulses and the instability of the emotional state reveal the importance of the role of using defense mechanisms. That is, in order to reduce and eliminate the existing anxiety, the teenager uses defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are strategies that serve to protect the ego from internal and external stress factors. These mechanisms intensify due to the occurrence of emotional, physical, and hormonal changes during adolescence. Thus, defense mechanisms serve to protect the teenager's ego and reduce the existing tension.

Method. The article discusses the period of adolescence, age characteristics, defense mechanisms, and their manifestations in adolescence within the framework of the psychodynamic approach. During the analysis of scientific literature, classical psychoanalysts (S. Freud, A. Freud), classification of defense mechanisms (approaches of G. Vaillant, P. Cramer), as well as empirical studies conducted with adolescents in different countries were analyzed. The structure of the article consists of the developmental characteristics of adolescence, a psychodynamic view of this period, the use of defense mechanisms in this period, and the results of empirical studies.

Discussion. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that arise and are used unconsciously to protect a person from unacceptable thoughts and ideas. Although this concept was put forward by S. Freud, it was developed by A. Freud [11, p. 43]. Defense mechanisms are strategies used by the ego of a person, a bio-psycho-social being, and ensure mental survival. Although these unconscious reactions serve to restore the conflict between the id and the superego, reduce the person's anxiety, in many cases they can cause the person to escape from reality and aggravate the existing problem. In DSM IV, the term defense mechanisms is recorded as a "defense functionality scale" [1, p. 754]. Defense mechanism reactions are automatic, subconscious processes, and in the process of implementing these mechanisms that help a person accept reality, the ego is not independent, but dependent on the id. The id, which is the source of pleasure impulses, is a product of subconscious processes and it causes the ego to experience different emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, etc. Another part that determines the right and wrong of the ego's actions is the superego. From an early age, the child assimilates the moral norms of his parents, teachers, and society, as well as the system of prohibitions and boundaries. The superego blames the ego for the mistakes he makes. In order not to experience this feeling, the ego tries to find a common path between the desires of the id and the superego. No matter how much the ego tries to maintain a balance between the id and the superego, the id tends to carry out its own desires. For example, if a child is bitten by a dog or falls down the stairs, the child will run away from the dog or not climb the stairs due to the fear he experiences, but the ego cannot cope with

the subconscious fear and anxiety, at which point the superego enters the process and punishes the ego, which results in feelings of guilt and shame [17, p. 47]. Although the ego is the observed party, a person's behaviors and thoughts may not always make sense. Since the id demands that its impulses be satisfied, the ego adapts to the demands of social society and the representation of these demands in the superego and tries to restrain it. When these two factors contradict each other, conflict arises, and when the superego cannot resolve this conflict, anxiety arises, and the ego uses defense mechanisms to eliminate the existing anxiety and restrain the id impulses. As a result, the ego both eliminates anxiety and tries to keep the basis of anxiety unconscious. A. Freud considers the use of defense mechanisms by the ego to eliminate the conflict between the structures of the personality (id, superego) as a normal process [11, p. 16]. In order to understand how the ego uses defense mechanisms, it is important to understand the functions of defense mechanisms. A. Freud classifies 10 main defense mechanisms: regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self, reversal and sublimation. G. Vaillant, based on the psychodynamic approach, divides defense mechanisms into 4 levels [15, p. 366–370]:

1. The image distorting style (dissociation, denial, splitting, isolation, devaluation);
2. The Immature style (acting-out, passive-aggression, autistic-fantasy, somatization, displacement, projection);
3. Neurotic (undoing, pseudoaltruism, idealization, reaction formulation);
4. Mature (sublimation, anticipation, humor, suppression).

As a result, each of these defense mechanisms differs depending on the age, development and character characteristics of the personality. Based on these classifications, it is possible to study how and with what frequency defense styles are used during adolescence.

Age and developmental characteristics of adolescence

The period in which the child grows physically and completes the acquisition of the function of sexual maturation is called adolescence. This period begins around the ages of 10–11. The most important sign of adolescence is the structural changes occurring in the psyche, which change under the influence of anatomical and physiological development. During this period, boys and girls gradually experience changes in their appearance: facial features, body structure, deepening of the voice in boys, hormonal fluctuations, and parallel height growth. At the same time, personal communication, self-awareness, the formation of real and ideal selves, and the development of social communication play an important role during this period. Communication is considered the leading activity in adolescents during this period. The social environment and relationships with friends are

considered a priority for adolescents. Many authors call this period a crisis period. Because during this period, both physical and mental development are in the foreground. Another reason for calling it a crisis period is that during this period, many changes and maturity characteristics appear in the development of the child's personality, as a result of which various difficulties arise in the behavior of the teenager: laziness, isolation, stubbornness. The teenager begins to become introverted by distancing himself from his parents, or the social environment (friends) comes to the fore. Therefore, this period is considered the most difficult and critical period. Also, 3 main levels of maturity appear in adolescents: social maturity, psychological maturity, and sexual maturity. For both the physical and mental development of the teenager, each of these maturity levels must develop in parallel. The adolescence period is also characterized by the development of a sense of adulthood. As a result, the teenager turns from a small child into a big child during this period. At the same time, with the emergence of a sense of adulthood, the teenager begins to adopt the norms and rules for adults. As a result, adolescents resemble their behavior and attitudes to adults. With the emergence of a sense of adulthood in adolescents, adolescents want to be treated like adults, not treated like children. The teenager's communication with friends gradually expands and qualities such as loyalty to friends and equality develop. This also indicates the development of a «friendship code». According to studies, ambivalence is manifested in behavior during adolescence. As the opposite sexes are interested in each other, on the other hand, they tend to be chosen among their friends. For this reason, boys try to be friend boys and girls, and this nuance is associated with the gender differences between them. The emotional instability, reaction to internal and external stress factors, and social adaptation difficulties encountered during this period necessitate the use of defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms frequently encountered in adolescents

According to A. Freud, asceticism and intellectualization are used more during this period. While asceticism prevents the expression of impulses, thanks to intellectualization, the teenager relaxes his aggression by rationalizing and applying logic to the event. According to Blos, during this period, the teenager tends to engage in ascetic behaviors to cope with sexual and bodily desires, for example, depriving himself of pleasurable activities and food. When faced with mental disorders, his ability to explain them intellectually and the development of rational thinking skills indicate that analytical thinking skills are also developing during this period. The development of analytical thinking is considered an important factor for the formation and development of personality. According to A. Freud, these two defense mechanisms are very important for maturation and include the role of defense mechanisms against impulses. Teenagers use creative imagination to

express their inner world during times of crisis. This provides them with emotional relief. According to Henderson, the defense mechanisms of denial are active in children aged 5–6, and projection are active in children aged 8–11 [16, p. 110–117]. Reaction formation is active in childhood, and intellectualization is active in adolescence. According to Cramer, denial, projection, and identification are used more in adolescence [14, p. 607–620]. Another study proves that defense styles change according to age and gender [13, p. 523–552].

Below are examples of defense mechanisms used by adolescents:

Rationalization: A teenager justifies his poor performance in school by the inadequacy of his teacher;

Reaction formation: Showing unacceptable desires and feelings with behaviors that create a sense of guilt in the ego, for example, a teenager who is jealous of his sister shows love to her, a teenager with active sexual impulses demonstrates religious and moral behaviors;

Undoing: Behaviors a person does to eliminate feelings of guilt after a wrong behavior, such as apologizing;

Repression: The suppression of disturbing emotions and events in the subconscious, but the suppressed impulses come to light in the future in dreams or through slips of the tongue.

Displacement: The transfer of dangerous, unacceptable emotions to a smaller object. For example, a teenager who is abused by his parents acts violently towards the animal he feeds, a teenager who is beaten by his parents at home hits his classmates, makes aggressive gestures, etc.

Sublimation: A teenager directs his aggressive impulses to sports;

Humor: One of the main defense mechanisms that allows a sense of maturity in the relationship of children and adolescents with their relatives.

Projection: An example of this defense mechanism is when a teenager transfers his internal aggression to others. In a study conducted with adolescents on defense mechanisms and psychological development, it was observed that projection decreases in women and increases in men towards the end of adolescence.

Empirical approaches and modern research results

In modern times, there are many tools for measuring defense mechanisms in adolescents, the most commonly used of which are DSQ40, DMRS-Q-C (up to 13–14 years old). However, it should be noted that the original version of the DSQ40 test was developed for adults [2, p. 246–256]. Recently, adapted versions for adolescents have begun to be used in research [19, p. 41–52]. A large part of the analyzed studies were conducted using these tools. Adolescents experiencing a crisis period use various defense mechanisms during their development. Thus, studies show that more denial, projection, and more complex defense mechanisms are observed

with the development of the superego in later stages of development. The frequency of use of defense mechanisms is related to the adolescent's temperament type, character, family type, risk factors, and level of emotional instability. There are many studies reflecting this. Thus, one article states that there is a relationship between defense mechanisms and various emotional states [3, p. 1241–1245]. In a study conducted on adolescents by Lobel and colleagues, the results of women and men showed differences, as in women anxiety, worry are negatively related to denial, repression, rationalization, while in men there is no significant difference between these variables [4, p. 110–117]. Another study conducted on adolescents shows that anger is positively related to projection, displacement and repression, anxiety is positively related to displacement, reaction formulation, undoing, and denial is negatively related to depression, that is, as the denial defense mechanism increases, depression decreases [5, p. 133–148]. Feldman et al. showed that the age, gender, and psychological health of the adolescent affect the defense mechanisms he uses, and also, as a result of the study, immature defense mechanisms prevailed in mentally unhealthy adolescents [6, p. 1344–1354]. An interesting result was obtained from a study conducted in the USA by Erikson, Feldman and Steiner with 140 adolescents. It was found that the level of adaptation of the adolescent affects his defense style, so that adolescents with a mature defense style have better psychological adaptation ability, while adolescents who prefer immature defense mechanisms have poor adaptation ability [7, p. 1599–1607]. According to the results of a study on the relationship between personality styles and defense mechanisms, consisting of 830 people aged 14–19, using the DMI-Y and MACI instruments, adolescents with an introverted personality type use more inward-oriented defense mechanisms (repression, introjection, fantasy, somatization), while adolescents with an extroverted personality type use more outward-oriented defense mechanisms (projection, rationalization) [8, p. 14–40]. Another interesting study was conducted among 266 adolescents using the Kellerman' life style questionnaire (LSQ). Thus, the study determines how students' defense mechanisms change from the first year of school to high school. According to the results, regression increases with age in boys, while reactive formulation decreases in girls [9, p. 75–80]. The next study is a study conducted with 510 adolescents using the OPD-CA2-SQ, DSQ-A instruments, according to the results, mental health problems, psychodynamic conflict level (anxiety, self-blame, etc.) and maladaptive defense styles are positively correlated [10, p. 157–164]. The analyzed research results show that the defense mechanisms used during adolescence differ and change depending on age, gender, character traits, and the level of stress factors.

Conclusion. Adolescence is a period of crisis, as well as a period when personality structures are formed, the tendency to become mature, independent,

and social relationships come to the fore. The defense mechanisms used during this period are usually related to the emotional instability, anxiety, and psychosocial functionality of the adolescent. The analysis of scientific literature shows that adolescents who use mature defense styles have lower levels of psychological distress, while adolescents with high psychological distress also have higher levels of immature defense mechanisms. The analysis of studies shows that gender and age differences in the use of defense mechanisms are also important factors. As a result, the scientific analysis of the literature reveals the importance of the use of defense mechanisms in adolescents, and also contributes to understanding how defense styles change at different developmental stages.

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