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Title: What's Wrong With the Rorschach? What's Wrong With Opponents of the Rorschach?

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Abstract. This article provides a political psychological commentary on the contemporary controversy concerning the reliability and validity of the Rorschach.

There is a long tradition of psychologist crusaders on a mission to identify and debunk the softness of clinical psychological judgment in contrast to the hardness of physical sciences predictability. These engagers in games of j'accuse have most often either contrasted the goodness of statistical (actuarial) judgment with the badness of non-statistical judgment or the goodness of objective assessment with the badness of projective assessment. What the crusaders seem to have in common is a quest to contort theory and methodology to a reality that may not exist. Interestingly, this is the very thing they attribute to the targets of their crusade.

A very recent case in point is the textbook by Wood et al. (2003) that attacks the reliability and validity of psychological assessment via the Rorschach--commonly referred to by the lay public as the inkblot test. The authors' indictment includes assertions that (1) the interpretation of Rorschach data does not rely on sufficient criteria to differentiate between clinical and non-clinical populations, (2) scores on various Rorschach indices are suspect because they are dependent on the subjective judgments of individuals who administer the Rorschach, and (3) scores on various Rorschach indices do not measure what they are reputed to measure. We are left with the conclusion attributed in The New York Times to Wood that tarot cards would work almost as well the Rorschach in helping to make psychological judgments.

Differentiating Between Clinical and Non-Clinical Populations. This topic is but one example of a larger set bearing on the Rorschach's accuracy (based on various subscores, in turn, based on the raw data of test responses) in making socio-legal judgments. Such judgments include not only who may be correctly or incorrectly assigned a label of a specific emotional or mental disorder, but also who may or may not be a good or better parent in custody evaluations, a perpetrator of misdemeanors and felonies, a competent formal leader for an organization, a safe bet to be awarded a security clearance or other position requiring significant trust, and so on.

One can strongly make the case that specific Rorschach scores have inadequate predictive validity in such matters, but this should not be surprising, because the Rorschach was not constructed with this intent and is not used in this manner by competent practitioners. Instead, the Rorschach is reputed by competent practitioners to allow meaningful inferences to be made about intrapsychic and behavioral tendencies--in conjunction with the data of others psychological tests and other life data about the individual in question. Thus, damning the Rorschach for not doing what it is not supposed to do may only be a powerful rhetorical gambit in the politics of applied psychology, not an immutable sign of eternal damnation.

Subjective Judgments. One can best understand attacks on the Rorschach for its subjectivity in three different ways. First, one may faithfully record the raw data of a response to a Rorschach card, but then--before some sort of interpretive analysis is applied--one must code the response in terms of its

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

semantic content, its goodness of fit to the visual stimulus, and many other aspects. This coding is unfavorably contrasted by Rorschach opponents with objective psychological assessment wherein the coding of raw data has been already been built into the scoring.

However, the reliability of non-built-in coding can be demonstrated to be high enough not to ineluctably threaten validity. In fact, whether coding is built-in or not, the bottom line of the meaningfulness and accuracy of interpreting coded data is a separate issue.

Second, one may interpret raw data directly based solely on semantic and syntactical meaning that, in turn, may be suggestive of signs, symbols, and other products of semiotics. Rorschach opponents consider such an enterprise non-scientific and subject to a host of dysfunctional cognitive heuristics.

However, from an epistemological perspective, formal empirical and experimental approaches do not have a market on knowledge and something that might be called Truth. Reason and logic, faith, anecdotal and nonsystematic empiricism and experimentalism, and appeals to other standards of authority including one's intuition have their place in the human enterprise of knowing. To constrain acceptable psychological assessment to several variants of logical positivism--when even the putative exemplars of the approach, theoretical and experimental physicists, have effectively critiqued it--exemplifies both hubris and a naive philosophy of science. In fact, a belief that human psychology must, a priori and a posteriori, be most amenable to reified approaches from the physical sciences may itself be a lucrative target of assessment.

Third, the Rorschach assessor is said to be employing mind, while the objective assessor is not. But Rorschach opponents can no more jettison mind, whatever it might denote and connote, than anyone else. Mind is mind, whether through employing a sophisticated set of algorithms or a nonverbalized hunch.

Not Measuring What is Supposed To Be Measured. Claiming that the Rorschach does not measure what its good-faith users claim it measures presupposes that there are measures of what the Rorschach is reputed to measure that, indeed, measure the latter. Rorschach opponents round up the usual suspects of such measures and claim insufficient convergent and divergent validity on the part of the Rorschach.

However, these usual suspects have their own problems. Their claims to validity may be based on huge samples employed during standardization so that very small differences between subject groups are still statistically significant. As well, nomothetic truths may have little utility in the idiographic judgment of a specific case unless measures of variability around some norm are extremely small. In addition, there may not even be alternative and valid measures of much of what good-faith Rorschach users claim to be searching for.

One might well conclude that conflict between supporters of objective and projective and that between statistical and non-statistical are as much ideological, or even religious, as scientific. In fact, one's position on the conflict may be as meaningful an indicator of one's own psychology as other commonly used personality criteria, constructs, and means of assessment. All of this can be apperceived within a political context--competitors seeking to satisfy infinite needs with only finite resources available in a public forum.

(See Exner, J.E., Jr. (1999). *The Rorschach: Measurement concepts and Issues of validity*. In S. E. Embretson, & S.L. Hershberger (Eds.). *The new rules of measurement: What every psychologist and*

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

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