

Interpreting discrepancies between the MMPI-2 and the Rorschach Inkblot test: a case report

I. Durosini¹, F. Fantini², L. Chudzik³,
F. Aschieri²

¹ Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy;

² European Center for Therapeutic Assessment, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy;

³ Department of Psychology, University of Tours, France

Summary

This article covers a prototypical discrepancy between MMPI-2 and Rorschach results by interpreting the tests administered to an inmate sentenced for domestic violence. The results of his MMPI-2 and his Rorschach tests were evaluated and integrated on the bases of Finn's (1996) theoretical model. Finn's model for the integration of self-report tests and performance-based tests allows the clinician to make sense of discrepancies between test results.

Key words

Case report • MMPI-2 • Rorschach • Personality Test

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2)¹ and the Rorschach Inkblot test^{2,3} are two of the most frequently used personality assessment instruments. De Fidio and Grattagliano⁴ reviewed the sources of convergence and divergence between MMPI-2 and Rorschach test results. However, they did not include the model of Finn⁵, a practical approach to interpret self-report and performance-based tests results. Finn identified five patterns (Table I) based 1) on the clients' level of disturbance on the MMPI-2 and on the Rorschach, and 2) on the clients' level of engagement in the Rorschach Inkblot test. In the convergent cells, MMPI-2 and Rorschach results agree on the degree of the client's disturbance. In the discrepant cells, psychological tests results disagree on the degree of disturbance (see Table II for more detail). A common discrepancy is found in clients with relatively good MMPI-2 results and much more severe Rorschach results (Cell B), as illustrated in the case example.

Case report

Jack was a 40-year-old man sentenced to three years of jail for severe domestic violence. He met the psychologist as part of the compulsory treatment in prison. In the sessions, he appeared as a nice, sympathetic and well-adjusted man. He repeatedly claimed that the guilty sentence was a mistake. Prior to the treatment, the psychologist administered him the MMPI-2 and the Rorschach. The overall profile of Jack is of a well-adapted and slightly internalizing person. His MMPI-2 results suggested that Jack was sensitive to the social judgement (L = 66T), even if he was not consciously downplaying the impact of his problems (F = 55T, K = 44T). The non-K corrected profile shows a within normal limits profile, except for a low score on Scale 3, indicating that he saw himself as pragmatic and may tend to be seen by others as tactless. His higher score was at Scale 2 (61T), indicating a tendency for introspection and self-blaming, a lack of self-confidence, and a passivity in conflicts. Also, all his acting out scales (i.e., Scale 4, 8 and 9) were in a not problematic range, with scores below 45 T scores.

Correspondence

Ilaria Durosini
Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, largo A. Gemelli, 1, 20123, Milan, Italy • E-mail: ilaria.durosini@unicatt.it

TABLE I. Patterns of MMPI-2 and Rorschach test Results (Finn, 1996, p. 545).

| | High degree of disturbance on MMPI-2 | Low degree of disturbance on MMPI-2 |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| High degree of disturbance on Rorschach | Cell A ^a | Cell B ^a |
| Low degree of disturbance on Rorschach | Cell C, Case 1 ^a Cell C, Case 2 ^b | Cell D ^a |

MMPI-2 profiles in all cases are considered to be consistent (i.e., *VRIN* and *TRIN* within normal limits), valid, and unguarded (i.e., no significant elevations on *L* and *K*).

^a Rorschach protocols in these cells show adequate engagement on the part of the client (i.e., *R* is average or above and *Lambda* is < 1.0)

^b These Rorschach protocols are constricted (with low *R*s and/or *Lambdas* greater than 1.0).

TABLE II. Relationship between MMPI-2 and Rorschach test results⁵.

| | Patterns of MMPI-2 and Rorschach test results | Interpretations |
|------------------|---|--|
| Convergent cells | Cell A: high level of disturbance on both the MMPI-2 and the Rorschach test. | "In this cell fall clients whose psychological functioning is disrupted in both structured and unstructured situations [...]. Clients' problems in living are quite evident in their day-to-day functioning, they are aware of these problems, and are willing and able to report them on the MMPI-2" (Finn, 1996, p. 545-6). |
| | Cell D: minimal level of disturbance on both personality tests. | "In this cell fall clients who function well in both structured and unstructured situations" (Finn, 1996, p. 547). |
| Discrepant cells | Cell B: low level of disturbance on the MMPI-2 but high level of problem on the Rorschach. | "Clients with this pattern have underlying pathology that emerges in emotionally arousing, regressive, interpersonal, unstructured situations (such as the Rorschach administration). However, they function relatively well in familiar, structured situations when they can use intellectual resources to deal with anxiety (such as when taking the MMPI-2). Such clients are often unaware of the full nature of their difficulties and hence, are unable to report them on the MMPI-2" (Finn, 1996, p. 546). |
| | Cell C (Case 1 and Case 2): high disturbance on the MMPI-2 but minimal level of problem on the Rorschach. | Cell C, Case 1: "In this instance clients are adequately engaged in both the MMPI-2 and Rorschach, and the disagreement between the two sets of test findings reflects the greater control clients have over their self-presentations on the MMPI-2 as compared to the Rorschach [...]. The disturbance shown on the MMPI-2 represents a conscious attempt on the part of clients to endorse psychopathology, whereas the lack of disturbance on the Rorschach is inconsistent with this presentation and raises the possibility of malingering, exaggeration, or a "cry for help" (Finn, 1996, p. 546-7). Cell C, Case 2: "This pattern results from a defensive reaction of emotional withdrawal or constriction on the part of clients in response to the regressive pull of the Rorschach administration. These clients are able to reveal their problems in living on the MMPI-2 because it is impersonal, less arousing, and less overwhelming. However, during the Rorschach these clients "shut down" because they are overstimulated and confused by the interpersonal, emotionally arousing test situation" (Finn, 1996, p. 547). |

His Rorschach protocol gave a different picture of his functioning. Despite being brief (*R* = 15), he had a high engagement in the task (*L* = 0.36). Among the indices of major psychopathology, the Perceptual Thinking Index (PTI) was 3, pointing to some arbitrary and disordered thinking (*INC2* = 1; *FAB2* = 1; *X-%* = .47), inability to produce socially expected behaviours (*P* = 2), representations of self and others based on projected rather than factual elements (*Sum H* = 3, all accompa-

nied by *FAB* or *INCOM2* codes), and the expectation of relationships as aggressive and potentially violent (*AG* = 3; *COP* = 0). All his responses at cards VIII, IX and X had poor form quality, indicating that Jack's contact with reality decreased in emotionally arousing contexts.

In a more structured situation, Jack was a man who appeared very competent, able to focus, and who could be trusted. However, in unstructured contexts, Jack

could lose his social skills, and struggled to manage his perceptual and ideational processes. In such circumstances, his behaviour could become violent. After the feedback session, Jack told the assessor he agreed with this interpretation, and ended up describing himself as a version of the famous romantic figure of Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde. The integration of these two parts of his personality became the goal of the treatment.

Conclusions

In this article, self-report and performance-based tests results were integrated in a TA⁵ framework. TA

is a semi-structured intervention in which psychological tests are used in a collaborative and transformative process⁶. The differences between MMPI-2 and Rorschach helped the clinician to refine case formulations and tailor the subsequent treatment to the client's needs. Literature suggests that the same framework for test interpretation can be helpful with many types of clients such as adults^{7,8}, couples⁹, and families¹⁰.

Conflict of interest

None

References

- 1 Butcher JN, Dahlstrom WG, Graham JR, et al. *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2): manual for administration and scoring*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1989.
- 2 Exner JE. *The Rorschach: a comprehensive system. Basic foundations and principles of interpretation (4th Ed.)* New York: Wiley 2003.
- 3 Meyer GJ, Viglione DJ, Mihura JL, et al. *A manual for the Rorschach Performance assessment system*. Toledo, OH: R-PAS 2011.
- 4 De Fidio D, Grattagliano I. *Correlazione tra il MMPI-2 e il Rorschach: un'analisi possibile?* Giorn Ital Psicopat 2007;13:162-70.
- 5 Finn SE. *Assessment feedback integrating MMPI-2 and Rorschach findings*. J Pers Assess 1996;67:543-57.
- 6 Aschieri F, De Saeger H, Durosini I. *L'Évaluation Thérapeutique et collaborative: Preuves empiriques*. Pratiques Psychologiques 2015;21:307-17.
- 7 Aschieri F, Smith JD. *The effectiveness of therapeutic assessment with an adult client: a single-case study using a time-series design*. J Pers Assess 2012;94:1-11.
- 8 Durosini I, Tarocchi A, Aschieri F. *Therapeutic assessment with a client with persistent complex bereavement disorder: a single-case time-series design*. Clin Case Stud 2017;16:295-312.
- 9 Provenzi L, Menichetti J, Coin R, et al. *Psychological assessment as an intervention with couples: single case application of collaborative techniques in clinical practice*. Prof Psychol Res Pr 2017;48:90-7.
- 10 Aschieri F, Fantini F, Bertrando P. *Therapeutic assessment with children in family therapy*. Aust N Z J Fam Ther 2012;33:285-98.