

CHAPTER 5

RETROSPECTIVE CLINICAL EXPERIENCES USING BILATERAL ART WITH RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter describes experiences using the bilateral art protocols for couples/dyads. Recall from Chapter 3 that there are two relational protocols. The first protocol is designed to facilitate openness and empathy between members of a couple and is used in the first case example. The remaining two examples explore the use of bilateral art using the second protocol designed to explore individual responses to a relationship. In these latter examples, the relationships being explored are the supervisor-supervisee dyads that are an integral part of the training of marriage and family therapists.

Increasing Openness and Empathy: Using Relational Protocol 1

This section provides a single case study describing the use of bilateral art relational protocol 1 with a middle-aged couple “John and Sally” who presented with numerous complaints including John’s use of alcohol. The extent of the alcohol abuse was not readily apparent from the couple’s initial presentation of their difficulties. During the couple’s second session, John talked about the positive steps that he was taking as well as his feelings of shame surrounding his drinking. I introduced the bilateral art protocol and John identified the positive element “I am proud of myself for taking action” and the opposing negative element “I am ashamed.” Sally was given paper and pen and asked to record thoughts and feelings that emerged from witnessing John’s bilateral art activities. Figure 7.1 shows John’s response to the positive element on the right and his response to the negative element on the left. John scaled the positive element a 7 prior to the intervention and it remained unchanged following the intervention. He scaled the negative element a 2 and it decreased to a 1 following the intervention. I was uneasy about the

values that John used to scale the strength of his beliefs as they were not congruent with the stories the couple were telling. John was engaged in denial of his addiction.



Figure 5.1 John’s bilateral art drawing with positive element “I am proud of myself for taking action” on the right and opposing negative element “I am ashamed” on the left.

Sally’s responses to witnessing the activity were that the scaling of the negative element seemed as though it should have been a 7, particularly following a drinking binge. She commented that John was “very pitiful and much easier to get along with ... he accepts anything I say... [there is a] change in voice [and he] can’t make eye contact.” She further stated that “his taking action makes me feel like “acting” like everything is ok, but I have done that before and it hasn’t been ok. My emotions are always up and down.”

At this point, I realized that there was a significant substance abuse problem and that treatment was going to be far more extensive than we typically provide at The Family Therapy Center. Programs and treatment options were discussed. Unfortunately, neither member of the couple was open to pursuing any of the recommended options; John continued to believe that he

could handle the addiction on his own and Sally was unwilling to look at her role in the relationship, repeating the pattern of her childhood with an alcoholic parent.

I do not believe in this case that the bilateral art protocol facilitated any meaningful integration. However, it did serve to expose the severity of John's dependence upon alcohol, both through John's inability to acknowledge the extent of his shame and through Sally's descriptions of John's post drinking behaviors and her roller coaster existence.

Examining the Supervisor/Supervisee Relationship in Marriage and Family Therapy Training: Using Relational Protocol 2

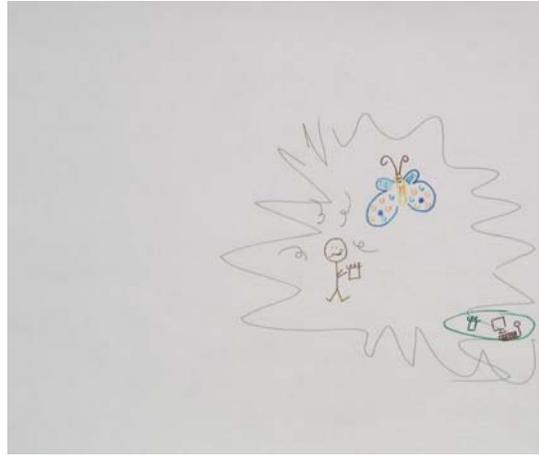
This section presents experiences using the second relational protocol with two supervisor/supervisee relationships, relationships that are a requisite part of the training of marriage and family therapists. In the first dyad, the supervisor is a junior faculty member and the supervisee is a second year doctoral student. In the second dyad, the "supervisor" is, in fact, a "supervisor-in-training" enrolled in a course on marriage and family therapy supervision as well as the supervisee of the first supervisor/supervisee dyad. The supervisee is a first year marriage and family therapy doctoral student.

The second relational protocol is distinctly different from the protocol used in the previous section. First, members of the dyad are each asked to draw their view of the relationship. Each member of the dyad identifies positive and opposing negative elements associated with the relationship. Each member of the dyad then applies the bilateral art intervention to his or her identified positive and negative elements. Finally, each member of the dyad creates a post-intervention drawing of his or her view of the relationship and the visual products and individual responses are explored.

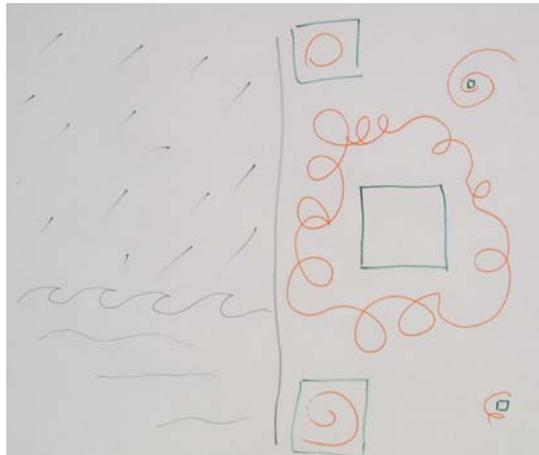
Supervisor/Supervisee Dyad 1

The first supervisor/supervisee dyad involves a junior marriage and family therapy faculty supervisor and an older second career marriage and family therapy doctoral student. The supervisor's pre-intervention relationship drawing, shown in Figure 5.2a, reflects her response to the experience of supervising a professor emeritus of computer science who was pursuing a second career as a marriage and family therapist. She viewed the supervisee as a colorful butterfly free to explore her new life and herself as a stick figure uncertain about how to work with someone who had just tossed aside the life to which she was now aspiring. The items so necessary to the new faculty member and tossed aside by the supervisee were encased in a circle in the lower right corner of the drawing. Cognizant of the supervisee's prior career and life experience, the supervisor identified the positive element "I can contribute" and the opposing element "there is nothing I can do" as the foci for the bilateral art intervention. Responses to these elements are shown in the bilateral art drawing in Figure 5.2b with the positive element on the right and the negative element reflecting the hopelessness the supervisor felt on the left. The strength of the supervisor's belief in the positive element increased from a 2 to a 7 and strength of belief in the negative element decreased from a 6+ to a 2 following the intervention. After completing the drawing and scaling process, the supervisor commented "it's all about me" with some expression of surprise. Finally, the supervisor's post-intervention drawing of the relationship is shown in Figure 5.2c. Following this drawing the supervisor shared the belief that the supervisor and supervisee could learn together and enjoy the special qualities that each brought to the relationship. The drawing projects this shared experience surrounded by wispy lines that represent the larger system in which they existed.

(a)



(b)



(c)

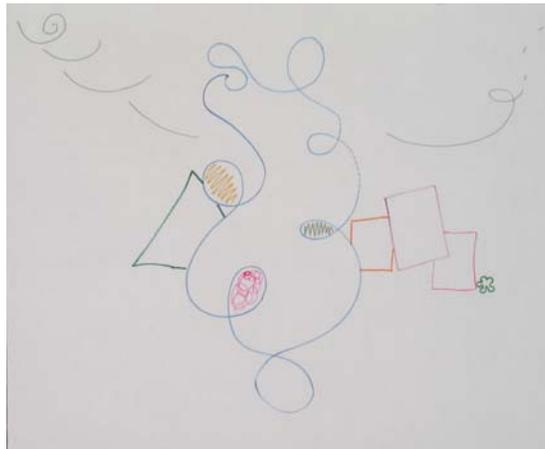


Figure 5.2 Supervisor's responses to the bilateral art protocol for exploring relationships (a) pre-intervention drawing of relationship, (b) bilateral art drawing with positive element "I can contribute" on the right and "there is nothing I can do" on the left, and (c) post-intervention drawing of the relationship.

The supervisee in this dyad, the retired professor, responded to the pre-intervention drawing of the relationship as shown in Figure 5.3a. She described herself as the cloud without a comfortable place to land. She was concerned that the much younger supervisor might not understand her stage of life and that the experience of supervision would be painful. For the bilateral art intervention, the supervisee identified the positive element “I can trust” and the opposing negative element “I can not trust [the supervisor to understand].” Figure 5.3b shows the bilateral art drawing with the positive element on the left and the negative element on the right. The strength of the supervisee’s belief in the positive element increased from a 5 to a 6 and strength of belief in the negative element decreased from a 4 to a 2 following the intervention. At this point the supervisee, noted the supervisor’s comment “it’s all about me.” She felt a sense of agreement as she looked at her own drawings focused on trust. It was sometime later that this sense of agreement was articulated. Finally, the supervisee’s post-intervention drawing of the relationship revealing much safer landing site for the cloud is shown in Figure 5.3c.

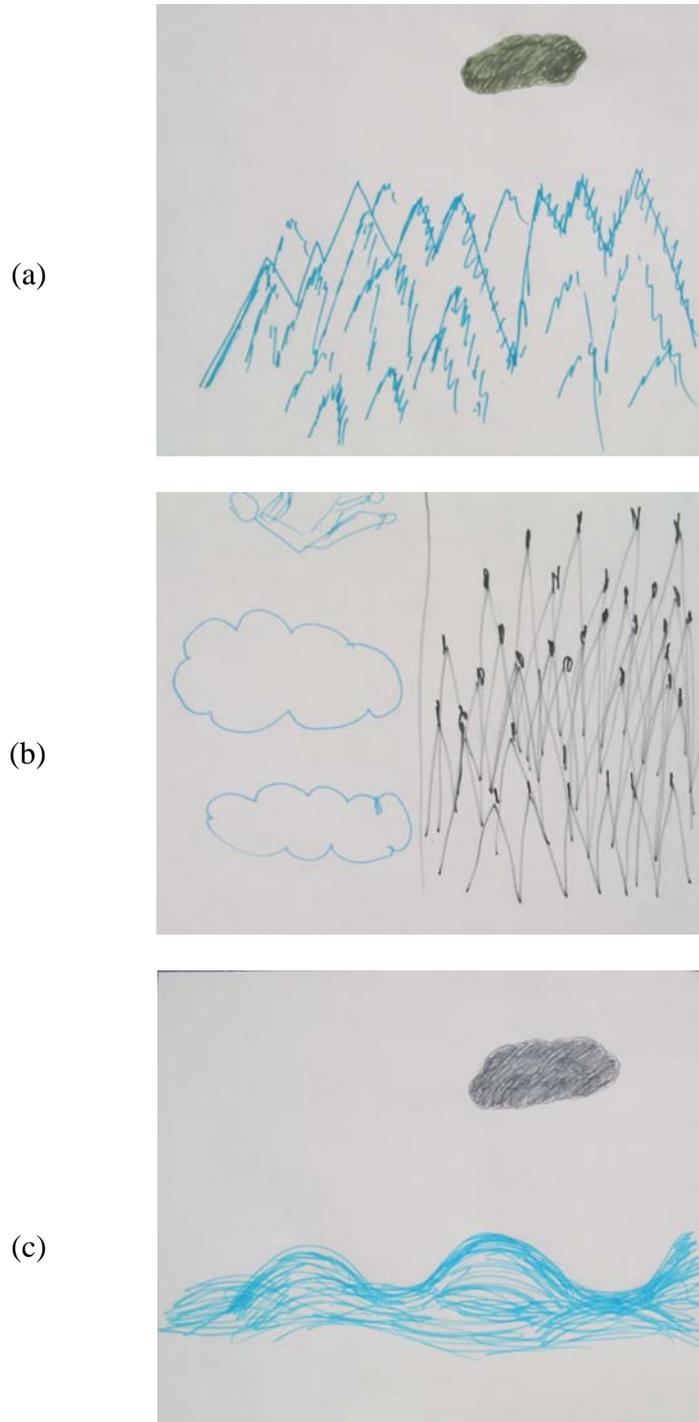


Figure 5.3. Supervisee’s responses to the bilateral art protocol for exploring relationships (a) pre-intervention drawing of relationship, (b) bilateral art drawing with positive element “I can trust” on the left and “I cannot trust” on the right, and (c) post-intervention drawing of the relationship.

Supervisor/Supervisee Dyad 2

The second supervisor/supervisee dyad adds a transgenerational element to this section. The “supervisor” of this section --- a second year doctoral student enrolled in the marriage and family therapy supervision class --- is the older second-career “supervisee” of the first supervisor/supervisee dyad. The supervisee in this dyad is a young first year marriage and family therapy doctoral student.

The supervisor-in-training’s drawing of the relationship is shown in Figure 5.4a. She commented that there were two people communicating but on different frequencies. She wanted to open up the dialog between herself and the supervisee. The supervisor-in-training was concerned that she had less formal experience as a marriage and family therapist than the “supervisee” and was having difficulty owning the life experience that contributed to her skills as a therapist and as a supervisor. For the bilateral art intervention, the supervisor-in-training identified the negative element first as “I don’t have much to offer here” and then the opposing positive element as “I do have something to offer.” Figure 5.4b shows the bilateral art drawing with the positive element --- a bright yellow sun --- on the left and the negative element --- an inert rock with a shadow cast by the sun --- on the right. Following the bilateral art intervention, the supervisor-in-training noted that “a rock can be good, it is stable and you can push against it.” The strength of belief in the positive element increased from a 3 to a 5 and the strength of belief in the negative element decreased from a 5 to a 2.5 following the intervention. The post-intervention drawing depicted the supervisee and supervisor-in-training both as bright yellow suns and she made the comment “I need to meet the supervisee where she is.” She was now owning her age and experience.

(a)



(b)



(c)

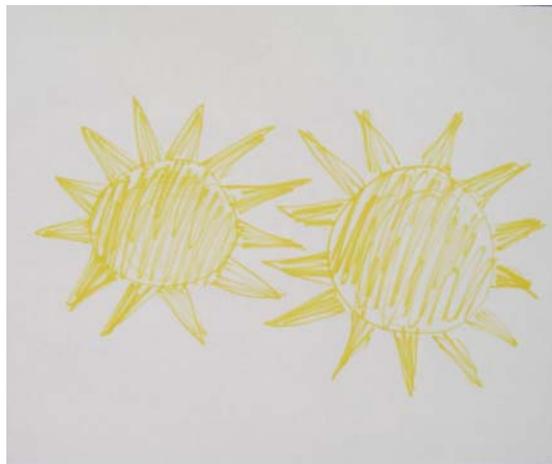
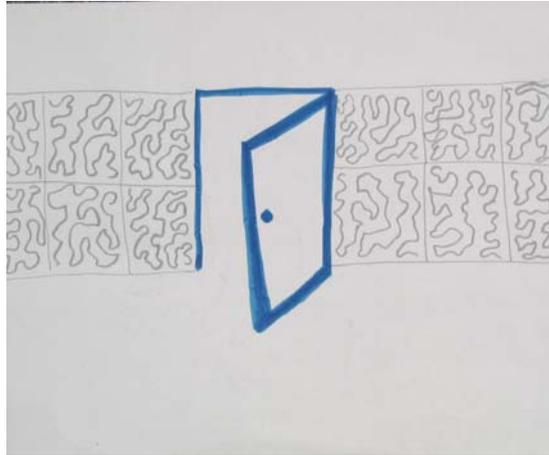


Figure 5.4. Supervisor-in-training's responses to the bilateral art protocol for exploring relationships (a) pre-intervention drawing of relationship, (b) bilateral art drawing with positive element "I do have something to offer" on the left and "I don't have much to offer here" on the right, and (c) post-intervention drawing of the relationship.

The supervisee in this dyad depicted her view of the supervisor-in-training/supervisee relationship as shown in Figure 5.5a. An open door is sandwiched between windows with diffusers occluding views on the other side of the window. The supervisee identified elements congruent with this drawing: the positive element being “I can see her” and the opposing negative element being “I can’t see her.” Figure 5.5b shows the bilateral art drawing with positive element on the right and negative element on the left. The supervisee’s strength of belief in the positive element increased from a 5 to a 6 and the strength of belief in the negative element remained the same following the intervention. The supervisee commented that “touching the positive element drawing made me laugh” and that when tracing the negative element “I rubbed very hard trying to smear it.” When using both hands to explore the images, she reported “touching the positive one was really fast [with] fast taps like skipping, changing fingers, funny, like having fun.” Additionally, she reported that on the right she was looking down a long tunnel whose sides were bright and that on the left she was looking down a long dark tunnel and could see diffuse light at the end. In her final drawing depicting the relationship, shown in Figure 5.5c, the supervisee commented that she that didn’t know where it came from, noting its difference from her previous drawings. She identified herself as one of the fish. The supervisor-in-training asked who the jellyfish was and the supervisee was unsure and was unable to place the supervisor-in-training in the picture. In a subsequent discussion with the supervisee, she commented that she had been concerned about her final drawing, Figure 5.5c, and had given it some thought. She acknowledged that she had experienced a traumatic event the evening prior to the intervention and was concerned that thoughts and feelings associated with that event had crept into her final drawing.

(a)



(b)



(c)



Figure 5.5 Supervisee's responses to the bilateral art protocol for exploring relationships (a) pre-intervention drawing of relationship, (b) bilateral art drawing with positive element "I can see her" on the right and "I can't see her" on the left, and (c) post-intervention drawing of the relationship.

Discussion

Several themes emerged from this exercise that are worth noting. Perhaps most obvious is that both supervisors experienced concern with the responsibility of being a supervisor --- being able to contribute. In addition, a thread existed that tied together the concerns of both supervisor and supervisee. In the first dyad, the supervisor was addressing precisely the issue that the supervisee was concerned about. She was articulating her concern with the uniqueness of the relationship just as the supervisee was articulating her concern that it would not be recognized. In the second dyad, the supervisor-in-training expressed her concern with her communication with the supervisee, a concern that resonated in the supervisee's drawing with the diffusers in the windows. I believe that these preliminary experiments provide support for further controlled studies that examine the effectiveness of these protocols.

Summary

This chapter provides case descriptions of experiences with two distinct protocols for the direct application of the bilateral art intervention to relationships. The first protocol is used with a couple struggling with issues of alcohol abuse. The second protocol is used to explore the relationship two supervisor/supervisee dyads that are an important part of the training of marriage and family therapists. The single case study using the first protocol yielded mixed results and additional examples are required before its effect can be evaluated. Experiences with the second protocol provide support for further investigation.

The next chapter extracts the discreet, quantitative results within the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 and summarizes the findings.