

PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNALIZING AND INTERNALIZING BEHAVIOR IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT DEVELOPMENT

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Synopsis

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When two texts, or two assertions, or perhaps two ideas, are in contradiction, be ready to reconcile them rather than cancel one by the other; regard them as two different facets, or two successive stages, of the same reality, a reality convincingly human just because it is complex.

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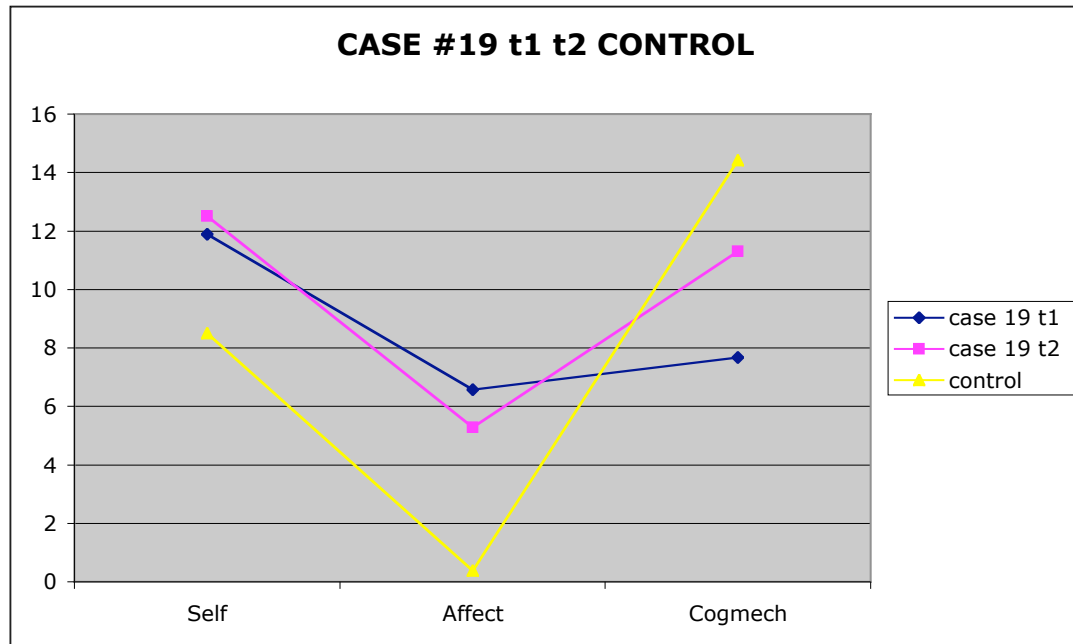
Introduction

In this presentation findings taken from clinical and narrative data from over 100 adolescents as well as writings from several highly publicized cases are analyzed from a developmental perspective using computerized text analysis applications, the Linguistic Inventory and Word Count (LIWC) (Pennebaker) and in collaboration with Wilma Bucci and Bernie Maskit, the Discourse Attributes Analysis Program ((DAAP).

Hypothesis

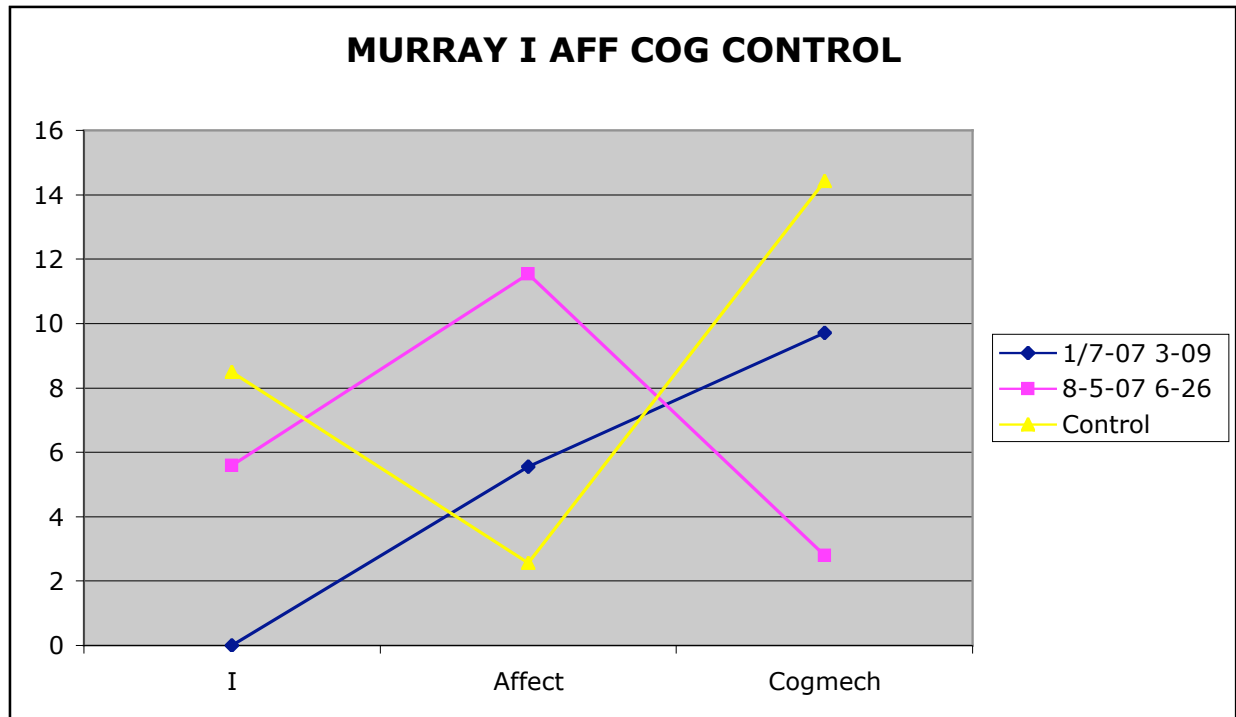
Externalizing and internalizing phenomena are mutually defining and antithetical; they are therefore complementary in the same way that particle and wave theories of light are complementary. Development is defined by the dialectic of these polar phenomena. Disorders, externalizing or internalizing, result from the breakdown of this process.

Results



This scan shows not only the consistent pattern associated with clinical improvement but also the significant elevation of emotional language and the low rate of containing and internalizing words in the clinical sample when compared to the control values.

The occurrence of containing and internalizing words increases in relationship to both controls and to emotional, externalizing words.



In the case of Murray, who had a lethal outcome, there is a clear reversal in the rate of occurrence of externalizing and internalizing words compared with recovered case #19. This pattern characterizes all the cases studied that had a fatal outcome. They are the mirror image of the scans of those cases with a good outcome.

Summary

My research shows that youth who are healthier or who improve clinically over time (and even violent youth experiencing a time of relative stabilization) demonstrate greater capacity for reflection (internalization), taming the tendency toward evocative expression (externalization).

Development is a dialectical process that is defined by the appearance and rise and fall over time of the two complementary poles of internalizing and externalizing language use.

Emotional language is equivalent to action. Violent individuals have extremely high rates of emotion words in their narratives. Those who are creative and violent have less subjectively reported distress.

Disorders of internalization and externalization represent a breakdown of the developmental path and a distortion and intensification of creative, adaptive or compensatory responses to the crisis. Anxiety, depression, and somatization, or aggression, violence and delinquency may result.