The Rorschach Inkblots

The use of the Rorschach as a neuropsychological instrument remains an issue of controversy. Despite the extensive clinical and theoretical literature related to the Rorschach, those individuals critical of this instrument maintain that the validity of the Rorschach has not been established according to strict psychometric standards. Proponents of the Rorschach maintain that the functional utility of this instrument relies on the clinical skills and sensitivities of the clinician using it. The past few years have seen a great increase in the number of research studies investigating the reliability and validity of the Rorschach. However, the controversy continues. Regardless of one’s bias toward the use of this instrument, there is a paucity of research on its validity and reliability when it is used with neurologically impaired clients. The utility, or the potential utility, of this procedure, however, continues to be of interest (see the symposium listing for the Eighth European Conference of the International Neuropsychological Society, Costa & Rourke, 1985). The proponents of the Rorschach defend its use and conclude that the Rorschach has an adequate empirical base to allow its use in a forensic context (McCann, 1998). The courts seem to agree, as a review of legal cases in which the Rorschach was involved in legal testimony indicates that the findings of an evaluation using the Rorschach were allowed in testimony the majority of times in which the Rorschach was used (Meloy, Hansen, & Weiner, 1997). However, the true test of the Rorschach needs to be conducted in the context of expert research psychologists published in peer-reviewed journals (Exner, Colligan, Boll, Stischer, & Hillman, 1996; Wood, Nezworski, & Stejskal, 1996).

A recent article by Wood, Nezworski, Stejskal, Gerven, and West (1999) raises several pertinent points regarding validity studies of the Rorschach. First, it is essential to realize that no conclusive studies regarding the validity of the Rorschach can be made. Instead, validity questions need to address the validity of individual scores obtained from the Rorschach. Second, each study should use its own control group instead of relying on comparisons to the normative base of the Exner system. Finally, contrasted extreme group designs have limited utility for clinical application of the Rorschach. Statistical power may be artificially inflated in such studies, although comparisons of diagnostic groups may be informative.

The Rorschach research has been summarized multiple times during its history (Baker, 1956; Goldfried, Stricker, & Weiner, 1971; Klebanoff, Singer, & Wilensky, 1954). It continues to be difficult to assess the Rorschach in terms of the experimental and statistical models typically used in psychology. Similarly, the methodological shortcomings dis-
cussed in the aforementioned reviews continue to cause problems (Viglione, 1997). Despite these problems, Parker, Hanson, and Hunsley (1988) concluded that the Rorschach had sufficient convergent validity when used for the purposes for which it was designed. Weiner (1996) also supported the use of the Rorschach and argued that misunderstanding of the instrument had led to the criticisms.

There have been a few meta-analyses conducted on studies of the Rorschach. Garb, Florio, and Grove (1998) criticized these meta-analyses as being flawed and reevaluated the data with the result that the Rorschach appears to explain only 8% to 13% of the variance in the criteria of these studies. As a point of comparison, the MMPI appears to explain 23% to 30% of the variance in criteria.

The Rorschach is used as an indicator of brain pathology, both because there may be direct effects of brain damage on emotional functioning and because there can be secondary effects of the emotional reaction to the neurocognitive changes. The implied assumption is that tests of personality functions should therefore be sensitive to the existence of an “organic” personality. One research approach has been to determine which Rorschach scores (signs) are found in cognitively impaired individuals, and to use these signs in predicting the presence of brain pathology. This simplistic approach has not been proven to be highly successful, however, in part because it rests on the erroneous assumption that brain damage is a unitary construct. Furthermore, brain lesions are likely to produce both general and specific effects, and signs constructed from a heterogeneous group of neurologically impaired subjects can be sensitive, at most, to the general effects. The Rorschach is a complex visual–perceptual task requiring such cognitive processes as attention, recognition, integration, naming, and the ability to formulate an oral–verbal expressive response. Lesions affecting any one of these processes may therefore be manifested on the Rorschach.

Before we discuss the various sign approaches that have been used with the Rorschach, it is important to provide a general overview of the Rorschach, as the various sign approaches are often interpreted in the context of the entire Rorschach protocol. An evaluation of the utility of the Rorschach is complicated by the fact that a number of scoring systems have been developed for use with this instrument (e.g., Beck, Beck, Levitt, & Molish, 1961; Exner, 1974). Most of these systems share such common scoring categories as location, determinants, and content. The analysis of a Rorschach protocol is based on the relative number of responses falling into the various categories, as well as on certain ratios and interrelationships among different categories (Exner, 1974). The Exner Comprehensive System is probably best suited to empirical evaluation and may be the most likely to be used in research (Ganellen, 1996).

**NORMATIVE DATA**

Putatively normative data have been provided by a number of researchers on the various scoring systems for the Rorschach (Ames, 1966; Ames, Metraux, Rodell, & Walker, 1973; Beck et al., 1961; Cass & McReynolds, 1951; Klopf & Davidson, 1962). Ames and her associates, for example, collected and published Rorschach norms on children between the ages of 2 and 10, on adolescents between the ages of 10 and 16, and on adults 70 and older (Ames, Learned, Metraux, & Walker, 1954; Ames, Metraux, Rodell, & Walker, 1974;