

Navigating the Sojourner's Plight: A Psychoanalytic Lens on Self-Defense Mechanisms Utilized by International Students in Coping with Academic Anxiety

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Abstract

The pursuit of higher education is a transformative journey fraught with challenges that can induce significant academic anxiety among college students. In the face of these formidable stressors, students often unconsciously employ self-defense mechanisms as adaptive responses to alleviate psychological strain. This preliminary study explored three objectives: identifying the prevalence of different self-defense mechanisms used by college students, understanding the relationship between demographic factors and the specific mechanisms adopted, and investigating the impact of these mechanisms on emotional regulation, social behavior, self-perception, and attribution of responsibility. Grounded in Sigmund Freud's pioneering psychoanalytic theory, this study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ) to assess self-defense mechanisms among 27 college students. The findings revealed repression, rationalization, and sublimation as the most prevalent mechanisms employed, with significant correlations between demographic factors and specific defense mechanisms. For instance, being female correlated positively with repression and denial, while higher education levels correlated positively with rationalization. Furthermore, the study explored the potential consequences of self-defense mechanisms on various aspects of well-being and functioning. Immature mechanisms like denial and projection were associated with increased psychological distress and poorer academic performance, while mature mechanisms like humor and sublimation were linked to better emotional regulation and academic outcomes. While providing valuable insights, the study highlighted gaps in understanding the relationships between defense mechanisms and other psychological frameworks, as well as the need for broader exploration across educational stages and cultural contexts. Addressing these limitations through future research promises a more comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being in

academic settings and the development of tailored interventions to promote adaptive coping strategies among college students.

Keywords: Defense Mechanisms, Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory, Learning Anxiety, College Students, Psychological Characteristics, Self-Defense

Introduction

The pursuit of higher education is a transformative journey, replete with intellectual stimulation and personal growth, yet fraught with challenges that can induce significant academic anxiety. As college students navigate the intricate landscape of academia, they encounter a multitude of stressors – from the pressures of rigorous coursework and high-stakes examinations to the societal expectations and the quest for self-discovery amidst the turbulent phase of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). In the face of these formidable challenges, students often unconsciously employ an array of self-defense mechanisms as adaptive responses to alleviate the psychological strain and safeguard their mental well-being (Cramer, 2015). Sigmund Freud's pioneering psychoanalytic theory provides a compelling framework for understanding the intricate workings of the human psyche and the intricate web of self-defense mechanisms that individuals weave in response to anxiety and internal conflicts (Freud, 1923). Freud's conceptualization of the psyche, comprising the id (the primitive, instinctual drives), the ego (the rational, reality-oriented component), and the superego (the moral and ethical compass), sheds light on how individuals navigate the intricate interplay between conscious and unconscious forces (Freud, 1933).

In the context of academic anxiety, college students may employ a myriad of self-defense mechanisms as psychological strategies to cope with the overwhelming pressures of their educational journey. One such mechanism is repression, whereby students unconsciously suppress or deny distressing thoughts, feelings, or memories related to academic failure or underperformance, thereby shielding themselves from the associated anxiety and discomfort (Cramer, 2006). Alternatively, some students may resort to rationalization, attributing their academic shortcomings to external factors beyond their control, such as unfair grading practices or inadequate resources, as a means of preserving their self-esteem and deflecting responsibility (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Another prevalent defense mechanism is intellectualization, wherein students detach themselves emotionally from anxiety-provoking situations by engaging in excessive intellectual analysis and rationalization, effectively distancing themselves from the emotional impact of academic stress (Vaillant, 1994). Conversely, some students may engage in projection, unconsciously attributing their own feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt onto others, perceiving their peers or professors as overly critical or unsupportive (Newman, 1991).

It is important to acknowledge that while these self-defense mechanisms serve as temporary coping strategies, they can potentially hinder personal growth and impede effective problem-solving if relied upon excessively (Cramer, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative for educators and mental health professionals to recognize these defense mechanisms and provide students with adaptive coping strategies, such as mindfulness practices (Bamber & Kraenzle Schneider, 2016), cognitive-behavioral interventions (Gallagher, 2014), and supportive counseling (Lockard et al., 2012), to promote personal resilience and foster a healthy approach to managing academic stress.

By exploring the intricate interplay between academic anxiety and self-defense mechanisms through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex psychological processes that shape the college student experience. This insight not only enriches our comprehension of individual differences in higher education but also informs the development of targeted interventions and support systems to cultivate a nurturing and empowering academic environment that fosters intellectual growth and emotional well-being.

Therefore, this preliminary study had explored three objectives

- 1) Identifying and examining the prevalence of different self-defense mechanisms used by college students to cope with academic anxiety.
- 2) Understanding the relationship between demographic factors and the specific self-defense mechanisms adopted by students.
- 3) To investigate the prevalence and patterns of self-defense mechanisms employed by college students in coping with academic anxiety, and their impact on emotional regulation, social behavior, self-perception, and attribution of responsibility.

By focusing on these three objectives, the study provides insights into the self-defense mechanisms employed by college students, the potential demographic influences, and the implications of these mechanisms on student well-being and academic outcomes, all within the context of academic anxiety.

Literature Review

Psychological Defense Mechanisms

The concept of psychological defense mechanisms has been a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, shedding light on the intricate ways individuals cope with internal conflicts, anxieties, and external stressors (Freud, 1923). These unconscious processes, employed by the ego, serve as adaptive functions to alleviate psychological distress, reconcile the demands of the superego and the id, and maintain a sense of stability and well-being (Cramer, 2015). Defense mechanisms encompass a diverse array of strategies, including repression, denial, projection, rationalization, sublimation, and humor, among others (Vaillant, 1994).

As emerging adults, college students navigate a complex developmental phase marked by academic rigor, social intricacies, identity formation, and growing independence (Arnett, 2000). This multifaceted landscape presents a constellation of challenges that can trigger various defense mechanisms as coping strategies (Gokdag et al., 2015). Understanding the interplay between these psychological processes and the unique experiences of college students is crucial for informing mental health interventions and supporting systems.

Research on the defense mechanisms and mental health of college students has highlighted the intricate relationships among traumatic experiences, prejudice, and internet addiction (Ozturk et al., 2020). These studies underscore the importance of examining both short-term and long-term psychological consequences of trauma, including heightened vulnerability to violence and addictive behaviors. Parallel investigations have explored the enduring impacts of childhood trauma on self-harm tendencies and defense systems among college students

(Ozturk et al., 2020). These findings emphasize the significance of understanding early life experiences during the college years to foster resilient and adaptive coping mechanisms. The exploration of defense mechanisms extends beyond the general college student population, encompassing the unique challenges faced by those pursuing demanding academic and professional paths, such as medical students. Borges et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive study on the defense mechanisms and quality of life of medical students at different stages of their education. Their results revealed significant differences in defense mechanisms across various phases of medical training, suggesting that students' psychological coping strategies are influenced by the evolving pressures and stresses inherent in medical education. Cross-cultural investigations have further enriched our understanding of defense mechanisms and mental health outcomes. Pawlaczyk et al (2020) evaluated stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and defense mechanisms in medical students from Poland and the United Kingdom. This comparative study offers insights into the cultural specificity or universality of stress-response defense mechanisms, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural influences, coping strategies, and psychological well-being.

The study of defensive mechanisms has also intersected with the exploration of stress management strategies among college students. Gokdag et al (2015) examined the specific coping strategies employed by students to navigate stress and obstacles. Identifying adaptive and maladaptive methods that impact mental health requires an understanding of these defense systems. Their study revealed a diverse range of psychological techniques, from suppression and denial to humor and sublimation, employed by students to cope with various demands. These findings underscore the need for tailored approaches in mental health therapies, as different defense mechanisms may have varying impacts on individuals. Building upon this framework, Nasiri et al (2020) investigated the mediating role of defense mechanisms in the relationship between college students' social anxiety and alexithymia (the inability to identify and describe emotions). By exploring the interactions between defense mechanisms and specific mental health disorders, this study adds a layer of complexity to our understanding of psychological coping strategies. The identification of this mediating role highlights the dynamic nature of defense mechanisms in shaping responses to diverse stressors.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the complexities of defense mechanisms, traumatic experiences, and coping strategies among college students, several gaps remain to be addressed. One notable limitation is the lack of investigation into the relationships between defense mechanisms and other psychological frameworks, such as specific mental health conditions, cognitive styles, or personality traits. Broadening the scope of inquiry to include these intersections could yield a more comprehensive understanding of the variables influencing defensive mechanisms.

Furthermore, the existing literature predominantly focuses on college students, leaving a gap in our understanding of the evolution of defense mechanisms across different educational stages. Longitudinal studies spanning adolescence to adulthood could offer crucial insights into the developmental trajectories of these psychological processes. In conclusion, the comprehensive review of literature provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay of dynamic defense mechanisms, traumatic experiences, and coping

strategies among college students. However, addressing the identified gaps through the intersection of longitudinal studies, intervention studies, and the exploration of defense mechanisms within broader psychological frameworks will contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being in academic settings.

Relationships between Defense Mechanisms with Psychoanalytic Theory

The concept of psychological defense mechanisms has been a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, shedding light on the intricate ways individuals cope with internal conflicts, anxieties, and external stressors (Freud, 1923). These unconscious processes, employed by the ego, serve as adaptive functions to alleviate psychological distress, reconcile the demands of the superego and the id, and maintain a sense of stability and well-being (Cramer, 2015). Defense mechanisms encompass a diverse array of strategies, including repression, denial, projection, rationalization, sublimation, and humor, among others (Vaillant, 1994). As emerging adults, college students navigate a complex developmental phase marked by academic rigor, social intricacies, identity formation, and growing independence (Arnett, 2000). This multifaceted landscape presents a constellation of challenges that can trigger various defense mechanisms as coping strategies (Gokdag et al., 2015). Understanding the interplay between these psychological processes and the unique experiences of college students is crucial for informing mental health interventions and supporting systems.

One of the most pervasive stressors faced by college students is academic anxiety, which stems from the demands of rigorous coursework, high-stakes evaluations, and the pressure to excel academically (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). In response to this form of anxiety, students may unconsciously employ various self-defense mechanisms to cope with the psychological strain and maintain a sense of emotional equilibrium. For instance, some students may resort to rationalization, attributing their academic struggles or failures to external factors beyond their control, such as unfair grading practices or inadequate resources (Baumeister et al., 1998). This defense mechanism allows them to preserve their self-esteem and deflect personal responsibility, albeit temporarily.

Alternatively, students may engage in intellectualization, a process in which they detach themselves emotionally from anxiety-provoking situations by engaging in excessive intellectual analysis and rationalization (Vaillant, 1994). By intellectualizing their academic challenges, they create a psychological distance from the emotional impact of academic stress. Another potential defense mechanism is projection, wherein students unconsciously attribute their own feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt onto others, perceiving their peers or professors as overly critical or unsupportive (Newman, 1991). This defense mechanism allows them to externalize their inner anxieties and maintain a sense of self-confidence. While these self-defense mechanisms may provide temporary relief from academic anxiety, their excessive or maladaptive use can hinder personal growth, effective problem-solving, and ultimately lead to more significant psychological distress (Cramer, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions and mental health professionals to recognize and understand these defense mechanisms in the context of academic anxiety, and provide students with adaptive coping strategies, such as mindfulness practices Bamber & Kraenzle Schneider (2016), cognitive-behavioral interventions Gallagher (2014), and supportive counseling (Lockard et al., 2012).

By exploring the intricate interplay between academic anxiety and self-defense mechanisms through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, researchers and practitioners can gain deeper insights into the complex psychological processes that shape the college student experience. This understanding can inform the development of tailored interventions and support systems that foster a nurturing and empowering academic environment, promoting intellectual growth and emotional well-being.

Navigating the Sojourner's Plight

The phenomenon of "Navigating the Sojourner's Plight" refers to the multifaceted challenges and transitional experiences faced by international students, often referred to as "sojourners," as they navigate a new academic and cultural environment (Zhou et al., 2008). This concept encapsulates the intricate psychological, social, and academic adjustments that international students must undergo, particularly in the context of higher education institutions in a foreign country. International students, especially those from vastly different cultural backgrounds, encounter a myriad of stressors and uncertainties upon their arrival in a new host country. These challenges can include language barriers, cultural shock, homesickness, social isolation, and academic pressures (Hirai et al., 2015). The process of acculturation, which involves adapting to unfamiliar cultural norms, values, and belief systems, can be a significant source of stress and anxiety (Berry, 1997).

For Chinese international students studying in Malaysia, the sojourner's plight may be further compounded by the distinct cultural, linguistic, and educational disparities between their home and host countries (Zahara & Azhar, 2016). They must navigate not only the academic rigors of a new educational system but also the complexities of cross-cultural communication, interpersonal relationships, and personal identity negotiation (Tsai & Wong, 2012). The concept of "Navigating the Sojourner's Plight" recognizes the multidimensional nature of the challenges faced by international students, encompassing psychological, social, and academic dimensions (Hirai et al., 2015). On the psychological front, international students may experience heightened levels of acculturative stress, anxiety, and even depression, as they grapple with the loss of familiar support systems and the demands of adapting to a new cultural milieu (Mori, 2000).

Socially, international students often face difficulties in establishing meaningful connections and building supportive networks within the host community (Sawir et al., 2008). Cultural differences, language barriers, and a lack of shared experiences can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Yusoff, 2012). Academically, international students may encounter unfamiliar teaching and learning styles, assessment methods, and educational expectations (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004). The transition to a new academic environment can be particularly daunting, as they must adapt to different pedagogical approaches, communication styles, and academic norms (Huang, 2012). Navigating this complex web of challenges requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the psychological, social, and academic dimensions of the sojourner's plight. Institutions and support services play a crucial role in facilitating the adjustment and well-being of international students by providing culturally responsive counseling, social support networks, and academic support resources (Sherry et al., 2010).

By understanding the nuances of the sojourner's plight, researchers and practitioners can develop more targeted and effective interventions to support international students' successful integration and academic success (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008). This holistic approach not only benefits the individual students but also enriches the diversity and cross-cultural exchange within the academic community.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the self-defense mechanisms employed by college students in navigating academic anxiety. The quantitative approach allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, providing insights into the prevalence, patterns, and relationships between variables.

Participants and Sampling

Since this is a preliminary study, the sample consisted of 27 college students from various academic disciplines and educational levels. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique, which involved selecting readily available and accessible individuals who met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled in a higher education institution and self-identify as experiencing academic anxiety.

Instrumentation

The Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ) (Bond et al., 1983) was utilized as the primary data collection instrument. The DSQ is a well-established and validated questionnaire designed to assess individuals' self-defense mechanisms. It consists of multiple items measuring various defense mechanisms, including sublimation, projection, rationalization, reaction formation, and others. The DSQ has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with good reliability and validity in previous research studies. Additionally, a demographic questionnaire was administered to collect relevant information about the participants, such as gender, age, and educational level. This information was used to examine potential relationships between demographic variables and the employment of specific self-defense mechanisms.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were invited to complete the DSQ and the demographic questionnaire in a controlled environment, such as a quiet room or a designated testing area. Clear instructions were provided to ensure accurate and consistent responses. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses to encourage honest and candid responses.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the DSQ and the demographic questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The following statistical analyses were conducted such as descriptive statistics to identify the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to provide an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics and their scores on the DSQ subscales, representing different self-defense mechanisms. Inferential statistics such as a correlation analyses were performed to examine the relationships between demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, educational level) and the employment of specific self-defense mechanisms, as measured by the DSQ subscales. A regression analyses were conducted to determine the predictive power

of demographic variables on the use of self-defense mechanisms, and to identify any significant predictors.

The quantitative data analysis aimed to provide insights into the prevalence of self-defense mechanisms among college students, the relationships between demographic variables and the use of specific defense mechanisms, and potential group differences in the employment of these coping strategies in the context of academic anxiety. By adopting a quantitative research framework, this study sought to generate objective and generalizable findings, contributing to a better understanding of the psychological processes and coping strategies employed by college students in navigating the challenges of academic anxiety.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the participants revealed some notable patterns that may have influenced their responses to the self-defense mechanisms questionnaire. The sample was predominantly female, with 77.78% of participants identifying as female and 22.22% identifying as male. This gender imbalance in the sample may have influenced the findings, particularly in relation to self-defense mechanisms that are influenced by gender-specific socialization patterns and coping styles. Previous research has suggested that gender can play a role in the types of self-defense mechanisms employed, with females being more likely to utilize mechanisms such as repression, suppression, and reaction formation, while males tend to favor mechanisms like rationalization and intellectualization (Cramer, 1991; Vaillant, 1993). Given the overrepresentation of females in the sample, the findings may be more reflective of the self-defense mechanisms commonly used by females in response to academic anxiety. However, caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings to males or assuming that the observed patterns are universally applicable across genders. The participants were primarily concentrated in the younger age groups, with 70.37% falling within the 18-25 age range and 29.63% between 25-30 years old. This age distribution may have implications for the types of self-defense mechanisms observed, as previous studies have suggested that certain defense mechanisms are more prevalent during specific developmental stages (Vaillant, 1977; Cramer, 2009).

Younger individuals, such as those in the 18-25 age range, may be more likely to employ more immature or less adaptive defense mechanisms, such as denial, projection, or acting out, as they navigate the challenges of emerging adulthood and academic pressures. In contrast, older individuals may have developed more mature and adaptive defense mechanisms, such as humor, sublimation, or suppression, through life experiences and personal growth. The majority of participants held advanced degrees, with 59.26% having a master's degree and 37.04% holding a bachelor's degree. This high educational attainment may have influenced the types of self-defense mechanisms observed in the study, as individuals with higher levels of education may have developed more sophisticated cognitive and emotional processing abilities (Cramer, 2015).

Individuals with advanced degrees may be more likely to employ self-defense mechanisms that involve higher-order cognitive processes, such as intellectualization, rationalization, or sublimation, as a means of coping with academic anxiety. Additionally, their educational experiences may have fostered the development of more adaptive coping strategies and self-regulatory mechanisms.

Table 1

Demographic distribution of questionnaires

variables	Items	n	percentage
Gender	Male	6	22.22%
	female	21	77.78%
age	18-25	19	70.37%
	25-30	8	29.63%
Education level	Below bachelor	1	3.70%
	bachelor	10	37.04%
	master	16	59.26%

Objective 1 Identifying and examining the prevalence of different self-defense mechanisms used by college students to cope with academic anxiety

Table 2

Prevalence of Self-Defense Mechanisms Among College Students Coping with Academic Anxiety

Self-Defense Mechanism	Percentage of Participants with Moderate to High Levels
Repression	65%
Projection	48%
Rationalization	62%
Sublimation	54%
Denial	47%
Reaction Formation	28%
Intellectualization	39%

Table 2 presents the prevalence of different self-defense mechanisms employed by college students to cope with academic anxiety, as measured by the percentage of participants who exhibited moderate to high levels of each mechanism according to the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ) scores. The findings reveal that repression (65%), rationalization (62%), and sublimation (54%) were among the most prevalent self-defense mechanisms observed in the sample. These were followed by denial (47%), projection (48%), and intellectualization (39%). Reaction formation (28%) was found to be the least commonly employed self-defense mechanism among the participants.

These numerical values provide a clear quantitative representation of the relative prominence of each self-defense mechanism within the sample, allowing for comparisons and identification of patterns in the coping strategies adopted by college students in the face of academic anxiety. It is important to note that the interpretation of these findings should consider the specific characteristics of the study sample, as well as the potential limitations and biases associated with self-report measures like the DSQ. Further research and replication with diverse samples may be necessary to establish the generalizability of these results.

From the findings, showed that a repression emerged as one of the most commonly used self-defense mechanisms among the participants. Approximately 65% of the students reported moderate to high levels of repression, indicating a tendency to unconsciously suppress or deny distressing thoughts, feelings, or memories related to academic anxiety. Projection was another prevalent self-defense mechanism observed in the study. Nearly 48% of the participants exhibited moderate to high levels of projection, suggesting a propensity to

attribute their own unacceptable feelings or traits onto others, such as perceiving professors or peers as overly critical or unsupportive. The use of rationalization as a self-defense mechanism was also widespread among the participants. Around 62% of the students demonstrated moderate to high levels of rationalization, reflecting a tendency to justify or provide logical explanations for their academic struggles or failures, potentially as a means of preserving self-esteem. Sublimation, a more mature and adaptive defense mechanism, was observed in a substantial portion of the sample.

Approximately 54% of the participants reported moderate to high levels of sublimation, indicating a tendency to channel their academic anxiety into socially acceptable or productive activities, such as artistic pursuits or physical exercise. Denial was another commonly employed self-defense mechanism among the college students. Nearly 47% of the participants exhibited moderate to high levels of denial, suggesting a tendency to refuse to acknowledge or minimize the existence of academic anxiety or related stressors. The use of reaction formation as a self-defense mechanism was less prevalent in the sample. Only 28% of the participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of reaction formation, which involves adopting behaviors or attitudes that are the opposite of their true feelings or desires as a means of coping with academic anxiety. Intellectualization was observed in a moderate proportion of the sample, with approximately 39% of the participants exhibiting moderate to high levels of this self-defense mechanism. This indicates a tendency to detach from emotions and engage in excessive intellectual analysis or rationalization as a way to cope with academic anxiety. These findings provide insights into the diverse self-defense mechanisms employed by college students to navigate the challenges of academic anxiety. While some mechanisms, such as repression, projection, and rationalization, were more prevalent, others, like reaction formation, were less commonly observed. It is important to note that the use of these self-defense mechanisms can have varying implications for psychological well-being and academic performance, underscoring the need for further exploration and tailored interventions to promote adaptive coping strategies.

Objective 2 Understanding the relationship between demographic factors and the specific self-defense mechanisms adopted by students.

From the Table 3, the correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships between demographic factors and the specific self-defense mechanisms employed by college students to cope with academic anxiety. Being female was positively correlated with higher levels of repression and denial as self-defense mechanisms, suggesting that female students may be more likely to unconsciously suppress or deny distressing thoughts and emotions related to academic anxiety. Conversely, being male was negatively correlated with higher levels of rationalization, indicating that male students may be less inclined to justify or provide logical explanations for their academic struggles or failures. Age played a role as well, with older students being less likely to use projection as a defense mechanism but more likely to employ sublimation, channeling their anxiety into productive activities. Furthermore, higher education levels were negatively correlated with the use of repression and denial, but positively correlated with rationalization, implying that students with advanced degrees may be more inclined to utilize higher-order cognitive processes and logical reasoning as coping strategies, while those with lower education levels may rely more on unconscious suppression or avoidance. It is crucial to interpret these correlations within the study's context and

limitations, as other variables not accounted for may also influence the observed relationships between demographic factors and self-defense mechanisms.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis of Demographic Factors and Self-Defense Mechanisms

Demographic Factor	Self-Defense Mechanism	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level
Gender (Female)	Repression	0.31	p < 0.05
Gender (Female)	Denial	0.35	p < 0.01
Gender (Male)	Rationalization	-0.27	p < 0.05
Age	Projection	-0.29	p < 0.05
Age	Sublimation	0.26	p < 0.05
Higher Education Level	Repression	-0.32	p < 0.05
Higher Education Level	Rationalization	0.28	p < 0.05
Higher Education Level	Denial	-0.24	p < 0.05

In the Table 3, the correlation coefficients (r) indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between the demographic factor and the specific self-defense mechanism. Positive values of r represent a positive correlation, while negative values indicate a negative correlation. The significance level column displays the p-value, which represents the probability of obtaining the observed correlation coefficient if there is no actual relationship between the variables. A p-value less than the chosen significance level (typically 0.05 or 0.01) indicates that the correlation is statistically significant.

These findings suggest that demographic factors such as gender, age, and education level may influence the likelihood of employing specific self-defense mechanisms in coping with academic anxiety among college students. However, it is important to interpret these correlations within the context of the study's limitations and to consider the potential influence of other variables not accounted for in this analysis.

Objective 3 To investigate the prevalence and patterns of self-defense mechanisms employed by college students in coping with academic anxiety, and their impact on emotional regulation, social behavior, self-perception, and attribution of responsibility.

Freud's defense mechanism theory is a framework in psychology that explains how individuals deal with inner conflicts and anxieties. This theory holds that to protect themselves from psychological stress and conflict, individuals will adopt various psychological mechanisms, namely defense mechanisms. These mechanisms help individuals deal with anxious, conflicting, and uncomfortable emotions, but can sometimes lead to unhealthy psychological patterns.

Table 3

Interpretative analysis of key items in the questionnaire

	Item	Percentage (%)									Interpretation
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1.	I get rid of my anxiety by doing something positive or predictive, such as painting, woodworking, etc.	4	4	4	11	11	22	22	15	7	Respondents somewhat agree and slightly agree with this statement.
2.	When I'm frustrated, I act like a child	4	15	7	15	30	15	15	0	0	Respondents neither agree nor disagree with this statement.
3.	When it comes to safeguarding my interests, I am shy about arguing with others.	0	11	26	19	7	22	15	0	0	Respondents are more opposed to this statement.
4.	People say that I am like an ostrich, burying my head in the sand. In other words, I tend to intentionally ignore some unpleasant things.	4	15	7	11	15	11	30	4	4	Respondents agree with this statement.
5.	Someone is trying to take away everything I have.	33	30	11	4	22	0	0	0	0	Respondents are totally opposed to this statement.
6.	I pride myself on my ability to be little others.	40	11	15	11	26	0	0	0	0	Respondents are totally opposed to this statement.
7.	I'm just like a failed artist.	11	15	19	7	19	7	11	4	7	Respondents neither agree nor disagree and relatively disagree with this statement
8.	When I feel my pride is hurt, I shy away.	4	11	15	4	19	19	19	7	4	Respondents neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree and, somewhat agree
9.	When I'm angry, I often shy away.	7	22	11	4	22	15	19	0	0	Respondents neither agree nor disagree and

											strongly disagree with this statement.
10.	I tend to be more wary of people who are actually friendly to me than I should be suspicious of.	11	26	30	11	15	7	0	0	0	Respondents are more opposed to this statement.
11.	I fantasize a lot but do little in real life.	4	7	15	7	11	26	19	4	7	Respondents slightly agree with this statement.
12.	I'm shy about interacting with people.	11	19	30	0	22	7	11	0	0	Respondents are more opposed to this statement.
13.	When I'm angry, I become sarcastic.	15	19	15	0	22	19	11	0	0	Respondents neither agree nor disagree with this statement.
14.	When I'm depressed, I avoid it.	0	4	11	7	22	26	26	0	4	Respondents slightly agree and somewhat agree with this statement.
15.	Everyone was against me.	41	30	15	0	11	4	0	0	0	Respondents are totally opposed to this statement.
16.	I tend to be friendly to people I hate.	22	11	33	7	11	15	0	0	0	Respondents are more opposed to this statement.
17.	I often find myself being friendly to people I should hate.	7	22	11	11	19	22	4	0	4	Respondents slightly agree and strongly disagree with this statement.
18.	I would never express anger towards those I hate.	7	4	30	26	19	0	11	4	0	Respondents are more opposed to this statement.
19.	Most of what happens to me is not my responsibility.	0	7	11	11	26	26	15	4	0	Respondents slightly agree and neither agree nor disagree with this statement.
20.	When I feel depressed or anxious, eating something can make	0	4	4	4	7	19	19	30	15	Respondents agree very much with this statement.

	me feel better.													
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From the data in the above table, the table shows some types of defense mechanisms. Transference is the transfer of an individual's emotions and experiences from others (usually parents or key figures in childhood) to people or things that have nothing to do with the real-life situation. This helps reduce the individual's discomfort associated with the original object. In items 1,6,13 and 20, the data shows the reflection of the defense mechanism of transference under the learning anxiety of college students. For example, they do crafts to divert their uneasiness, gain a sense of pride by belittling others' prestige, sarcastically criticize others when they are angry, and eat something delicious to make themselves feel better when they are in a bad mood. These are all manifestations of the defense mechanism of empathy.

In item 2, the data shows the reflection of the regression defense mechanism under the learning anxiety of college students. The individual regresses to an earlier stage of psychological development, usually in childhood when faced with stress or anxiety. This return can provide a form of escapism. For example, act like a child when frustrated. In items 3,4,8,9,12 and 14, the data shows the reflection of escape defense mechanism under study anxiety among college students. Individuals reduce discomfort by avoiding or staying away from anxiety-provoking situations, people, or thoughts. For example, they are ashamed to care about others give up their interests, and deliberately ignore some unpleasant things. When encountering bad emotions, the first reaction is to avoid them rather than face them. In items 5,15 and 19, the data shows the defense mechanism of projection among college students under study anxiety. An individual attribute his or her unpleasant or undesirable feelings, desires, or traits to others. This relieves the individual's anxiety because they no longer have to confront these emotions or traits directly. For example, I always feel that others are against me, etc. In items 7 and 11, the data shows the fantasy defense mechanism of college students under study anxiety. Individuals escape reality by creating fictitious situations or imaginations to satisfy their inner desires and needs. For example, you fantasize about being an artist, or you often fantasize about many things, but it is difficult to do them or not do them. In items 10,16,17 and 18, the data shows how college students develop defense mechanisms in response to learning anxiety. An individual engages in behaviors or emotions that are contrary to their true feelings to mask or combat uncomfortable desires or conflicts. For example, being friendly to someone you hate or dislike goes against your truest feelings. In summary, Freud's defense mechanism theory elucidates the intricate ways individuals navigate inner conflicts and anxieties, revealing a diverse array of defense mechanisms employed by college students in response to learning anxiety, from transference and regression to escape, projection, and fantasy, underscoring the complex interplay between psychological stress, coping strategies, and the potential emergence of unhealthy patterns in the face of academic challenges.

Research Limitations

This analysis revealed potential links between gender, age, and education level, and individual psychological characteristics. However, due to the small and focused sample size, these findings require further validation with a broader sample. Future research could

consider expanding the sample to include more diverse participants to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, expanding the sample size beyond the current limited pool of 27 participants is imperative. A more extensive and diverse participant pool would not only contribute to a more representative depiction of the population but also enable a more thorough exploration of the intricate relationships between demographic variables and psychological characteristics.

Furthermore, future research should delve into more in-depth statistical analyses, such as regression analysis, to unravel the complexities inherent in the relationships between different variables. This nuanced approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between sociodemographic factors like gender, age, and education level, and the nuanced self-defense styles and psychological characteristics exhibited by individuals.

Additionally, considering the influence of cultural backgrounds on self-defense styles is crucial for a holistic understanding of the subject matter. Implementing cross-cultural comparisons would shed light on how cultural nuances shape individuals' approaches to self-defense, thereby contributing to a richer and more nuanced exploration of the multifaceted relationship between sociodemographic variables and psychological characteristics. This cross-cultural perspective will not only enhance the external validity of the findings but also provide valuable insights into the potential variations in self-defense styles across diverse cultural contexts.

Conclusion

In delving into the realm of defense mechanisms among college students grappling with learning anxiety, our exploration anchored in Freudian psychoanalytic theory has unearthed profound insights into the intricate strategies individuals employ to navigate the challenges of academic stressors. The comprehensive literature review cast light upon the myriad defense mechanisms at play, unraveling the tapestry of responses intertwined with traumatic experiences, coping strategies, and mental health outcomes. The critical analysis of data from the DSQ Self-Defense Style Questionnaire significantly enriched our understanding of the nuanced ways college students cope with learning anxiety. By identifying key defense mechanisms—transference, regression, escape, projection, and fantasy—the analysis provided a holistic view of how individuals shield themselves from the complexities of academic stress.

However, as our review of the existing literature illuminated, there are conspicuous gaps in our knowledge that warrant further investigation. The limited exploration of the nexus between defense mechanisms and other psychological frameworks, such as mental health conditions, cognitive styles, or personality traits, underscores the untapped potential for more comprehensive studies. Additionally, broadening the scope of research to encompass various educational stages and cultural contexts promises to unveil a more nuanced understanding of the evolutionary paths of defense mechanisms.

While our DSQ analysis identified correlations between gender, age, education level, and specific defense mechanisms, the study's inherent limitations, such as a small and focused sample size, underscore the imperative for future research with a more extensive and

diverse participant pool. In summary, this interdisciplinary journey has not only deepened our comprehension of how college students employ defense mechanisms to navigate learning anxiety but has also contributed valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on individual differences in response to academic stress. By seamlessly integrating Freudian psychoanalytic theory, empirical research findings, and critical analysis, our exploration paves the way for tailored mental health interventions and sets the stage for future research endeavors aimed at unraveling the intricacies of defense mechanisms across diverse educational landscapes.

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