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UDC 159.953

**THE DISPOSITIONS OF DEFENSIVE AND COPING BEHAVIOR
IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIVIDUAL PECULIARITIES
OF A PERSONALITY**

SUMMARY. In this article the integral construct of dispositions of defensive and coping behavior of the individual is examined. The correlation of the elements of the construct with personal peculiarities of respondents of different age groups is also analyzed.

KEY WORDS. Psychological defense, coping, dispositions of defensive and coping behavior, individual peculiarities of personality.

Theoretical aspects of the study. One of the central problems in modern understanding of coping behavior is to define its determination. Personal and environmental factors come into conflict (dispositional and situational approaches), being possible sources of formation, initiation and changes in coping strategies in problematic situations. Ironically, this contradiction is not typical for the understanding of defensive behavior, its sources and actual manifestations. The original ontogenetic explanatory diagram (S. Freud, A. Freud, R. Plutchik and others) allowed us to determine the sequence of intervention of these factors in the development of psychological defenses, where innate individual biological, psychophysiological or other characteristics of a person and the system of natural and social environment conditions (catalytic or inhibitory characteristics of the individual) form personal characteristics. In these circumstances, in the process of forming, presenting a threat to early-stage personality, environmental factors, in the context of individual characteristics, provoke the development of certain defense mechanisms, combined with personal characteristics of people.

In our research, we assume the uniting of defensive and coping actions into a single system, the structure of which has two levels of organization: separate coping strategies and defense mechanisms (defining the specifics of actions in problematic situations) and generalized dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (determining the general direction of activity in the interaction between an individual and a problematic situation). Based on the articles of I. Altman, R. Lazarus, R. Plutchik, A.V. Burmistrova, T.V. Gushchina, E.L. Dotsenko, T.L. Kryukova and others, we have identified four dispositions of defensive and coping behavior: “Information blocking”, “Distance changing”, “Controlling” and

“Transformation” [1]. This assumes that within these dispositions, psychological defense and coping are linked not only with structural relations, but also with functional ones. Having a common goal of functioning—maintaining an optimal level of life and mental well-being in difficult situations—they work together and consistently achieve it. But their functions in pursuit of this goal are different. Psychological defense, a kind of “information filter”, sifts out information about the external or internal world of people, which can dramatically change their ability to lead a stable existence. Coping activity, working with the image of a situation, being adjusted by psychological defense, ensures the achievement of adaptation to changing reality.

There also remains a pressing question about personal and environmental conditionalism of complex dispositions of defensive and coping behavior. To work out this issue, the most appropriate determinational aspect seems to be a dispositional approach, presupposing the close relationship of personality traits and coping styles. N. Bolger formulated the thesis that “coping is an individual acting under stress” [2, 525]. Numerous research and empirical works (N. Bolger, C.S. Carver, M.F. Scheier & J.K. Weintraub, P. Costa, P. Hewitt & G. Flett, M. Li, etc.), conducted as part of this approach, allow us to confirm its justification and hypothetically correlate certain personality traits with dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (Table 1).

Table 1

Analysis of probable relations of defensive and coping behavior dispositions with personality traits

Dispositions of defensive and coping behavior	Activity orientation vector under disposition implementation:	
	Actions directed towards the environment	Actions directed towards oneself
Information blocking (maintaining of interaction disposition)	Ignoring information about the environment, distraction, denying, repressing <i>Correlating personality traits:</i> neuroticism [3]; low originality [4]	Concealing information about oneself, avoiding interaction, social disguise, lies, limiting the spread of information about oneself, fading, regression <i>Correlating personality traits:</i> externality, low self-efficacy [5]
Distance changing (changing of interaction position)	Elimination of stress source, removing it from oneself, aggression as a form of removing problematic relation carriers from personal activity field, substitution <i>Correlating personality traits:</i> neuroticism [6]; extrapunitive [5]	Avoiding, leaving as distance changing with problematic relations carrier, day-dreaming, substitutional actions (food, alcohol, etc.) <i>Correlating personality traits:</i> neuroticism [6]; depressiveness [7]; anxiety [8]; loneliness [9], low achievement motivation [5]

Dispositions of defensive and coping behavior	Activity orientation vector under disposition implementation:	
	Actions directed towards the environment	Actions directed towards oneself
Controlling (maintaining of subject and environment characteristics)	Environment control, monitoring and limiting the activity of others, maintenance of the established order, insulating oneself from outside influence <i>Correlating personality traits: internality [10]</i>	Self-monitoring, controlling and voluntary regulation of actions and emotions, rationalization <i>Correlating personality traits: internality [10; 6]; control as a survival component [5]</i>
Transformation (changes in the characteristics of the subject and the environment)	Transformation, changing the subject environment, creativity, vandalism, social interaction establishment, manipulation <i>Correlating personality traits: openness to new experience, extraversion [3], motivation for people, low achievement motivation [5]</i>	Self-transformation, self-change, self-development, self-improvement, adaptation, search for social support as a resource state change, compensation <i>Correlating personality traits: conscientiousness [3]; activity [11]</i>

In addition, a number of researchers (E. Frydenberg, R. McCrae, S. Taylor, G. Vaillant, T.L. Kryukova, S.A. Khazova and others) have noted the special role of individual factors of the age and gender of an individual, as relevant to manifestations of the defensive and coping behavior of an individual.

The scope of the study. Based on the information above, we should note a number of facts that form the problem field of our research:

1) there is an alternative to the dispositional approach, suggesting that defensive and coping behavior change in the context of a situation (for example, based on assessment of the problem, its predictability and typicality, etc.), therefore, the system of coping and defense is not always considered as a stable personal unit;

2) even in the works of authors who adhere to the dispositional approach, there are significant contradictions and paradoxical findings about the relationship of personality traits and separate defenses or coping strategies;

3) the relationship of certain dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (as stable orientation of an individual in stressful environmental conditions or when there is a sense of threat) with personality traits and individual characteristics of a person is defined only hypothetically, based on the experience of research of separate coping strategies and defense mechanisms, which are not incorporated in a complex construct.

Thus, the segmentation and specialty of most studies, the nomination of a new construct of defensive and coping behavior dispositions require new research data on

what personality traits have strong relationships with certain dispositions of defensive and coping behavior.

Purpose of the study: To determine characteristics of manifestation of defensive and coping behavior in relation to the personal characteristics of an individual in the context of the dispositional approach to coping.

Research methods should be considered, based on the type of research problems.

1. *Data collecting tasks* were implemented with the use of psychodiagnostic methods:

— diagnostics method of dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (O.V. Kruzhkova, I.V. Vorobiev);

— method of “Control Locus Scale” (J. Rotter);

— method of “Questionnaire of formal-and-dynamic properties of individuality” (V.M. Rusalov);

— method of “Motivation of success and failure fear” (A.A. Rean).

2. *Analytical problems* suggested turning to mathematical and statistical data analysis:

— multi-dimensional dispersion analysis (MANOVA);

— spearman’s correlation analysis.

The results of the study. The study involved 262 residents of Ekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk region aged from 18 to 60 years, 128 of whom were men (47 adolescents, 19 young people, 62 mature) and 134 were women (42 adolescents, 34 young, 58 mature).

The study tested a series of hypotheses about interaction with a preference for certain dispositions of defensive and coping behavior linked to individual (gender, age) and personal (internality, activity, emotion, motivation peculiarities) characteristics of the respondents.

As a result of multi-dimensional dispersive analysis it was found:

— First, gender is not a significant factor in determining preference of dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (Pillay mark 0.923, the level of significance when assessing gender effect $p \geq 0.386$). To some extent, these results contradict the popular view about gender differentiation in coping and defensive behavior, and probably need further testing and refinement;

Second, age group appears to be a significant factor in determining preferences for certain dispositions of defensive and coping behavior (when Box’s $p = 0.369$ and Livigno $0.067 < p < 0.996$ criteria are not significant), in the case of the internality, achievement motivation, activity and emotional identity of the respondents (see Table 2 and 3).

Preference for the disposition “Blocking of environmental information” increases from youth to maturity among the respondents due to their internality, general activity and marked achievement motivation. By focusing on achievement of a goal, relying on themselves and considering their own efforts to be the cause of events, these people tend to ignore external features of the situation in the form of unrecognized denial of external events’ causality or of deliberate willful disregard for obstacles. Typically,

such use of the disposition involves a rich resource potential and certain personal experience in overcoming different scale problem situations.

Table 2

The results of MANOVA (effect: “age group”; Covariates: “internality”, “index of general activity,” “Index of general emotional disposition”, “achievement motivation”)

Independent variables (main effect and covariates)	Dependent variables (dispositions of defensive and coping behavior)	Pillay's mark significance level	The level of significance in evaluating the effects of inter-group factors	The total explained variance of the variable in considering the effects and the covariate
Age group	Blocking of information about the environment	0,002	0,030	22,8%
	Distance changing: exile		0,025	8,1%
	Self-control		0,003	14,6%
	Self-transformation		0,003	16,3%
Internality	Blocking of information about the environment	0,019	0,001	22,8%
	Self-control		0,019	14,6%
	Self-transformation		0,023	16,3%
Index of general activity	Blocking of information about the environment	0,000	0,000	22,8%
	Distance changing: exile		0,002	8,1%
	Self-transformation		0,019	16,3%
Index of general emotional disposition	Self-transformation	0,001	0,003	16,3%
Achievement motivation	Blocking of information about the environment	0,000	0,000	22,8%
	Self-control		0,000	14,6%

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for dispositions with differences in the effect of “age group”

Dispositions of defensive and coping behavior	Age group	Arithmetic average	Standard deviation
Blocking of information about the environment	Adolescence	2,876	2,158
	Youth	3,510	2,952
	Maturity	4,470	2,903
Distance changing: exile (activity)	Adolescence	1,944	1,457
	Youth	1,265	1,411
	Maturity	1,409	1,357

Dispositions of defensive and coping behavior	Age group	Arithmetic average	Standard deviation
Self-control (internality, motivation)	Adolescence	2,955	1,671
	Youth	2,510	1,175
	Maturity	2,252	1,394
Self-transformation (internality, activity, emotional disposition)	Adolescence	1,910	1,571
	Youth	1,265	1,221
	Maturity	1,096	1,291

Application of the disposition “Distance-changing: exile” is most characteristic of adolescent respondents due to their general activity. Application of the aggressive variant for solving problems is often associated with the inexperience and arrogance of people, their lack of experience in constructive problem solving. However, this disposition is also very prominent in people of mature age, compared with respondents belonging to the age group of “youth”, which can be explained probably by pseudo-confidant behavior in a problem situation.

The highest intensity of the disposition “Self-control” is characteristic of the youth group and then gradually decreases with successive age due to the internality and marked achievement motivation of the respondents. These respondents, probably, are characterized by high personal perfectionism against themselves, when increased responsibility for their own actions, perception of themselves as the cause of the majority of external events, combined with determination and a high level of claims, lead to formation of the complex of self-motivated, self-monitoring and self-limiting actions. Obviously, this combination reduces the psychological well-being of people and violates their psychological health, leads to neuroticism, dissatisfaction with life and developing a sense of guilt. With the increase in years, the acquisition of personal experience and the development of reflection, this complex loses its sharpness, and total self-control is rarely used as the primary focus in the resolution of problem situations.

The disposition “Self-transformation”, the most characteristic of adolescence, gradually loses its relevance up to maturity due to the internality, activity and emotional disposition of the respondents. Adolescence is a period, on the one hand, of bright expression, and on the other, a stage of active search for individual identity. This personality is characterized by the ultimate flexibility and variability caused by either internally determined reasons or by conditions of an external social situation. A personality gets used, so to speak, to existing social conditions, along with the aggravation and formation of its individuality. In adulthood, this process remains relevant only in times of crisis change, but in a stable condition as action direction to overcome problem situations is more often irrational.

Thus, correlating a certain relationship of preference for defensive and coping behavior dispositions with the age of the respondents with consideration of some personal characteristics (covariates), the relationship of dispositions with the considered personality characteristics becomes apparent. Specification of this relationship was conducted with the help of correlation analysis (Table 4).

Table 4

Correlation analysis results

Age group	Disposition variant	Relationship with personal characteristics indicators	
		direct	inverse
Adolescence	Blocking of information about the environment	—	General activity index (r = -0,299, p = 0,005)*
	Distance changing: leaving	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,290, p = 0,006)	—
	Self-control	Success motivation (r = 0,332, p = 0,002)	—
	Self-transformation	General activity index (r = 0,334, p = 0,001)	—
Youth	Blocking of information about the environment	Success motivation (r = 0,465, p = 0,001)	Index of general emotional disposition (r = -0,422, p = 0,003)
	Environment control	—	Index of general emotional disposition (r = -0,365, p = 0,011) General activity index (r = -0,346, p = 0,017)
	Environment transformation	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,548, p = 0,000)	—
	Distance changing: leaving	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,328, p = 0,025)	—
Maturity	Blocking of information about the environment	Internality (r = 0,313, p = 0,001) Success motivation (r = 0,216, p = 0,031)	Index of general emotional disposition (r = -0,264, p = 0,005) General activity index (r = -0,295, p = 0,001)
	Distance changing: exile	General activity index (r = 0,267, p = 0,005)	—
	Environment control	Success motivation (r = 0,228, p = 0,021)	—
	Environment transformation	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,292, p = 0,002)	Internality (r = 0,215, p = 0,033)
	Blocking of information about oneself	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,281, p = 0,003)	General activity index (r = -0,252, p = 0,009)
	Distance changing: leaving	Failure fear motivation (r = 0,358, p = 0,000)	—
	Self-transformation	Index of general emotional disposition (r = 0,229, p = 0,019) General activity index (r = 0,260, p = 0,007)	—

Emphasis is placed on multiple preference relationships of dispositions of defensive and coping behavior with the motivational aspects of a personality characteristic of all age groups of respondents who participated in the study. Thus, the disposition of "Distance changing: leaving" for all age groups has a direct relationship with failure fear motivation, which is explained by the general thrust of these structures away from a problem situation and failure to take an active part in it.

Failure fear motivation has direct relationship with preference of the disposition "Environment transforming" for the age groups of "youth" and "maturity." Perhaps this transformation of the external world is not an all-out strategy of interaction with problem situations, and acts as a tool to create "personal safe space" for people, in which they close themselves, "hide" themselves.

Preference for the disposition "Blocking of environmental information" has a direct relationship with success motivation, and the reverse one with the general emotional disposition index in the age groups of "youth" and "maturity." Probably, determination and self-possession in interaction with everyday problem situations lead to the training of the mindset to ignore the minor life difficulties, which manifests itself in the form of blocking negative information about environmental impacts. This complex in the age group of "maturity" is aggravated by reduced activity (inverse correlation with the index of general activity) and sparing efforts to overcome problems.

Preference for the disposition "Self-transformation" has direct correlation with the index of general activity of an individual in the age groups "youth" and "maturity", which can be explained by the target setting of a person in self-development and self-realization in case of necessary psycho-physiological activity potential.

Conclusions

1. In the study no differences were defined in the manifestation of dispositions of defensive and coping behavior on the basis of gender.

2. According to the results of the dispersive analysis, different age groups of the respondents manifested differences in the demonstration of certain dispositions, where the disposition of "Blocking information about the environment" and "Distance changing: exile" are most characteristic of the mature age respondents, and the dispositions of "Self-control" and "Self-transformation" are more relevant for adolescent found respondents.

3. According to the results of the correlation analysis, all the age groups manifested multiple relationships between the defensive and coping behavior dispositions and such personality traits as internality, activity, emotional disposition and motivational orientation. The most numerous and close are relationships of defensive and coping behavior with personality motivation peculiarities.

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