No psychological instrument is more controversial than the Rorschach. Thousands of practicing psychologists rely on it without reservation in making clinical decisions of the gravest importance (e.g., Archer & Newsom, 2000), whereas many researchers regard it as nearly worthless as a tool for psychological assessment (Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000). Historically, perhaps the deepest divisions have been between psychoanalytically-oriented psychologists, who believe that projective techniques are needed to penetrate the defences which cloud conscious awareness of real personality features, and trait psychologists, who rely on self-reports as the most direct and generally most accurate way to find out what a person is like.

Although the first author was trained by Samuel Beck, one of the masters of Rorschach interpretation, and although we have used projective tests including the Holtzman Inkblot Test (HIT; Holtzman, 1961) in our research (Costa & McCrae, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1980), there is no doubt that we are trait psychologists. In a recent summary we concluded that projective techniques in general “are highly inferential, ignore other factors that contribute to responses, are unreliable over time, and are inadequate as samples of behavior. The bottom line is that they frequently fail to show evidence of external validity; that is, they do not predict the kinds of outcomes they are supposed to” (McCrae & Costa, 2003, p. 153). Our purpose in writing this chapter is not to repeat those criticisms nor to repudiate them, but to consider the Rorschach from the perspective of the trait-based Five-Factor Theory of personality (FFT; McCrae & Costa, 1996, 1999). We hope from that perspective to explain how Rorschach responses might be understood and used, and what research designs would be most useful in testing these hypotheses.
The Rorschach and the Five-Factor Model

The Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality is a descriptive taxonomy of personality traits into higher-order factors, commonly labeled Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae & John, 1992). In the past 20 years, the FFM has become the dominant model of personality trait structure, assessed by a variety of measures (De Raad & Perugini, 2002) that include both self-report and observer rating versions. A large body of research has established the universality of the structure (Rolland, 2002) and the heritability (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001) and long-term stability (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000) of the factors. Studies comparing ratings from different observers attest to the consensual validation of traits from all five factors (McCrae et al., in press).

The FFM is intended to be a comprehensive model; it purports to include virtually all the traits that can be measured by self-report or observer rating. A series of studies has shown that it does so with respect to most established personality questionnaires (e.g., Conn & Rieke, 1994; Costa, Busch, Zonderman, & McCrae, 1986; McCrae, Costa, & Piedmont, 1993). But the few studies that have been reported relating the FFM to various scores derived from the Rorschach show little evidence of concordance. Greenwald (1999) proposed a series of hypotheses linking variables from the Comprehensive System (CS; Exner, 1993) to the scales of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992b). For example, she anticipated that Agreeableness would be directly related to COP and inversely related to the Isolation Index, S, and AG. None of her 17 hypotheses was supported. Similar null findings are reported elsewhere in this volume, and all parallel the lack of beyond-chance associations we found when examining HIT variables (Costa & McCrae, 1986).

On the one hand, these results are surprising, because Meyer, Bates, and Gacono (1999) demonstrated substantial overlap in the constructs purportedly measured by the two instruments. Their Rorschach Rating Scale (RRS) consists of a set of items, each summarizing a construct from a variety of Rorschach systems – for example, “This person feels aggressive or combative impulses in his/her interactions” represents the construct measured by AG. Meyer and colleagues asked clinicians and lay raters to select an individual they knew well and assess him or her on both the RRS and an adjective measure of the FFM. An RRS factor called
Narcissism, Aggression, and Dominance had a strong negative loading on
the Agreeableness factor; Passive Dependence, Vulnerability, and Inferiority
loaded on the Neuroticism factor. Social and Emotional Engagement vs
Constriction was a definer of the Openness factor. Extraversion and Con-
scientiousness were not well represented among Rorschach constructs,
and Intellectual Defenses and Obsessive Character was not well represented
in the FFM measure. It appears, then, that there ought to be convergence
between Rorschach measures and the FFM dimensions of Neuroticism,
Openness, and Agreeableness, because the two instruments are assess-
ing similar constructs in these domains.

On the other hand, the failure to find convergence is not unprecedent-
ed. It is well known that there is limited evidence of agreement between
Rorschach measures and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inven-
tory (MMPI; Hathaway & McKinley, 1983), a self-report measure of per-
sonality and psychopathology (Archer, 1996). The usual interpretation
of this discordance is that the two instruments operate on different
levels, with the Rorschach tapping deeper aspects of the psyche. We
would like to address that idea in the context of a personality theory that
was developed to account for findings from research on the FFM, but
which has a much broader applicability.

One reason to pursue this issue, and not simply dismiss the Rorschach
as a failed psychometric tool, is evidence that some Rorschach variables
do measure something. Parker, Hanson, and Hunsley (1988) conducted
a meta-analysis which found that Rorschach variables had acceptable
reliability and, based on five studies with a clear rationale for the hypoth-
esis tested, an estimated validity of .41. Meyer and Handler (1997) sum-
marized evidence that Klopfer’s Rorschach Prognostic Rating Scale pre-
dicted treatment outcome. Our own research on the HIT included a
two-year longitudinal retest, which showed significant stability for 18 of
22 variables, ranging as high as .73 for Form Definiteness. The HIT
apparently measures some enduring psychological features, although
they may be cognitive or perceptual styles rather than personality traits
per se. Alternatively, they may be representations of trait-relevant char-
acteristics that are missed by self-report measures.

Self-report measures are certainly not perfectly valid. That fact is seen
most clearly when self-reports are compared to the ratings of knowledge-
able informants. Correlations of .5 or .6 are not uncommon (McCrae et
al., in press), but that still leaves a large portion of the variance unac-
counted for. Even when multiple raters are combined, there appears to
be a ceiling of about .70 for the consensual validity of self-reports. It is
possible that the remaining variance might be represented in scores on projective instruments like the Rorschach.

**A Five-Factor Theory of Personality**

FFT is a model of the personality system that identifies important components and specifies how they are related (see Figure 1). Central to the theory is the distinction between *Basic Tendencies*, which are abstract capacities and dispositions, and *Characteristic Adaptations*, which are developed over time through the interaction of the individual with his or her environment. Perhaps the clearest example of this distinction comes from language. All healthy children are born with the capacity to learn language – a Basic Tendency – but it is their social environment that determines which language they learn. Fluency in French or Serbo-Croatian is a Characteristic Adaptation, as are habits, attitudes, interests, roles, and relationships.

FFT differs from most theories of personality in assuming that personality traits are Basic Tendencies rather than Characteristic Adaptations, and that Basic Tendencies are influenced solely by biological mecha-

![Figure 1](image_url)  
*Figure 1. A model of the personality system, showing the major components and the causal pathways that link them. Adapted from McCrae & Costa, 1999.*
nism, including not only genes, but also the physiological results of disease, injury, aging, and pharmacological agents. In this view, personality traits are essentially a matter of temperament. Although this postulate is both radical and likely to prove oversimplistic in the long run, it provides a powerful and parsimonious explanation for the heritability, stability, and universality of personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Other aspects of the theory are more relevant to the interpretation of personality test scores. According to FFT, personality traits are not directly observable, either to external observers or, through introspection, to the self. This is not because people repress self-knowledge, but simply because traits appear only as they are manifested in Characteristic Adaptations. For example, in the course of life experience, an extravert learns that parties are fun, that there are many opportunities for talking with co-workers during the workday, and that roller-coasters produce a natural high. Faced with the same experiences, an introvert learns that parties are boring, that it is possible to avoid most people at work, and that roller-coasters produce no sensation other than nausea. The interests and aversions that are shaped by such experiences become Characteristic Adaptations, and are registered in the Self-Concept as aspects of the individual's identity. Note that the Self-Concept is itself a Characteristic Adaptation, acquired as the person interacts with the environment.

The Self-Concept is a repository of beliefs, attitudes, and narratives (McAdams, 1993) about the self, and as the arrows in Figure 1 show, it is influenced by Basic Tendencies, other Characteristic Adaptations, and the Objective Biography, which is the cumulative record of life experience and behavior. Like all Characteristic Adaptations, it is also shaped by External Influences, the category that subsumes all environmental influences. The most obvious influences on the development of the Self-Concept are the Objective Biography and External Influences. We learn who we are both from observation of our own behaviors and emotional reactions, and from feedback from others: parents, teachers, peers. Other Characteristic Adaptations are involved because they underlie almost all psychological functioning. For example, in order to conceive of oneself as an extravert one must know the meaning of the word extravert, and that semantic knowledge is a Characteristic Adaptation.

Basic Tendencies, specifically traits, have indirect influences on the development of the Self-Concept because they shape Characteristic Adaptations. But they also may have direct influences on the Self-Concept. John and Robins (1994) have shown that narcissism, a trait related to low Agreeableness, distorts the accuracy of self-perceptions. High levels of
Openness are associated with the structural complexity of life narratives (McAdams et al., in press). Neuroticism contributes to low self-esteem (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991).

**Self-Reports, Observer Ratings, and the FFT**

When individuals complete a self-report inventory like the MMPI or the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992), they draw on their Self-Concept. When asked if they “really like most people they meet,” it is unlikely that respondents recall specific instances of meeting people and tally the number of times they really liked them. Instead, they draw on established beliefs about how they relate to others and the affects that are prompted by the idea of meeting people. Self-reports of personality traits are generally accurate because most people’s self-concepts have encoded accurate inferences about what they are like. In this sense, FFT holds that people are basically rational (McCrae & Costa, 1999), in contrast to psychoanalytic views that people are governed largely by unconscious and irrational forces that must be inferred from indirect signs.

Ratings from knowledgeable observers are presumably accurate because the informants have observed the target on many occasions and developed what might be called an Other Concept that is reasonably accurate.* Why, then do self-reports and observer ratings show correlations that are not only less than 1.0, but consistently lower than the reliability of the measures? There are many possibilities (McCrae, Stone, Fagan, & Costa, 1998)—so many that it is remarkable that agreement is as strong as it is (Funder, 1989). Although there are also limitations on observer ratings, most attention has been paid to problems with self-reports, especially problems of self-deception and impression management (cf. Paulhus, 1984). There is no doubt that self-reports can be deliberately falsified (Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995), and it is likely that people

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* By “accurate” we mean relatively, not absolutely, accurate. Most people may claim they are “above average” in altruism, a claim that cannot be literally true for all of them. But those respondents who say they are much above average are in fact likely to be more generous than those who claim only to be somewhat above average. It is for this reason that self-report (and observer rating) scores are always interpreted with reference to norms.
are sometimes deceived about their own personality traits. Much of the appeal of projective methods lies in their apparent immunity to these two sources of bias. But it must be recalled that self-reports are generally valid, in both normal (Piedmont, McCrae, Riemann, & Angleitner, 2000) and clinical (Bagby et al., 1998; Mutén, 1991) samples. Information from projective tests may perhaps usefully complement self-reports, but there is no scientific justification for replacing self-reports by projectives.

**Projective Measures and Five-Factor Theory**

All projective measures – sentence completions, TATs, inkblots – present the respondent with ambiguous stimuli and analyze the responses. The fundamental projective hypothesis, stated by Rapaport (1942, cited in Wiggins, 2003) is the belief that “all behavior manifestations of the human being, including the least and most significant, are revealing and expressive of his personality.” That view is entirely consistent with FFT, which sees the Objective Biography as the result of the interaction of External Influences on Characteristic Adaptations, which themselves reflect Basic Tendencies. Not all behavior manifestations are equally revealing, however. We learn more about a person by taking a life history than by watching her walk down the street. From the perspective of FFT, the question is not whether the Rorschach can tell us about personality; the question is how well it does so.

Some projective techniques, like the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) draw on the Self-Concept, and, perhaps not surprisingly, show convergence with self-reports and observer ratings of personality traits in the FFM (McCrae & Costa, 1988). Other projectives, including especially the Rorschach, do not require any reference to the Self-Concept. Instead, they evoke responses guided by the respondent’s Characteristic Adaptations, and these responses are thought to reveal psychologically important aspects of the person.

Rorschach responses inevitably tell us something about the respondent. They are made in a particular language, and they draw upon the constructs available in a particular culture; indeed, one of the criticisms of the use of the Rorschach in anthropological field work was the claim that most scoring systems disregarded cultural context (Rabin & Limuaca, 1967). Like the recognition of objects in daily life, Rorschach
responses require basic perceptual and cognitive processes – represented as *Dynamic Processes* in Figure 1 – and Rorschach diagnosis is perhaps most successful in detecting cognitive and perceptual aberrations that distinguish psychotic patients from normals or nonpsychotic patients (Jorgensen, Andersen, & Dam, 2000).

But how might normal personality traits be reflected in Rorschach responses? There are several possibilities:

1) The manifest content might suggest the conscious concerns of the individual. For example, responses depicting violent actions might suggest the fearfulness of respondents high in Neuroticism or the hostility of respondents low in Agreeableness.

2) Formal properties of the responses might reflect personality styles. *Lambda*, the ratio of pure form responses to nonpure form responses, is thought to reflect “the tendency to simplify complex stimulus fields” (Meyer, Viglione, & Exner, 2001, p. 68) and might be a sign of low Openness to Experience.

3) Responses might have no direct relation to personality traits, but might represent a defensive distortion of trait levels. Tranquil scenes might, through reaction formation, indicate underlying anxiety.

4) Responses might be determined by unknown psychological mechanisms that do not bear any obvious relation to the traits they reflect, just as the subtle items of the MMPI bear no obvious relation to the constructs they are purported to measure (Wrobel & Lachar, 1982).

The distinction between (3) and (4) parallels that between classic psychoanalytic interpretations of the Rorschach and the views of Exner (1993), who has adopted a strictly empirical position in which scores and complex indices are justified solely on the basis of their predictive utility (Wiggins, 2003). If, say, attention to small details in color blots but not in achromatic blots were demonstrated to be a reliable sign of Conscientiousness, then no rationale would be necessary to infer Conscientiousness from such a response pattern.

Case (1) is clearly consistent with FFT, which states that behaviors (including Rorschach responses) are a function of Characteristic Adaptations that have been shaped by underlying traits. Individuals high in Neuroticism have many fears, and might well report threatening scenes in responding to an inkblot. Case (2) is also consistent with FFT, which holds that personality traits can influence dynamic processes like perception. It is known, for example, the people high in Openness score...
higher in measures of divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987); their cognitive styles might influence their perception of Rorschach cards. Although, according to FFT, both manifest content and formal style could be associated with traits, there is little consistent evidence to date that they are. Megargee and Schwartz (1968) reported an association between Neuroticism and a manifest Anxiety score on the HIT, but Costa and McCrae (1986) failed to replicate it. Greenwald (1999) hypothesized that $\Lambda$ would be inversely related to Openness, but found no significant correlation. It is well known that behavior is only weakly related to personality traits unless it is aggregated over a large number of instances (Epstein, 1979). Perhaps the behavior sampled in the course of completing a Rorschach is simply not sufficient to make reliable inferences about traits. Or perhaps the wrong variables have been chosen. For example, although she hypothesized that $Z_d$, “an index of response complexity and detail” (p. 521) would be related to Conscientiousness, Greenwald found that it was instead correlated with Openness. Given open individuals’ cognitive complexity (Rouff, 1975), this is a reasonable correlate. There has been too little research relating Rorschach variables to the dimensions of the FFM to conclude that there are no reliable associations with any of the factors. Note that these reliable associations might, as case (2) supposes and the $Z_d$/Openness correlation illustrates, have a straightforward interpretation, or they might, as case (4) supposes, be apparently meaningless.

**Psychological Defenses and the Expression of Personality Traits**

But the most interesting, if difficult, possibility is (c). In this case we would not expect that the Rorschach variable would be significantly correlated with self-reports of a trait, because we hypothesize that unconscious defences or other mechanisms disguise the relation of the response to the trait. Someone seething with inner rage might show unmistakable signs in the Rorschach protocol while consciously believing and reporting that he or she is calm and easy-going. This situation corresponds to the common belief that when self-report and projective data differ, they may both accurately reflect personality characteristics, but operate on different levels. FFT does not rule out such a possibility;
Basic Tendencies might in principle be expressed outside of conscious awareness.

What does it mean to say that projective measures reflect the same trait at a different level from self-reports? From the perspective of FFM, it means that the same trait is expressed in different ways in the person. These different manifestations may or may not be mutually consistent, but both must reflect the same underlying Basic Tendency, and thus we can make a number of predictions of how Rorschach variables ought to operate. Because Agreeableness is heritable (Riemann, Angleitner, & Strelau, 1997), valid Rorschach indicators of Agreeableness should also be heritable. Because Agreeableness increases with age (McCrae et al., 1999), its Rorschach signs should also increase with age. Because women are more agreeable than men (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001), women’s Rorschach protocols should show more signs of Agreeableness than men’s. Ultimately, because Agreeableness affects interpersonal behaviors and relationships, it should be perceptible to outside observers, including clinicians and laypersons who know the individual well. Rorschach Agreeableness scores might not correlate with self-reports, but they ought to correlate with observer ratings of Agreeableness.

A quick check of PsycINFO shows that research testing these hypotheses has rarely been conducted. We found a single instance of a behavior genetic study of Rorschach variables (Lohrenz & Gardner, 1967), and one comparing peer ratings of a personality trait – dependency – to Rorschach data (Zuckerman, Levitt, & Lubin, 1963). There are, of course, studies relating Rorschach variables to age and gender (e.g., Greenwald, 1990), but they have not been organized and interpreted with respect to FFM traits. In principle, one might be able to use Meyer et al.’s (1999) correspondence scheme to classify Rorschach variables in terms of personality traits, and conduct a meta-analysis of age and gender differences.

Longitudinal and behavior genetic studies of Rorschach variables would be highly informative, but they are also difficult to conduct. However, it would be quite simple to conduct observer-rating studies. Spouses or friends of patients assessed by the Rorschach could complete the observer rating Form R of the NEO-PI-R to describe the patient. These data, themselves of value to the clinician in understanding the patient and how he or she is seen by significant others (Mutén, 1991), could be used as criteria in validating Rorschach variables.

More sophisticated research designs can easily be imagined. As a “gold standard” for evaluating assessments, two (or more) clinicians who were well acquainted with the patient but blind to test results could complete
the RRS (Meyer et al., 1999) and Form R of the NEO-PI-R. These criteria could be used to assess the validity of patient self-reports on the NEO-PI-R, Rorschach responses, and their combination.

**Statistical Considerations**

The idea of equally valid but nonoverlapping information from self-reports and projective methods is appealing. It recognizes the strengths of both of these long-contesting camps, and it offers the prospect of dramatic improvement in the accuracy of personality assessment. If the correlation of both Rorschach and self-report measures with an external criterion were 0.50, and the correlation between the two predictors were 0.00, the multiple correlation with the criterion would be .71: Twice the variance would be explained.

So little research has been done along these lines that we cannot rule out that optimistic scenario, at least for the factors that seem to be represented in Rorschach variables, Neuroticism, Openness, and Agreeableness (Meyer et al., 1999). But it seems rather implausible to us. Statistically, two variables can be uncorrelated indicators of the same trait only if they show opposite correlations with another variable, which we might hypothesize to be defensiveness. We could model this by two equations, in which true trait scores and defensiveness are equally weighted:

1) Self-Report = Trait – Defensiveness + error
2) Rorschach = Trait + Defensiveness + error

These variables would both be related to the true score (Trait), but they would also be systematically distorted, in opposite directions. Highly defensive individuals would underestimate their level of Neuroticism in self-reports, whereas their Rorschach responses would overestimate it.

Although this model is statistically satisfactory, it is cumbersome. It is easy to see why people would be defensive about Neuroticism and perhaps low Agreeableness, but it is less clear why people would unconsciously distort their levels of Openness. Closed people value Closedness, as open people value Openness; Openness is ego syntonic at all levels. The model also requires that there be a different defensiveness mechanism for each different trait, because otherwise traits would not
form orthogonal factors.* A given individual might be highly defensive with respect to Openness, moderately defensive with respect to Agreeableness, and not defensive at all with regard to Neuroticism. The number of variables needed to characterize a person will at the broadest level will have doubled, from five to ten.

These models are possible, but we do not think they are plausible. We suspect Rorschach variables in general do not agree with self-reports of personality traits because the Rorschach does not assess traits well. Zuckerman et al. (1963) found that self-reports of dependency were significantly correlated with peer ratings of dependency, but that Rorschach measures were not.

This does not mean that Rorschach variables are useless. They hold promise as measures of cognitive and perceptual aberrations that can differentiate psychotic from nonpsychotic patients (Jorgensen et al., 2000). They may be useful in describing the clinical state of the patient at the moment of the test administration. But until much more supportive evidence has been accumulated, it is probably unwise to make inferences about chronic anxiety, hostility, rigidity, or any other personality trait on the basis of Rorschach scores.

The Rorschach in Psychodynamic Assessment:
A Case Study

Academic psychologists familiar only with the research literature are often puzzled by clinicians’ faith in the Rorschach. Surely there must be something beyond sheer graduate school indoctrination that encourages the use of the test! We suspect that the perceived utility of the instrument comes from the fact that it is used in the context of a complete psychodynamic assessment that may include life history, clinical symptoms, other test data, and the patient’s observable behavior in interaction with the clinician. An excellent example of that approach is given in Behrends and Blatt’s (2003) assessment of Madeline G., the case study examined from multiple perspectives in Wiggins’ (2003) volume. Behrends and Blatt administered the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Test, the

* Raw NEO-PI-R domain scores are intercorrelated, but orthogonal factor scores can be calculated, and it is these that we believe best operationalize the FFM (Costa & McCrae, 1995).
Thematic Apperception Test, and the Object Relations Inventory as well as the Rorschach and carefully observed her behavior and emotional reactions throughout the assessment procedure. From all this information, they concluded that she was “action-oriented and highly emotional, with a flair for the dramatic. She is a free spirit and a bohemian, who prides herself on her unconventionality . . . Although her thinking is vulnerable to the intrusion of painfully disruptive associations, her openness to such experiences tends to enrich and enliven, rather than to disorganize, her overall functioning” (pp. 4–5).

With regard to Rorschach responses, “the predominant feature is the extensive affective and ideational elaborations” (p. 22) that might sometimes be considered confabulations. In isolation, these responses might be considered pathological, but in the context of other Rorschach indicators (e.g., $F+\% = 64\%$, suggesting good cognitive control) and other observations, they are viewed by Behrends and Blatt as indicators of a struggle between emotional vulnerability and creative integration.

A more prosaic interpretation would suggest a very active imagination. We know from self-report and partner ratings on the NEO-PI-R that Madeline is very high in Openness to Experience, especially Fantasy ($T = 76$; Costa & Piedmont, 2003). She is also very high in Openness to Feelings, which could account for her strong emotional reactions to many of the blots. Individual Rorschach variables are not necessarily good indicators of Openness – for example, Madeline’s Lambda score is 1.17, suggesting a rather closed “tendency to simplify complex stimulus fields” (Meyer et al., 2001, p. 68)–but anyone who read the protocol and interacted with Madeline for a day would recognize that she is curious, sensitive, and open to a wide range of experiences.*

Although there appears to be concordance between the Rorschach, self-reports, and observer ratings with regard to Openness, that is not the case with regard to Neuroticism. Behrends and Blatt remarked that Madeline has strong defences against dysphoric affect, but “when these defences fail, Madeline can experience extreme feelings of depression, desolation, and hopelessness” (p. 25). She reports depressing or disturbing images in the Rorschach, but then jokes about them, or recalls happier content from earlier cards. In contrast, Costa and Piedmont (2003)

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* Behrends and Blatt pointed out the presence of transparency responses that may indicate suicidal ideation. An alternative interpretation is to note that people high in Openness have thin boundaries (Hartmann, 1991; McCrae, 1994), which might be expressed in transparent imagery.
reported that Madeline sees herself as very low in Anxiety, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Vulnerability, and overall Neuroticism. Is she really so well-adjusted, or is she being defensive in her self-report responses? If we consult her partner, it appears that the Rorschach-based conclusion is right: He says she is average in Anxiety and Depression and high in Self-Consciousness and Vulnerability. (Both Madeline and her partner agree that she is very high in Angry Hostility and Impulsiveness, traits not singled-out in the Rorschach interpretation.) Most impressive is the fact that Behrends and Blatt essentially predicted the subsequent year-long depression that follows the break-up of Madeline G.’s common law marriage (Trobst & Wiggins, 2003).

This case study illustrates some of the clinical appeal of the Rorschach. In the hands of skilled clinicians who interpret it in conjunction with other observations and test results, the Rorschach can give a reasonably accurate picture of some personality traits – in some cases, perhaps, more accurate than self-reports. But does the Rorschach have incremental validity? Would Behrends and Blatt have drawn less accurate conclusions if the Rorschach had been omitted from their assessment battery? Lilienfeld et al. (2000) claim there is little evidence of incremental validity, although they admit that it “has not been studied for the vast majority of Rorschach scores” (p. 38).

Madeline G.’s Rorschach is particularly revealing because she is articulate, imaginative, and clearly engaged in the task, and her responses thus provide a relatively rich sample of behavior. A thoughtful individual who read her Rorschach protocol might make many of the same inferences that Behrends and Blatt did, without any training in the scoring and interpretation of the Rorschach, or any background in psycho-dynamic theory.

Clinicians and the Future of Rorschach Research

Considering the widespread use of the Rorschach and the number of published studies that have used it, it is surprising how little we know about it as a measure of personality traits. Mainstream personality researchers abandoned the Rorschach years ago – it last appeared in *JPSP* in 1987 – before modern findings on the Five-Factor Model and its stability, heritability, and consensual validity had been established. Even if they were interested, personality researchers would probably find it
difficult to get funding for a study of Rorschach responses, because the
instrument has lost scientific credibility in many quarters. And whatever
its merits, the Rorschach will not regain credibility until a new body of
research findings convinces the critics. Caught in this bind, Rorschach
research is virtually lost to academic psychology.

The only practical solution is to turn clinicians into researchers. Every-
one who now administers the Rorschach for clinical purposes should
also collect self-report and informant ratings of personality using estab-
lished measures of the FFM (De Raad & Perugini, 2002), as well as
background and outcome data. Pooled across many clinicians, such a
database would allow definitive conclusions about the validity and incre-
mental validity of specific Rorschach scores. Clinicians should also sum-
marize their overall psychodynamic assessment in terms of ratings on
the five factors, to facilitate research on the contribution of the Ror-
schach to global assessment. Clinicians could publish their own results,
or provide data to statisticians for a multi-center trial that might be
sponsored by the International Rorschach Society. Clinical practice
could only benefit from the inclusion of multiple measures of the FFM
(Costa & McCrae, 1992a), and the end result could be either a vindica-
tion of the Rorschach or a compelling reason to abandon it as a measure
of personality traits.

But there is much more to personality than traits, and the Rorschach
may hold most promise as a measure of dynamic processes. As Figure 1
shows, Basic Tendencies, Characteristic Adaptations, and External In-
fluences all interact through Dynamic Processes. Previous treatments of
Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 1996) have listed examples of
these processes (such as perception, repression, and role-playing), but
this aspect of the theory is not well developed. In particular, there are
no techniques for assessing the operation of dynamic processes. Ror-
schach responses, and in particular the interaction of respondent and
interpreter in the inquiry phase (Ritzler & Nalesnik, 1990) may provide
telling examples of how individuals manifest their traits in characteristic
adaptations and maladaptations, and how they express these adapta-
tions in behavior across the life course. As Blatt (1990) expressed it,
there are “exciting new possibilities for the use of the Rorschach . . . if
we have the imagination and creativity to develop methods for evaluat-
ing cognitive processes and the structures of mental representations
from an individual’s responses to relatively ambiguous stimuli” (p. 401).

Note that the study of dynamic processes cannot be carried out in
isolation, any more than Figure 1 could represent the person if it were
reduced to the connecting arrows. To understand how people operate, the clinician must also understand their Basic Tendencies, their Self-Concept, their Objective Biography. Self- and informant reports on measure of the Five-Factor Model provide valid information on some of the most important Basic Tendencies, and life history interviews can indicate how these traits have played out in real life. Responses to the Rorschach might be informative about the intervening mechanisms. Blatt (1990) observed that projective data were most useful “if one had a comprehensive theory of personality that provided a framework for interpreting the remarkable diversity of observation that became available through these procedures” (p. 396). Perhaps Five-Factor Theory can provide that framework.

References

A Five-Factor Theory Perspective on the Rorschach


McAdams, D.P., Anyidoho, N.A., Brown, C., Huang, Y.T., Kaplan, B., & Machado,


A Five-Factor Theory Perspective on the Rorschach


**Summary**

Many of the constructs the Rorschach is used to assess are related to personality traits included in the Five-Factor Model, but studies to date have not shown convergence between Rorschach and self-report measures of these traits. This poses a problem for the Rorschach, because recent research on the universality, stability, heritability, and consensual validity of traits demonstrate that self-report measures cannot be dismissed. In an effort to understand these issues, we examine the Rorschach from the perspective of Five-Factor Theory (FFT), a systems model of the person. FFT is compatible with the projective hypothesis, but would generally lead to the expectation that Rorschach signs and self-reports should be correlated. Where they are not, the validity of Rorschach measures of personality traits would need to be confirmed by demonstrations of their heritability, stability, and convergence with observer ratings. The Rorschach may be more useful when interpreted in the context of a global psychodynamic assessment. Clinicians who use the Rorschach should gather the data necessary to test its validity as a measure of personality traits and related constructs, and clinicians and researchers should consider the possible use of Rorschach responses in assessing dynamic processes.

**Résumé**

Beaucoup de dimensions pour l’évaluation desquelles on utilise le Rorschach sont liées aux traits de personnalité retenus dans le modèle des cinq facteurs, mais les études n’ont montré à ce jour aucune convergence entre le Rorschach et la mesure de ces traits par l’auto-évaluation. Cela pose un problème pour le Rorschach, parce que les travaux récents sur l’universalité, la stabilité, l’héritabilité et la validité consensuelle de ces traits démontrent qu’on ne peut pas disqualifier les mesures fondées sur l’auto-évaluation. Dans un effort pour éclairer cette question, nous examinons le Rorschach du point de vue de la théorie des cinq facteurs. La théorie des cinq facteurs est compatible avec l’hypothèse projective,
mais devrait conduire dans l’ensemble à attendre que les signes au Rorschach et l’auto-évaluation soient corrélés. Quand ils ne le sont pas, la validité des évaluations de traits de personnalité par le Rorschach devrait être confirmée par la démonstration de leur héritabilité, de leur stabilité et de leur convergence avec les évaluations faites par des observateurs. Le Rorschach est peut-être plus utile quand on l’interprète dans le contexte d’une évaluation psychodynamique globale. Les cliniciens qui utilisent le Rorschach devraient recueillir les données nécessaires pour tester sa validité en tant que mesure de traits de personnalité et de réalités du même ordre, et les cliniciens et les chercheurs devraient prendre en considération la possibilité d’utiliser les réponses au Rorschach dans l’évaluation des processus dynamiques.

Resumen

Muchos de los constructos teóricos que se usan en la evaluación con Rorschach se relacionan con rasgos de personalidad incluidos en el modelo de los Cinco Factores, pero hasta el momento no se ha podido demostrar una convergencia significativa entre Rorschach y medidas de autoinformes para valorar esos rasgos. Esto plantea un problema para el Rorschach, porque las más recientes investigaciones sobre la universalidad, estabilidad, herencia y validez consensual de dichos rasgos señalan que las medidas procedentes de los autoinformes no pueden ser ignoradas. Intentando comprender mejor estos aspectos, examinamos el Rorschach desde la perspectiva de la teoría de los Cinco Factores (Five-Factor Theory: FFT), un modelo sistémico de la persona. La FFT es compatible con la hipótesis proyectiva pero implica la expectativa de que los signos Rorschach y los datos de los autoinformes deberían correlacionar. Cuando no ocurre así, la validez de las medidas Rorschach sobre rasgos de personalidad debería ser confirmada mediante pruebas de heredabilidad, estabilidad y convergencia de las puntuaciones de observadores. El Rorschach podría ser más útil si se interpretara en el contexto de una evaluación psicodinámica global. Los clínicos que usan el Rorschach tendrían que recopilar los datos necesarios para probar su validez como medida de rasgos de personalidad y constructos relacionados. Tanto clínicos como investigadores deberían considerar la posible utilidad de las respuestas al Rorschach para evaluar procesos dinámicos.