

Rorschach Indicators of Trauma/Dissociation

Dissociation

(From Leavitt & Labott, 1997, Psychological Assessment. Volume 9 (3), 244-249)

1. References to percepts being seen thru veils, fog, mist so that objects look blurry, unclear or unreal. Ex: People surrounded by clouds or walking through the mist
2. Percepts defined as vague or far away from other percepts on the same card. Must convey an exaggerated sense of depth perception or perspective (looking up at a monster on Card IV doesn't make the cut). Ex: People at a distance looking through something that is very deep and blurry.
3. Percepts described as shifting, moving or changing rapidly. EX: a tornado blowing everything apart with debris flying everywhere. Some types of time-lapse photography percepts may also apply.

Of the above 3: 0 = minimal dissociative symptoms
 1 = intermediate dissociative symptoms
 2 or more = high level of dissociative symptoms likely

Scores greater than one should be followed up. It is not permissible to diagnose dissociation on the basis of a Rorschach alone. These references are meant to alert you to possible areas of concern.

Trauma and PTSD

(From International Handbook of Traumatic Stress, 1993, Chapter 16, Patti Levin, The Trauma Center in Brookline, MA) Note: These guidelines are derived from group data and may or may not be seen in any given individual protocol. They are intended to give you a jumping off point for conceptualizing your thinking.

1. Relatively high number of Y, V and m responses (Signals internal tension, the most intensely painful affects and a sense of being out of control and/or a helpless, powerless spectator).
2. Relatively high level of M- and M (none) responses (difficulty connecting to people and attempts to detach from or disregard traumatic intrusions).

3. Relatively normal scores on Schizophrenia Index (SCHZI) with cognitive slippage restricted to FABCOM2 (the 2 unimaginable events of the patient and the trauma coming together at the same time).
4. Relatively little use of any kind of color (FC+CF+C+Cn)
5. When color is present, FC:CF+C that is extreme in either direction (alternating flooding of affect or psychic numbing). Most commonly, CF+C will be > FC.
6. Relatively low Afr. and an unusual amount of attention to small, idiosyncratic detail (Dd). (Whatever the preferred premorbid coping style, the organism is now trying to back away from pain and affect and trauma. Denial and avoidance are used as a way of coping with uncontained or unmanageable affect. Selective attending to the small details of a situation is one way to do this.)
7. Positive findings on the Hypervigilance Index (HVI) and an elevation in the use of clothing contents (Cg). (Represents the tendency to be post-traumatically overly alert to signs of danger or threat in both daily routines and relationships and a need to maintain a guarded, self-protective position).
8. Percepts that directly reflect or refer to the patientsÆ own trauma.
9. X+% low and/or Xu%, X-% high,
WITH
Number of Populars Average
AND
D scores relatively low (Suggests that pt. is aware of conventional reality but is unable to modulate feelings in a way that allows more adaptive behavior vs. pt. has poor reality testing.)
10. Zf high (constant attempts at meaning-making), but Zd low (hasty or impulsive decision-making in an attempt to close own painful stimuli quickly).
11. a:p ratio 3:1 in either direction (Reflects rigid, inflexible thinking, i.e., getting ôstuckö in the trauma.)
12. Relatively high level of PSV responses (Again, an indication of ôstuck-ness).

13. On the Intellectualization Index, only AB (abstract content) may be present at slightly higher levels (Patient tries to intellectualize away psychic threats; to understand or make meaning out of what is inherent illogical, i.e., a reason for the trauma, but is unsuccessful).
14. Contents of sex (Sx) and blood (Bl) are more likely seen than in non-trauma profiles. (Suggests loss of emotional control or filtering.)
15. Elevations in space (S) response may signal a healthy underlying anger or hostility.
16. Hd and (Hd) may be relatively high partially as a by-product of many Dd responses. (This suggests both suspiciousness of others and attempts to contain situations by attending only to parts of it.)
17. Increased incidence of MOR, Vista (V) and An responses likely correspond to the damaged self-image that is characteristic of PTSD.

COMPARISON OF DSM CATEGORIES AND RORSCHACH VARIABLES

DSM

RORSCHACH

Re-experiencing Symptoms

| | |
|--|--|
| Intrusions | M-; CF+C>FC; m&Y; HVI; PSV; Sx&Bl |
| Dreams | Indices not found |
| Dissociative symptoms: Flashbacks, etc. | C; concrete, trauma-related responses, m&Y; M-; M (no form); FABCOM2; X+% low; X-% high;AB |
| Triggers | m&Y; CF+C>FC; D low; maybe V |

Avoidance

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Thoughts | Afr low; AB |
| Situations | Afr low; HVI; Zd; Hd>H |
| Amnesia | Indices not found |
| Diminished interest | Afr low; brief records |
| Detachment | M (no form); Afr; M-; HVI; no T; FD; Pure H<2 |
| Restricted range of affect | Afr; FC+CF+C+Cn |
| Sense of doom | HVI; May have many MOR |

Arousal Symptoms

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Difficulty with sleep | Indices not found |
| Irritability | m & Y; AdjD score |

Difficulty concentrating

Maybe Pure C; Zd

Hypervigilance

HVI

Startle

Maybe Pure C

Physical hyper-reactivity

Maybe Afr & CF+C>FC, MAYBE Pure C; Maybe concrete, trauma-related response