

A RORSCHACH STUDY OF
FIFTEEN WOMEN WITH TRICHOTILLOMANIA

By Sonia Smuts
University of Pretoria
Department of Psychology

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Dr Maurice Aronstam

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By Sonia Smuts

Dr Maurice Aronstam
Department of Psychology
MA (Clinical) Psychology

ABSTRACT

Fifteen adult women (mean age 34.5 years) participated in this exploratory study. The study aimed to identify commonalities in trichotillomania patients' personality structure and psychological functioning. Relevant historical data were obtained, the Massachusetts General Hospital Hairpulling Scale was completed, and a Rorschach test in terms of the Comprehensive System was administered. The results point to an innate vulnerability in the sample's personality structure that impedes their capacity for efficient problem-solving, decision-making, and coping behaviour. Other key findings include a distorted perception of themselves, a limited capacity for control and stress tolerance, difficulty in modulating and expressing emotions, the interference of primary process thinking in ideational activity, and the effects of these factors on their interpersonal relationships. Theoretical inferences are made about the probable aetiological roots of these findings. As the subjects' level of functioning was unexpectedly high in the light of their deep-rooted pathology, the dynamic role and function of self-induced hair pulling as a symptom were considered. Suggestions are made to improve the treatment prognosis of the disorder.

Keywords: Trichotillomania, hair pulling, Rorschach, Exner, Comprehensive System, personality structure, psychological functioning, adjustment, psychodynamic, aetiology, treatment

'N RORSCHACH-STUDIE OOR VYFTIEN VROU MET TRICHOTILLOMANIE

Deur Sonia Smuts

Dr Maurice Aronstam

Departement Sielkunde

MA (Kliniese) Sielkunde

SAMEVATTING

Vyftien volwasse vroue met trichotillomanie (gemiddelde ouderdom 34.5 jaar) het aan hierdie ondersoek deelgeneem. Die doel van die studie was om gemeenskaplike faktore in trichotillomaniepatiënte se persoonlikheidsstruktuur en psigologiese funksionering te identifiseer. Toepaslike historiese inligting is ingesamel, die 'Massachusetts General Hospital Hairpulling Scale' is voltooi, en 'n Rorschach-toets is volgens die 'Comprehensive System' afgeneem. Die resultate dui op 'n ingebore kwesbaarheid in die doeltreffendheid van die steekproef se probleemoplossings- en besluitnemingsvermoë, asook hoe hulle moeilike situasies hanteer. Ander sleutelbevindinge sluit 'n verwronge selfbeskouing in, beperkte beheer en stres-toleransie, probleme met die modulering en uiting van emosies, die invloed van primêre prosesse tydens denkbeeldvorming, en die uitwerking van hierdie faktore op interpersoonlike verhoudings. Teoretiese gevolgtrekkings word oor die waarskynlike etiologiese gronde vir die bevindinge gemaak. Aangesien die respondente se funksioneringsvlak bo verwagting positief in die lig van 'n diepgevoerde patologie was, is die dinamiese rol en funksie van selfgeïnduseerde harepluk as simptome oorweeg. Voorstelle ter verbetering van die behandelingsprognose vir die versteuring word gemaak.

Sleutelwoorde: Trichotillomanie, harepluk, Rorschach, Exner, Comprehensive System, persoonlikheidsstruktuur, psigologiese funksionering, aanpassing, psigodinamies, etiologie, behandeling