

Reality Testing, the Rorschach and Dvoskin

From: "Joel A. Dvoskin" <JoeltheD@AOL.COM>

Subject: Re: Test standards

To: PSYLAW-L@LISTSERV.UNL.EDU

In a message dated 5/31/2006 6:13:31 A.M. US Mountain Standard Time, gregdeclue@MAILMT.COM writes:

Now here is Michael's example from his psylaw post: "Here's an example. I wrote and testified that a parent was unfit (or that was the gist: I don't testify on the ultimate issue unless I have to), partly because she could not always perceive reality accurately enough to tailor her responses to the demand characteristics of the situation. As an example, I cited her answer to a Rorschach card that looks like a person in profile, with arms, legs, head, torso. The part that looks like arms, she saw as a second leg. I testified that I was not merely inferring a problem with reality perception, I had observed an instance of it."

Michael and Greg -

Here's the part I don't get. Why would you want to use an inkblot card to infer that her poor reality testing will interfere with the ability to parent? Without a real-life example of poor parenting, the blot would seem useless or misleading, especially in light of the fact that (according to Bob) "normal" people give 7% Minus responses. (Or is it that 7% of normals give Minus responses? In either case, there is an error rate to be dealt with.)

It would make more sense to me if you provided examples of the woman forcing her son to put shoes on his hands, and used the Rorschach to offer an hypothesis or explanation about why a mother would do such a thing. But I'd still be more impressed with the poor mothering than I would with her response to one card.

Let me add that many parents have some trouble testing reality, and their kids turn out just fine. Joann Nicholson has done a ton of research on parenting among women with serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders such as Schizophrenia. (See <http://www.parentingwell.info/resources.html> ) I believe that she would argue that Michael's inference is not a fair one, and that the abilities, challenges, supports, and barriers for parents with mental illness are very complicated.

I think it is fair to say that I tend to be conservative than most of my psychologist colleagues about accusing others of poor reality testing, especially when the accusation is based on an artificial stimulus such as art or inkblots. Art Dude looks at a Jackson Pollock painting and sees things that I cannot see. Since there are more of us Cretans than there are Art Dudes, I win the consensus. To me and my legions of art-impaired friends, the painting, however pleasing to the eye, is just splashes of paint. But is Art Dude psychotic?

To take another example, conservative Christians, Jews, or Muslims might believe that the ideas of an atheist are literally "crazy," and vice versa. But I've seen no evidence that these fundamentally different and irreconcilable beliefs about "reality" -- it doesn't get more real than whether or not there is a God -- result in different outcomes in child rearing.

So my preference would be to look at actual child-rearing behaviors, especially abuse and neglect. It is, in my opinion, a fair hypothesis that kids can adapt to some weird parental ideas -- whether they are crazy, controversial, off-kilter, or merely creative -- so long as they are loved, protected, and nurtured.

Sorry for the long note. By the way, this has been really interesting, and I thank Michael for so gracefully enduring all of these questions and challenges to his point of view.

Joel

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