When I began teaching the interpretation of the TAT about 30 years ago, I felt keenly the lack of any useful norms. The most helpful thing I could find was Rapaport’s brief comments about some of the cards in his monograph, which had just appeared (Rapaport, Gill, & Schafer, 1946). As the years went on, books about the TAT began to appear with their authors’ more or less normative notations about the kind of material usually pulled by each picture, notably M. I. Stein (1948), Bellak (1954b), and Henry (1956). During this period were published three reports of formal normative research by Rosenzweig and Fleming (1949), and Eron (1948, 1950). In 1949, I came across an unpublished compilation of such material by Dr. Robert L. McFarland, which he was kind enough to let me reproduce in 1956 for my students along with some supplementation from the above-mentioned books that had appeared by that time and from two unpublished masters theses (Fleming, 1946; Kiefer, 1950), plus commentary based on my own clinical experience.

Many successive classes of graduate students reported to me that they found my enlargement of McFarland’s compilation highly useful, and I have distributed countless copies in the two decades since I first produced it, without any revisions. When I decided to put together the present book, my first thought was simply to include it here with the most minor retouching. When I read it over, however, I became aware that it contained a good deal of redundancy, with extended quotations from generally available books, and that opinion has since been established—and in some instances, refuted—by normative research, some of it my own unpublished work.

All in all, it seemed best to boil the old document down, introducing as much hard information from quantitative normative studies as possible. I have made an effort to locate and use as much of the published normative material as possible, but it is a frustrating task. To begin with, since there is no generally used scoring system, each normative study uses its own variables, tabulating data in different and nonequivalent ways, so that it is extremely difficult to cumulate a series of them. Most of the work dates back to the decade immediately following the publication of the cards; it is impossible to say how differently contemporary American samples would respond to the pictures, though I believe that the gross outlines—which is what we mainly want from norms—have not changed much. Most of the samples used leave a great deal to be desired: numbers of cases were generally small, sampling methods not specified and never truly satisfied, and supportive data on subjects usually skimpy. The work generally used available groups of college undergraduates of both sexes, or of patients, predominantly fairly young male veterans in VA hospitals and clinics. All studies have sampled whites, relatively few outside the middle class. The only time I know of when a national probability sample of U.S. adults was given a thematic test, ironically no TAT cards
were used. Veroff (1961) and his colleagues used two sets of six pictures each, specially
drawn to be suitable for general samples of men and women, respectively, and he
provides no norms for these unpublished pictures.

In everything that I have seen, nothing yet seems to me comparable to the job that
Edith E. Fleming did in her MA thesis, only the cream of which was skimmed off and
published in her joint paper with Saul Rosenzweig. Her breakdown of the material was
detailed enough to be exhaustive but clear enough to be reliably used by others. Her
sample (50 men, 50 women) was gathered mostly by ten examiners, all students in
Rosenzweig's fall 1944 course, each of whom had the assignment to test five males and
five females, who were not to be in a professional field, although some students were
undergraduate majors in psychology. The average age of both sex subgroups was 27.5
years (S.D. 6 and 6.3); all subjects were American-born urban whites, 80% of whom
had had at least two years of college. Consequently, I had my research assistant (now
Dr. Lolafaye Coyne, of the Menninger Foundation) apply it to several other bodies of
data I managed to lay my hands on, all of them from rather educated males and each
using a slightly different set of TAT cards. Anne Roe kindly lent me TAT's from the
eminent biologists, physicists, and artists whom she tested (Roe, 1946, 1952); William
E. Henry generously made available stories told by successful and unsuccessful business
executives he had studied (Henry & Gardner, 1949); and the local files produced TAT
data from the control group of Rapaport's Diagnostic Psychological Testing study
(Rapaport, Gill, & Schafer, 1945–1946) and from psychiatric residents who were
subjects in the selection research project (Holt & Luborsky, 1958).

In writing this chapter, therefore, I have tried to digest all the foregoing, plus
published normative research by Eron (1948, 1950, 1953), Wittenborn (1949),
Murstein (1963, 1972), Ullmann (1957), and Gurel and Ullman (1958). I have
made relatively little use of the recent trend of TAT research to have judges (mostly
college students) rate or scale the pictures themselves for such variables as ambiguity
(Bijou & Kenny, 1951), pleasantness (Murstein, 1958), hostility (Murstein, David,
Fisher, & Furth, 1961), or achievement (Murstein, 1965), because such work tells us
nothing directly about the kinds of stories we get using each picture, which is what we
need. It is unfortunate that most of the recent normative research has used the scaling
approach, even employing multidimensional scaling techniques, semantic differentials,
etc., instead of dealing with the clinically useful features of the stories. I have tried to
concentrate on the latter in this chapter.

A Normative Guide to the Use of the TAT Cards

In preparing this small handbook for the clinical use of the TAT, which I
hope will be useful to personality researchers as well, I have assembled all of
the normative data I could find, published or unpublished. In the course of
doing so, I have been over the entire cumulative bibliography of the TAT—
my own (which I allowed Henry to publish in his 1956 book and which is