

**Environmental conservation and psychoanalytic defense mechanisms.  
The case of the Cachoeira River Watershed, Joinville – SC- Brazil**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study aimed to evaluate the defense mechanisms used by residents in the surroundings of the Cachoeira River Watershed, which is severely polluted and considered the most vulnerable to degradation in the municipality of Joinville - SC. Defense mechanisms were described by Freud as unconscious processes through which the ego dissociates itself from impulses or affects that it considers threatening and that brings suffering. Concerning environmental issues, these mechanisms can act powerfully to create inconsistencies between professed attitudes and behaviors to norms against environmental degradation, the culture of reducing toxic waste, climate change, etc. This is a qualitative study, in which seven residents participated, evaluated using three individual interviews. Defining the number of participants involved in the snowball sampling. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in full and analyzed independently. Idealization, projection, rationalization, denial, and apathy were the most frequently identified defense mechanisms in the case studies, corroborating the hypothesis of the emergence of anxiety and suffering in the face of threatening environmental situations. This study concludes is that understanding the defensive functioning of people who face these situations can help to improve more effective interventions in programs and campaigns aimed at environmental conservation.

**KEYWORDS:** Environmental degradation, Psychoanalysis and the Environment, Ego defenses.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

At the end of the 19th century, the concept of environmental conservation emerged in the US within the ideological current of conservationism that opposes economic growth “at any cost”, disregarding the impacts on the natural environment and the depletion of natural resources. Complementarily, on the genesis of ecological sensitivity in the modern world, Pádua (2003, p.391), demonstrates the emergence of an environmental problem perception, related to urban-industrial transformations from the end of the 19th century in Europe and, also, among other historical processes, the European colonial expansion and the consolidation of science as a privileged way of understanding the world. He declares that:

Modern ecological criticism is largely due to the understanding on the part of scientists and administrators that the economic processes adopted by European colonizers in regions..., as well as in Brazil, were causing accelerated and evident environmental degradation.

In Brazil, the Brazilian Foundation for Nature Conservation (FBCN) was created in 1958. It was, until the creation of IBAMA in 1989, the main organization of Brazilian civil society dedicated to preserving and conserving nature.

On February 22, 1989, with the enactment of Law No. 7.735, which created the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), the integration of environmental management in the country became a reality. This is possible because of the merger of four main environmental regulatory agencies, into the Special Secretariat for the Environment, whose developments present constant social, political, and economic challenges.

Conservationist thinking involves responsible and reasonable utilization of nature while recognizing citizens as both managers and participants in the process. This approach serves as a foundation for many contemporary environmental movements and should guide sustainable development policies that guarantee a high quality of life while preserving resources for future generations. Consequently, various organizations worldwide have

initiated efforts and initiatives to educate and raise environmental awareness among citizens. Governments, associations, and industries have implemented stricter standards and economic incentives in recent decades to combat environmental pollution, climate change, and other global environmental issues.

Although environmental awareness has improved in recent years, studies have pointed out a significant gap between people's attitudes toward environmental conservation and their actions (Hiramatsu, Kurisu & Hanaki, 2016, p.8-24). While the discourse and rationalization about the importance of the environment are evident, there is a discrepancy between these words and actual actions. This work argues that approaches to environmental awareness and education have not fully integrated the understanding of how human beings deal with their conflicts, guilt, ambivalence, anxiety, fears, and uncertainties, which hinder the effective engagement of people in practical environmental initiatives. In this regard, Renée Lertzman (2015, p.3) provides valuable insights into how programs for environmental defense and conservation can be organized:

Instead of trying to motivate and inspire people to act by forcing us to go against the tide and frame our work as persuasion, I take as a starting point that people already care a lot, but that maybe they are involved in complicated dilemmas that make action hard to take care of.

Lertzman's perspective highlights the personal conflicts that may hinder individuals from taking positive action toward the environment. Greene (2018), a renowned scholar in the field of moral decision-making and the interplay between rationality and emotions, discusses the dual processes of ethical intuitions and the tragedy of the commons, where the individual pursuit of self-interest can lead to collective harm. According to Greene, common sense approaches often lead to social problems such as war, terrorism, and environmental destruction. He proposes that moral reasoning can be understood through moral dilemmas and that morality is a set of mental tools that enable us to consider not only our interests but also the well-being of the community. This is not solely a matter of brain anatomy, but also of mental functioning, encompassing both rational and emotional factors. This aligns with the psychoanalytic approach to studying human subjectivity, which emphasizes mental, conscious, and unconscious aspects rather than anatomy. Kollmuss (2002) illustrates this point.

The existence of unconscious processes and emotional reactions to environmental threats causes unprecedented psychological tensions, emotions, and conflicts. The anguish that sets in will lead to secondary psychological problems, responses aimed at relieving negative feelings. (KOLLMUSS, 2002, p.239-260).

Often, these defense mechanisms can hinder people from taking action in favor of environmental conservation. Psychoanalysis, developed by Freud, describes defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, rationalization, idealization, projection, and apathy, which can be useful when examining the engagement issue in environmental problems from a psychological perspective. Freud started investigating the ego's defenses at the beginning of

his practice as a neurologist. Defense mechanisms serve to protect the psyche by repelling from consciousness what causes displeasure, anxiety, or anguish. However, promoted by the ego, the conscious aspect of the Self, defense mechanisms can originate symptoms and alterations of the Self that bring psychic suffering. The defensive processes theme has been developed since the creation of psychoanalysis by Freud, and several authors have made significant contributions, such as Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Hanna Segal, Rene Lertzman, David Zimerman, Harold Searles, and Dovan Cartwright. Building upon their contributions, this study evaluates how the defense mechanisms arising from the environmental degradation of the Cachoeira River Watershed affect the residents living in its surroundings.

## **2 OBJECTIVE**

The primary objective was to assess how the defense mechanisms resulting from the environmental degradation of the Cachoeira River Watershed affect the residents living near it.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research dynamics**

Data collection was carried out from March 2021 to July 2021. The research took place in person, at a private participant's address, or indicated by the participant, in the presence of the researcher and participant, after signing the Free and Informed Consent Form, strictly following the COVID-19 prevention protocol.

The work was approved by the Research Ethics Committee - CEP, of the University of Joinville Region - UNIVILLE, Legal Opinion No. 4.593.739, on March 16, 2021.

### **3.2 Methodological design**

Intending to analyze the use of defense mechanisms, the present study used the procedures adopted by Lertzman (2015) as a research technique such as the study of multiple cases, qualitative approach supported by a Relational Dialogical Interview - RDI, use of open interviews with the free association of ideas, allowing the researcher to evaluate the information in greater depth within the psychoanalytic approach.

The challenge for environmental researchers involves including methodologies to measure the complicated emotional nature of human beings confronted with environmental problems. As Maiteny (2000, p.339) observes, "environmental policy and social research tend to neglect the inner experiential dimensions of human life". As an alternative, the psychoanalytic approach centers unconscious defense mechanisms on understanding the affects, emotions, and feelings experienced by environmental threats, as well as responses to them. With over a century of practice and clinical research, psychoanalytic knowledge offers a differentiated view of how real losses or anticipatory losses generate anxiety, how human beings protect themselves against displeasure and anxiety, retreating from these states using

some defense mechanisms such as denial, projection, rationalization, splitting, apathy, and others.

### 3.3 Study area

The study was carried out with residents in the city of Joinville - SC - Brazil, with domicile in the region of the Cachoeira River Hydrographic Watershed, which is fully inserted in the urban region of the Municipality of Joinville. This region occupies 72.60% of the urbanized area, with 59.10 km<sup>2</sup>. Located in the southern region of the country, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Joinville location map, in relation to the state of Santa Catarina and Brazil.



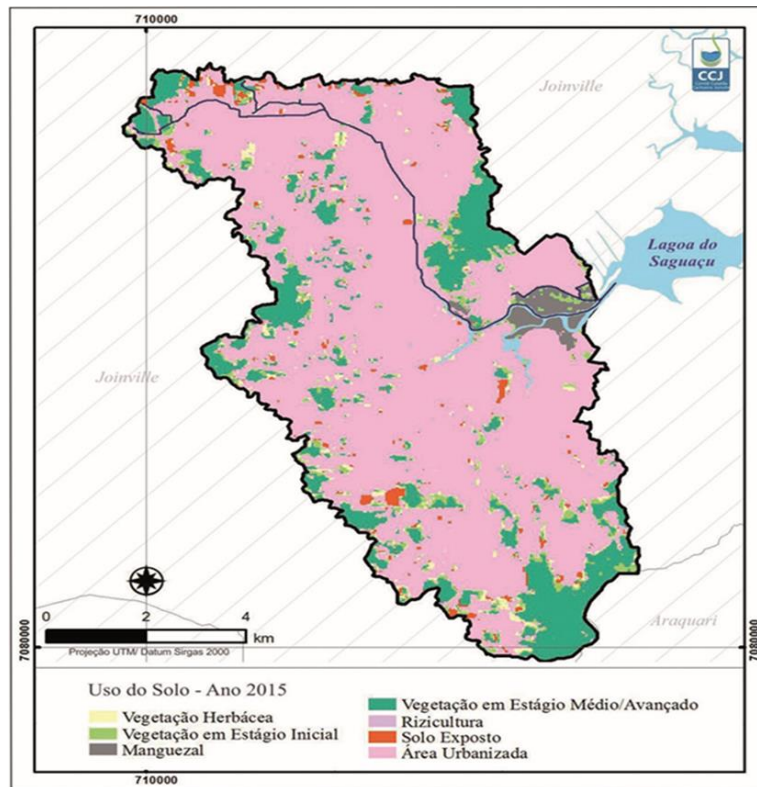
Source: Joinville Research and Urban Planning Institute – IPPUJ 2000

Joinville is the largest city in Santa Catarina, responsible for around 20% of exports from Santa Catarina. According to IBGE (2008), it is among the fifteen largest collectors of municipal, state, and federal taxes and fees. The city concentrates much of its economic activity on the industry. The Gross Domestic Product - GDP of Joinville is also one of the highest in the country, around BRL 52,792.59 per year according to the most recent IBGE index (2018). Also, according to IBGE (2021), the estimated population is 604,788 people. The percentage of schooling from 6 to 14 years old is 97.3% and the Municipal Human Development Index – IDHM is 0.809, according to the latest data collected by IBGE (2010).

Seven watersheds make up the hydrographic assortment in the municipality of Joinville, where the Cachoeira River Hydrographic Watershed and the Cubatão do Norte River Hydrographic Watershed are located. The length of the main river, which is the Cachoeira

River, is 16 km. The Saguauçu Lagoon is the debouch area, part of the estuary of the Babitonga Bay complex (IPPUJ, 2013).

Figure 2 – Cachoeira River Watershed – land use and occupation – 2016. The map legend allows viewing 72.60% of the urbanized area over this Watershed (CCJ, 2016).



Source: Cubatão Cachoeira Committee -CCJ (2016) - UNIVILLE

The Cachoeira River Watershed area has been considered the most vulnerable to environmental degradation in the region. According to the surveys made by Ferreira (2015, p.121) regarding the causes of pollution and environmental degradation for many years, the main factors responsible for water pollution were “untreated domestic sewage, released since the beginning of colonization until nowadays”; the “incorrect disposal of garbage” in the river and on its banks; the “removal of riparian forest” for many years and mainly the use of the river to dispose large volumes of “industrial waste when the city was industrialized”.

### 3.4 Participants

This study had the participation of seven people, five men and two women. The selected participants’ sample was supported by the snowball technique, also known as snowball sampling or chain of informants (VINUTO, 2015), which initially had 28 volunteers. After signing the Free and Informed Consent Form, they responded to a Screening Questionnaire.

The aim was to select some participants who could be perceived by environmentalists and public opinion researchers as "not caring" about the environment or environmental

causes. The group interviewed was not intended to be a "sample" in the sense of being representative of a larger group. The priorities were depth, as opposed to "breadth", and microanalysis as opposed to generalizations about a particular demographic group. People who can easily be overlooked and included in surveys as individuals with low environmental concern due to indeterminate personal problems were chosen to be interviewed. Those who reported on the questionnaire that they think about environmental issues in the intermediate range of responses "never" and "often" and who expressed a moderate level below conscious thinking about environmental issues were chosen. Those who expressed thinking "often", were not involved in any environmental conservation activities.

### **3.5 DRI - Dialogical Relational Interview**

Historically, the DRI emerged in 2007, stemming from a demand to Lertzman (2015) to design a research methodology that could effectively explore unconscious processes and dynamics and address object relations and environmental contexts in the highly polluted region of the Great Lakes, Wisconsin - USA. The core of this approach is the design of what Lertzman calls Dialogic Relational Interviews - DRI.

Following this methodology, the present study aimed to perform three individual interviews, each lasting an average of 45 minutes, with the seven selected participants.

At the beginning of the first of the three interviews, a single statement was made as an invitation to speak: "Tell me where you grew up. Please start as you wish and say whatever comes to your mind." This question was designed to be broad and wide-ranging, deliberately unconscious regarding the study's topic, and aimed to establish a relationship of trust with the interviewer, to then move on to water, nature, environment, and the Cachoeira River topics.

After each interview session, a pre-analysis was carried out, with the perception of the narratives, as well as the importance of highlighting the topics, ideas, thoughts, and feelings that emerged in the interview that were particularly loaded or significant.

The second interview intentionally remained unstructured and free-associated, gradually becoming focused on the environmental theme as the interviewer presented occasional questions, clarifications, feedback, and interpretations. At the beginning of the second interview, participants were reminded that the degradation of the Cachoeira River was the specific subject of the interview for which they were selected and around which they were invited to freely associate their ideas. At this point, some associations that the participant brought up in the first interview regarding the topic were revisited, which could be further explored, stimulating confidence in being able to talk about it and the emotions that arose with such content or memory. The more confident the participants were in sharing their reflections, the more the interviewer could raise questions. For example, "What do these things mean to you?" In this way, words, expressions, feelings, and defensive mechanisms present in the participant's mind were recorded. The idea that thoughts are associated with each other through unconscious psychic determinism is of great importance for understanding the dialogical interview.

In the third meeting, we aimed to narrow and deepen the associations. As in the second interview, we started the third interview by providing feedback to the participants on



what was heard in the previous meeting, as clearly as possible, so that they could perceive the level of attention given to their speech. It was also possible to show solidarity through brief comments regarding testimonies of pain or mourning. This aspect of the dialogical approach was central to building a relationship of trust in conducting qualitative research interviews.

Thus, in the final meeting, more direct questions were provocatively raised on emotions felt about a specific topic that each participant brought up, or about a loss they had and on which they used defense mechanisms, always being as transparent and welcoming as possible. At the same time, there was a focus on the environmental topic. To achieve this, images related to pollution or waste disposal in the Cachoeira River were shown to the participant, which would serve to impact them. They would then respond to the visual stimulus and not to the interviewer, avoiding a frontal and direct question about their feelings regarding ecological threats faced by the Cachoeira River. Following this logic, each interview served a specific function with the set of meetings.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

The data obtained through the Screening Questionnaire application was typed and statistically processed. Qualitative variables were generated by their absolute frequency and percentage, which enabled the selection of seven participants for the qualitative phase.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews followed the epistemological principles that demonstrated the interview technique and interview analysis in psychoanalysis. First, careful attention was paid to the state of mind and feelings (anxieties, emotional aspects, or affects) of the interviewees, as they were shown to be at the basis of defense mechanisms.

In this process, the following defense mechanisms were considered: denial, apathy, projection, repression, idealization, splitting, and rationalization. To confer coherence with the evaluation of the results, research and definitions of defense mechanisms proposed by Freud S. (1896-1996); Klein (1975); Freud A. (1936); Lertzman (2015); Segal (1964); Stoll-Klemann, O’Riordan, and Jaeger (2001); Searles (1972) and Zimmerman (2001) were used.

With the compilation of results, a synthesis of each case study was carried out, highlighting the defense mechanisms which are transmitted through a table organization of the defense mechanisms analysis of the participants in this study.

## **4 RESULTS**

19 men (67%) and 9 women (33%), totaling 28 individuals, participated in the screening questionnaire. The screening questionnaire consisted of 8 qualitative questions and its results were presented through frequency graphs, which provided a preliminary understanding of each volunteer's position on issues such as levels of environmental concern, engagement, and knowledge of environmental issues, and feelings about the theme of this study.

Table 1 shows environmental concern measured by the thinking frequency about environmental issues and educational level. Individuals who completed higher education



reported thinking about environmental issues more frequently. On the other hand, the only person who reported never thinking about environmental issues had a primary education level. This suggests, with some degree of uncertainty, that educational level may be an important factor in addressing environmental issues.

Table 1: Environmental concern according to educational level

	Educational level			Total
	Elementary School	High School	College Level	
Frequently	4 36.36%	2 18.18%	5 45.45%	11 100%
Occasionally	2 25%	4 50%	2 25%	8 100%
Rarely	1 12.50%	4 50%	3 37.50%	8 100%
Never	1 100%	0 0%	0 0%	1 100%
Total	8 28.57%	10 35.71%	10 35.71%	28 100%

Source: Developed by the author based on research data.

Below are the general characteristics of the 7 participants selected for the stage of interviews and case studies. With regard to marital status, most are married, only two no longer live with their spouses, one due to widowhood and the other due to divorce. Their age group ranged from 31 to 89 years old and their schooling ranged from elementary school to complete higher education. The place of residence was in different neighborhoods each and one in the center of the city.

Chart 1. Characterization of participants selected for the interview stage of the present study.

	Participants						
Personal data	Case 1 Alex	Case 2 Flávio	Case 3 Elisabet	Case 4 Jackson	Case 5 Izabel	Case 6 Roberto	Case 7 Sílvio
Marital status	married	married	widower	married	married	married	divorced
Age	39	31	89	38	50	26	42
Graduation	College	High school	Fundamental	Fundamental	High school	Fundamental	High school
Residential area	Bucarem	Boehmer-Wald	Centro	Guanabara	Jardim Paraíso	Itaum	Fátima

Chart 2, in turn, summarizes the reason for choosing the participants for the interviews and confirms that the majorities never, rarely, or occasionally think about environmental issues and do not participate in groups or causes for the environment.

Chart 2. Reason for participants' selection.

Participants*	Reason for selection
Alex	Often thinks about environmental problems but is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.
Flávio	Rarely thinks about environmental problems, the topic is rarely discussed in the family, and is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.
Elisabet	Occasionally thinks about environmental problems but is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.
Jackson	Never thinks about environmental problems. He says that the Cachoeira River has a bad smell and floods the city center.
Izabel	Occasionally thinks about environmental problems but is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.
Roberto	Occasionally thinks about environmental problems but is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.
Silvio	Occasionally thinks about environmental problems, rarely discusses the subject with their family and is not involved in any environmental conservation activities.

\* The participants' names are fictitious.

To have an overview of the defense mechanisms identified in the case reports studied, a demonstrative chart was created showing these mechanisms and their incidence per participant.

Chart 3: Compilation of results from the defense mechanisms analysis of the participants in the present study.

Defense Mechanism	Participants						
	Case 1 Alex	Case 2 Flávio	Case 3 Elisabeth	Case 4 Jackson	Case 5 Izabel	Case 6 Roberto	Case 7 Silvio
Denial	4	3	1	-	-	2	-
Apathy	1	1	1	2	1	7	2
Projection	2	4	1	1	8	7	-
Repression	1	1	1	2	-	4	1
Idealization	4	4	2	3	6	11	1
Splitting	4	1	3	1	1	3	-
Rationalization	4	3	-	-	1	4	-

Below is a summary of the defense mechanisms and how each one was identified through the interviews.

Chart 4: Identification of defense mechanisms in the interviews.

Defense Mechanism	How they were identified in the interviews
Denial	The narratives of denial presented the word "no" directly or showed themselves as a refusal of the interviewees to accept the existence of the painful situation of the Cachoeira River, thus avoiding anxiety.
Apathy	Apathy was present as a mental solution to the frustrations of the interviewees in the face of pollution and local degradation that they could not solve at the level of consciousness, bringing a paralysis and lack of creativity to deal with environmental issues.
Projection	Frequently used mechanisms, the participants mainly projected onto the government the solution to local environmental problems, allowing for relief of internal tensions.
Repression	This mechanism appeared in the speeches as a sign that the environmental issue should be avoided, not evocable. The interviewees who used this type of defense changed the subject to others of their interests whenever attempts were made to focus on the nature and pollution of the Cachoeira River.
Idealization	Prevailed in the interviewees' speeches, idealizing the interactions they had with the Cachoeira River in the past, or idealizing the change in the situation through God and even in technology and permaculture.
Splitting	There was a great ambivalence observed between nature as something positive and good, and negative and bad, generating anxieties and internal tensions. For example, sometimes the Cachoeira River was a good place, while at other times its waters flooding the city made it something bad.
Rationalization	It prevailed in some interviewees who sought to provide logical explanations for environmental problems, extensively discussing their theories. In this way, they were able to establish commitments between conflicting impulses that pollution triggered, relieving anxiety and frustration.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In Brazil, when talking about pollution, especially of water bodies such as rivers and seas, the image of the Tietê River in the city of São Paulo or the Guanabara Bay located in Rio de Janeiro often comes to mind. The image of overflowing is also frequent, especially in rivers and streams, causing many problems, including material damage and health risks due to exposure to harmful elements such as leptospirosis.

Therefore, water pollution, in addition to its visual aspect, odor, and the problems caused by flooding, is not associated with any other direct and immediate impact on human beings. However, a careful examination points to the opposite, that is, that there are indirect and subjective elements that affect people, causing harm to their health and, consequently, to their well-being. And the development of defense mechanisms is one of these points. These mechanisms are also considered adversities to be considered in programs aimed at a change in attitude toward ecological problems.

Through this study, it was possible to verify that all interviewees and residents of the surrounding areas of the Cachoeira River Watershed developed a multitude of defense mechanisms due to the river's pollution. It is observed, at first, that it is not possible to generalize any defense mechanism; however, some stand out more due to the psychological tensions, anxieties, and negative emotions arising from environmental threats.

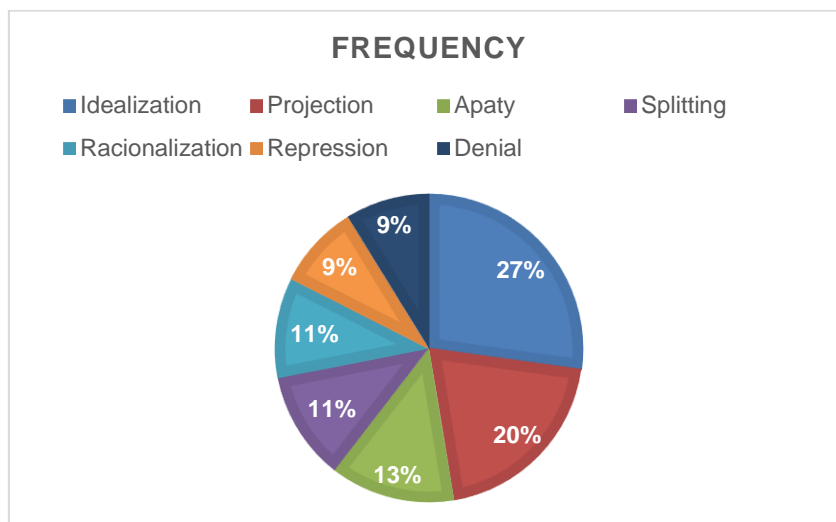
Indeed, as discussed in this study, for Freud, the notion of defense mechanisms is an unconscious process through which the ego, the conscious part of the psychic apparatus, dissociates itself from impulses or affects that it considers threatening and may bring suffering. In short, defenses maintain their principle of avoiding what is difficult to deal with, thus creating a barrier that protects the person from realities that may, to any degree, bring suffering. In the present context, it is also noted that the environmental issue is a triggering factor of suffering for the person, since there is dissociation between the idealized, as something positive, and the actual situation, as something negative.

The difference between the idealized and the actual reality comes from the fact that the interviewees have conditions for comparison, that is, they have experienced, at some point in their lives, an environment without pollution or degradation. Even assuming that the environment was not free of damage, which is quite plausible in certain places and times, pollution and degradation were not perceived to the extent that the environment could be qualified as unsuitable.

This condition of comparison proved to be a very important factor in the development of defense mechanisms, which seek to achieve a condition of balance and adaptation to threatening environmental realities. Therefore, defensive mechanisms such as denial, idealization, projection, rationalization, and apathy, for example, constitute the internal struggle resulting from an external factor, namely environmental damage.

In this study, it was possible to identify, in the three rounds of interviews with each of the seven participants, seven main types of defense mechanisms used in their narratives, in their order of frequency: idealization, 31 times; projection, 23 times; apathy, 15 times; splitting, 13 times; rationalization, 12 times; denial and repression, 10 times each.

Figure 3: Frequency at which defense mechanisms were identified.



The group was characterized as heterogeneous, with diverse age groups, genders, sociocultural levels, religious beliefs, and nationalities. The objective was not to select a representative sample from a larger population, but rather to explore subjectivities in greater

depth to give voice to the thoughts and feelings of people who, due to a lack of interest in environmental issues, would not be prioritized in research or initiatives in favor of the environment. The aim was to better understand the reasons underlying their behavior of resistance and indifference, and this goal was achieved, as in-depth accounts and testimonies were obtained through case studies. Tragic stories of losses, grief, and personal suffering related to some interviewees' lives were collected, as well as losses and anxieties regarding the environmental chaos currently being experienced.

During the case discussion phase, a convergence with the psychoanalytic theory of defense mechanisms, among the various authors that underpinned the research was found when analyzing the defense mechanisms that emerged in the narratives. For example, it was found to be in harmony with Zimmerman (2001) on the defense mechanism of idealization, which appeared most frequently in the present study. He observes that idealization is related to partial objects classified as good, bad, persecutory, and idealized objects, always in interaction. Segal (1964), in a complementary way, understands that the relationship with the good object can be idealized and can occur in various situations. The findings of Lertzman's (2015) research on this idealized childhood world were also corroborated throughout the interview data when participants remembered playing in foaming waters and white dunes, making it difficult, she says, to analyze a profound sense of nostalgia for lost innocence and the association of the natural world, before environmental degradation, such as algae, invasive species, toxins, etc.

This group, despite its wide diversity, presented two distinct positions regarding environmental conservation issues: either the participant was impacted and moved by environmental problems, showing initiative and creativity in thinking of practical actions, or they appeared apathetic, with environmental paralysis concerning pollution and degradation problems.

The more apathetic pattern represented a point of convergence for most of the interviewees. In these cases, in addition to apathy, it was possible to correlate the use of defense mechanisms such as idealization, projection, splitting, rationalization, and repression in their narratives.

The smaller part of the group showed themselves to be impacted and moved by environmental problems. Although the use of defense mechanisms such as idealization, projection, splitting, rationalization, repression, and denial was also correlated here, they were used to a lesser extent or as a defense mechanism by participants who were not engaged in practical environmental conservation activities. However, it reinforces the fact that these participants were more creative and willing to assume their social role in environmental issues in general, as well as in the degradation of the Cachoeira River and its surroundings.

Assuming that environmental engagement and awareness can be developed much more through the bond established between the agent and the residents of a community than through the knowledge expressed to others, this study sought to describe some contributions that psychoanalysis can offer to the field of environmental conservation, through the evaluation of defense mechanisms.

The valuable contribution of the Relational Dialogical Interviews method was also highlighted, with a psychoanalytic foundation, both for promoting deep reflection on environmental issues and for addressing the feelings and defenses that such issues bring up in people. Additionally, it contributes to the application of a Dialogical Stance in educational programs and campaigns focused on environmental conservation, which includes all participants as subjects with knowledge of the environmental theme, who is heard, and who construct a mode of communication that includes affective aspects.

In this historical moment, bringing a deep understanding of the painful dilemmas experienced about the environment is of utmost importance, so that we can act with the maximum possible discernment, care, and creativity. Programs and initiatives that seek to delve deep and make uncomfortable connections to have a more acute perception of the environmental situation, which lead to the most radical and truthful places that the issue raises, present emotional, moral, intellectual, and practical challenges of the highest order, for which this study sought to be an encouragement.

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the contributions that psychoanalysis, specifically the evaluation of defense mechanisms, can offer to the environmental conservation field. By analyzing the responses of a community members group to the degradation of the Cachoeira River and its surroundings, the study revealed the presence of both apathetic and engaged attitudes toward environmental issues and the use of various defense mechanisms in response to these issues. The study also highlighted the value of the Relational Dialogical Interviews method in promoting in-depth reflection on environmental issues and the emotions and defenses they evoke in individuals. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the importance of approaching environmental conservation through a dialogical and inclusive approach that recognizes the unique knowledge and perspectives of all individuals involved. We hope that this study will inspire further research and initiatives aimed at promoting a deeper understanding and more effective action toward environmental challenges.

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