

## **Guidelines for the Interpretations of House Tree Person Test**

### **Interpretation of the House**

- House should hopefully be nurturing place with normal levels of detail and normal size. Too little and the client may reject family life; too big and they may be overwhelmed by it.
- Lines and walls represent boundaries and strengths of the ego, thus weak lines in the structure of the house are weaknesses in the ego, while strong lines are problems with anxiety and a need to reinforce boundaries.
- The roof symbolizes the fantasy life, and extra attention to it can indicate extra attention to fantasy and ideation, while incomplete, tiny, or burning roofs can indicate avoidance of overpowering and frightening fantasies (think about fears of ghosts in the attic - these are based on the association for us).
- Windows, doors, and sidewalks are all ways that others enter or see into the house, so they relate to openness, willingness to interact with others, and ideas about the environment. Thus, shades, shutters, bars, curtains, and long and winding sidewalks indicate some unwillingness to reveal much about yourself (think about expression like windows to the soul or the door to the mind). Cars could be signs of visitors coming or people in the home leaving. Lights could be signs to welcome visitors or reveal prowlers. Open doors or many windows could mean strong needs to engage others. Big windows, especially in the bathroom, could be exhibitionistic desires.
- Psychotics tends to show ground lines (their need for grounding), clear visions of the insides of the house (they believe their thoughts and mind are open to view by others), strange angles (like their strange thought processes), or a house on the verge of a collapse (like their ego).

### **Interpretation of the Tree**

- The trunk is seen to represent the ego. sense of self, and the intactness of the personality. Thus heavy lines or shadings to represent bark indicate anxiety about one's self, small trunks are limited ego strength, large trunks are more strength... (think about the saying that a tree that bends lasts through the wind, but one that

doesn't snap, like the ego that is flexible and healthy lasts through the world, but the inflexible and neurotic ego ends up broken).

- A tree split down the middle, as if hit by lightning, can indicate a fragmented personality and serious mental illness, or a sign of organicity.
- Limbs are the efforts our ego makes to "reach out" to the world and support "things that feed us" what we need. Thus, limbs detached are difficulties reaching out, or efforts to reach out that we can't control.
- Small branches are limited skills to reach out, while big branches may be too much reaching out to meet needs. Club shaped branches or very pointy ones represent aggressiveness. Gnarled branches are "twisted" and represent being "twisted" in some efforts to reach out. Dead branches mean emptiness and hopelessness.
- Leaves are signs that efforts to reach out are successful, since leaves growing mean the tree is reaching out to the sun and getting food and water. Thus, no leaves could mean feeling barren, while leaves detached from the branches mean the nurturing we get is not very predictable. Pointy leaves could be aggression, obsessive attention to detail on the leaves could be Obsessive Compulsive tendencies.
- Roots are what "ground" the tree and people, and typically relate to reality testing and orientation. No roots can mean insecurity and no feeling of being grounded, overemphasized roots can be excessive concern with reality testing, while dead roots can mean feelings of disconnection from reality, emptiness, and despair.
- Christmas trees after the season is over can mean regressive fantasies (thinking about holidays and family and good times to make yourself feel better).
- Knots or twists in the wood, like gnarled limbs, indicate some part of the ego is twisted around some issue. Knotholes are an absence of trunk, and thus an absence of ego control. Sometimes they are seen as indicating a trauma, and the height up the tree represents the age of the trauma (so, halfway up for a 10 year old is at age 5). Squirrels and small animals are an Id intrusion into an area free from ego control. Research does show that weeping willow trees are more common in depressed people. People with high needs for nurturance draw apples.

## Interpretation of the Person

- Here, the idea is that the person of the same sex is like you, and the person of the opposite sex is what you may not admit is like you. Very Jungian when you think of it, in that the opposite sex is the anima or animus.
- Typically, the person is centered or just below vertical center on the page, is symmetrical, pleasing to look at, and sufficiently detailed. They tend to be clothed, although pregnant women or women who have recently given birth may draw naked women, and women having recently seen the gynecologist may draw naked women. Erasures led to improvements, and the person seems contented with the drawing, perhaps laughing at it a bit. Usually the same-sex person is drawn first, and the opposite-sexed person second. Some interpret drawing the opposite-sex first as a sign of gender confusion, which has not been well-supported.
- Arms are the way we reach out to the environment, and hands the way we effect it. Open arms indicate willingness to engage, closed arms are defensiveness, disconnected arms are powerlessness... pointed fingers or balled fists can be aggression, hidden or gloved hands can be anxiety or antisocial tendencies... It could also be difficulty drawing good hands.
- Legs and feet are also like the roots of trees, and represent grounding and power too. If cut off at the bottom of the paper (think of cutting someone off at the knees) it can mean loss of autonomy, small feet (inadequate base) can indicate a need for security, while big feet can indicate the same.
- The neck separates the head (cognition) from the body (drives and needs), so no neck is no separation, long neck is desire for more separation of the two, etc...
- Mouth is how we get needs met (think Freud and oral stuff), so big or open mouth is neediness, cupid bow or luscious lips is sexualized needs, closed tight mouth is denial of needs or some passive-aggression, and frowns, sneers, and smiles mean with they do in real life. There is limited support for oral-dependency themes, and more for slash mouths and teeth to be consistent with verbal aggression.

- Genitalia, breasts, etc... are seldom drawn, and indicate sexual concerns and discomfort. Emphasis on breasts though are not uncommon in prepubescent girls, and both disturbed and non-disturbed boys emphasize pectorals.
- Drawing clowns (hiding face and person), robots (loss of emotions in a psychotic way), cow boys (masculinized needs), snowmen (rounded bodies, regressive themes), stick man (childish or regressive themes) etc can mean what is noted in parenthesis above. Excessive details are consistent with some obsessiveness when dealing with anxiety.