Rorschach Cards IV and VII Revisited

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Abstract: Using 67 emotionally disturbed children and adolescents in residential treatment, the "father-mother" hypothesis of Cards IV and VII of the Rorschach technique was investigated. While Cards X and IV were selected significantly often, it was only Card IV which was selected as the "father" card significantly more often than chance, as well as significantly less often selected as the "mother" card. Conversely, Card VII was selected as the "mother" card significantly more often than chance and selected as the "father" card significantly less often. The more dysfunctional a child or adolescent's relationship is with his/her parents, the more likely the child/adolescent selects Card IV as the "father" or Card VII as the "mother" card. Implications are discussed.

Cards IV and VII purportedly pull for responses that directly or symbolically relate to parental figures in that the cards have form and textural qualities that are often associated with masculinity (Card IV) and femininity (Card VII). The perceptions projected onto either of these two cards represent a significant motivational process (Shafer, 1954). The clinical significance of the Rorschach is in the area of psychopathology and in clarifying the degree and type of conflicts within clinical populations (Little, 1959; Marsh, 1961; Zelin & Sechrest, 1963). Despite the diversity of connotations each card holds for various people, Shafer (1954) and Pirotrowski (1957) submit that parent-child disturbances may be discerned in a person's reactions to Cards IV and VII. Hence, an empirical interest arose in the content and structural analyses of response to these two cards. For instance, adolescent delinquents who experience disturbed parental relationships in response to Cards IV and VII produced fewer responses and with longer response latencies than did adolescent delinquents who experienced no apparent dysfunctional parental relations (Hirchenstein & Rabin, 1955). In an attempt to relate Rorschach responses to behavior, Zelin and Sechrest (1963) demonstrated that adult patient's responses to Card IV, as evaluated by clinicians, were associated with therapists' ratings of conflictual relations with his/her father. Also, Marsh (1961) found that normal adults who perceive their parents as hateful and rejecting appear to project these conflicts onto the "parent" cards. Marsh concluded that the father-mother card hypothesis was tenable only when there has been early parental rejections.

Despite considerable diversity of dependent variables, it seems at best that Cards IV and VII in some manner are related to the "father" and "mother" figures, respectively. However, Card II (Meer & Singer, 1958) and Card IV (Little, 1959) have been found to relate to the "father" figure and Card IX (Levy, 1958) and Card X (Meer & Singer, 1950) to the "mother" figure. The diverse findings and diverse methodologies (sample type, sample age, content of analyses of responses, dependent variable) consequently have cast the father-mother card hypothesis into some disregard.

The following study attempts to investigate the "father-mother" card hypothesis by way of including four often ignored but critical factors. These include: (a) using a clinical population, rather than a normal population; (b) using children so that if a parent-child dysfunction exists, it may be most available to being projected or aroused; (c) emphasizing the idiosyncratic structuring of meaning by directly asking a child to select his/her "father" and "mother" cards; and (d) obtaining therapist ratings of the degree of dysfunctional parent-child relationship. Such considerations may allow one to discern if children perceive specific Rorschach cards
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Table 1
Frequency in Selecting Each Card as “Father” and “Mother”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>VIII</th>
<th>IX</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Male Subjects</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Female Subjects</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Male Subjects</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Female Subjects</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as “parent” cards and if there is a relationship between their doing so and the degree of dysfunctional relations with his/her parents. Also, if indeed there is a “father” and a “mother” card, it seems essential to clarify whether the purported “father” card is significantly unrelated to the purported “mother” card and vice versa.

Method

Subjects. Sixty-seven children served as subjects. All subjects were in residential treatment at a psychiatric hospital, the Emma Pendleton Bradley Hospital, Riverside, Rhode Island. There were 48 boys and 19 girls, aged 7-16 years (X = 12.2) of upper-lower to middle-class socioeconomic status (14 of broken homes) and of various psychiatric diagnosis (Personality Disorder: n = 32; Behavior Disorder: n = 35). No child was included in the study whose IQ was below 85 (range 89-130, X = 108).

Materials. Each child was administered the Rorschach. To assess the degree of parent-child dysfunctional relationship, a rater (the individual therapist) was to circle one word (slightly or moderately or extremely) as a response to the question “To what degree does this child experience a dysfunctional relationship with his/her parents?”

Procedure. Each subject was administered individually the Rorschach technique along with a battery of cognitive, perceptual-motor and personality tests by a PhD level Clinical Psychologist as part of an extensive post-admission Psychological Evaluation. Following a standardized administration of the 10 Rorschach cards (including the inquiry phase), each subject was asked to select for each of the four questions one card “which in some way reminds you, or makes you think, of your mother/father” and “which one do you like the best/least?” There were no constraints placed on the card selection. The order of the four questions was randomized and only two of the questions (mother/father cards) were of interest in this study. Two months after admission and approximately one month after the Psychological Evaluation, each subject’s individual therapist completed the questionnaire pertaining to the parent-child relationship. Neither tester or therapist were aware of a study being conducted.

Results

An analysis of the frequency across subjects of cards selected as the “father” card as compared to the frequency with which cards were selected as the “mother” card was computed (see Table 1). Significant differences occurred with Cards IV (X² = 12.62, p < .001) Card VII (X² = 37.22, p < .001), and Card X (X² = 10.28, p < .01). Card IV was significantly more often selected as the “father” card (X² = 5.92, p < .02), and not once as the “mother” card (X² = 6.7, p < .01). Subjects chose Card VII significantly more often as the “mother” card (X² = 30.52, p < .001) and failed to endorse this card as the “father” card (X² = 6.7, p < .01). In addition, Card X was selected significantly above chance as the “father” card (X² = 10.28, p < .01). None of the other comparisons yielded any significant results. A separate analysis by sex reveals almost identical findings for each of the sexes. A comparison between the children who selected at
least one criterion card and those who did not yield significant differences on such obvious variables as IQ: 107 vs. 110; broken homes: 8 vs. 6; from middle-class: 46% vs. 52%.

Across subjects, the rank order of frequencies in selection among the 10 cards for the "mother" and for the "father" card was quite dissimilar (rs = .378, ns). In contrast, the rank order of boys and girls frequencies in selection of cards for "mother" was remarkably similar (rs = .964, p < .01) and for "father" by boys and girls also was significantly similar (rs = .867, p < .01). In other words, while each card has a variety of connotations to each subject, some notable convergence of meaning assigned, or association aroused, to these cards definitely occurred.

In more concrete terms, 48 percent of the subjects selected one of the two criterion cards. The nature of constructing meaning is variable as indicated by the finding that of the 134 choices (two for each of 67 subjects made, 32 were in the direction of the "father-mother" hypothesis, or about 24 percent. Obviously, caution is necessary in accepting the seeming relationship, even among emotionally disturbed children, of father-mother figures and the selection of Cards IV and VII, respectively.

Yet a qualification arises. The relationship between degree of parent-child dysfunction and frequency of choosing a criterion card was significant ($\chi^2 = 18.4; p < .001$). The more dysfunctional the parent-child relationship, the more likely the child is to select one of the criterion cards (slight: none of 13 subjects; moderate: 12 of 33 subjects; extreme: 18 of 21 subjects). Indeed, almost 86% of the children rated as experiencing extremely dysfunctional parent-child relationships selected at least one criterion card (see Table 2).

Also, it appears that subjects ($n = 23$) diagnosed as Behavior Disorder significantly more often than subjects ($n = 7$) diagnosed as Personality Disorder ($\chi^2 = 12.4, p < .001$) selected a criterion card. Of note, the former diagnostic category is associated with parental rejection.

Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that among emotionally disturbed children Cards IV and VII are associated with "father" and "mother", respectively. There is support also that the association of one of these cards to a parent is related to parent-child disturbances. Children experiencing intense conflicts with their parents tend to construe or associate "father" with Card IV and "mother" with Card VII. Such a relationship does support projective theory (Shafer, 1954). As previously found, other cards possess connotations relevant to father and mother. For instance, in this study, Card X was the most frequently selected card as a "father" card. The significance of this result is quite unclear. However, it may well be spurious since Meer and Singer (1950) found the opposite, that is, Card X was associated with "mother".

Conceivably, among a clinical population, particularly those experiencing severe dysfunctional relationships with parents, there is a tendency to respond to the ostensible form and textural qualities that are associated with masculinity (e.g., Card IV) and femininity (e.g., Card VII). Such persons appear to be more susceptible to the stimulus pull of one of the criterion cards and, hence, perceive Cards IV and/or VII as "parent" cards. The less salient the feelings toward parental figures, or the less conflictual the parent-child relations, the less likely Card IV or VII is seen as a "parent" card. In contrast, the more salient the feelings toward parental figures, or the more conflictual the relationships, the more readily the arousal of associations or responsiveness to the stimulus qualities of either Card IV or VII. The reason for this is not clear. However, the significantly greater frequency of children diagnosed as Behavior Disorder selecting a criterion card further supports earlier conjectures of parental rejection being a critical variable (Marsh, 1961). Conceivably, a person's construal of parental rejection fosters both projection of conflict onto either Card IV or
VII (Marsh, 1961) and that the conflict in fact relates to felt rejection by the child.

When no parental conflict exists for the child, the response to Cards IV and VII may reflect perceptions not of father and mother per se, but of higher order abstractions of cognitions, perceptions and affects related to masculinity/femininity and men/women generally. Thus, analysis of each patient’s selected “mother” and “father” card, the structural qualities of the responses to these cards, as well as the structural qualities of the responses to Cards IV and VII may assist further in delineating people’s perception and emotional experience of their social environment.

References


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