



The Concept of Defense Mechanisms in Contemporary Psychology: Theoretical, Research, and Clinical Perspectives

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What is the scientific status and the "truth value" of the concept of defense mechanisms? Among contemporary psychologists, three types of answers to this question may be expected. Some would wholeheartedly endorse the theoretical, clinical, and research value of this notion; others would reject it outright. Between these two extremes, a large number of observers, perhaps the majority, would suspend their judgment. Their attitude, compounded of hope and doubt, would capitalize on defense as an interesting and promising concept. At the same time, these psychologists would express skepticism and disappointment over its clinical limitations, theoretical ambiguity, and research failures. The present volume is primarily addressed to the audience of hopeful skeptics—those who have not given up on the notion of defense, yet have been frustrated by the difficulties of incorporating it into the modern, streamlined structure of psychology. To this end, we have brought together theoretical and empirical contributions germane to defense together with reports about their applications to clinical and personality assessment, especially in relation to psychopathology, psychosomatics, and psychotherapeutic intervention.

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