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**THE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEFENSE STYLES AND SELF-
CONCEPT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

Background And Purpose: Defense Mechanisms Self-Protection Responsible In Faced With Various Forms Of Anxiety Are. Since In The Psychoanalysis Any Mental Disorder Associated With Certain Maladaptive Defense Mechanisms, This Study Aimed To Investigate The Relationship Between Defense Styles And Self-Concept Among College Students Has Been Kharazmi.

Method: Study Type Is Correlation and the Research Community Is Total of Students Are Kharazmi That 231 People Were Selected By Simple Random Sampling to Completed Defense Style Questionnaire (Andrews Et Al.) And Self (Beck). Data By Correlation Test And ANOVA And SPSS 20 Software Was Analyzed.

Results: The Results Showed That The Self-Concept Of Students And Mature Defense Style There Is A Significant Relationship ($P < 0/01$). This Relationship Wasn't Significant Among Those Use Of Immature Style. As Well As Male And Female In Self-Concept And Defensive Style Did Not Differ.

Conclusion: Whatever Individuals Use From The Style Of Mature Defensive Are Less Distorted Reality And It Has An Impact On Their Self-Concept. And Also, It Seems That The Combination Of Various Factors In The Shaping Of The Defense Styles And Self-Concept Makes No Difference To Girls And Boys In These Variables.

Keywords: Defensive style, Self-concept, students

INTRODUCTION

Psychological mechanism is not a new concept in psychology. Psychoanalysts or neo-psychoanalysts and recent views have provided several types of classification which human beings use to defend themselves against reality or perceived threats (1). We use psychological defense just in the same way that we use security systems, and we are not aware that they are protecting us every moment. Psychological defenses are rarely observed when they are weak. But in a wider scope, they can be very stressful for others and for the person who uses those defenses (2). The concept of defenses comes from the psychoanalytic tradition which refers to adaptive and non-adaptive mechanisms to face with experiences which challenge the person's emotional balance (3). Defense mechanisms can be defined as regular processes which allow people to reduce cognitive dissonances and to minimize sudden changes inside and outside of the environment through changing the way they are received (4). There are differences in defense mechanisms we use. These cognitive-behavioral mechanisms are called defense styles (5, 6). Vaillant (7) has classified the defenses in four levels of maturity: narcissistic, immature, neurotic,

matures. For him, narcissistic defenses are the least mature one in which the reality is either completely distorted or totally denied. On the second level, there are immature defenses which are partially mature. On the third level, there are neurotic defenses which are very common, and mature defenses are also at the highest level of maturity. By applying Vaillant's hierarchical classification (7), Andrews, Singh, and Bond (8) divided defense mechanisms into three categories of mature, neurotic, and immature based on the adaptive action. Mature mechanisms include: sublimation, humor, prediction, and regression; Neurotic defense mechanism includes four items as: undoing, altruism, "pseudo-altruism", intellectualization, and reaction formation; and immature mechanisms also include 12 items: projection, somatization, rationalization, splitting, decomposition, displacement, passive-aggressive, acting out, isolation, autistic fantasy, devaluing, and denial.

Defense mechanism can change human perception of themselves, others, beliefs or feelings (9). Self-concept has turned to be an important issue in psychology due to its impact on behavior. Self-concept in men and women may be considerably different from

each other and it may be directly related to their education. Also, students' self-concept can effect on their educational performance in university (10). Self-concept can be divided into two groups of academic self-concept and non-academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is the person's view about academic activities and it is associated with particular issues and teachers and schools, while non-academic self-concept is associated with the person's view about his/her non-academic activities including physical self and communication with parents, friends, and society (11). Self-concept can be defined as a person's feeling of himself/herself which is formed as a result of the person's interaction with the environment and the other people. Positive self-concept is important for the psychological health and education progress (12). Self-concept is one of the main concepts in Rogers' theory and it includes a set of features which a person, as a unique creature, understands about himself/herself. Self-concept is achieved through social interactions. Rogers believes that a concept of self, which is widely based on the others' evaluations, is developed as a result of the person's interaction with people in the environment. According to Rogers, the

person pays attention to the others' evaluations because of a need for positive attention. This strong need in person causes that he/she pays more attention to the others' evaluations than to his own ones in judging his/her values. He believes that human being is an active and self-flourishing creature and he/she is seeking harmony between self and experience as a part of self-flourishing process. However, due to the past experiences which threaten self-concept, he/she develops defense mechanisms of denial or distortion (13). In Rogers' point of view, a person who has a strong and positive self-concept has totally different views about the world in comparison to a person with a weak self - concept, and he/she will be successful in his/her job and education. Psychologists and sociologists believe that self-concept and its components are the main factor in the formation of character and they are the central core of social harmony, and they consider adolescents as the most critical periods in life in terms of the growth of self-concept (14). Mousazadeh, Iranparvar, and Motevalli's findings have shown that those who have more positive self-concept use more defense mechanisms. In fact, these two variables have a positive significant relationship and by increasing self-concept,

using efficient defense mechanisms will also increase. Cramer and Jones (15) have reported that people with negative physical image use immature defense mechanisms such as denial more. Cramer (16) showed that those who use immature defenses show the signs of immature behavior like anxiety as well.

Since no research has been done about the relationship between self-concept and defense mechanisms and since a considerable proportion of the population, now, is student society, the importance of students' health is more important than before and we are going to deal with the issue in this research. Our hypotheses in this regard are: 1. There is a significant relationship between self-concept and defense mechanisms; 2. There is a significant relationship between self-concept and girls and boys' defense mechanisms.

Research Methodology

This is a correlation study. So, regarding the population size, 231 students in two groups of girls and boys were selected by simple random method from Kharazmi University, and they responded the questionnaires of defense style (Bond et al.) and self-concept (Beck).

Defense Style Questionnaire (Andrews, 1993): the questionnaire is a 40-question tool which measures twenty defense mechanisms based on mature, neurotic, and immature defense styles, and in 9-point Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Mature mechanisms include: sublimation, humor, prediction, and regression. Neurotic defense mechanism includes: undoing, "pseudo-altruism", idealization, and opposite reaction; and immature mechanisms include: projection, passive-aggressive, acting out, splitting, devaluing, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, isolation, decomposition, rationalization, and somatization. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of Persian form scale questions of each mature, immature, and neurotic styles were 0.75, 0.73, and 0.74 respectively in a student sample, which shows a satisfactory internal consistency for Iranian form of the defense styles questionnaire (17). Test re-test reliability of defense style questionnaire was also 0.82 (r=0.82) (17).

Beck's Self-Concept Test (BSCT): this test which has been provided in 1978 by Beck and Stir and based on Beck's cognitive theory, has 25 articles. This scale, which studies and measures 5 aspects of features includes: intellectual ability, work efficacy,

physical attractiveness, social skills, virtues and vices. Beck et al. (1985) have reported the reliability of 0.88 and 0.65 respectively, by using test re-test after one week and three months. Also, the internal consistency coefficient has been reported 0.80 for this scale. In Iran, by using the Split method and Cronbach's alpha, Mohammadi (1993) has reported the validity of the questionnaire 0.65 and 0.68 respectively. Moreover, Dibajnia (2004) obtained 0.79 for Chronbach's alpha in this questionnaire (18).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the descriptive information of the research variables. Since we need Pearson parametric test and one-way analysis of variance, and since normality of score distribution is one of the presupposition of using parametric tests, we used Kolmogrov-Smirnov test to study the normality of the score distribution. The results of this test are shown in table 1.

The data in table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the self-concept variable, mature defense style, immature defense style, and neurotic defense style have been $85/42 \pm 11/02$, $21/40 \pm 3/10$, $6/57$ $57/15 \pm$, $21/20 \pm 2/94$ respectively. The mean and standard deviation of these variables into two groups of girls and boys

are provided in the above table. Since the value of Kolmogrov-Smirnov test is not significant for variables ($P>0.05$), the participants' scores on variables are normal.

Table 2 has provided correlation matrix between self-concept and its factors with defense mechanisms. According to this table, self-concept is just correlated with mature defense style ($P<0.01$, $r=0.270$). Positive side of this correlation shows that the more a person receives high scores in self-concept, the more probable it is that he/she uses mature defense style. The correlation of self-concept factors and defense styles is also provided in the table.

One-way analysis of variance has been used to study the difference between boys and girls in defense styles. To use this test, first, the homogeneity presupposition of the two groups was tested. Due to the lack of significance in the Levene test ($P>0.05$), this presupposition was followed for self-concept, mature defense style, immature defense style, and neurotic defense style. It means that the variance of the two groups was homogeneous for these variables. The results of one-way analysis of variance were also provided in table 3.

Regarding the results in table 3, since F values are not significant ($P>0.05$) in none of

the variables of self-concept (F-0.081), mature defense style (F-3.461), immature defense style (F-2.732), and neurotic defense style (F-0.584), there is statistically no

difference between boys and girls in the mentioned variables and therefore, the hypothesis of the research is not confirmed.

Table 1: Descriptive information and the results of Kolmogrov-Smirnov test of the subjects according to sex

VARIABLE	GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	KOLMOGROV-SMIRNOV TST	
					Z	Significance level
SELF-CONCEPT	Boys	111	85/63	11/25	0/801	0/543
	Girls	120	85/22	10/85	0/515	0/953
	Total	231	85/42	11/02	0/859	0/452
MATURE DEFENSE SYLE	Boys	111	21/01	3/38	0/985	0/286
	Girls	120	21/77	2/79	0/790	0/544
	Total	231	21/40	3/10	1/254	0/091
IMMATURE DEFENSE STYLE	Boys	111	56/41	6/57	1/105	0/174
	Girls	120	57/83	6/53	1/16	0/103
	Total	231	57/15	6/57	1/221	0/101
NEROTIC DEFENSE STYLE	Boys	111	21/05	2/75	1/037	0/233
	Girls	120	21/34	3/11	1/108	0/172
	Total	231	21/20	2/94	1/184	0/131

Table 2: Correlation matrix between self-concept and defense mechanisms

VARIABLES	SELF-CONCEPT	MENTAL ABILITY	JOB PERFORMANCE	PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS	SOCIAL SKILLS	ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
MAYURE STYLE	0/270 **	0/463 **	0/261 **	0/111	0/242 **	0/320 **
IMMATURE STYLE	-0/005	0/292 **	0/571 **	0/548 **	0/547 **	0/552 **
NEUROTIC STYLE	0/060	0/508 **	0/146 *	0/426 **	0/359 **	0/224 **

** significant in P<0.01 * Significant in P<0.05

Table 3: The results of one-way analysis of variance

VARIABLE	CHANGE SOURCES	TOTAL SQUARES	DEGREE OF FREEDOM	MEAN SQUARES	F	SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL
SELF-CONCEPT	Intergroup	9/88	1	9/88	0/081	0/77
	Intragroup	27940/22	229	122/01	-	-
	Total	27950/10	230	-	-	-
MATURE DEFENSE STYLE	Intergroup	33/10	1	33/10	3/461	0/06
	Intragroup	2190/45	229	9/56	-	-
	Total	2223/55	230	-	-	-
IMMATURE DEFENSE STYLE	Intergroup	117/57	1	117/57	2/737	0/09
	Intragroup	9837/42	229	42/95	-	-
	Total	9954/99	230	-	-	-
NEUROTIC DEFENSE STYLE	Intergroup	5/07	1	5/07	0/584	0/44
	Intragroup	1987/76	229	8/68	-	-
	Total	1992/84	230	-	-	-

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the research showed that there is a significant relationship between students' self-concept and their mature defense style. This relationship was not significant among those who use immature styles. There are some results of the other researches which are consistent with the results of the present research: matured defense style with psychological well-being (19), improvement of symptom severity (20, 21). Mature defense mechanisms with physical and mental health (22), and immature defense mechanism and its negative relationship with the mental health (23). The previous researches about defense mechanisms indicate that these mechanisms are on a continuum of mature defenses, middle defenses, and immature defenses. Immature defenses are somehow associated with negative results such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders (24, 25, 26). While the mature defenses are usually related to the positive consequences such as career success and job satisfaction (27, 28), Bond and Perry (20) stated that improving defense mechanism predicts the observed ratio of depression in general. Moreover, while the mature defense styles have a supportive role in self-esteem, the immature defense styles

hinder protection and integrity of self by extreme distortion (29). To explain the result, it can be said that the defense mechanisms are, in fact, distorting the realities, and the reality is distorted more in immature and neurotic defenses than in mature defenses. The more cognitive distortion of a defense is, the less conscious awareness will be, and consequently, less effort will be done to deal with cognitive distortion. So, the defense mechanisms lower our conscious cognition of our conflicts, and influence on the emotions conflicting our beliefs, therefore, the defense mechanism, especially immature mechanism, are an obstacle to understand the reality in the person and deprive him/her from the possibility of rational and effective defense, and reduce the person's capacity of insight and self-discovery (30).

Moreover, data analysis shows that there was no difference in girls and boys' self-concept and using defense mechanisms. This result is consistent with other similar researches such as: Hamidi (31) showed that there is no difference between girls and boys in using defense mechanisms. Moradi (32) showed that there is no relationship between using defense mechanisms and sex among female and male students. Najafi Kelyani, Pourjam, Jamshidi, Karimi, and Vahid Najafi Kelyani

(14) did a research to study the students' stress, anxiety, depression, and self-concept in the University of Medical Sciences in Fasa, and they concluded that there is no significant relationship between self-concept of male and female students. Rogers believes that if the conflict with self and others reduces, then the self-concept has an important role in setting behavior through recognition of those aspects of the experience which are accepted by consciousness and those which have regressions (33). However, other results have shown that men and women not only use different mechanisms (34, 35), but also are different in defense styles as well (36,37). This is not consistent with the result of the present study. Additionally, Heydari Nasab (2006) quoted from Hamidi (38) that women usually use neurotic defense mechanisms and men usually use immature defense mechanism. To explain the result, this reason can be mentioned that the self is formed by the combination of other factors which include our interaction with our complementary sex group. Our roles and characters are formed by parents and siblings' recommendations, i.e. the other people around us in the environment, and by social rules which include our culture, media, and important

institutions like school and religion, and all these factors cause just a little difference between boys and girls. The other reason of lack of great differences is that the two groups may have different sources of self-concept. While the women's identity can be strongly connected to the events of social networks, the men's identity is strongly connected to their profession (39). Like the most researches, this research also had some limitations such as: sample was limited only to students, lack of interest for cooperation in some students, and using a self - report questionnaire. It seems that if the future researches could decrease the limitations of the present research by using other evaluation methods and studying the variables in more different populations, more definitive results can be achieved. Moreover, the study of the potential mediating variables which can influence both variables of self-concept and defense styles can be effective for the future research to explain the subject better.

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