

Critical Thinking Activity

Theories of Personality

Organizing and Analyzing Information

Directions: Use the information below to conduct a cartoon search to find and categorize examples of defense mechanisms.

Sigmund Freud described various ways that the ego seeks to protect itself from the demands of the id and superego. He called these protections defense mechanisms. Common *defense mechanisms* include rationalization, repression, denial, projection, reaction formation, regression, displacement, and sublimation. All humans use defense mechanisms from time to time, but psychologically healthy people do not depend on these mechanisms. They find ways to confront and resolve problems rationally and realistically.

Satirists, humorists, and cartoonists help us see the silly things that people think and do. Cartoonists, for instance, often exaggerate a character's reactions in order to get us to laugh. They commonly show characters using a defense mechanism to handle a conflict. The cartoon strips seem especially insightful when we can see bits of ourselves in the characters. This helps us recognize times that we have used a particular defense mechanism to handle a problem confronting us.

1. Obtain the comic strips from local or national newspapers or other sources such as calendars or the internet. You will need at least a week's worth of papers to get an adequate number of samples.
2. Review each day's comic strips and comics from other sources to identify examples of at least four of the defense mechanisms. Create a clipping file of these examples. Include the date and the newspaper's name on your clippings.
3. Organize the comics in your clipping file by defense mechanism illustrated. During this process, you may find that different characters are using different defense mechanisms. Classify the comic with the defense mechanism of the main character.
4. When you find more than one example of a defense mechanism, rank the cartoons from the one that best expresses the defense mechanism to the one that makes the weakest connection to the mechanism.
5. Select one of the defense mechanisms and write a report analyzing how cartoonists use humor to teach us about ourselves. The samples of the comic strips should be included in the report. The report should explore how the cartoon character's use of the defense mechanism is similar to our own. How is it different? What is the short-term outcome of the defense mechanism? What are likely long-term outcomes of continued use of the defense mechanism? Analyze one way that you have learned to confront and resolve problems rationally and realistically.