

## Critique of Woods Criticism of the Rorschach

From: David Ranks [mailto:David.Ranks@imail.org] Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2009 07:47 To: Neuropsychology Subject: RE: [npsych] help- demand for projective testing

Jason:

Here is a peer-reviewed, published critique of that book.

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Scientific Critique or Confirmation Bias? By Hale Martin, Ph.D.

What is Wrong with the Rorschach? By James M. Wood, M. Teresa Nezworski, Scott O. Lilienfeld, & Howard N. Garb purports to be a scientific critique of the Rorschach. However, my hope to find an unbiased critical review of the Rorschach was disappointed. I found the book replete with thinking errors that led me to question the conclusions, if not the motives of the authors. Moreover, the authors' understanding of psychological assessment in general and of the role of the Rorschach in assessment is inadequate for the task they attempt in this book. Unintentionally, the book presents a powerful argument for more, not less, training in graduate schools in the Rorschach and psychological assessment. Perhaps the most prevalent thinking error in the book is selective abstraction. The authors focus almost exclusively on negative findings without adequately considering positive results. For example, they focus extensively on the fact that approximately 70 studies included in John Exner's volumes are not peer reviewed and published in professional journals. They accurately conclude that some of these studies appear to contain flaws or are too sketchy to be critiqued. While this seems to be a valid criticism of some of Exner's work, the authors pay little attention to the 1,793 studies on the Rorschach published in peer review professional journals between 1977 and 1997 (identified by Hiller, Rosenthal, Bornstein, Berry, & Brunell-Neuleib, 1999). The fact is that there are many good peer reviewed studies of the Rorschach that contribute to its validity that the authors ignore. Similarly they frequently magnify facts that support their beliefs and minimize facts that contradict their beliefs. Selective abstraction is also evident in their attack on Comprehensive System norms. The authors extol the sample reported by Shaffer, Erdberg, and Haroian in 1999, which they present as evidence that the current Comprehensive System norms over pathologize. However, they ignore the obvious flaws in the Shaffer, Erdberg, and Haroian study, such as collecting approximately two thirds of their "normal" sample from volunteer blood

bank donors in California, small sample size ( $n = 123$ ), and using graduate students in training for the critical test administration. The authors of this book justifiably rail against the error discovered in 1999 (by a person "favorably disposed to the Rorschach") that 221 protocols included in the Comprehensive System norms were duplicates. No one could argue that this error was not an egregious one, but the authors fail to mention that when the error was corrected, the norms actually did not change much. They also ignore the fact the Rorschach Workshops has been carefully collecting a new normative sample (at last check  $n = 350$ ) that generally supports the Comprehensive System norms that have been in use. Arbitrary inference and overgeneralization are other thinking errors found throughout the book. In Chapter 1, Wood presents the case of Rose Martelli, in which a psychologist allegedly relied solely on indicators from a Rorschach in the face of "manifest" information to the contrary to negatively impact the outcome of a custody case. As is commonly known among well-trained psychologists, no one test and certainly no one indicator provides sufficient information from which to draw firm conclusions. It is the pattern of scores within tests, the pattern of tests within batteries, and test results in context with all the diverse information that can be gathered that are central to any conclusions that can be drawn in an assessment. This principle is profoundly important to competent assessors. However, Wood inaccurately concludes the injustice that ensued was the fault of the Rorschach, not the psychologist conducting the assessment. He further overgeneralizes this instance to imply that this is how the Rorschach is typically used, and furthermore, implies that these miscarriages of justice based on the Rorschach are common. Erroneous personalization is also apparent in the book. In Chapter 11 the authors assume that Finn's 2002 Presidential address to the Society of Personality Assessment focused on the authors' attacks on the Rorschach. The speech actually focused on assessment in a managed care environment and not the Rorschach or the authors of this book. This personalization is one of several in the book that lead to significant distortions. Furthermore, the authors commit many of the errors they caution against in Chapter 11, including the use of testimonials and anecdotes to support claims and falling victims to their own confirmation bias, among others. The result of all these thinking errors is a distorted and inaccurate analysis of the Rorschach, ironically in the name of science. In general, the authors write as if there is some conspiracy by those "favorably disposed to the Rorschach" to inflate the reliability and validity of the Rorschach. The evidence seems to indicate otherwise. It has been those "favorably disposed to the Rorschach" that have discovered and published the errors the authors report in this book and that have welcomed debate in "their" journals about weaknesses in the Comprehensive System. Finally, the authors include advice to attorneys in Chapter 12 on how to circumvent the APA ethics code to get access to raw test data for use in court. I find this disturbing in that I believe there are reasons for ethical principles, in this instance to protect assessment data

from misuse by those who do not have the expertise to understand it. It seems to me irresponsible if not unethical to encourage others to disregard this concern. In summary, this book does nothing to lead in a responsible direction. It is important to be critical of any scientific endeavor in order to keep it honest, but this book seems less of a scientific critique than strenuous confirmation bias. The book's arguments lead me to value competent training in the Rorschach and psychological assessment, training the authors of this book obviously missed.

Hale Martin, Ph.D. is a graduate of the clinical psychology program at the University of Texas at Austin, an Assistant Professor at Denver University, and a psychologist in private practice.

From: Jason King [mailto:drking@kingassociates.info] Sent: Sunday, January 18, 2009 7:42 AM To: Neuropsychology Subject: Re: [npsych] help- demand for projective testing

Bob,

As one who always maintains a healthy dose of skepticism, I am willing to entertain the possibility that I don't know what I'm talking about. However, it's not just me. The majority of psychologists have rejected the usefulness of Exner's Rorschach procedures, particularly newly-trained folks. I don't know anyone who uses it clinically; although I know there are a few hold-outs left. Many training programs have stopped teaching it at this point or give it a cursory mention since it is of historical interest. It is basically a joke in the views of others outside the field.

You asked what evidence I have. Well, I'd start with the book "What's Wrong with the Rorschach? Science Confronts the Controversial Inkblot Test" <http://www.amazon.com/Rorschach-Science-Confronts-Controversial-Inkblot/dp/078796056X>

I was been trained in both Exner's as well as traditional psychodynamically oriented content analysis approaches to the Rorschach, and in the past regularly I've regularly used both approaches clinically. In sum, I've found Exner's painfully detailed approach in particular to represent little more than an elaborate exercise in smoke and mirrors.

I actually think projective techniques have some limited value, and at one point in psychology's development they were the best methods clinicians had for assessing clinical disorders and personality. However, their limited value mostly came from being used in the hands of a skilled clinician who could draw intuitive inferences from the examinee's behavior and responses, not from Exner's elaborate scoring system.

I appreciate that some people take Exner's system very seriously, and even devote entire careers to specializing in the detailed analyses of texture, color, and other

variables and their various ratios, etc. There are also some people who are very skilled at providing detailed analyses of astrology, reading palms, and other such endeavors. However, those days are gone, and psychology has objective empirically validated procedures now. Having an external referral source, such as the school in this example, attempt to mandate use of the Rorschach is equivalent to someone trying to mandate the use of pneumo-encephalography when we have MRI available.

Jason

--- On Sat, 1/17/09, Robert McIntyre <robert.mcintyre4@gte.net> wrote: From: Robert McIntyre <robert.mcintyre4@gte.net> Subject: Re: [npsych] help- demand for projective testing To: "Neuropsychology" <npsych@neurolist.com> Date: Saturday, January 17, 2009, 11:18 PM

Jason, With all due respect, you don't know what you're talking about.

Bob

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----- Original Message ----- From: Jason King To: Neuropsychology Sent: Saturday, January 17, 2009 1:46 PM Subject: Re: [npsych] help- demand for projective testing

Regarding Rorschach indicators of emotional maturity, possibly these would include the FC:CF+C ratio, and the AdjD index. FC>CF+C, and AdjD=0 in a non MR person would interpret as emotionally reserved and has reasonably good stress tolerance. But in the presence of high L (the typical MR population finding), an FC>CF+C and AdjD=0 may not mean much because the person has not told you much about what it was about each blot that determined their response.

I realize that the above message was offered in a sincere attempt to provide helpful information, and my intent is not to insult its author. However, with all due respect to the Exner method, I believe this detailed analysis of tea leaves contributes about as much as the study of imaginary fabrics for the emperor who had no clothes. As others have mentioned, I would politely explain to the school that contemporary scientific psychology has devised far more valid methods of screening for clinical psychological disorders.

Jason King