

Editorial

Special Section: Forensic Assessment and Projective Methods

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In 2006, the former Editor of *Rorschachiana*, Dr. Anne Andronikof, asked me if I would be willing to serve as guest editor for a special section in the journal on forensic applications of projective methods. The special section needed to be filled with contributions from colleagues from across the globe to reflect the international nature of *Rorschachiana* and the ISR. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a rather difficult enterprise. Three authors promised papers, but never sent in their contributions, not even after several extensions of the deadline. This is, of course, rather disappointing, because in many respects one could argue that the use of projective methods and the Rorschach Inkblot Method in particular is increasingly popular in forensic assessment. The recent publication of the *Handbook of Forensic Rorschach Assessment* (Gacono & Evans, 2008), containing 27 chapters divided over 616 pages, bears witness to this development.

The Rorschach inkblot method (RIM) is a helpful tool in finding answers to all kinds of psycho-legal questions. Because it is an indirect test method, that is not completely transparent to the subject, it is less vulnerable to impression management than traditional self-report methods. Moreover, by including the RIM in a forensic test battery, one increases the number of test methods and information sources, allowing cross-validation of diagnostic conclusions. We can put more faith in our diagnostic conclusions when two or more different test methods or information sources show similar results, than when they diverge.

The necessity of using multiple test methods and cross-validation has been advocated by scholars such as Gregory Meyer (Meyer et al., 2001),

who demonstrated that multi-method assessment results in increased and/or incremental validity superior to single method assessment. The need for optimization of diagnostic validity is, of course, important in any assessment situation, but weighs even more in forensic assessment contexts. In the latter cases, the stakes for the subject who is being assessed can be extremely high. Results from forensic psychological evaluations inform the legal system on topics such as competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility, parenting rights and child custody, and violence risk assessment. Many of the legal decisions based on these forensic evaluations have serious implications for the civil liberties of the subject. The benchmark for safety (read: validity) of diagnostic conclusions in forensic assessment should therefore even be higher than in general clinical assessment. The Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists of the American Psychology and Law Society (see: <http://www.ap-ls.org/links/92908sgfp.pdf>) are currently being revised, and reflect the professional caution that should be exercised when psychologists offer their expertise within the legal arena.

Thus, due to the above-mentioned misfortune during the preparation of this Special Section, it includes just two papers. The first one, by Sendín and García-Alba provides an interesting analysis of an underresearched topic, fabricated or induced illness, also-called Munchausen syndrome by proxy. The term syndrome is a bit misleading, because what is called a syndrome is actually a distinct form of child abuse. The RIM can be used to gain insight into the personality of the perpetrator and the victim of this type of child abuse, as the authors illustrate. Thus, assessment with projective methods offers insight into the main characters involved in this insidious form of violence, which might open avenues for treatment and prevention.

The second paper is written by Hildebrand and myself, and offers a case study of a male forensic psychiatric patient. He is treated on an involuntary basis in a forensic hospital and assessed at regular time intervals by means of a standard test battery, including the RIM. The case study shows the seriousness and the stability of the personality pathology of the patient, and, thus, how difficult it is to change fundamental aspects of personality.

Forensic psychological assessment has become a true subspecialty in the past decade. Increasingly, scholarly books on the science and practice of forensic assessment are appearing in the literature, still mainly of North American origin (e.g., Archer, 2006; Gacono & Evans, 2008; Jackson, 2008;). This is an encouraging development. Let's hope that within

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the next decade or so, *Rorschachiana* will receive many new submissions from across our five continents on the use of projective methods in forensic assessment. Our forensic “clients” deserve excellent forensic assessments informed by empirical research and scholarly reflection.

References

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