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The Defensive Psychological Dynamics in an Adolescent Addicted to Social Media: A Clinical Analytical Study Through the Application of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

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Abstract:

This article aims to investigate the defensive dynamics of an adolescent experiencing addiction to social media from a clinical psychoanalytic perspective by examining the psychological defense mechanisms utilized to cope with internal conflicts and emotional pressures. The study was based on the assumption that excessive engagement with social media may be associated with a specific defensive organization that reflects the characteristics of the adolescent's psychological structure and serves a function in reducing psychological tension and regulating anxiety. The researcher adopted a clinical approach based on the case study method, using a semi-structured clinical interview and the administration of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) as a projective instrument designed to explore unconscious contents and the underlying defense mechanisms operating within the personality. The protocol was analyzed from a dynamic perspective. The findings revealed the presence of a defensive organization characterized by the activation of several defense mechanisms, particularly denial, projection, rationalization, and fantasy, alongside indicators of narcissistic vulnerability, difficulties in emotional regulation, and challenges in the establishment of object relations. The results further indicated that intensive involvement with social media fulfills a defensive function in this case, contributing to the compensation of feelings of inadequacy and psychological loneliness, while also reducing the intensity of internal tension and conflicts, rather than constituting merely a recreational or entertainment-oriented behavior.

Keywords: Defensive dynamics. Clinical psychoanalysis. Adolescent addicted to social media. Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world, particularly over recent decades, has witnessed an unprecedented digital revolution that has profoundly influenced all dimensions of social, economic, and psychological life. This transformation has generated significant changes in individuals' lifestyles and modes of existence, rendering them considerably different from previous patterns. For instance, smartphones have become ubiquitous in almost every household and increasingly function as extensions of the body and mind, particularly during leisure time, as individuals devote growing attention to browsing digital devices rather than engaging in direct real-life interactions.

Moreover, a culture of immediacy and immersion in brief, repetitive forms of content consumption has emerged. Social media have consequently become an inseparable component of everyday life, extending beyond their communicative role to constitute an alternative relational and existential framework that increasingly replaces direct interpersonal interactions. This extensive expansion of the digital sphere has led numerous researchers to express concerns regarding what has become known as social networking site addiction, particularly due to the significant psychological, social, and behavioral consequences associated with this phenomenon, especially during adolescence.

Adolescence represents a transitional developmental period characterized by profound physical, psychological, and social transformations. This stage involves major developmental achievements that enable adolescents to construct their identity, strengthen their social competencies, and develop a greater understanding of themselves. However, it is also marked by various challenges related to psychological adjustment and adaptation to multiple pressures, particularly the process of seeking independence from the family environment. When these

developmental transformations occur within a digital context that facilitates escape, withdrawal, and isolation, adolescents may become more vulnerable to developing behavioral patterns characterized by addiction to social media. Such engagement may serve as a means of emotional discharge, helping to alleviate tension and anxiety, fill psychological emptiness, and compensate for perceived deficiencies in real-life relationships (Kassi Salima, 2012, p.88).

Previously, adolescents' social experiences were primarily confined to a local framework based on direct interactions with peers, family members, and society. However, in recent years, social media have become a primary medium for social interaction among adolescents. Despite their contribution to communication and social connectivity, these platforms have also generated negative consequences, including addictive patterns of use that may significantly affect adolescent development. Adolescents increasingly seek to construct their social identity through virtual interactions, while excessive involvement in online communication may contribute to a decline in real-world social exchanges, as they may gradually prefer screen-based interactions over direct interpersonal encounters, negatively influencing their social skills. Furthermore, the constant need to check notifications and update posts may develop into a compulsive behavioral pattern, potentially resulting in reduced academic performance and diminished face-to-face social interactions.

Furthermore, these networks may provide an idealized representation of reality by displaying selectively presented aspects of individuals' lives, which may encourage adolescents to engage in unfavorable social comparisons with others. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that adolescents rely on defense mechanisms to manage internal anxiety and psychological tensions arising from the developmental transformations they experience. From this perspective, the Thematic Apperception Test emerges as an important projective instrument widely

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employed to explore mental representations, unconscious conflicts, and the nature of defense mechanisms activated by individuals beyond conscious awareness.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address the following research question:

- What types of defense mechanisms does the adolescent addicted to the use of social media resort to, as revealed through the Thematic Apperception Test?

1.1 Research Hypothesis

The predominance of inhibition and avoidance contexts (C) among adolescents addicted to social media.

1.2 Study Importance

The significance of this study lies in increasing awareness among families and educational institutions regarding the negative impact of digital addiction on the psychological well-being of adolescents addicted to social media, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of their psychological structure.

1.3 Study Objectives

The primary objective underlying this study is to identify the nature of defensive contexts among adolescents addicted to social media.

1.4 Operational Definition of the Study Terms

A. **Defensive Contexts:** These refer to the set of defense mechanisms or psychological processes utilized by adolescents addicted to social media, as identified through the Thematic Apperception Test.

B. **Adolescence:** This refers to a transitional developmental stage in an individual's life characterized by physiological, physical, psychological, behavioral, and social transformations associated with puberty. The age range extends between ...

C. **Addiction to Social Media:** This refers to a psychological, physical, and behavioral condition characterized by persistent dependence on excessive engagement with social media, accompanied by an intense and progressively increasing desire to spend extended periods browsing these platforms. The diagnosis of social networking site addiction is determined based on the score obtained on the Social Networking Site Addiction Scale developed by Salama Roukia and Bourouba Amal.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 The Psychological Apparatus and the Mechanism of Defensive Contexts

According to psychoanalytic theory, the psychological apparatus represents the dynamic structure responsible for organizing an individual's psychological life, in which its fundamental components—the id, ego, and superego—interact within a delicate balance between the immediate satisfaction of drives, internalized social norms, and the demands of external reality. This interaction frequently generates intrapsychic conflicts, placing the individual in a position where they must either confront these conflicts or attempt to reduce their psychological intensity. Within this framework, defense mechanisms emerge as unconscious psychological processes employed by the ego to maintain its integrity, preserve psychological equilibrium, and alleviate the anxiety generated by these conflicts.

These mechanisms may fulfill an adaptive and functional role in various situations; however, they can evolve into maladaptive patterns when excessively activated or when they substitute realistic strategies of coping and adjustment. Understanding the psychological apparatus and defense mechanisms provides a deeper perspective for examining the individual's internal organization, particularly within pathological contexts such as behavioral addictions, where defensive processes may serve as strategies for avoiding

psychological distress, emotional suffering, or unresolved internal conflicts. Such mechanisms must therefore be examined in relation to the individual's psychological development, relational experiences, and developmental history, particularly when they occur during the critical period of adolescence.

Accordingly, defense mechanisms among adolescents will be addressed, as the concept of defense mechanisms represents one of the most fundamental contributions introduced by Freud approximately a century ago. Freud initially employed this concept to describe the unconscious strategies through which the ego protects itself against anxiety. When Freud began investigating defense mechanisms in (1849), he considered them specific manifestations associated with psychological disorders. However, by (1915), he had revised this perspective, viewing them as a set of non-pathological psychological processes utilized by individuals when confronted with conflictual situations. He subsequently concluded that these mechanisms may acquire either adaptive or pathological characteristics depending on their function, intensity, and manner of utilization. (Al-Duhaysat, 2016, p.10)

Defense mechanisms represent diverse patterns of psychological processes through which defensive operations are expressed. The predominant defense mechanisms may vary according to the individual's developmental stage and the level of complexity and elaboration of the underlying defensive conflict. Chazaud considers that variations in defense mechanisms and their characteristics are associated with the level of ego organization and the nature of the pressures against which the individual attempts to protect themselves. Similarly, Nacht argues that the defense mechanisms activated by the ego differ according to whether they operate within the context of an organized or disorganized ego structure. (Mellal, 2017, p.221) Defense mechanisms are unconscious and repetitive processes

that adolescents frequently and automatically employ, without conscious intention, to cope with anxiety arising from deeply rooted internal threats generated by instinctual drives of the id, the demands and pressures of the superego representing internal threats, or the pressures and risks of external reality representing external threats. This process occurs either through transforming the original internal or external source that produces a profound sense of threat and anxiety or by redirecting it toward an alternative goal that is socially acceptable. (Al-Takhaineh et al., 2017, p.324)

Psychological defense mechanisms are unconscious processes through which the ego attempts to reduce anxiety and manage psychological conflicts. They operate as strategies aimed at preserving psychological equilibrium by modifying perceptions of reality and reducing the negative impact of threatening experiences on the individual's psychological state. In contrast, behaviorists consider psychological defense mechanisms as acquired and learned responses shaped by individual experiences, viewing them as conscious patterns because individuals may use them as partial avoidance strategies. Cognitive theorists have introduced another conceptualization of these mechanisms by referring to them as coping mechanisms for stressful situations. From this perspective, they represent cognitive processes through which individuals draw upon their experiences to confront stressful circumstances, either through effective responses or through modifying or eliminating the stressful situation. These mechanisms do not operate independently; rather, they function through mutual interaction. For example, denial and repression may initially occur, followed by conversion and then projection. The individual perceives certain characteristics as inconsistent with their self-image, leading to their denial, subsequent repression, and eventual attribution to individuals toward whom they hold negative feelings. As a result, these undesirable characteristics are

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perceived as belonging to others rather than recognized as aspects of the self.

Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies used to avoid anxiety-provoking situations and the associated feelings of guilt, reduce internal conflicts, and protect the self from perceived threats. They function through processes that enable individuals to reduce negative psychological states, including anxiety, tension, conflict, and frustration. They are also considered adjustment strategies, as the ego employs these defensive processes to achieve adaptation between the individual and the social environment. These functions represent the adaptive dimensions of defense mechanisms. Psychological defense mechanisms refer to processes through which the psyche unconsciously prevents tension resulting from internal psychological conflicts. They differ from coping mechanisms, which are consciously and intentionally employed to adapt to social demands and manage stressful situations. (Al-Kandari, 2021, p.347)

With the emergence of technological developments, the concept of defense has undergone several conceptual transformations. These changes, which are generally subtle and progressive, require clarification. Initially, Freud conceptualized defense as a consequence of the ego's conflict with unpleasant ideas or affects. More specifically, he limited the concept of defense primarily to instinctual drives and sexual motivations. However, contemporary researchers have adopted a broader perspective. According to Vaillant, the ego employs defense mechanisms to manage conflicts among four fundamental dimensions of inner life: instincts, external reality, significant others, and internal prohibitions shaped by conscience and culture. More specifically, the ego activates defense mechanisms in the following five situations:

- To maintain affects and emotions within manageable and controllable limits during sudden life crises (for example, the death of a close person).
- To restore emotional balance through postponing or redirecting sudden increases in biological drives, such as those occurring during puberty.
- To allow sufficient time to adapt to and accept changes in self-image, such as those following major surgery or unexpected bodily changes.
- To cope with unresolved conflicts involving individuals, whether "living or deceased," particularly when their absence cannot be tolerated.
- To endure major conflicts with conscience, such as killing during wartime or causing harm to a parent. (Freud, 2020, p.37)

2.2 Addiction to Social Media and the Psychological Disorders Resulting from It:

Addiction to social media can be defined through the concept of Internet addiction presented by ICDL 10, which describes it as excessive and unproductive use of social media by individuals who demonstrate a strong dependence on these platforms to occupy leisure time, seek entertainment, and satisfy social needs. Similarly, DSM10 considers it a means of filling leisure time. Several researchers have linked pathological use to the extent to which this behavior dominates an individual's daily life, including Revoy and Young. Revoy defines it as a genuine disorder characterized by the inability to control time spent online despite continuous attempts to do so. In the same context, Young describes it as a general category encompassing various behavioral patterns and impulse-control difficulties. She further emphasized that although many individuals perceive the use of this technology as harmless, this perception does not correspond entirely with reality. In some respects, it may represent a socially accepted form of addiction, despite ongoing warnings regarding its potential risks. (Ghalmi, 2011, p.35) Young also considered

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this type of addiction to have gained recognition among mental health specialists as a significant disorder that may negatively affect individuals' social, professional, family, financial, and academic functioning.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, social networking site addiction can be defined from a psychological perspective as a pattern of compulsive and excessive use of social networking applications and platforms that results in impairment of the individual's psychological, social, and functional functioning. This addiction develops when the individual experiences a persistent and urgent need to check accounts or interact through these platforms, accompanied by an increasing inability to regulate this behavior despite awareness of its negative effects on daily life. Accordingly, individuals addicted to social media present a specific psychological profile that extends beyond a repetitive behavioral pattern; rather, it reflects underlying psychological dynamics in which the need for recognition, low self-esteem, escape from reality, social anxiety, and, in some cases, tendencies toward isolation and withdrawal converge.

The addicted individual may also display dependent personality characteristics. Individuals who tend to become dependent on substances or behaviors are described as having difficulty relying on themselves. According to the Dictionary of Psychology (1998), dependency refers to a condition in which the individual expects assistance from others or seeks emotional and material support, protection, and daily care. The individual relies on others for guidance, decision-making, and reassurance. From a psychoanalytic perspective, dependency is rooted in the oral stage, during which the infant is entirely dependent on the mother for nourishment and security. (Al-Halabi, 2015, p.105)

Dependent personality disorder was defined in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders (DSM-5) as a pervasive and excessive need for care that leads to submissive and clinging behaviors, accompanied by fears of separation. This pattern begins in early adulthood and appears across multiple contexts. A dependent personality is diagnosed when the following symptoms are present: difficulty making daily decisions without excessive advice and reassurance from others; the need for others to assume responsibility for most major areas of life; difficulty expressing disagreement due to fear of losing support or approval, excluding realistic fears of punishment; difficulty initiating projects or performing tasks independently due to low confidence in personal abilities rather than lack of motivation or energy; excessive efforts to obtain care and support from others, even through undertaking unpleasant tasks voluntarily; feelings of discomfort or helplessness when alone due to fear of being unable to care for oneself; urgently seeking another relationship as a source of care and support following the end of a close relationship; and unrealistic preoccupation with fears of being left to manage independently. (Hammadi, 2016, p.249)

Dependent personality is considered one of the personality patterns most vulnerable to developing addiction, whether to substances and drugs or to certain behaviors, including Internet addiction and social networking site addiction. Excessive attachment to others and the inability to relinquish the need for external dependence may transform an addictive substance or behavior into a symbolic substitute for the strong need to rely on an external object. The psychological profile of individuals addicted to social media is characterized by difficulties in emotional regulation and the emergence of various psychological disorders. Numerous psychological studies have shown that excessive use of social media may be associated with several disorders, including mood disorders (such as depression), personality disorders, and anxiety disorders. Positive associations have been identified between anxiety disorders and virtual communication addiction, particularly social anxiety,

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social phobia, and performance situations involving interaction with unfamiliar individuals or exposure to others' attention. These situations may generate anxiety symptoms that can develop into panic states.

Accordingly, addiction to social media may function as a coping strategy for difficulties associated with social anxiety, as these platforms provide a means of communication and establishing social relationships perceived as less threatening than face-to-face interactions. Regarding obsessive-compulsive disorder, an association has been observed between obsessive-compulsive symptoms and social networking site addiction; however, this association appears less frequently compared with social anxiety. Concerning personality disorders among individuals addicted to the Internet, studies have identified borderline, antisocial, and narcissistic personality traits. (Merhbaoui, 2018, pp.355-357)

3. Field Framework of the Study

3.1 Methodological Procedures of the Study

3.1.1 Exploratory Study:

The exploratory study in scientific research aims to examine the conditions and factors surrounding the phenomenon under investigation. It is considered essential as it enables a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and facilitates familiarity with the study subject from different perspectives. The objectives of this field study include identifying the research context, selecting suitable cases for the main study, establishing interaction with the participants, and administering the Social Networking Site Addiction Scale. Subsequently, a case presenting addiction to social media was selected, and the nature of the defensive contexts was identified through the Thematic Apperception Test.

3.1.2 Study Boundaries:

The feasibility of conducting research in the human and social sciences is fundamentally dependent on the availability of the research sample and the willingness of participants to engage in the study. The field study was conducted in the city of Biskra The present study was conducted during the academic year 2024/2025 on an adolescent case presenting addiction to social media, based on the results obtained from the Social Networking Site Addiction Questionnaire developed by Salama Roukia and Bourouba.

3.1.3 Research Method:

In the present study, the clinical approach was adopted due to its relevance and effectiveness in conducting an in-depth psychological investigation of the individual. This approach allows for the identification and analysis of defensive contexts. The clinical method refers to the in-depth examination of personality as an individual case, whether normal or pathological. It aims to understand the individual's current behavioral functioning based on information related to their clinical history and present condition, with the objective of establishing an immediate diagnosis, assessing or predicting future development, and subsequently selecting appropriate therapeutic approaches. (Sahraoui, 2020, p.3)

The term *clinical* originally referred to the study of abnormal phenomena in general and pathological phenomena in particular. This concept was later expanded to include the assessment of individuals and their adaptation processes, with diversity in the methods applied within clinical studies. Clinical psychology relies on the collection of detailed information regarding the behavior of a specific individual or case. The case may involve an individual, a school, a family, a local community, or an entire culture. The objective is to provide a comprehensive and precise description of the case under investigation. This approach also involves the application of clinical methodological techniques, particularly the case study method, which consists of developing a psychological formulation addressing the causes,

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purposes, and enduring influences underlying an individual's personality, behaviors, or psychological and behavioral difficulties. The case study is primarily considered an exploratory research method; however, it is also valuable for clarification, interpretation, and providing illustrative examples. (Khayat, 2016, p.8)

3.1.4 Study Tools:

A. Semi-Structured Interview:

A semi-structured interview is an interview format that includes a set of open-ended questions organized according to a predefined guide. The researcher follows participants' responses and introduces additional questions when necessary to obtain further clarification and ensure greater accuracy. The semi-structured interview was employed as a preliminary instrument before administering the test.

B. Observation:

Observation represents a fundamental technique for understanding and diagnosing clinical phenomena. It constitutes an essential component of everyday clinical practice and, in many situations, may represent the only available method for specialists when dealing with certain psychological phenomena that cannot be expressed verbally. (Ajrad, n.d., p.16) The researcher also employed observation as a complementary method during the interview process, particularly for monitoring behavioral manifestations, facial expressions, and gestures.

C. Thematic Apperception Test (TAT):

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is a projective assessment tool developed in 1965 by Morgan and Murray. The original version consists of thirty-one cards, some of which are presented to all examinees, whereas others are specifically designed according to age and gender criteria for children and adults. (Chabert, C., 1998)

Shentoub introduced several modifications to the test by reducing the number of cards and retaining only those considered the most relevant and expressive. In her subsequent works, she focused on the construction of discourse, emphasizing its formal characteristics and the different narrative styles that may reflect the presence of defense mechanisms. She also highlighted the importance of returning to Freud's first and second topographies, as well as the dynamic and economic perspectives, when interpreting protocol narratives, drawing upon Freud's theoretical contributions and clinical works. (Darbouche, 2003, p.106)

3.2 Presentation and Analysis of the Study Case

3.2.1 Personal Data of the Case:

The case concerns a female adolescent aged ... years, currently enrolled in the fourth year of middle school. She is the fifth child within the birth order, with six sisters and one brother. She lives within a nuclear family consisting of her parents and siblings. Her father works as a merchant, whereas her mother is a housewife. The family's socioeconomic status is considered good. The case began using social media one year ago after obtaining a mobile phone initially intended for educational purposes. Subsequently, her use gradually developed into an addictive pattern, characterized by continuous engagement with social networking platforms, particularly Facebook and TikTok, throughout the day.

3.2.2 Interview Summary:

The case describes her relationship with her parents as positive, particularly with her father, whom she identifies as the closest person to her. However, her relationship with her mother appears relatively tense, especially when her mother expresses disapproval regarding her excessive phone use. She describes her father as a source of affection, security, and emotional support. The case reports that she shares her difficulties and concerns within the family environment; however, she simultaneously indicates the presence of general concern among family

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members regarding her excessive phone use. This suggests a certain emotional distance within family interactions despite her positive representations of family relationships. She perceives herself as beautiful and honest, yet she also expresses a desire to modify her self-perception, reflecting an internal conflict between her desired self-image and her experienced self-representation.

The case began using social media approximately one year ago and currently spends most of the day engaged with these platforms. She reports experiencing pleasure while using them, accompanied by anxiety when disconnected, indicating a strong emotional attachment to these virtual environments. Despite emphasizing their perceived benefits for academic purposes, she acknowledges periods of difficulty controlling the amount of time devoted to their use. She also expresses a desire to change her lifestyle and reduce her dependence on these platforms. Overall, the case reveals internal contradictions between the desire for change and attachment to the virtual environment, resulting in a state of psychological conflict related to identity, interpersonal relationships, and the organization of daily activities.

3.2.3 Interview Analysis:

- **Card Problematic:** The case identified the manifest content of the card; however, she did not access its latent content. This indicates that she did not identify with a child experiencing functional immaturity while confronted with an object representing an adult reality rather than a toy, suggesting the presence of adequate functional maturity.
- **Card 2...23":** *"I see a person... she is a little girl carrying books with her, distracted and looking toward her left side. Beside her, there is a pregnant woman who is also looking toward the crops. This is a farm; there is someone there, a man who is not wearing a shirt, and next to him is a horse. The man and the horse are*

both looking toward the left side. The farm has been harvested, and the man appears like a player because of his muscles. This is what is there."

- **Defensive Contexts:** Following a prolonged latency period (CP1), the examinee initially demonstrated difficulty identifying the characters (CP3: "this is a pregnant woman"), followed by a description marked by adherence to details, particularly regarding the characters' expressions and postures (A2.1), in addition to the absence of explicit identification of the underlying conflict (CP4).
- **Card Problematic:** The case recognized the manifest content through her description of the card but did not access the latent content. This suggests the absence of significant psychological disturbance or an Oedipal conflict.
- **Card 3BM:** *"A grown-up girl, old in age, sitting on the floor, placing her hand on the bed and leaning on it. She appears to be crying and desperate. The drawing is not well organized; her head is not proportional to her body... silence, that is all."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** After an initial latency period (CP1), the case began by failing to identify the characters (CP3), then proceeded with a description of the manifest content (CF1), accompanied by the emergence of motor activity (CC1). This was followed by a significant emotional reaction (CN3), minimization and circularity (CM3), a sudden shift in the narrative direction (A2.14), and interruption within the story construction (CP1).
- **Card Problematic:** The case initially described the manifest content of the card. She also accessed the latent content, represented by the loss of the object and the emergence of a depressive position, indicating the presence of depressive manifestations.
- **Card 4 ...19":** *"A man is being held by his wife. Beside them, there is a hanging picture containing a woman wearing underwear, looking with sharp eyes expressing hostility and hatred. The man's eyes are attractive, and their color appears*

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unnatural. I wanted to focus only on him. The woman in the picture is jealous of the woman holding this man; this is the situation."

- **Defensive Contexts:** Following an initial latency period (CP1), the examinee began by identifying the characters (CP3), followed by a description characterized by attention to details (B2.1), attribution of mirror relationships (CN7), emergence of the sexual theme (B2.9), expression of emotional states through postures (CN4), and emphasis on subjective impressions (CN1).
- **Card Problematic:** The case accessed the latent content of the card, identifying the couple's conflict through its two dimensions: the libidinal and aggressive aspects.
- **Card 5...17":** *"A woman is standing, placing her hands on the door, and looking inside the room. There is a small framed picture hanging on the wall and a vase with flowers. That is what I see."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** Following an initial latency period (CP1), the participant began by describing the manifest content (CF1), emphasizing sensory characteristics (CN5), along with a description marked by attention to details (A2.1), accompanied by a general tendency toward restriction and brevity (CP2).
- **Card Problematic:** The case elaborated the manifest content of the card but did not perceive the latent theme represented by the maternal image, suggesting a positive representation of the relationship with the mother.
- **Card 6GF...13":** *"A woman is sitting on a sofa, beside her there is a piano, and on her left side there is a man. He is talking to her and saying something; she appears surprised and astonished, as if something has shocked her. He is relaxed. The woman's hairstyle is tied up, similar to the hairstyles of wealthy people. She is wearing an apron with a handkerchief placed in its pocket. The man is wearing a necklace and is talking to her.*

They are looking at each other, focused on the subject. This is what I see."

- **Defensive Contexts:** Following an initial latency period (CP1), the case began by describing the manifest content of the card (CP1) and demonstrated difficulty identifying the characters (CP3). She introduced narcissistic details (CN10), emphasized sensory characteristics (CN5), and described postures reflecting emotional states (CN4).
- **Card Problematic:** The case elaborated the manifest content but did not access the latent content represented by the seduction fantasy.
- **Card 7GF...20":** *"A little girl with her mother, sitting on the sofa. The girl is holding a small child. The girl's hands are abnormal; they are large in relation to her body and do not appear to belong to her. Beside them, there is a table. The mother is holding a book and explaining its contents; she is talking. The girl appears distracted, as if she is in another world. This is what I see."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by a description of the manifest content (CF1), accompanied by attention to objects, including the expressions and postures of the characters (A2.1). This was also associated with fantasies unrelated to the image (B2.2), arbitrary justifications based on these details (E3), and emphasis on sensory characteristics (CN5).
- **Card Problematic:** The case described the manifest content while also accessing the latent content represented by the id (mother–daughter relationship) and an identificatory conflict.
- **Card 9GF....18":** *"I see a woman holding a palm tree, carrying a book in her hand with a notebook placed on top of it, as if she is looking at a child. Below, there is a girl wearing a dress that appears open at the chest and back. She is holding the dress with her hands. The child appears arrogant and is observing the woman above, looking at her as if she is jealous of her. She*

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wants to become like her and watches her without her knowledge."

- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by a description of the manifest content (CF1), with emphasis on sensory characteristics (CN5), emergence of the sexual theme (B2.9), emphasis on internal psychological conflicts (A2.17), and expression of meaningful emotions (CN3).
- **Card Problematic:** The case elaborated the latent content related to identity concerns and sexual identification within a context of competition and jealousy, suggesting difficulties in identity construction and self-affirmation.
- **Card 10...8":**£ *"Nothing appears; it seems ambiguous. That is all."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by failure to perceive the manifest theme (E1), accompanied by a general tendency toward restriction (CP2).
- **Card Problematic:** The case did not elaborate either the manifest or latent content due to the ambiguous nature of the card.
- **Card 11...18":** *"I see large mountains, a waterfall descending from them, and then there is a slope containing a familiar creature resembling a bee and a spider, which is very large compared to them. There is also a cave containing a dragon. A slope extends between the waterfall and the creatures. The dragon appears to have captured a living creature, something resembling a fish or a mermaid. This is what exists."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by a description of the manifest content (CF1), with the emergence of a back-and-forth movement theme (B2.12), accompanied by self-criticism (CN9) and the use of image-based representations (CN8) to support fantasy elaboration (A2.12).
- **Card Problematic:** The case perceived the manifest content but did not access the latent content related to anxiety. She did not

display pathological indicators or resistance toward the threatening elements represented by nature, suggesting the absence of pathological manifestations.

- **Card 13MF ...13":** *"She found him while she was naked, so he turned his face away. This is a woman; it is clear that she is not his wife, which is why he turned his face away. This is obviously his wife."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by the emergence of the sexual theme (B2.9), emphasis on sensory characteristics (CN5), instability in identifications (B2.11), and a subsequent return to emphasis on sensory characteristics (CN5).
- **Card Problematic:** The case did not perceive the manifest content, while she elaborated the latent content related to sexuality within the couple and aggressive sexual expression, indicating the presence of sexual contradictions and aggressive conflicts.
- **Card 19 ...27":** *"I did not understand anything in it. Something is unclear. Honestly, I did not understand it."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** A latency period (CP1) was followed by failure to perceive the manifest content (E1), accompanied by a general tendency toward restriction (CP2).
- **Card Problematic:** The case did not elaborate either the manifest or latent content and limited her response to the statement, “I do not understand anything.”
- **Card 16...10":** *"Are you making fun of me? A blank card, there is nothing in it. That is all."*
- **Defensive Contexts:** Following a latency period (CP1), the case provided a description of the manifest content (CF1), accompanied by a general tendency toward restriction (CP2).
- **Card Problematic:** The case perceived the manifest content but did not access the latent content associated with pre-Oedipal and primitive issues, indicating the absence of regression toward the pre-Oedipal stage. The following table presents the overall distribution of contexts:

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Table 1. presents the overall distribution of contexts:

Contexts of Rigidity and Control A	**Contexts of Flexibility B**	**Contexts of Inhibition and Conflict Avoidance C**	**Primary Contexts E**
A1	B2	CP	E
A1.1=1	B2.2=3	CP1=19	E1=1
A1.2=1	B2.9=4	CP2=4	E3=2
A2	B2.10=1	CP3=8	E20=1
A2.1=12	B2.11=1	CP4=1	
A2.3=1	B2.12=4	CN1=1	
A2.12=3	B2.13=1	CN3=5	
A2.14=1		CN4=2	
A2.17=3		CN5=14	
		CN7=1	
		CN8=1	
		CN9=1	
		CN10=1	
		CC1=1	
		CF1=15	
		CM3=1	
∑=22	∑=14	∑=75	∑=4

Through the analysis of the contexts identified within the case's protocol, a predominance of inhibition and conflict avoidance contexts (C) was observed compared with flexibility contexts (B), control contexts (A), and primary processes (E). Contexts (C) represented the highest proportion, with a total score of 75. They were manifested through prolonged latency periods and interruptions in narrative production (CP1), restricting the spontaneity and fluency of expression, difficulty identifying characters (CP3), a tendency toward restriction (CP2), and insufficient elaboration of conflicts (CP4). These findings confirm the strong presence of defensive processes associated with inhibition and avoidance of conflict.

These contexts were followed by narcissistic contexts (CN), characterized by emphasis on sensory characteristics, meaningful emotional expressions, postures reflecting emotional states, focus on subjective impressions, mirror relationships, self-criticism, and references to narcissistic elements. These indicators suggest the presence of narcissistic characteristics functioning as defensive attempts to compensate for feelings of inadequacy and emotional deprivation. Control contexts (A) appeared subsequently, represented by descriptions marked by attention to details, particularly the expressions and postures of characters, as well as the emphasis on fantasy and internal psychological conflicts. Flexibility contexts (B) followed, characterized mainly by the emergence of sexual themes, emphasis on movement and escape, fantasies distant from the presented images, attachment to narcissistic details, instability in identifications, and the presence of themes associated with fear and catastrophic experiences. Regarding primary contexts (E), they represented the least dominant category, although they were expressed through arbitrary justifications, failure to perceive manifest themes, ambiguity, and insufficient definition of responses.

3.3 General Analysis of the Case

Based on the administration of the semi-structured interview and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), the case reveals a set of psychological indicators reflecting internal conflicts between the demands of the id and the regulating functions of the superego, within the framework of the ego's unequal attempts to maintain equilibrium between these opposing forces. This conflict is also evident at the relational level, particularly in the case's representations of parental relationships. She tends to describe a positive relationship with her father, whom she represents as an idealized object of love and support, while expressing an implicit tension toward her mother. This pattern reflects elements of an incompletely

resolved Oedipal conflict that have not yet been integrated within a mature relational framework.

The case also demonstrates the use of several defense mechanisms, including denial, rationalization, reaction formation, and compensation. Regarding her relationship with social media, it is characterized by a form of neurotic dependency, as these platforms appear to serve the function of satisfying internal needs that remain insufficiently fulfilled in reality. This suggests difficulties in ego regulation and control, particularly as the case acknowledges occasional inability to control phone use, reflecting ego vulnerability in response to digital stimuli.

At the level of self-representations, the case exhibits internal contradictions between the ideal self-image and the realistic self-image. Her expressed desire to improve her perception of herself reflects a conflict between the real ego and the ideal ego, alongside the emerging development of a critical superego structure. However, this superego remains relatively fragile and insufficiently effective in regulating impulses. Several symbolic defensive characteristics also emerged, contributing to the overall psychological formulation derived from the interview and TAT protocol. Several cards were associated with prolonged latency periods preceding narrative production, indicating internal resistance and difficulty accessing unconscious material. A tendency to rely primarily on the manifest content of the cards rather than identifying with the represented roles was also observed, alongside the use of fantasy, suggesting defensive strategies aimed at reducing anxiety through maintaining a descriptive and distanced mode of engagement with the stimuli.

In cards (3BM and 9GF), the case revealed significant identity-related conflicts associated with the loss of the maternal object, suggesting possible difficulties in feminine identification

processes. In card (4), a libidinal-aggressive conflict emerged within the representation of the marital relationship, reflecting difficulties in symbolizing intimate relationships and feminine rivalry. This may be associated with the influence of immature relational experiences in understanding gender-based relationships. In card (13MF), explicit sexual content emerged, indicating the presence of id impulses expressed with limited superego regulation, thereby reinforcing the hypothesis of underlying sexual conflicts. In cards (11) and (19), the case demonstrated rich imaginative capacity and symbolic functioning; however, she did not directly recognize or confront the associated anxiety. This reflects relatively effective defensive attempts to isolate threatening psychological material from conscious awareness.

The analysis of contexts confirmed the predominance of inhibition and conflict avoidance contexts (C). Accordingly, the clinical formulation of the case indicates the presence of complex internal conflicts related to identity, identifications, parental relationships, and impulse regulation. These conflicts lead the case to mobilize various defensive mechanisms in an attempt to manage internal tension, while relying on the digital world as a compensatory space for emotional emptiness and as a source of a temporary and illusory sense of psychological stability.

3.4 Discussion of the Results in Light of the Hypothesis

The field findings obtained from the adolescent case experiencing addiction to social media, who was selected based on achieving the highest score on the Salama Roukia and Bourouba scale, were analyzed through the use of a semi-structured interview to examine behavioral patterns, in addition to the administration of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The case narratives were analyzed according to Shentoub's 1990 scoring system. The results revealed a clear predominance of inhibition and conflict avoidance contexts (C), confirming the validity of the research hypothesis. This predominance was

further supported by the emergence of several indicators reflecting unresolved psychological conflicts, expressed through specific symbols within the analysis grid, such as CC4, indicating feelings of sadness and despair; CP1, reflecting an internal state of anxiety; and CN2, referring to feelings of guilt or diminished self-confidence. These indicators clearly suggest that the adolescent is experiencing a significant state of psychological conflict.

Accordingly, the use of social media cannot be considered merely an entertainment-oriented behavior; rather, it appears to represent a defensive response aimed at escaping from internal conflict or reducing its psychological intensity. From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, these findings can be understood through the concept of psychological defenses, which emerge within the ego as responses to tensions and conflicts between instinctual demands, external reality, and the regulatory functions of the superego. During this sensitive stage of psychological development, adolescents attempt to adapt to transformations related to physical, sexual, psychological, and social identity. This process increases vulnerability to feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, and rejection. When these tensions cannot be managed through more mature adaptive strategies, the adolescent may resort to less developed defensive mechanisms. In this context, these mechanisms may be expressed through excessive engagement with social networking platforms as a form of withdrawal, denial, or fantasy activity, which correspond to defensive patterns associated with inhibition and conflict avoidance contexts.

According to Shentoub's analytical framework, defensive contexts of type (C) reflect internal inhibition resulting from unconscious psychological conflicts. These contexts represent indicators of imbalance within the adolescent's internal psychological organization. This finding supports the

interpretation that addiction to social media is not merely a behavioral phenomenon, but rather a psychological manifestation reflecting deeper underlying dynamics. Therefore, the clinical analysis of the case indicates that adolescent addiction extends beyond its apparent technological dimension, revealing profound psychological conflicts expressed through relatively immature defensive processes. Social media consequently function as a psychological refuge through which the adolescent unconsciously attempts to reconstruct her sense of self and alleviate internal tensions. This confirms the validity of the study hypothesis and highlights the importance of therapeutic approaches focusing on underlying psychological conflicts rather than addressing only the external manifestation of addictive behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the present study, which aimed to identify the nature of defensive contexts among adolescents addicted to social media, it was demonstrated that this form of addiction does not result solely from technological accessibility or the availability of leisure time. Rather, it represents an expression of unconscious psychological conflicts that adolescents attempt to contain, avoid, or overcome through excessive involvement in virtual environments.

The findings further indicated that the addicted adolescent uses these digital platforms as an alternative psychological space through which she achieves a certain degree of internal equilibrium, reducing psychological tension through defensive mechanisms primarily characterized by inhibition and conflict avoidance (C). Consequently, social media function as a defensive refuge rather than merely serving as a means of social communication.

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