Mechanisms of Defense—Freudian Psychodynamic Theory

**Repression**: Blocking a threatening idea, memory, or emotion from consciousness.

**Projection**: Attributing one’s own unacceptable feelings and impulses to someone else.

**Displacement**: Directing one’s emotions, especially anger, toward things, animals, or other people that are not the real object of one’s feelings.

**Sublimation**: A special case of displacement in which the displacement of emotions serves a higher cultural or socially useful purpose, as in creation of art or inventions.

**Reaction formation**: Transforming anxiety-producing thoughts or feelings into their opposites in consciousness.

**Regression**: Returning to more primitive levels of behavior in defense against anxiety or frustration.

**Denial**: Refusing to admit that something unpleasant is happening, or that a taboo emotion is being experienced. Denial blocks or distorts perception; repression blocks or distorts memory.

Identify the defense mechanism being used in the following statements.

1. After receiving a low grade on an exam, Phil slams the door as he leaves the classroom. __________

2. George feels that his younger son, Gary, is unattractive and not very smart. He accuses his wife of picking on Gary and favoring their other son. __________

3. After Sue Ann’s baby brother was born, she began to talk baby-talk and to suck her thumb like she did when she was younger. __________

4. Sixteen-year-old Tom had started using drugs, and the changes in his behavior made it pretty obvious, but Tom’s parents didn’t believe the school principal when she called to talk with them about the problem. __________

5. Many people who were interred in concentration camps were unable to recall events that happened in the camp during their internment. __________

6. Lucy dresses in provocative clothes and uses suggestive language although she fears that she is unattractive and she really isn’t very interested in sex. __________
7. Mark behaves like a stereotypical “he-man,” but he is actually anxious and insecure about his gender identity. __________________

8. Marie wears those youthful clothes and fad hairdos. She apparently can’t see that she doesn’t look 30, or even 40, anymore. _________________
9. Trixie was homesick and anxious when she moved into the dormitory and started her first year in college. She began to sleep with her old teddy bear again because it made her feel better.

10. Jason frequently visits adult bookstores, explaining that he wants to see the type of perverts who buy the porn trash they sell.

11. Jack has had a really hard day at the office. He is particularly angry at his boss, Carlotta, because he found out today that he had been passed over for a promotion. When Jack gets home, his wife, Joellen, asks him what he would like for dinner and he yells at her for “bothering him with stupid questions.”

12. Ms. Norton wrote a letter to her mother inviting her to spend the winter with them even though Mr. Norton objected to having his mother-in-law “picking at him” all winter. Ms. Norton gave the letter to Mr. Norton to mail and he carried it in his coat pocket for almost a month before Ms. Norton found it. He claimed that he “just forgot.”

13. Patricia has a lot of anger at the way her verbally and physically abusive father treated her during her childhood. She has never confronted him about this. However, she has written a best-selling novel in which parent-child conflict is a major theme.

14. John has a lot of unconscious hostility toward his father, but he is outwardly very affectionate toward him and tells other people that he and his father have a wonderful relationship.

15. Kay takes advantage of other people when she thinks she can get away with it. People rarely take advantage of Kay because it is her belief that others will cheat you if they can, and she makes it her business to see that they don’t get an opportunity.

16. Most people who know Jonathan know that he is gay. However, his mother stopped speaking to her best friend because the friend told her that “parents should recognize and accept homosexuality in their children.”

17. During an argument, Sally told her husband that he was sexually inadequate and probably a latent homosexual. When he mentioned this several years later, she didn’t recall ever having said such things.

18. Whenever Ann and Tim have an argument, Ann goes to her parents’ house and tearfully tells them how mean Tim is to her. Her parents comfort her.
and assure her that they know the problem is not the fault of “their little
girl.”

19. Michael is probably the biggest gossip in the office, but he frequently
accuses others of talking too much and spreading rumors.

20. After a fight with her best friend, Penelope finds herself driving too fast and
cutting off other drivers.

Answers:

1. displacement  11. displacement
2. projection    12. repression
3. regression    13. sublimation
4. denial        14. reaction formation
5. repression    15. projection
6. reaction formation 16. denial
7. reaction formation 17. repression
8. denial        18. regression
9. regression    19. projection
10. projection   20. displacement