

From: Wood, James <jawood@UTEP.EDU>
To: PSYLAWS-L@crcvms.unl.edu <PSYLAWS-L@crcvms.unl.edu>
Date: Sunday, September 09, 2001 7:28 PM
Subject: Comprehensive System Norms

Dear List Members,

The problems with the Comprehensive System for the Rorschach (CS) have become increasingly clear over the past few years. There are problems with scoring reliability and validity. Perhaps most seriously, the evidence is now overwhelming that the norms for many important CS variables are seriously "off" and probably have been for over 15 years.

The problems are laid out in our article in the most recent issue of *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* (Wood, Nezworski, Garb, & Lilienfeld, "The misperception of psychopathology: Problems with the norms of the Comprehensive System for the Rorschach").

In our article, we aggregated the data from 32 different studies, including every published article on the CS that we could find that used a non-patient sample (excluding studies from Exner's Rorschach workshops) and a collection of dissertations that also used non-patient samples. We found that the means and standard deviations reported by researchers for important CS variables diverge substantially from the CS norms, although the aggregated results are quite close to the numbers reported independently in a recent study by Shaffer et al, and in international studies. In other words, the results reported in our article are very close to what other researchers are reporting, and all are similarly discrepant from the CS norms.

Our article is followed by five commentaries. The three commentaries by John Hunsley (a Rorschach critic), Edward Aronow (a noted Rorschach scholar), and Thomas Widiger (unaligned in the current Rorschach controversy) all agree that there is compelling evidence of serious problems with the CS norms. The two commentaries by John Exner (creator of the CS) and Greg Meyer (a proponent of the CS and incoming editor of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*) disagree.

The journal also contains our reply to these various comments.

I'd like to respond to a few of the remarks that Robert McIntyre is making about this article, and an article that we published last year in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* (Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000, "The scientific status of projective techniques"). McIntyre's postings, which are appearing on two lists simultaneously (SSCP-net and the Psychology-Law list) contain several inaccuracies and some fairly serious allegations about selective reporting. If you are weary of the debate about the CS, feel free to delete this message without reading further.

1. McIntyre is quite right that we believe there's an ethical issue

here. The norms for many important CS variables are in error and tend to make ordinary people look seriously disturbed. A psychologist who uses these norms to evaluate a client runs the risk of concluding that the client is much more disturbed than he or she really is. McIntyre argues that he and other psychologists who use the Rorschach cross-check their scoring. But although cross-checking may improve the reliability of scoring, it has no effect on the norms problem. Even if a Rorschach is impeccably scored, it ultimately must be compared to the norms - and as our article shows, the norms appear to be seriously in error. Besides, such cross-checking seems to be quite rare. Only a fraction of psychologists do it, and these psychologists only do it for a subset of the Rorschachs they administer.

2. McIntyre writes:

"Wood et al (2001) seize upon the Schaffer reference above as likely proof for their thesis (the Rorschach overpathologizes), then go on to selectively present other studies in support of their contention...."

Shaffer, Erdberg & Haroian (1999; "Current non-patient data for the Rorschach, WAIS-R, and MMPI-2", *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 73, 105-116) tested a group of 123 non-patient adults in California. Although the participants looked fine on the WAIS and MMPI-2, they looked awfully "sick" when compared to the norms of the CS. McIntyre mentions that many of the participants came from a blood bank, which may give the impression these were homeless people selling their blood for cash. I checked with Shaffer, however, and he replied that it's against the law to sell blood in California. All these blood donors were volunteers at a community blood bank (obliging people -- volunteered to give blood, volunteered to take the Rorschach too).

We wondered whether Shaffer et al.'s findings had been replicated by other researchers. That's when we collected the 32 studies in our review. As I said, the aggregated results from the 32 studies were very similar to what Shaffer et al. found - and similarly discrepant from the CS norms. McIntyre says we "seized upon" the Shaffer study. I think it's simpler and more accurate to say that we replicated it.

3. As to the allegation that we "selectively present" other studies:

This is simply wrong. We did a thorough search of the published literature and put in every study we could find that reported the relevant CS variables for non-patient samples. Our search criteria and search strategy are reported in the Method of our article. In his Comment, Gregory Meyer identified some effect sizes that we had missed. In response (as we describe in our Reply) we recalculated the effect sizes using Meyer's additions, but found they didn't change the means and standard deviations by much at all (most of our aggregated samples already contained 600-800 subjects, so the addition of a few effect sizes just didn't make much difference).

4. McIntyre criticizes our inclusion of dissertations in our review. As

John Hunsley has pointed out, meta-analysis has shown that it's a good idea to include unpublished studies as well as published studies in reviews. In our article, we included a table comparing the results from the dissertations with the results from the published articles. They were very similar. McIntyre suggests that these graduate students may be doing a poor job in administering or scoring the Rorschach - if so, they are getting results that are very similar to the results of the more experienced researchers.

5. McIntyre lifts a sentence out of our article on "The Scientific Status of Projective Techniques" and suggests that we don't really know how the Rorschach is administered and scored. In our article, we were not trying to give a blow-by-blow description of every element in Rorschach administration. In fact, my co-authors and I know quite well about the "Inquiry" stage in administering the Rorschach, and all of us were trained to administer and score the test. But quite frankly, isn't this really beside the point? The issue is not whether Jim Wood and his colleagues are bona-fide and long-time Rorschach users, but whether the Comprehensive System is scientifically sound.

6. McIntyre also asks:

> For example, the MMPI non-patient norms based only on
>Minnesotans visiting relatives at the Minnesota state hospital were
used for 40 years, >before the MMPI-2 came out.
>Then the MMPI -1 was continued in use without anything like the
>aggressive tactics used in critiques of the Rorschach.
>Where were Wood et al then?

At the time McIntyre is talking about, I was in grade school, high school, college and graduate school.

Apparently it strikes him as unfair that we are picking on the Rorschach instead of the MMPI.

But.... the problems with the original MMPI norms were corrected over 10 years ago, and now belong to the history of clinical assessment. By contrast, Exner and Weiner do not seem convinced that the norms for the CS even need correcting.

Certainly Exner doesn't say so in his Comment on our article. Last fall, I contacted Exner and asked him if we could see the data on which the norms were based. He declined.

In closing, I just want to point out that the numbers in our article aren't the isolated and skewed findings of Rorschach critics. They are based on 32 studies from researchers who like the Rorschach. And the aggregated results in our article are quite consistent with the findings of Shaffer et al. and the international samples that have been collected. The evidence comes from many different sources and is quite consistent: The

CS norms have serious problems, and tend to make normal people look "sick".

James M. Wood, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Texas at El Paso
El Paso, TX 79968
E-mail: jawood@utep.edu
Phone: (915)747-6570
Fax: (915)747-6553