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Aurora Milesi & Filippo Aschieri

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CLINICAL APPLICATIONS AND CASE STUDIES

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Case Studies with the Rorschach Test: A Systematic Literature Review

Aurora Milesi and Filippo Aschieri

Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

This systematic review provides the first comprehensive synthesis of Rorschach case reports published over the past 50 years. A total of 217 articles published between 1974 and 2025 were identified through searches in Scopus, PsycInfo, and PubMed, complemented by manual screening of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *Rorschachiana*, and the Therapeutic Assessment Bibliography. Publication volume increased steadily across decades. Exner's Comprehensive System was the most frequently used coding system, followed by the School of Paris and, more recently, R-PAS. Strong associations emerged between coding systems and language of publication: CS and R-PAS articles were published almost exclusively in English, whereas School of Paris contributions appeared predominantly in French. R-PAS case studies were more often published in higher-ranked journals, whereas School of Paris contributions appeared more frequently in non-indexed journals. Most case reports focused on children, adolescents, and young adults, although demographic variables such as ethnicity and cultural background were rarely reported. The Rorschach was used primarily in clinical settings, commonly within multimethod assessments integrating psychostructural and psychodynamic perspectives. Reporting transparency varied considerably, highlighting the need for clearer reporting standards and greater openness in future Rorschach case study publications.

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Case studies have long played a distinctive role in psychological assessment, offering idiographic insights that complement nomothetic, group-based evidence. In assessment practice, well-documented case reports can serve multiple functions: illustrating the clinical use of assessment tools, supporting theory development, informing training, and translating research findings into applied contexts. Beyond their relevance for research and theory building, case studies play a crucial role in clinical practice. For clinicians engaged in psychological assessment, published case reports provide concrete models of case formulation, test interpretation, and integration of multimethod data. For clinicians, published case reports provide concrete models of case formulation, test interpretation, and integration of multimethod data, supporting training, communicating expert clinical reasoning, illustrating assessment processes in applied settings, and contributing to the dissemination of best practices (Lewis & Hopwood, 2026). In this sense, case studies function as a bridge between research and practice, between expert knowledge and everyday clinical decision-making (O'Donohue & Lilienfeld, 2013). As Yin (2013) notes, the analysis of cases describes phenomena in their real-world context to capture their complexity, they encourage research translation (Glasgow, 2013), and enrich scientific progress by providing a detailed account of the phenomenon of interest.At the same time, case studies have often been downplayed due to methodological questions concerning transparency, inspectability of data, and the standards by which inferences can be evaluated by readers, reviewers, and practitioners. This study aims to provide the first comprehensive view of how the Rorschach has been used in its most typical application: the understanding of respondents' psychological functioning based on their idiographic results (Baggi & Martino, 2024; Mihura & Meyer, 2022).

While individual cases can be potentially useful in the development of psychological knowledge and, in some instances, serve as its foundational elements (Freud, 1895), to date there has not been any systematic scrutiny of how Rorschach cases were reported in published literature and of their contents, such as, for example, which Rorschach systems they used, which field of psychology they belonged to, and to what extent readers could access the test materials. In this study, we provide an encompassing review of Rorschach case studies published in the last 50 years with the aim of highlighting the frequency of these publications over time, their language, the coding system of the test applied, the journal indexing and ranking (based on Elsevier's Scopus database) in which cases were published, the respondents' age and ethnicity (and the presence of multiple cases in each article), the reasons for the assessment in which the Rorschach was used, the other sources of information presented alongside the Rorschach test, the principles applied to Rorschach case conceptualization, and the transparency with which authors present Rorschach materials in their articles.

We included both retrospective cases, in which the decision to publish the case was made after encountering a particularly interesting Rorschach protocol, and cases prospectively identified for a specific aim to be studied with the Rorschach. Both typologies of publication can provide valuable scientific

CONTACT Aurora Milesi aurora.milesi@unicatt.it Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Largo Gemelli 1, 20123, Milan, Italy
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knowledge. Retrospective cases often illustrate a particularly prototypical or informative phenomenon. For example, Sendín Bande & García-Alba (2008) retrospectively described the unexpected encounter with a mother who suffered from Munchausen's syndrome by proxy, whose toddler was experiencing unexplainable physical symptoms. Retrospectively analyzing the Rorschach of single cases, authors provided prototypical examples of aggression dynamics in a person with a neurotic personality organization and a history of criminal behavior (Meloy & Gacono, 1994), a person with psychopathological traits and borderline personality organization (Meloy & Gacono, 1993), and a forensic patient with psychotic symptoms (Peterson, 1992). Retrospective cases are widely present in the fields of psychopathology and treatment as well, for example Danesino and colleagues (1979) explored identity discontinuities among multiple personality patients, Finn (2011) documented change during Therapeutic Assessment and treatment of a severely traumatized patient, and Peiffer and colleagues (2024) discovered the interplay of psychological motives and family dynamics behind the patient's school difficulties. Prospective cases are characterized by a more controlled sampling, which allows for a more reliable set of conclusions on the research question (Flyvbjerg, 2006). For example, through the Rorschach Andò and colleagues (2019) have studied the psychological functioning of a patient who suffered of the typical symptoms of hyperhidrosis, Mathieu and colleagues (2022) searched for similarities and differences between the Rorschach profiles of two patients undergoing bariatric surgery coming from different cultural backgrounds, and Rivera and Viglione (2010) selected several children from a non-clinical context to describe their Rorschach profiles.

Understanding the features of how cases were presented in published literature might highlight the interplay between the development of systems and their representation in the scientific literature, providing data on how this type of submissions is welcomed by journals, and which Rorschach systems are more frequently accessed in which journals. As an instrument employed in a wide variety of ways across different coding systems, settings, populations, and contexts, the Rorschach has been used as a versatile assessment tool.

The diversity of applications of the Rorschach has contributed to its use but has also led to a fragmented body of literature, making it difficult to gain a comprehensive view of how the test has been applied and developed over time. To date, no systematic review has synthesized this extensive tradition. By focusing on case studies - a methodological format that highlights the richness of in-field applications - the present review offers insight into the diverse uses, purposes, and contexts in which the Rorschach has been employed. In this light, it provides a foundation for assessing the current state of Rorschach case study literature and for identifying ways to enhance its utility as a bridge between research and clinical practice.

Method

Transparency and openness

This study's design and analyses were not preregistered. Data, analysis code, and supplementary materials are openly available on the project's OSF repository (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/K9MZS). Analyses have been performed using SPSS software (version 31.00.00).

Inclusion process

We performed both a formal literature search on Scopus, PsycInfo and PubMed and an informal search of titles and abstracts in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, in *Rorschachiana* and on the Therapeutic Assessment Institute website. For the formal literature search, we applied the search terms "Rorschach" AND "Case", limited to the title and abstract sections. In all databases, a filter was applied for the date of publication, selecting only articles published between 1974 (formal introduction of the Comprehensive System by Exner) and December 31st, 2024. We selected 1974 as the starting point because the introduction of Exner's Comprehensive System marked a major turning point in the field, promoting a more systematic and standardized use of the Rorschach and supporting the development of more empirically grounded research. On October 6th, 2025, we repeated the same search to include studies published from January 1st, 2025 up to date. For PsycInfo search, an additional filter for only peer-reviewed articles was applied. In addition to the formal database search, we also screened articles published within the same time frame in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* and examined the *Therapeutic Assessment Bibliography* available on the Therapeutic Assessment Institute website to identify potentially relevant publications not captured by the database search. Since *Rorschachiana* has been formally accessible in electronic format only since 1993, the informal search for this journal was conducted from 1993 onward. The detailed flow of articles through the review process, including the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and retained at each stage, is fully reported in the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1).

All references were uploaded on Rayyan, a web-based platform designed for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al., 2016) for the detection of duplicates and abstract screening.

A detailed screening codebook and decision tree, available on the project's OSF repository (https://doi.org/10.17605/.IO/K9MZS), were used during both the abstract-level and full-text screening phases to guide article inclusion and exclusion decisions. In the abstract-level screening, articles could be excluded for the following reasons: (a) language - published in languages other than English, Italian, French, and Spanish - i.e. the languages all authors read and understand-, (b) focus on general issues without presenting Rorschach-assessed cases, (c) use of research designs other than case studies - e.g., large *N* empirical studies, family assessments reporting "consensus Rorschach", small groups of cases analyzed to highlight similarities and differences among subgroups of protocols -, (d) articles presenting cases in which the Rorschach was not the primary focus of the report - e.g., Therapeutic Assessment cases using the Thurston-Cradock Test of Shame (Thurston & Cradock, 2009) and briefly referring to the testing with the Rorschach test- or (e) articles with insufficient information for screening - e.g., records with missing abstracts or abstracts that did not provide enough information to determine whether the article contained a case study.

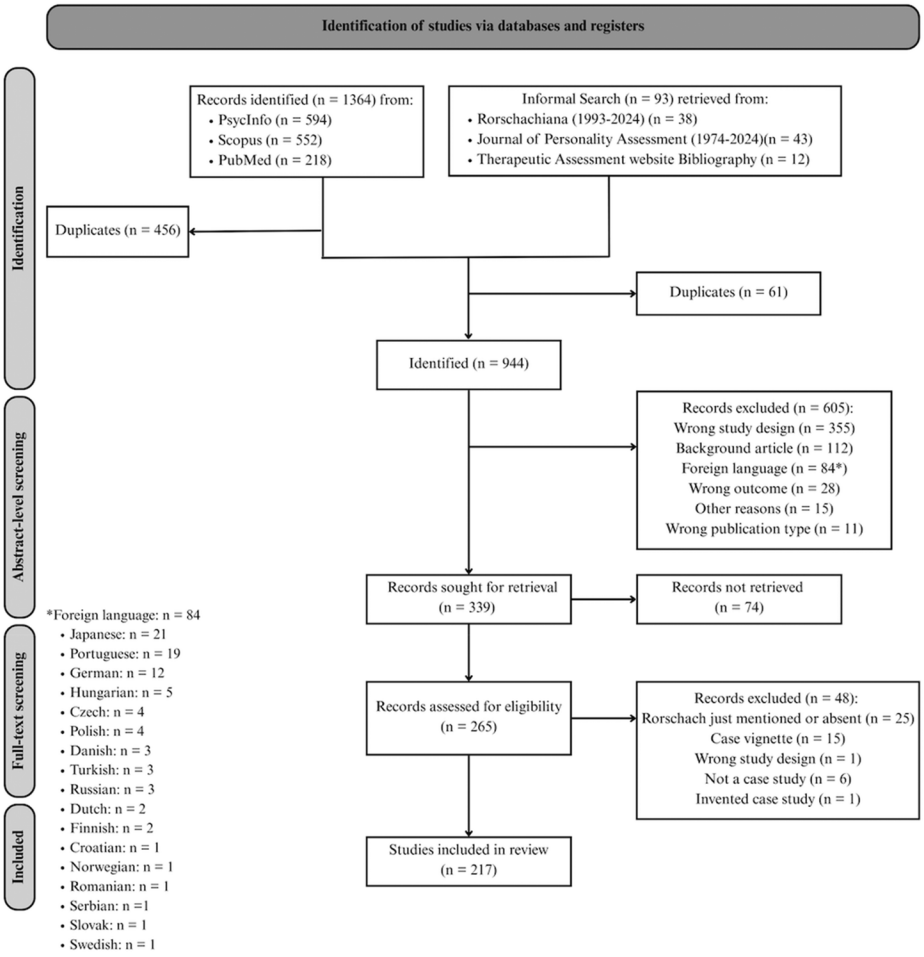

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for case studies with the Rorschach Test.

Following the abstract-level screening, the full text of the selected and retrievable articles underwent analysis by F.A and am Besides screening the full text of all articles with the aforementioned exclusion criteria, we excluded articles that only mentioned the Rorschach test or that did not interpret it, and which presented cases with very limited information on the respondent and/or on the Rorschach test interpretation (i.e., case vignettes). We also excluded articles that reported cases used solely to exemplify findings from empirical group-based research. Such cases were not intended as standalone case studies, but rather as illustrations following aggregated analyses, and typically lacked sufficient clinical and methodological detail to support independent interpretation or systematic coding within the scope of the present review. Upon completion of this comprehensive analysis, a total of 217 articles met the criteria for inclusion in the systematic review.

Coding of studies

Coded variables are summarized in Table 1, whereas the coding procedures are detailed in the Codebook available on the project's OSF repository. Each article was coded for its publication period, language, the coding system of the Rorschach test applied, journal indexing and ranking (based on Elsevier's Scopus database), the presence of multiple cases in each article, respondents' age and ethnicity, reasons for the assessment, the other sources of information presented alongside the Rorschach test, the principles applied to Rorschach case conceptualization, and transparency criteria.

Inclusion and coding reliability

The reliability of the process of inclusion and exclusion of articles, of both the abstract-level screening and the full text, has been evaluated by calculating the interrater agreement between two raters. F.A. and am reached an excellent agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977) for the abstract-level screening phase (k =.83) and for the full-text (k =.74) inclusion/exclusion decision. Disagreements were resolved by discussion between coders.

To evaluate the reliability of the coding procedure, interrater agreement was calculated for variables requiring higher levels of inference and domain-specific expertise in the Rorschach test and psychological assessment literature. These included the identification of the Rorschach coding system (particularly when not explicitly stated), the classification of additional sources of information reported in the studies, and the coding of transparency criteria. These variables required coders to interpret implicit information and apply specialized judgment, making reliability estimation essential. Interrater agreement was assessed in collaboration with an independent rater (F. F.), an experienced Rorschach examiner.

Table 1. List and description of coded variables.

Variable	Description
Publication year	*Coded in four-year periods starting from 1974 through 2025*
Language of the publication	*English, Italian, French, and Spanish*
Journal ranking on Scopus	*Journal's ranking was based on Elsevier's Scopus database (www.scimagojr.com) using the best quartile distribution among the available subject categories.*
Multiple Cases	*Presence of more than one case in the same article.*
Age and Ethnicity	*Age and ethnicity of each participant were coded. The ethnicity of the respondents was coded on the explicit presence of this information, or as long as the manuscript contained enough information to infer it reliably.*
Reasons for the assessment	*Clinical, forensic, medical, educational, and research settings*
Other sources of information presented with the Rorschach	*Subject's history, self-report tests, medical or forensic reports, other performance-based tests, structured observations or interviews, and neurofunctional assessment*
Rorschach Coding System	*Rorschach Coding System applied: Beck; Bohm; Comprehensive System (CS) (including Comprehensive System Revised, CS-R); Klopfer; Perceptanalysis; Psychodynamic Content Scales; Rapaport; Rorschach Performance Assessment System (R-PAS); School of Lausanne; School of Paris; Scuola Romana Rorschach; Trauma Content Index (TCI); Non-identifiable; No System Applied.*
Approach to the case conceptualization	*Psychostructural, Psychodynamic, Integrated.*
Transparency criteria	*We coded the presence of the following elements in the article: protocol, coding, quantitative aggregated data, explicit referral to the coding system applied.*

In contrast, other variables (i.e., year of publication, journal ranking, language of publication) were directly observable and involved minimal or no inferential ambiguity. therefore, Interrater reliability was not calculated for these variables (interrater reliability results are illustrated in Table 2).

For the coding systems, Francesca Fantini and am reached a good overall agreement (k = .76); category-specific agreement coefficients showed an average k = .71, with values ranging from $k = -0.016$ to $k = 1.00$. Of note, the variables showing the lowest agreement levels were the least frequently used coding systems, which led to a greater chance of obtaining extreme agreement results. The interrater reliability analysis conducted on the other sources of information presented with the Rorschach and on the questions addressed by the Rorschach test showed an overall excellent agreement (k =. 73 and .78< k < 1.00 respectively). The interrater reliability analyses of the transparency criteria between Francesca Fantini and am on 65 articles showed good to excellent (i.e. Cicchetti, 1994) agreement levels ranging from k =.78 and $k = 1.00$.

Table 2. Interrater reliability analysis results

Variable	Variable levels	Cohen's k	n
Inclusion - Abstract level		.83	181
Inclusion - Full text level		.74	217
Coding Systems	Comprehensive System	.87	65
	R-PAS	1.00	
	School of Paris	.95	
	School of Lausanne	.79	
	Rapaport	−.02	
	Beck	1.00	
	Scuola Romana Rorschach	1.00	
	Psychodynamic Content Scales	.74	
	Klopfer	.85	
	Non Identified	.51	
	TCI	1.00	
	No system applied	1.00	
	Piotrowski	−.016	
	Bohm	1.00	
Questions addressed by the test administration		.73	65
Other sources of information	History	.78	65
	Self-report tests	1.00	
	Medical/forenisc reports	.93	
	Projective/narrative tools	.90	
	Structured observation	1.00	
	Maximum performance tests	.96	
	Strcutured Interview	1.00	
	Neuropsychological tests	1.00	

Transparency and openness

All materials used in this review, including the decision tree and coding codebook, are available as online supplementary materials. No primary data or analysis code were generated, as the study relies exclusively on published sources.

Data analysis

We provide descriptive statistics for (1) the number of publications over time and their language, (2) respondents' age and ethnicity, (3) presence of multiple cases in each article, (4) reasons for the assessment, (5) the coding system of the test applied, (6) the other sources of information presented alongside the Rorschach test, (7) the principles applied to the Rorschach case conceptualization, (8) journal indexing and ranking (based on Elsevier's Scopus database), and (9) transparency criteria.

The frequency of Rorschach case publication in time was tested with a simple regression model. We compared three most frequently used systems running Chi-Square analyses for publication language, reporting ethnic features of respondents, the ranking of the journals in which the articles were published, the reasons for the assessment and the typology of Rorschach case conceptualization. Following Sharpe (2015), when the Chi-Square was statistically significant, we analyzed the adjusted residuals of each cell to identify where the observed distribution of cases departed from the expected distribution. We used Bonferroni's correction, dividing alpha (set at .05) by the number of cells in the Chi-square, hence

resulting in statistically significant scores when z-scores are above |2.77| (in a 9-cells Chi-Square test) and |2.99| (in a 18-cells Chi-Square test).

We also ran three one-way ANOVA to investigate the effects of the three most common coding systems on respondents' age, the number of other sources of information presented with the Rorschach, and on the transparency criteria. Finally, we tested the effects of the journal's ranking on the number of other sources of information presented with the Rorschach and on the number of transparency criteria.

For Chi Squared, effect sizes were expressed as Cohen's *w*, derived from Cramer's *V*. This choice reflects the fact that Cohen's (1988) benchmarks are defined for *w*, whereas the magnitude of Cramer's V depends on table dimensionality and does not allow for fixed thresholds. Cohen's w was computed as $w = V\sqrt{k-1}$, where *k* represents the larger dimension of the table, and interpreted using the conventional cutoffs of 0.10 (small), 0.30 (medium), and 0.50 (large). Effect sizes for ANOVA were expressed as partial eta squared (ηp^2) and interpreted according to Richardson's (2011) benchmarks (0.01 = small, 0.06 = medium, 0.14 = large).

Results

Number of publications over time

Rorschach cases have been growing in number when considering the 1974-2025 period. Specifically, four articles were published between 1974 and 1977, compared to 31 between 2018 and 2021, and 23 between 2022 and 2025. The average number of articles published per year in each four-year period rose from 1.00 (1974-1977) to 6.75 (2014-2017), 7.50 (2018-2021), and 5.75 (2022-2025). A simple linear regression showed that time significantly predicted the number of articles ($F(1, 215) = 678.03$, $p < .001$) explaining 76% of the variance, ($R^2 = .76$). The association was strong and positive ($R = .87$, $\beta = .87$, $t = 26.04$, $p < .001$), indicating that the number of publications increased linearly over time.

Coding systems

The frequency of use of each coding system used is reported in Figure 2. The most frequently adopted coding system was the Comprehensive System (42.4%, $n = 92$), followed by the School of Paris (27.6%, $n = 60$) and R-PAS (6.0%, $n = 13$). Of note, in a considerable portion of articles (11.5%, $n = 25$), the authors did not report the coding system applied for the coding and interpretation of the test and this aspect could not be inferred from the text. In a very small portion of the articles, the authors applied other Rorschach systems (i.e., Klopfer 3.7%, $n = 8$, Lausanne 1.8%, $n = 4$). The use of systems other than Comprehensive System, School of Paris and R-PAS is largely concentrated in less recent articles. For example, all articles employing the School of Lausanne system were published between 1994 and 1998, except for one in 2023 (Husain et al., 2023), 75% of the articles applying the Klopfer system ($n = 6$) were published between 1974 and 1997, while the two most recent ones appeared in 2012.

Figure 3 displays the frequency distribution of the three most frequently used coding systems across the study period. Formal statistical comparisons of coding-system-specific temporal trends were not conducted because several coding systems were represented by a limited number of publications, resulting in insufficient data to support reliable inferential analyses; the following observations should therefore be interpreted as descriptive.

First, The number of case studies using the Comprehensive System (Exner, 1974) appears higher in the years between 1974 and 2011 than in the subsequent period, during which publications using the Rorschach Performance Assessment System (R-PAS; Meyer et al., 2011) also begin to appear. Second, publications applying the School of Paris (Chabert, 2012) appear more frequently from the late 1990s onward and continue to appear throughout the subsequent decades.

Only 33 articles (15.2%) applied more than one system for coding Rorschach test data. Specifically, 32 articles employed one additional coding system, five applied two, and one article applied four distinct additional coding systems. Among the 93 articles that identified the Comprehensive System (CS) as the primary coding system, 18 (19.3%) incorporated one additional coding system, one employed two and one employed three. Among the articles applying one additional system, the most frequent were the Psychodynamic Content Scales (e.g., Erdberg, 2012; 68.4%; $n = 13$) and the Trauma Content Index (TCI; Armstrong & Loewenstein, 1990; 15.8%; $n = 3$).

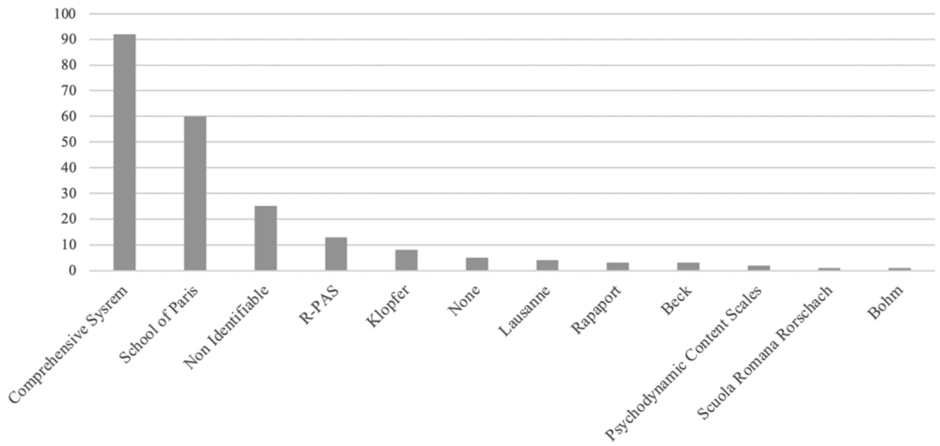

Figure 2. Frequency of primary coding systems.

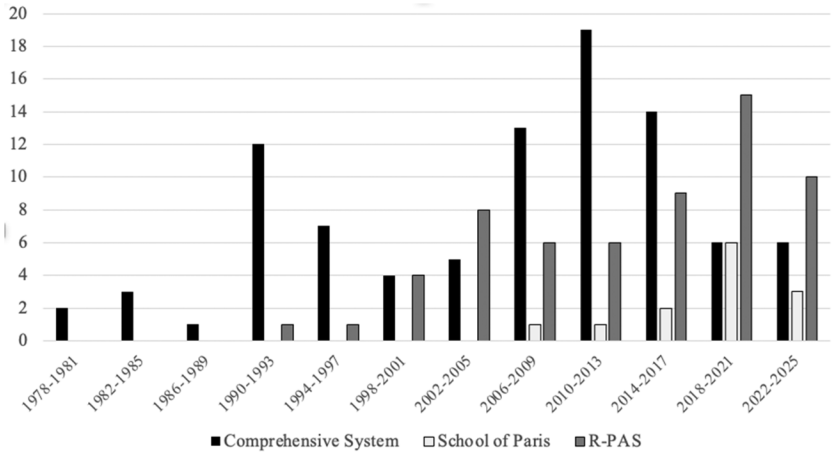

Figure 3. CS, School of Paris and R-PAS publications through time.

Even less frequent are studies directly comparing how different interpretative systems inform the understanding of the psychological functioning of the same respondent. Only a few examples exist in the literature. For instance, De Tychey and colleagues (2010) interpreted the same Rorschach protocol of a patient with alexythimia using both the School of Paris and the Comprehensive System, with the aim of highlighting similarities and differences in the conceptualization of this psychopathology and in the conclusions derived from the two systems. More recently, Prudent and colleagues (2022) compared different interpretative frameworks applied to the same protocol of a severely disturbed patient, examining interpretations derived from the Comprehensive System, the School of Paris, and the School of Lausanne.

Of the 60 articles that used the School of Paris as the primary coding system, seven (11.6%) applied one additional coding system; of these, six applied the psychodynamic content scales as secondary system, and one applied the CS. Finally, considering the 13 articles applying R-PAS as the primary coding system, one article included the TCI as an additional coding system and one applied the Grandiosity and Narcissism Variables (Hinrichs, 2016).

Language of publications

Regarding the language of publication, most articles were written in English (69.5%, $n = 151$), with a large portion in French (27.6%, $n = 60$), and a small number in other languages (1.8%, $n = 4$ in Spanish and 0.9%, $n = 2$ in Italian). When analyzing the language of publication across four-year intervals, the results indicate an increase of articles in French, from just one in 1990-1993, to 15 between 2018 and 2021, and 10 between 2022 and 2025. Chi-square analysis showed a strong and statistically significant connection among the three most widely used systems and language ($\chi^2(4) = 117.338$, $p < .001$, $w = .85$, adjusted $p < .001$; Critical z Value = 2.77). Among the articles applying the CS, two were written in French (Adjusted Residual = − 8.8) while 90 were published in English (Adjusted Residual = 9.1); vice-versa, only 10 articles applying the School of Paris system were published in English (Adjusted Residual = −10.8), with the remaining 48 articles written in French (Adjusted Residual = 10.1).

Ranking

Regarding journal rankings, we categorized the articles into three groups according to the Scopus indexing of the respective journal in the year of publication: (1) articles published in non-indexed journals, (2) articles published in journals indexed in lower quartiles (Q3-Q4), and (3) articles published in journals indexed in higher quartiles (Q1-Q2). Roughly half of the articles were published in journals not indexed in Scopus in the year of publication (48.8%, $n = 106$), and about one fourth (25.8%, $n = 56$) of journals belong to the second category (Q3 or Q4), and about one fourth of articles (25.4%, $n = 55$) were published in higher-ranking journals (Q1 or Q2).

When considering only the ranking of journals in which cases using the three most used systems were published, Chi-squared analysis highlights significant and moderate differences among them ($\chi^2(4) = 19.756$, $p < .001$, $w = .34$). A pairwise z-test post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction (adjusted $p = .002$; Critical z Value = 2.77) revealed that articles applying R-PAS had a significantly lower number of publications in non-indexed journals (0%, $n = 0$; Adjusted Residual = −3.0), whereas articles applying the School of Paris had a significant higher number of publications in non-indexed journals (56.7%; $n = 34$; Adjusted residual = 3.3) and a significant lower number of publications in higher-ranking journals (15.0%; $n = 9$; Adjusted residual = −3.1), compared to the other two main systems.

This result might be connected with the relative lower frequency of highly ranked journals written in French, and with the interest in case studies of French-language journals such as *Psychologie Clinique et Projective* ($n = 18/60$; 30.0%; indexed in Scopus on the lower Quartile starting from 2021), *Bulletin de psychologie* ($n = 11/60$; 18.3%; never indexed in Scopus), and *L'Evolution Psychiatrique* ($n = 10/60$; 16.6%, indexed in lower quartiles starting from 1999).

Respondents features: multiple cases, age, ethnicity

Considering articles with single ($n = 178$) and multiple cases ($n = 39$), we reported data from a total of 267 respondents. The mean age of participants was 27.37; 49.3% ($n = 136$) were aged between 3.5 and 24, 28.3% ($n = 78$) were between 25 and 40 years, 13.8% were aged 41 to 57 ($n = 38$), and 5.1% ($n = 14$) were aged 60 to 78 years; finally, age was not reported in 10 cases (3.6%).

The ethnicity of participants was reported only in 67 of the 217 articles (30.8%). In two articles reporting multiple cases, more than one ethnicity was reported. In 45 articles respondents were identified as Caucasian (20.7%), in 12 as African or African American (5.5%), in 5 as Asian (2.3%), in 4 as Hispanic (1.8%), in 2 as Arabian (0.9%) and in 0.46% as "other". For 150 cases (69.1%), ethnicity was not specified nor identifiable.

Reasons for the assessment

Concerning the question addressed by the Rorschach test administration, the purpose of the assessment was not identifiable for a small proportion of studies (2.4%, $n = 5$). As an example, Eggimann (1998) described the case of two homosexual men, who "have been submitted to psychological testing based on projective techniques in order to differentiate their types of personality organization", but without providing further information on the context in which their assessment took place (e.g. research or clinical); similarly, DeCato (1993) illustrating the approach of perceptanalysis and the Comprehensive System to the Rorschach through the case of a 12-year old boy, without specifying the purpose of his assessment. For the remaining 212 articles, the context and purpose of the Rorschach administration was reported; in 2 of these, the administration had more than one purpose - for example, Carstairs et al. (2025) reported the case of two assessments of the same subjects: the first took place in a forensic setting whereas the second one in a clinical setting.

Clinical issues were the most common, accounting for 59.9% of cases ($n = 130$). For example, Hamilton and colleagues (2009) described the Therapeutic Assessment of a child with social difficulties, in which the Rorschach was included, along with other tests, as part of the assessment. Similarly, Frigaux et al. (2018) reported a clinical case in which the assessment was conducted to determine the differential diagnosis between autistic and schizotypal features. The administration was held for research purposes in 21.6% ($n = 47$) of case studies; 74.4% of these ($n = 35$) employed purposive recruitment. However, 22 of the purposive research articles did not specify the rationale for participant selection. For example, Mazoyer and colleagues (2023) recruited a patient with ovarian failure in the context of a larger research protocol on the same topic but did not explain why this specific case was reported separately. Only 11 purposive articles provided a detailed description of the participant selection process. For instance, Claudel and Claudon (2014) described the case of Oscar, a sibling of a person with autism, who was recruited through theoretical sampling from a larger research sample, and reported separately because of "*his particular sensitivity to projective tasks*" (p. 337). In the remaining 12 research cases, participants were retrospectively selected without a clear description of recruitment purposes or procedures. For example, Bouteloup, Belot, and Mariage (2020), in their case study on the identity aspects of grandparenthood, described a woman retrospectively selected from a larger sample of patients with migraines; similarly, Harris and colleagues (2007) presented the case of a boy with ADHD recruited "*who was evaluated as part of a research protocol at the age of seven*" (Harris et al., 2007, p. 502) without further specification of the context or the selection process.

The Rorschach was administered in forensic contexts in 7.8% of the articles ($n = 17$). In all forensic cases, the Rorschach was part of a pre-sentence assessment. For instance, Terrell (1982) reported the case of a man charged for forgery who was administered the Rorschach as part of his psychiatric evaluation during the trial, and Carstairs (2011) reported the assessment of a woman referring in a child protection context.

In 5.5% of the articles ($n = 12$), cases were drawn from medical settings. For example, Poloni et al. (2019) presented the case of a woman with hallucinations, aiming to clarify the differential diagnosis between psychosis of organic etiology and factitious disorder.

In 2.3% of the articles ($n = 5$), cases were drawn from educational settings. For instance, Ramires et al. (2015) analyzed interaction structures in the psychodynamic therapy of a boy diagnosed with Asperger's disorder, referred due to his parents' concerns about school performance; Peiffer et al. (2024) described the Rorschach assessment of an 8-year-old girl referred by her mother, upon her teacher's suggestion, to evaluate the possibility of skipping a grade.

The coding system applied and the reason for the administration of the Rorschach appeared moderately connected ($\chi^2(10) = 29.870$, $p < .001$, $w = .67$) (Table 3). A post hoc z-test on the adjusted residuals with Bonferroni correction (adjusted $p = .0013$; Critical z Value = 2.99) revealed a significantly higher proportion of articles using the Comprehensive System for clinical purposes (70.7% of CS articles, $n = 65$; Adjusted Residual = 3.3) and a significantly lower number of cases published with research purposes (10.9% of CS articles, $n = 10$; Adjusted Residual= − 4.8) and, conversely, a significantly lower proportion of articles using the School of Paris system for clinical purposes (41.7% of School of Paris articles, $n = 25$; Adjusted Residual = − 3.5) and a significantly higher number than expected of articles using the School of Paris system administering the Rorschach for research purposes (48.3% of School of Paris articles, $n = 29$; Adjusted Residual = 5.1), compared to the two other systems.

Other sources of information

Regarding the other sources of information presented with the Rorschach test, results indicated that respondents' history and background were presented in all articles. A total of 56 articles (25.8%) used only respondents' backgrounds as additional information. Additional projective and narrative

Table 3. Purposes for the Rorschach administration and Coding Systems

			Purposes for the Rorschach administration						
			Clinical	Forensic	Medical	Educational	Research	Non-identifiable	Total
Coding System	Comprehensive System	*n*	65	7	6	2	9	2	92
		%	70.7%	7.6%	6.5%	2.2%	10.9%	2.2%	100.0%
	R-PAS	*n*	8	2	0	0	3	0	13
		%	61.5%	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	23.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	School of Paris	*n*	25	2	2	1	29	1	56
		%	41.7%	3.3%	3.3%	1.7%	48.3%	1.7%	100.0%
	Total	*n*	98	11	8	3	42	3	157
		%	59.4%	6.7%	4.8%	1.8%	25.5%	1.8%	100.0%

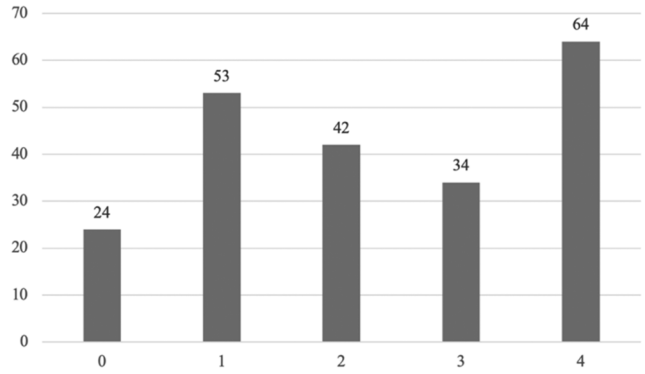

Figure 4. Contemporary presence of transparency criteria.

tests were used in 37.7% of cases ($n = 82$), followed by self-report measures (30.8%, $n = 67$) and maximum performance tests (21.1%, $n = 46$). Less commonly presented additional sources included medical or forensic reports (13.8%, $n = 30$), structured interviews (8.3%, $n = 18$), structured observations (5.1%, $n = 11$), and neuropsychological assessments (5.1%, $n = 11$). A one-way ANOVA revealed a small but significant effect of applied coding systems on the number of additional sources of information presented alongside the Rorschach ($F(2,162) = 3.614$, $p = .029$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$). Tukey's post hoc test showed that R-PAS ($M = 2.92$, SD = 1.11) was associated with a significantly higher number of additional information sources compared to the School of Paris ($M = 2.05$, SD = .72; $p = .029$). No significant differences were found between the Comprehensive System ($M = 2.34$, SD = 1.29) and either R-PAS or the School of Paris.

The Scopus indexing status of journals in which the articles were published had a large and statistically significant influence on the number of supplementary information sources used with the Rorschach ($F(2, 214) = 17.167$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$). Tukey's post hoc comparisons showed that articles published in higher-ranking journals reported more supplementary information sources ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.39$; $p < .001$) than those appearing either in lower ranking journals ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 0.91$) or in journals that were never indexed on Scopus ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.80$).

Rorschach case conceptualization

Regarding the approaches to Rorschach case conceptualization, 58.5% ($n = 127$) articles presented an integration of psychostructural and other theoretical approaches, conversely, a "pure" psychostructural approach to case conceptualization was used in 18.4%, ($n = 40$), whereas a "pure" use of a theoretical interpretation, which did not rely on any quantitative aspect, was applied to case conceptualization in 23.0% ($n = 50$) of cases respectively.

Transparency

Concerning the transparency criteria, 47.4% ($n = 103$) of case studies provided the coding, 54.3% ($n = 118$) reported quantitative aggregated data, 52.1% ($n = 113$) attached the protocol, and 75.1% ($n = 163$) explicitly referred to the Rorschach system applied. Although 29.5% of articles reported all four transparency criteria, 54.8% of publications had up to two transparency criteria, indicating a tendency to provide limited transparency in the reporting of Rorschach results, raising concerns about the reliability of conclusions in the reviewed case studies (Figure 4). One-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences in the presence of transparency criteria among the CS ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.22$), the School of Paris ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.31$), and R-PAS ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.32$; $F(2, 162) = .531$, $p = .589$). Likewise, journal indexing did not significantly influence transparency criteria ($F(2, 162) = 0.998$, $p = .371$).

Discussion

This study represents the first attempt to systematically evaluate articles on Rorschach case studies. We have reviewed literature between 1974 and 2025 using PsychInfo, Scopus, and Pubmed databases, and the tables of contents of the *Journal of Personality Assessment* and *Rorschachiana*, including a total of 217 articles. The coding of articles yielded good to excellent interrater agreement coefficients on variables that required decision-making processes.

From 1974 the publication of articles in which the Rorschach is the centerpiece for understanding the respondents has increased for both English and French language readers, suggesting that these articles are welcomed by journals and are informative for readers. The Comprehensive System, the School of Paris and R-PAS are the most widely used coding systems applied in Rorschach cases. Since its introduction in 1974, the CS has grown constantly until the early nineties, remaining the most frequently used system for Rorschach cases until the mid 2010s. Starting from the mid-nineties, the application of the School of Paris to cases has seen a rapid increase, making it the second most widely used coding system. Notably, since the introduction of

R-PAS in 2011, a growing number of articles have been published using this approach, paralleled by a reduction in the frequency of articles using the CS and a further increase of articles using the School of Paris. Authors using the School of Paris do not appear to have been influenced by the introduction of R-PAS, which instead might have had an impact on the use of CS. Considering the language of publications, our data show that there is a substantial overlap between the three most widely used systems and the language of the articles, English for the CS and R-PAS and French for the School of Paris.

Overall, these findings suggest that the cultural background of Rorschach users, readers, and authors shapes how the test is applied with French speaking Rorschach users basically not interested and involved with the developments of English-language Rorschach systems and vice-versa.

The authors' cultural background has an impact also on the journals in which the articles are published. This study shows that different systems have differential access to high quality journals. School of Paris cases, most often written in French, were more frequently published in journals not indexed by Scopus, CS cases appeared in journals with all typologies of ranking, and R-PAS cases appeared more frequently in the most scientifically relevant journals.

The increased presence of Rorschach case reports does not necessarily translate into broader access to diverse approaches for readers. English-language publications using the CS (and more recently, the R-PAS) and French-language publications using the School of Paris largely target audiences already familiar with those systems. Each system tended to rely only on its own coding and interpretive strategies, with the CS being the most frequently integrated with psychodynamic content scales and the School of Paris and the R-PAS more often used on their own. The lack of multiple systems applied to the same case might be an inevitable consequence of how differently systems conceptualize the test and operationalize their own methods for administration, coding and interpretation. For example, the R-Optimized administration procedure of R-PAS (deemed fundamental to limit the confounding effect of the number of responses on the test variables) and the interest in catching the subtleties of the free association phase used by the School of Paris and the School of Lausanne approaches, result in protocols that can hardly be considered as belonging to the same test.

However, the lack of articles comparing different approaches to the Rorschach using the same protocol is a missed opportunity. This limited cross-exposure reduces opportunities for dialogue across distinct test traditions: English-speaking readers rarely encounter School of Paris cases, and French-speaking readers rarely access CS or R-PAS cases. Broader availability of cases across linguistic and theoretical contexts could promote greater dialogue about the relative value of different systems in various assessment contexts, ultimately benefiting the development of the test itself.

Comparing the vast number of different systems of Rorschach use (e.g., Beck, Hertz, Bohm, Scuola Romana, Klopfer) with the almost complete absence of articles using other systems than the CS, R-PAS and the School of Paris suggests either that the users of other systems have no interest in publishing cases or that these are the most credible ways to publish Rorschach cases in peer-reviewed literature. In this context, it is puzzling to note the presence of several articles in which authors did not explicitly acknowledge the Rorschach system they used. The lack of this information might contribute to the serious misunderstanding that all the systems for the Rorschach test are equivalent in terms of their research background and utility. Viglione et al. (2022) recently concluded that it is not the Rorschach test that is more or less valid and sustainable in forensic settings, it is instead the system which is used and the expertise of the professional who administers, codes, and interprets it that makes it admissible. Given this conclusion, it is important that readers can evaluate the soundness and credibility of Rorschach cases with reference to which systems were used.

The Rorschach system and the journal have both an influence on the extent to which the Rorschach case follows a multi-method assessment model (Weiner, 1999). Cases with more additional sources of information presented alongside the Rorschach appeared in journals with higher ranking and in articles using the R-PAS.

The majority of articles focus on the use of the Rorschach to address clinical issues, but in more than one fifth of cases it serves as a research instrument. Considering that forensic assessments are the second most frequent contexts for the use of the Rorschach, (Baggi & Martino, 2024; Mihura et al., 2022), published articles on forensic cases are relatively scarce. This lack is noteworthy also given the emphasis on the utility of this test in forensic settings (Viglione et al., 2022). Going forwards, more cases on the contribution of the Rorschach from forensic assessment are necessary. Conversely, case-based research seems to represent one of the most prominent areas in which the test is applied. Recent surveys on the applications of the Rorschach do not identify research as a primary area of use (Baggi & Martino, 2024; Mihura et al., 2022). However, findings from the present literature review indicate that research represents the second most frequent aim for which in which the test is used. However, the effectiveness of the Rorschach for research purposes using cases might be enhanced by the adoption of sounder methodological standards applied in this field. Case-studies whose sampling criteria are not specified increase the risk of bias in the conclusions and call for an overall improvement in how these studies are carried out and published.

The interplay between the issues addressed using the Rorschach and the Rorschach system being applied is also notable. Historically, clinical cases most frequently used the CS. Since 2025, the CS-R (Exner et al., 2022) has become more prevalent. The School of Paris, on the other hand, publishes more research cases. This may be because these French authors are convinced that the in-depth interpretation of the School of Paris provides is ideal for research purposes

Contrasted with the "blind" interpretation of the Rorschach proposed by Klopfer in the 1950s, almost the totality of the articles included in this systematic literature review present, at least briefly, the respondents' history and

background. Furthermore, more than half of the cases present at least two or more other sources of information besides the respondents' background, suggesting that the multimethod assessment framework (e.g. Bornstein, 2022; Meyer et al., 2001; Mihura & Graceffo, 2014) has been widely incorporated by authors irrespectively of the approach to the Rorschach test itself. Furthermore, the presence of other commonly used methods such as performance-based measures, self-report and maximum performance tests, suggest that the information provided by the Rorschach can be flexibly integrated with a with a wide range of instruments, making it a particularly versatile assessment tool. Articles using the R-PAS add, on average, almost one more diverse source of information than CS and School of Paris. Relatedly, such triangulation of information seems to be encouraged by indexed journals more than by non-indexed ones.

When Rorschach users aim to integrate information from different sources and interpretive approaches to the Rorschach, the most frequent combination is between the CS and one Psychodynamic Content Scale, indicating an interest in blending structural data and psychodynamic elements to the understanding of the case. Similarly, as highlighted by recent literature (Baggi & Martino, 2024) the case conceptualizations presented build upon an integration between psychostructural and psychodynamic or other theories in most cases, suggesting an effort to provide a multifaceted interpretation of respondents' functioning. A smaller percentage of authors rely either on psychostructural data or on qualitative, psychodynamic-based inferences from the protocol without integrating the formal scoring in their conclusions. These practices are likely to hinder the appreciation of the Rorschach among readers unfamiliar with psychoanalytic thinking and inclined to maintain a skeptical approach to psychological instruments which fail to produce observable standards and criteria of reliability and validity, and from readers interested in more qualitative-oriented, inferential considerations on the protocols.

Most of the respondents are relatively young (less than 20% of respondents are older than 41), suggesting that the Rorschach articles tend to focus on issues that include a developmental element. However, it is notable that most of the normative samples are for adult respondents, and norms for children and adolescents are out dated, questionable, and present only for specific Rorschach systems (Ornberg & Zalewski, 1994; Viglione & Giromini, 2016). Therefore, findings from younger respondents should be interpreted with caution, particularly when normative comparisons are involved. At the same time, given the progressive aging of the population worldwide, expanding the literature on older adults through additional Rorschach case studies may also represent a valuable future direction (e.g., World Health Organization, 2022).

Articles tend to provide inadequate information about the ethnicity of respondents. Around 70% of publications do not report respondents' ethnic background. Though respondents' ethnicity does not have a significant impact on Rorschach normative data (Meyer et al., 2015), given the relevance of respondents' background when interpreting the test (Fantini et al., 2022), not reporting this information and related cultural implications is a significant drawback of the current literature of Rorschach case studies.

When respondents' ethnicity is reported, only about 20% of respondents are explicitly identified as non-Caucasian. This suggests that there is a wide area of potential Rorschach research and application to recently growing demographic trends, such as ethnic and cultural minorities.

Finally, less than half of the articles included in the analysis provided full details with regard to the Rorschach system used, the protocol, its coding, and the related calculations. This means that often readers cannot fully evaluate the validity of authors' inferences and conclusions. These findings are consistent with a recent editorial in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, which highlighted that full access to raw assessment data, transparent clinical reasoning, and inspectability of assessment procedures represent key priorities for contemporary clinical case-based contributions (Lewis & Hopwood, 2026).

Since no difference in transparency criteria among the various Rorschach systems emerged, it is likely that the number of transparency criteria relates to the editorial choices of the journals, stressing with different degrees the need to present the raw data.

Constraints on generality

The findings of this systematic review are constrained by the characteristics of the published case studies included in the analysis. First, the review is limited to case reports that were publicly available in peer-reviewed journals and written in a restricted set of languages, which may exclude relevant case-based applications reported in other formats or languages. Second, because the review focuses on idiographic case studies, the results are not intended to support statistical generalizations to populations, but rather to inform understanding of assessment practices, reporting patterns, and methodological features within the existing literature.

In addition, the reviewed case studies span different historical periods, cultural contexts, and Rorschach coding systems, which may limit the generalizability of specific findings to contemporary assessment practices or to any single assessment framework. Consequently, the conclusions of this review are most applicable to discussions of how case studies are documented and used within psychological assessment, rather than to inferences about the prevalence or effectiveness of assessment procedures.

Limitations

Our study has some practical limitations that need to be accounted for. First, our systematic literature review does not represent a completely exhaustive overview of Rorschach case studies published literature. The definition of "case" that we adopted was the use of the Rorschach as the main instrument to make sense of respondents' psychological functioning. When combined with the rather strict exclusion criteria that we applied, the review included a relatively narrow portion of articles on Rorschach cases. Specifically, by

including only cases focusing on the Rorschach with individual participants and excluding articles reporting aggregated data from multiple or systemic cases, we likely omitted to include several relevant articles on family/systemic or group case studies (e.g., Molgora & Cigoli, 2007). Moreover, the exclusion of books and chapters - which are common formats for the publication of detailed case studies - might have led to the omission of key contributions to case study literature across different systems (e.g. Chabert, 2012; Mihura & Meyer, 2022). Similarly, several Therapeutic Assessment repeated-measures case studies, in which the Rorschach is frequently integrated within broader multimethod assessment procedures, may not have been captured by the present search strategy. In addition, our review was limited to articles published in English, Italian, French, and Spanish, and therefore does not provide a comprehensive overview of Rorschach case studies published in other languages. This is particularly relevant for countries with long-standing and highly productive traditions of clinical Rorschach research, such as Japan (e.g., Fujita, 1981, Nihashi et al., 2006) and Brazil (e.g., Scortegagna & de Villemor-Amaral, 2012; Giasson et al., 2023), where substantial contributions to the case study literature have been published. As a result, important culturally grounded approaches to Rorschach interpretation and case formulation may not be adequately represented in the present review. Consequently, findings concerning the distribution of publication languages should be interpreted with caution, as the language frequency of the included studies was influenced by the review's inclusion criteria and does not necessarily reflect the true distribution of the global Rorschach case study literature.

Second, in the absence of a standardized tool for assessing the quality of case study articles, the transparency criteria proposed in this review were designed ad hoc by the authors, which might expose the variable of quality to potential bias. In fact, in planning how to monitor the quality of the articles presented in this systematic literature review, we realized that the most diffuse coding systems to assess the quality of case studies (such as Pearson's Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument, PQARI; Pearson, 2004) would have been hardly applicable to this systematic literature review. On the one hand, the PQARI was developed for prospective qualitative research (case studies) and it would have been less than optimal for single cases or case studies retrospectively selected for publication. Second, its use would have required the coders to take a position based on their own 'Rorschach assumptions' to address issues such as the appropriateness of diverse interpretative theories, coding systems, and conceptualizations of the Rorschach test used by authors. This judgment might have directly limited the perceived quality of an entire category of studies, namely those developed within a psychoanalytic perspective, due to the authors' bias in favor of empirically supported Rorschach systems.Finally, interrater reliability was calculated only for variables requiring higher levels of interpretive judgment. Although variables based on explicit information are less prone to coding ambiguity, the absence of reliability estimates for all variables should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Future directions

This first synthesis is necessarily situated within a literature that has long been methodologically fragmented and uneven in scope. Building on this review, we see several challenges and recommendations for future research that can concretely strengthen the evidentiary basis of Rorschach case studies and enhance their clinical and scientific utility. First, several population groups remain underrepresented in Rorschach case studies in the published literature. We therefore encourage future research to include a broader range of cultural, ethnic, and age groups, particularly those that are currently underexplored or belong to minorities. Similarly, several areas of application for Rorschach case studies remain marginal, even in fields where the test could be fruitfully applied, such as forensic, educational, and healthcare settings. Expanding and systematically documenting the diversity of samples and settings would enhance the generalizability and applicability of the Rorschach, contributing to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the test across different contexts.

Second, given that more than half of the reviewed articles do not provide all the information required to inspect of protocol, coding, and interpretation to the reader, greater attention should be given to the transparency and inspectability of the Rorschach test, regardless of the coding system applied. This recommendation aligns with recent literature emphasizing the importance of ensuring valid and reliable procedures in the use of the Rorschach test and aims to encourage authors and editors to consider promoting higher standards of inspectability in the publication of Rorschach cases, to enhance their methodological rigor and reproducibility. To this end, the principles of the open science framework offer concrete strategies for enhancing the accessibility and credibility of Rorschach case reports. We also emphasize the importance of preserving the Rorschach findings and conclusions. To this end, we highlight the need for authors to rely on empirically rigorous coding systems, whose variables have been systematically examined and supported by research evidence. Ensuring the use of validated coding frameworks would strengthen the reliability of Rorschach-based conclusions and contribute to the test's credibility in both clinical and research settings.

Third, when using the Rorschach within case studies, we encourage authors to explicitly disclose the criteria with which they recruited their respondent(s). According to Seawright and Gerring (2008), case study research can be based on different case-selection procedures, and each entails different research purposes. Typical cases represent examples that reflect a characteristic cross-case relationship and are primarily useful for confirmatory purposes, particularly in examining causal mechanisms that support or challenge a theory. Diverse cases capture variation in a given variable or relationship and can serve both exploratory and confirmatory aims. Extreme cases focus on unusual expressions of a variable and are generally exploratory. Deviant cases depart from the expected relationship, allowing researchers to generate new explanations or question existing assumptions. Influential cases assess the impact of a particular

independent variable on an outcome and may confirm that overall findings have been adequately examined. Case designs involve selecting cases that are respectively comparable or markedly contrasting, with either exploratory or confirmatory purposes. Careful alignment between research objectives and sampling strategy enhances the credibility of case-study Rorschach research.

Finally, our systematic review focuses specifically on Rorschach-based cases. We recommend further reviews to explore the use of the test with other research designs, intending to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of the Rorschach research and its applications across research fields.

As highlighted by our review, longstanding criticisms of the test and literature controversies have emphasized limitations in norms, reliability, and validity, especially when the test is used idiosyncratically or without adequate procedural control (e.g. Garb, 1999; Wood & Lilienfeld, 1999). More recent syntheses have shown that the picture is more nuanced than early critiques suggested: some aspects of the Rorschach have demonstrated consistent and meaningful associations with relevant clinical constructs, whereas others require more cautious interpretation (Mihura et al., 2013). In parallel, contemporary developments in administration and scoring procedures have contributed to greater methodological clarity and coherence, helping reduce sources of variability and supporting a more reliable use of selected Rorschach variables across contexts (e.g. Pianowski et al., 2023). In light of these insights, our results suggest that the central question is not whether the Rorschach should be used, but how it is used. In our view, the most constructive way forward is an explicitly evidence-based approach: select variables with empirical support, tailor administration and interpretation to the respondent and setting, and maintain transparency about procedures and inferential steps.

Situated within a historically fragmented literature, we hope this review contributes to clarifying the conditions for responsible, context-sensitive use of the Rorschach across applications; future empirical contributions can extend this trajectory by contributing to fill current gaps and consolidating a more unified, methodologically rigorous knowledge base for clinical and research practice with the Rorschach test.

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Ethical approval

This study relied exclusively on published literature and did not involve the collection of primary data from human participants. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Aurora Milesi**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Filippo Aschieri**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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