

ewniForum

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ABOUT MENSA – Mensa is an international society for intelligent people. Mensa's primary purposes are to identify and foster human intelligence for the benefit of humanity; to encourage research into the nature, characteristics and uses of intelligence; and to provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members. Proof of scoring in the 98th percentile on any number of standardized I.Q. tests is required to qualify for membership. Qualification may be determined by tests given by Mensa or by submission of properly certified prior evidence. Address inquiries to an officer listed below or to American Mensa Ltd. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to Mensa publications to quote or reprint material, except where individual copyrights are indicated. All quotations and reprinted material must credit the author, editor and **EWNIForum**. We appreciate a copy of the issue the reprint appears in so we can pass it along to the artist or author. Material reprinted from other Mensa publications must credit the original source. For permission to reprint copyrighted material, write to the artist or author in care of the editor. Original submissions actively sought. Opinions expressed herein are not those of American Mensa, EWNIMensa or the editor. Newsletter deadline is Friday of the last weekend of the month before publication.

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This month, the newsletter has gone out late, and it also appeared at first as though it would be rather thin. The reasons were many:

- (1) Technical difficulties. My printer has seemed to have something against Mensa. When it works, it works well, but lately it has not cooperated on Mensa-related projects.
- (2) Personal issues. I have had a number of personal items occupying my time that have caused delays. More on that later.
- (3) We are (still) experimenting with different methods of printing the newsletter, which has been taking some time and effort. Please be patient with this process, as the ultimate goal is to bring you a better newsletter. See below for further explanation.
- (4) Newsletter material has been rather scarce. I was going to include another little contest in this issue, but in recent months the response to all requests for reader input, other than the election and the math puzzle, have quite literally been zero or very close to it. Recently, one of our newer members went far out of her way to make a very nice addition to our newsletter and its entertainment value, which was then rewarded by our readers with an overwhelming lack of response.

If our readers do not want puzzles or contests in the future other than the math puzzle, I shall refrain from printing them. This is simple supply and demand. There has been no demand, so space that would be devoted to that will be reassigned to something else, if I can find something else. Which brings up:

- (5) I suppose it is time for my (approximately annual) rant. It would be irresponsible of me if I did not mention that except for the usual items from the usual, very small group, in the last several **years** there have been very few reader contributions.

Organizations that publish newsletters containing more than just a calendar of events usually rely on their members for content. For the last several years, though, people outside our group have contributed far more than our own members . . . again with the exception of the usual core group of reliables. We can do better than that.

Continued . . .

ON THE COVER

Toad Away

A house in Peaceful Valley, near downtown Spokane.

contributed by Gardner Bailey

In fairness, I will say that there have also been some contributions that have not made it into the pages due to space and time limitations or other factors. I will apologize to Jim Guerin in particular for not printing more of his material. That is just the way it has worked out; there is nothing personal about it. Those are the decisions that editors sometimes have to make.

Even so, being in a position of deciding what not to publish has been a rare and enjoyable experience. Usually, I have had to scramble to dig up enough stuff to fill our pages, with variable results. That is not the way it should be.

In concluding item (5), I will just relate that I know of at least one past editor who has made the same observation of prior years. That does not reflect well on our group.

End of rant. I dislike bringing up the subject at all but I feel that it must be done.

(6) Now for the good news. First, I have managed to fill the issue after all.

You will be pleased to know that Jim Werdell has resumed writing his guest column, though he does not guarantee one every month. The first installment is in this issue. Please welcome back Jim's *Maniacal Musings*.

I have changed the page layout somewhat. The margins are slightly wider, allowing more content. I have also attempted to make some small format changes that I hope will make for a little easier readability. If anyone has feedback on the new layout, pro or con, by all means e- or snail-mail me, Lonny Eachus, at one of the addresses inside the front cover.

This whole printing thing has caused problems recently, but it should work out for the best. Our new publishing procedure should take less time, resulting in fewer unwanted delays, and there are some great side benefits. Not only should the print quality go up, at long last it will be practical to publish the entire newsletter to the Web.

If all goes well, this month's newsletter will be of higher print quality and it will be our first issue online! So apologies for the delay, but I call that good news.

<http://ewni.us.mensa.org>

Questions Without Answers

Does a clean house indicate that there is a broken computer in it?

Why is it that no matter what color of bubble bath you use the bubbles are always white?

Is there ever a day when mattresses are NOT on sale?



Take a cable car to the RG! With us, you're a VIP with magic card access to hospitality — relax with a drink and a snack, and let the 180-degree vista of San Francisco Bay take your breath away! Enjoy walking tours of the city, chocolate and wine tastings, and excellent presentations galore.

The RG hotel provides easy access to San Francisco attractions and great public transit, and the funky surrounding neighborhood includes cozy bars, ethnic eateries, and late-night dining.

Join us for the Thursday night Thanksgiving dinner on November 25. Catch up with old friends and make some new ones at the Friday night cocktail party. Bring a non-M friend to the admissions testing on Saturday at 9 a.m. Don't miss the Saturday night banquet. Stay for the very special speaker. Wrap up your wonderful weekend with a tasty Sunday brunch and enjoy the guest presenter.

Register Now for the \$55 Rate!

Name _____

Name for Badge _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Volunteers have more fun and meet more people!

May our Volunteer Coordinator contact you? Yes

Sign up for	Thanksgiving dinner?	Yes
	Saturday Banquet?	Yes
	Sunday Brunch?	Yes

Interested in Thanksgiving dinner with Mensa at a San Francisco restaurant? Contact Susan Heimlich to reserve your space at 650-325-8078 or susanheimlich@compuserve.com. Thanksgiving diners are responsible for their own meal expenses.

Registration and Meal Information

Registration is: \$55 through July 31
\$65 through September 30
\$70 through October 31
\$75 thereafter

Meals are: \$39 for Saturday Banquet
\$15 for Sunday Brunch

Send this form, and a check payable to "San Francisco Regional Mensa", to:

SFRM RG
c/o Rich Matthews
P.O. Box 225190
San Francisco, CA 94122

Hotel Information

Make Your Reservations Now:

Holiday Inn Golden Gateway (at lower Nob Hill)
1500 Van Ness Avenue (at Pine Street)
San-Francisco, CA 94109

Room rates guaranteed to November 15 (or until our block of rooms fills up);
say "Mensa" to get the RG rate.

SFO airport shuttle available for \$15 one-way. Parking \$15/night for hotel guests with in/out privileges; \$12/day flat rate for day-trippers (no in/out).

Call 1-800-HOLIDAY or 415-441-4000, fax to 415-776-7155, or email
reservations@sfhigg.com. SR/DR/TR/QR only \$85.

More Questions

Why do people constantly return to the refrigerator with the hopes that something new to eat will have materialized?

If diamonds are a girl's best friend and a dog is man's best friend, which is the dumber sex?

How come we never hear any father-in-law jokes?

How do those dead bugs get into closed light fixtures?

Why do we wash BATH towels? Aren't we clean when we use them? If not then what was the purpose of the bath?

Vancouver Mensa invites you to our

HOLLYWOOD NORTH REGIONAL GATHERING

September 3 – 6, 2004

RICHMOND HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTRE.

Vancouver Mensa is hosting a Regional Gathering celebrating the movies. And, we're returning to the great service of the Richmond Hotel, Richmond, B.C.

Sign up now – until June 30th, registration is only \$85 Canadian (\$65 US). The meal package for our Saturday Banquet and Sunday Brunch is \$75 Canadian.

Interesting speakers, an unusual toy show, silent auction, Saturday night talent show, and the wonderful hospitality of Vancouver BC make this the ideal way to spend your Labour Day weekend.

The registration form is available on our Gathering website:

<<http://Vancouver.ca.mensa.org/RG2004>>

For additional information, email: **<vanrg-registrar@canada.mensa.org>**
or phone Diana Powell at 604-738-9000, or Nina France at 604-267-7571.

EWNIMEMBERS

Welcome back to these renewing members:

Lyndon Eveland	Spokane, WA
Frederick Fliegel	Spokane, WA
Scott Hall	Sandpoint, ID
Jason Laws	Spokane, WA
William Lazerus	Coeur d'Alene, ID
Jacque Michael	Billings, MT

One member has newly moved into our region. Welcome to our group.

Andreas Udby	Spokane, WA
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Let us all give a warm welcome to the following new members of Mensa and our group.

Gudrun Leonard	Lewiston, ID
Jason Bain	Troy, MT
Delmer Cox	Livingston, MT

Getting Blotto

by Lonny Eachus



In my wanderings around the Internet I occasionally happen upon some interesting stuff. At one point, I came across a link to a site that discussed the dated but still used Rorschach Test. You know, the one with the ink blots. I learned a few things. For one, it is pronounced "raw shock". I had always pronounced it with two Rs.

The first site I was visiting was dedicated to material related to child custody proceedings. At first, I did not see the connection. Then, I noticed where the author warned anyone who was involved in a child custody battle to not take the Rorschach. Then I had to read further to find out why. Then, of course, I had to find more information to corroborate what this author was stating. And so on. I learned quite a bit.

The Rorschach Test was introduced in 1921 by the Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach, though he did not himself use them for personality analysis. In brief, the patient (or subject) is shown 10 bilaterally symmetrical inkblots and asked to tell what each of them resembles. When an "expert" assigns an interpretations and a score of the patient's responses, it is claimed that the blots provide "a full and penetrating portrait" of the patient's personality.

One thing that surprised me was that there is only one set of actual Rorschach ink blots. I had always thought they were pretty much random black ink spots that psychologists or psychiatrists could make at home by spreading some ink. Not so. Also, some but not all of them are multicolored, and they are always shown in the same order.

When I found out there was only one set, I thought I would reproduce them here in miniature for this article, but then I found that they are also copyrighted. It is ISBN number 3-456-82605-2, and you can buy a set for about \$75.

At issue here is validity of certain kinds of psychological testing. As stated in *What's Wrong with the Rorschach?* By Wood, et al.⁽¹⁾, "Administered over one million times each year, the Rorschach is used to assess personality across a wide range of circumstances: child custody disputes, educational placement decisions, employment and termination proceedings, parole determinations, and even investigations of child abuse allegations . . . But is the Rorschach more than a modern variant of tea leaf reading?"

"*What's Wrong with the Rorschach* explains why psychologists continue to judge people by their reactions to inkblots, despite half a century of largely negative scientific evidence against the test."

The book further states that "The scientific evidence for the Rorschach has always been feeble. By 1965, research psychologists had concluded that the test was useless for most purposes for which it was used. The most popular modern version of the Rorschach, developed by psychologist John Exner, has been promoted as scientifically superior to earlier forms of the test. In 1997 the Board of Professional Affairs of the American Psychological Association bestowed an award on Exner for his "scientific contributions" and applauded his version of the Rorschach as "perhaps the single most powerful psychometric instrument ever envisioned."

However, it has been shown that Exner's version has the very same problems as the earlier versions of the test, including a very real tendency to diagnose normal people as being mentally ill.

In addition, except for schizophrenia and some related disorders, the Rorschach is useless for detecting most common mental problems. Recent research indicates that it also fails to accurately determine most personality traits.

According to *The Skeptic's Dictionary*⁽²⁾, "Those who believe in the efficacy of such tests think that they are a way of getting into the deepest recesses of the patient's psyche or subconscious mind. Those who give such tests believe themselves to be experts at interpreting their patients' interpretations."

In other words, the tests are very – some might say extremely – subjective. As one source put it: in order for the test to truly reflect the subject's personality, it must be independent of any projection of the therapist's own personality. Therefore, the therapist must not make reference to his/her own interpretations of the inkblots, which means that the results would have to be checked by an outside party for lack of bias. This further implies that the particular inkblot itself is superfluous . . . it could be anything at all, such as stains on a napkin or, as others have impugned, tea leaves in the bottom of a cup.

But if this is so, how is it the test is supposedly dependent on these particular inkblots? Why are they specific, and copyrighted? The very nature of the test testifies against its own efficacy.

Even if the Rorschach were to accurately gauge desire, that does not translate into action, or even willingness to act. People experience desires every day that they have no intention of acting on. To act on every spontaneous desire would be to live in absolute anarchy, with no rules, ethics, morals, or manners. One example cited was that even if the Rorschach were to reveal a desire to have sex with the therapist, that does not imply that the subject would actually be willing to do so if presented with an opportunity.

Given the inherently subjective nature of these tests, how did the "experts" come up with their standard interpretations of patients' interpretations? Without a standard, different interpretations by different patients could have equal validity, which would make the test meaningless. Where, though, is the empirical research to back up the standards? And I have no doubt some are asking, "Why should I care?"

As mentioned above, the Rorschach is used hundreds of thousands of times every year in schools, clinics, and courts to determine personality and mental health. It is used to determine a parent's fitness in child custody cases. It is sometimes used to help determine whether a convicted criminal might receive the death penalty. Suspected sexual abusers and airline pilots are administered the test by psychologists who could make critical decisions regarding their future lives. More on this later.

continued

MONTHLY EVENTS

MAY:

7 Fri FIRST FRIDAY – After work, **5:30** at the **China Dragon Lounge**, corner of Division and Queen, directly north of Northtown Mall in Spokane. Call **Milly** or **Beetle** for information and/or directions.

11 Tue MONTHLY MEETING - 7 PM, Room 246, the (Herak) Engineering Building at Gonzaga University. Topics of discussion? ? ? Come and find out. Call **Milly** or **Beetle** for info and/or directions.

13 Thur MISSOULA “Second Thursday” — at **THE RAVEN** on 130 E. Broadway. (406) 829-8188

21 Fri TGIF - 5:30 PM, ROCK CITY GRILL - NEW LOCATION - Riverpark Square, ground floor next to North entrance. **This is now a NON-SMOKING establishment.** Look in Lounge area.

21 Fri - - - - NEWSLETTER DEADLINE - - - -

25 Tue CREASE AND POKE - the June newsletter. **7 PM** at Beetle's house, 3404 E. Carlisle Ave. Call first.

JUNE:

4 Fri FIRST FRIDAY – **China Dragon Lounge**, 5:30 PM

NO MEETING THIS MONTH

10 Thur MISSOULA Second Thursday - at **THE RAVEN**

18 Fri TGIF - 5:30 PM, ROCK CITY GRILL - Riverpark Square

Another Question

Considering all the lint you get in your dryer, if you kept drying your clothes would they eventually just disappear?

(Editor's Note: The answer to this question can be found in the article, "Lonny's Quantum Theory of Laundry", coming soon to a newsletter near you.)

MENSAVERSARIES

24 years	Ralph Otteson	Clayton, WA
24 years	Betsy Mott	Spokane, WA
21 years	Richard Hoover	Hamilton, MT
19 years	Richard Soger	Plentywood, MT
18 years	Sarah Holte	Billings, MT
18 years	Nanette Wichman	Spokane, WA
16 years	Mike Louttit	Great Falls, MT
14 years	Jessie Lang	Spokane, WA
13 years	Donald Kendrick	Usk, WA
6 years	Dennis Schmidt	Billings, MT
4 years	Rachel Sprague	Spokane, WA
3 years	Steven Whalen	Sandpoint, ID
2 years	Robert Rutherford	Sandpoint, ID
1 year	Guy Hauder	Nine Mile Falls, WA
1 year	Dan Hanson	Otis Orchards, WA

BIRTHDAYS

2 nd	Marc Schillios	Spokane, WA
7 th	Jeanne Donais	Elk, WA
9 th	Scott Ross	Absarokee, MT
10 th	Richard Hitchcock	Lewistown, MT
11 th	Brian Cheney	Spokane, WA
11 th	Cathryn Adams	Spokane, WA
11 th	Vernon Fogle	Helena, MT
13 th	Samuel Ward	Spokane, WA
14 th	Richard Soger	Plentywood, MT
15 th	Bill Olson	Big Sky, MT
17 th	Dan Hanson	Otis Orchards, WA
20 th	Jason Bain	Troy, MT
22 nd	Betsy Mott	Spokane, WA
23 rd	Connie Mayfield	Spokane, WA
26 th	Jeffy Doherty	Red Lodge, MT
27 th	Denis Olson	Great Falls, MT
29 th	Linda Plick	Missoula, MT
31 st	Nancy Van Dyken	Bozeman, MT

One of our group got married this month. Member Bari Cordia Graves married Frank Federspiel on Tuesday, May 4.

Getting Blotto *(continued)*

The popularity of the Rorschach can be traced back to its use by "experts" to give impressive descriptions of the problems of mental patients during the 1940s and 1950s, using "blind analysis". The Rorschach testers used the technique on patients they did not know, and made diagnoses based on their findings. Some cases yielded results that highly impressed researchers. However, these qualify as mere anecdotal evidence.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s though, well-known, controlled studies were showing much less impressive results (one citation from *What's Wrong* is "Little and Shneidman, 1959"). A discrepancy was developing: there were many anecdotes of spectacular results from the test, while at the same time, it frequently failed miserably when performed in a controlled environment. This kind of discrepancy is one with which skeptics are quite familiar. It tends to surround tales regarding the channeling of spirits, seances, crystal balls, and other similar feats.

I do not want to get into a debate about whether real fortune telling or real prophets exist. That is a different matter entirely. A discussion would take up volumes, and no matter which side I took, I would certainly be fried for it.

What is important here is that some of the techniques used by "fortune tellers" who were shown to be fakes are well understood.

As early as 1949, J.R. Wittenborn and Seymour Sarason of Yale discovered three techniques used by Rorschach interpreters that gave a false impression of effectiveness.

The first technique is simply vagueness. The authors of *What's Wrong* used the Oracle at Delphi as an example of this technique. The Oracle told a king that if he went to war he would destroy a great nation. Thinking this to be an augury of the success of his ambitions, he engaged in battle and it was his own nation that was defeated. The prediction was not wrong; the interpretation made all the difference.

In regard to the Rorschach, Wittenborn and Sarason found that testers delivered "ambiguous phrases or esoteric Rorschach clichés which can be given almost any specific interpretation which subsequent developments may require."

The second technique was the use of inconsistent and contradictory statements in the evaluation: "One or the other of these statements may be employed according to the requirements of the circumstances. Such resourcefulness on the part of the examiner is often ascribed to the test itself."

The third technique might be called "Hindsight is 20/20". Rorschach testers enhanced the accuracy of their tests (and their reputations) by including information in their interpretations after they had learned more about the case from other sources.

The book by Wood et al. Contains a very good illustration of what one can accomplish using just the vagueness technique. They refer to it as the "Barnum Effect", after the late P.T. Barnum:

"In the late 1940s, psychologist Bertram Forer published an eye-opening study that he called a 'demonstration of gullibility' (Forer 1949). After administering a questionnaire to his introductory psychology class, he prepared personality sketches. For example: "Disciplined and self-controlled outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations."

"Forer asked the students to rate their own sketches for accuracy. The students gave an average rating of "very good." More than 40 percent said that their sketch provided a *perfect* fit to their personality."

What is interesting here (and perhaps predictable to readers), is that Forer had given all the students the same personality sketch. He borrowed the wording from horoscope and astrology sources. Students gave high scores for accuracy for the simple reason that these vague statements, at one time or other, can apply to just about everybody.

More information on how such methods can be used to manufacture an astounding impression of accuracy -- out of virtually nothing -- can be found by researching the so-called "cold reading" techniques used by fake psychics.

Here is a concrete example of a "Barnum Statement", from a text by Exner, the one who (supposedly) standardized and legitimized the Rorschach in more recent years:

"This patient's emotions tend to be inconsistent in terms of their impact on thinking, problem solving, and decision-making behaviors. In one instance thinking may be strongly influenced by feelings. In a second instance, even though similar to the first, emotions may be pushed aside and play only a peripheral role. . . ."

While this statement seems to be saying something specific about the patient, it merely states that sometimes his thoughts control his feelings, and sometimes his feelings control his thoughts. This could apply to anybody, so what is the point of recording it?

Perhaps the most sinister aspect of this whole problem is something brought up by the *What's Wrong* authors: a therapist could be using these cold reading techniques, and be doing so entirely unconsciously.

In his book *House of Cards*⁽³⁾, Robyn Dawes takes this idea a step further. He contends that a great deal of modern psychotherapy, not just the Rorschach, is -- well, a house of cards. A sham, based on little or no empirical evidence. The chapter titles in his book are telling. Part 1, *The Claims of the Mental Health Experts Versus the Evidence*, contains chapters entitled "Psychotherapy: The Myth Of Expertise", "Licensing: The Myth Of Protecting The Public", "A Plethora Of Experts And What To Do About Them", and "Why The Myths Are Believed".

A group called SPARC (Separated Parenting Access and Resource Center)⁽⁴⁾ also has much to say about the Rorschach. They give a very detailed description of the test. There is a discussion of each inkblot, and common interpretations used by therapists for them. They even include outlines of each official Rorschach blot. They do not reproduce the whole thing because of the copyright issues. SPARC gives numerous warnings about particular blots ("Don't say this or that . . ."). Even though some of the comments warned against my seem quite innocent, they are interpreted by many therapists as signs of serious mental illness.

Which brings us back to one of the main points. How valid are these tests, upon which the quality of life -- in some cases even the lives -- of many people depend? SPARC states, "SPARC's position on the use of the Rorschach test is that it is an inappropriate and unreliable test for use in the context of a child custody evaluation, and that tests such as the Bricklin series or the MMPI-2 are more suitable and more reliable for use personality evaluations in custody disputes."

Without more information, I would question even that. In one of my university classes some years ago, my psychology professor stated that the validity of the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) had been pretty thoroughly discredited as far back as 20 years prior to that time, even though "the military still uses it".

Some corporations still use a variant of it when evaluating prospective employees. Perhaps the MMPI-2 is based on more solid foundations than the original, but I have no specific knowledge of that. Other sources have also attacked the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), as suffering from problems similar to that of the Rorschach.

Again, it should be pointed out that the sponsors of the SPARC site are concerned with accurate psychological evaluation in the context of custody disputes. Therefore there is some concentration on court-ordered evaluations and the impact they can have. A number of professionals have written to SPARC to inform them or dispute their claims.

To illustrate the troublesome nature of the situation surrounding the Rorschach and other "projective" tests, SPARC quotes others:

"Nobody agrees how to score Rorschach responses objectively. There is nothing to show what any particular response means to the person who gives it. And, there is nothing to show what it means if a number of people give the same response. The ink blots are scientifically useless." (Bartol, 1983).

"The only thing the inkblots do reveal is the secret world of the examiner who interprets them. These doctors are probably saying more about themselves than about the subjects." (Anastasi, 1982).

A number of people involved with psychology have written to SPARC to give their opinions. A writer stated, "The Rorschach should be used only for its original purpose, i.e. a parlor game . . . I, for one, think your page does a public service by exposing a vestigial, anachronistic, and invalid psychological assessment procedure."

One psychologist reinforced my reservations about the MMPI, among other things. He also stated that one of the first questions asked by a Rorschach tester is whether the subject is familiar with the test. A responsible tester would reject someone who responded by saying yes. He writes:

"(1) Although a client in a court mandated situation may not be able to refuse the evaluation, he can probably refuse to take a Rorschach or contest its use. **The easiest way is to simply tell the psychologist that he is familiar with the test.** Or the person can ask the person if they use the comprehensive system and refuse if the person does not.

"(2) The person can state they are willing to comply with the administration of **objective** tests (e.g., MMPI-2) but do not want to take **projective** tests. (By the way... the MMPI-2 is also a notoriously poor test ... it is outdated with poor norms, etc. See Ziskin and Faust's book for more information).

"(3) After the fact, a person can file a complaint with the State Psychology Board or the American Psychological Association for breach of duty, malpractice, etc.

"(4) Better yet, if the person can afford it, hire a private psychologist to perform an evaluation. Make sure the psychologist is ethical and competent and has experience in child custody litigation. If one can afford a psychologist who is board certified (i.e., has a ABPP or ABFP after their degree), this is even better because these individuals are more likely to use appropriate child custody assessments."

A few things should be noted about this writer's comments. In (1), he mentions "the comprehensive system". By this he means the *Exner*-standardized version of the Rorschach test, which we have already seen refuted above.

In item (2), he refers to an "objective" test. One must understand what the word "objective" means in this context. It does **not** mean the test is not subjective!!! It refers only to the form of the test. A multiple-choice exam in high school is sometimes called objective because the exam can be scored with a paper key. Since answers do not have to be interpreted by a human before scores are assigned, it is called objective. Those of us used to dealing in the hard sciences, though, tend to associate the word "objective" with the ideas of scientific validity and lack of bias. Be careful; that is not the case here.

An objective test, in the context used above, is not guaranteed to be valid. To continue the multiple-choice example, while your score might be found objectively, say with a key, the questions themselves and their associated "correct" answers could be completely biased and arbitrary. And so, therefore, could the results of the test. While your score can be objectively found, the decision of what goes into the test can be as biased and subjective as with any other test. So what your score actually means, or even whether it means anything at all, is another matter entirely.

Dawes⁽³⁾ wrote: "Now that I am no longer a member of the American Psychological Association Ethics Committee, I can express my personal opinion that the use of Rorschach interpretations in establishing an individual's legal status and child custody is the single most unethical practice of my colleagues. It is done, widely. Losing legal rights as a result . . . violates what I believe to be a basic ethical principle in this society — that people are judged on the basis of what they do, not on the basis of what they feel, think, or might have a propensity to do. And being judged on an invalid assessment of such thoughts, feelings, and propensities amounts to losing one's civil rights on an essentially random basis."

As I mentioned before, the SPARC site, which is well worth a visit, describes the Rorschach test in detail, down to answers that are desirable / expected for each ink blot. For example, SPARC states about the second card, "It is important to see this blot as two human figures, usually females or clowns. If you don't, it's seen as a sign that you have trouble relating to people."

Looking at the actual blot (as I have), you can see that there are in fact parts that could be called vaguely humanoid. Accepting this as an answer is probably a good idea. But requiring an answer that specific from something so vague is little more than wishful thinking in my opinion. They are inkblots. If you really expect people to answer that consistently, perhaps a photo would be more appropriate.

SPARC makes recommendations for anyone finding themselves in a position of having to take such a test. The test is timed, though that is not mentioned.

"Don't hold the card at an unusual angle. Watch how you phrase things. Say '*This looks like ...*' or '*This could be ...*', never '*This is...*' After all, you're supposed to realize that it is just a blot of ink on a card. By the same token, don't be too literal and say things as, 'This is a blotch of black ink.' Don't groan, get emotional, or make irrelevant comments. Don't put your hands on the cards to block out parts. The psychologist will watch for all of the foregoing as signs of brain damage.

"There are several responses that almost everyone gives; mentioning these shows the psychologist you're a regular guy.

"It is okay to be original if you can justify what you see in the shape, shading, or color of the blot. If you see an abalone and can point out why it looks like one, then say so. Justifiable original responses are usually judged to be indicative of creativity or intelligence."

"You don't want non sequiturs, images that don't fit the blot in the judgment of the psychologist. These may be signs of psychosis."

"Since time is a factor, it is important to come up with good answers fast. (It looks particularly bad if you take a long time and give a dumb, inappropriate answer.)"

Are you starting to appreciate the gravity of this situation? Prior to this, I had thought the Rorschach was used to unearth glaringly blatant psychoses (subject sees every blot as a depiction of people following him, for example). While that might be true in rare cases, relatively serious diagnoses have been and are being made based on very subjective interpretations of innocuous statements. People can be (and are) diagnosed as being fit for the funny farm, based on simple wisecracks about a spot of ink.

This strongly reminds me of the plot of the movie *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. I highly recommend the movie if you have never seen it. The long and short of it is, very serious issues are being decided over minor occurrences and perhaps even horseplay or slips of the tongue. Given what I have learned, I think I would probably be put away, because I have a very strong tendency to be an irreverent smartass.

I want to make it clear that I am no professional psychologist. Some of my readers probably have qualifications in this field that far exceed mine. Some of them might well disagree. My purpose here, though, was simply to pass on information I found (and found to be alarming), not to press an opinion of my own. Whatever your own opinion, feel free to write me about it if you like, and rest assured that I will not be offended. My address is inside the front cover.

One thing seems clear: there are problems with certain widely accepted psychological testing practices. There is not enough empirical evidence to support some of the conclusions being reached on the basis of those tests. This problem should be addressed.

My brief synopsis here is not intended to be a thorough discussion of the topic. If you are interested, visit the websites listed in the footnotes, perhaps even acquire the books (they are available on Amazon.com), and read more about the issue.

In my wanderings, three tests in particular were called into question: the Thematic Apperception Test, the MMPI (MMPI-2), and the Rorschach Test. There are other projective tests of very questionable value, such as the Lüscher Color Test and one called "Play With Anatomically Correct Dolls".

As SPARC made clear, it is probably not a good idea for someone to agree to tests such as these when important court cases or life issues are in the balance.

Taking one of these tests has a lot in common with the situation of an innocent person agreeing to be given a Polygraph examination: it has no power whatever to prove your innocence (sanity), but you can definitely be made to look guilty (crazy), based on someone else's subjective interpretation of your answers. That is a bad gamble. - LE

You can take a humorous "Rorschach Test" online at

<http://www.stupidstuff.org/main/rorschach.htm>

- [1] *What's Wrong with the Rorschach? Science Confronts the Controversial Inkblot Test* by James M. Wood, M. Teresa Nezworski, Scott O. Lilienfeld, Howard N. Garb
- [2] *The Skeptic's Dictionary*, by Robert Todd Carroll <http://skepdic.com/inkblot.html>
- [3] *House of Cards*, by Robyn Dawes 1996
- [4] Visit SPARC's website at <http://www.deltabravo.net/custody/index.html>
See their Rorschach page at <http://www.deltabravo.net/custody/rorschach.htm>
- [5] "What's Wrong With This Picture?" Scientific American, May 2001
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/newsresearch/publications/journals/sa1_2.pdf

LETTER HOME

Dear Mom and Dad,

Our scoutmaster told us to write in case you saw the flood on TV and were worried. We are OK. Only one tent and two sleeping bags got washed away. None of us drowned because we were all up on the mountain looking for Chad when it happened.

Oh yeah, please call Chad's mother and tell her he's OK. He can't write because of the cast. I got to ride in one of the search and rescue jeeps. It was neat. We never would have found him in the dark if it wasn't for the lightning. Scoutmaster Walt got mad at Chad for going on a hike alone without telling anyone. Chad said he did tell him, but it was during the fire so he probably didn't hear.

Did you know that if you put gas on a fire, the gas can will blow up? The wet wood didn't burn, but one of the tents did. And some of our clothes. John is going to look weird until his hair grows back.

We will be home on Saturday if Scoutmaster Walt gets the car fixed. The wreck wasn't his fault. The brakes worked OK when we left. Scoutmaster Walt said that a car that old, you have to expect something to break down; that's probably why he can't get insurance. We think it's a neat car. He doesn't care if we get it dirty, and if it's hot, sometimes he lets us ride on the fenders.

It does get pretty hot with 10 people in the car. He let us take turns in the trailer until the state patrolman stopped and talked to us. Scoutmaster Walt is a neat guy. Don't worry, he is a good driver. He is teaching Terry how to drive on the mountain roads. There isn't any traffic. All we ever see up here is logging trucks.

This morning the guys were swimming and diving off the rocks. Since I can't swim, and Chad was afraid of sinking because of his cast, Scoutmaster Walt let us take the canoe across the lake instead. It was great. You can still see some of the trees under the water from the flood.

Scoutmaster Walt isn't crabby like some scoutmasters. He didn't even get mad about the lifejackets. He has to spend a lot of the time working on the car so we are trying not to cause him any trouble.

Guess what? We all got our first aid merit badges. When Dave dove in the lake and cut his arm, we got to make a tourniquet. Wade and I threw up, but Scoutmaster Walt said it was probably just food poisoning from the leftover chicken. He said they used to get sick from the food in prison. I'm glad he got out and became our scoutmaster. He said he sure figured out how to do things better while he was there.

I have to go now. We are going to town to mail our letters and buy bullets. Don't worry about anything. We are fine.

Love, your son.

P.S. How long has it been since I had a tetanus shot?

APRIL PUZZLE ANSWER

To review, if the sum of the squares of the first fifty positive integers is **42,925**, what is the sum of the squares of the first 50 positive **even** integers?

First, let's assume that the statement about the first sum is correct. Now let's write out the first series (partly) and under it the second one.

$$1^2 + 2^2 + 3^2 + 4^2 + \dots + 50^2 = 42,925$$

$$2^2 + 4^2 + 6^2 + 8^2 + \dots + 100^2 = ?$$

Note that each term of the second series is the square of a number that is twice as big as the corresponding one in the first series. When a number that is twice as big is squared, the result is 4 times as big. Therefore each term in the second series is 4 times as big as its mate in the first series, and the sum consequently must be 4 times as big.

So the answer is $4 \times 42,925 = 171,700$.

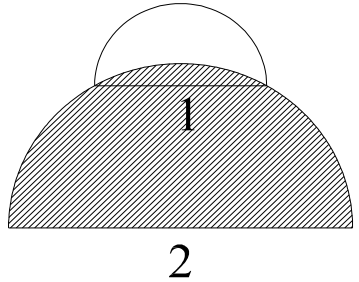
ATTABOY, MIKE

I received two answers, both correct, with correct explanations, from Mike Strombach and Donna Williams. Mike came in about 24 hours earlier so he gets the coveted award, **but Donna deserves an HONORABLE MENTION** for giving a good explanation without using strict algebra terminology. She professes to not know algebra, but there is hidden knowledge lurking in the background.

MAY PUZZLE

A semicircle of diameter **1** sits atop a semicircle of diameter **2**, as shown. The unshaded area inside the smaller semicircle and outside the larger semicircle is called a *lune*. Determine the area of this lune.

Send your answer directly to me. There are three ways you can do this:



E-mail: this is best - perfesser3@comcast.net.

Regular mail: 3404 E. Carlisle Ave., Spokane, WA 99217

Phone call: 509 487-7366 (leave a message if I don't answer)

You will be judged on your speed, correctness, and **clarity of explanation** of your reasoning. The winner will get one of the coveted **ATTABOYS**.

- Gardner Bailey, NEW Puzzle Editor

Current Affair

I believe that I deserve to pat myself on the back. Not only did I use my Mensa intellect to avoid calling the dreaded electrician, I also used my genius to develop an innovative new candle lighting system.

It all started when my “honey do” list included taking down an old ceiling-mounted light fixture and replacing it with a fancy new hanging candelabra --- the kind with four small tea light or votive candles. Very pretty, indeed.

Of course, my first action was to turn off the electricity to the ceiling light. (I’m no fool, having been shocked a number of times previously for having not done so.) It was quite obvious that the light switch that controlled the ceiling light turned the electricity on and off. After all, the lights went on and off when it was switched. No light, no live wires. So I turned off the switch, and even taped it so no dummy would inadvertently turn it on while I was working.

Next I took off the ceiling plate that concealed the wires and tested them with a little electric current tester. No light on the tester --- no live wires. After disconnecting the wires on the fixture from the wires in the ceiling, I felt I was halfway there. There was only one problem --- I had these three wires, one white, one black and one green, hanging from the ceiling. Being the neat (spelled anal) person that I am, I carefully twisted the bare parts of all three wires together and capped them with one of those twisty caps that you use to cover the bare parts. I neatly tucked the combined wires back into the overhead receptacle. So far so good.

Having completed the part for which the electrician would have charged \$1,000 or so, the rest was easy. With the wires neatly stored away, it was easy to mount the new ceiling plate, covering the concealed wires, and hang the candelabra on the provided hook.

Now for the good part. It was only a few days later that I decided it was safe to remove the tape I had used to safely keep the old light switch in the “off” position. In doing so, I accidentally switched it to the “on” position. Imagine my surprise when tongues of flame shot down from above the new hanging candelabra, lighting all four candles at one time! This was perfect! A new way to light the candles with a flick of the switch. The Mensa intellect does it again!

Now, if I can just figure out why I have to reset the circuit breaker (and the smoke detector) after each lighting, I think there’s a patent (ka-ching) in my future.

- JimWerdell@comcast.net

Big Question

Could it be that the real reason women live longer than men
is that they do not have to live with women?



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