SOFTWARE REVIEW

Rorschach Interpretive Assistance Program: Version 4 for Windows. John E. Exner, Jr., Irving B. Weiner, and Psychological Assessment Resources Staff. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, 1999, $595.

Reviewed by Marvin W. Acklin

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Aside from actual administration of the test, scoring the Rorschach remains one of the most important sources of clinical information in the psychological assessment process. It is also one of the most demanding and time consuming. Scoring the test, response by response, discloses the fine grain of the test respondent's psychological processes and forms the foundation and database for calculation of indexes, ratios, and percentages of the Structural Summary.

Automation of Rorschach coding and calculation of the score summary was apparently initiated by Z. Piotrowski. John Exner, in the early to mid-1980s, automated the scoring process, taking advantage of online scoring using a mainframe computer. With the development of the PC, computer-assisted Rorschach scoring became possible for the individual clinician—no more long and tedious summarizing and calculation of the Structural Summary!

Rorschach Workshops and Psychological Assessment Resources (PAR) set the early standard with its DOS-based programs: the Rorschach Interpretation Assistance Program (RIAP) and the Rorschach Scoring Program (RSP). RIAP4 is the latest PAR product to take advantage of the increased computing power of the Windows 95/98 operating system. RIAP4 requires a CD-ROM device and at least 16 MB of RAM, commonly available in post-486 PC systems.

The RIAP4 user interface is significantly reorganized, simplified, and improved over the earlier DOS-based program, enhancing navigation and facilitating ease of data entry. Using the mouse, RIAP4 data entry is fast and efficient, particularly if the clinician relies on the preferred method of coding responses on a separate sheet of paper and then transferring the codes into the program. Keyboard entry, for those who prefer it, is still possible. Once one memorizes the interface and the sequential aspects of entering response codes, the process of data entry becomes fast indeed. The most significant improvement over the earlier DOS program is the incorporation of interactive form tables and location charts into the program through the use of pop-up windows, which eliminates the need to flip through form tables and location charts of Exner's (1995) workbook for the Comprehensive System. An extensive dictionary of error prompts and context-sensitive help prompts and corrects the coding process. RIAP4 summarizes the codes as responses are entered and calculates the Structural Summary after 14 responses are entered. The program has an onboard word processor, enabling the user to edit the output or to output information to a standard word-processing package. Another significant improvement is the completely redrafted, data-cluster-based interpretive statements that have replaced the wooden and mechanistic language of earlier versions with a somewhat more experience-near and person-centered language. A sample report is available at the PAR Web site (http://www.parinc.com).

Although much improved and more descriptive of actual humans, RIAP4 interpretive statements remain highly artificial, are oftentimes conflicting and, in my opinion, are unsuitable for direct inclusion in the assessment report. For clinicians whose test files may be subpoenaed, as most any experienced forensic psychologist will testify, the inclusion of the interpretive report can be extremely problematic. I have seen instances where the stilted RIAP interpretive statements were directly quoted in closing legal arguments! Finally, although RIAP4 interpretive statements are described as "actuarial," it is my impression that the reliability and validity of interpretive statements have never been sufficiently established. The manual is completely silent on this point. This, of course, is a problem with all computer-based test interpretation. Because of these concerns, including the high cost of the software, the experienced clinician may elect to purchase the less expensive scoring assistance program (RSP4:S), which does not include the interpretive report. Despite these caveats, the interpretive search strategy and clusters and associated statements remain an effective framework for the development of inferences and a highly effective teaching tool for students and trainees.

RIAP4 has a user-friendly data manager that permits grouping of cases and the generation of descriptive statistics (mean, media, mode, etc.) and, as in earlier versions of the program, includes an export facility for transferring data to a statistical package. PAR claims that records from RIAP3 may be imported into the RIAP4 program, but I was unable to do so. Additionally, the RIAP4 output uses a fairly complex graphics format (lines, boxes, and shading) that, although spiffy in ap-

pearance, is a printer "memory hog." It overloaded 1 MB of laser-printer memory in my older Canon laser printer, taking a very long time to print, but it worked fine in the 2-MB environment of my Hewlett Packard LaserJet 6PM. The technical support person at PAR was not only mildly annoyed when I called to discuss this problem (even after I informed her that I was a software reviewer), but she also was unable to explain the problem or propose a remedy. We determined the remedy ourselves by adjusting the resolution (dots per square inch) setting on the printer configuration (one really does not need all those spiffy lines, boxes, and shaded graphics). The program is remarkably bug free, although PAR has already notified users of the need for a patch that is downloadable at the PAR Web site. I have encountered no problems using either the Pentium II or Pentium III systems with 64 and 128 MB of RAM, respectively. The program was fast and efficient. The RIAP4 installation process and launching of the program is very easy and may be done without resorting to the manual. The program has a user-friendly and informative online help facility. Documentation is adequate. As in previous versions, the program continues to have an annoying copy protection scheme.

Despite these minor criticisms, RIAP4 is a vast improvement over previous versions of the program. RIAP4 may not include some of the bells and whistles of its competitors—for example, Phil Caracena's (1988–2000) ROR-SCAN (from whom apparently the PAR developers borrowed some features)—but it brings the now-classic and familiar Exner Structural Summary up to date, taking advantage of today's fast computers and the Windows 95/98 operating system.

REFERENCES

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