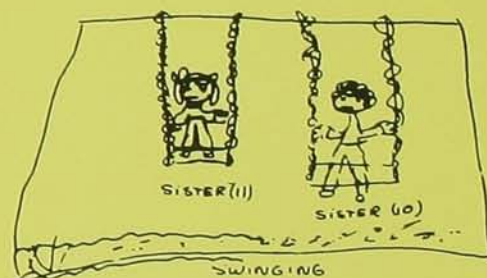
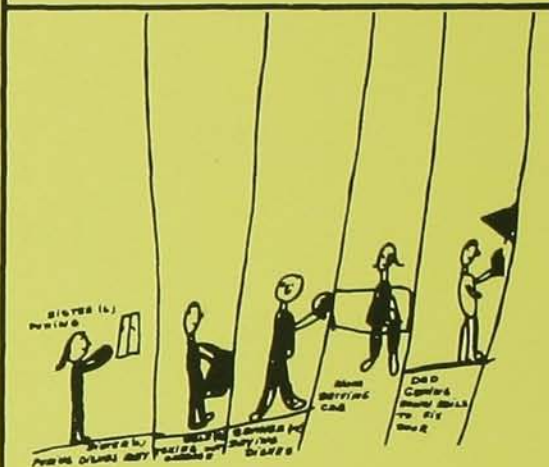
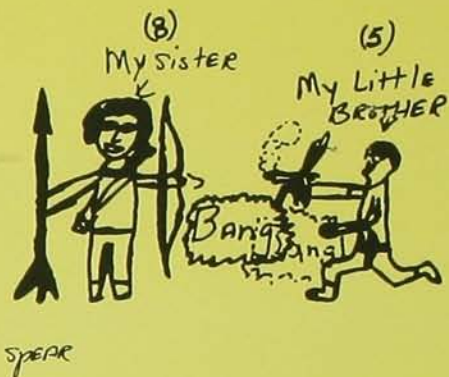


ACTIONS, STYLES and SYMBOLS in KINETIC FAMILY DRAWINGS (K-F-D)

An Interpretative Manual

By Robert C. Burns
and
S. Harvard Kaufman

Introduction by Louise Bates Ames



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TO POLLY And CINDY, HEATHER And CARTER

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INTRODUCTION

At all too rare an interval a very bright star appears in the projective technique sky. One such was Hermann Rorschach's Ink Blot Test. Burns and Kaufman's Kinetic Family Drawing Test appears to be another. The Rorschach tells us how the individual experiences; the K-F-D how he perceives himself in his family setting. Seldom has a test shown itself to be able to tell us so much about a subject so quickly and so surely.

The Kinetic Family Drawing Test gives me the same feeling as did the Rorschach when it came to this country so many years ago—that it is a tool which is going to be phenomenally useful to us in years to come. I was also much struck by Lowenfeld's Mosaic Test when it was first introduced. The K-F-D is a worthy third in this outstanding company. In using this test, one has the impression of being in near the beginning of what will undoubtedly turn out to be a major projective technique.

This present volume, *Actions, Styles and Symbols in Kinetic Family Drawings: An Interpretative Manual*, is a truly wanted book. It will find a ready, in fact an eager, audience since it provides just that kind of help and information which many readers of the authors' introductory book, *Kinetic Family Drawings (K-F-D)*, have wished for. It fills a real need. A good many clinicians, since the publication of this earlier book, have begun their

own collections of family drawings. The wealth of drawings and of interpretations in this present volume will permit these individual collections of drawings to come to life.

Beginning users of the K-F-D inevitably ask themselves, of each drawing they are presented with: *What does it mean? What does it tell us? What is the subject saying about himself and his family?* This book gives many answers. In the richness of its interpretations it provides an intellectual delight. I should warn, "Read this book at your own risk," because once you are really hooked on this test it is hard to get away."

It is generally agreed that the unconscious speaks through symbols. Any adequate interpretation of K-F-D responses, in addition to the surface interpretation which any clinician, however sophisticated, will give to the drawings produced, requires interpretation at the symbolic level. Beds, bicycles, brooms; cats, clowns, cribs; lamps, lawnmowers, leaves; snakes, stars, stop signs, and so on through the alphabet—the authors give their own interesting interpretations of the outstanding symbols commonly used. To mention only one, the elucidation of the "garbage" theme, especially as it relates to the new baby in the family, is of special interest to any professionals, or laymen, concerned with the impact of the new member of the family on that older sibling who is being displaced.

But that these are no dream book interpretations is suggested by the warning that the meaning of symbols can be overinterpreted. The authors warn, correctly, that in any attempt at hypothesizing the unconscious expression of any single symbol one must weigh the alternate and sometimes seemingly incompatible interpretation.

Even more interesting than the authors' interpretation of specific symbols is their elucidation of styles of drawing. For instance, the notion of compartmentalization in which the child isolates individual members of the family by putting them in box-like rectangles, or by encapsulating them, or even by putting some

on the back of the page, is especially helpful. (While reading this manuscript, I examined a little girl who not only drew her father on the back of the page, but pictured him as sitting back to at his desk in a high-backed chair, so that only his arm showed.) The authors also give us good, clear interpretations not only of *symbols* and *styles* but also of *themes*. Symbols, styles and themes—all tell their own stories.

The customary actions of father and mother, as seen by subjects, are especially noteworthy. Children see mothers as cooking, washing dishes, making beds; see fathers as working, mowing lawn, playing ball. Young children seem to take these differences in sex role quite for granted, though, in contrast, boys and girls do not seem to see themselves as behaving in substantially different ways. In this connection it is interesting to note the ratio of boys and girls—many more boys than girls—which the authors find in a clinic population. Why is it, we wonder, that boys have so very much harder a time than girls in a society such as our own?

The very generous inclusion of all drawings discussed is extremely useful. Seldom have basic data been provided more generously by a publisher. Every reader is here permitted to draw his own conclusions, make his own interpretations, arrive at his own insights.

This is by no means a book for superficial reading. My own reaction is that I wish to study seriously each drawing and the authors' interpretation of that drawing. I believe that most readers who are really interested in K-F-D will feel the same way. Though on the surface this test might seem to offer a situation in which interpretation might be made fairly easily even by the layman, the present manual, clear as it is, makes one appreciate that the interpretation of human drives and motivation is by no means simple. The K-F-D analysis sheet offers a useful beginning objective measure of this highly subjective and individualized test response.

Anyone using the K-F-D test can enjoy the excitement of being in at the beginning of a marvellously effective new way of measuring human behavior. The years ahead offer much promise for this new technique. The Kinetic Family Drawing Test can make a real contribution to any clinician's battery of projective techniques. I predict that this test will have a great future among those professionals whose work focuses on an understanding, and interpretation, of drawings of children—those drawings which can and do tell us so very much about what children are like, what their problems are, what life looks like to them. This new book by Burns and Kaufman is one of the most important and potentially useful which I have ever read. I recommend it very highly.

LOUISE BATES AMES, PH.D., *Chief Psychologist*
Gesell Institute of Child Development
Formerly, President of the Society
for Projective Techniques

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PREFACE

This book is about the actions, styles and symbols appearing in children's kinetic (action) drawings of their families. The technique of obtaining children's drawings by asking them to "draw everyone in the family doing something" has been discussed in *Kinetic Family Drawings (K-F-D)* by Burns and Kaufman (5).

Kinetic Family Drawings (K-F-D) was meant to be a general introduction to a new tool for understanding children, particularly troubled children. Our aim in the introductory book was to communicate the excitement of working with a new clinical tool. While the book was structured in a developmental and partially Freudian framework, it was hoped the children's K-F-D's would "speak for themselves" with a freshness and a minimum of interference from the greybeard authors.

The aim of this book is to point out the K-F-D actions, styles and symbols which slowly came into focus during a dozen years of scrutiny by the authors as they gradually accumulated some 10,000 K-F-D's from individual patients. Descriptive notes on the drawings were written by the examiner as directed by the patient.

While it is hoped the K-F-D's will continue to "speak for themselves," the authors will try to communicate some of the characteristics of the K-F-D which slowly emerged for them.

Grateful thanks is expressed to Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (500-428 B.C.) whose definition of Understanding (NOUS) — “giving movement, unity and system to what had previously been a jumble of inert elements” — provided the intellectual spark touching off our K-F-D investigations.

Thanks, also, to Dolores Goodell McCarthy for her skillful efforts in preparing the manuscript and for her joyous enthusiasm.

Our thanks, above all, to the troubled children who did the K-F-D's. May their pictured pleas for understanding and love, often so simply and trustingly portrayed, be better understood and answered by all of us.

ROBERT C. BURNS
S. HARVARD KAUFMAN

CHAPTER 1

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's drawings have a freshness and naivete which is too quickly lost as conformity, defensiveness, and sophistication take over. It is during this period of openness and freshness that children tell us much about themselves and the human condition.

Bender (3) and Despert (8) have pioneered in the psychological interpretation of the art of disturbed children. Anastasi and Foley (2) made an early exhaustive survey of the literature concerning artistic behavior in the abnormal. Alschuler and Hattwick (1) contributed to the appreciation of children's painting. Raven (21) described an imaginative technique in which the child was asked to draw and, while drawing, to imagine and describe a series of events.

More recently, Di Leo (9) has discussed children's art with emphasis on developmental and deviant characteristics. The comprehensive work of Koppitz (17) has focused on a systematic evaluation of multiple aspects of human figure drawings of children age five to twelve. Dennis (7) has studied group values through children's drawings.

II. ANALYSIS OF HUMAN FIGURE DRAWINGS AS PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS

A. *Draw-a-Person Test (D-A-P)*

In 1926, Florence Goodenough published "*Measurement of Intelligence by Drawings*" (12). A child was told to "Draw a Person," and the drawings were scored for mental age by a quantitative method. The Goodenough D-A-P test soon became an accepted and widely used psychological test of intelligence.

B. *House-Tree-Person Test (H-T-P)*

Buck (4) introduced the House-Tree-Person (H-T-P) test in 1948. A child was asked to draw a house, a tree and a person. Clinical interpretations of the drawings were made. The H-T-P was one of the first uses of human figure drawings as a psychological projective test. Catalogs such as that of Jolles' (16) describe in great detail the symbolic interpretations of the house, the tree and the person.

C. *Draw-a-Family Test (D-A-F)*

The earliest report found in the literature on family drawings (D-A-F) are those by Hulse (14) (15). Aside from studies by Reznikoff and Reznikoff (22) and Shearn and Russell (23), no other reports of the D-A-F could be found in the journal literature. Hammer (13), Koppitz (17), and Di Leo (9) discuss the use of D-A-F in their comprehensive books.

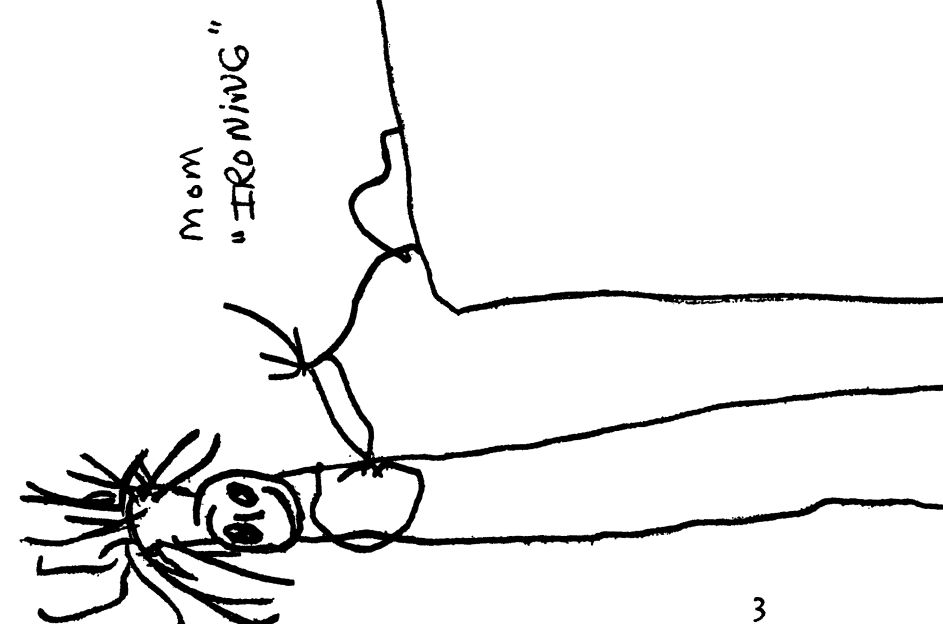
D. *Kinetic-Family-Drawings (K-F-D)*

In 1970 Burns and Kaufman described a method of simply asking children to draw the members of their families *doing* things. It was hoped that the addition of movement to the akinetic drawings would help mobilize a child's feelings not only as related to Self concept but also in the area of interpersonal relations.

The K-F-D often reflects primary disturbances much more quickly and adequately than interviews or other probing techniques. For example, 6-year-old Doug was causing a great disturbance at school and at home. Doug produced K-F-D 1.

Note the three hearts adjacent to the supine "Dad" and the proximity of Doug to him. The father had a history of three seri-

SISTERS
RIDING BIKE



mom
"IRONING"



ME (6)
DOUG
PUNCH
PUNCHIN
BALL

DAD
SLEEPING

K-F-D 1

ous heart attacks in the past nine months. The “symbols” of the hearts have obvious validity. The “style” of encapsulating and underlining the father reflects Doug’s concern and focus of attention on Dad. The “actions” are related to Doug’s feelings. His own action, “punching,” reflects his rage against the forces which have struck down his Dad. The action of the mother, “ironing,” reflects Doug’s need for warmth from her—intensified by Dad’s inability to give warmth. Dad’s action is “sleeping”—reflecting his illness and impotency. The sister’s action is “riding a bike”—a normal activity suggesting Doug’s “normal” feelings toward her.

Through Doug’s portrayal and through our analysis of his K-F-D actions, styles and symbols, we improve our understanding of Doug and his behavior.

Before embarking on our exploration of the K-F-D’s produced by troubled children, let us consider a few produced by “normal” children.

CHAPTER 2

NORMAL KINETIC FAMILY DRAWINGS

I. PROCEDURE FOR OBTAINING K-F-D's

The drawings are obtained from children individually. The child is asked to seat himself on a small chair at a table of appropriate height. A sheet of plain white, 8½ x 11 inch paper is placed on the table directly in front of him. A No. 2 pencil is placed in the center of the paper and he is asked to "Draw a picture of everyone in your family, including you, *DOING* something. Try to draw whole people, not cartoons or stick people. Remember, make everyone *DOING* something—some kind of action."

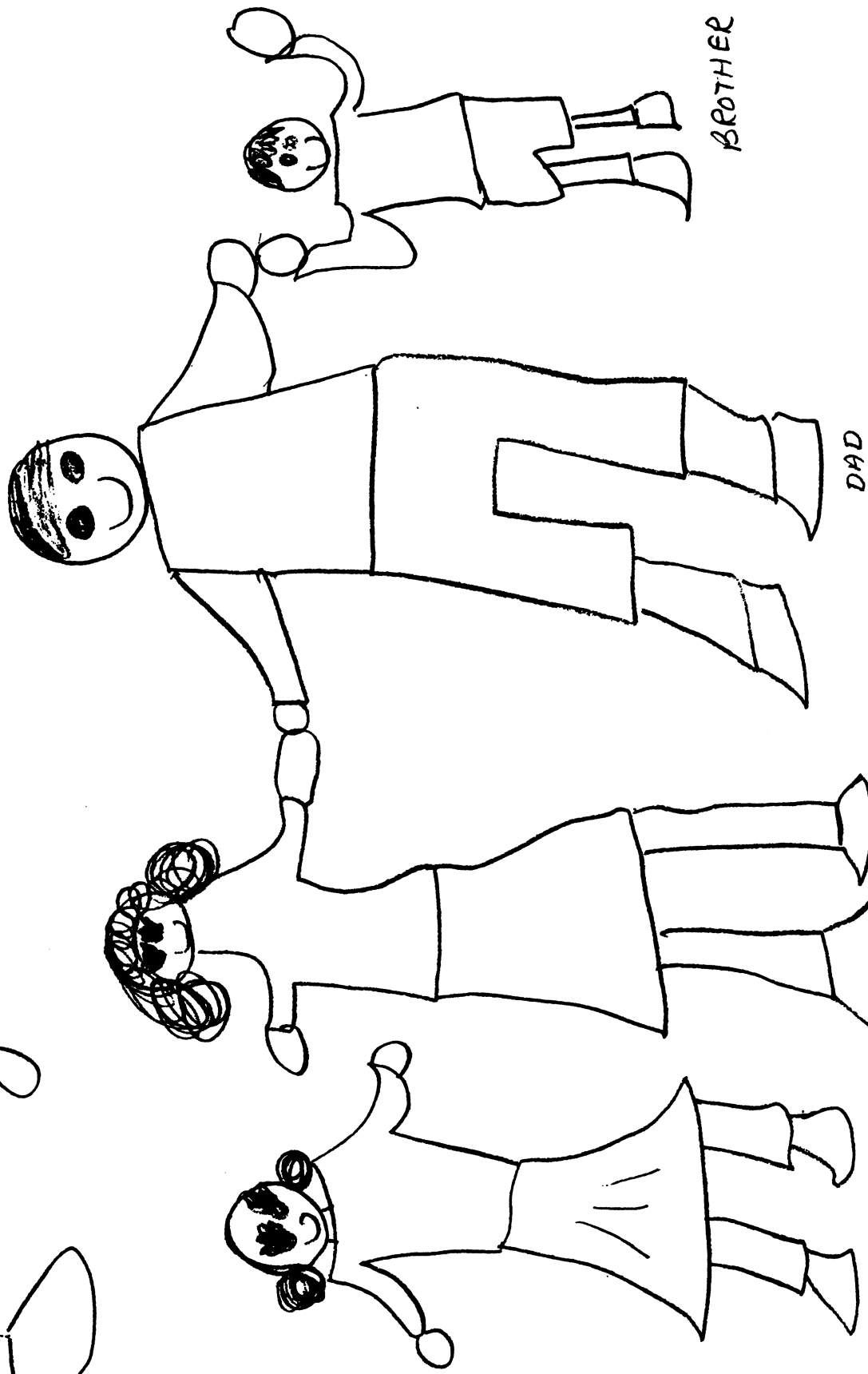
The examiner then leaves the room and checks back periodically. The situation is terminated when the child indicates verbally or by gesture that he is finished. No time limit is given. Non-compliance is extremely rare. If the child says, "I can't," he is encouraged periodically and left in the room until he completes the K-F-D.

II. K-F-D's PRODUCED BY "WELL ADJUSTED" OR "NORMAL" CHILDREN

K-F-D 2, made by 8½-year-old Liz, shows a family with no barriers between the members and a physical closeness. There is a light shining above, which often in our drawings depicts a general warmth. One has the feeling in looking at this drawing of a close relationship between the parents and between the parents and the children.



8



DAD

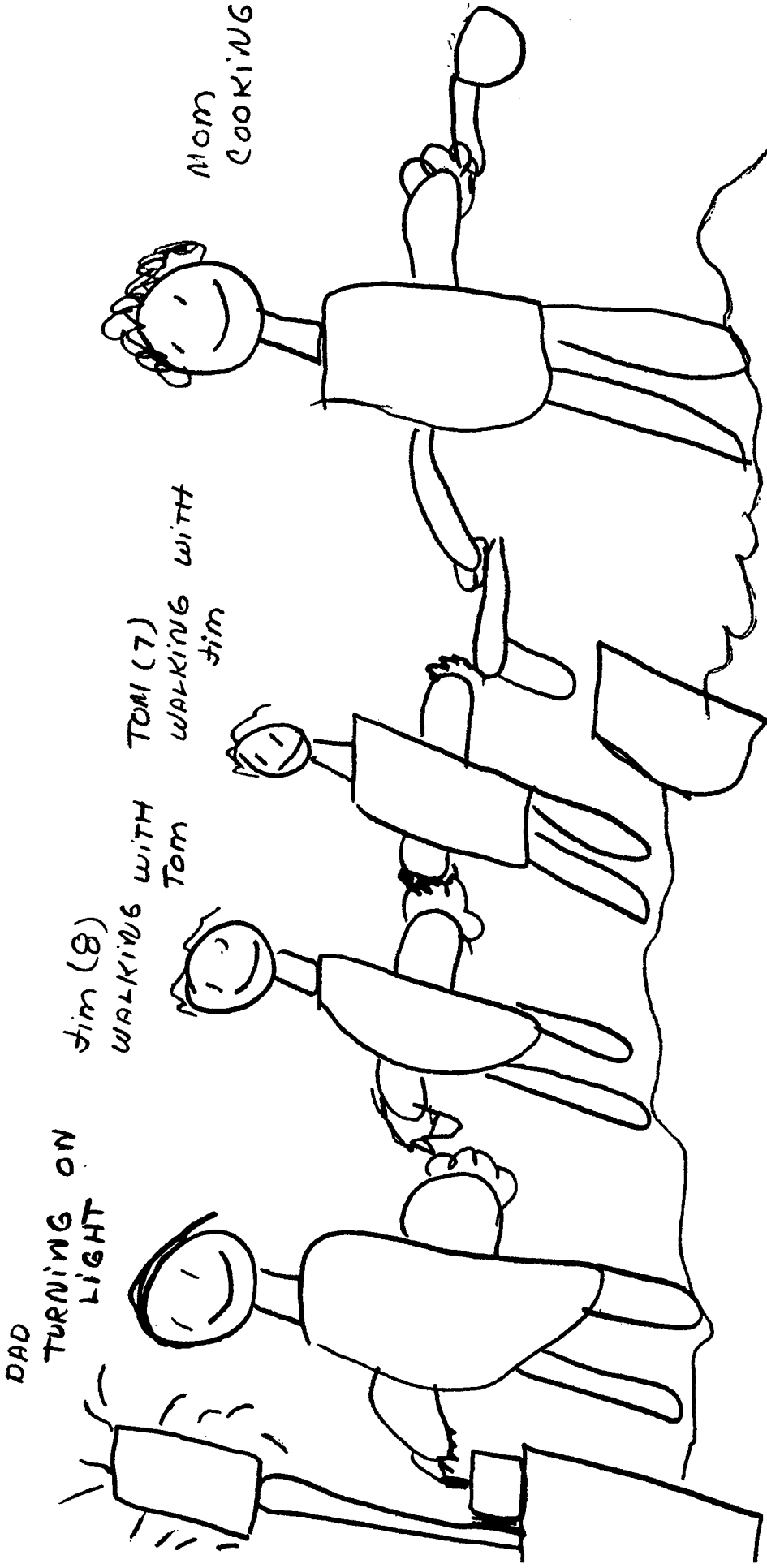
MOM

SELF (8)

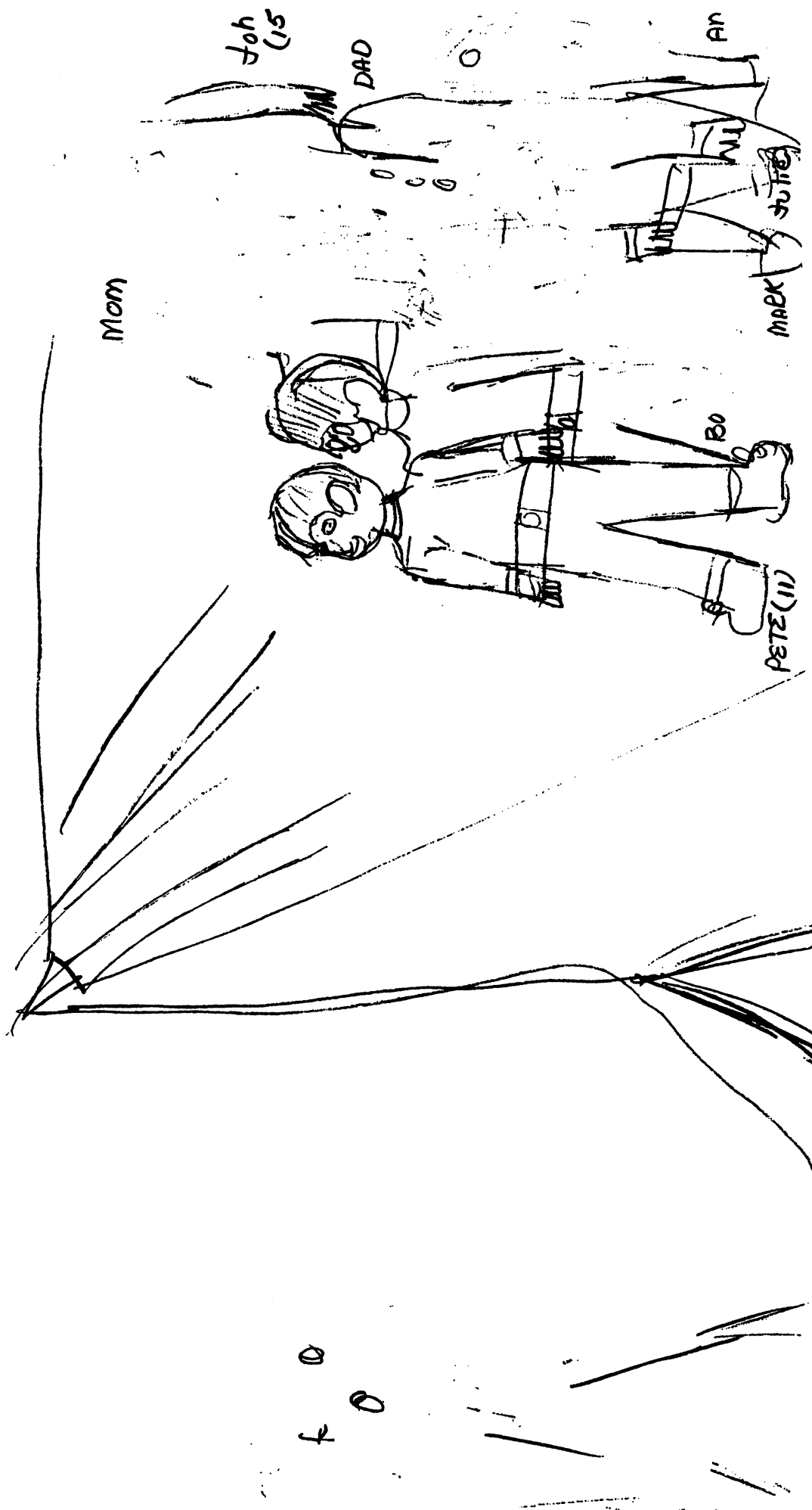
BROTHER

K-F-D 2

K-F-D 3, by 9-year-old Jim, again reflects closeness in the family. This time, the activities of the parents are included in the total feeling. The mother is nurturing the family through her cooking activities; the father is close to Jim and is turning on the light. One has the feeling of happiness and closeness between members of the family in the total family atmosphere and activity.



K-F-D 4, by 11-year-old Peter, reflects a closeness in the family. They are all being photographed; the beam of the light is on them. There are no barriers between members of the family.



K-F-D 4

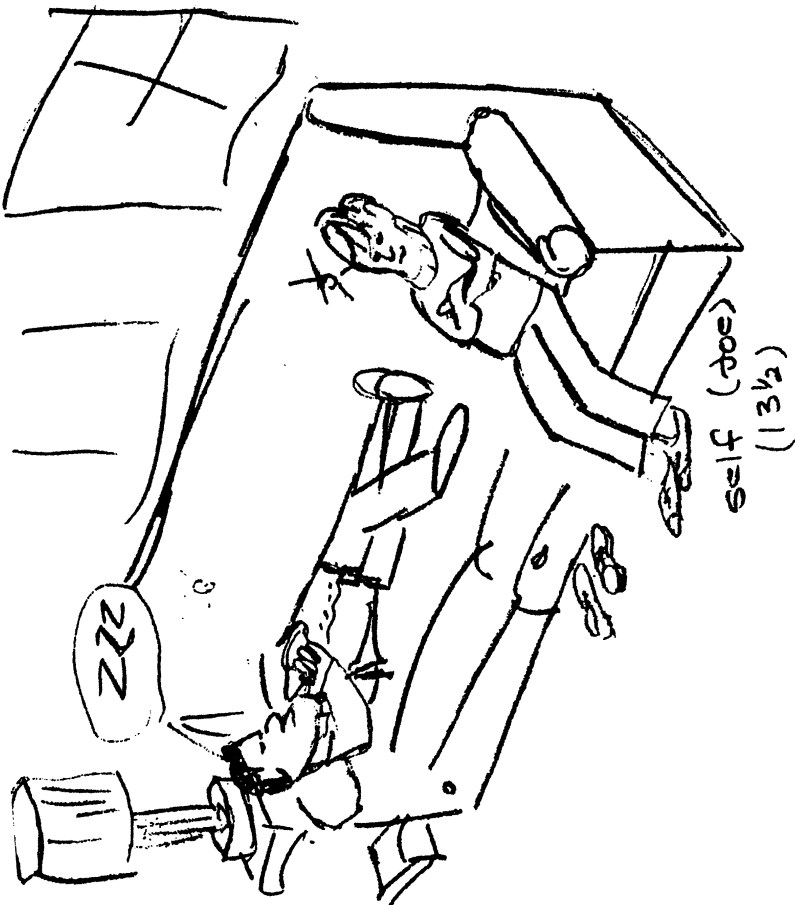
In K-F-D 5, we see a typical adolescent drawing by 13½-year-old Joe, who is beginning to assert his independence, which, of course, is quite natural at this age.

We see the "handy" mother cooking for the family, albeit she looks somewhat stern—many parents seem stern to teenagers.

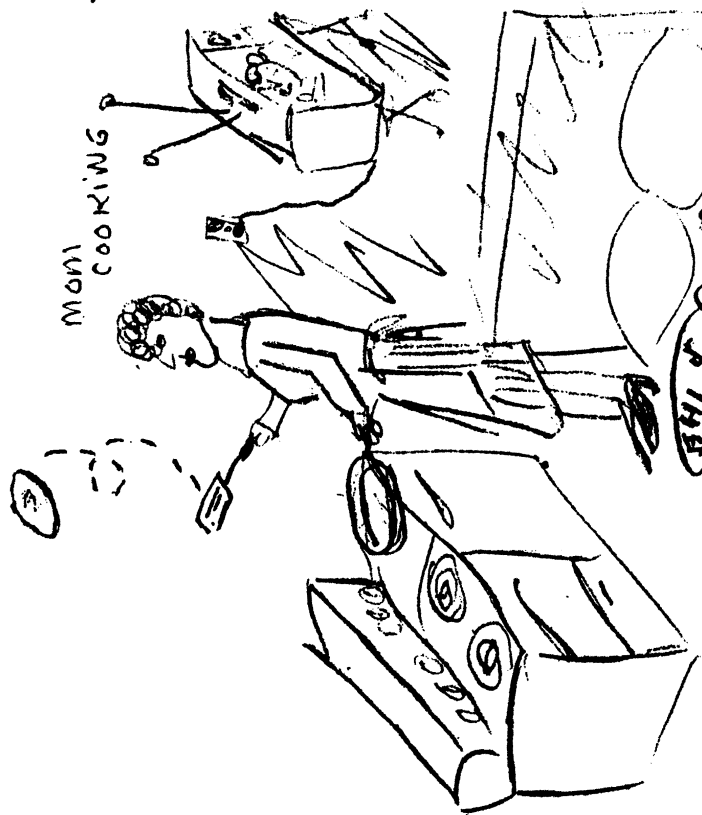
The 11-year-old sister is busy talking to her friend on the telephone. The hardworking father is asleep. The television is the center of the family with the rather disgruntled Joe looking at it, but one gets the feeling that he would rather be "doing his own thing." Grandpa is in the corner playing cards and is somewhat isolated by distance and the table from the others in the family.

If we look at the drawing more carefully, perhaps we can "see" more. If, for example, we look at the relative heights of the family members, we see that the father is the ascendant person. We are reminded of the ancient dictum that one's head must not appear above that of the King. While the father is asleep, he seems to be the dominant person in the "pecking order"—his head is next to the lamp with the light theme so frequent in our drawings. On the other hand, the bottom person in the pecking order is Grandpa, who is obviously not dominant in the family. Joe places himself close to but below the father and seems to be impatiently awaiting his own "rise." The mother is close to but "over" the daughter, who seems preoccupied with her own peer group connections outside the home. The symbolism of the bed as related to the sister and the controls suggested by the hypervigilant mother are part of Joe's pubertal world.

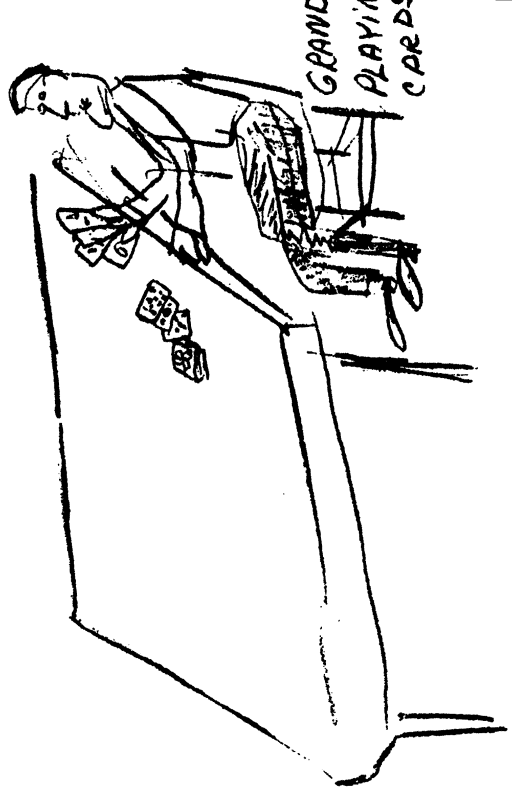
This drawing, then, depicts "normal" adolescent strivings in an assertive but well-controlled young male who has identified with and grudgingly accepted the "temporary" authority of the parents.



Self (doe)
(13 1/2)



MOM!
COOKING



GRAND
PLAYING
CARDS



SISTER (11)

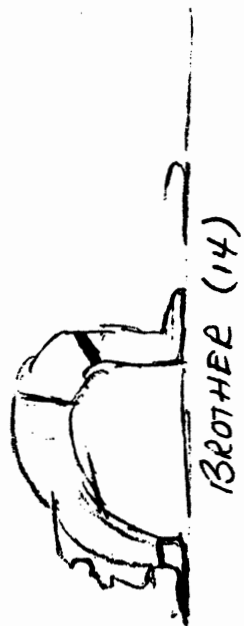
KFD 5

•K-F-D 6, by 12½-year-old Anne, reflects the blooming independence of adolescence. However, the conflicts depicted begin to deviate from normalcy. One notes the peaceful central figure of the father, who is dominant although apparently overworked. The mother is busy in the kitchen, but she is "faceless." Anne is busy reading, with her head turned away from the family, and she is absorbed in her own world.

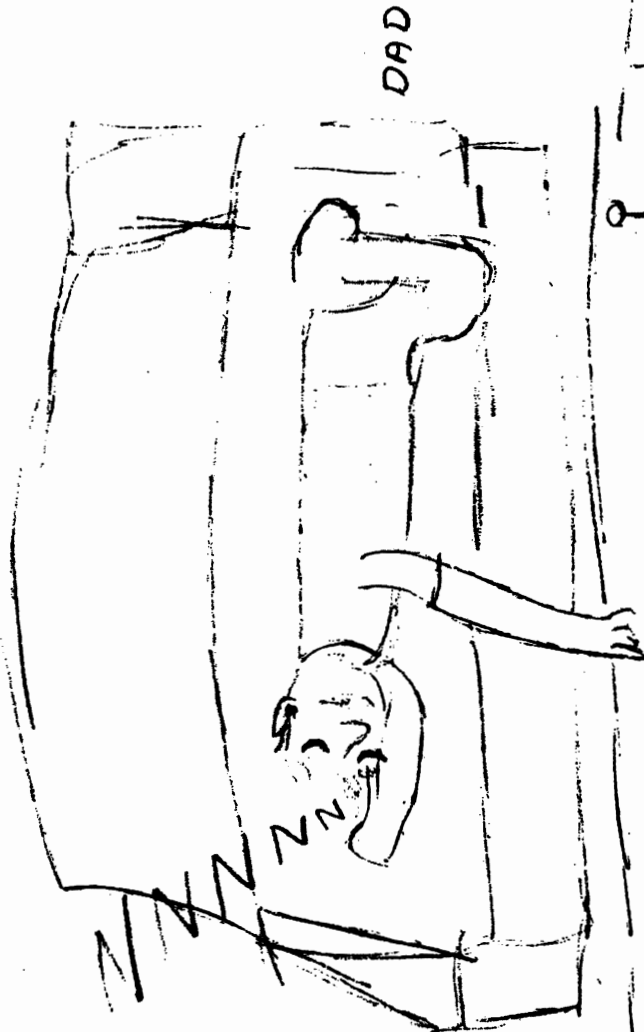
One wonders about the distorted, open-mouthed 14-year-old brother, who is "above" Anne. The brother's figure was larger but was erased. The felt rejection of the mother and conflict with the brother are significant problem areas for Anne.

As we view Anne's K-F-D, we "see" much more if we are familiar with the "meaningful" aspects of individual human figure drawings (H-F-D's). Machover (19) (20), described some of the qualitative features in H-F-D's. For those not familiar with works such as Machover's, a brief summary of H-F-D characteristics and their common clinical interpretation is given in the Appendix.

Analysis of individual H-F-D's may be done "in vacuo." However, analysis of individual K-F-D figures calls for an interpretation within the matrix of the total drawing. Some recurrent characteristics of individual K-F-D figures are worth considering before focusing on actions, styles and symbols.



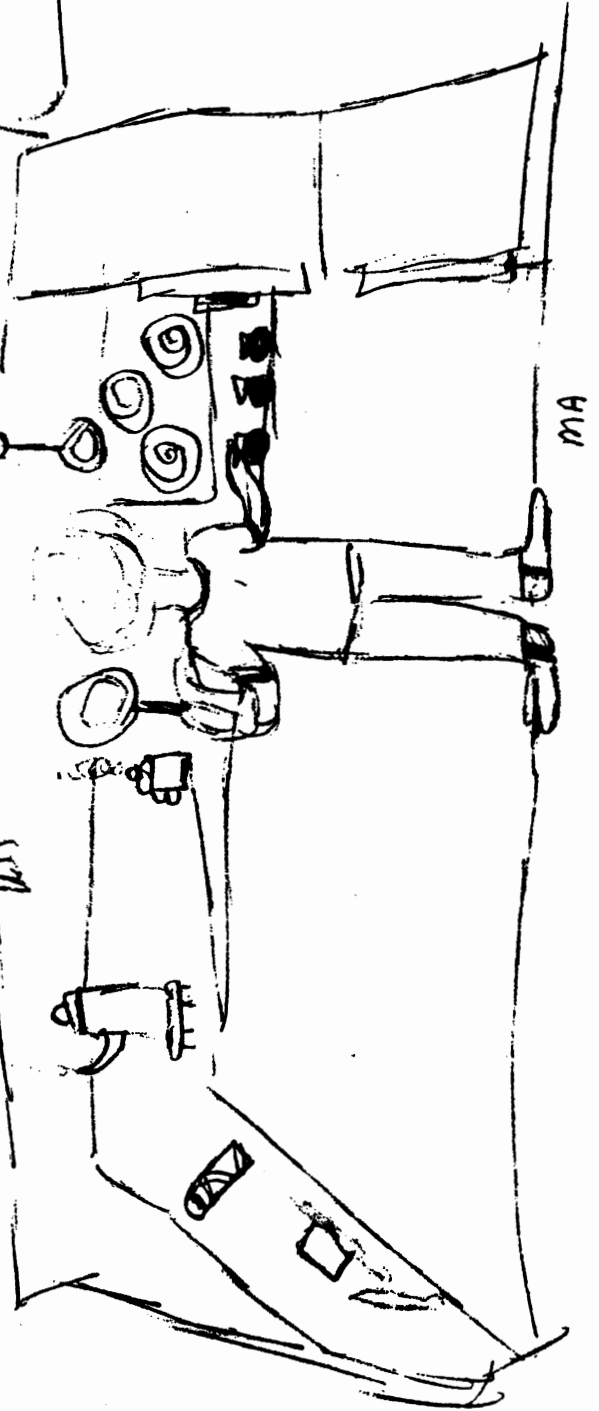
BROTHER (14)



DAD



Self (12½)



MA

K-FD 6

CHAPTER 3

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL K-F-D FIGURES

A. *Arm Extensions*

Arms are often distorted in K-F-D's, as shown in K-F-D 7, where the brother's exceptionally long arm stealing cookies seems to be of some significance to 8-year-old Danny, who made the drawing.

Arm extensions may include cleaning implements (mops, brooms, vacuum cleaners, etc.), paint brushes (paddles?), weapons, and a host of other objects perceived as aids in controlling the environment.