

# A Rorschach Study on the Psychological Characteristics of Alcoholics

By Charlotte Buhler, Ph.D.

*Consulting Psychologist, Los Angeles County General Hospital*

and D. Welty Lefever, Ph.D.

*Professor of Education, University of Southern California*



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## Contents

Introduction . . . . .	1
I. Case Material . . . . .	2
II. Psychiatric Classifications . . . . .	7
III. Recent Rorschach Studies on Alcoholism . . . . .	10
IV. Rorschach Technique and Interpretations as Used in this Study . . . . .	13
Chart I. Diagnostic Rorschach Sign List . . . . .	16
V. A Brief Report on the Statistical Analysis of Rorschach Signs . . . . .	18
Analysis of Group Differences for Individual Signs . . . . .	18
Reliability of Sign Weights . . . . .	19
Development of a Summarizing Score . . . . .	19
Development of Diagnostic Sign Patterns . . . . .	22
VI. Statistical Sign Analysis of the Alcoholic Cases . . . . .	22
VII. Psychological Interpretation of Alcoholic Rorschach Signs . . . . .	32
VIII. Alcoholic Types . . . . .	44
Summary . . . . .	60
References . . . . .	64

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## INTRODUCTION

FROM a survey of the literature, in particular the classical volume edited by Jellinek (1), it is evident that the phenomenon of alcoholism presents unusual difficulties for satisfactory clinical classification and interpretation. Different opinions prevail on whether there is a common denominator in all cases of alcoholism and whether there is a specific physical or psychological disposition to develop alcoholism rather than any other symptom of maladjustment.

Many authors distinguish an "essential type" of alcoholic (Knight, K. Menninger) or a "genuine addict" (Gabriel) from a "reactive type" (Knight, K. Menninger). The "essential type" or "genuine addict" is more or less specifically conceived of as a psychopathic personality. He is described as an individual whose first alcoholic episodes usually start in the early teens and who is conspicuously maladjusted in demanding pleasure continuously, in having little sense of reality, and in accomplishing nothing worthwhile. For this type Allen uses the term psychopathic alcoholic although other authors consider this definition too narrow or otherwise unsatisfactory. All these authors, however, agree in distinguishing a "true" addiction (Jellinek) as one in which alcohol has a much more definite and apparently more basic function than in "secondary types" of addiction (Jellinek) which develop as an incidental habit, a reaction to a situation, or a symptomatic escape from unsolved conflicts or real illness.

In "true" addiction alcohol tends to take the place of life itself, while in habitual, reactive, neurotic or symptomatic drinking, the alcohol seems to remain an accompaniment of life. In both cases, however, alcohol plays a role it does not play in the lives of nonalcoholics, and the question as to the conditions and circumstances of this role is still unanswered.

As Frank (2) has said, "What in the alcoholic leads him, or drives him to utilize alcohol instead of all the other neurotic, psychotic, or psychosomatic patterns of defense or escape or release equally available?" Frank adds another very important question: "How does it happen that the individual develops craving for alcohol only at adolescence or in adult years, as contrasted with the early development of the neurotic and psychotic patterns, many of which derive from infancy or preschool years?" It is this question, especially, which