

ABSTRACT

What your story? Assessing Childhood Maltreatment Using the Thematic Apperception Tests in
an Adult Inpatient Population

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There is robust evidence that childhood maltreatment contributes to the development of adult psychopathology (Brown & Anderson, 1991; Johnson, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, & Bernstein 1999; Johnson, Smailes, Cohen, Brown, & Bernstein, 2000; Ruggiero et al., 1999). However, the identification of childhood maltreatment remains a methodological problem that results in inconsistencies in the reported incidence and psychological sequelae of maltreatment. A primary method for identifying histories of childhood maltreatment among adults is retrospective self-report measures which are susceptible to multiple biases (Briere, 1992; Cicchetti & Rizley, 1981; Shaffer, Huston, & Egeland, 2008). This present study suggests that childhood maltreatment can be assessed using a projective measurement called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) as it has been shown to provide less biased information regarding personality pathology associated with a history of childhood abuse (Toth, Cicchetti, Macfie, & Emde, 1997). The present study assessed the utility of a new scoring system for the TAT (Comprehensive Assessment of the Thematic Apperception Test (CATAT)) (Cohen, 2016) for distinguishing adult inpatients with a history of childhood maltreatment from those without. The results indicated that the CATAT has the potential to be a tool for assessing childhood abuse in inpatient populations but requires further development. Particularly, the CATAT demonstrated the most potential to assess for childhood emotional abuse.