Method of Ink Blot Test

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These tests were developed to be used in clinical, organizational, and human resource departments. Some psychologists might still use these tests today for personality assessments or assessments of unconscious motives or feelings. However, the American Psychological Association discourages use of official ink blot tests. Because of the early and untimely death of both of these men, resulting in the lack of a key to reading the answers given by patients, psychologists have been skeptical of using the ink blots as a reliable source in clinical work. Many studies have been conducted trying to deduce an answer to whether or not to use the ink blots. An overview of past ink blot studies, found that the ink blots do show a tendency towards certain data but there is a lack of research and evidence actually using the ink blots clinically.

Psychologists who use projective tests, like the ink blot test, argue that they are useful at tapping into underlying thoughts and desires that not even the patient is aware that they are having. Since a projective test requires a highly trained psychologist to analyze the data and determine what it means, it has faced criticism. Projective tests, such as the Rorschach test have been criticized due to issues with inter-rater reliability, test-retest reliability (repeatability), validity, biases, and issues with cultural sensitivity and norms.

One advantage of projective tests is that individuals taking the test are free to answer however they see fit. Since projective tests are subjective, participants

don't have any constraints on how they answer. The subjectivity of these tests is why psychologists thought that it measured one's most inner thoughts and feelings and/or ones personality. The more unstructured stimuli, the more the participant reveals about themselves. This contrasts with objective tests where the answers are clearly put into categories and participants are very limited in how they can answer. While objective tests can still measure emotions, thoughts, and personality, the answers are already pre-set thereby limiting the answers of the participant. This in theory, would hinder the process of stating one's most inner thoughts & feelings. Another advantage is the ambiguity of the projective tests makes the purpose of the test unknown. This is an advantage because if participants know what they are being tested for, they are more likely to socially conform and mask their true answers.

The procedure for administration and measurement varies by each ink test, however, they are all based around how the participant responds to ambiguous stimuli. The Howard ink blot test for example, has participants responding to one card at a time with the ink blots on it. They are then told to tell the psychologist everything they see and what it might represent to them. Time of responses from start to finish is also measured with this test.[10] For the Rorschach test, the subject is sitting side by side with the researcher and is presented with the 10 official ink blot cards one at a time. After they have all been presented once, and the participant has responded, the cards are presented again and the participant is told to rearrange the cards to match what they saw the first time. The researcher monitors every movement, and everything the participant says aloud as well, and records them. This differs from the Howard test in that the cards are re-presented to the participants. Tests like the Blacky pictures test and the Thematic apperception test involve making up narratives for the pictures presented to the participants. Based on these narratives, psychologists can assess personality and unconscious thoughts and motives. While all these projective tests have different procedures and types of measurement, they are all thought to measure one's personality, one's thoughts and one's emotions; including those that are from the unconscious mind of the participant. Dr. Rakesh Kumar wrote a book Rorschach Inkblot Test: A Guide to Modified Scoring System, which is his interpretation of how to administer, score, and diagnose based on the ink blot tests.

Method

The Rorschach test is appropriate for subjects from the age of five to adulthood. The administrator and subject typically sit next to each other at a table, with the administrator slightly behind the subject. Side-by-side seating of the examiner and the subject is used to reduce any effects of inadvertent cues from the examiner to the subject. In other words, side-by-side seating mitigates the possibility that the examiner will accidentally influence the subject's responses. This is to facilitate a "relaxed but controlled atmosphere".

There are ten official inkblots, each printed on a separate white card, approximately 18 by 24 cm in size. Each of the blots has near perfect bilateral symmetry. Five inkblots are of black ink, two are of black and red ink and three are multicolored, on a white background.

After the test subject has seen and responded to all of the inkblots (*free association* phase), the tester then presents them again one at a time in a set sequence for the subject to study: the subject is asked to note where they see what they originally saw and what makes it look like that (*inquiry* phase). The subject is usually asked to hold the cards and may rotate them. Whether the cards are rotated, and other related factors such as whether permission to rotate them is asked, may expose personality traits and normally contributes to the assessment.

As the subject is examining the inkblots, the psychologist writes down everything the subject says or does, no matter how trivial. Analysis of responses is recorded by the test administrator using a tabulation and scoring sheet and, if required, a separate location chart.

The general goal of the test is to provide data about cognition and personality variables such as motivations, response tendencies, cognitive operations, affectivity, and personal/interpersonal perceptions. The underlying assumption is that an individual will class external stimuli based on person-specific perceptual sets, and including needs, base motives, conflicts, and that this clustering process is representative of the process used in real-life situations.

Methods of interpretation differ. Rorschach scoring systems have been described as a system of pegs on which to hang one's knowledge of personality. The most widely used method in the United States is based on the work of Exner. Administration of the test to a group of subjects, by means of

projected images, has also occasionally been performed, but mainly for research rather than diagnostic purposes.

Test administration is not to be confused with test interpretation:

The interpretation of a Rorschach record is a complex process. It requires a wealth of knowledge concerning personality dynamics generally as well as considerable experience with the Rorschach method specifically. Proficiency as a Rorschach *administrator* can be gained within a few months. However, even those who are able and qualified to become Rorschach *interpreters* usually remain in a "learning stage" for a number of years.

Features or categories

The interpretation of the Rorschach test is not based primarily on the contents of the response, i.e., *what* the individual sees in the inkblot (the *content*). In fact, the contents of the response are only a comparatively small portion of a broader cluster of variables that are used to interpret the Rorschach data: for instance, information is provided by the time taken before providing a response for a card can be significant (taking a long time can indicate "shock" on the card). As well as by any comments the subject may make in addition to providing a direct response.

In particular, information about *determinants* (the aspects of the inkblots that triggered the response, such as form and color) and *location* (which details of the inkblots triggered the response) is often considered more important than content, although there is contrasting evidence. "Popularity" and "originality" of responses can also be considered as basic dimensions in the analysis.

Content

The goal in coding content of the Rorschach is to categorize the objects that the subject describes in response to the inkblot. There are 27 established codes for identifying the name of the descriptive object. The codes are classified and include terms such as "human", "nature", "animal", "abstract", "clothing", "fire", and "x-ray", to name a few. Content described that does not have a code already established should be coded using the code "idiographic contents" with the shorthand code being "Idio." Items are also coded for statistical popularity (or, conversely, originality).

More than any other feature in the test, content response can be controlled consciously by the subject, and may be elicited by very disparate factors, which makes it difficult to use content alone to draw any conclusions about the subject's personality; with certain individuals, content responses may

potentially be interpreted directly, and some information can at times be obtained by analyzing thematic trends in the whole set of content responses (which is only feasible when several responses are available), but in general content cannot be analyzed outside of the context of the entire test record.

Location

Identifying the location of the subject's response is another element scored in the Rorschach system. Location refers to how much of the inkblot was used to answer the question. Administrators score the response "W" if the whole inkblot was used to answer the question, "D" if a commonly described part of the blot was used, "Dd" if an uncommonly described or unusual detail was used, or "S" if the white space in the background was used. A score of W is typically associated with the subject's motivation to interact with his or her surrounding environment. D is interpreted as one having efficient or adequate functioning. A high frequency of responses coded Dd indicate some maladjustment within the individual. Responses coded S indicate an oppositional or uncooperative test subject.

Determinants

Systems for Rorschach scoring generally include a concept of "determinants": These are the factors that contribute to establishing the similarity between the inkblot and the subject's content response about it. They can also represent certain basic experiential-perceptual attitudes, showing aspects of the way a subject perceives the world. Rorschach's original work used only *form*, *color* and *movement* as determinants. However currently, another major determinant considered is *shading*, which was inadvertently introduced by poor printing quality of the inkblots. Rorschach initially disregarded shading, since the inkblots originally featured uniform saturation, but later recognized it as a significant factor.

Form is the most common determinant, and is related to intellectual processes. *Color* responses often provide direct insight into one's emotional life. *Movement* and *shading* have been considered more ambiguously, both in definition and interpretation. Rorschach considered *movement* only as the experiencing of actual motion, while others have widened the scope of this determinant, taking it to mean that the subject sees something "going on".

More than one determinant can contribute to the formation of the subject's perception. Fusion of two determinants is taken into account, while also assessing which of the two constituted the primary contributor. For example, "*form-color*" implies a more refined control of impulse than "*color-form*". It is,

indeed, from the relation and balance among determinants that personality can be most readily inferred.

Symmetry of the test items

A characteristic of the Rorschach inkblots is their symmetry. For many, this is unexceptional, but Rorschach, and subsequent researchers, considered the issue. Rorschach experimented with both asymmetric and symmetric images before choosing the latter, giving the explanation:

Asymmetric figures are rejected by many subjects; symmetry supplied part of the necessary artistic composition. It has a disadvantage in that it tends to make answers somewhat stereotyped. On the other hand, symmetry makes conditions the same for right and left handed subjects; furthermore, it facilitates interpretation for certain blocked subjects. Finally, symmetry makes possible the interpretation of whole scenes.

Exner scoring system

The *Exner scoring system*, also known as the *Rorschach Comprehensive System* (RCS), is the standard method for interpreting the Rorschach test. It was developed in the 1960s by <u>John E. Exner</u>, as a more rigorous system of analysis. It has been extensively validated and shows high <u>inter-rater reliability</u>. In 1969, Exner published *The Rorschach Systems*, a concise description of what would be later called "the Exner system". He later published a study in multiple volumes called *The Rorschach: A Comprehensive system*, the most accepted full description of his system.

Creation of the new system was prompted by the realization that at least five related, but ultimately different methods were in common use at the time, with a sizeable minority of examiners not employing any recognized method at all, basing instead their judgment on subjective assessment, or arbitrarily mixing characteristics of the various standardized systems.

The key components of the Exner system are the clusterization of Rorschach variables and a sequential search strategy to determine the order in which to analyze them, framed in the context of standardized administration, objective, reliable coding and a representative normative database. The system places a lot of emphasis on a <u>cognitive triad</u> of *information processing*, related to how the subject processes input data, *cognitive <u>mediation</u>*, referring to the way information is transformed and identified, and *<u>ideation</u>*.

In the system, responses are scored with reference to their level of vagueness or synthesis of multiple images in the blot, the location of the response, which

of a variety of determinants is used to produce the response (i.e., what makes the inkblot look like what it is said to resemble), the form quality of the response (to what extent a response is faithful to how the actual inkblot looks), the contents of the response (what the respondent actually sees in the blot), the degree of mental organizing activity that is involved in producing the response, and any illogical, incongruous, or incoherent aspects of responses. "Bat" is a popular response to the first card.

Using the scores for these categories, the examiner then performs a series of calculations producing a structural summary of the test data. The results of the structural summary are interpreted using existing research data on personality characteristics that have been demonstrated to be associated with different kinds of responses.

With the Rorschach plates (the ten inkblots), the area of each blot which is distinguished by the client is noted and coded—typically as "commonly selected" or "uncommonly selected". There were many different methods for coding the areas of the blots. Exner settled upon the area coding system promoted by S. J. Beck (1944 and 1961). This system was in turn based upon Klopfer's (1942) work.

As pertains to response form, a concept of "form quality" was present from the earliest of Rorschach's works, as a subjective judgment of how well the form of the subject's response matched the inkblots (Rorschach would give a higher form score to more "original" yet good form responses), and this concept was followed by other methods, especially in Europe; in contrast, the Exner system solely defines "good form" as a matter of word occurrence frequency, reducing it to a measure of the subject's distance to the population average.

Performance assessment system (R-PAS)

Rorschach performance assessment system (R-PAS) is a scoring method created by several members of the Rorschach Research Council. They believed that the Exner scoring system was in need of an update, but after Exner's death, the Exner family forbade any changes to be made to the Comprehensive System. Therefore, they established a new system: the R-PAS. It is an attempt at creating a current, empirically based, and internationally focused scoring system that is easier to use than Exner's Comprehensive System. The R-PAS manual is intended to be a comprehensive tool for administering, scoring, and interpreting the Rorschach. The manual consists of two chapters that are basics of scoring and interpretation, aimed for use for novice Rorschach users,

followed by numerous chapters containing more detailed and technical information.

In terms of updated scoring, the authors only selected variables that have been empirically supported in the literature. The authors did not create new variables or indices to be coded, but systematically reviewed variables that had been used in past systems. While all of these codes have been used in the past, many have been renamed to be more face valid and readily understood. Scoring of the indices has been updated (e.g. utilizing percentiles and standard scores) to make the Rorschach more in line with other popular personality measures. Preliminary evidence suggests that the R-PAS exhibits good inter-rater reliability.

In addition to providing coding guidelines to score examinee responses, the R-PAS provides a system to code an examinee's behavior during Rorschach administration. These behavioral codes are included as it is believed that the behaviors exhibited during testing are a reflection of someone's task performance and supplements the actual responses given. This allows generalizations to be made between someone's responses to the cards and their actual behavior.

The R-PAS also recognized that scoring on many of the Rorschach variables differed across countries. Therefore, starting in 1997, Rorschach protocols from researchers around the world were compiled. After compiling protocols for over a decade, a total of 15 adult samples were used to provide a normative basis for the R-PAS. The protocols represent data gathered in the United States, Europe, Israel, Argentina and Brazil.

Cultural differences

Comparing North American Exner normative data with data from European and South American subjects showed marked differences in some features, some of which impact important variables, while others (such as the average number of responses) coincide. For instance, texture response is typically zero in European subjects (if interpreted as a need for closeness, in accordance with the system, a European would seem to express it only when it reaches the level of a *craving* for closeness), and there are fewer "good form" responses, to the point where schizophrenia may be suspected if data were correlated to the North American norms. Form is also often the only determinant expressed by European subjects; while color is less frequent than in American subjects, color-form responses are comparatively frequent in opposition to form-color responses; since the latter tend to be interpreted as indicators of a defensive

attitude in processing affect, this difference could stem from a higher value attributed to spontaneous expression of emotions.

The differences in form quality are attributable to purely cultural aspects: different cultures will exhibit different "common" objects (French subjects often identify a <u>chameleon</u> in card VIII, which is normally classed as an "unusual" response, as opposed to other animals like cats and dogs; in Scandinavia, "Christmas elves" *(nisser)* is a popular response for card II, and "musical instrument" on card VI is popular for Japanese people), and different languages will exhibit semantic differences in naming the same object (the figure of card IV is often called a *troll* by Scandinavians and an *ogre* by French people). Many of Exner's "popular" responses (those given by at least one third of the North American sample used) seem to be universally popular, as shown by samples in Europe, Japan and South America, while specifically card IX's "human" response, the crab or spider in card X and one of either the butterfly or the bat in card I appear to be characteristic of North America.

Form quality, popular content responses and locations are the only coded variables in the Exner systems that are based on frequency of occurrence, and thus immediately subject to cultural influences; therefore, cultural-dependent interpretation of test data may not necessarily need to extend beyond these components.

The cited language differences can result in misinterpretation if not administered in the subject's native language or a very well mastered second language, and interpreted by a master speaker of that language. For example, a bow tie is a frequent response for the center detail of card III, but since the equivalent term in French translates to "butterfly tie", an examiner not appreciating this language nuance may code the response differently from what is expected.