Special Issue
Projective Methods With Couples: Families,
Thematic Apperception Test, and the Rorschach

Research Article

Observing Couples Discussing About "What Might This Be?"

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Abstract: The literature has recently stressed the clinical utility of using the conjoint Rorschach for assessment and intervention with couples seeking treatment. However, there are no clear guidelines in interpreting the behaviors couples display during the discussion about "what could this be?" This study explores the application of the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System to code couples' behaviors during the process of creation and discussion of conjoint Rorschach responses, using three groups of couples with different degrees of marital satisfaction. Results of these exploratory analyses suggest that (a) the coding allows for identification of differences among the three groups of couples, and (b) the coding yields specific information on partners' behaviors in each group of couples.

Keywords: conjoint Rorschach, couples, Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System

The use of Rorschach cards (Rorschach, 1921) has a long tradition in the psychological assessments of systems. Starting with Blanchard (1959), Rorschach cards have been administered to couples (Bauman & Roman, 1966), families (Loveland, Wynne, & Singer, 1963), and various systems centered around an individual client (Cutter & Farberow, 1968) with instructions to the examinees to produce consensual responses. However, Nakamura and Nakamura (1987) stressed how studies on the consensus use of the Rorschach show many inconsistencies in the administration procedures, the coding, and the focus of analysis for interpretation, and this may be a reason why the technique did not spread as it could have, given the depth of the clinical information it provides to researchers and clinicians.

In recent years, the consensus among assessors on the validity and reliability of Exner's Comprehensive System (CS; Exner, 1978, 2003) has supported the exploration of the CS with couples in assessment and counselling contexts (Handler, 1997; Noy-Sharav, 2005) by assessing each partner individually first, and

https://doi.org/10.1027/1192-5604/a000109

consequently by administering the conjoint Rorschach to the partners together. In further support of the conjoint Rorschach, Collaborative and Therapeutic Assessment procedures (CTA; Finn, 2007) have stressed its utility as an intervention with clients. In a recent publication, Finn (2015) illustrated the power of consensus administration of the Rorschach with a couple stuck in a pattern of mutual pathological projective identification. Finn described the therapeutic impact on the couple of working with the partners on the processes they used to reach the conjoint responses. The therapeutic effect of a discussion with a couple of their Rorschach responses in the context of a collaborative couple's assessment was also illustrated by Provenzi, Menichetti, Coin, and Aschieri (2017). In this study, collaborative assessment allowed couples to promote compassion, empathy, and insight about their life experiences.

It seems evident that the clinical work on couples' in vivo interactions during a consensus Rorschach can be very promising, especially in the framework of the collaborative or therapeutic assessment of couples. However, the identification and interpretation of partners' communication patterns and behaviors can be challenging, and the CTA literature to date has not formalized any structured means to point assessors' attention to specific clinically relevant processes.

The Present Study

To foster the development of this promising area of clinical work, we think it is important to provide information about the applicability of a structured coding system to couples' conjoint Rorschach discussions. This study aims to assess the applicability of a structured coding system, the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System (RMICS; Heyman & Vivian, 2000), to the analysis of the interactions while completing the Rorschach of one group of couples seeking couples counselling and two groups of satisfied couples. Since the Rorschach allows for the registration of the dynamics of couples reaching agreements on their perceptions of the cards, and those displayed when partners end up in disagreement on a specific content, in contrast to the typical use of the RMICS in studies on couples' communication, RMICS codes for couples' behaviors are differentiated based on the fact that they would lead to agreement or disagreement on a percept. On the basis of guidelines on observational studies with couples (Heyman, 2001), we expect the RMICS codes to: (a) highlight differences in the way couples discuss their conjoint Rorschach and (b) highlight specific behaviors of the partners in each type of couple. Conjoint Rorschach research on distressed and satisfied couples showed distinct structural summary results in couples' ability to find agreements,

emotional distress and avoidance, as well as negative attributions and hostility (Aschieri,2013). Such areas of functioning have also been repeatedly found to be relevant in observational studies of couples.

When observed in free interactions or problem-solving tasks, distressed couples tend to show more frequent use of complaints (Alberts, 1988), criticism (Koren, Carlton, & Shaw, 1980), and mind-reading (Gottman, 1979). On the contrary, satisfied couples are more capable of focusing on the problem/task, verbalizing agreement, expressing assent, and smiling (Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Distressed couples reciprocate negative and positive behaviors for longer times than do nondistressed couples, while the latter show shorter sequences of negative behaviors (Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Also, Revensdorf, Voeghel, Wegener, Hahlweg, and Shindler (1980) found that the partners of distressed couples tended to display more negative and less positive behaviors after any positive or negative partner's solicitation, with higher frequencies of negative behaviors following neutral statements compared with nondistressed couples. Schaap (1982) found lower levels of involvement in the listening partner during a discussion in distressed couples, in contrast to a higher frequency of positive validation patterns and contracting patterns in nondistressed couples. Ting-Toomey (1982) found that highly satisfied couples tended to display reciprocal positive interactions, satisfied couples were more involved in confront–defend patterns, and nonsatisfied couples revealed frequent patterns characterized by confront–defend–complain–defend. Finally, Weiss and Heyman (1997) highlighted how distressed couples tend to use more negative statements, fewer positive statements, and reciprocate more negative behaviors during problem-solving discussions.

Given the lack of literature regarding husbands' and wives' behaviors at the Rorschach, we did not formulate expectations in any direction and we explored whether the RMICS would have highlighted specific differences in their roles during the conjoint task.

Method

Participants

This study involved three groups of Italian married couples (N = 12) living in the Milan area (see Table 1). The first and the second groups included volunteer couples (nonclinical couples [NC]; n = 6) who (a) were not (and had never been) in individual, couple, or family therapy, and (b) were not undergoing psychiatric treatment, according to the partners. Volunteer couples were further divided into two subgroups based on the partners' individual scores on the Marital Adjustment

Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). The three couples with higher scores on the MAT (M = 131.1) were grouped together, as the test results suggested that their relationships were very healthy and fulfilling (high satisfaction group [NC-HS]; n = 3), and the remaining three couples (M = 111) constituted the second subgroup (low satisfaction group [NC-LS]; n = 3), as their MAT scores indicated a relatively lower level of satisfaction, yet above the threshold of 100. The third group included couples seeking help in an outpatient couple treatment program where they were assessed before the beginning of the treatment (clinical couples [C]; n = 6).

Procedure

The conjoint Rorschach was administered to all the couples following the same administration procedure described by Aschieri (2013): "Now I am going to give you the Rorschach cards, I need you to look at them and, for each of them, the two of you need to reach an agreement on one or more responses" (p. 47). Couples were allowed to give as many conjoint responses as they wished, and if they were not able to achieve one agreed-on response, the assessor urged them to take their time and keep working together.

The response phase was audio-recorded. Two researchers independently double-coded the verbal interactions of the spouses during the response phase using the RMICS (Heyman & Vivian, 2000). The RMICS covers, in declining hierarchical importance, 11 coding categories corresponding to specific behaviors enacted by the partners during their interaction and related to the potential for marital problems. The RMICS defines the speaker turn as its basic coding unit. If the partner emits more than one code during a turn, he/she receives the highest code on the hierarchy. To deal with long speech turns, speaker turns that last more than 30 s are coded in 30-s segments (i.e., coded as if a new speaker's turn occurs every 30 s).

The RMICS codes used in this study comprised the original codes and one additional ad hoc created code, MC0 (metacommunication). We coded metacommunications to record a specific set of utterances that emerged during the administrations. In many cases, rather than discussing what each card could have been, couples started to discuss how to proceed in the discussion about the card. We coded metacommunication expressions such as, "How should we start?" or "Do you want to go first this time?" Also, the coding differentiated behaviors that eventually led to a mutually agreed upon response from the behaviors that the couple displayed while discussing content that the partners ended up not agreeing upon. Table 2 contains the list of RMICS codes used in this study, their scoring criteria, and examples of such codes in the conjoint Rorschach Comprehensive

Table 1. Demographic data: descriptive statistics for nonclinical (NC-HS, high satisfaction group; NC-LS, low satisfaction group) and clinical (C) couples

	Nonclinical couples (NC) (n = 6)					
	NC-HS couples (n = 3)	NC-LS couples (n = 3)	Clinical couples (C) (n = 6)			
	Mdn	*Mdn*	*Mdn*	H^a	*df*	*p*
Age husband	43	40	42	1.708	2	0.426
Age wife	40	36	39.5	1.562	2	0.458
Years of marriage	15	7	12.5	2.866	2	0.239
Children	3	1	1.5	5.778	2	0.056
SES	60	58	52.25	1.136	2	0.567

Note. [a]Kruskal–Wallis test value was used to assess differences in participants' age (husband and wife), years of marriage, number of children, and socioeconomic status (SES).

System. Disagreements between the two raters in the coding of the couples' discussion during the response phase were resolved through discussion until agreement.

Data Analysis

The coded audiotapes were analyzed with T-LAB 5.1 software (Lancia, 2004), a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) program that can evaluate the relations among words within a single section of text or across multiple texts (the so-called corpus). We performed three analyses on the codes attributed to couples' interactions. For example, a sequence such as this one on Card VIII:

Husband (H): "Oh, this card is full of colors... shall you go first?"
Wife (W): "Well, I think this is a flower"
H: "I believe it is a rotten tomato"
W: "Can't you see the petals of the flower, and the green stem here?"
H: "Oh, I see what you mean... yes it can be a flower"

This sequence would receive the following codes: H_MC0 (H_Metacommunication, W_SD (W_Self-Disclosure), H_SDn (H_Self-Disclosure – n), W_PD (W_Problem Discussion), H_AC (H_Acceptation).

Analyses were run on the codes attributed to NC and C couples discussing all their responses to all Rorschach cards. The T-LAB 5.1 software was hence used to scrutinize and explore the corpus composed by all the codes describing the partners' behaviors.

Table 2. RMICS codes used in the analysis of conjoint Rorschach verbalizations

RMICS	Codes		Topic	Rorschach example
	Response eventually given	Response eventually rejected (n)		
Metacommunication	MC0		All statements in which partners communicate to find a common strategy to create or select mutual and shared responses. Metacommunications are relative to all the statements that organize or reflect on the communicative exchange	"This time you should start first"; "How do we do?"; "Do you want me to tell you what I saw before?"*Note*: "It's difficult this one, I would not know how to do" would be coded MC0. A comment on the response adequacy, as in, "It's difficult this one, I think we should be really sure this is a bat, consider the legs!", would be coded as a Problem Discussion (PD).
Psychological abuse	PA	PAn	Communications and behaviors intended to devaluate the other's self, menaces, and threats	"How can you say you do not see a *horse*, you should look for medical counseling."
Distress-maintaining attributions	DA	DAn	Negative causal explanations of reasons for which: (a) the other does not understand the speakers' proposals; (b) the other proposes a response	(a). "Yes, he says *butterfly* because he always wants to disagree with me"; (b). "You do not see a *butterfly* because you wish me always to be accepting your ideas."
Hostility	HO	HOn	Hostile statements to the other's perceptions and responses proposals	"This is not a *bat*, no matter what you think" (angry intonation).
Dysphoric affect	DY	DYn	Statements, comments and expressions of sadness or distress	"I am not sure, anyway I am sad about this difficulty"; "I do not think we will manage this solution easily" (hopeless voice).

(Continued on next page)

Table 2. (Continued)

RMICS	Codes		Topic	Rorschach example
	Response eventually given	Response eventually rejected (n)		
Withdrawal	WI	WIn	During the discussion over a potential response, one partner steps back from the interaction, does not reply appropriately to the other's communications, changes the topic of the discussion leaving the previous turn unanswered	"Don't you see the *bat's* wings?" [no reply]; "Don't you see the *bat's* wings?" "In any case this is a *mask*" (reply).
Relationship-enhancing attributions	RA	RAn	All comments communicating appreciation and consideration of the partner's ideas	"You are so original, let's say a *butterfly.*"
Acceptation	AC	ACn	Paraphrasing, positive feedback used to validate and make the other feel understood	"Yes I understand how you see it, but consider the blot also in this way..."
Self-disclosure	SD	SDn	Statements in which partners express their response proposals	"To me this seems a *flower.*"
Humor	HM	HMn	Intentionally humors statements	"Give up joking [laughs], this is a *bat*!"
Problem discussion	PD	PDn	Descriptions and clarifications of one's own response proposals; verbal and nonverbal signs of assent, accord, and questions facilitating the other's expressions	"I mean, I said *bat* because these are his wings, his head, and these are the legs"; "Hmm, yes, go on..."; "And according to you, this is the tail or another leg of the *bear*?"

In this research study three explorative analyses were run:

1. The first analysis, the *correspondences analysis* (see, for example, Molgora, Ranieri, & Tamanza, 2014), allows for the identification of the latent dimensions (namely *factors*) underlying the corpus, and aims at identifying which were the most relevant behavioral dimensions underlying the differences between NC-HS, NC-LS, and C couples. Similar to factor analysis, correspondence analysis extracts a set of factors reported in a bidimensional space, and each of them sets up a spatial dimension centered at the value 0, between the negative and positive endpoints. Thus, the items that are placed on the opposite ends of the factor are most different from each other. Statistical tests (test values ≥ 1.96, $p < .05$) are provided to assess the weight of the items that define each polarity of the factors. The higher the value, the more important the element is in defining the factor. Again, similar to factor analysis, the meaning of each factor is inferred based on the items that are more relevant in its definition. This analysis also provides a graphical representation of where each of the three groups of couples is set in the space defined by the two factors.
2. The second analysis, the *specificity analysis* (see, for example, Saita, Zuliani, Tramontano, & Bonanno, 2016), focuses on the specific behaviors in each group of couples by contrasting the presence and absence of each code within each group of couples with its overall presence in the complete corpus. It yields a description of which are the more frequent codes within each group and which are the codes that are less used by each group in contrast to the others providing a chi-square test value. The chi-square value derives from a 2 × 2 contingency table in which the two rows are the frequency of each code and the sum of all other codes, and the two columns are the count of each code in one type of couple and the count of that code in the remaining groups of couples. A chi-square absolute value over 3.84 is considered statistically significant with $\alpha = .05$. T-LAB indicates the codes that are more frequent than expected with positive chi-square values and the codes that are less frequent than expected with negative values.
3. The third analysis, the *analysis of association of codes* (see, for example, Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010), focuses on the behaviors that more frequently accompany the most specific behaviors in each group of couple. This analysis illuminates the typical process of interaction of NC-HS, NC-LS, and C couples. The level of association between codes is measured using cosine coefficient (Salton & McGill, 1984). It is calculated as the ratio between the frequency of code co-occurrences in the text and the product of the square root of their respective occurrences. The association index value range varies

between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating stronger association (Lancia, 2004). There are no guidelines as to which cut-off should be considered a clinically and statistically relevant coefficient. In this study, we report and describe coefficients in descending order, limiting the discussion to those codes with relevance for the aim of the analyses.

The RMICS codes for husbands' and wives' behaviors are the unit of analysis, in all analyses. Each analysis provides both information on the differences in the coding among couples and information on the roles of husbands and wives within each couple group.

Results

Our first goal was to explore whether the RMICS coding is able to identify latent factors underlying the NC-HS, NC-LS, and C interactions, by means of a correspondences analysis. Results highlighted two dimensions, accounting for 77.26% and 22.74% of the data variance, respectively. The latent factors are graphically represented in Figure 1.

The first factor, represented by the horizontal axis, differentiates codes that describe NC and C couples. The second factor, represented by the vertical axis, differentiates mainly codes of NC-HS and NC-LS couples (see Table 3).

From the analysis of RMICS codes composing the first factor, its psychological meaning might be interpreted as the couples' ability to be constructively involved in problem-solving. In fact, the first factor is characterized by the opposition between a polarity characterized by NC couples, partners equally striving to find a shared response even when it will not be eventually achieved, presence of both positive and negative emotions, and wives expressing all their views, even if they will not be accepted by their husbands. The opposite polarity of the first factor is characterized by C couples, by major efforts of both partners in discussing the items until a shared definition of reality is eventually achieved, metacommunications on how to come to an agreement, and wives showing more negative behaviors of withdrawal and dysphoric affect.

These results suggest that RMICS codes are able to highlight the different manner in which the couples in this sample addressed the inherent conflict to reach a consensus on a shared view of reality while discussing the Rorschach. NC-HS and NC-LS couples are able to discuss any topic thoroughly; when they agree on a response its endorsement is straightforward, problem-solving efforts to better

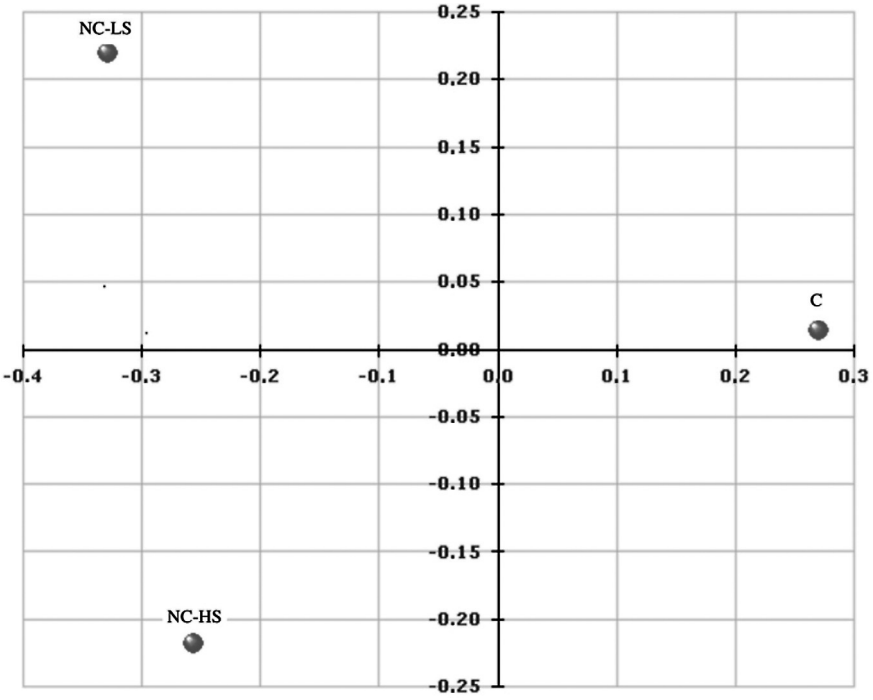

Figure 1. Correspondences analysis graph.

understand each other's views are made in cases of disagreements, and both partners express both hostility and positive emotions. On the other hand, in C couples, partners are concerned with the definition of how to find a solution rather than the solution itself, and any shared response requires relevant efforts to be finally endorsed. Furthermore, in C couples, wives tend to express more sadness and withdraw from problem-solving.

From the analysis of codes composing the second factor, its underlying meaning seems to be connected with the emotional processes and behavioral fluctuations in the problem-solving task. The second factor is characterized by the opposition between a polarity characterized by NC-HS couples, with positive emotions in husbands reinforcing shared responses and positive efforts of husbands to reach an accord even when this is not eventually found. The opposite polarity is characterized by NC-LS couples, partners making the other feel understood both when agreement is eventually found and when it is not, and husbands' hostility being balanced by wives' and by positive behaviors.

Table 3. Correspondences analysis results

Factor 1				Factor 2			
NC couples		C couples		NC-HS couples		NC-LS couples	
RMICS	Test value	RMICS	Test value	RMICS	Test value	RMICS	Test value
NC-LS	−11.00	C	17.40	NC-HS	−8.00	NC-LS	7.35
NC-HS	−9.35	W_Problem discussion	7.90	H_Humor	−3.68	H_Acceptation	4.06
H_Problem discussion (n)	−7.04	H_Problem discussion	6.04	H_Problem discussion (n)	−2.98	H_Hostility (n)	3.24
W_Problem discussion (n)	−5.14	H_Metacommunication	4.99			H_Acceptation (n)	3.10
W_Humor (n)	−4.04	W_Withdrawal	2.61			W_Acceptation (n)	2.76
W_Hostility (n)	−3.89	W_Withdrawal (n)	2.34			W_Relationship-enhancing attributions	2.10
W_Self-disclosure (n)	−3.72	W_Dysphoric affect	2.15				
H_Humor (n)	−3.69						
W_Humor	−3.57						
H_Hostility (n)	−2.85						
H_Humor	−2.74						
W_Self-disclosure	−2.22						

Note. NC = nonclinical couples. C = clinical couples. NC-HS = high satisfaction group. NC-LS = low satisfaction group. RMICS = Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System. W = wives. H = husbands. (n) = response eventually rejected.

These data suggest that NC-HS couples deal effectively with problems and invest energy to maintain positive emotions in the discussion, and that NC-LS couples are more concerned with potential negative repercussions of disagreements, with wives offering more reassurances to the partners when disagreements emerge.

The second goal is to explore whether the RMICS coding allows us to describe the more specific behaviors that characterize each group of couples, and those behaviors that are missing from their interactions, through a specificity analysis (see Table 4). The more prominent behaviors of NC-HS couples are problem-solving efforts from both partners to find shared responses when partners do not agree, both partners' humor when partners agree, and wives' expressions of anger when partners do not agree. Lack of husbands' acceptation, metacommunications, and humor are typical of husbands in NC-HS couples.

In NC-LS couples, the more specific behaviors are wives buffering their husbands' hostility in disagreements on a content by accepting their husbands' response proposals, and wives' expression of relationship-enhancing attributions when partners arrive at mutually agreed-upon responses. Similar to NC-HS couples, problem-solving in cases of eventual agreement is the least present code in the NC-LS group. C couples' interactions are marked by problem-solving behaviors from wives and husbands in cases of agreement on the Rorschach response, husbands' metacommunications, wives' withdrawal from the interaction both when partners agree and do not agree on a percept, and husbands' acceptation when the couple agrees. C couples, in contrast to NC-LS and NC-HS couples, show a lack of wives' problem-solving behaviors when partners disagree, hostility in both partners when they disagree, and husbands' humor in disagreements.

The third goal was to explore the extent to which RMICS describes the patterns that couple show around their more specific behaviors. Hence, the association of codes analysis focuses on what precedes or follows each group of couples most specific behaviors, that is, husbands' problem-solving and humor when agreement is lacking in NC-HS couples, hostility for husbands and acceptation for wives when agreement is not achieved in NC-L*S* couples, and problem-solving behaviors in agreed-upon responses in C couples. For NC-HS couples, the association analysis takes into consideration the more specific codes for both husbands and wives, problem-solving on disagreements, and humor. Since partners' problem-solving behaviors in cases of disagreement repeatedly co-occurred, problem-solving in NC-HS couples was re-coded a single unit of behavior to explore its associations with other codes.

In NC-HS couples (see Table 5), problem-solving on disagreements is associated with problem discussion in cases of agreement, with partners' acceptance and self-disclosures both regarding responses on which partners will agree and disagree,

Table 4. Specificity analysis results for nonclinical (NC-HS, high satisfaction group; NC-LS, low satisfaction group) and clinical (C) couples

Over-used RMICS codes					
NC-HS couples		NC-LS couples		C couples	
RMICS	χ^2	RMICS	χ^2	RMICS	χ^2
H_Problem discussion (n)	39.62	H_Hostility (n)	18.69	W_Problem discussion	59.63
H_Humor	21.00	W_Acceptation (n)	10.14	H_Problem discussion	35.14
W_Problem discussion (n)	14.70	W_Relationship-enhancing attributions	7.31	H_Metacommunication	24.34
W_Humor	10.75			W_Withdrawal	6.55
W_Hostility (n)	8.60			W_Withdrawal (n)	5.17
H_Humor (n)	5.51			H_Acceptation	4.96
Under-used RMICS codes					
H_Acceptation	−9.64	W_ Problem discussion	−39.88	W_Problem discussion (n)	−53.12
H_Problem discussion	−5.78	H_Problem discussion	−20.88	W_Hostility (n)	−15.73
H_Metacommunication	−5.29			H_Humor (n)	−13.81
				H_Hostility (n)	−6.53

Note. W = wives. H = husbands. (n) = response eventually rejected. RMICS = Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System.

Table 5. Cosine coefficient of association of codes analysis between units of behaviors and other RMICS codes in nonclinical couples (NC-HS, high satisfaction group)

NC-HS couples			
Partners' problem discussion (n)		Husbands' humor	
RMICS	Cosine coefficient	RMICS	Cosine coefficient
H_Problem discussion	1	W_Humor	0.843
W_Problem discussion	1	W_Problem discussion (n)	0.761
H_Acceptation	0.870	H_Problem discussion (n)	0.740
W_Humor	0.840	H_Problem discussion	0.721
W_Acceptation	0.653	W_Problem discussion	0.716
W_Self-disclosure (n)	0.612		
W_Self-disclosure	0.589		
H_Self-disclosure	0.521		
H_Self-disclosure (n)	0.430		

Note. W = wives. H = husbands. (n) = response eventually rejected. RMICS = Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System.

and wives' humor. In keeping with the analysis of specificities showing that problem-solving discussion for responses on which partners agree are among the least present behaviors in this group, it seems that NC-HS couples are able to discuss throughout any possible potential response, and while trying to reach difficult common solutions they are able to rapidly achieve and define accepted common choices, leaving space to express acceptance of others' views, self-disclose, and express positive emotions. Husbands' humor, the other most specific behavior in NC-HS couples, is reciprocated, and is present both when partners solve problems on agreed and disagreed upon responses. It could be speculated that humor and positive emotions are reciprocated and help NC-HS couples to repair and remain focused while problem-solving over disagreements. Their ease in quickly reaching agreements may in turn increase and sustain humor and positive emotional exchanges.

In NC-LS couples, the most specific behaviors were hostility from husbands and acceptation of husbands' expressions from wives when couples disagree over a response (see Table 6). When partners disagree, higher associations of husbands' hostile behaviors are observed with wives' proposals of potential responses, and with wives accepting and validating behaviors. In NC-LS couples, wives' acceptation of husbands' proposals when they will end being rejected by the couple is accompanied by wives' self-disclosures, husbands' acceptation, and by husbands' engagement in goal-oriented problem-solving both when the couple ends up agreeing and when the couple ends up disagreeing. These results suggest that

Table 6. Cosine coefficient of association of codes analysis between units of behaviors and other RMICS codes in nonclinical couples (NC-LS, low satisfaction group)

NH-LS couples			
Husbands' hostile behaviors		Wives' acceptance (n)	
RMICS	Cosine coefficient	RMICS	Cosine coefficient
W_Self-disclosure (n)	0.594	W_Self-disclosure	1
W_Self-disclosure	0.591	W_Problem discussion	0.966
W_Acceptation	0.524	W_Problem discussion (n)	0.856
		H_Acceptation	0.810
		H_Problem discussion	0.714
		H_Problem discussion (n)	0.650

Note. W = wives. H = husbands. (n) = response eventually rejected. RMICS = Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System.

wives have a pivotal role in facilitating couples' problem-solving, by balancing their partners' hostility with their self-disclosures and proposals for agreeing on one or more aspects of Rorschach responses.

Since partners' problem-solving behaviors in agreed-upon responses are co-occurring, problem-solving in C couples was recoded as a single unit of behavior to explore its associations with the codes that more closely precede and follow C couples' problem-solving (see Table 7). Problem discussion codes are highly associated with acceptation of the potential response features, with self-disclosures, with self-disclosures in the case of disagreements, with metacommunications, and with efforts at problem-solving in the case of disagreement. All the associations revealed very high coefficients, suggesting that the discussion over agreed-upon responses and responses that are eventually rejected are tightly interwoven, and metacommunications from both partners may help organize the response process of these couples.

Discussion

The RMICS coding of behaviors during the conjoint Rorschach task highlighted differences among the three groups of couples, suggesting that developing knowledge in such coding may help clinicians focus their attention on relevant aspects of couples' interaction. These differences are even more striking given the low power inherent in the comparison of such a small number of couples. Also, the differences found in this study resonate with expectations based on research on

Table 7. Cosine coefficient of association of codes analysis between problem solving behaviors and other RMICS codes in clinical (C) couples

C couples	
RMICS	Cosine coefficient
H_Acceptation	0.984
W_Acceptation	0.984
W_Self-disclosure	0.968
W_Metacommunication	0.951
H_Problem discussion (n)	0.935
W_Problem discussion (n)	0.918
H_Metacommunication	0.901
H_Self-disclosure	0.883
H_Self-disclosure (n)	0.866
W_Self-disclosure (n)	0.847

Note. W = wives. H = husbands. (n) = response eventually refused. RMICS = Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System.

differences among satisfied and distressed couples. Very satisfied couples in our sample (NC-HS) easily reach shared solutions, work intensely on resolving differences, express conflict when they disagree, but are also able to laugh and generate positive emotions both when facing disagreements and when agreeing. In stable but less satisfied couples in our sample (NC-LS), agreements are still easily reached, but a higher rate of positive and negative emotional fluctuations occur. In this regard, in these couples, wives have a crucial role: They buffer their husbands' hostile behaviors with an open and accepting attitude. Finally, couples seeking marital counseling in our sample (C) are characterized by a great amount of effort in finding shared responses, by wives' withdrawals from interactions, and by lack of emotional expressions of anger. In these couples, the achievement of the problem-solving task is helped by the use of husbands' metacommunications to define, in addition to conjoint answers, also conjoint and shared ways to find those answers.

Limitations and Conclusion

The main shortcoming of this study is the very small, convenience sample used. Hence, the extent to which the results of this study can be generalized is very limited at best. Second, it should be noted that the findings connected to couples in

the C group may not apply to all types of conflictual/distressed marital relationships. While the literature has repeatedly stressed the connection between marital distress and marital treatment (Schonbrun & Whisman, 2010; Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981; Whisman, Beach, & Snyder, 2008), the couples in our sample may not be representative of distressed couples in that they were searching for support to address their conjugal issues. Finally, researchers aiming to explore this field should also note that the analyses run in this study did not allow us to compute the effects size of the results and to plan analyses that allow for such specification.

Despite these limitations, this is the first research to assess couples' Rorschach interactions with a structured coding system developed in the framework of observational studies of couples in ecological environments with a textual computer-assisted analysis on the coded behaviors. Our analyses did not include the quality, in terms of determinants, form accuracy, or contents of the responses our couples ended up providing at the consensus Rorschach, or the quantity of agreed-upon contents in their protocols. Previous research (Aschieri, 2013) highlighted that distressed couples tend to agree more than satisfied couples on specific types of responses. It would be interesting to explore in further studies how differently satisfied and distressed couples, in their behavioral interaction during the conjoint response phase, are able, respectively, to reject responses with such features or agree on them. Also, another difference in the structural summaries of distressed and satisfied couples is the number of agreed-upon responses and the number of responses to the last three colored cards. Further studies should explore whether the interaction between partners is different with cards that have different levels of emotional pull (Ishibashi et al., 2016), and whether distressed couples show distinct patterns of disagreement in chromatic and achromatic cards.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge A. Andronikof for mentoring the first author with the analysis of conjoint Rorschach.

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Received October 30, 2017
Revision received February 12, 2018
Accepted August 10, 2018
Published online May 9, 2019

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Summary

The literature has recently stressed the clinical utility of using the conjoint Rorschach for assessment and intervention with couples seeking treatment. However, there are no clear guidelines in interpreting the behaviors couples display during the discussion about "what could this be?" This study explores the application of the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System to code couples' behaviors during the process of creation and discussion of conjoint Rorschach responses, using three groups of couples with different degrees of marital satisfaction. Results of these exploratory analyses suggest that (a) the coding allows for the identification of differences among the three groups of couples, and (b) the coding yields specific information on partners' behaviors in each group of couples.

Sommario

La letteratura ha recentemente dimostrato l'utilità di Rorschach consensuale per la valutazione e l'intervento nelle coppie. Tuttavia, non vi è alcuna guida per interpretare i comportamenti che possono essere osservati durante la somministrazione. Questo studio esplora l'applicazione del Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System per valutare i comportamenti della coppia durante il processo di creazione e discussione della risposta congiunta. Vengono studiati tre gruppi di coppie con tre gradi di soddisfazione coniugale: i risultati di questa analisi esplorativa suggeriscono che (a) il punteggio consente di identificare le differenze tra i tre gruppi e (b) la codifica fornisce informazioni specifiche per ciascun membro della coppia nei tre gruppi.

Résumé

La littérature a récemment souligné l'utilité clinique de l'utilisation du conjoint Rorschach à des fins d'évaluation et d'intervention auprès des couples en quête de traitement. Toutefois, il n'existe pas de directives claires sur l'interprétation des comportements des couples lors de la discussion sur le thème « Qu'est-ce que cela pourrait être ? ». Cette étude explore l'application du « Système de codage d'interaction conjugale rapide » pour coder les comportements des couples au cours du processus de création de réponses en utilisant trois groupes de couples avec différents degrés de satisfaction conjugale.

Les résultats de ces analyses exploratoires suggèrent que (a) le codage permet d'identifier les différences entre les trois groupes de couples et (b) le codage fournit des informations spécifiques sur les comportements des partenaires dans chaque groupe de couples.

Resumen

La literatura ha demostrado recientemente la utilidad del Conjoint Rorschach para la evaluación y la intervención con las parejas. Sin embargo, no hay una guía para interpretar los comportamientos que se pueden observar durante el traspaso. Este estudio explora la aplicación del Rapid Marital Interaction System para calificar las conductas de la pareja durante el proceso de creación y discutir la respuesta conjunta. Se estudian tres grupos de parejas con tres grados de satisfacción marital. Los resultados de este análisis exploratorio sugieren que (a) la codification permite identificar las diferencias entre los tres grupos, y (b) la codification proporciona información específica para cada miembro de la pareja en los tres grupos.

要約

「これは何に見えますか？」についてのカップの話し合い

その文献は最近、治療を求めている夫婦のアセスメントや介入に、夫婦共同でロールシャッハを行うことが臨床的に有用であることを強調した。しかし、「これは何に見えますか？」という話し合いの中で、夫婦が示す行動を解釈する際の明確なガイドラインはない。この研究では、夫婦間の満足度の異なる3つのグループを使って、共同ロールシャッハでの回答の作り方、その話し合いのプロセスにおける夫婦の行動をコード化するための急速夫婦間相互作用コーディングシステム（the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System）の適用を検討している。これらの探索的分析の結果は、 (a)3つの夫婦のグループ間の違いの識別を可能にする、 (b) コーディングが夫婦の各グループにおけるパートナーの行動に関する特定の情報をもたらす、ことを示している。

