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Disentangling the change–alliance relationship: Observational assessment of the therapeutic alliance during change and stuck episodes

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Abstract


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The therapeutic alliance has received a great deal of attention both in the field of psychotherapy research and of clinical practice and training for the last four decades (Alexander & Luborsky, 1986; Corbella & Botella, 2003; Horvath, Del Re, Flückiger, & Symonds, 2011; Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Lambert & Ogles, 2004; Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994). To a great extent the popularity of this concept is due to the cumulative findings that support its association with positive treatment outcome along a wide variety of therapeutic models (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Horvath et al., 2011; Lambert & Ogles, 2004; Orlinsky et al., 1994). The effect size linking alliance to outcome has been consistently estimated between .25 and .30 which is a moderate correlation (r = .275), but a significant relationship (Horvath et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, a major question debated within this field of study is the specificity of this association between alliance and outcome. Originally, the most accepted definitions of the alliance considered it a global indicator of the quality of the collaborative

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