

A Neurotic Criminal: "I've learned my lesson..."

J. Reid Meloy

*Department of Psychiatry
University of California, San Diego*

Carl B. Gacono

Atascadero State Hospital

The case of a 42-year-old man with a nonviolent criminal history caused by compulsive gambling is presented. His Rorschach is analyzed and interpreted using both psychostructural (Exner, 1986) and psychodynamic (Cooper, Perry, & Arnow, 1988; Meloy & Gacono, 1992b) methodologies. Findings provide idiographic support for Meloy's (1988) hypothesis that a neurotic psychopath is an oxymoron, yet neurotic personality organization and criminal behavior can and do coexist.

In 1916, Freud speculated that the majority of criminals might be motivated by a sense of guilt and a need to rationalize it by behaving criminally. Nietzsche (1883/1969) called this neurotic fellow the "pale criminal" (p. 65). Freud left it "to future research to decide how many criminals are to be reckoned among these 'pale' ones" (1916/1957, p. 333; see also Alexander, 1930a, 1930b, 1935). We sadly report, nearly 80 years later, that there seem to be very few.

Despite the seeming rarity of the neurotic criminal in our time, we have managed to identify one such feckless and hapless individual and would like to present his case and Rorschach. This is the fourth study in a series (Gacono, 1992; Meloy & Gacono, 1992b; Meloy & Gacono, 1993) that investigates psychopathic character at various levels of personality organization (Kernberg, 1984). We think this case provides idiographic support for Meloy's (1988) hypothesis that the neurotic psychopath, *per se*, does not exist; yet a person organized at a neurotic level could, for a variety of reasons, do criminal things.

CASE STUDY

David is a 42-year-old caucasian man born and raised in an intact, Greek Roman Catholic, middle-class family. He has two older brothers. His mother was a housewife, and his father was a store manager until his death from a heart attack when David was 31.

He describes his childhood as confusing.

Father invalidated me in every aspect of my personality. I was a fuck-up unless he was there. When I hit puberty I began to assert myself. In school I rebelled. Academically I was at the bottom, but on the SATs I was at the top.

David was neither physically nor sexually abused as a child, but he does have potent early memories of his father: "Explosive scenes. I had no warm times with him. He told me what a shit I am. He'd scream, holler like a madman." He characterized his mother as emotionally withdrawn. He summarizes his childhood as a time of fear, unhappiness, and confusion. His mother would explain that his father was "sacrificing" for him when he got "crazy." There is no history of conduct disorder as a child and no history of alcoholism, criminality, or psychiatric disorder in the family. His lifetime medical history was insignificant except for pneumonia in the first grade.

David met his wife in college; they married after she became pregnant, and three sons were subsequently born. He describes his marriage: "When I met Susan, my self esteem was very low. Hers was too. Our interaction was minimal for seven years. Emotionally our relation was retarded. We were meeting our goals, but not taking care of the relationship."

Meanwhile, David graduated from business school, worked briefly as a county auditor, and then entered private practice as a financial investor. After 7 years of marriage, David and Susan separated. He began dating another woman and was introduced to gambling by a client.

I started winning. I became preoccupied with gambling and finding time. I tried to maintain the status quo and not make choices. Freeze it, rather than choose, it was an escape. Dad made all my choices up 'til then. I'd rationalize, run over to Las Vegas and gamble by myself. My denial was rampant... I was making lots of money, and it accelerated the gambling. I'd cover my lines of credit within two weeks and no one knew. My ongoing rationale was I'd get even and quit. I borrowed money from a client. When my father died, I became reckless, I affirmed by father's opinion that I would fuck-up without him there.

Three years after he began gambling, David was borrowing money from client trust accounts, abusing alcohol, lying to his clients, missing appointments, and owed approximately \$600,000 to various individuals and institutions. He sought treatment from a psychiatrist during this time but was not hospitalized until he was arrested and charged with conspiracy to obtain,

distribute, manufacture, and possess illegal drugs. He describes his criminal activity: "Most compulsive gamblers will [commit crimes]. The opportunity was there. The meth [methamphetamine] manufacturing was part of my self-destruction. I knew I was being surveilled by the police five weeks before I did the lab." When asked if he feels guilt, he said, "I feel shame. I feel like a bad person. I was raised a Catholic and a Christian. I was lying, manipulating, breaking the law, not telling the truth."

David eventually pled guilty to three separate, nonviolent crimes, including theft and tax evasion, and was sentenced to 5 years in prison. He was released to a halfway house after 7 months and successfully completed his parole 2 years later. David became an active member of Gamblers Anonymous after his hospitalization and continues to participate in that self-help group. He is also in individual psychotherapy. This evaluation was prompted by his attempt to be licensed in another state so that he could, once again, practice financial investing. The purpose of the evaluation was to aid the court in determining whether David had been sufficiently rehabilitated and had the moral character to practice as a licensed financial investor.

At the time of testing, David was not on any prescribed medications. He did have a positive drug abuse history, however, for alcohol, cocaine, amphetamine, and cannabis. He was administered the MCMI-II, the MMPI-2, and the Rorschach. He produced a two point 4(T69) 5(T68) MMPI-2 profile and a histrionic personality pattern (BR78) MCMI-II profile.

RESULTS

The Rorschach protocol is presented in Table 1, the sequence of scores in Table 2, and the structural summary in Table 3. The Rorschach was analyzed using the Rorschach Scoring Program Version 2 (Exner, 1990). Table 4 is the scoring for defenses (Cooper, Perry, & Arnow, 1988), and Table 5 is the aggression scoring (Meloy & Gacono, 1992a).

DISCUSSION

Kernberg (1984) theorized that neurotic personality organization would evidence (a) sharply delimited, yet whole self and object representations; (b) repression and higher level defenses that would protect the patient from intrapsychic conflict; and (c) preserved reality testing that contributes to the realistic and meaningful evaluation of self and others. The Rorschach of David generally supports these theoretical premises and validates our hypothesis that he is organized at a neurotic level, and furthermore, is not a psychopathic character.

TABLE 1
Rorschach Protocol of a Neurotic Criminal

I	1. Something flying, an airplane.	Looking down on plane, wing look to it. Howard Hughes after WWII—outline.
	2. A flying insect.	Same thing. Wing structure is irregular in design—different motion, how I saw it.
	3. Shape of a woman in here.	Like in antique shop—the shape—made with wire.
	4. A pumpkin, jack-o-lantern.	Opening—mouth, eyes.
	5. I see something more carnivorous, a wolf.	Ears, jowls, shape, coming down. Openings here.
	6. I can see a conductor, the Philadelphia orchestra, reminds me of Leonard Bernstein.	Hands (holds up)—like Stravinsky.
	7. An inkblot.	Seen my son's work—looks like ink.
II	8. Two rabbits playing Pattycake.	Ears, heads up, hands.
III	9. Two waiters serving a table at a restaurant.	An artist, cartoonist used to . . . in New Yorker, reminds me of that (?) heads, torso, arms, legs, looks like waist jacket.
IV	10. Looking up at a giant standing in front of a tree—angle of some one tall.	Feet here, tree trunk, cause of color, depth perception. Peter Max could have done it in 60s.
V	11. Ballet, a dance.	Shape—abstract, grace, fluid. "Dance of butterflies."
	12. A butterfly.	In a theatrical sense, not a real butterfly.
VI	13. A pelt, a dry pelt. I know nothing about hunting.	Shading—hide would look like.
	14. A bass fiddle.	The blackness, image of a fiddle.
VII	15. Two Moulin Rouge dancers looking at each other.	Reminds me of a Lautrec poster—two heads, headpieces, way he'd draw girls.
VIII	16. It's pretty. Two gophers.	Legs, on a seal, a state seal somehow.
	17. A woman's corset being torn apart.	Lives in here—opened up.
	18. Skeleton of a bizarre fish.	Just does. In a museum like New York—old skeletons. Looking down on it.
IX	19. The colors—no images.	
	20. A German clock—like we had as a kid in our house.	Brass balls on a spring, rotating back and forth.
X	21. Two crabs.	Bizarre, colorful crabs—I've seen on PBS.
	22. Yellow flowers—cotton or something.	Covering—irregularity of when cotton blooms.
	23. Rest looks like art work my son abhors.	I've looked at modern art that looks like this. Colors, pastels. Visually exciting to me.

TABLE 2
Rorschach Sequence of Scores (Exner, 1990) of a Neurotic Criminal

Card	No	Loc	#	Determinant(s) (2)	Content(s)	Pop Z	Special Scores
I	1	Wo	1	mau	Sc	1.0	
	2	Wo	1	FMao	A	1.0	
	3	Ddo	99	Fu	(H)		
	4	DdSo	99	Fu	Art	3.5	
	5	WSo	1	FMao	A	3.5	
	6	Do	1	Mpo	H		
	7	Wv	1	Fu	Art		PER
II	8	D+	6	Mao	2 A	3.0	FAB,COP
III	9	D+	1	Mao	2 (H),Hh,Art,Cg	P 3.0	COP,PER
IV	10	W+	1	Mp.FVc	(H),Bt	P 4.0	DR
V	11	Wv	1	Mao	Hx,A		AB
	12	Wo	1	Fc	(Aj)	P 1.0	
VI	13	Wo	1	FTo	Ad	P 2.5	
	14	Ddo	99	FC'u	Sc,Art		
VII	15	D+	1	Mpo	2 (Hd),Art	P 3.0	PER
VIII	16	D+	1	FCo	(A),Art	P 3.0	
	17	Do	5	mp-	Cg		AG
	18	Do	4	F-	An,A		MOR
IX	19	Wv	1	C	Art		
	20	Do	6	mau	Sc		PER
X	21	Do	1	FCo	2 A	P	PER
	22	Do	15	FCo	2 Bt		
	23	Wv	1	CFo	Art		PER

Summary of Approach

I: W.W.Dd.DdS.WS.D.W	VI: W.Dd
II: D	VII: D
III: D	VIII: D.D.D
IV: W	IX: W.D
V: W.W	X: D.D.W

Note. Copyright © 1976, 1985, 1990 by John E. Exner, Jr.

TABLE 4
 Defense Scale Scoring of a Neurotic Criminal (Cooper, Perry, & Arnow, 1988)

<i>Defense</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Neurotic			
Higher level denial	(13)	1	
Intellectualization	(1,2,6,11,12,15,18,20,23)	9	
Isolation	(3,9,10,15,18,23)	6	
Reaction formation		0	
Repression	(7,19,20,21,22)	5	
Rationalization	(12)	1	
Pollyannish denial		0	76%
Borderline			
Devaluation		0	
Omnipotence		0	
Primitive idealization	(1,6,10,15,16)	5	
Projection	(5,7)	2	
Projective identification		0	
Splitting		0	24%
Psychotic			
Hypomanic denial		0	
Massive denial		0	0%
Total scored		29	100%

Note. Several defenses may appear in any one response.

TABLE 5
 Aggression Scoring of a Neurotic Criminal
 (Meloy & Gacono, 1992a)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	
<i>Ag</i>	1	(17)
<i>AgC</i>	1	(5)
<i>AgPast</i>	0	
<i>AgPot</i>	0	
<i>SM</i>	0	
<i>Ag denial</i>	1	(13)

Self and Object Representations

The object world of David suggests a normative interest in others (All $H = 5$) and the expectation of cooperativeness in his interpersonal life ($COP = 2$). Despite an imaginative propensity not to represent others as whole, real, and meaningful objects ($H:(H) + Hd + (Hd) = 1:4$), none of his human content or movement responses indicate loss of contact with reality. Likewise, he is neither isolative ($Isolate/R = .09$) nor dependent ($Fd = 0$). His aggressive response ($Ag = 1$) is normative for nonpatient male subjects ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 1.10$; Exner, 1990), and there is no suggestion of a paranoid elaboration of his internal objects ($H + A:Hd + Ad = 6:1$). Most importantly, and unlike antisocial personality disordered male subjects (Gacono & Meloy, 1992), he has a normative capacity to form attachments to others ($T = 1$).

David's self-perception is also what we would expect in a neurotic individual who may be experiencing shame and guilt concerning bad deeds. He compares himself negatively to others (Egocentricity ratio = 0.22), which generates painful, dysphoric feelings ($V = 1$), the latter finding unusual in nonpatient male subjects (17%; Exner, 1991). Despite this difficult introspective process, predicted during psychotherapy, he does not evidence an abnormal sense of self-injury ($MOR = 1$) or a pathologically narcissistic grandiosity ($Rf = 0$). David's expectations of himself are also realistic ($W:M = 10:6$). All of these indices bode well for psychotherapeutic success. The only negative indicator is a plethora of personal ($PER = 6$) responses, suggesting in this clinical context an intellectualized ($2AB + Art + Ay = 10$) rigidity when challenged, rather than self-aggrandizement (Gacono, Meloy, & Heaven, 1990).

Repression and Higher Level Defenses

David's neurotic defenses (76%) predominate over his borderline defenses (24%), and there is a complete absence of psychotic defenses (see Table 4). These findings sharply contrast with the defensive operations of the psychotic and borderline psychopath (Meloy & Gacono, 1992b; Meloy & Gacono, 1993). The proportionate distribution of defenses is consistent with neurotic personality organization but captures the dynamic shifts that occur among defenses and between levels of personality during the Rorschach process itself.

Idealization, scored in the Cooper, Perry, and Arnow system (1988) at the borderline level, is used by David in an adaptive manner consistent with his history. This defense is generally absent in psychopaths (Gacono, 1990; Gacono & Meloy, 1992), and, when it does appear, is devoid of human content. In this case, 60% of the idealizing responses contain human content (Responses 6, 10, 15), which identify artistic figures (Bernstein, Max, and Lautrec).

Intellectualization is most commonly employed at the neurotic level, followed by isolation, repression, rationalization, and higher level denial. These defenses generally work well to manage both sexual and aggressive impulses, and derivative emotions.

Sexual impulses do not appear in the record ($Sx = 0$), consistent with 96% of nonpatient male subjects (Exner, 1991), and are only suggested in a sublimated form in Response 20 (Card IX): "brass balls on a spring." Aggressive impulses are also denied or sublimated in the service of maintaining attachment. Card VI: "A pelt, a dry pelt. I know nothing about hunting. (?) Shading—hide would look like." When directly expressed (Card VIII: "A woman's corset being torn apart."), aggression disorganizes him, reality testing is momentarily lost (Responses 17 and 18), and the impulse is turned inward to render a sense of self-injury (*MOR* on Response 18). Aggressive impulse is ego dystonic for David and infrequently articulated when scored using our more detailed indices (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; Meloy & Gacono, 1992a; see Table 5).

The derivative emotions of his instinctual life are also well managed by his higher level neurotic defenses. There is less defense against internal emotion ($\lambda = 0.28$) and more avoidance of external emotional stimuli ($Afr = .53$) than expected. However, affect is modulated most of the time in a normative manner ($FC:CF + C = 3:2$) with an occasional unmodulated lapse ($C = 1$). This latter response is extremely unusual in an introversive like David (expected in 1% of introversives; Exner, 1991) but is consistent with a histrionic character style in which affective flooding will often occur (Shapiro, 1965). Nevertheless, stress tolerance and control are better than average ($AdjD = +1$), and affect appears to help with perceptual accuracy ($F+\% = 20$, $X+\% = 61$). Constraint of affect is normative ($C' = 1$), and Vista ($V = 1$) in a neurotic context is likely to suggest introjective rather than anaclitic depression (Blatt, 1974; Meloy, 1992), a finding consistent with David's articulated remorsefulness.

Preserved Reality Testing

David's reality testing, although idiosyncratic ($X+\% = 61$), is not impaired ($X-\% = 9$). This is an unusual and welcome finding in a criminal subject (Gacono & Meloy, 1991). Furthermore, he shows no *M-* responses, a pathognomonic indicator of ideational distortion, particularly around object relations, and no clinically significant formal thought disorder ($WSum\delta = 7$, Level 2 = 0). Ideational helplessness, however, is contributing to perceptual distortion ($m = 3$), and this state variable, in the absence of anxiety ($Y = 0$), may be measuring his sense of controllable stress (McCown, Fink, Galina, & Johnson, 1992). This variable's elevation is predicted given David's choice to seek relicensure and the consequent attack upon his character that he knew would occur.

The most striking cognitive abnormality is the underincorporative style ($Zd = -6.0$). This information processing characteristic, most prevalent in young children, is present in only 10% of introversives and 5% of nonpatient male subjects (Exner, 1986). It predicts what Exner called "stimulus neglect," a haphazard scanning of the environment, but can be easily altered through treatment (Exner, 1986, p. 361).

Psychopathic Character

Does David have a psychopathic character, even if it is organized at a neurotic level? We think not. Weiner (1991) proposed four measures of core psychopathic deficits (superego impairments): $T = 0$, $Pure H < 2$, $COP = 0$, and $S > 2$. These variables infer an emotionally detached, disinterested, uncooperative, and chronically angry individual. David's Rorschach is only positive for the second criterion, and his total human content is normative. Our research (Gacono et al., 1990; Gacono & Meloy, 1991, 1992, 1994; Meloy, 1988) suggested that five variables distinguished psychopathic from nonpsychopathic criminals: $T = 0$, $Rf > 0$, Egocentricity > 0.45 , $PER > 2$, $Y = 0$. David is positive for the latter two variables. Unlike our psychopathic samples, however, his use of personals was not juxtaposed with the borderline defenses of projective identification or omnipotence (Meloy & Gacono, 1993), but instead appeared with intellectualization, isolation, and repression. We think the absence of Y , found in 58% of normal male subjects (Exner, 1986), was due to the absence of uncontrollable stress (McCown et al., 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

The Rorschach data suggest an individual organized at a neurotic level of personality with compulsive, histrionic, and antisocial character traits. He is not psychopathic. Although our test results do not speak directly to his criminal motivation, they are consistent with an individual whose low self-esteem and wish to avoid some serious life stressors made gambling an exciting and novel outlet (Galski, 1987). When money was needed, criminal activity followed, and with the death of father, the unconscious wish to be caught resulted in his arrest and prosecution. If he had only not listened to his dad. "Of all terrors of conscience speak to me, but do not speak to me of my father!" (from the opera *Don Carlos*, quoted in Reik, 1961, p. 268). David, our neurotic criminal, "was equal to his deed when he did it; but he could not endure its image after it was done" (Nietzsche, 1883/1969, p. 65).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at a symposium entitled, "Neurotic Personality Organization: Through the Looking Glass III" at the

Midwinter Meeting of the Society for Personality Assessment, March 20, 1993, San Francisco, California.

We thank Marilyn Clarke for the excellent preparation of this article.

Dr. Gacono is now with the Federal Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, F. (1930a). The neurotic character. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 11, 292-313.
- Alexander, F. (1930b). *Psychoanalysis of the total personality* (B. Glueck & B. D. Lewin, Trans.). New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publications. (Original work published 1923)
- Alexander, F. (1935). *Roots of crime*. New York: Knopf.
- Blatt, S. (1974). Levels of object representation in anaclitic and introjective depression. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 29, 107-157.
- Cooper, S., Perry, J., & Arnow, D. (1988). An empirical approach to the study of defense mechanisms: I. Reliability and preliminary validity of the Rorschach defense scales. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 187-203.
- Exner, J. (1986). *The Rorschach: A comprehensive system: Vol. 1. Basic foundations* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Exner, J. (1990). *Rorschach Scoring Program version 2*. Asheville, NC: Rorschach Workshops.
- Exner, J. (1991). *The Rorschach: A comprehensive system: Vol. 2. Interpretation*. (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Freud, S. (1957). Criminals from a sense of guilt. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 332-333). London: Hogarth. (Original work published 1916)
- Gacono, C. (1990). An empirical study of object relations and defensive operations in antisocial personality disorder. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 54, 589-600.
- Gacono, C. (1992). A Rorschach case study of sexual homicide. *British Journal of Projective Psychology*, 37, 1-21.
- Gacono, C., & Meloy, R. (1991). A Rorschach investigation of attachment and anxiety in antisocial personality disorder. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 179, 546-552.
- Gacono, C., & Meloy, R. (1992). The Rorschach and the DSM-III-R antisocial personality: A tribute to Robert Lindner. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 48, 393-405.
- Gacono, C., & Meloy, R. (1994). *The Rorschach assessment of aggressive and psychopathic personalities*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Gacono, C., Meloy, R., & Heaven, T. (1990). A Rorschach investigation of narcissism and hysteria in antisocial personality disorder. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 55, 270-79.
- Galski, T. (1987). *The handbook of pathological gambling*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.
- Kernberg, O. (1984). *Severe personality disorders*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- McCown, W., Fink, A., Galina, H., & Johnson, J. (1992). Effects of laboratory-induced controllable and uncontrollable stress on Rorschach variables *m* and *Y*. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 59, 564-573.
- Meloy, R. (1988). *The psychopathic mind: Origins, dynamics, and treatment*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson.
- Meloy, R. (1992). *Violent attachments*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson.
- Meloy, R., & Gacono, C. (1992a). The aggression response and the Rorschach. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 48, 104-114.
- Meloy, R., & Gacono, C. (1992b). A psychotic (sexual) psychopath: "I just had a violent thought..." *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 58, 480-493.

- Meloy, R., & Gacono, C. (1993). A borderline psychopath: "I was basically maladjusted..." *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *61*, 358-373.
- Nietzsche, F. (1969). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. New York: Penguin. (Original work published 1883)
- Reik, T. (1961). *The compulsion to confess: On the psychoanalysis of crime and punishment*. New York: Grove Press.
- Shapiro, D. (1965). *Neurotic styles*. New York: Basic Books.
- Weiner, I. (1991). Conceptual issues in the Rorschach assessment of criminality and antisocial personality. *Rorschachiana*, *XVII*, 31-38.

J. Reid Meloy
964 5th Avenue, Suite 435
San Diego, CA 92101

Received November 4, 1993