

Abstract

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFECT AND DEFENSE IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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The purpose of this study is to further determine the nature of the relationship between how defense mechanisms affect and are affected by the ways in which feelings are modulated and regulated in children and adolescents. This study has been built upon an IRB-approved research project conducted under primary investigator Steven Tuber, Ph.D. at the Psychological Center and the City College of New York. The study data are pre-existing, collected from 5 – 17 year old children and adolescents presenting for treatment and/or assessment at the Psychological Center, a community clinic. This group's age range span major developmental shifts in terms of cognitive capacity during childhood, which allows for an exploration of these shifts in terms of affect and defense. All children were consecutively selected, without any additional screening procedures, as they presented for psychological treatment. Demographic information including age, gender, IQ, and SES was collected. The current study focuses on the participants' response to the Thematic Apperception Test, which was part of a short protocol. The TAT transcripts were assessed using both the Affect Maturity Scale (AMS), and the Defense Mechanism Manual (DMM). Defenses were calculated proportionally, while affect maturity was calculated as a mean within each record. The study supported hypotheses (i) that age is positively correlated with increasing maturity of defense and (ii) increasing level of affect maturity, and (iii) that defense maturity and affect maturity are be positively correlated. Results from correlational analyses are described, as are ancillary analyses that address differences between age groups and prior studies. These analyses provide quantitative evidence for the relationship between the developing maturity of defense and affect in a clinical sample of children and adolescents.