DEFENCE MECHANISM

**Degree Course (Three Years)**

**Psychology Honours**

**B. A. Part– I Honours Paper II : PSYCHOPATHOLOGY**

**Unit 3**

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The term ‘Defence Mechanism’ was first used by Sigmund Freud in his paper “The Neuro-Psychoses of defence” (1894). In [psychoanalytic theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoanalytic_theory), a Defence mechanisms is an [unconscious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconscious_mind) psychological mechanism that reduces anxiety arising from unacceptable or potentially harmful stimuli. Freud explained a defence mechanism is a tactic developed by ego to protect against anxiety.

Defence mechanisms may result in healthy or unhealthy consequences depending on the circumstances and frequency with which the mechanism is used. Defence mechanisms are psychological strategies brought into play by the [unconscious mind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconscious_mind) to [manipulate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_manipulation), [deny](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denial), or distort reality in order to defend against feelings of anxiety and unacceptable impulses and to maintain one's [self-schema](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-schema) or other [schemas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schema_(psychology)). These processes that manipulate, deny, or distort reality may include the following: [repression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_repression), or the burying of a painful feeling or thought from one's awareness even though it may resurface in a symbolic form; [identification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identification_(psychology)), incorporating an object or thought into oneself; and [rationalization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalization_(psychology)), the justification of one's behaviour and motivations by substituting "good" acceptable reasons for the actual motivations. In psychoanalytic theory, repression is considered the basis for other defence mechanisms.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_mechanism#cite_note-utah-2)

Healthy people normally use different defence mechanisms throughout life. A defence mechanism becomes [pathological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathological) only when its persistent use leads to maladaptive behaviour such that the physical or mental health of the individual is adversely affected. Among the purposes of ego defence mechanisms is to protect the mind/self/ego from [anxiety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anxiety) or social sanctions or to provide a refuge from a situation with which one cannot currently cope. Anna (1937) developed the ideas given by Freud and elaborated them, adding 5 other own.

Psychiatrist [George Eman Vaillant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Eman_Vaillant) introduced a four-level classification of defence mechanisms:

* Level I – pathological defences (psychotic denial, delusional projection)
* Level II – immature defences (fantasy, projection, passive aggression, acting out)
* Level III – neurotic defences (intellectualization, reaction formation, dissociation, displacement, repression)
* Level IV – mature defences (humour, sublimation, suppression, altruism, anticipation)

Some are used more commonly than others.

* **Repression: -** This was the first defence mechanism that Freud discovered & the most important one. It is an unconscious mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts becoming conscious. It is the withdrawal from consciousness of an unwanted idea, affect or desire by pushing it down or repressing it, into the unconscious part of the mind. It can be defined as Motivated Forgetting.

*Example*: **-** Hysterical Amnesia, in which the victim has performed or witnessed dome disturbing act & then completely forgotten the act itself & the circumstances surrounding it. Repression is caused due to forces active within ourselves. We try to forget what makes us feel inferior, ashamed, guilty & anxious Is the blocking of unacceptable impulses from consciousness; removing traumatic experiences from our conscious memory… “It didn’t happen” …syndrome.

* **Regression: -** When someone is under a lot of stress, they return to behaviour from an earlier stage of development. Also known as back journey. Is the reversion of an earlier stage of development in the face of unacceptable impulses.

*Example*: **-** a lady regressed into adolescent starts to walk, talk or dress like as her younger self. When a person is confronted to some loss may be back journey to a stage which had been more pleasant & successful in his lifetime.

* **Projection**:- The attribution of one’s undesired impulses onto another. Is the misattribution of a person’s undesired thoughts, feelings or impulses onto another person who doesn’t have thoughts, feelings or thoughts. Projection occurs when an individual threatened by his own angry feelings accuses another of harbouring hostile thoughts. People deal with unacceptable impulses by acting as if other people have them Possessing a feeling that is designed as socially unacceptable and instead of facing it, that feeling or "unconscious urge" is seen in the actions of other people

Example: - spouse cheats on wife and says that she is also a cheater

* **Reaction formation:** - Expressing emotions that are the exactly opposite of what you feel. Conceal anger/hate with kindness. Teasing/bothering someone you like. It is converting the dangerous or unacceptable thoughts, feelings or impulses into their opposites. This is a point where a person goes beyond denial & behaves in the opposite way to which he or she thinks or feel. t is also called Reversal Formation.

Example: - a woman, who is very angry with her boss and want to quit instead may be overly kind and generous towards her boss.

* **Sublimation:-** The channelling of unacceptable social impulses into more acceptable outlets. seen as the most acceptable of the mechanisms, an expression of anxiety in socially acceptable ways. This is similar to displacement but occurs when we manage to displace our emotions into a constructive rather than destructive manner

Example: - Sport is an example of putting our emotions into something constructive .

* **Rationalization: -**The cognitive reframing of one’s perceptions to protect the ego in the face of changing realities. Some people may attempt to explain undesirable behaviours with their own set of “facts.” This allows you to feel comfortable with the choice you made, even if you know on another level it’s not right.

*Example*, people who might be angry at co-workers for not completing work on time could be ignoring the fact that they’re typically late, too.

* **Projection: -** Is the misattribution of a person’s undesired thoughts, feelings or impulses onto another person who doesn’t have thoughts, feelings or thoughts. Projection occurs when an individual threatened by his own angry feelings accuses another of harbouring hostile thoughts. People deal with unacceptable impulses by acting as if other people have them.

Example: - spouse cheats on wife and says that she is also a cheater.

* **Denial: -** The refusal to accept reality and to act as if a painful event, thought or feeling did not exist. One of the most primitive of defence mechanisms and characteristic of very early childhood development. Denial is one of the most common defence mechanisms. It occurs when you refuse to accept reality or facts. You block external events or circumstances from your mind so that you don’t have to deal with the emotional impact. In other words, you avoid the painful feelings or events. This defence mechanism is one of the most widely known, too.

Example: Your mom asks you to ride the lady bug ride with your younger brother, but you do not want to ride the “baby rides.” When reminded of the meltdown you had for not getting to ride the ladybug ride at the fair the year before you respond “No, I didn’t, I never wanted to ride that ride. I cried because it was a really hot day.”

* **Compensation**: - It is a process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weakness by emphasizing strength in other areas. It may be positive or negative. Separating your life into independent sectors may feel like a way to protect many elements of it.

Example: - when a person says, “I may not know how to cook but i can sure do the dishes”. or “OK, maybe I’ll never be able to pass the class, but I’ll have fun and that teacher will be sorry”

* **Displacement: -** To transfer an impulse or idea from a threatening object to a less threatening object. The redirecting of thoughts, feelings and impulses from an object that gives rise to anxiety to a safer, more acceptable one. Replacing a threatening object with a less threatening one.

Example: being angry at your boss and yelling at your dog for its tail knocking over your drink.

* **Fantasy / Daydreaming:**-The channelling of unacceptable or unattainable desires into imagination; it can protect one’s self esteem as when educational, occupational, or social expectations are not being met, one imagines success in these areas…

Examples: “If I were the boss, I would. . .”

**Conclusion:** - Defence mechanism helps to reduce the anxiety & help an individual to adjust better. But too much of everything is bad. Same is true with defence mechanism. Children should be guarded against too much use of defence mechanism. Because once they start using them it will become a habit with them & later on, they will be using it unconsciously.