



Couples' joint drawing patterns: Associations with self-report measures of interpersonal patterns and attachment styles



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ABSTRACT

The development of a typology of joint-drawing patterns in couples proposed that three types exist: balanced, complicated, and disconnected (Snir and Wiseman, 2013). The current study explores the links between the three drawing patterns that were derived from the pictorial phenomena expressed in joint drawings and the couples' interpersonal patterns and attachment styles assessed by self-report measures. Sixty romantically involved couples that completed the joint drawing task. Their drawings were classified into the three types. Couples completed the Central Relationship Questionnaire, and the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale, along with the Couple's Relationship Perceptions Questionnaire. The results supported in part the hypothesized association. Couples whose drawings were classified in the balanced drawing group reported higher love and care scores and were securely attached. They reported that their partner provided a secure base, and they enjoyed greater personal growth and development than couples in the other drawing groups. These findings provide partial support to the assumption that joint drawing styles distinguish between interpersonal patterns in the couple relationship. Applying the joint-drawing technique with couples can shed light on the relational characteristics of the partners. This finding is relevant for evaluation processes and clinical practice in the art therapy field.

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Introduction

Joint drawings

In the joint drawing technique two individuals paint or draw together on one sheet of paper (Snir & Wiseman, 2010; Snir & Hazut, 2012). This art-based technique is designed to be used for diagnosis, interpreting, advancing and enhancing interpersonal relationships in systemic art therapy for couples, dyads (parent-child), families and groups (Gavron, 2010; Markman-Zinemanas & Gvuli-Margalit, 2003; Proulx, 2003). It is also used as a tool in dynamic, individual art therapy to reflect and process client-therapist relationships (Robbins, 1994; Lachman-Chapin, 1987).

When the joint drawing technique is used as an evaluative tool, observable phenomena are discernible in the drawing itself and during the drawing process. For example, these are manifested

in the choice of materials, colors, the images created, the way in which the couple relates to each other and handles the task, and their verbal reactions to the drawing. The therapist can thus glean information about the couple's relationship, needs, and difficulties (Wadson, 1973; Snir & Hazut, 2012).

Although art therapists' commonly use joint drawings to enter into an evaluative process and to intervene based on the joint creations, little research has been devoted to examine the key theoretical assumption that the pictorial phenomena manifested in the joint creations express meaningful aspects of the drawing partners' relationship. The present study was thus designed to explore this assumption by examining the associations between pictorial phenomena expressed in free and undirected joint drawings and the partners' interpersonal patterns as assessed by self-report questionnaires.

Joint drawing patterns

The predominant pictorial phenomena expressed in joint drawings by couples have been documented in a larger study (Snir & Hazut, 2012) in which a phenomenological qualitative analysis led

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Picture 1. The balanced pattern.

to the development of a typology consisting of three joint drawing patterns defined as *Balanced*, *Complicated*, and *Disconnected* (Snir & Wiseman, 2013).

The “Balanced pattern” (see [Picture 1](#)) is characterized by a coherent product resulting from the couple’s ability to implicitly agree on the subject matter and to work cooperatively on it. The couple’s drawing process is characterized by the fact that each of them creates and adds images and details to the other’s drawing, exhibits sensitivity to the colors and images the other created, but retains the ability for self-expression. As a result of this process of cooperative drawing, the visual

elements used by each member of the couple can be contiguous on the page in a way that does not detract from the other’s work.

The “Complicated pattern” (see [Picture 2](#)) is characterized by unconnected images lacking a common denominator. The couple’s drawing alternates between a strong connection accompanied by many contacts between the drawn elements, sometimes to the point of defacing the work of the other, and what therapists perceive as estrangement, expressed by the creation of separate, sometimes even disconnected images, and attempts to define separate areas for autonomous drawing.



Picture 2. The complicated pattern.

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