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A psychoanalytic attachment theory perspective of the defenses used in relationships by teenage girls in a children's home

By

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Abstract

This study set out to explore the use and manifestation of the defense mechanisms of teenage girls living in a children's home. This was done using data which was collected and analysed by thematic content analysis in a previous study. A qualitative approach to this endeavour entailed one-on-one, in-depth interviews with eight teenage girls who had been living in the care of a children's home for at least six months and caregivers were interviewed regarding each of the girls. Interviews were taped, and transcribed. Three narrative analyses were conducted on the set of transcripts; once from the perspective of Klein's theory, once from Winnicott's theory and once from an attachment theory perspective. The Kleinian results suggested evidence of splitting, projection and introjection, denial, idealisation, envy and projective identification. The Winnicottian results indicated the development of a rigid false self to protect the true self from vulnerability through the use of distorting reality through projective and introjective mechanisms, compliance, self destructive tendencies, and unregulated aggression. The attachment theory results indicated defenses which resembled either a dismissive or preoccupied state of mind. The integration of these analyses suggested that despite certain divergences, the different theoretical accounts each seem to offer a valuable perspective on similar phenomenon.