

Reaction Formation

Reaction formation describes forced actions that oppose one's feelings. It is one of the immature ego defenses. It is described as an unconscious process and exaggerated behavior. An example of reaction formation is the reverse story of Cinderella. Reaction formation is the opposite of the mature ego defense known as sublimation.



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Characteristics

Actions Oppose Feelings

[Upside-down-tube \(opposite\)](#)

Reaction formation describes forced actions that oppose one's feelings. It is described as acting on the contrary by replacing unwanted feelings or ideas with the opposite. This is known as an equal and opposite reaction.

Immature Ego Defense

[Immature-baby with Ego-Lego](#)

Reaction formation is an immature ego defense that is built to reduce anxiety and distress from uncomfortable situations. This leads to the inability of a person to cope effectively.

Unconscious Process

[Unconscious](#)

The purpose of ego defenses are to conquer anxiety or other negative emotions that are too challenging for the superego to handle. A person with reaction formation will be satisfied with their own actions without realizing their true motives. This process happens unconsciously and is aimed at relieving unpleasant feelings.

Exaggerated Behavior

[Exaggerated Behavior](#)

Reaction formation presents as exaggerated, compulsive behavior. This defense doesn't look sincere or natural. It's done in an extreme, immature way.

Reverse Cinderella Story

[Reverse Cinderella Story](#)

A sample case of reaction formation is when a step-mother treats her step-child overprotectively, despite disliking the child. We can think about this by the reverse story of Cinderella. Cinderella's stepmother treated her poorly. If Cinderella's stepmother experienced reaction formation, she would have defended Cinderella with everything she had. Another example of reaction formation includes the story of Oedipus. He hates his mother and thus married her.

Immature Sublimation

Immature-baby with Sub-limes

Reaction formation is an immature type of sublimation which replaces unwanted feelings or ideas with more acceptable actions. An example of sublimation is someone who has aggressive behavior and tries to replace it by participating in sports.