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## **THE INTERPLAY OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS, COPING STRATEGIES, AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE IN ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: STUDY DESIGN**

*This article proposes the design of the study to find out the relationships between psychological defense mechanisms, coping strategies, and self-acceptance in adolescent development. It integrates theories from psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioral approaches, and humanistic psychology with recent neuroscience findings. Proposing to use validated assessment tools (DSQ-40, ACS, RSES), the research analyzes data from diverse adolescents to identify prevalent defense mechanisms and coping strategies, exploring their interrelationships and contributions to self-acceptance and well-being. Key focus areas include cultural influences, social media impact, gender differences, and personality traits in psychological adaptation. The study also proposes to consider neurobiological aspects of adolescent development. Advanced statistical techniques are proposed to develop a comprehensive model of adolescent psychological functioning, elucidating interactions between defense mechanisms, coping strategies, and self-acceptance. This research offers insights into adolescent psychological strategies and their effectiveness, with implications for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. Findings of the future research can inform targeted interventions and support programs addressing individual differences, cultural contexts, and challenges faced by today's adolescents in the digital age.*

**Keywords:** *adolescence, psychological defense mechanisms, coping strategies, self-acceptance, identity formation, cultural influences, social media, gender differences, personality traits.*

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## **ВЗАЄМОДІЯ ЗАХИСНИХ МЕХАНІЗМІВ, СТРАТЕГІЙ ОПАНУВАННЯ ТА САМОПРИЙНЯТТЯ У РОЗВИТКУ ПІДЛІТКІВ: ДИЗАЙН ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ**

*Це комплексне дослідження вивчатиме складні взаємозв'язки між психологічними захисними механізмами, стратегіями опанування та самоприйняттям у розвитку підлітків. Спираючись на усталені теорії психоаналізу, когнітивно-поведінкові підходи та гуманістичну психологію, дослідження інтегрує останні відкриття в галузі нейропсихологічної науки для забезпечення багатогранного розуміння психології підлітків.*

У дослідженні пропонується застосування розгалуженого методологічного інструментарію з використанням валідних інструментів оцінки, включаючи опитувальник захисних стилів (DSQ-40), шкалу опанування підлітків (ACS) та шкалу самооцінки Розенберга (RSES) для вимірювання досліджуваних конструктів. Аналізуючи дані різноманітної вибірки підлітків, дослідження має на меті виявити типові захисні механізми та стратегії опанування, дослідити їх взаємозв'язки та вивчити, як вони сприяють самоприйняттю та загальному благополуччю підлітка.

Ключові напрямки дослідження включають вплив культурного походження на стилі опанування та захисту, вплив соціальних медіа на самоприйняття підлітків, гендерні відмінності в управлінні стресом та самоприйнятті, а також роль особистісних рис у становленні психологічної адаптації. Дослідження також враховує нейробіологічні основи цих процесів, враховуючи її онтогенез мозку, що відбувається в підлітковому віці.

Запропонований дизайн дослідження включає використання релевантних статистичних методів, таких як регресійний та кореляційний аналіз, необхідних для розробки комплексної моделі самоприйняття підлітків. Ця модель має на меті прояснити складні взаємодії між захисними механізмами, стратегіями опанування та самоприйняттям, забезпечуючи методологічну основу для майбутніх досліджень та побудови програми психокорекційних втручань.

Пропонуючи розуміння поширеності різних психологічних стратегій серед підлітків та їх ефективності у сприянні самоприйняттю і благополуччю, це дослідження може мати суттєву практичну значущість для психологів, педагогів, соціальних працівників. Результати можуть фасилітувати розробку цільових психокорекційних втручань та програм підтримки, які враховують індивідуальні відмінності, культурні контексти та унікальні виклики, з якими стикаються сучасні підлітки в умовах війни.

**Ключові слова:** підлітковий вік, психологічні захисні механізми, стратегії опанування, самоприйняття, формування ідентичності, культурні впливи, соціальні медіа, гендерні відмінності, особистісні риси.

## Introduction

Today, adolescents face numerous demands and expectations, often leading to increased psycho-emotional stress and the need to develop effective adaptation mechanisms. These demands, ranging from academic pressures to social challenges, can significantly impact the psychological well-being of young individuals. In this context, the study of psychological defense mechanisms and coping strategies becomes particularly relevant, as they play a crucial role in the process of self-acceptance and the formation of adolescent identity.

Self-acceptance is a vital aspect of mental health and well-being, especially during adolescence when the personality is actively forming and undergoing numerous changes. Adolescents are in a critical developmental stage where they seek to establish their identity and place in the world. The process of self-acceptance involves recognizing and embracing one's strengths and weaknesses, which is essential for healthy psychological development. A lack of self-acceptance can lead to various psychological issues, including low self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

Understanding the mechanisms that help adolescents cope with internal and external stressors allows us to better comprehend their behavioral and emotional responses. Psychological defense mechanisms are unconscious processes that protect individuals from anxiety and the perception of internal or external dangers or stressors.

Coping strategies, on the other hand, are conscious efforts to manage stress and difficult emotions. They can be problem-focused, addressing the source of stress, or emotion-focused, managing the emotional response to stress. Effective coping strategies are crucial for fostering resilience and promoting positive outcomes during the turbulent years of adolescence.

Exploring the structure of adolescents' self-acceptance through the lens of psychological defense mechanisms and coping strategies involves delving into a complex web of interrelated factors. This research seeks to identify possible relationships between different types of defense mechanisms and levels of self-acceptance. For instance, understanding how reliance on certain defense mechanisms correlates with lower or higher levels of self-acceptance can provide valuable insights. Additionally, analyzing the effectiveness of various coping strategies in the context of adolescent development can shed light on which approaches are most beneficial for fostering self-acceptance.

This study also emphasizes the importance of theoretical frameworks that underpin the investigation of self-acceptance, psychological defense mechanisms, and coping strategies. Theoretical perspectives from psychoanalytic theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, and developmental psychology offer different lenses through which these phenomena can be understood. Integrating these perspectives can provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate processes involved in adolescent self-acceptance.

By outlining a robust study design and validating the theoretical frameworks involved, this research seeks to provide a solid foundation for future empirical investigations. It also holds potential practical significance by offering data that can be used to develop psychological support programs and interventions aimed at improving the mental health of adolescents.

### **Analysis of research**

Sigmund Freud introduced defense mechanisms in the late 19th/early 20th centuries as part of his psychoanalytic theory. He proposed these as unconscious psychological strategies used by the ego to protect itself from anxiety and unacceptable thoughts or feelings. Freud initially identified repression as the primary defense mechanism, later expanding to include others like denial, projection, and reaction formation. He emphasized their

unconscious nature and believed that while adaptive in moderation, excessive use could lead to psychological disorders [10].

Anna Freud's expansion of defense mechanism theory, especially in relation to adolescence identified additional mechanisms, bringing the total to ten main types. A. Freud emphasized their role in normal psychological development, not just pathology, with particular focus on adolescence. She described defenses common in adolescents, such as intellectualization and asceticism, highlighting their adaptive function during this challenging developmental stage [9].

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman introduced the transactional model of stress and coping in the 1980s. This model views stress as a dynamic interaction between a person and their environment. According to this theory, stress occurs when an individual perceives that the demands of their environment exceed their personal resources. The model emphasizes two key processes: cognitive appraisal and coping [14].

Cognitive appraisal involves two stages: primary appraisal (evaluating the significance of a stressor) and secondary appraisal (assessing one's ability to cope with the stressor). Coping is defined as the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person [8].

The researchers proposed that individuals typically use both types of strategies to cope with stressors, but the balance may shift depending on the nature of the stressor and the individual's assessment of their ability to change the situation. Problem-focused strategies are often more effective when the stressor is controllable, while emotion-focused strategies may be more useful when the stressor is beyond the individual's control.

Carl Rogers, a prominent humanistic psychologist, developed the concept of unconditional positive regard as part of his person-centered therapy approach in the 1950s and 1960s. Unconditional positive regard refers to the attitude of complete acceptance and support of a person regardless of what they say or do [17].

Rogers proposed that when individuals experience unconditional positive regard from others, particularly from significant figures in their lives, they are more likely to develop self-acceptance. This self-acceptance involves acknowledging and accepting all aspects of oneself, including both positive and negative qualities, without self-judgment or rejection.

According to Rogers, unconditional positive regard fosters an environment where individuals feel safe to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors without fear of rejection. This, in turn, promotes greater self-

understanding and self-acceptance. Rogers believed that self-acceptance was crucial for psychological well-being and personal growth [17].

While traditional cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) focused primarily on changing negative thoughts and behaviors, the concept of self-acceptance has been increasingly integrated into CBT approaches, particularly in what's known as third-wave CBT [13].

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a prominent example of this integration. ACT emphasizes accepting one's thoughts and feelings rather than struggling against them, while committing to actions that align with one's values. This approach incorporates self-acceptance as a key component of psychological flexibility.

Recent advances in neuroscience have significantly enhanced our understanding of adolescent brain development and its implications for emotional regulation [5; 7; 12]:

**Prefrontal Cortex Development:** the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions including decision-making and impulse control, continues to develop throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. This ongoing development can explain adolescents' sometimes impulsive behavior and difficulty in regulating emotions.

**Limbic System Changes:** the limbic system, involved in emotional processing and reward-seeking behavior, undergoes significant changes during adolescence. This can lead to heightened emotional responses and increased sensitivity to social and emotional stimuli.

**Neural Pruning and Myelination:** adolescence is characterized by synaptic pruning (the elimination of unused neural connections) and increased myelination (which improves the efficiency of neural transmission). These processes contribute to more efficient brain function but can also lead to temporary imbalances in emotional processing.

**Hormonal Influences:** pubertal hormones not only trigger physical changes but also influence brain development and emotional experiences.

**Sleep Patterns:** changes in sleep patterns and circadian rhythms during adolescence can impact mood regulation and emotional stability.

**Neuroplasticity:** the adolescent brain shows high levels of neuroplasticity, making it particularly responsive to environmental influences and learning experiences.

**The purpose of this article** is to propose a comprehensive design for investigating the structure of adolescents' self-acceptance through the lens of psychological defense mechanisms and coping strategies. This includes examining the theoretical and methodical backgrounds that underpin the study, identifying relationships between different types of defense

mechanisms and levels of self-acceptance, and analyzing the effectiveness of various coping strategies in the context of adolescent development.

By outlining a robust study design and validating the theoretical and methodical frameworks involved, this research seeks to provide a solid foundation for future empirical investigation. This study represents an important step towards a deeper understanding of the psychological processes accompanying personality development during adolescence. It also holds practical significance by offering data that can be used to develop psychological support programs and interventions aimed at improving the mental health of adolescents.

### **Methods**

This article will employ a comprehensive approach to exploring the topic of self-acceptance, psychological defense mechanisms and coping strategies of adolescents' drawing upon a variety of methods to provide a well-rounded and informative theoretical and methodological analysis. An extensive review of relevant academic literature, surveys and scientific papers will be conducted to gather insights into the challenges faced by adolescents, the importance of defense mechanisms coping skills and effective coping strategies in the structure of self-acceptance.

### **Main results**

The interaction between defense mechanisms, coping strategies, self-acceptances and identity formation in adolescence is complex and multifaceted and from our point of view should include:

1. Identity exploration and defense mechanisms: certain mechanisms may aid or hinder identity exploration.
2. Coping strategies and identity commitment: problem-focused coping often associated with successful identity commitment.
3. Self-acceptance and identity coherence: higher self-acceptance linked to more stable identity formation.
4. Feedback loops: emerging identity influences coping and defense choices, affecting further development.
5. Role of stress: high stress can lead to primitive defenses, impeding identity formation and self-acceptance [6; 15].
6. Social context: family, peers, and culture crucial in psychological processes' interaction.
7. Neurobiological underpinnings: brain development patterns linked to changes in these psychological processes.

This integrated approach to understanding adolescent psychological development has important implications for educational practices, parenting

strategies, and clinical interventions aimed at supporting healthy adolescent development and identity formation.

Cultural background is considered by us to significantly influence the use and effectiveness of defense mechanisms and coping strategies among adolescents and should include:

1. Collectivist vs. individualist cultures: collectivist cultures favor socially oriented strategies; individualist cultures emphasize personal approaches.
2. Cultural values and defense mechanisms: acceptance of certain mechanisms varies by culture (e.g., suppression in emotionally restrained cultures).
3. Religion and spirituality: influence based coping strategies, with faith-based methods more common in some contexts.
4. Cultural trauma and coping: historical traumas shape coping mechanisms across generations.
5. Acculturation and coping: immigrant adolescents blend strategies from heritage and new cultures.

The rise of social media has had a profound impact on adolescent social dynamics and self-perception which may include [2; 16]:

1. Social comparison: frequent use can decrease self-acceptance through unfavorable comparisons.
2. Selective self-presentation: curated online images can both enhance and undermine self-acceptance.
3. Cyberbullying: linked to decreased self-acceptance and maladaptive coping.
4. Body image: exposure to idealized images associated with lower self-acceptance.
5. FOMO: can negatively impact self-acceptance and increase anxiety.
6. Online support networks: can enhance self-acceptance, especially for marginalized youth.
7. Peer influence: shapes self-acceptance through social validation and pressure.
8. Digital literacy: important for navigating social media positively.
9. Cultural differences: impact varies across cultural contexts.
10. Longitudinal effects: studies exploring long-term effects on psychological well-being.

This research underscores the complex interplay between cultural background, social media, peer relationships, and adolescent self-acceptance,

highlighting the need for nuanced approaches in supporting adolescent development in our increasingly digital and culturally diverse world.

Research is also to consider notable gender differences in how adolescents cope with stress and develop self-acceptance:

1. Gender coping strategies: studies have consistently found that adolescent girls tend to use more emotion-focused coping strategies, such as seeking social support and emotional expression. In contrast, boys are more likely to employ problem-focused coping or avoidance strategies.

2. Rumination: researches suggest that adolescent girls are more prone to rumination, a coping style associated with increased risk for depression and lower self-acceptance.

3. Social support: girls generally report seeking and receiving more social support as a coping mechanism compared to boys, which can influence self-acceptance both positively and negatively depending on the nature of the support.

4. Body image: studies show that girls typically experience more body image concerns, which can negatively impact self-acceptance. Boys, while also affected, generally report higher body satisfaction.

5. Academic stress: research indicates that girls often report higher levels of academic stress and may employ different coping strategies in academic settings compared to boys.

6. Emotional expression: studies suggest that societal norms often make it more acceptable for girls to express emotions openly, potentially influencing both coping strategies and pathways to self-acceptance.

7. Self-esteem: while findings are mixed, some studies indicate that boys tend to report higher self-esteem during adolescence, which can influence self-acceptance.

8. Gender identity: research on transgender and non-binary adolescents has revealed unique challenges in coping and self-acceptance, often related to societal acceptance and gender dysphoria [3; 4].

Personality traits have been found to significantly impact an individual's choice and effectiveness of defense mechanisms and coping strategies and we also intend to consider the following:

1. Big five personality traits: Studies have explored how the Big Five traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) may correlate with different coping styles and defense mechanisms.

2. Resilience: researches identify personality traits associated with resilience, such as optimism and hardiness, which influence the use of adaptive coping strategies and more mature defense mechanisms.



3. Locus of control: studies show that individuals with an internal locus of control tend to use more problem-focused coping strategies and more mature defense mechanisms.

4. Self-efficacy: higher self-efficacy has been linked to more active coping strategies and less reliance on avoidant defense mechanisms.

5. Perfectionism: researches explore how different types of perfectionism (adaptive vs. maladaptive) influence coping strategies and defense mechanisms, with maladaptive perfectionism often leading to less effective coping.

6. Attachment styles: studies have examined how attachment styles, developed early in life, influence the choice of defense mechanisms and coping strategies in adolescence and beyond.

7. Temperament: researches on temperamental traits, such as behavioral inhibition or approach tendencies, have shown their influence on stress reactivity and coping style preferences.

8. Cultural considerations: cross-cultural studies have explored how the relationship between personality traits and coping/defense mechanisms may vary across different cultural contexts.

9. Development over time: longitudinal studies have investigated how the relationship between personality traits and coping/defense mechanisms evolves from adolescence into adulthood.

10. Clinical implications: research in this area informs personalized therapeutic approaches, tailoring interventions to individual personality profiles to enhance coping skills and promote more adaptive defense mechanisms.

This research underscores the complex interplay between gender, individual personality traits, and psychological coping mechanisms, highlighting the need for personalized approaches in supporting adolescent development and mental health and are planned to be used for the model build.

### **Measurement and Assessment:**

We propose the following measures to be used: Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40) [1]: The DSQ-40 is a widely used self-report measure to assess psychological defense mechanisms. It consists of 40 items that evaluate 20 defense mechanisms, categorized into three main styles:

1. Mature: includes sublimation, humor, anticipation, and suppression.

2. Neurotic: includes undoing, pseudo-altruism, idealization, and reaction formation.

3. Immature: includes projection, passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, dissociation, splitting, rationalization, and somatization.

Participants rate each item on a 9-point Likert scale, indicating how much they agree with each statement. The DSQ-40 provides scores for individual defense mechanisms and overall defense styles, allowing researchers to assess the predominant defense patterns in adolescents.

Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) [11]: The ACS is a comprehensive measure of coping strategies specifically designed for adolescents. It consists of 80 items (in the long form) or 18 items (in the short form) that assess 18 different coping strategies. These strategies are grouped into three main styles:

1. Productive coping (e.g., problem-solving, seeking social support).
2. Reference to others (e.g., seeking spiritual support, seeking professional help).
3. Non-productive coping (e.g., worry, self-blame, tension reduction).

Respondents rate the frequency of using each coping strategy on a 5-point Likert scale. The ACS provides a comprehensive profile of an adolescent's coping repertoire.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) [18]: While not a direct measure of self-acceptance, the RSES is often used as a proxy due to its strong correlation with self-acceptance. It's a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by assessing both positive and negative feelings about the self. Items are answered on a 4-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The RSES is widely used due to its brevity, reliability, and validity across different populations.

Possible research outcomes: based on the proposed blocks of the model we foresee the following possible outcomes.

*Exploring demographic influences:* Researchers would collect demographic data (age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) alongside the DSQ-40, ACS, and RSES scores. Statistical analyses (e.g., regression, correlations) would be used to identify significant relationships between demographic factors and scores on these measures. This could reveal, for instance, whether certain defense mechanisms or coping strategies are more prevalent in specific age groups or socioeconomic backgrounds.

*Identifying common coping strategies:* Analysis of ACS results would provide a ranked list of the most frequently used coping strategies among the adolescent sample. This information is crucial for understanding how adolescents typically respond to stress and challenges.

*Developing a comprehensive model:* Researchers would use statistical techniques to examine the interrelationships between defense mechanisms (from DSQ-40), coping strategies (from ACS), and self-acceptance (inferred from RSES). This model would aim to explain how these psychological constructs influence each other and contribute to overall adolescent well-being.

### **Conclusion**

Conducting this research and building a comprehensive model of psychological constructs of adolescent well-being, we expect to achieve several key results. This research would provide a clear picture of which defense mechanisms and coping strategies are most common among adolescents, helping educators and mental health professionals recognize typical adolescent responses to stress.

Results may highlight how factors like age, gender, and socioeconomic status impact psychological functioning in adolescents, crucial information for developing targeted interventions that consider individual and group differences. The developed model would provide a theoretical framework for understanding adolescent psychological functioning, guiding future research and informing the development of more effective interventions.

This comprehensive approach would provide valuable insights into adolescent psychological functioning, contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in supporting adolescent mental health and development. This large-scale scientific Ph.D. survey aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between psychological defense mechanisms, coping strategies, and self-acceptance in adolescents. The findings will contribute to the existing literature and inform the development of interventions to promote positive mental health outcomes among adolescents.

Furthermore, this research holds particular significance in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Adolescents in Ukraine are facing unprecedented stress and trauma, making the understanding of their psychological coping mechanisms and self-acceptance crucial for providing effective support. The insights gained from this study could inform targeted interventions and support programs specifically designed to address the unique challenges faced by Ukrainian youth during this difficult time. By enhancing our understanding of adolescent psychological resilience, this research can contribute to efforts to mitigate the long-term mental health impacts of war on the younger generation in Ukraine.

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