

Interpreting the Rorschach

From: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com [mailto:Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com] On Behalf of Gérald Lajoie Sent: Friday, March 20, 2009 12:42 To: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com Subject: RE: [Rorschach_List] evaluations composed of computer reports ations composed of computer reports

Aubrey:

"However, the sequence you describe is the reverse of the one Exner suggests. He suggests forming you initial hypotheses based on the structural data. Then refine these hypotheses using all other sources of information such as qualitative analysis of the verbiage, sequence, history, observations, other tests, etc. This allows the Rorschach data to make its own unique contribution before being clouded you clinical judgment."

Why should clinical judgment be thought of as "clouding" anything: on the contrary, is it not enlightening, even when it comes to making sense out of so-called "structural" data?

I have done qualitative blind analyses of several Exner (published)protocols, and generally, my hypotheses were closer to the (published) case histories than most of what Exner got from his SS.

This was a bit disquieting, so I tried to understand why that was so.

My first impression was that the analysis based on the SS were stereotyped, made of several one-fits-all canned interpretations. Several were not particularly relevant.

Second, the SS is based on the scores, that is: on things scored. Therefore all the unscored information is lost. (Keep in mind that scoring depends in part on the working alliance, proper administration, proper inquiry, sufficient knowledge of the criteria...). Also, the scores may be technically "right", but they do not take the context into consideration (tone of voice, attitude...). Finally, some scores may be technically right, but interpretatively wrong: when you score a gun as Sc, or consider all FD as signs of introspection, or all M as indications of directed thought.

Third, interpretations are based on research results. Several questions come up: how convincing, valid, or sound were those results; how relevant was the methodology ? Do they really apply to my case; how many alternative interpretations were not tested, (not tested means not validated in a certain way; this is not identical to not valid)?

Fourth, interpretations are based on computations that may be very right, medium or very wrong; as is the case of the D score when you have several bad M's or uncontrolled Color responses.

Those are some of the reasons why SS may mean "Shaky Stuff".

Of course, the same criticism can apply to qualitative analysis: too much subjectivity, overgeneralizations based on isolated parts of theories (canned interpretations), prejudice, lack of clinical experience and knowledge, selective perception.

Yet, if both tools are used with rigor, they can achieve accurate understanding of a given testee.

Psychology has been influenced more by quantitative research than by qualitative research (which is to be found more in sociology, anthropology, etc.) But I find qualitative methodology not only extremely demanding, but also closer to the daily practice of clinical psychology: a fact (S wears a black dress), a first hypothesis, she weeps (second fact), is hypothesis one confirmed, or infirmed, etc?

So, moving from the very first response (and of course, pre-response and para-response phenomena), you can design, check, reformulate, discard clinical hypotheses, and then look at the SS to see if this overall look may pinpoint something you missed.

Anyways, for one, I have never been able to score responses without analyzing them at the same time. Sequence is so incredibly rich, and it has no room in the SS.

From: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com [mailto:Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com] On Behalf Of Washington, Aubrey O. Sent: Friday, March 20, 2009 14:39 To: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com Subject: RE: [Rorschach_List] evaluations composed of computer reports

Gérald and Pam,

You may be surprised to hear that I agree with everything you have said. Evaluating assessment data is a combination of both sequential and simultaneous processing. We are constantly gathering (or ignoring) and evaluating (correctly or not) thousands of bits of information about the person we are assessing. Rorschach structural data is only one small part of that. I was trying to describe (perhaps not very well) where Exner places the structural data in a sequential analysis of all the data. It is a partial skeleton of the personality description.

I keep getting this image of a forensic anthropologist trying to reconstruct what a particular person looked like from a pile of bones retrieved from a mass grave. Most of the bones might belong to the right person, but some bones might be missing and some bones might belong to someone else or the family dog. If he finds two right femurs, he must decide which one to keep and which one to throw out. Based on his knowledge of anatomy, he begins to reconstruct the basic skeleton, incomplete to it may be. When he has the basic shape, size, and sex of the person, he can start adding muscle, flesh, hair, clothing, etc. These important details may be based on other evidence gathered at the scene, knowledge of the culture, etc.

Hmm. This seems to be spiraling out of control. I'd better stop here. I need a weekend!

Aubrey

From: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com [mailto:Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com] On Behalf of Pamela Olsen Sent: Friday, March 20, 2009 11:26 To: Rorschach_List@yahoogroups.com Subject: Re: [Rorschach_List] evaluations composed of computer reports

I think we begin to form hypotheses within a minute or so of when the patient walks through the door, just in response to body language, tone of voice, etc. These hypotheses are continually revised in response to new data that comes in, which might be in the form of factual information, clinical observation, or test data. I don't think one comes before the other or has priority, except that there is a sequential unfolding of any evaluation in this world. Tests are just another perspective.

We hold all of this info and shifting perspectives as we continue to gather information. It is only when we finally put it in writing that it comes together. I often find myself adjusting my opinion even as I write, and sometimes post-report.

For me, what test data often does is help me to articulate what I'm seeing but perhaps haven't been able to articulate, or even thematize (if that's a word), until I see those scores. Then I can reflect again on what I've observed or been told, and make better sense of it.

For those of you who have skied in a white-out, it's a bit like this: you kind of bend your knees to absorb any new moguls that pop up that you can't see until you're upon them. If you relax, stay open to whatever comes, and let yourself respond accordingly, and then you can get down the hill without falling. If you tighten up because you insist that the hill be a particular way when it is not, then you'll fall.

I love how it all comes together. My hands have become quite arthritic (thumbs) from all the typing I do, and I wonder why I continue to do so many assessments. But they continue to be one of the most interesting aspects of this work. I just wish people's lives didn't hang in the balance quite so much, depending on what we say and how we say it.

On 20 Mar 2009, at 10:26 AM, Washington, Aubrey O. wrote:

It sounds like you put good effort into evaluating all the data you have. However, the sequence you describe is the reverse of the one Exner suggests. He suggests forming your initial hypotheses based on the structural data. Then refine these hypotheses using all other sources of information such as qualitative analysis of the verbiage, sequence, history, observations, other tests, etc. This allows the Rorschach data to make its own unique contribution before being clouded by your clinical judgment. Of course Exner is coming from the assumption that interpretations based on the structural data are empirically based and therefore more reliable and potentially valid. This is an assumption that is clearly truer for some interpretations than others.

Interesting point! I think for me it's hard *not* to start forming hypotheses based on all the other "stuff" that I have access to, as the information rolls in. And I want to be clear, as I'm getting more and more conversant with the structural summary calculations, that previewing is more and more reflecting mental calculations of the structural summary ("gee, that seemed like it was a lot of W and not very much M, I wonder how that aspirational ratio is going to compare to the norming sample").

I'm an old scientist, so I'm used to holding lots of different and potentially contradictory data simultaneously and not being too in love with any of my multiple competing hypotheses. It has certainly happened (many times) that I form an initial impression of a person from some sources that I then get more statistically robust data from other sources that calls the initial interpretation into question. Actually, I tend to think those are the most interesting analyses, because usually the person is being misinterpreted by other people in his life, too, which is part of why things are going so far south.

Alberto writes:

only another person can validly reconstruct the personality makeup of the test subject from the test record and data by establishing a kind of 'mirroring' human relationship with the latter (acknowledging all the 'projecting' caveats that implies).

Amen, brother! I really like that way of putting it. I think that part of what I'm really enjoying about learning Rorschach is that it really lets me feel what it's like to be inside someone else's experience. I can do that to a good extent in the cognitive and academic domains through those kinds of testing, but, more than the other projectives I'm learning, I feel like the Rorschach is letting me get a really powerful and multifaceted window on the person's world.