Abstract

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG OBJECT RELATIONS, ATTENTION, AND LANGUAGE IN A SAMPLE OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

by

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Background: Object relations (OR) disturbances are implicated in a broad range of socio-emotional problems and psychopathology in childhood, which are also common among children diagnosed with attention and language impairments. Research indicates attachment-based factors play a role in the socio-emotional difficulties of children with learning disabilities; however, the specific influences of attention and language deficits on OR development is unknown. The present study aims to investigate the reciprocal influences of attention and language functioning on OR development. An empirically established OR measure for the Rorschach was systematically adapted to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and examined for convergent validity to investigate potential differences in OR quality across the two projective instruments. Methods: 47 participants culled from a previously existing data set of children identified as at-risk for ADHD and SLI were assessed on measures of language, attention, and OR. The Rorschach Mutuality of Autonomy (MOA) scale (Urist, 1977; Urist & Shill, 1982) and adapted version for the TAT (MOA-TAT) were used to assess OR. Pearson correlation analyses were used to examine the convergence between the MOA and MOA-TAT scales, as well as their relationship to attention and language functioning. Results: The findings from the study provide preliminary support for the MOA-TAT scale as a reliable and valid measure of
OR. Inter-rater agreement for the MOA-TATAT was excellent (ICC = .86), and significant convergence was revealed between the two scales. The MOA-TAT, however, evidenced a more adaptive OR distribution and higher frequency of responses than the MOA scale. The relationship among attention, language, and OR were not statistically significant. However, correlational trends emerged for attention symptomatology. Findings pertaining to language were inconsistent with and disconfirmed the study hypotheses. Conclusions: Results from the study offer significant contributions to OR assessment research and implications for clinical assessment practices.