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Rorschach Personality and Barnum Statements:

An Extended Report

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Running Head: Rorschach Personality

Abstract

Frequent and Infrequent concepts were identified in psychological reports. These concepts were presented with established Barnum statements to 70 college students for estimation of the percentages of persons described by each concept. Significant differences between the three concept categories were obtained although rates of endorsement for all concepts were high.

Rorschach Personality and Barnum Statements

Consumers of personality assessment reports find them to be deficient in content and communication style (Dana, 1980). The continued use of the Rorschach, as a major source of data for these reports, will be partially dependent on increased understanding of report content and the availability of more adequate reports.

This study examines personality concepts that are used in psychological reports based on Rorschach data, particularly the category of concepts defined as Barnum statements because they apply to everyone. Student Rorschach reports contain between 20% and 30% Barnum concepts (Dana & Fouke, 1979) while professional MMPI computer reports have approximately 5% of statements specific to more than one code type (Caldwell, Note 1). While these sources define Barnum concepts differently, they suggest the desirability of relatively low base rates for Barnum concepts in psychological reports.

Method and Results

The 18 Barnum statements came from an established list (Forer, 1949) plus two later additions (Snyder & Larson, 1972). The other statements had been reliably abstracted from 31 Rorschach reports (17 male and 14 female college-student volunteers) and reliably clustered into 286 concepts. The frequencies of these 286 concepts in the 31 original reports were examined and frequent concepts were defined as those 70 concepts which occurred in 10 to 31 reports. The 217 Infrequent concepts were defined as those which occurred only once. The concepts in the two lists - Frequent and Infrequent - were selected to be comparable in length and vocabulary level with concepts in the Barnum list. The 65 remaining concepts - 18 Barnum, 26 Frequent, and 21 Infrequent - were put in random

order (Appendix A). Seventy general psychology students, 39 males and 31 females (\bar{X} age 19.8; SD = 1.9) were asked to indicate the numbers of persons each statement described in percentages from zero to 100, and t-tests were computed for sex and concept category differences.

Table 1 presents data on endorsement frequency for all concepts. While males endorsed only one concept more frequently than females, females endorsed nine concepts significantly more frequently than males. There were no overall significant sex differences between the three categories of concepts. The average percentage of endorsement by concept category was 60.9 (Barnum), 56.0 (Frequent), and 51.2 (Infrequent) with standard deviations of 9, 9.9, and 10.0, respectively. The t-test differences between concept categories in frequency of endorsement were all highly significant ($p = .00001$), either by sex or with sexes combined.

Discussion

The high endorsement rates for all categories of concepts did not accord with their actual frequencies. All categories were seen to be descriptive of at least half of an unspecified group. Since both method and content issues are germane, they will be described separately.

One method concern is with the general psychology, subject-pool population. These subjects typically have little vested interest in imposed research participation and may respond with sets for acquiescence and/or social desirability. The uniformly high rates of concept endorsement may reflect response behaviors that are subject-pool specific. A second concern has to do with attempts to match concepts in the Frequent and Infrequent lists with Barnum statements for length and vocabulary level. Infrequent concepts, defined by unique occurrence, may have had their uniqueness diluted by matching with Barnum statements. A third concern is with the label "Frequent" concepts. Frequent concepts may

have included Barnum concepts as well as other categories of concepts (e.g., Allport secondary traits in addition to common traits or Barnum statements).

Several content issues may be identified. There are no complete lists of Barnum statements as they appear in personality assessment reports. There is also an absence of norms for frequency of occurrence of these concepts in reports. Without base rates for all categories of concepts that appear in reports, it is difficult to remedy the content problems indicated by consumers of these reports. Such information may be basic not only to our understanding of whatever the Rorschach measures but to our attempts to train Rorschachers as well (Dana, Note 2).

Consensus on descriptive language for concepts contained in Rorschach reports would be helpful. For example, Allport (1937) has identified common traits which are similar to Barnum statements in frequency, secondary traits equivalent to Frequent concepts, as well as more idiographic and low frequency traits. Central traits impart personal identity and individual traits define uniqueness. Central and individual traits are represented by Infrequent concepts.

Finally, it is possible that our Rorschach perceptions of individual differences may have been exaggerated. This is particularly critical if we discover that Barnum statements occur more frequently in Rorschach reports than anticipated. The Rorschach is believed to measure global personality characteristics and to provide a descriptive portrait of a person, but the exact dimensions of this portrait have not been empirically established. While a dozen factors describe college student personality based on Rorschach reports (Dana, Bonge, & Stauffacher, 1981), these factors accounted for only 42.5% of total item variance. Furthermore, not all of these factors are replicable from the Rorschach reports of hospitalized schizophrenic patients (Cameron, 1982).

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2. Dana, R. H. Learning to be a Rorschacher. Journal of Personality Assessment, submitted.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Endorsement Frequencies of 65

Barnum (B), Frequent (F), and Infrequent (I) Concepts

<u>Concept</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Concept</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
1F **	37.5	18.5	34I	48.1	21.8
2F	52.5	25.4	35F *	53.5	27.2
3F	76.3	24.3	36B	33.8	22.7
4F	70.9	22.2	37I	54.1	19.8
5F	64.8	23.4	38I	59.6	19.0
6B *	51.0	18.9	39I	34.1	23.4
7I	66.2	21.1	40I	29.8	23.6
8B *	57.0	21.6	41B	40.8	19.4
9I	58.0	17.8	42I	53.1	21.8
10F	51.6	21.2	43F	49.8	21.5
11F	52.9	18.3	44I	35.5	20.9
12F	54.4	19.7	45I *	39.8	24.9
13F	52.8	20.3	46B	64.6	19.8
14F	53.2	24.6	47F	50.5	26.4
15I	41.4	19.3	48B	58.7	19.5
16F	76.0	22.8	49F	71.7	19.2
17B	69.7	17.6	50B	57.1	27.3
18F	67.4	17.0	51I	66.4	23.6
19B	69.0	23.3	52I	47.3	21.3
20B	49.9	22.6	53B	67.9	23.1
21B	73.1	19.3	54I	59.3	25.4
22F	38.8	21.8	55I	79.7	17.6
23F	49.3	25.5	56B	64.1	20.6
24F	47.4	21.7	57I *	45.6	33.0
25B	61.8	21.0	58F *	62.0	28.9
26F	76.4	24.2	59I *	59.8	19.0
27F	45.1	22.3	60B	59.3	25.2
28F	57.1	20.1	61F	51.4	20.7
29I	39.4	18.6	62B	67.0	23.5
30F	53.6	24.4	63I *	59.0	17.9
31B	70.5	25.2	64B	81.3	16.0
32F *	40.3	21.7	65I	43.7	23.0
33I	54.6	21.1			

* Females endorse significantly more frequently.

** Males endorse significantly more frequently.

Appendix A: List of Concepts

SEX _____ AGE _____ YEAR IN SCHOOL _____ MAJOR _____

HERE ARE SOME STATEMENTS PEOPLE MAKE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE. ON A SCALE OF 0 - 100%.
WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE DO YOU FEEL WOULD BE DESCRIBED BY EACH STATEMENT?
PLEASE PLACE THE PERCENTAGE YOU ESTIMATED BEFORE EACH STATEMENT.

- _____ % 1. sees world in impersonal, matter-of-fact way
- _____ % 2. experiencing emotional distress
- _____ % 3. experiences conflict
- _____ % 4. can be responsive emotionally
- _____ % 5. uses fantasy
- _____ % 6. independent thinker
- _____ % 7. adequate ties with reality
- _____ % 8. self-critical
- _____ % 9. easy to like
- _____ % 10. uses denial and repression as defenses
- _____ % 11. perceptive
- _____ % 12. has long range goals
- _____ % 13. sensitive and empathic
- _____ % 14. tension interferes with use of inner resources
- _____ % 15. inner strength is low
- _____ % 16. needs approval, responsiveness, belongingness
- _____ % 17. competent (functions adequately)
- _____ % 18. can relate to others
- _____ % 19. self-doubts
- _____ % 20. insecure
- _____ % 21. likes variety
- _____ % 22. very intelligent

Appendix A (con't)

- _____ % 23. not in complete control of own life
- _____ % 24. creative
- _____ % 25. not always frank in revealing self
- _____ % 26. experiences anxiety
- _____ % 27. introspective
- _____ % 28. has high aspirations
- _____ % 29. has administrative qualities
- _____ % 30. distrusts others
- _____ % 31. unused capacity
- _____ % 32. has problems in relationship with mother
- _____ % 33. aware of affective/security needs
- _____ % 34. feelings are easily hurt
- _____ % 35. sometimes withdraws
- _____ % 36. aspirations are unrealistic
- _____ % 37. optimistic for positive changes
- _____ % 38. chooses occasions for interactions
- _____ % 39. much harbored resentment and hostility
- _____ % 40. others are seen as threatening
- _____ % 41. extraverted
- _____ % 42. love for nature
- _____ % 43. aware of impulses
- _____ % 44. mysterious
- _____ % 45. young and old simultaneously
- _____ % 46. usually affable (sociable)
- _____ % 47. experiences difficulty with interpersonal relationships
- _____ % 48. self-controlled

Appendix A (con't)

- _____ % 49. capable of close relationships
- _____ % 50. minor problems with sexual adjustment
- _____ % 51. many traditional beliefs and actions
- _____ % 52. ruminative thinking operates
- _____ % 53. security is a major goal
- _____ % 54. hounded by possibility of failing
- _____ % 55. concerned over money
- _____ % 56. aspirations are realistic
- _____ % 57. struggle for survival
- _____ % 58. experiencing growth and confusion
- _____ % 59. determined
- _____ % 60. occasionally wary and reserved
- _____ % 61. has organizational interests and ability
- _____ % 62. dislikes restrictions
- _____ % 63. well-mannered and polite
- _____ % 64. affectional needs
- _____ % 65. appears to be biding time