

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE NATURE OF DEFENSES USED BY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN WITH ADHD**

by

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This study sought to develop a more nuanced clinical picture of children with ADHD by examining the relationship between their emotional dysregulation and their use of defense mechanisms—the unconscious mental processes that guard against strong emotions. Children’s responses to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) were examined for evidence of defense mechanisms using an empirically validated scale, the Defense Mechanism Manual. The study employed a mixed between-within nonequivalent group design to examine the responses of 37 children ages 7-10. It was hypothesized that children with ADHD would use more frequent and more immature defenses than their peers without the disorder. Additionally, those TAT cards designated as “high arousal” were predicted to elicit more defense mechanisms than those considered to be less emotionally stimulating. Results indicated that ADHD was not a significant predictor of defense use. However, arousal level and age were found to be significant predictors of defense use. Implications of these findings and directions for future research were discussed.