

# Preface

This book is addressed to practitioners and researchers who are interested in adolescent development, personality assessment, and the Rorschach Inkblot Method. Adolescence is a complex and varied developmental phase, characterized by dramatic physical, mental, and psychological changes. Physically, the usual adolescent growth spurt transforms adolescents from their childhood stature to much of their adult size and strength, and the pubertal emergence of secondary sex characteristics alters their shape and appearance. Mentally, adolescents become capable of abstract thinking and increasingly familiar with the world around them. From a developmental perspective, adolescents come to grips with the tasks of adjusting to their bodily changes, individuating from their parents, becoming involved in social and romantic relationships, and beginning to establish a sense of their personal identity and advance toward adulthood.

Adolescents vary considerably in the pace of these transitions from childhood to adulthood. Some early adolescents show adult characteristics, while some young adults are mainly coping with adolescent issues. Moreover, the pace of developmental changes is commonly uneven within as well as between individual adolescents. Some adolescents are mentally sophisticated but socially immature, while other adolescents of the same age show mature social skills but childishly concrete reasoning. The wide variability of developmental issues both between and within adolescents can make it difficult to distinguish normal from abnormal development. This variability also makes it challenging to distinguish between transient reactions to developmental crises that would be resolved and psychological disorders that are likely to persist into adulthood.

The difficulty in distinguishing normal from abnormal development in adolescents has been compounded by an often expressed but erroneous view of adolescence as a stormy period during which young people ordinarily show symptoms of emotional disturbance. To the contrary, extensive research has documented that disturbance is not an integral feature of normative adolescence and that apparent symptoms of psychological disorder in young people should not be taken lightly, as in “She’ll grow out of it” or “He’s just going through a phase.” However, regarding

and treating transient adjustment problems as evidence of diagnosable psychopathology is as misguided as ignoring or making light of symptom formation in adolescents.

As for personality assessment, the distinction between normal range adolescent functioning and diagnosable or emerging psychopathology can best be accomplished by accurate evaluation of a young person's personality characteristics. Personality characteristics that differentiate healthy from psychopathological states can be observed in the four domains of cognitive functioning, affective experience, interpersonal relatedness, and self-perception. In the domain of cognitive functioning, for example, psychologically healthy adolescents are usually able to think logically and coherently, whereas loose associations and arbitrary or circumstantial reasoning are likely to indicate psychological disorder. Similarly, normal range adolescents are for the most part able to perceive people and events accurately, whereas disturbed adolescents often display impaired reality testing.

In the domain of affective experience, normal range adolescents are reasonably capable of recognizing and expressing their feelings, whereas severely constricted emotionality, recurrent depressive moods, and persistent inability to experience pleasure usually delineate the presence of some disorder. In the domain of interpersonal relatedness, adolescents are normally interested in and able to form rewarding relationships with other people, whereas social disinterest and withdrawal may reflect developmental arrest or abnormality. Normal range adolescents are also able to feel comfortable in close relationship, whereas those with psychological problems may regard other people with suspicion and distrust, and avoid any intimacy with them. As for self-perception, psychologically healthy adolescents usually are progressing toward forming a stable sense of identity and self-worth. Substantial confusion about the kind of person the adolescent is or would like to become, extremely lowered self-esteem, and feelings of being inept or unworthy often characterize adolescents with psychological problems.

The Rorschach Inkblot Method is a sensitive and psychometrically sound assessment instrument that measures personality functioning in the cognitive, affective, relatedness, and self-perception domains. As such, the Rorschach proves useful in distinguishing between normal and abnormal development in adolescents and delineating the type of psychological disorder that might be present. The clinical implications of Rorschach measurements depend on how the obtained findings accord with normative reference data. Only on the basis of such comparisons can a valid evaluation be made concerning whether a young person is functioning within the normal range or is instead likely to be experiencing or susceptible to psychological disorder. The adolescent norms of the Rorschach Comprehensive System (CS) have not been changed since the publication of the first edition of Volume 3 of the Rorschach CS (Exner & Weiner, 1982). Recently collected normative reference data on international samples of nonpatient adolescents provide contemporary cross-cultural data that update the previous norms and are presented in this volume.

The book begins with three chapters (Part I) that provide readers with basic information on the topics to be discussed in the text. The first of these chapters reviews

the development and foundations of the Rorschach Inkblot Method, with attention to the continuing evolution of the CS and its utility for assessing adolescents in the twenty-first century. The second chapter discusses key issues in the assessment of adolescents, with particular attention to differentiating patterns of psychopathology from normal developmental variations. The third chapter presents general considerations in utilizing performance-based assessment instruments in the evaluation of personality functioning in adolescence, including the importance of integrating the structural, thematic, and behavioral data in Rorschach interpretation and combining the data with information obtained from self-report inventories.

Following these three introductory chapters, the text continues with three chapters (Part II) that discuss the current status of the Rorschach with respect to theoretical formulations, research findings, and practice guidelines. Chapter 4 discusses psychodynamic perspectives on Rorschach interpretation and elaborates the theoretical assumptions that responses to the inkblots (a) reflect how people generally experience and respond to events and (b) reveal underlying thoughts and feelings that are likely to influence their behavior. Chapter 5 reviews research findings demonstrating that the Rorschach is a reliable, valid, and useful assessment instrument and presents normative reference data obtained recently from an international sample of several hundred nonpatient adolescents. Chapter 6 on practice guidelines addresses the issue of when and with whom the Rorschach works. This chapter describes the utility of Rorschach assessment whenever decisions are being made in light of personality characteristics and delineates the cross-cultural applicability of the Rorschach to people of all ages, except for very young children. The contemporary adolescent reference data provide the basis for presenting the cut-off scores for 45 CS variables and CS-based indices that have implications for normal or abnormal functioning and five stylistic variables that should be considered while interpreting the data. This diagnostic approach is illustrated in the text with a case study of a normally functioning adolescent.

The next five chapters (Part III) elaborate diagnostic, forensic, and therapeutic applications of Rorschach assessment. Chapters 7–9 discuss how Rorschach findings can facilitate differential diagnosis and treatment planning by providing information about personality characteristics and psychopathological manifestations. With eight varied case illustrations, these chapters show how Rorschach data, when used properly in relation to age-based norms, can help delineate the presence, nature, and severity of internalized and externalized symptom patterns. These eight cases of symptomatic adolescents encompass a broad range of psychopathology, including cognitive, affective, anxiety, avoidant, obsessive-compulsive, somatization, and eating disorders. Each case illustration focuses on variables in the adolescent's protocol that deviate from normative expectation and thereby provide clues to the nature of the young person's disorder. Descriptive information and cutoff scores for each of the 45 evidence-based variables are discussed in the course of the case illustrations. Chapter 10 discusses the utility of Rorschach assessment in resolving psycholegal issues, particularly in cases of criminal misconduct in which the court is referring to trial competence, criminal responsibility, and correctional dispositions. Special attention is paid to evaluating whether a behavioral problem

reflects a transient developmental crisis, is symptomatic of some underlying disorder, or indicates the emergence of antisocial behavioral manifestations in adulthood. Chapter 11 shows that Rorschach assessment can be therapeutic in its own right and discusses the positive therapeutic impact that can derive from a well-conducted Rorschach examination.

The twelfth and concluding chapter (Part IV) draws on information in the preceding chapters to formulate an empirically based psychodynamic model for Rorschach assessment of adolescents that helps to delineate personality characteristics conducive to positive adolescent development. The presented model of *Rorschach Psychoanalytic Science and Practice (RPSP)* derives from standardized-individualized conception of Rorschach assessment in which personality descriptions are based on well-validated CS variables but also capture the individual uniqueness of adolescents' subjective experience of their psychological problems.

This book follows in many respects the second edition of Volume 3 of the Rorschach Comprehensive System (Exner & Weiner, 1982, 1995), which has been the major reference source for Rorschach work with young people. The present text extends the evolution of the CS in several aspects. Beyond reviewing the basic CS administration and coding guidelines, this CS-based volume presents and applies several new structural variables, provides updated normative reference data for distinguishing between healthy and faltering adolescent development, and illustrates with detailed case studies how Rorschach assessment can help to delineate a wide range of psychological disorders. Accurate evaluation of adolescents' personality functioning and symptom formation is essential for promoting progress toward responsible and rewarding adulthood.

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Theory, Research, and Practice

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