

# ANTITHETICAL APPERCEPTION OF FAMILY MEMBERS BY NEUROTICS<sup>1</sup>

MEIR TEICHMAN<sup>2</sup>

*University of Missouri, Columbia*

The present study is concerned with the perceived degree of similarity between family members by neurotic and by well-adjusted students.

Neurosis is viewed by Adler (1), as a mistaken attitude towards the self and the world. The individual sets for himself mistaken goals and develops a style of life protecting himself from facing the discrepancy between these and reality. One such safeguard is the "antithetical mode of apperception."

In this process, phenomena which do not belong together must, of course, be sharply separated by abstractive fiction. The urge to do this comes from the desire for orientation which, in turn, originates in the safeguarding tendency. This urge is often so considerable that it demands artificial dissection of the unity, the category, and even the self into two or several antithetical parts (1, p. 248).

The neurotic, in order to overcome his insecurity and to preserve his self-esteem, organizes events, objects and people in rigid, clearly differentiated categories. This largely provides him with excuses.

Kelly (2) presented a model of thought and thought organization with the "construct" as the unit of thought, and "a person's construction system" as "composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs." As pointed out by Papanek (5), "Kelly's dichotomous constructs are not static." He viewed the well-adjusted and creative person as having loose and flexible constructs, in contrast to the constricted pattern of constructs of the unadjusted individual. Following Kelly, Rogers (6) presented a seven-stage model of progress in therapy, in which one of the main criteria was the loosening of constricted and rigid constructs.

These considerations lead to the formulation and testing of a hypothesis of different modes of perception of family members by

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<sup>2</sup>Author's address: Center for Research in Social Behavior, 111 Stewart Road, Columbia, Mo. 65201.

neurotics as compared to normals. It is assumed that the neurotic, on account of his antithetical type of perception, will differentiate between family members more sharply than well-adjusted subjects will do.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The *Ss* were 20 undergraduate students, males and females, at the University of Missouri. Ten *Ss* were referrals to the Student Health Center, diagnosed as neurotic, and recommended for therapy. The other 10 *Ss* were well-adjusted students serving as controls.

### *Procedure*

The Landfield (3) revision of the Role Construct Repertory Test (Rep test) was administered to both groups anonymously. In the test the *S* is asked to rate a list of persons (roles) according to 15 personal bipolar constructs, elicited in the testing situation. The *S* describes each person (role) according to one of the two extremes of the construct, e.g., mature or immature. When neither extreme can be applied, the rating is "N" or "?". Thus, *S* has four possibilities for rating a person on each of the 15 personal constructs.

Only the roles of father, mother, brother (son), and sister (daughter) were considered in the present study.

### *Scoring and Analysis*

The degree of similarity between the 6 possible pairs of roles was computed as follows: If both roles were rated the same extreme of the construct, the pair scored 1 point for similarity; otherwise the score was 0 points. Since each pair of roles was rated for the 15 bipolar constructs, the degree of similarity between pairs ranged from 15 points for complete similarity or lack of differentiation between two roles, to 0 points for no similarity or total differentiation between the pair of roles (family members). A total family score similarity was also derived, taking the mean of the 6 separate similarity scores. The difference between all 7 scores for the two groups was tested for significance by the Mann-Whitney U Test for small groups (7).

## RESULTS

It was predicted that neurotic *Ss* will differentiate between family members more than well-adjusted *Ss*. Table 1 presents the comparisons between the two groups for the 6 possible pairs of family members (roles), and for the total family score. In every case the similarity score of neurotics was, as predicted, lower than the score of normals. These differences were highly significant, with one exception, in the case of the father-sister comparison. The results

TABLE 1. MEAN DEGREE OF SIMILARITY BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS (ROLES) AS RATED BY NEUROTICS AND WELL-ADJUSTED CONTROLS

Compared roles	Mean similarity scores		Mann-Whitney U	P
	Neurotics N = 10	Controls N = 10		
father - mother	4.80	9.00	3.5	.001
father - brother	6.10	9.50	14.5	.01
father - sister	7.70	8.40	33.0	.09
mother - brother	6.10	9.00	19.0	.01
mother - sister	5.90	10.00	11.0	.01
brother - sister	7.20	10.20	17.0	.01
total family similarity score	6.30	9.35	0.0	.001

agree with previous findings confirming different aspects of the antithetical mode of apperception in neurotics (4).

#### SUMMARY

The degree of cognitive differentiation among family members (roles) by neurotic and by well-adjusted students was studied. Following Adler's notion of the antithetical mode of apperception in neurotics, it was predicted that neurotic Ss will differentiate among family members more than well-adjusted controls. The Landfield revision of Kelly's Role Construct Repertory test was administered to 10 neurotic and 10 normal undergraduate students at the University of Missouri. The results significantly support the hypothesis.

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