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KEY PERSONALITY PSYCHIC DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN EARLY AND LATE ADULTHOOD

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The article focuses on the hierarchy of psychic defense mechanisms in early and late adulthood. It revealed that in early adulthood the key mechanism is denial, while in late adulthood it is projection; unlike early adulthood, in late adulthood one uses mechanisms of intellectualization, displacement and reactive formation more often. It is demonstrated that denial of reality contributes to positive self-attitude of an individual both in early and late adulthood. It is revealed that intellectualization mechanism helps a young person become more self-confident, while for an older person the same is done by mechanisms of reactive formation. Projection as a psychic defense mechanism does not contribute to positive self-attitude.

Key words: psychic defensive mechanisms, denial, projection, early and late adulthood.

Problem statement. Necessity for psychic defense of a personality arises when a subject develops a feeling of personal inadequacy, threat to personality integrity and significance. It highlights close relationship of defense mechanisms with deep structures of human personality, as the ultimate goal of a defensive process lies in achieving consistency between real content of consciousness and I-concept of a person.

Due to the fact that defense mechanisms develop as specific means of social and psychological adaptation and are aimed at coping with emotions of different modality their role and significance throughout life can change. Psychological problems related to key psychic defense mechanisms in different periods of adulthood have been scarcely highlighted in Ukrainian psychology. Their research would enable us to elicit a number of answers regarding self-attitude and constructive life stand of person due to age-related changes.

Recent research and analysis of publications. Personality defense mechanisms are multi-aspectual notion encompassing numerous ways of its interpretation. The first ideas about this notion were offered by S. Ferenczi, who among defensive mechanisms drew attention to the processes of identification, introjection and projection. There were further researches done by a number of prominent scholars, among whom one can name such distinguished names as Z. Freud, K. Abraham, F. Bassin, E. Jones, M. Balint, M. Klein, G. Nurnberg, A. Freud, K. Horney, V. Frankl, A. Adler, C. Rogers, etc. Summing up the ideas of these researchers, psychic defense mechanisms can be viewed as a certain way of behavior, reaction or action of a person that is determined by the influence of external or internal environment factors [1–4, 6].

Following the ideas of founders of psychic defense mechanisms issue, nowadays there are a number of current interpretations of this notion. V. Bassin and V. Rozhnov stress that it is necessary to understand psychic defense as psychic activity aimed at spontaneous eradication of psychic trauma consequences. V. Tashlykov interprets this notion as the mechanisms of adaptive reconstruction of information acceptance and evaluation appearing in the situation when a person cannot adequately deal with feelings of anxiety caused by internal or external conflict. A similar approach is used by V. Tsapkin, according to whom psychic defense is a way of representing distorted sense in person's life [following 1, 3, 5].

Apart from the approaches stressing in the defense mechanisms the idea of «eradication» of traumatic experience and overcoming anxiety, widespread are the ideas of V. Rotenberg, V. Volovyk and V. Vid who address the functional meaning of these mechanisms. The researchers express the idea that these mechanisms are to support consciousness integrity and also compensate for psychic deficiency in person's life. In other words, defense mechanisms allow for preservation or, to be more specific, achievement of internal well-being, as the person is less preoccupied with what is going around him/her [following 3, 4].

Thus, in broad meaning psychological defense mechanisms stand for any reaction of the body aimed at preservation of oneself and one's integrity. In narrow meaning this notion is commonly understood as those reactions of a person which s/he mastered during socialization process, however, mainly addresses them unconsciously to protect his/her internal psychic structures – one's «I» – from feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt, anger, as well as from conflict, frustration or any other situation which are accepted as dangerous and threatening.

The idea of unconscious nature of psychic defense mechanisms is opposed by the view of F. Bassin, B. Zeigarnyk, Ye. Sokolova and H. Sullivan, who are of the opinion that psychic defense is a conscious regulation system activated in personality self-actualization processes during periods when this process is getting complicated. Modern scholars, such as Ye. Romanova and L. Hrebennikov, in support of the above-mentioned, state that these mechanisms develop as specific means of social and psychological adaptation and are used to cope with emotions of different modality in cases when experience of a person signals to him/her about probable negative consequences of his/her feelings and direct expression [1, 4].

Thus, attempt to protect Self-concept, isolate it from ruining influences is one of the key motives of human behavior. Logically, the question arises what personal factors contribute to the development of defense mechanisms. According to V. M. Kunitsyna, development of these mechanisms is determined by low self-esteem of an individual. Definitely self-respect is a factor that determines interrelationship with other people, in particular, the less a person respects him/herself, the less he/she values others, is afraid of them and is trying to achieve self-assertion by means of devaluating opinion and actions of other people. Logically, V. M. Kunitsyna assumes that low self-respect results in the fact that a person more frequently relies on psychic defense mechanisms to protect him/herself from self-accusation, constant psychological discomfort and complexes. Based on the aforementioned the conclusion is made that protection is a necessary precondition of preserving stability of personal structure under conditions of constant pathogenic conflict between different levels of self-consciousness [following 3].

The aim of our research was, firstly, to reveal psychic defense mechanisms hierarchy typical of early and late adulthood; secondly, differences in the defense mechanisms intensity level depending on age; thirdly, to identify the role key age-related psychic defense mechanisms play in the process of achieving positive self-attitude.

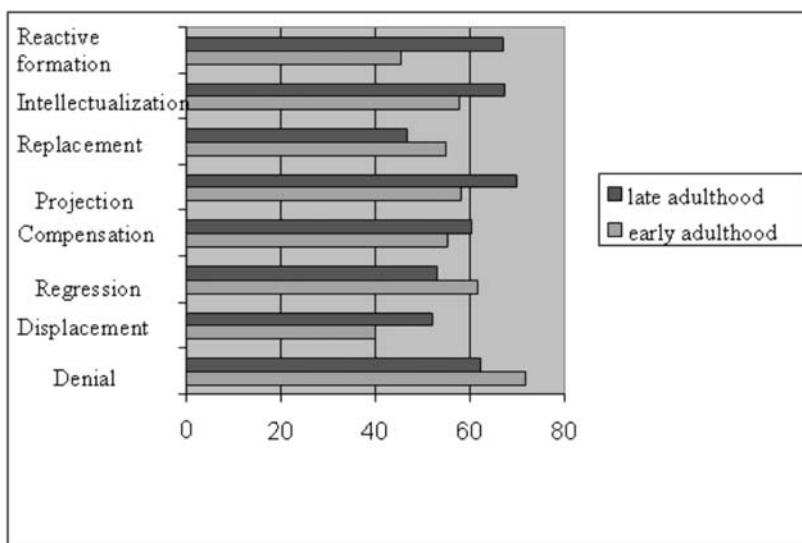
Main part of the research. Empirical research included 89 participants, males and females in age periods of early and late adulthood. Early adulthood was represented by 47 respondents aged from 21 to 40 years old (average age – 29,7 years), adulthood – by 42 respondents aged from 60 to 79 years old (average age – 69,1 years).

To identify personality psychic defense mechanisms a questionnaire-test «Lifestyle Index» (Plutchik & Kellerman) was used that enables us to diagnose intensity level of key defenses (denial, displacement, regression, compensation, projection, replacement, intellectualization, reactive formation) and establish their hierarchy. To identify defense mechanisms psychological correlates we used methodologies of self-attitude and personal biography. Methodology by V. Stolin and S. Pantelieiev measures such self-attitude modality as closedness, self-confidence, self-management, mirror Self, self-value, self-acceptance, internal proneness to conflict, self-affection, self-accusation, self-respect, autosympathy and self-abasement. Methodology «Personal Biography» (O. Motkov) is designed to study general personality constructiveness and harmoniousness, brightness of his/her self-realization, clarity of his/her life self-determination, positive nature of personal transformation.

To verify statistical validity of the data obtained the following statistical and mathematical methods were used: t-Student, correlation analysis (Pearson's-r with $p < 0,05$) and factor analysis – a method of key components with varimax rotation (with factor loading $> 0,500$).

Let us consider psychic defense mechanisms in two age groups. In early adulthood the most expressed is mechanism of denial (intensity level 71,69%). Regression is on the second place (61,55%), projection – on the third (58,10%). In late adulthood of the highest intensity is projection (69,96%), intellectualization (67,26%) and reactive formation (66,90%). The least expressed in early adulthood are mechanisms of displacement (40,07%) and reactive formation (45,53%), while in late adulthood – replacement (46,52%). These outcomes are confirmed by comparative analysis: in early adulthood mechanism of denial has considerably higher mean group indicator than in late ($t=2,217$ with $p=0,029$); in late adulthood, in comparison with early adulthood, higher indicators are typical of projection ($t=2,471$ with $p=0,015$), intellectualization ($t=-2,539$ with $p=0,01301$), reactive formation ($t=-4,503$ with $p=0,000$) and displacement ($t=-3,278$ with $p=0,001$) (Fig. 1).

Thus, a young person (21–40 years old) trying to get protected from psycho-traumatic situation most often denies those things that cause frustration and anxiety, does not accept and admit those things which are obvious for the other people. There is a characteristic feature of temporary return to the earlier development stages, more primitive forms of behavior or thinking and tendency to attribute one's socially undesirable feelings, desires, wishes to other people or mystical forces. Blame for one's drawbacks or failures is put on somebody or something. Unlike those from late adulthood, people from early adulthood are less prone to forgetting or ignoring unpleasant events, opinions, memories and feeling, as well as transforming emotional attitude to the object in one's consciousness into the opposite one.



Average indicator of psychic defense mechanisms in early and late adulthood

Regarding older people (60–79 years old), they are primarily characterized by shifting responsibility for something happening inside «Self» onto the environment, logical explanation of those actions and desires which are condemned by society and transformation in the consciousness of the emotional attitude to the object into the opposite one. If compared with younger generation, it is less peculiar for people of older age to release suppressed due to frustration emotions onto more accessible objects.

Let us consider the role key psychic defense mechanisms – denial and projection – perform in achieving positive self-attitude in each age group. The fact that denial is important in achievement of positive self-attitude in early and late adulthood is proved by factor and correlation analysis. Two factor models are built that enable us to clarify the role of key psychic defense mechanism in the corresponding age group in achieving positive self-attitude of a person. Regarding empirical data of respondents who represent early adulthood factor model includes seven latent factors and accounts for 73,01% from general dispersion of data; regarding empirical data of respondents who represent late adulthood there was five-factor model accounting for 66,21% from general dispersion of data.

According to the data of factor analysis for the group of people in early adulthood, the third factor, accounting for 16,14% from general dispersion of data, included such psychic defense mechanisms as denial (0,714) and intellectualization (0,611), as well as such self-attitude modalities as self-respect (0,781), self-acceptance (0,692), mirror-Self (0,673), self-management (0,668), autosympathy (0,666), self-affection (0,538). Denial is only interrelated with intellectualization as defense mechanism ($r=0,307$), at the same time being closely correlated with all self-attitude modalities except for closedness (Table 1).

Table 1
Interrelationship between psychic defense mechanism «denial» and self-attitude of a person

Self-attitude modalities	Early adulthood (N=47)	Late adulthood (N=42)
Closedness	0,079	0,457*
Self-confidence	0,381*	0,365*
Self-management	0,609*	0,706*
Mirror-Self	0,582*	0,326*
Self-value	0,422*	-0,039
Self-acceptance	0,633*	0,264
Self-affection	0,439*	0,314*
Internal conflict	-0,398*	-0,074
Self-accusation	-0,303*	-0,063
Self-respect	0,647*	0,693*
Autosympathy	0,662*	0,226
Self-abasement	-0,381*	-0,073

* With $p<0,05$

Such self-attitude modalities as self-respect and self-management are getting more expressed in early adulthood with increasing intellectualization intensity ($r=0,322$ and $r=0,317$).

As it has been already mentioned, in late adulthood denial plays significantly less important role in personality psychic defense in comparison with the period of early adulthood and has close interrelationship with intellectualization ($r=0,353$) and compensation ($r=0,333$), projection ($r=-0,341$) and reactive formation ($r=0,428$). There are also fewer correlations with self-attitude modalities. Statistically verifiable correlations exist only with closedness, self-confidence, self-management, mirror-Self, self-affection and self-respect (Table 1). In factor structure denial was included into the fifth factor that accounts for 12,10% from general dispersion of data together with such mechanism as intellectualization (factor loading 0,738 and 0,538 respectively), as well as self-attitude modalities which characterize self-management (0,848) and self-respect (0,771).

Thus, irrespective of the fact that logical overcoming of internal conflicts is not particularly expressed for the early adulthood, still by blocking emotional reactions to frustrating feelings intellectualization contributes to denial of reality, which in its turn, helps a young person become more self-confident, accept himself/herself just as he/she is, stronger feel one's «Self», one's value for others and for oneself. To a certain extent combination of these psychic defense mechanisms is related to lack of desire to change one's Self-concept at the background of generally positive self-attitude. With growing denial in early adulthood one will observe reduction of internal conflict, self-accusation and self-abasement.

Denial as defense mechanism also plays a positive role in terms of increasing personality constructiveness at a young age. This is indicated by direct interrelationships between denial and general personality constructiveness ($r=0,528$) and its key components: life self-

determination ($r=0,382$), self-realization ($r=0,464$), personality transformation ($r=0,403$) and harmony of personality ($r=0,540$).

With denial increase at older age more active will become such age-related defense mechanisms as intellectualization and reactive formation, while projection as more intense defense mechanism will get weaker. For this age group partial ignoring of psycho traumatic information can significantly improve their understanding of oneself as an active, determined and self-confident person, somewhat rigid regarding internal changes of one's «Self», who evaluates oneself according to success criteria and thinks that the others are of the same opinion about him/her. Contrary to early adulthood, denial in late adulthood will contribute to greater level of hiding one's inner world from the others.

Besides denial, self-acceptance in late adulthood is also improved owing to subjective transformation of psycho traumatic impulses into their opposite ($r=0,335$), while clearer understanding of one's «Self» and internal locus of control will grow with activation of defense mechanisms related to rational and intellectual ways of coping with psycho traumas ($r=0,358$) and ways of replacing real defect with imaginatively constructed values ($r=0,331$).

As for interrelationship with personality constructiveness, then in older age people who are more prone to denial, will have stronger feeling of harmony of their personality and life in general ($r=0,442$).

Projection as psychic defense mechanism plays a significant role in late adulthood. According to factor analysis, the fourth factor accounting for 10,72% from general dispersion of data combined projection (-0,504), replacement (-0,710), reactive formation (0,688), closedness (0,741) and respondents' gender (0,677). At older age projection correlates with such self-attitude modalities as closedness ($r=-0,441$), internal conflict ($r=0,374$) and self-abasement ($r=0,337$) (Table 2).

Table 2
Interrelationship between psychic defense mechanism «projection» and self-attitude of a person

Self-attitude modalities	Early adulthood (N=47)	Late adulthood (N=42)
Closedness	0,057	-0,441*
Self-confidence	-0,149	0,058
Self-management	-0,179	-0,025
Mirror-Self	-0,259	-0,063
Self-value	-0,022	-0,023
Self-acceptance	-0,045	-0,064
Self-affection	0,070	-0,201
Internal conflict	0,436*	0,374*
Self-accusation	0,359*	0,269
Self-respect	-0,217	-0,162
Autosympathy	-0,002	-0,113
Self-abasement	0,434*	0,337*

* With $p<0,05$

In factor structure of empirical data for early adulthood group projection occupies an important place in the second factor (14,81% from general dispersion of data) with factor loading

-0,695. This factor also includes compensation (-0,613), regression (-0,786), reactive formation (-0,747), self-abasement (-0,796), internal conflict (-0,775) and self-accusation (-0,677). These relationships are supported by correlation analysis. At young age projection is interrelated with internal conflict ($r=0,436$), self-accusation ($r=0,359$) and self-abasement ($r=0,434$).

External projection of unaccepted feelings and thoughts typical of the older age will enhance release of suppressed, mainly negative, emotions onto more accessible objects that is illustrative of more reflexive persons and those prone to verbal aggression. At the same time a person feels intensification of internal conflict, self-accusation and self-abasement. Afore-mentioned is more typical of elderly males. Similarly to late adulthood, in early one projection of frustrated emotions onto other objects will enhance internal conflict, self-accusation and self-abasement of a person with simultaneous growth of critical attitude to one's «Self». Frequent use of projection mechanism in late adulthood will prevent harmony of personality ($r=-0,406$); for early adulthood these relations have not been identified.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Hierarchy of psychic defense mechanisms in early and late adulthood is different: in early adulthood key mechanism is denial, in late – projection. As to intensity, in early adulthood denial is more expressed in comparison with late one. In late adulthood more intense are projection, intellectualization, reactive formation and displacement.

Key psychic defense mechanism in early adulthood – denial – contributes to positive self-attitude of a person. Denial as defense mechanism also plays a positive role in personality constructiveness growth at young age. In late adulthood, though still important, this influence is less noticeable. Moreover, in terms of support of certain aspects of positive self-attitude in late adulthood important are reactive formation, intellectualization and compensation; in early adulthood it is intellectualization. Projection as a key psychic defense mechanism in late adulthood does not contribute to positive self-attitude of a person; the same can also be stated about early adulthood.

Further research of these issues can be related to understanding key psychic defense mechanisms in middle adulthood.

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ПРОВІДНІ МЕХАНІЗМИ ПСИХІЧНОГО ЗАХИСТУ ОСОБИСТОСТІ У РАННІЙ ТА ПІЗНІЙ ДОРОСЛОСТІ

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Досліджено ієрархію механізмів психічного захисту особистості у ранній і пізній дорослості. З'ясовано, що у ранній дорослості провідним механізмом є заперечення, у пізній – проекція; у пізній дорослості частіше, ніж у ранній, використовують механізми інтелектуалізації, витіснення і реактивного утворення. З'ясовано, що заперечення реальності сприяє позитивному самоставленню людини у ранній та пізній дорослості. Виявлено, що молодій людині стати самовпевненішою допомагає механізм інтелектуалізації, а старшій людині прийняти себе – механізм реактивного утворення. Проекція як механізм психічного захисту не сприяє позитивному самоставленню людини.

Ключові слова: механізми психічного захисту, заперечення, проекція, рання та пізня дорослість.