

Analyzing with Art Therapy

Sometimes it is difficult to get a client to begin talking about what they want, especially if it involves strong emotions about family members. One way round this is to use a technique from Art Therapy.

Give the person a piece of paper and something to draw with. Then ask them to create a composition for a picture.

The picture has to include a sun, a house, some water, a tree, a snake, a path and flowers.

Tell them to think about how they would arrange these different things into an attractive composition, and then get them to draw it.

It does not have to be fancy or artistic, just whatever they would like to draw.

Give them a few minutes to draw it. Don't watch them while they are drawing, and don't offer any suggestion.

Then look at what they have produced.

You can start analysing the picture as representing how they see the world. Each of the seven items is a psychological element, a symbol of the unconscious mind.

- 1) the house represents the client
- 2) the sun represents their father
- 3) the tree represents their mother
- 4) the snake represents sexuality
- 5) the water represents emotions
- 6) the path represents how they relate to others.
- 7) the flowers represent friends



Analysis:

DISTRIBUTION

First look at the distribution of the symbols, how they relate to each other on the page, how close or far they are from each other. Also look at whether in the composition the symbols are overlapping or separate, or partly hidden by clouds or hills. This will tell you how your client sees the relationship between these things.

Then, examine each symbol.

The **HOUSE** represents how the person sees themselves. Big, small, tumbledown... look at how open and accessible the house is - are there windows, a door, are they open or closed. Is there a fence around it, is there a path leading to the door?

The **TREE** represents the client's mother. Look at the state of the tree, the type of tree. Is there fruit on it, is it short or big, how close is it to the house? Is it open and branching like an oak tree or narrow and prickly like a pine tree?

The **SUN** represents the client's father. The higher the sun, the more dominant the father is in the family. Is the sun half hidden behind hills, or obscured by clouds?: these represent the relationship with the father. Is the sun close to the house, to the tree, or distant and isolated? Has the sun been drawn warm and friendly with rays and a smiley face?

The **SNAKE** represents sexuality. How big is the snake? Is it hidden or out in the open. Is it wrapped around something, is it standing up or slinking away? How close is it to the house?

The **WATER** is emotions, fears, worries. Is the water a stream or river that flows through the picture? Is there a waterfall or boats or ducks: all these represent active happy associations. Is the water a pond that is isolated? That represents keeping things to yourself, deep issues. Is the water a barrier to other parts?

The **PATH** shows how well feelings and relationships are integrated, how they link. If the path wanders through the picture and leads to the front door, and the door is open, the person is open to love and welcomes people. If the path avoids other symbols in the picture, then the person wants people to stay away.

The **FLOWERS** represent friends in their life. If there is just one big flower, then it is probably the client. If there are many flowers this represents many friends, and everything in between. The distribution shows how friends are scattered around in their life.

Then ask the client to start talking about the picture, knowing now what the symbols mean. The symbols are often very accurate, but even if they are not, they are a great way of getting the client to open and explore their emotions.

Because the client is being asked to comment on something outside of themselves they are less likely to feel threatened by criticising family relationships so they can be more open in talking about how they feel.

It is also fun to do at a dinner party to get people talking and get to know each other.

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