

Using the Rorschach for Exploring the Concept of Transitional Space within the Political Context of the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an application of a new Rorschach index, the Reality–Fantasy Scale (RFS) for evaluating the extent to which educated Israeli Jews and Arabs manifest a similar adaptive and functional ability in preserving psychic transitional space. The RFS is a psychodynamic oriented diagnostic tool, based on Exner’s (1993) Comprehensive System for scoring and interpreting the Rorschach, and designed to operationalize Winnicott’s (1971) concept of potential space. The scale is based on a paradigm that conceptualizes the Rorschach task as inviting the subject to enter the intermediate transitional space between inner and outer reality. The RFS ranges from –5 to +5, and a score of zero indicates adaptive and functional use of potential space. The results point to a basic similarity between two groups of Jewish (n = 41) and Arab (n = 14) non-patients both using adaptively inner space between reality and fantasy. These results are discussed in terms of current psychoanalytic thought of relationality, political psychology research, cross-cultural personality assessment, and the empirical study of psychoanalytic concepts.

Key words: conflict resolution, Middle-East, potential space, Reality–Fantasy Scale (RFS), Rorschach

INTRODUCTION

The application of psychoanalytic conceptualization to the interpretation of social and political contexts in general, and conflict resolution in particular, has often been suggested as integrating the personality, individual-level, and the political, state-level psychology. Starting with Freud’s (1921) thoughts on group psychology and the analysis of the ego, the tradition relating psychoanalysis and large group psychology has been expanded to the investigations of

various political and ethnical intergroup conflicts. Such investigations have challenged the usual complacency about the psychoanalytic enterprise and are highly recommended, particularly at present (Akhtar, 2002).

The need for an interdisciplinary perspective to the studying of conflict resolution stems from the nature of the examined phenomena. Conflict and cooperation are social realities which do not shape themselves to the molds of social sciences, but, rather, might be viewed from the perspective of each of the various disciplines that comprise this field (White, 1986). None of these disciplines can be seen as a substitute for another. Certainly, this might raise a problem of integration. However, this problem is a known issue whenever social scientists have an interest in a given social reality rather than in abstract social science concepts and relations.

Examination of reviews in literature shows that areas that widely contribute to the study of conflict resolution are not evenly dispersed across psychology as a whole. Although social psychology, and increasingly, cognitive approaches are used widely, especially manifesting in the topics of attitudes and images, physiological elements such as the biological roots of aggression have rarely been investigated in this context (Blumberg, 1997). In these reviews, studies related to personality variables are included in the broad category of psychodynamic and mental health aspects, which relates to topics such as mutual nuclear anxieties, the sense of threat and insecurity, the role of imagination in issues related to conflict resolution, the characteristics of the spiral process of hostile interaction, mutual perceptions, mutual threat, cognitive distortions and biases in images of the parties involved in the conflict, and the potential for hostility toward other human groups (Kramer and Moyer, 1991; Blumberg, 1993).

Some psychologists and psychiatrists tend to extrapolate from what they have learned on individual human beings and interactions in small groups, to international conflicts. Studies that deal with psychoanalysis and politics usually explore psychoanalytic explanations to political phenomena, or examine the consequences of these phenomena on the inner world of the individual. Thus, for example, a recent work of Schreuder (2001), published in this journal, relates to the concept of transitional space in political persecution. The author uses this concept to understand the various psychological consequences of structural physical violence regarding the individual's transitional space.

The present paper further elaborates the utility of Winnicott's (1971) conceptualization of transitional or space potential in searching for the connections between inner experiences and the outer political conditions in Israel, where two national groups – Jews and Arabs – are involved in a long-standing conflict. We ask whether individuals who live in a threatening environment succeed to maintain outer and inner phenomena separate yet interrelated, preserving an adaptive and functional transitional space.

OUTER, INNER, AND TRANSITIONAL PHENOMENA: WINNICOTT'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POTENTIAL SPACE

The concept of potential space is perhaps the most important, nonetheless the most elusive of the ideas introduced by Winnicott (1971). The concept is used to describe the space between the self and the object, the intermediate area between reality and fantasy. Winnicott (1971) contrasts the concept of potential space with the inner world, on the one hand, and with actual or external reality, on the other. He considers it to be an area that is not challenged, a place that is neither in the realm of fantasy nor of reality, a place that seems impossible but nonetheless possible, crossing both the point of subjectivity and objectivity, sameness and difference, knowing and not knowing, the private and the common. This is where transitional phenomena, playing and cultural experiences, occur (Ogden, 1989; Pizer, 1996).

Ogden (1985, 1989) refers to the process, which takes place in the individual's transitional space, as a dialectical one. This dialectical relationship may initially be observed in the mother–infant dyad. In the course of normal development it may be found in other dyads as well: conscious–unconscious; patient–analyst; and reality–fantasy (Freud, 1915; Winnicott, 1971). It is this dyad of fantasy and reality that is discussed in this paper.

The transitional space is conceived as being very closely bound up with our environment and our reactions to it. Usually, there are some basic conventions that individuals who live in the same country share with most of the people around them, and this shared external world provides them with structure and security. The shared reality seems self-evident. However, in some regions around the world, such as the Middle East where violence is a repetitive experience, the obviousness of reality is not self-evident, and one could find it difficult to trace the boundaries between inner and outer realities namely to preserve potential space. Thus, an environment loaded with conflict and threat might be assumed as being able to exert a desymbolizing effect on the individual's transitional space and might therefore cause its collapse.

Ogden (1985, 1989) points to some possible forms of psychopathology that may occur when there is a collapse of one's potential space. When the reality pole collapses into the fantasy one, fantasy is no longer experienced as a psychical event but rather as concrete external reality. In these cases one might observe mental phenomena usually being manifested in psychosis where it is no longer clear whether the feeling of fear originates from inside or from outside. Suspicion originating in the self is ascribed to others and is used to explain their behavior.

When reality is used predominantly as a defense against fantasy, the fantasy pole collapses into the reality one. Under such circumstances, reality robs fantasy of its vitality and the capacity to imagine is impaired. These are cases of severe obsessional states, psychosomatic illness, or what Bollas (1989) calls "normotic conditions." When reality and fantasy are experienced as parallel and equal conditions without the ability to create and preserve a potential

space, dissociative states may occur. In these states of ego-splitting, where the subject both knows and does not know reality features, one can hardly point to a true dialectic process since the situation has been constructed to a large extent in the service of denial. As a result, it involves a severe limitation of the way in which one pole is able to inform and be informed by the other and the subject looks like failing to create and preserve potential space.

Mitchell (2000) states that fantasy and reality are usually understood as incompatible. However, separating fantasy and reality is only one way to construct and organize experience. For experience to be meaningful, vital and robust, fantasy and reality cannot be too distinguished from each other. Fantasy cut adrift from reality becomes irrelevant and threatening. Reality cut adrift from fantasy becomes vapid. Meaning in human experience is generated in the mutual, dialectical enriching tension between reality and fantasy. An adaptive, healthy, and functional ability to preserve potential space would thus be demonstrated in individuals who manage to separate their own psychic reality from that of other people while adequately maintaining an intermediate, transitional area where reality and fantasy are perceived as separate yet interrelated.

Winnicott's (1971) construct of potential space uses spatial metaphor informed by a psychoanalytic model of subjectivity, which relates to psychic and social realities as occupying different sites or zones in topographical terms. These topographical terms are subsequently accepted as self-evident, thus enabling us to assume that fantasy and reality do exist as separate concrete sites of experience, equally related to material zones of inner and outer space. Once potential space is understood as socially produced zone, we might ask what would be the point where a threatening outer reality becomes experienced as violating the inner world of healthy subjects to the extent that they are not able to create, use, and preserve potential space. Because people's fantasy may endanger them in denying their current problems, it might be assumed that healthy subjects would show a collapse of reality into fantasy only when they are in dire circumstances or when they unconsciously decide that by facing a frightening reality they would paralyze themselves.

Studies which examine the inner experience of subjects who were under extreme threatening situations, such as persecution, arrest, deportation, and imprisonment, suggest that in these situations reality shared with others would be replaced with a constrained and paranoid reality devoid of continuity and structure. Consequently, a desymbolizing effect, which reduces people's ability to use and understand metaphors, might appear. These studies, however, assume the violation of the transitional space during physical violence, and a confusion of inner and outer worlds as one of the inevitable consequences of persecution (Schreuder, 2001). The present study further explores the possible violation of the transitional space in individuals who share a threatening outer reality, in conditions other than persecution. To address this aim the study uses a new Rorschach index, the Reality-Fantasy Scale (RFS) designed to measure Winnicott's (1971) concept of potential space.

OUTER, INNER, AND TRANSITIONAL PHENOMENA IN THE RORSCHACH RESPONSE

The ambiguity of the stimulus of the Rorschach task and the nature of instructions (“What might this be?”) create a situation in which subjects are expected to both find and make something out of the blot, keeping an enriching tension between the given inkblots and their fantasy world. We might thus assume that Rorschach percepts, like transitional objects, are simultaneously created (in the sense that the blot is given its meaning by the inner world of the subject) and found (in the sense that the final response has to be within the limits of the existing blot features).

Schafer (1954) states that from the point of view of thought organization, the fluctuating psychic levels in the Rorschach response process, and the changes from perceptual to the interpretive attitude or vice versa, appear to involve shifts in line between reality and fantasy. Thus, each Rorschach response is not creation from scratch and combines finding meaning and giving meaning.

Smith (1990) applies Ogden’s (1985, 1989) terminology about forms of collapse of potential space to Rorschach responses. When the reality pole collapses into the fantasy one, the blot is experienced as if it were real. The percepts may become terrifying or enjoyable in themselves and responders may feel as if they were part of the response.

When the fantasy pole collapses into the reality one, subjects may feel difficulty in giving responses. They may begin some of their valid responses by insisting that it is just an inkblot, or deny responses that have been given. Their explanations at the inquiry are very often a cataloguing of which parts of the percept do or do not occur. Some of these subjects are keen observers and will note what details are missing to make it look like a real bat. Given that the Rorschach cards bear relatively concrete resemblance to the real objects that they are assumed to fit, these subjects do not adapt themselves to the basic task of the test to “misperceive” the stimulus (Exner, 1993). They cannot pass the threshold where perception as recognition becomes perception as interpretation (Leichtman, 1996a).

When reality and fantasy are experienced as parallel and equal conditions without the ability to create and preserve a potential space, subjects may show a dissociative state which, in Rorschach terms, would reveal in a labile pattern of responses. Some responses would definitely be anchored in the real features of the blot, whereas others would totally be the product of the subject’s inner experience, with no connection to the concrete features of the stimulus.

Thus we might operationalize the concept of the ability to preserve potential space through the Rorschach by exploring the relationship between subjects and their Rorschach percepts, asking how and at what distance from the self the percept was created and experienced. This question was investigated in the present study by developing the Rorschach Reality–Fantasy Scale.

THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT AS THE OUTER REALITY: HISTORICAL, SPATIAL, AND INTERGROUP RELATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the Middle-East conflict has been loaded with spatial and intergroup relational considerations: Would the Arabs insist on the return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians refugees who had fled their home in 1948, thereby threatening the Jewishness of the new state? Would Israel agree to withdrawal of the 1947 United Nations partition agreement? Would the Arabs ever accept the idea of a Jewish state? Would recognition be based on security arrangements that could be relied on? The conflict seemed generally intractable, although differences could be observed both between the interests of various groups within Israel and between the interests of existing Arab regimes and the Palestinians (Quandt, 1993).

The Six Day War in 1967 was a turning point in this conflict, altering the regional balance of power and bringing various dramatic changes in the domestic and foreign policies of the actors involved. This war gave Israel control of the Sinai desert, the West Bank of the Jordan River, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip with its refugee camps, and the strategically important Golan Heights. More than a million Palestinians came under the control of the Israeli military, creating an acute dilemma for Israel. None of the post-British mandate of Palestine was now free of Israeli control. Since the Arab states could not see a prospect of victory and feared the high costs of defeat, they preferred the option of “neither war nor peace” which seemed also to be tolerable for Israel. Nevertheless, permanent rejection of peace with Israel remained the most fundamental principle of Arab politics and any Arab state, particularly Jordan and Lebanon, that sought to negotiate was discouraged from doing so by internal and external pressures.

Following the Yom Kippur War in 1973 several agreements were signed between Israel and its neighbors: the disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria in 1974–1975, which strengthen the willingness of Israel to give up territories; the Camp David Accords in 1978; and the Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty in 1979. Nevertheless, during this period there were no actions directly addressing the intercommunal dimension of the conflict, except for the Autonomy Plan in the Camp David Accords. This plan, however, was deemed inadequate by the Palestinians, who argued that it would not lead to the realization of their demands for self-determination.

At the same time, there was a gradual transformation of the focus from the interstate dimension of the conflict to the intercommunal one. Thus, whereas until the Six Day War the conflict was predominated by the interstate dimension, focusing on the relationships between Israel and its Arab neighbors, after this war it regained the intercommunal dimension with the Palestinians, which had predominated until the establishment of the state of Israel. This

transformation was expressed in the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), originally supported by Arab regimes to keep Palestinians under control, which quickly became an independent actor in the region, and the legitimate representative of the Palestine people, emphasizing the centrality of Palestinian participation in any negotiated settlement. It symbolized the expectations of the Palestinians and caused much concern among established Arab regimes, which were not used to seeing the Palestinians controlling the matters on their own. In theory, these changes in the Arab world might have opened the way for an easing of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The first Intifada, the rise of the Palestinians in the territories which broke out in 1987, entailed massive demonstrations, strikes, and attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians, and over time shifted from stones to shootings. What started out as a riot in a refugee camp in Gaza, soon spread over all the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, taking since then diverse forms and varying intensity. The events of the Intifada were of such nature that they captured attention, from the individual cognitive and emotional perspective, as well as from the political, social, and communicational perspectives. The extreme and negative events were unusual and unexpected in terms of Israel's past experience in the territories, being very significant for both Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens.

The Gulf War in 1991 would convince even the most militants of both parties that a military solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict was impossible. Perhaps most encouraging for the peace process to start was the evidence that many Jewish and Arabs were tired of the conflict and ready for the historic compromise. With the readiness of the PLO to meet Israel's minimal conditions, the Oslo agreements, signed in 1993, came relatively easily. In 1994 the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan was signed.

The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by a fanatic religious Jewish student in November 1995 raised again the question of whether the peace process is feasible. After the assassination the political climate in Israel became unstable. During this time there were various activities aiming to promote the peace process (such as the Camp David Summit); nonetheless, the process seemed to collapse. As a result, there has been an escalation in the relationships between the state of Israel and the Palestinian authority. The Palestinian terror organizations have commissioned terrorist bombings in major cities in Israel, in what is called now the second Intifada. The state of Israel retaliates by hunting down terrorist leaders and by so doing limits the Palestinian citizens with curfews. There has been growing mistrust and hostility on both sides.

This hostility affected the delicate texture of relationships between Jews and the Israeli Arabs who have been citizens of the state of Israel and gradually became affected by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The present study relates to the members of these two national groups of Jews and Israeli Arabs involved in the long-standing Middle-East conflict and examines their ability to preserve potential space between inner and outer realities. The main question is

whether the repetitive experience of conflict and violence, in an environment in which individuals do not feel protected, would be revealed in their inability to create, use, and preserve potential space.

METHOD

Participants

The study participants were 55 Israeli students and graduates from six high-level universities in the country. The convenient sample was divided into two samples of 41 Jews (21 females and 20 males, mean age of 24.61 years and standard deviation (*SD*) of 3.72 years) and 14 Arabs (8 females and 6 males, mean age of 25.43 years, *SD* of 3.41 years).

Procedure

The Rorschach protocols of both the Jewish and the Arab samples were administered during the time where the peace process in the Middle East began to collapse. As noted, at this time the escalation in the relationships between the state of Israel and the Palestinian authority began to affect the relationships between the Jews and the Israeli Arabs.

The protocols were administered and scored according to Exner's (1993, 2000) Comprehensive System (CS). The Rorschach was administered to the Jewish sample in Hebrew and to the Arab sample in Arabic by well-trained clinicians or graduate students of clinical psychology. The examiners also conducted a clinical interview to rule out history of gross psychopathology as exclusionary criterion. No subject was ruled out according to this criterion. Each protocol was scored by two raters, a graduate student of clinical psychology and a senior expert. In each case of discrepancy between the two raters a decision was made after consultation by the raters with two of the authors. Interrater reliability statistics were obtained for all the protocols, regarding the different segments of the CS, using the method of interrater agreement percentages, as recommended by Exner et al. (1995). Observed values for interrater agreement for the various CS segments were:

- 99% for Location and Space.
- 97% for Developmental Quality.
- 90% for Determinants.
- 90% for Form Quality.
- 96% for Pair responses.
- 94% for Content.
- 97% for Popular responses.
- 90% for Special Scores.

These values exceed the criteria of 80% and 85% recommended by Weiner (1991) and Exner et al. (1995), respectively. The minimum number of responses (R) per protocol was 14, which made all the protocols that were included in the study valid in terms of response productivity.

The Development of the Reality–Fantasy Scale (RFS)

The RFS was designed to assess adaptive use, creation, and preservation of potential space and it differentiates significantly between non-patients and patients with various mental disorders. The RFS uses a group of variables, or combinations of variables, based on Exner (1993, 2000), and one additional special score of Reality Collapse (RC). This new special score is given to responses in which the subject is observed or sounds like totally losing distance from the inkblot, reacting as if the blot is the thing itself. The score represents, to a certain extent, a special phenomenon in which the subject treats the inkblot as the real perceived object, and has been mentioned in past Rorschach literature (see, for example, Bohm, 1958), although not yet included in the CS. The observed value of interrater agreement for the RC score in the current study was 95%. The initial selection of CS variables for the RFS was done in three stages.

First, a general theoretical definition for the concepts of “reality” and “fantasy,” based on psychoanalytic literature, was selected. Certainly, this definition could not refer to all the divergent theories that deal with these two major psychoanalytic concepts. Instead, it was decided to use the basic conception of “reality” as being simply the material world “out there”, and that of “fantasy” as being a species of thought activity that is kept free from reality testing. Reality, according to this conception, is not a finding but a refinding of an object previously perceived, whereas fantasy is viewed as idiosyncratic, representing the specific compromise formations created in response to subject’s internal conflicts (Arlow, 1995; Wallerstein, 1995).

Second, basic updated Rorschach literature (Leichtman, 1996b; Lerner, 1998; Weiner, 1998; Kleiger, 1999; Exner, 2000) was substantially reviewed to search for CS variables that might be considered as having face validity in operationalizing the two concepts. The variables were thus derived on a conceptual basis with the goal being to address the theoretical conceptualization of “reality” and “fantasy.”

Third, the case studies presented in Meloy et al. (1997) were scanned, searching for the words *reality* or *fantasy* and their derivations (thematic imagery, reality testing, and so forth). The context in which these words appeared was then explored to find out to which of the CS variables they refer. The choice of Meloy et al. (1997) was dictated by the assumption that by integrating the CS and the psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of the Rorschach protocol in each of the case studies, it was most appropriate for this empirical content analysis.

After the theoretically based selection of variables a psychometric evaluation that included obtaining item–total correlations, assessing reliability, and evaluating the additional contribution of each variable to the reliability coefficient, was conducted for empirically selecting the best variables to be incorporated in the final version of the RFS. The results of this analysis pointed out 12 variables or combinations of variables. These variables were integrated in a flowchart (Figure 1) that instructed the rater how to score each response on the RFS. The primary criterion for including a variable or combination of variables in the final version of the RFS was the item–total correlation. Inclusion of items in the scale followed, in general, the criterion of $r \geq 0.30$, suggested by Nunnally and Berenstein (1994) for item–total correlation. The 0.75 standardized alpha coefficient of the scale further validated the inclusion of the selected items in the scale.

General Guidelines for Coding and Computing the RFS Scores

In the course of entering CS codes each Rorschach response should also be reviewed for the response-level RFS (RFS-R) code, according to specific steps presented in a flowchart (see Figure 1). These steps are followed in order until scoring decision is made.

The RFS-R is coded on an 11-point scale ranging from -5 to $+5$. The negative range stands for the extent to which the subject moves away from the concrete stimulus and brings in fantasy material, where losing reasonable contact with the blot's features is manifested in the score of -5 . The positive range, on the other hand, stands for the extent to which the percept is anchored in the reality features of the blot, where the highest level of foreclosure of the fantasy realm is manifested in the score of $+5$. An RFS-R code of zero may thus represent a balanced combination between reality and fantasy in an individual response.

After coding each response, two derivations should be computed. One is the RFS protocol-level (RFS-P), defined as the mean RFS score of a protocol, and the other is the RFS scatter (RFS-S), defined as the RFS standard deviation of a given protocol. The present study focused on the RFS-P. Although one might wonder whether the scoring could be simplified by using aggregated CS indices across the protocol, it should be stressed that the main idea of the scale construction is searching for adaptive or impaired use of potential space as being reflected in each individual response separately. Similarly to the new CS variables of Good Human Response (GHR) and Poor Human Response (PHR), suggested by Perry and Viglione (1991), the RFS-R should thus be viewed as a single item, rather than as a multi-item scale found in most other personality tests. Consequently, some of the statistical procedures designed to validate scale construction, such as factor analysis, would be inappropriate for validating the RFS.

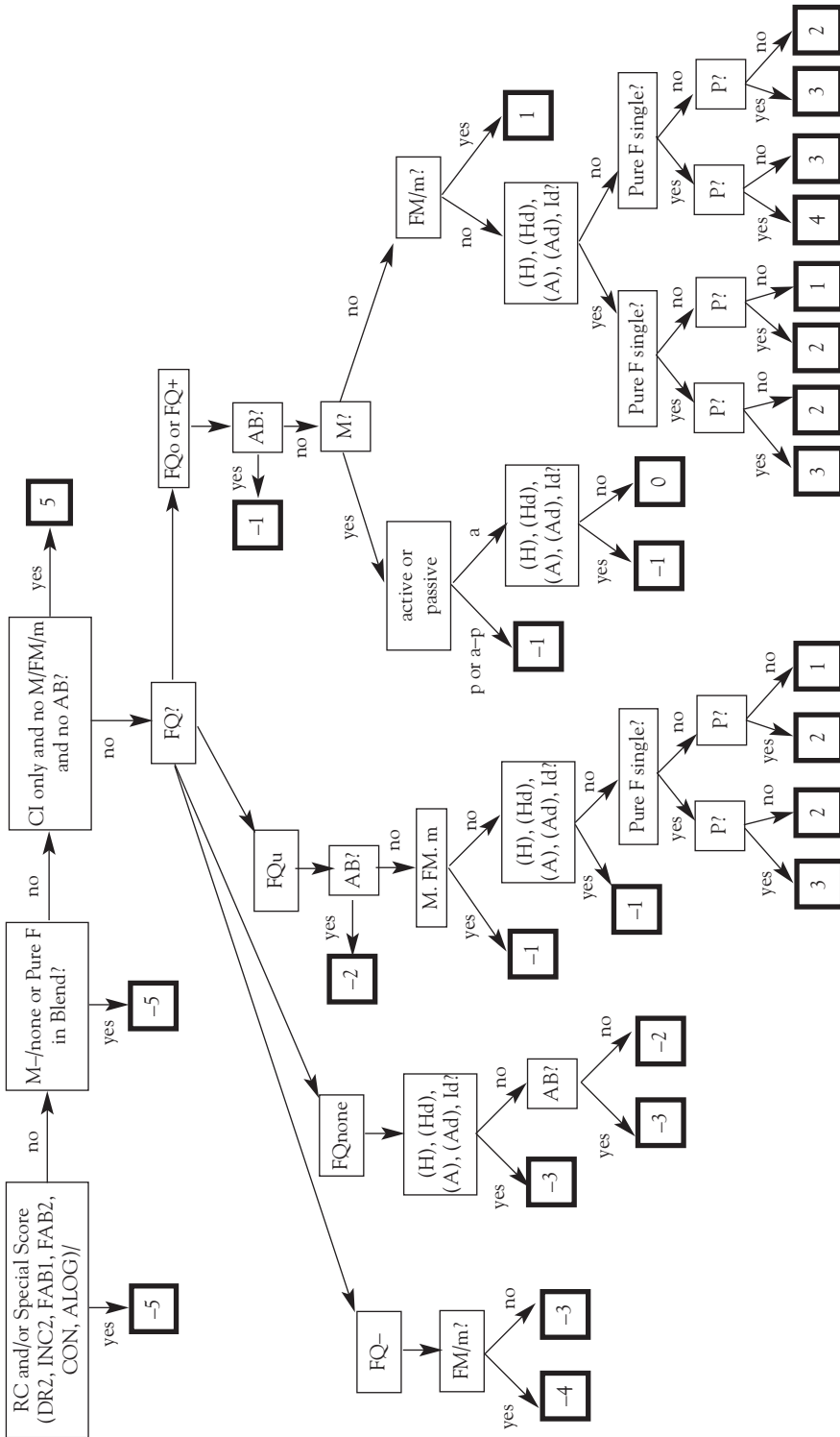


Figure 1 Flowchart of scoring the response-level RFS (RFS-R).

RESULTS

A preliminary analysis revealed that the number of Rorschach responses per protocol (R) did not differ significantly across the two samples ($t = 1.81$; $p > 0.05$), with a mean of 22 responses per protocol (SD 8.02) in the Jewish and 27 (SD 10.49) in the Arab sample. It seemed therefore that there was no need of constraining or controlling R in further statistical comparisons as it might be required in Rorschach studies (Meyer, 1993).

An analysis that compared the difference between the two groups with regard to the mean score on the Reality–Fantasy Scale (RFS-P) showed that the mean RFS-P of both groups was -0.01 (with SD of 0.64 in the Jewish sample and 0.71 in the Arab sample). Based on the theoretical reasoning of the scale construction, assuming that a healthy protocol would score around zero, these results point out that both groups demonstrate adaptive ability to preserve transitional space.

Nonetheless, the RFS-P of zero found in both the Jewish and the Arab samples would warrant a thorough examination of the other RFS derivation, the scatter of the scores along the protocol (RFS-S), to look for the extremity of the impaired use of potential space. The results showed that the difference between the two groups as to the RFS-S (mean = 2.46, SD = 0.37 in the Jewish sample and mean = 2.64, SD = 0.26 in the Arab sample) was revealed as insignificant ($t = 1.73$, $p > 0.05$).

As the two samples were not comparable regarding gender, analysis of variance (ANOVA) of gender and sample on the RFS-P and on the RFS-S was conducted. The analysis for the RFS-P revealed a non-significant main effect of gender ($F = 2.28$, $p > 0.05$), a non-significant effect of sample ($F = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$), and a non-significant effect of the interaction ($F = 1.65$, $p > 0.05$). The analysis for the RFS-S revealed similar results: a non-significant effect of gender ($F = 0.24$, $p > 0.05$), a non-significant effect of sample ($F = 2.71$, $p > 0.05$), and a non-significant effect of the interaction ($F = 0.03$, $p > 0.05$). These results confirmed the assertion that the similarity between the two samples as to their RFS scores was not an artifact of being incomparable with regard to gender composition.

Given that the two groups included normative population of non-patients with exclusionary criterion of gross psychopathology these results confirmed the theoretical reasoning of the scale construction that a healthy protocol would score around zero. These results might demonstrate that although both groups have lived in a threatening outer environment for years, none of them show problems in preserving the transitional psychic space.

DISCUSSION

The idea that interactions, dialogues, and outer conflicts condition the boundary between the individual's consciousness and unconsciousness has been

an important topic of recent literature (Mitchell, 1997). Rather than locating the unconsciousness as entirely within the mind of the individual (for example, the patient or the therapist in the clinical context), many contemporary theorists emphasize the notion that conscious and unconscious phenomena are shaped within specific intersubjective contexts. Thus, dynamic and fluid boundaries between conscious and unconscious mental states, conditioned by real outside interactions, shape the individual's mental processes. Similarly to all forms of mental activity, unconscious mental states are connected to, situated in, and derived from particular relational contexts. Inner mental processes are not only psychological content occupying psychic space, but also reflect the contingencies of the immediate outer intersubjective context.

Many authors suggest that there is a mode of organizing continuing experience in which distinctions between self and other, internal and external, fantasy and perception are dissolved. Thus, dichotomies such as inside–outside, fantasy–reality, consciousness–unconsciousness, intrapsychic–interpersonal, and within the mind and between people are not discrete and unambiguous domains of experience. Rather, the boundaries separating these apparent dichotomies reflect fluidly shifting properties of intersubjective systems that change in different times and contexts (Bromberg, 1993; Orange et al., 1997; Mitchell, 2000). The intrapsychic and the interpersonal are thus overlapping and interdependent domains of experience, an idea that was referred to by Mitchell (2000) as the “relational matrix,” where both realms create, interpenetrate, and transform each other in a subtle and complex matter.

These ideas, usually applied to the clinical context, have been transferred in the present study to the political context of the Middle East. The main question was whether the repetitive experience of conflict and violence in an environment in which individuals do not feel protected, would reveal in their inability to create, use, and preserve potential space. The study presents an application of a new Rorschach index, the Reality–Fantasy Scale (RFS), for evaluating the extent to which Jewish and Arab Israeli educated youngsters manifest a similar adaptive and functional ability in preserving psychic transitional space.

The results point to a basic similarity between the two groups of Jewish ($n = 41$) and Arab ($n = 14$) non-patients, in their ability to preserve potential space. The mean RFS score in both groups was around zero. Based on the theoretical reasoning of the scale construction assuming that a healthy protocol would score around zero, these results point out that both groups demonstrate adaptive ability to preserve transitional space. The assumed RFS-P score of zero for a healthy protocol was validated in a previous study that compared the present non-patient Jewish sample to a control group of 18 patients from different outpatient clinics in Israel, who were reported on referral as demonstrating psychotic-like behavior. The control group of patients revealed as being located within the negative range of the RFS, indicating reality collapse into fantasy, and scored significantly lower than the present Jewish sample (Tibon et al., 2002).

Both the Jewish and the Arab groups in the present study were thus revealed as being able to create, use, and preserve a functional and adaptive potential space, as might be expected from a non-clinical population, although alternative hypotheses for these findings might also be offered. Although consistent with the findings of the CS (Exner, 1993, 2000), it might be argued that the scale does not fully capture the concept of transitional space. Also, it might be argued that the scale is not sensitive enough to capture reactions to the real external tensions of the Arab–Israeli conflict and how normative individuals are adapting to that social climate. The specific theoretical interpretations here would therefore benefit from more empirical research designed to explore their validity. It should be stressed that the small sample size limits the generalizations that could be made from the study. However, a small sample size seems to be the norm in Rorschach research, probably because the administering and scoring procedure can be extremely time-consuming and demands special skills of the examiner.

Unlike the results of other applied psychoanalytic studies that examine the inner experience of subjects under extreme threatening situations such as persecution (Schreuder, 2001) the present study did not point to a desymbolizing effect on the transitional space of normative individuals in the political context of the Middle East. Thus, whereas other studies assume the violation of the transitional space and a confusion of inner and outer worlds as one of the inevitable consequences of extreme conditions such as persecution, the present study did not confirm the applicability of this assumption in other conditions, such as the long-standing Middle-East conflict.

By evaluating the utility of a basic psychoanalytic construct, namely potential space, in two groups involved in a political conflict, the paper demonstrates how different studies in the field of political psychology can be inspired by psychoanalytic concepts and therefore proposes the legitimate inclusion and application of these concepts in political psychology research.

If one looks closer at Freud's (1921) theory about group psychology and the analysis of the ego, it is clear that in his topology of personality Freud seems to have displaced social conflict into psychic patterns of coping and regulating inner space. However, some psychoanalytic authors (Billig, 1976) comment that in doing that Freud effectively reduces the analysis of the conflict from the social level to the individual level and, moreover, to the psychic level. Consequently, group consciousness is structured into the topology of human subjectivity, and thus contextual issues like class and race are left out of discussion. Social conflict merely becomes a psychopathological manifestation and there is no point in treating it.

Furthermore, historians and political scientists may object to the idea of relating political attitudes to personality traits and mental conditions, stating that politics is not a matter of enduring dispositions but of shifting alliances and oppositions. Yet, it is accepted that there are recognizable patterns that endure beneath shifting political fashions. Various studies that have been pursued in

the Australia, Germany, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, the UK, and the USA show considerable cross-cultural generalizability for the psychological correlates of political ideology (McCrae, 1996).

Apart from being applicable to political psychology, the results of the present study also illuminate some topical issues of cross-cultural personality assessment. There has currently been widespread concern about the applicability of personality assessment methods to different cultural groups. The Rorschach has been assumed to provide us with an ideal source of data for cross-cultural research because it is assumed to involve culture-free stimuli. Nonetheless, statements about cross-cultural similarities in Rorschach responses have not satisfied the concerns of minority culture psychologists and anthropologists. Researchers in these fields believe that culture means value commitments and moral orientations, akin to faith, which are integrated in and experienced by individuals and would thus be reflected in their Rorschach responses.

Exploring possible ethnic differences and bias in Exner's (1993, 2000) Comprehensive System (CS), different studies point out that the CS variables mean what they mean irrespective of the subject's ethnicity or national origin and that there might be a few possible exceptions to the general universal interpretive significance of the variables as a result of cultural effect (Weiner, 1998; Meyer 2002). The results of the present study confirm this assertion, pointing out that the Rorschach provide us with a reliable and valid source of data for cross-cultural research.

The applicability of the RFS, from the points of view of political psychology and cross-cultural assessment, might further be extended to another perspective, that of the psychology-psychoanalysis research. The RFS is a psychodynamic oriented diagnostic tool, based on Exner's (1993, 2000) CS for scoring and interpreting the Rorschach, and is designed to operationalize Winnicott's (1971) concept of transitional or potential space. The scale is based on a paradigm that conceptualizes the Rorschach task as inviting the subject to enter the intermediate transitional space between external reality and fantasy.

Although, historically, Rorschach work was fundamentally divided into two fractious groups of those adamant proponents of the empirical atheoretical approach of Exner's (1993, 2000) CS and the psychoanalytic-oriented approach supporters, today both groups can see the potential power of integrating the two approaches. Consequently, collaborative work began to emerge, yielding analyses of a given case study from the two perspectives (Meloy et al., 1997) and exploration of measures such as the Ego Impairment Index (Perry and Viglione, 1991) addressed to operationalize psychoanalytic concepts in terms of the CS variables.

These developments not only brought the contemporary test interpretation to a more balanced point where the Rorschach is seen both as a test from which various empirical findings can be obtained and as a means of communication,

but also as a valid test for operationalizing psychoanalytic concepts. Analytic ideas might thus be studied in research, producing statistically significant results without damaging their intrinsic quality (Tibon, 2003).

The RFS is based on this integrative approach to Rorschach interpretation. Whilst operationalizing the psychoanalytic concept of potential space, it uses variables derived from Exner's (1993, 2000) CS. For anyone with a psychodynamic orientation, Exner's system, with its predominantly cognitive and empirical emphasis, constitutes a real challenge: how can we counterbalance its focus on external stimulation by allowing more importance to the inner world's stimuli? We believe that the Rorschach, when used with the CS, is revealed as a well-constructed test for exploring different psychoanalytic concepts.

Exner (1993) and Weiner (1998) state that the most accurate use of the Rorschach for differentiation of schizophrenia would be anchored in a conceptual approach, in which personality indicators would be defined before selecting specific Rorschach indicators. This approach led to the development of the Schizophrenia Index (SCZI) and the Perceptual-Thinking Index (PTI) of the CS. The RFS fits into this approach as well. It seems most challenging to look for operational definition of psychoanalytical ideas and insights in terms of the empirical atheoretical approach of the CS. In applying the CS variables to the construct of potential space we thus proceed with operationalizing a major psychoanalytic concept through Rorschach language.

Psychoanalytical oriented empirical measures have usually been employed almost exclusively by researchers and have not been used to answer questions arising from daily clinical practice. This phenomena is even more prominent when one looks into the application of psychoanalytic concepts outside the clinical practise, namely, to social and political issues. The empirical approach of the present study regarding psychoanalytic conceptualization might thus be useful for the relatively few clinicians who use a quantitative empirical approach to operationalize psychoanalytic constructs and who might be interested in applying these constructs for both clinical and non-clinical inferences.

To sum up, the application of Winnicott's (1971) concept of transitional space to the field of political psychology uses a difficult and elusive psychoanalytic construct that has subjective components and might thus raise questions about many inferences necessary to validate this application. However, we believe that the ideas revealed in this paper demonstrate how different studies in the field of political psychology might be inspired by psychoanalytic concepts. Based on current psychoanalytic thought of relationality the study explores the intrapsychic and the interpersonal as two overlapping and interdependent domains of experience. The results show that the ability to preserve potential space in individuals who are members of national groups involved in a long-standing threatening national conflict, would not necessarily be impaired. Using the Rorschach Reality–Fantasy Scale within the cross-cultural context of the conflict in the Middle East, the present empirical findings show

that the limited geographical potential space and the threatening outer reality have not affected the inner transitional space of the normative adaptive individuals. The similarity between the Jews and the Israeli Arabs in their ability to preserve potential space might further suggest the possibility of rapprochement between these two groups involved in the Middle-East conflict. A replication study is now being conducted concerning how the current developments in the outer circumstances prevailing in the region would affect the normative individual's ability to preserve transitional space. It is also suggested to further apply this operationalization of the psychoanalytic construct of transitional space by the Rorschach to other conflicts between ethnic and national groups around the world.

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