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SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF SELECTED RORSCHACH
CARDS IN A PSYCHIATRIC SAMPLE

by

ROBERT HENRY WISENER III, B.A.

A THESIS

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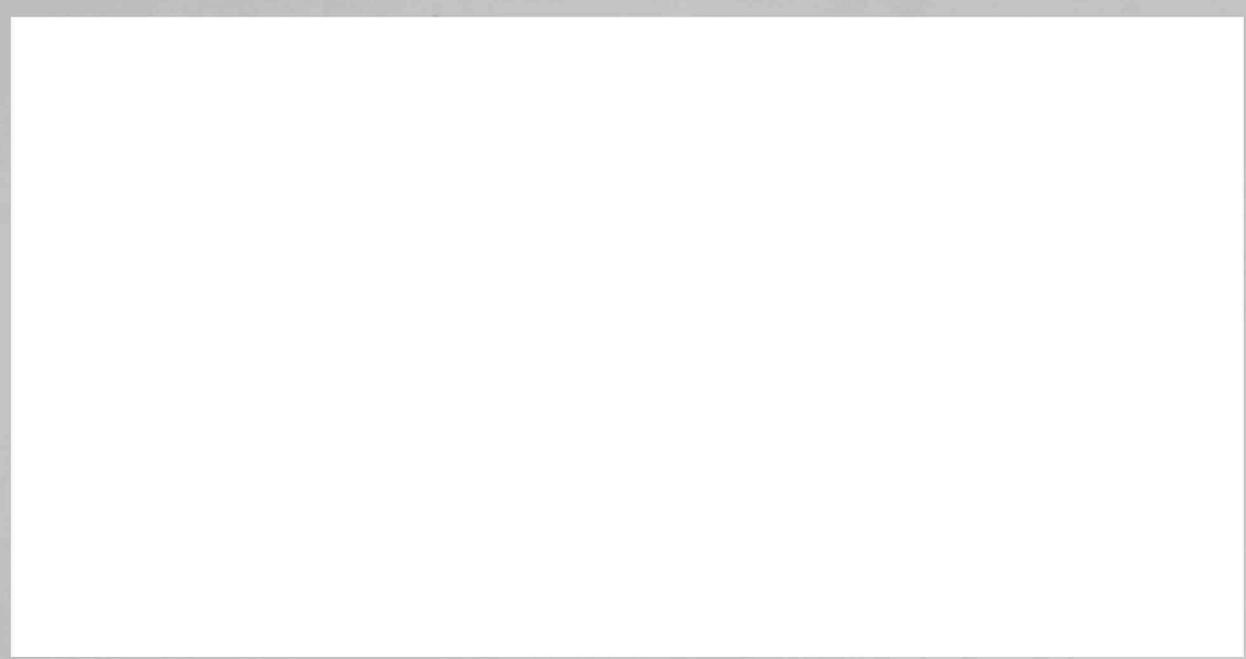
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The experimental use of inkblots in personality diagnosis and evaluation began with the work of Hermann Rorschach, a practicing Swiss psychiatrist. Following ten years of intensive investigation, Rorschach published Psychodiagnostics, an original and highly significant contribution to personality research and diagnosis.

Rorschach considered his test to be an experiment in perception, with inkblots used as a fixed stimulus and the responses evaluated in relationship to the structural properties of the blots. Interpretation of the Rorschach protocol was based upon scoring categories such as form, color, white space, and movement. According to Rorschach, one category, that of content, was to be considered secondarily in interpreting the Rorschach protocol. In Psychodiagnostics (p. 181) he states: "The actual content of the interpretations comes into consideration only secondarily." Content analysis includes the actual content of the percepts given in response to the Rorschach cards. Common content categories are human, animal, anatomy, and botany.

For many years, users of the test followed Rorschach's example in considering content analysis to be of lesser importance. However, within the last decade, there has been an increasing use of content analysis in the interpretation of Rorschach protocols. During this period, practitioners found that certain percepts occurred with a high degree of regularity in response to particular Rorschach cards. Rorschach investigators have hypothesized that specific Rorschach cards may have special symbolic meaning for a majority of individuals. Although many clinicians regularly employ such hypotheses in interpreting Rorschach protocols, few explicit experimental studies are found in the literature.

Review of the Literature

The following review of the literature is concerned with the studies of symbolic meanings associated with Rorschach cards II, IV, V, VI, and VIII.

Symbolic Meaning of Card II

Card II of the Rorschach test has received widespread verbal attention among practitioners as the "hostility" card. Lindner (1946) made repeated reference to the hostile, aggressive responses attributed to this card. Beck, (1961, p. 143) considered such hostile percepts as "blood," "bears," and "carcass hanging by the leg" to be of good form when given in response to Card II. These

responses are considered to represent a verbal expression of the hostile impulses associated with this card. However, in reviewing the literature, no study was found which investigated the symbolic meaning of Card II.

Symbolic Meaning of Card IV

One of the earliest statements concerning the symbolic characteristics of the Rorschach cards has been presented by Bochner and Halpern (1945). With reference to Card IV, they stated: "The heavy male figure may suggest the father, or authority in general. This may be pleasant or unpleasant. Its dark quality and overwhelming character are particularly disturbing to those for whom parental authority is still an unresolved problem" (p. 293). Later, Klopfer (1951) developed the hypothesis further, stating: "Card IV is to a majority of subjects a symbol of masculine aggression which may or may not be related to the father image" (p. 239). Card IV, which was referred to as the "father" card in past years, has become equally well known as the "authority" card.

Meer and Singer (1950) asked 50 male college students to select a "father card" from the ten Rorschach plates. The subjects were told that they could make their selection on any basis that they wished. The subjects were also requested to give the reason for their selections. Meer and Singer found that Card IV was selected beyond the

chance expectation as the "father card." The authors stated that "Card IV, which gave the most striking results, was called the 'father card' because of its solidity, massiveness and, as one subject put it, 'There's a sense of strength in the figure (p. 483).'"

Rosen (1951) investigated the hypothesis that Card IV symbolized aggression, authority and father. He presented slides of the Rorschach cards to 148 college students and the actual cards to 45 college students. Subjects selected, among other things, the cards which most resembled "masculine aggression," "father symbol," and "feeling of authority." Card IV was associated with "father symbol" at the .01 level of significance.

Levy (1958) explored the concept of Cards IV and VII as "parent images" in children. The sample consisted of 27 grade school children. The Rorschach cards were presented to each child in a random order. The children were also presented with a doll family: a man, a woman, a boy, a girl, and a baby. They were instructed to match each card with a doll and were told to use the dolls as many times as they liked. Levy found that Card IV was selected as the "male figure" a significant number of times.

Zelin and Sechrest (1963), in a series of experiments, attempted to assess the validity of the "father" concept of Card IV. In the first of two experiments reported, judgments about parental relationships of patients

in therapy were obtained from the therapist. Clinical judges were asked to predict the patients' parental relationships from responses to Rorschach Cards IV and VII. Responses to Cards I and III were used for comparative purposes. The investigators found that responses to Cards IV and VII accurately portrayed the subjects' paternal relationships. In another experiment, a 25-item questionnaire designed to measure attitude toward the relationship with both parents was administered to 130 college sophomores. From this group, 30 subjects were selected on the basis of extreme expression of attitude toward the parents. The subjects were divided equally according to sex. The 30 subjects were then individually administered Rorschach Cards I, II, IV, VII and VIII. Four clinical psychologists acting as judges rated the favorableness and intensity of the subjects' relationship with each parent on the basis of the Rorschach protocols. The concept of a Rorschach card representing a parent was not supported.

Research involving normal subjects on the symbolic meaning of Card IV has generally shown the concepts of "father" and "authority" to be positively correlated with this card.

Symbolic Meanings of Card V

Card V is commonly called the "reality card." Klopfer (1954, p. 344) in describing the inability to see

the "winged creature" on this card, stated: "The hypothesis in this case would be that the individual's ties to reality are rather weak." Richards (1957) related the lack of a whole percept, such as "winged creature," to a fractionation of the self concept. Beck (1961, p. 12) stated that the common percepts "bat" or "butterfly" in response to Card V require no intellectual effort on the part of the subject. Therefore, failure to give this percept may be due to an inappropriate perception of reality.

While Card V has been referred to as the "reality card," no empirical study directly testing the "reality card" hypothesis was found.

Symbolic Meanings of Card VI

Lindner (1946) was one of the first to note that Card VI evoked sexually symbolic percepts. Klopfer (1954) and Rosen (1951) have made reference to its sexual connotations. Beck (1961) noted that sexual responses to Card VI, such as "penis and pubic hair," "totem pole," and "club," are commonly given by the normal subjects. It is very probable that the popular title of "sex card" for Card VI had its origin in these discussions.

It has been hypothesized that Card VI may symbolize "sex" to many viewers. Only one study was found which investigated the "sex" concept of Card VI. Rosen (1951), in a study using college students, found that Card IV and Card VI were chosen for "male sex organ."

Symbolic Meanings of Card VII

Card VII is commonly referred to as the "mother card." Bochner and Halpern (1945) have stated in reference to Card VII that "the two female faces or even female figures (in reverse position, dancing girls) as well as the generally soft, light quality give the card a feminine quality frequently with maternal implications." Klopfer (1951) has modified this statement by saying that Card VII is "a symbol of basic emotional security which is frequently associated with the mother image."

Klopfer's statement reflects the criticism to the concrete and limited term "mother image." Many clinicians have substituted the term "security card" for "mother card" when referring to Card VII.

Meer and Singer (1950) attempted to validate the "mother card" concept of Card VII. They asked 50 college students to select one "mother card" from the 10 cards. Cards VII and X were selected more frequently as the "mother card."

Rosen (1951) attempted to validate the "mother" concept of Card VII. He found that Card VII was associated with "mother symbol" by a significant number of college subjects. Levy (1958) attempted to investigate the "mother card" concept among children. Using 27 grade school children, he found that Card IX was significantly associated with "female figures."

Zelin and Sechrest (1963) used both private therapy patients and college students in a series of experiments investigating the symbolic meanings of the Rorschach cards. They found that Cards I and III were frequently selected as "mother" cards, but the results were not statistically significant.

Card VII has been popularly known as the "mother card" or "security card." Research findings are somewhat conflicting and the concept of Card VII as the "security" card has not been directly investigated.

Rationale for the Study

In recent years there has been an increasing use of content analysis in the interpretation of Rorschach protocols. Increased familiarity with content analysis has led many investigators to hypothesize that certain Rorschach cards may have symbolic meaning for a majority of subjects. The limited research of such symbolic meanings has shown conflicting results. Further, research involving a hospitalized psychiatric sample has not been reported.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the symbolic meanings of Rorschach Cards II, IV, V, VI, and VII in a psychiatric sample.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Card II is selected as the card more representative of hostility than Cards IV, V, VI, and VII.

- A. There is no significant difference between males and females in the selection of a hostility card.
- B. There is no significant difference between diagnostic groups in the selection of a hostility card.

Hypothesis 2

Card IV is selected as the card more representative of authority than Cards II, V, VI, and VII.

- A. There is no significant difference between males and females in the selection of an authority card.
- B. There is no significant difference between diagnostic groups in the selection of an authority card.

Hypothesis 3

Card V is selected as the card more representative of reality than Cards II, IV, VI, and VII.

- A. There is no significant difference between males and females in the selection of a reality card.

- B. There is no significant difference between diagnostic groups in the selection of a reality card.

Hypothesis 4

Card VI is selected as the card more representative of sex than Cards II, IV, V, and VII.

- A. There is no significant difference between males and females in the selection of a sex card.

- B. There is no significant difference between diagnostic groups in the selection of a sex card.

Hypothesis 5

Card VII is selected as the card more representative of security than Cards II, IV, V, and VI.

- A. There is no significant difference between males and females in the selection of a security card.

- B. There is no significant difference between diagnostic groups in the selection of a security card.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

The hospitalized subjects were patients in the Big Spring State Hospital, Big Spring, Texas. This hospital, with a capacity of 900 beds, serves 47 counties. The majority of the patient population is of rural West Texas origin. The normal subjects were non-hospitalized residents of Big Spring, Texas.

The sample consisted of 24 males and 24 females, ranging in age from 20 to 50. All subjects met the following criteria: (1) no subject was included in the sample who did not achieve an overall I.Q. rating of 80 or above on either the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) or Revised Beta intelligence tests; (2) no hospitalized subject was included whose primary diagnosis was that of chronic brain syndrome; (3) all of the subjects were of Anglo-American birth.

Hospitalized subjects were grouped according to diagnosis. The psychotic hospitalized group consisted of patients who were diagnosed as functional psychosis. The non-psychotic hospitalized groups consisted of patients who were diagnosed as a functional neurosis or character

disorder. Each group consisted of 8 males and 8 females.

Procedure

The subjects were presented with the six selected Rorschach cards and given the following instructions:

This is a test of imagination. I want you to use your imagination and arrange these cards according to which one reminds you most of (stimulus word) to which one reminds you least of (stimulus word).

After each ranking, the cards were reassembled and the instructions were repeated. Cards ranked highest with respect to the concept being tested were assigned a rank score of 1. Those cards ranked lowest with respect to the concept being tested were assigned a rank score of 5. The other cards were assigned intermediate rankings.

Statistical Analysis

Differences between means of specific biographical data were evaluated by the use of t tests (Edwards, 1954, p. 417) using normal curve approximations. The normal curve approximations are expressed in z values. The t test is a rank test for the significance of the difference between two groups. This test was selected because it could not be assumed that the rank assignment of cards was normally distributed. The t test was used to demonstrate equivalence among the sex and diagnostic groups in the sample.

Kruskal-Wallis H tests (Ferguson, 1959, p. 270), for a one-way analysis of variance by ranks, were computed for all groups combined for each of the six Rorschach cards used in the study. The H test is a rank test for independent samples. This statistical analysis was used to investigate the relationship between the hypothesized symbolic meanings and the selected Rorschach cards.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The presentation of results will follow the order in which the hypotheses were stated in Chapter II.

The total ranked judgments of "hostility" for all groups are contained in Table 1. An H test was computed to test the hypothesis that Card II symbolized "hostility." This test yielded an H value of 2.6213, which was not significant at the .05 level. The first hypothesis was not upheld.

The total ranked judgments of "authority" for all groups are contained in Table 2. An H test was computed to test the hypothesis that Card IV symbolized "authority." The H test yielded a value of -4.26567, which did not approach significance at the .05 level. The second hypothesis was not upheld.

The total ranked judgments of "reality" for all groups are contained in Table 3. An H test was computed to test the hypothesis that Card V symbolized "reality." The H test yielded a value of -36.59345, which was significant beyond the .01 level. The third hypothesis was upheld.

TABLE 1

RANKED JUDGMENTS OF HOSTILITY FOR CARD II

Group	Total Ranked Score
Hospitalized Psychotic	464.0
Hospitalized Non-psychotic	368.0
Normal	368.0

TABLE 2

RANKED JUDGMENTS OF AUTHORITY FOR CARD IV

Group	Total Ranked Score
Hospitalized Psychotic	440.0
Hospitalized Non-psychotic	337.0
Normal	375.0

TABLE 3

RANKED JUDGMENTS OF REALITY FOR CARD V

Group	Total Ranked Score
Hospitalized Psychotic	330.0
Hospitalized Non-psychotic	375.5
Normal	441.0

The total ranked judgments of "sex" for all groups are contained in Table 4. An H test was computed to test the hypothesis that Card VI symbolized "sex." This test yielded an H value of -5.04804 , which was not significant at the .05 level. The fourth hypothesis was not upheld.

The total ranked judgments of "security" for all groups are contained in Table 5. An H test was computed to test the hypothesis that Card VII symbolized "security." This test yielded an H value of -8.0433 , which was significant beyond the .05 level. The fifth hypothesis was upheld.

Twenty t tests were computed in order to determine if there were significant differences between sex or diagnostic groups with respect to card selection. Only those tests which were significant are reported.

A t test was computed to determine if there was a significant effect of sex of subject upon the selection of a "sex" card. The test yielded a z of -4.2750 , which was significant beyond the .001 level. A comparison of the rank orders revealed that male subjects (mean = 262.75) ranked Card VI higher with respect to "sex" than did females (mean = 314.25).

A t test was computed in order to determine if there was a significant effect due to sex of the subject upon the selection of a "security" card. The test yielded a z of 2.0202, which was significant beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 4

RANKED JUDGMENTS OF SEX FOR CARD VI

Group	Total Ranked Score
Hospitalized Psychotic	389.5
Hospitalized Non-psychotic	419.5
Normal	343.0

TABLE 5

RANKED JUDGMENTS OF SECURITY FOR CARD VII

Group	Total Ranked Score
Hospitalized Psychotic	383.0
Hospitalized Non-psychotic	411.0
Normal	358.0

A comparison of the rank orders revealed that female subjects (mean = 267.5) ranked Card VI higher with respect to "security" than did males (mean = 309.5).

Tests were conducted to determine if there was a significant interaction between diagnostic classification of the subjects and selection of a "hostility" card. The t test between the normal and the psychotic hospitalized groups yielded a t of -1.73, which was significant beyond the .05 level. A comparison of the rank orders presented in Table 1 revealed that the normal group (mean = 172.75) ranked Card II significantly higher with respect to "hostility" than did the psychotic hospitalized group (mean = 232.5).

The t test between the non-psychotic hospitalized group and the psychotic hospitalized group yielded a t value of -1.39, which, while not significant at the .05 level, was significant at the .10 level. The mean card ranking of 184.5 for the non-psychotic hospitalized group and 232.5 for the psychotic hospitalized group indicated that Card II was ranked higher with respect to "hostility" by the non-psychotic hospitalized group than by the psychotic hospitalized group.

The t test between the normal group and the non-psychotic hospitalized group yielded a t value of -.052, which did not approach significance at the .05 level. Normal subjects and the non-psychotic hospitalized subjects

did not differ significantly in their rank judgments of the "hostility" card.

A t test between the non-psychotic hospitalized group and the psychotic hospitalized group with respect to ranking of an "authority" card yielded a z of -1.62264 , which, while not significant at the .05 level, was significant at the .10 level. The mean card ranking of 169 for the non-psychotic hospitalized group and 220.5 for the psychotic hospitalized group indicated that the non-psychotic hospitalized group ranked Card IV higher with respect to "authority" than did the psychotic hospitalized group.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The discussion of results will follow the order in which the hypotheses were stated in Chapter II. The concept of "hostility" as the symbolic meaning of Card II was not supported. No significant difference between the sexes with respect to card selection was found. Diagnostic groups differed with respect to card selection. Normal subjects rated Card II significantly higher with respect to "hostility" than did the psychotic hospitalized group. This difference was significant beyond the .05 level. Further, the non-psychotic hospitalized group tended to rank Card II higher with respect to "hostility" than did the psychotic hospitalized group. This difference, while not significant at the .05 level, was significant at the .10 level. It may be assumed that the symbolic meaning "hostility" for Card II is applicable only to normal subjects. It appears to be applicable to a lesser degree in persons who are neurotic or who have a chronic disorder. It does not appear to be applicable to psychotic subjects. This tendency toward decreasing applicability with increased severity of mental illness may be due to several factors. The extreme use of denial and repression in psychotic

disorders may have inhibited the normal associative responses to Card II. The pervasive hostility often found in psychotics may have led them to generalize the concept of "hostility" to many other Rorschach cards in addition to Card II. Further, the confusion often experienced by psychotics may have resulted in random selection of the cards by the subjects in the study.

The significant variability between diagnostic groups with respect to card selection may explain the lack of support for the "hostility card" hypothesis for Card II. If it can be assumed that the symbolic meaning of "hostility" for Card II is applicable only to normal subjects, this concept is no longer applicable with increasing severity of mental illness due to the factors cited in the above discussion.

The second hypothesis, that Card IV symbolized "authority," was not supported. This finding is not consistent with reported research. However, it should be noted that previous research utilized non-psychotic samples, usually college students. In the present study, no differences in card selection were found between sexes. However, the non-psychotic hospitalized and psychotic hospitalized groups differed in card selection at the .10 level. While not significant, this difference may indicate a tendency for psychotic patients to select cards other than Card IV as symbolizing "authority." A similar

tendency was noted with regard to the "hostility" card hypothesis for Card II. It can be assumed that the extreme use of denial and repression hypothesized for their selections of a "hostility" card may also apply in their selection of an "authority" card. That is, a tendency for psychotic subjects to select cards in an autistic manner may have significantly lowered the correlations for all groups combined, and may account for the inconsistency between the results of the present study and previous reported research (Rosen, 1951; Bevy, 1958; Zelin and Sechrest, 1963), which have shown Card IV to be associated with masculine authority.

The third hypothesis, that Card V was associated with the concept of "reality" by all subjects, was supported. There were no significant differences in card selection between either sex or diagnostic classifications. This finding is in agreement with the statements of Klopfer (1954) and Richards (1957). Klopfer (1954) states that a complete inability of the subjects to see concepts on this intensively striking card is extremely unusual. Further, it may be assumed that a large percentage of the psychotic patients in the present study had undergone at least a partial remission of their psychosis due to the treatment program at the hospital. The combination of a forceful, striking inkblot and lessened autism may have enabled the psychotic patients in the present study to

adequately perceive and respond to the reality-like configuration of Card V.

The concept "sex" was associated with Card VI at the .10 level. While not significant, this represents a trend in the hypothesized direction. This finding is not in agreement with those of Rosen (1951). The most meaningful explanation for this discrepancy may lie in the sample employed. No differences were found between diagnostic categories with respect to card selection. However, females in the present study were found to rank Card VI significantly lower with respect to "sex" than did males. Sexual knowledge is not openly expressed among women in the West Texas area. College students, similar to the sample employed by Rosen, have been characterized as being quite liberal in their views toward expression of sexual knowledge. It may be hypothesized that the female subject in the present study reacted defensively against the sexual aspects of Card VI, in opposition to the choices of the female students in Rosen's study. Such behavior would significantly lower the overall correlation for all groups.

The hypothesis that Card VII was associated with the concept of "security" was supported at the .05 level. There were no significant differences between diagnostic groups with respect to card selection. This finding is in agreement with previous research by Meer and Singer (1950)

and Rosen (1951). Female subjects ranked Card VII significantly higher with respect to the concept of "security" than did males. It is suggested that this result may also be explained by considering the role of women in the West Texas area. They are expected to be highly feminine, somewhat rigidly so. Their role is one of a homemaker: to provide a home for the husband and to rear the children. It would seem that the females in the present sample may have identified to an extreme degree with Card VII, due to its "feminine" and "maternal" qualities as cited by Levy (1958). Such behavior would be congruent with that postulated for the sex differences found in Hypothesis 4.

In summary, only the third hypothesis, that Card V was significantly associated with the concept of "reality" by all groups, was upheld in its entirety. The fifth hypothesis, that Card VII was ranked significantly higher with respect to "security" by all groups, was partially upheld. However, a significant difference between sexes with respect to card selection was found. A similar difference between sexes was found in regard to the "sex card" hypothesis of Card VI. It was postulated that the cultural role of women in the West Texas area may account for these findings. The women in the present study, due to cultural influences, may have highly identified with the feminine maternal aspects of Card VII, while denying or repressing the sexual symbolism of Card VI.

Differences between diagnostic groups, with respect to card selection, were found for Hypotheses 1 and 2. The "hostility" concept for Card II was not upheld. It was postulated that the highly autistic, confused, and dynamically repressive thought processes of the hospitalized individuals in the present sample did not allow them to respond to this concept in the same manner as the normal subjects. Thus, the ability to respond to the "hostile" symbolism of Card II decreases with the increased severity of mental illness. A similar trend was noted for the "authority" concept of Card IV. Again, it may be postulated that the personality dynamics of individuals in a psychiatric sample interfere with their ability to respond to the Rorschach cards in a normal, stereotyped manner.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study was an attempt to investigate the symbolic meanings of selected Rorschach cards in a psychiatric sample. The study was also concerned with the relationship between sex, diagnostic classification and perceived symbolic meanings of the Rorschach cards.

The sample employed consisted of 24 male and 24 female subjects. The subjects ranged in age from 20 to 50 years. The total sample was divided into three groups of 8 male and 8 female subjects: psychotic hospitalized, non-psychotic hospitalized, and normal. No subject was included in the sample who did not achieve an overall I.Q. rating of 80 or above on either the WAIS or Revised Beta intelligence tests. There were no subjects whose primary diagnosis was that of chronic brain syndrome, nor were there any subjects included in the sample who were not of Anglo-American birth.

Two statistical procedures were employed: Kruskal-Wallis H tests and t tests. These non-parametric procedures were chosen due to the rank-order nature of the data.

The first hypothesis, that Card II was ranked significantly higher with the concept of "hostility," was not upheld. A significant difference was found between the normal and psychotic hospitalized groups with respect to card choice. The non-psychotic hospitalized and the psychotic hospitalized groups differed in card selection at the .10 level. It was hypothesized that the concept of "hostility" with respect to Card II becomes less applicable with increasing severity of mental illness.

The second hypothesis, that Card IV was ranked significantly with the concept of "authority," was not supported.

Card V was significantly ranked with the concept of "reality" at the .01 level. No significant differences were found between sex, diagnostic classification and card selection. It was postulated that the majority of psychotics in the present sample had undergone at least a partial remission of their psychosis enabling them to accurately perceive and respond to the rather strong features of Card V. The third hypothesis was clearly supported.

Card VI was ranked with the concept of "sex" at the .10 level. This finding was not significant, but may represent a trend in the hypothesized direction. Males were found to rank Card VI significantly higher with respect to "sex" than did females. It was postulated that the different social roles and expectations of males and

females in the West Texas area may have prevented the women in this sample from accurately perceiving or reporting the percept. Such factors would significantly lower the rankings for all groups.

The concept of "security" was ranked with Card VII at the .05 level. It was suggested that Card VII may represent "security" to the majority of individuals without regard to diagnostic classification. Females, in the present study, ranked Card VII significantly higher with respect to the concept of "security" than did males. It was postulated that the particular role of women in the West Texas area enabled the females in the sample to strongly identify with the feminine and maternal qualities of Card VII.

In conclusion, the symbolic concepts proposed for the five Rorschach cards used in the study seem to have been influenced by sex and psychopathological factors. The rankings of Card II with the concept of "hostility" and Card IV with the concept of "authority" seem to have been influenced by pathological variables. Sex role factors, which may be particular to the West Texas area, seem to have affected the rankings of Card VI and the concept of "sex," and Card VII to the concept of "security." Only Card V was found to be ranked significantly with the proposed meaning of "reality" without regard to sex or diagnostic classification of the subject.

In light of the results and conclusions drawn from this study, more extensive research would seem necessary in order to investigate more fully the effects of sex and psychiatric illness upon perceived symbolic meanings of the Rorschach cards. Further, research employing all Rorschach cards rather than selected ones might clarify some of the questions pertaining to card selection under free choice conditions. Definitive research would provide the clinician with a more reliable method of content analysis in interpreting Rorschach protocols.

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