

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

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HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

An Art Therapy Approach
to Family Therapy

By

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This book is dedicated to my family of origin, who fostered both creativity and courage; to my nuclear family, who created an environment of love and support; and my extended family with whom I continue to share ultimate concerns.

Special thanks goes to Amanda, Chris, Connor, Courtney, Rett, Ryan, and Wesley.

PREFACE

Family is never far away from therapy. When you work with children you work with family issues. When you work with adults you work with relationship issues. Image is never far away from either child or adult. My son, Chris, a school psychologist and an art therapist, reminds me often, “You can’t work with kids without using art and most hurting adults have a little kid in there somewhere.”

My original training was as an artist and art educator, and later as an art therapist. Still later, my training as a psychologist was in Jungian depth psychology and family therapy. This book, entitled *Home Is Where the Art Is—An Art Therapy Approach to Family Therapy*, reflects my three decades of clinical practice with children and their families, and adults and their families. During two of those decades, I have taught family art therapy and directed an art therapy psychology program that awards master’s degrees in art therapy and marital and family therapy. With family therapists currently licensed in 50 states, more and more families or family members are being treated from a family systems approach. Communication, clearly not always verbal, is a major component in the success or failure of family relationships, not only in the nuclear family, but also over many generations. Therapists, using whatever means necessary to help family members communicate and repair, often turn to art. Written for students and professionals this book integrates the two approaches, art therapy and family systems.

- Art, in any age and in any country, is humanity’s first model for sharing experiences and communicating meaning.
- Art therapy is a therapeutic treatment that incorporates the process of the client creating or selecting images, reflecting on the art, and interacting with a trained professional for assessment, communication, stress reduction, and intervention. The art process, the art product, and reflection on both are used to identify inner and outer attitudes, behaviors, dreams, experiences, feelings, and thoughts. It is often the treatment of choice for the young, the old, and all those in between who are unable to put their inner feelings in words.

- Family therapy, regardless of ethnicity or culture, is a systemic model of relationships. Its goal is to investigate the family system, repair areas that keep it from working, reinforce areas that do work, and reduce stress between members in the system or between a member and the system.
- Family art therapy combines “thinking systems” and “seeing systems,” the two concepts of family therapy and art therapy.

Although much has been written on art therapy and much, much more literature exists on family therapy, few integrate the two theoretical approaches (Arrington, 1991; Kwiatkowska, 1975, 1978; Landgarten, 1981, 1987; Riley & Malchodi, 1994). Perhaps this is because a healing agent that introduces art making with its patterns and enactments as a modality for solving issues in, between, and about relationship is, in itself, a cognitive, behavioral, and intuitive paradox. If this is the case, then mental health professionals, of whatever theoretical orientation, might find it interesting to explore additional methods of applying cognitive behavioral paradoxical strategies in the therapeutic “process of reality construction, maintenance and change” (Sluzki, 1998, p. 417). In the case of introducing art, image-making, and creating for communication and relaxation, the brief, spontaneous, and even fun strategies enrich family therapy. They represent an unobtrusive offer to relate to and communicate with others (Gunter, 2000).

The structure of the book reflects my personal approach to art. My art media are painting and combining found objects. The structure of this book is also painterly, combining found objects. The overall theme of family can quickly be seen within it, but this theme is overlaid with art, archetypal patterns and meanings, and symbolic enactments. It is also interfaced with personality development, and in this “era of the brain,” with neurobiological research.

The introduction begins with a brief epitome of Randy and his Dad and Stepmother. It continues by addressing the questions of what is art and art therapy. Chapter 1, “Family Art Therapy,” looks at the marriage of art and family therapy, the clients, the goals, and art in family art therapy. It looks at the significance of how relaxation and “flow” are part and parcel of the creative process. It explores an integrative theoretical approach that incorporates three key perspectives of family art therapy: the historical, the interactional, and the existential perspectives. These three theoretical perspectives are expanded in a family art-based assessment with Sandy S. and her family.

Chapter 2 begins with the question: What is a family? It continues with a discussion of basic family functions and reparation of family problems, and looks at why marriages fail. Once again, we meet Randy, as his symbolic

search for home leads through multiple divorces and remarriages. The chapter briefly addresses early development of family therapy and family art therapy. Another question, why integrate art and family therapy, is answered with an illustration of an attempted family art-based assessment with Gary and his family. The chapter concludes with a search for information about Anne, an individual who is also a family member.

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the “Cycle of Love” and the family influences in personality development, seen in personality theorists and theories (e.g., Freud, Jung, attachment and object relations, Erikson, and Piaget). Stories about Michelle, Elizabeth, Tucker and Carl provide theoretical examples.

Since more and more family therapy practice includes violence associated with the unfilled basic human needs of nourishment and nurturing, Chapter 4, “The Cycle of Violence,” begins with a discussion of violence and its effect on early childhood environments. The chapter explores broken trust in families where there is a lack of nourishment and nurturing. It includes stories about the homeless Chad and Bethanne, the shifted and reshifted Randy, and Nancy’s horrific family experience.

Chapter 5 continues the theme of violence within families: Cathy and Sam experiencing painful failure as parents, and Andre, Barry and Clay, children witnessing domestic violence. The chapter ends with Anne revealing psychological violence in her life experiences.

Chapter 6, “The Cycle of Healing,” includes a discussion of resilience illustrated by a variety of stories from an integration of family and art therapy. Stories about Sharri, Mary, Humberto, Jenny, Sallie, Ron, and Neal and Michael, Nancy, Anne and Randy complete the cycle of healing.

Appendix A is filled with the practical “how to’s” of family art therapy, from general instructions on the gathering of materials, the basics of preparation, and clean up to where to go for information on professional ethics. Eight family art-based assessments are described.

Appendix B includes “how to” interventions. It begins with the “Life Cycle Log” and wordtapping and includes other techniques and interventions used with individuals in families, families, and family subsystems. “My Lifetime” was initiated by art therapist Jayne Rhyne (*Gestalt Art Therapy*, 1973). “The Value Garden” is an extension of a value clarification technique that I learned as a teacher (Simon, Howe & Kirschenbaum, 1972). The “Genogram” is a broadly used family therapy technique initiated by Bowen (1976). The rest of the techniques come from my own clinical and teaching experiences with input from clients, friends, peers, and students. I have included specific credits in the technique instructions.

Appendix C includes key terms and concepts of a select group of family therapy theorists. These include Satir, Bowen, Minuchin, Haley and Gottman.

to create images and myths that interface with dance, drama, and rhythm. It is those images and myths that reflect not only the attitudes of the times in which we live, but instill in us courage to defeat our enemies, courage to motivate others and ourselves for success in other tasks of life, and courage to repair broken hearts and minds. One has only to remember the funeral processions of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa, watched by billions, to comprehend how archetypal rituals, with mysterious meanings, arouse, inform, heal, and sustain countries, communities, families, and individuals.

Why Therapy? Why Art Therapy?

No one comes to psychotherapy because he or she is feeling good. People come with symptoms, deeply immersed in psychic and somatic pain. They come because there has been an act or fact of losing, especially unintentional parting with someone or something of value. They come because they have lost human and spiritual connection, personal identity, opportunity, support, and soul (Gilligan, 1995).

The R. family sat in the counseling office that was complete with toys, a family of anatomically correct dolls, sand tray figures, Smurfs[®], games, and a variety of art materials. From the outside, the small family unit appeared like any other small nuclear family. Randy, age five and a half, slumped in his chair, eyes clued to Dad. Dad, glum, looked from wife to son, to therapist, and then back again. Stepmother, eyes wide open, mouth pulled tight, sat looking like a deer caught in the headlights. She was ready to bolt.

Through an intake interview (a variety of written and oral questions), a genogram (a three-generational family tree [Bowen, 1978]; Appendix B-C), and a Family Art-based Assessment (Appendix A), I sought to discover the cast of characters in this family (Satir, 1972) and an answer to my internalized question, what had brought them to this place at this time? Dad, but mostly Stepmother, contributed information. Three months earlier, Randy had come to live with them. During that time the family life had become more and more painful. Randy's behavior had become unacceptable and punishment was not helping. Acting out at school, he fought and cursed other children, but when he was at home, and his Dad was away, he isolated himself in his room. A recent call from school that focused on Randy's behavior precipitated Stepmother calling for a counseling appointment.

While I talked with the adults, I sensed the tension that settled on and around the small boy whose feet dangled above the floor. Seeking to release the tension and engage Randy in the assessment process, I asked if he would

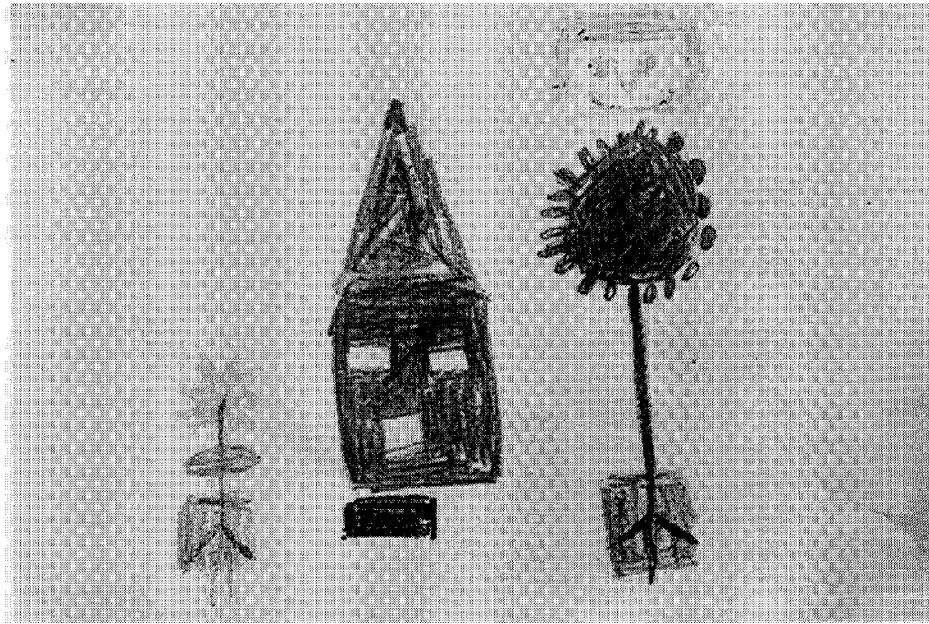


Figure 2. *Let's go home*, by Randy.

like to look around the room. While his parents and I continued talking, he slid out of his chair and walked from one group of toys to another. Picking up a puppet, he looked at it and then put it down. He buried a male figure in the sand tray and then he settled in front of the art table. Engaging him, I said simply, "Randy, would you like to draw?"

Randy picked up a red crayon and drew a house with windows and a door (Figure 2). He drew a small flower on the left side of the house and a large one with encapsulated (enclosed) roots on the right. In place of the sun, he put a smiling face. Like other children throughout the world whose moms, dads, brothers, sisters, and grannies (their significant attachments) have vanished from their daily lives, Randy was confused and grieving. I wondered what he was thinking. As I look back, I wonder if it wasn't "Why am I always wrong? I didn't do anything. Although I love Dad, I didn't ask him to bring me here." I am sure Randy was thinking about his home. But where was home? Where was his mom? Where was his brother? Was his brother safe with his stepfather? Why wasn't he at his grandmother's? She had a big house and he liked living with her. Finished with the painting, he turned and quietly said, "I want to go home."

What is home? For most people, home is a place of safety where one lives with loved ones called family. It is a comfortable dwelling place in one's

native land. It is a place where one's heart feels warm and safe. Home is a place where one belongs.

In order for Randy, his dad, and his stepmother to communicate, to blend, to merge, to become a family that could live together in a home where each felt he or she belonged, they needed to be heard and treated fairly, with affection and concern. But young children are powerless. Adults around them provide the environment or the voice with which they both can participate. Often this requires professional help outside of the family. For families in all cultures, with children like Randy, family therapy from an art therapy approach is often the treatment of choice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been written without the innovative art therapy work with families begun fifty years ago by Hanna Kwiatkowska. Trained in art, art therapy, and psychology, Ms. Kwiatkowska in the 1950s worked at the National Institute of Mental Health. During that time she identified the power art had in transforming families and family members and authored *Family Therapy and Evaluation through Art*, published in 1978 by Charles C Thomas. In the late 1970s, Ms Kwiatkowska came to Northern California to lecture about her work. The Art Therapy Program at the College of Notre Dame was just beginning and I was fortunate enough to talk to her about Family Art Therapy and its future. I am sure she could never have for seen how her approach would take hold and grow. For over 20 years, family art therapy has been used and broadened, not only at the College of Notre Dame, but also in colleges and universities throughout the United States.

I am grateful to my professional family at the California Notre Dame University (CNDU) and in the American Art Therapy Association; Drs. Frances Anderson and Carolee Stabno, who scaled tall buildings, red penciled chapters and performed other miracles; Dr. Valerie Appleton, Barbara Daniels, Cay Drachnik, Elizabeth Ratcliffe, and Dr. Betty Jo Troeger, who over the twenty years that I have taught Family Art Therapy throughout the United States have helped me formulate this book; and Dr. Vince Fitzgerald, CND, who encouraged me from the beginning to write from the perspective of real people and their lives not just about the theory that helped improve their quality of life. While writing this book, colleague and friend Dr. Judy Rubin asked me if I liked what I was writing. As I now finish this book, it is pretty obvious that what I liked most was reporting on the stories of families and individuals in them that were influenced for healing in some way by the art they created.

Thanks go to members of my office staff, Dolores Kopesec, Loren Breithoff, and Jonathan Johnson, who consistently attended to projects and pressures while providing unlimited personal support. Jonathan's positive attitude and professional skills as a graphic designer and "high techer" were indis-

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Throughout the writing process, my husband, Bob, worked to keep a balance in our nuclear family by continually filling my time with family and family events. Thank you.

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The vignettes and stories used in this book are based on actual families and individuals in families with whom I have worked, supervised their treatment, or hold in the highest regard for the way they have lived their lives. These stories illustrate theoretical and clinical issues of family art therapy and sometimes to make the point, several cases are integrated. Except where an adult has requested, all names and circumstances have been changed to protect confidentiality. This is true of the illustrations as well. Some have been redrawn from lighter drawings, in hopes of allowing the reader to concentrate on the basics of visual language rather than the diversity of artistic complexity.

SPIRIT

As a woman in the roles of family art therapist, artist, administrator, psychologist, professor, wife, mother, grandmother, and lifelong family member, I have heuristically found that those ultimate concerns that guide and motivate my life, that help me to be with myself and others, relate to what I call SPIRIT. SPIRIT is acquired from both nature and nurturance, my genetic gifts and the nurturance that was provided or not provided in my early and ongoing environments filled with significant others known as family.

- The S in SPIRIT stands for *security*, the security I received or did not receive from my family of origin. The security I have or have not mastered in my abilities and skills. The security I have or do not have to live and to risk in love, work, and being.
- The P in SPIRIT stands for *purpose*, my individual and collective purpose in living; what I want to do with my life; my motivation at this time, in this place.
- The first I in SPIRIT represents personal *identity*. We ask ourselves, What is my identity? Does my history, my profession, or my family define me? Am I known because of where I come from or because I am intelligent, creative, wealthy, strange, caring? One radio commentator is known as “her son’s mom.” What are you known as?
- The R in SPIRIT stands for *relationships*. Relationships, primary and extended, form the center of SPIRIT: my center. As an individual, I am always in relationship, whether at work or in love. I am also in relationship with my image of and belief in a Supreme Being or higher force. I form and am formed by my relationships.
- The second I in SPIRIT stands for *images*. Every day I choose images to represent me: images of clothing, housing, and transportation, images that construct and display my faith, my gratifications, and my dreams. The images I consciously or unconsciously choose communicate my inner thoughts and feelings. The images in agencies, associations, and

institutions with which I choose to associate define my purpose, form my identity, and expand my relationships.

- Finally, the T in SPIRIT stands for how, over *time* and through experiences, as I age and become more experienced, sophisticated, foolish, or wise, my security, purpose, identity, relationships, and images are all *tempered* in one direction or another, positively or negatively. We have all heard the story of the person who found the barn half full of manure and whined, feeling cheated and victimized, while the next person immediately started looking for the pony.

Human beings live along an innate and learned SPIRIT-filled continuum. A work in process, it ranges from negative to positive, always forming, adapting, defining and responding to experience and relationships. With age, choices fall between the two extremes, bitter or better, and we are wise to query: What direction am I going?

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Chapter 1

FAMILY ART THERAPY

FAMILY IS THE FRAMEWORK for human structure. Art and image are the canvas for its expression. “Family art therapy as the primary mode of treatment is certainly the most challenging and rewarding application of art techniques with families. However, it also demands a solid background in family therapy and extensive psychotherapeutic experience in addition to art therapy training,” Hanna Kwiatkowska (1978, p. 137).

If someone wanted to know more about herself, she would focus on her internal thoughts and feelings and her external behavior. If she wanted to understand why she related to other people as she did, those with whom she lived and worked, she would focus on how her personality was shaped in the family and in the environment in which she was born and raised. It might help if she knew how her parents were raised, and how their parents were raised, and then their parents. Family, an ever-expanding circle of individuals in influential relationships, is the center of human development.

Therapy requires knowing both how and who to treat. It involves verbal and non-verbal language, needed both to acquire and process theoretical knowledge, and to gather information necessary for treatment. This book begins by looking at the “degree of fit and congruence” between family therapy and art therapy (Liddle, 1982). Family functions and dysfunctions will be explored as well as human language, encoding, and expression using words and images.

THE MARRIAGE OF ART AND FAMILY THERAPY

Family dynamics, communication and functions are the core component of family therapy (Connell, Mitten, & Whitaker, 1993). They shape and