

USING DUAL SELF-PORTRAIT DRAWINGS TO WORK ON THE UNCONSCIOUS AND PERSONA

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Abstract

Artists often experiment with self-portraits, defined as a portrait made by the artists themselves. The background of this study links to the theories of Freud and Jung relating to the personal unconscious and collective unconscious. The study presents self-portrait drawings as a method of working to understand one's state of the unconscious and the persona. The dual self-portrait drawing allows two sides to be shown, the inner side and the outer side, which may reflect one's persona or masked self. Less than 20 young adults and seniors have participated in the activity, to which they voluntarily shared insights on their process of creating the dual self-portrait. Most individuals are able to better understand themselves in their current state, their hidden feelings and unspoken words, and some have shown deeper insights as they reflected on the drawing process. The approach taken throughout the drawing process is non-directive. However prompt questions were given after to assist participants as they reflect and gain new perspectives.

Keywords: Portrait, Self, Drawing, Unconscious, Persona, Process.

MENGGUNAKAN GAMBAR POTRET DIRI GANDA UNTUK BEKERJA PADA UNCONSCIOUS DAN PERSONA

Abstrak

Seniman sering kali bereksperimen dengan potret diri, yang diartikan sebagai potret yang dibuat oleh seniman itu sendiri. Latar belakang penelitian ini berkaitan dengan teori Freud dan Jung yang berkaitan dengan ketidaksadaran personal dan ketidaksadaran kolektif. Studi ini menyajikan gambar potret diri sebagai metode untuk memahami keadaan alam bawah sadar dan kepribadian seseorang. Gambar potret diri ganda memungkinkan dua sisi ditampilkan, sisi dalam dan sisi luar, yang mungkin mencerminkan kepribadian atau topeng diri seseorang. Kurang dari 20 orang dewasa muda dan lanjut usia telah berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan ini, dan mereka secara sukarela berbagi wawasan tentang proses pembuatan potret diri ganda. Kebanyakan individu mampu lebih memahami diri mereka sendiri dalam keadaan mereka saat ini, perasaan tersembunyi dan kata-kata yang tidak terucapkan, dan beberapa telah menunjukkan wawasan yang lebih dalam saat mereka merenungkan proses menggambar. Pendekatan yang diambil sepanjang proses menggambar bersifat non-direktif. Namun pertanyaan cepat diberikan setelahnya untuk membantu peserta saat mereka berefleksi dan mendapatkan perspektif baru.

Kata Kunci: Potret, Diri, Menggambar, Alam Bawah Sadar, Persona

I. INTRODUCTION

Self-portraits are created in various forms of creative expressions according to the artist themselves. Often artists experiment with drawings and paintings to create their self-portraits. Some artists gain understanding of self-portraits from the works of previous artists. Vohr (2020) explained, "Over the span of his career, Rembrandt created innovative self-portraits that are deeply revealing of his psychological state and suggestive of a complex inner life. Many modern artists, such as Vincent van Gogh, cited Rembrandt as an important influence." Vohr suggests artists are able to reveal a psychological state of an inner life through their self-

portraits. Several self-portraits throughout a period of time may reveal different life stages of an artist's life and their complex experiences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hall (2016) described, 'the self-portrait – more so than a portrait – is primarily a product of memory and imagination,' which he progressed to explain 'in the first philosophical discussion of self-portraiture, by the influential Plotinus (AD third century), self-portraits are produced not by looking out at a mirror, but by withdrawing into the self. During the Renaissance, one of the main theories of self-portraiture was the catchphrase 'every painter paints himself'. He described, 'one of the wonders of self-portraits is their capacity to induce unique levels of uncertainty in the viewer. Is the artist looking at us with a view to portraying or judging us? Is the artist looking at a mirror, with a view to portraying or judging themselves? Is the artist creating a persona to serve specific ends? Or have they delved into the book of memory, myth and imagination to create a work personal in its meaning?' The questions suggest that individuals who create self-portraits would have an idea of what they are portraying; yet it may leave some audience with wonders and curiosity. The portrait may seem uncertain to some audience without a background, context and understanding of the true meaning. However, the question arises, are self-portraits supposedly a creation for the artist or the audience?

In a study called 'Overcoming the Inner Critic: The Therapeutic Use of Self-Portraits with Older Adults', Echeverry, B. (2023) described 'creating self-portraits allowed them to explore their inner selves, express their strengths and personality traits, and enjoy their time together.' Moreover, he cited, 'The person-centered approach in expressive arts therapy encourages self-ownership, respect for the world of the inner artist, and the unique ways of engaging with the creative process (Rogers, 1993)' (Echeverry, B., 2023). Artists have shown the ability to explore inner selves and gain understanding of their inner selves through self-portraits. It may suggest how the process of exploring self-portraits and methods of person-centered expressive arts help individuals understand their inner selves, strengths, personalities, and other factors of the self.

1. Background of the Unconscious

The unconscious refers to both the personal and collective unconscious. Jung visualized the unconscious as the dark sea. He explained, 'as one's consciousness stands uncertain, wobbling on its feet, the wave of the unconscious may easily roll over it and the man forgets who he was.' Jung explained in *The Concept of the Collective Unconscious* (p. 42, no. 88), 'while the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of complexes, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes.' This concept of the unconscious, both the personal and the collective unconscious are within every individual and often remains unrecognized, forgotten or repressed. It brings to light how the unconscious is a deeper layer within any individual and may never be brought to consciousness.

It is further explained in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Jung, 1959) that 'at first the concept of the unconscious was limited to denoting the state of repressed or forgotten contents (in the later works of Freud). A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and

is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term “collective” because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.’

Jung’s writings suggest that the unconscious will stay hidden if the individual is not given a chance to identify and process their inner self. Additionally, there are many similarities in the collective unconscious of people, which connect human beings and have shown similar behaviours and patterns. Working on the unconscious through person-centered creative expressions such as self-portraits is shown to allow individuals to experience their inner selves and enable deeper layers within themselves to be known.

Additionally, in a more recent study, Schore (2019) described, ‘in classic writings, Freud emphasized, “Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious; but let us state at the very outset that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious. The unconscious has the wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious” (1915c/1957, p. 166). In my earlier neuropsychanalytic studies, I offered the following update of this “wider compass”: Freud’s seminal model of a dynamic, continually active unconscious mind describes the moment-to-moment operations of a hierarchical, self-organizing, implicit-procedural regulatory system that is located in the right brain (Schore, 2003b).’ Therefore, the repressed part in every individual is frequently recorded in the unconscious involuntarily. Often the repressed will only be recalled and brought to consciousness later after years or decades.

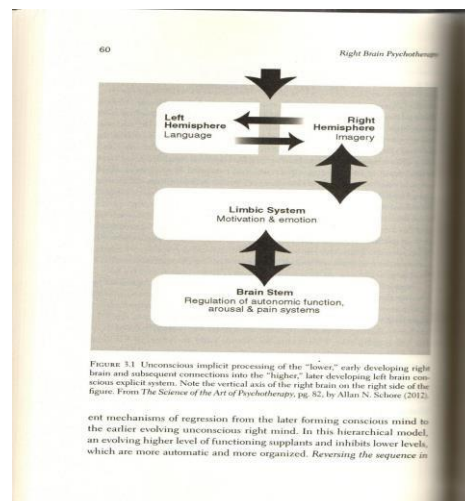


Figure 1.1. The Right Brain Psychotherapy, Schore, A.

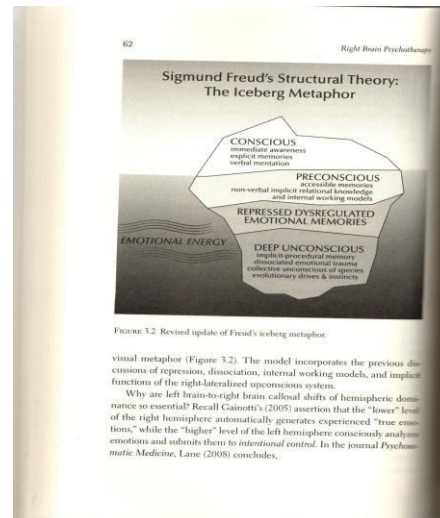


Figure 2.1. Revised Freud's iceberg metaphor, Schore, A.

In addition, he had written in his previous findings that 'the three levels of organization of the right brain represent, respectively, three levels of the system unconscious: preconscious, unconscious, and deep unconscious. The unconscious systems of the hierarchical three-tiered cortical-subcortical limbic core thus reflect the early developmental history of the subjective self (Schoe, 2013a).' It suggests how early childhood development background and events are stored in the unconscious of the brain.

2. The Brain and Limbic System

An important aspect to study is the brain's functioning and its connection to the inner self. A study by Kolk, B. (2014) had a number of participants who volunteered to be scanned in the imaging lab. One volunteer is a forty-year-old schoolteacher from a suburb outside of Boston. 'There were some puzzling dots and colors on the scan, but the biggest area of brain activation—a large red spot in the right lower center of the brain, which is the limbic area, or emotional brain—came as no surprise. It was already well known that intense emotions activate the limbic system, in particular an area within it called the amygdala. We depend on the amygdala to warn us of impending danger and to activate the body's stress response. Our study clearly showed that when traumatized people are presented with images, sounds, or thoughts related to their particular experience, the amygdala reacts with alarm.'

Kolk (2014) also explained, 'our scans clearly showed that images of past trauma activate the right hemisphere of the brain and deactivate the left. We now know that the two halves of the brain do speak different languages. The right is intuitive, emotional, visual, spatial, and tactual, and the left is linguistic, sequential, and analytical. While the left half of the brain does all the talking, the right half of the brain carries the music of experience.' This explains that the amygdala within the limbic system of the brain records traumatic memories within the body. When experiencing unexpected, stressful or traumatic events, the body automatically reacts on survival instincts, also commonly identified by the fight, flight or freeze responses. Thus when trauma arises, the left-brain or the rational brain is deactivated and the individual would experience blockage in the reasoning or thinking process. Through the study, it was shown that the right brain stores up the memory, inner thoughts and senses. Therefore, it may imply that when an individual is given a chance to freely create self-portraits, images stored in their amygdala and the right hemisphere of the brain will allow the individual to access deeper emotions, past experiences, and memories. Some of these past memories, thoughts and feelings could remain faded or forgotten until the individual takes

notice through processes on the right brain such as experimenting with self-portrait drawings and other creative expressions.

The artist Jean-Michel Basquiat painted a self-portrait in 1984 using acrylic and oil stick on paper mounted on canvas (Figure 3.1). His self-portrait is known as an exploration of dual identities, emphasizing on visual and cultural disconnect. Critics have suggested Basquiat's choice of red-eye colour creates a haunted look, which could reflect the internal frustration within his inner self. Agus Suwage is an artist born in Purworejo, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia with a series of self-portraits entitled 'The Theater of Me'. His self-portraits reflect social and political change in the 1990s. A number of ideas such as memory, fear, alienation, dreams, identity, and humour are intertwined into a spacious wall with shadows behind every portrait. It strikes the question; would Agus Suwage's artwork 'The Theater of Me' represent core memories, emotions and experiences of many individuals in Indonesia during the 1990s? In the examples given above, both artists have shown what could be argued as a significant and powerful artwork of the exploration of the self.



Figure 3.1. Self-portrait (1984) Jean-Michel Basquiat

III. METHODOLOGY

The study evokes from the interest of the use of self-portraits and its connection to the brain and the unconscious. Every self-portrait is created within a degree of consciousness of the artist. However, the process of art and creative expression works on the right hemisphere of the brain, which associates to the unconscious. It is fascinating how self-portraits may reflect an individual's inner self (unconscious) and outer self (conscious). The unknown will be brought to awareness through the individual's process and willingness to mirror themselves on a piece of paper.

As the individual stares at a blank paper or canvas, it is common to organize ideas into images within their mind or to select colours and symbols. The process of this pilot study is to give brief instructions with dual self-portrait drawing as examples. The instructions are given to allow participants to understand the idea of the dual self-portrait will be to create their two sides, the inner and outer self within a self-portrait using their own unique ideas. Several background research of creative art approaches are gathered as a reference for this study. A reference was taken from a post found by Cynthia Emerlye, a Vermont artist and life coach who facilitated art therapy group using the Dual Self-Portraits (Figure 4.1). Paintings from Emerlye's art therapy group were posted on her personal art blog, which could not be traced on its original platform. The art therapy group work of Emerlye has been selected as the reference image for the pilot study.



Figure 4.1. Dual Self-portrait Drawing, Art Therapy Group by Emerlye

The numbers of participants for the pilot study were between 15-19 adults undergoing 6-12 months of study in counseling or psychology. It was a key factor for participants to have basic understanding of themselves prior to the pilot study. The selected groups were participants who have gained an understanding of general theories of Freud and Jung. This group of participants may represent as a group prepared to process and gain understanding of the self. The aim of this study strives to empower participants to explore the inner self, outer self and engage in the freedom of expression. This pilot study was held online within the study theme of inner self and persona. During the pilot study, brief instructions were given in Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language). The participants were given 30 minutes to create their dual self-portrait drawing (numbers 1-4 in Table 1 & 2) and 15 minutes to reflect in writing (number 5 in Table 1 & 2). Participants were allowed to raise hands to ask questions when they are unsure of the steps or instructions. The therapist or professional may choose to play slow instrumental music without lyrics in the background or combine it with silence as to give space for the participants to process.

Table 1. Instructions of the Dual Self-Portrait Drawing in Bahasa Indonesia

Dual Self-Portrait Drawing

Materi: Kertas, pensil, pensil warna, pena atau cat lukis

1. Gambar wajah untuk mewakili diri anda sendiri.
2. Bagi wajah menjadi dua bagian. Satu sisi mewakili diri anda yang terdalam (inner), dan sisi lainnya mewakili diri anda yang diluar (outer).
3. Gunakan warna, ilustrasi, simbol untuk menunjukkan bagaimana menurut anda orang lain melihat anda. Apa yang dilihat saat melihat anda dan bagaimana kesan orang terhadap anda?
4. Lalu isi bagian dalam diri anda untuk menunjukkan pikiran yang terkubur, emosi, ketakutan, kesenangan, impian, dll.
5. Tuliskan refleksi: Seberapa berbedanya diri inner dan outer anda? Apakah mereka saling mencerminkan atau saling kontras, berbeda? Jika ada, apa yang ingin anda ubah atau tambahkan untuk diri luar (outer) anda dan dalam diri (inner) anda?

Kegiatan memberikan landasan untuk memahami diri secara keseluruhan, menetapkan tujuan, dan mengembangkan kecerdasan emosional. Catatan: partisipan kemungkinan akan mengingat beberapa memori dan emosi tertentu.

Table 2. Instructions of the Dual Self-Portrait Drawing in English

Dual Self-Portrait Drawing

Materials: Paper, pencil, colour pencils, pen, markers, paint

1. Draw a face to represents you.
2. Divide the face into two sides. One side represents your inner self, and the other side represents your outer self.
3. Use colours, illustrations, and symbols to show how you think other people see you. What do people see when they look at you and what impressions do they have of you?
4. Then on the other side, fill it with your inner self that represents your buried thoughts, emotions, fear, joy, pleasures, dreams, etc.
5. Write a reflection: How different are your inner and the outer selves? Do they mirror each other or do they show a contrast in difference? If so, what would you like to change or add to your outer self and your inner self?

This activity provides a foundation for gaining understanding of the self, setting goals or hopes and develops emotional intelligence. Note: participants may recall certain memories and emotions.

The idea of writing a reflection at the end of the dual-self portrait drawing activity allows the participant to internalize their understanding of the self. They may notice something in the drawing, which might not have emerged before. It is hoped that they will be able to gain better understanding of their inner and outer selves from their own perspective as the ‘artist’. On a chapter about Writing To Yourself, Kolk, B. (2014) explained, ‘Simply write the first thing that comes to your mind as you look at the object in front of you and then keep going without stopping, rereading, or crossing out.’ He described that, ‘soon an image will emerge, then a memory, and then a paragraph to record it. Whatever shows up on the paper will be a manifestation of associations that are uniquely yours.’

Next, after the dual self-portrait drawing and reflection, participants were each given 5 minutes to share about their overall process. The sharing after their reflection was held voluntarily, in an accepting and non-directive manner. The approach of the therapist or professional holding the group should be to maintain empathetic responding and active listening. Brown, N. (2013) described how ‘empathetic responding means that the content and feelings of the other person are understood but on a more cognitive level. The leader is not feeling what the other person is feeling. The following can help increase empathetic responding:

- 1) FOCUS ON THE SPEAKER
 - a. Orient your body and mind to the speaker
 - b. Do not think about personal concerns
 - c. Do not anticipate your response
 - d. Relax and breathe evenly and deeply
 - e. Feel the speaker’s presence
- 2) RESTRICT QUESTIONING
 - a. Only ask questions for clarification
 - b. Express feelings avoid questions
 - c. Do not substitute questions for interest
 - d. Eliminate rhetorical questions
- 3) LET THE SPEAKER FINISH
 - a. Become comfortable with silence
 - b. Do not interrupt

c. Do not finish statements for others

4) DO NOT GIVE YOUR “ANSWERS”

- a. You may not fully understand the other person’s situation
- b. They may tend to give only the information that makes them look good
- c. You are only hearing one side
- d. Your “answers” are unlikely to fit the other person.

The approach of an accepting, empathetic responding, active listening attitude would provide participants with a safe space to share after the dual self-portrait drawings. It would give insights into the participants’ current state of being and their view of self. If the drawing shows a contrast in difference between their inner self and outer self, then it may suggest incongruence between the real self vs. the ideal self based on the theory of Carl Rogers. It paints a picture of the type of persona the participant is displaying on their outer self. Furthermore, it strikes a question about the generations Z and Alpha, when young adults are given the space and freedom to post anything online, how would this affect their view of self in the real world vs. online? Would this permit a façade or a persona into an individual’s online or digital self?

IV. RESULTS

Participants for the pilot study, consisting of 15-19 adults were actively participating and were able to finish the dual self-portrait drawing on the given time. However, not all participants were able to reflect in writing within the 15 minutes. Some participants requested for a longer time to write their reflection. Brown, N. (2013, p. 113) stated the benefits and advantages for drawing in the group setting are uncontaminated expressions, focusing awareness, bypassing defenses, identifying important components, relieving tension, and helping to organize chaotic thoughts and feelings. Each benefit and advantage also has a sample exercise to illustrate the focus:

1. Focuses awareness on important aspects of self that were nonconscious or unconscious,
2. Bypasses some defenses, such as intellectualizing,
3. Assists members in identifying important components or aspects of self, problems, situations, and so on,
4. Can relieve tension, and give an opportunity for play and creativity,
5. Helps to organize chaotic thoughts and feelings.

This explains why participants in the pilot study could not finish their drawings and reflection writing within the hour given. It shows that the participants are in a deeper process and they are organizing their thoughts, feelings and understanding of the self. Only half of the participants were able to share their reflections given the limit of time. A number of the participants were able to gain an insight and understood the needs and wants within their inner self. Significant contrasts were shown as a result of the dual self-portrait drawing. Moreover, the pilot study has given the therapist or professional deeper understanding of the group of participants.

V. DISCUSSION

Jung described in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 43-44: ‘the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. This confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people, for the meeting with ourselves belongs to the more unpleasant things that can be avoided so long as we can project everything negative into the environment. But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing

about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious...'

Jung 43-44: 'True, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. This confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people, for the meeting with ourselves belongs to the more unpleasant things that can be avoided so long as we can project everything negative into the environment. But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious...

43-44: This problem is exceedingly difficult, because it not only challenges the whole man, but reminds him at the same time of his helplessness and ineffectuality. Strong natures—or should one rather call them weak?—do not like to be reminded of this, but prefer to think of themselves as heroes who are beyond good and evil, and to cut the Gordian knot instead of untying it. Nevertheless, the account has to be settled sooner or later. In the end one has to admit that there are problems which one simply cannot solve on one's own resources. Such an admission has the advantage of being honest, truthful, and in accord with reality, and this prepares the ground for a compensatory reaction from the collective unconscious: you are now more inclined to give heed to a helpful idea or intuition, or to notice thoughts which had not been allowed to voice themselves before. Perhaps you will pay attention to the dreams that visit you at such moments, or will reflect on certain inner and outer occurrences that take place just at this time.'

Galassi et al. (2022) found that engaging in the arts can support healthy aging by enhancing self-identity and sense of mastery and control, reducing depressive symptoms such as loneliness, and offering opportunities to socialize and make meaningful connections with others. Working with the arts can even increase brain plasticity and encourage neurogenesis, the growth of new brain cells. Besides the physical benefits, engaging with the arts provides cognitive stimulation that can support the treatment of dementia and other illnesses related to aging (Galassi et al., 2022).

Limitations

This pilot study resulted nearly as expected. However, two factors may affect the results of the study. The first factor would involve the role of different genders. A striking question would be, is there a possibility that female participants are more willing to share and be vulnerable to explore their inner self, repressed thoughts and feelings? Would it allow female participants to show more insights than male participants? Another factor that could be further explored are age range and backgrounds. How might expressing or drawing differ for an older aged participant versus the younger age? Could age differences affect the participant's understanding of self, for they may better understand themselves through years of experiences?

VI. CONCLUSION

The result of the pilot study leaned towards the conclusion that a bigger percentage of the participants created drawings with a contrast between their inner and outer selves. Most participants were unsure of the cause of differences between their inner and outer selves. Although, some participants were able to narrow and understand reasons behind the contrast, which could correlate due to their desire to meet standards or needs of the society, they may not allow themselves to present unhappy, sad, or angry. Some participants shared they often

try to portray “the good side” despite the difficulties and challenges in their daily lives. A few forgotten or repressed memories were recalled in the process of the dual self-portrait drawing and reflection after the pilot study. A number of participants were analyzing the unconscious and the persona within their drawings. They were able to better understand themselves and gain deeper insight regarding who they truly are, their current state, hidden or repressed feelings and unspoken words. In addition, the self-portrait drawing may offer a medium of self-healing when facilitated in an accepting and non-directive method.

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