The animal and opposite drawing technique: Implications for personality assessment

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THE ANIMAL AND OPPOSITE DRAWING TECHNIQUE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

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Representative case studies of two hospitalized patients demonstrate the utility of the animal and opposite drawing technique as a projective device. Kelly’s personal construct theory and interpretation of animal symbols provide the rationale for this evaluative device. Through the drawing of an animal and its opposite, a S projects salient features of his own conscious personality as well as those aspects of personality which are repressed and projected away from oneself. The case studies well represent the potential value of this little known technique.

Although not widely published, the technique of using animal drawings as projective symbols in personality assessment, as introduced by Schwartz and Rosenberg (1955), has high potential value. For some time the psychology staff at this institution has made use of animal and opposite-animal drawings in assessment procedures. A former member of our staff, Lyman M. Riegel,2 invented this technique by blending the Schwartz and Rosenberg study with Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory. Riegel reasoned that while the animal a person might choose to draw could hold projective components, the opposite-animal drawing could be used to establish a set of contrasting constructs useful in a more thorough understanding of the client’s personality.

The technique is not difficult to apply. The client is simply asked to, “Draw an Animal,” and then to “Draw the animal which is the opposite of the one you just drew.” He is also usually asked to include the names of the animals with the drawings. Complete freedom is allowed with regard to animal and opposite choice, time allowed, and no definition of “animal” or “opposite” is provided.

CONSTRUCT FORMATION

In Kelly’s (1955) system each construct may be described by two poles, one at each end of its dichotomy. The relationship between these two poles is one of contrast, and the extremities are referred to as “contrast ends.” In the animal and opposite drawing task the client is asked to focus on certain dichotomies within his construct system. The use of animals as symbolic referents in this construct system permits expression of more basic personality components than other types of projective drawings. While the first drawn animal may be viewed in terms of self-image, the animal-opposite presents the opportunity to examine the perceived un-self; the complementary roles, denied, or repressed aspects of the client’s personality.
TEST UTILITY

Admitting that anything a person does can be interpreted as a projection of his personal constructs, one might be led to question the comparative advantages of this technique. With this method the client is essentially establishing his own yardstick for personality measurement. First, the client's problems or conflicts are revealed in readily usable form. Second, the pathways of movement along a symbolic construct dichotomy become clear (how the concept "opposite" is applied). Finally, the data yield hypotheses which are easily subject to subsequent test against biographical information and other test data. The application of these principles to case studies is shown below.

CONTENT INTERPRETATION

Animal content and symbolism has long been recognized as an important dimension in interpretation of projective tests (Phillips and Smith, 1953; Klopf and Davidson, 1962). Especial significance of such symbolic referents are also clear in psychoanalytic formulations. While it is not the purpose of this article to delineate specifics of such interpretation, the reader is encouraged to consider the particular advantages to interpretation with the animal and animal-opposite dichotomy. A few of the more common content variation themes which may appear include: masculinity-femininity, maturity-immaturity, and aggressiveness-passivity. Are the animal and its opposite behaviorally different, accustomed to different environments, or does the client perhaps block on opposite formation completely?

TWO CASE STUDIES

In order to illustrate the utility of this technique and the application of content interpretation as well as empirical validity, two brief representative case studies taken from our hospital files are summarized below:

Wayne is a 19 year old white male who was brought to the hospital when his family was unable to cope with his assaultive behaviors. His diagnosis includes psychosis with epilepsy and mental deficiency (Full Scale WAIS I.Q. of 67). His first drawn animal was a primitively drawn bewhiskered primate, standing upright on the limb of an otherwise barren tree, and labeled "Mokeyse mokeydo." His second drawn animal (the opposite) was a man, also primitively drawn, standing upright, and facing away from the viewer.

In this instance the most obvious dichotomy is the maturity-immaturity dimension. Wayne may here be viewed as having a rather poor and derogative self-image, striving for manhood by desperate imitative efforts, doomed to fail, his pranks and playfulness causing the men he seeks to emulate to turn their backs on him.
Biographical data show him to be the younger of two sons. He professes a great deal of affection for both father and brother, but has failed to win acceptance by them, and in frustration turns to playful and later assaultive acting out behaviors directed against both of them.

*Ronald* is a 26 year old, single, white, male college graduate with a *WAIS* Verbal I.Q. of 143. During an acute psychotic episode he killed both of his parents with a shotgun. His first drawn animal was a smiling rat, drawn with precise attention to detail. The opposite-animal was a large beaked tropical bird, with a long drooping tail, fluttering toward a perch.

Here there is a clear contrast in self-image, initially a lowly, repulsive self-view opposed to an attractive, pleasant, exotic self-image. As an animal symbol the rat has long been noted as indicative of negative attitudes and a destructive orientation (Phillips and Smith, 1953). In this context the smile which appeared in the drawing is rather ominous. The fluttering bird is a female symbol, and in this context may reflect inadequate personality and anxiety surrounding sexual relationships, or an inability to establish rewarding heterosexual contacts.

Biographically we can discover a good deal of contempt for his parents; father held in low regard and mother considered lightly and insecure. There is considerable hostility and jealousy expressed toward his only sibling, a younger sister. He has never had a meaningful interpersonal relationship or sexual contact with a female. His major defenses are repression and paranoid rationalization.

**Conclusion**

Thus it becomes clear, in light of the above two cases, that considering the little time and effort required to collect animal and animal-opposite data, its utility in clinical assessment is unquestionable. We look forward to expanded application of, and research with this valuable technique.
FOOTNOTES
1. Now at the Department of Psychology, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65201.
2. Now Executive Director, Brown County Mental Health Center, Mt. Sterling, Illinois 62353.

REFERENCES