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Understanding Insecure Attachment: A Study Using Children's Bird Nest Imagery

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Abstract

This article describes a phenomenological study of the artistic creations of bird nests by four school-aged children to illuminate their internal experiences of attachment. The author analyzed qualitative data from in-depth interviews pertaining to two-dimensional and three-dimensional artistic representations of a bird's nest and a family of birds created by the child participants. Through the children's own voices and stories about their artwork, themes of danger, lack of protection, and vulnerability were elucidated. The study proposes that the Bird's Nest Drawing (BND) (Francis, Kaiser, & Deaver, 2003; Kaiser, 1996), and a Bird's Nest Sculpture (BNS) are valuable art therapy tools for understanding attachment schemas of children and their perceptions of their parental attachment-relationships.

Introduction

Researchers have identified a strong association between insecure attachment patterns and early behavioral problems such as aggression, anti-social behavior, and disruptive hyperactive behavior (Lyons-Ruth, 1996), and subsequent conduct disorder (Greenberg & Speltz, 1988). Insecure attachment in children also has been correlated with adult depression (Kobak, Studler, & Gamble, 1991), anxiety disorders (Warren, Huston, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997), eating disorders, and substance abuse (Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999; Francis, Kaiser, & Deaver, 2003). Until recently, the focus of attachment research has been devoted primarily to understanding and measuring attachment patterns and related behaviors in early childhood (under 6 years old) and in adulthood. Because of the breadth and severity of psychological and social-behavioral symptoms for which insecurely attached children are at risk, it seems necessary to understand the phenomenon of insecure attachment in school-aged children (Cicchetti, Toth, & Bush, 1988). Early identification of the influence that insecure attachment has on the development of the behaviors described above may help clinicians treat problems that become more resistant to change later in life (Bowlby, 1982; Main, 1995). Early intervention may prevent generational transmission of certain psychopathologies and/or insecure attachment organization (Dozier, Stovall, & Albus, 1999).

O'Connor and Zeanah (2003) postulated that "behaviors resembling [an] attachment disorder are probably more common in ordinary clinic samples than we appreciate, and that there is probably a high rate of mis- or under-reporting of these behaviors" (p. 323). Researchers have noted that there is a need to expand the understanding of the internal experiences of clinical populations of children to better identify distortions in internal working models that affect the organization of attachment and motivate behaviors (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Although researchers are starting to address the need for attachment measures in school-age children, understanding the actual lived experience of insecurely-attached school-aged children from clinical samples is still needed (Kerns, Schlegelmilch, Morgan, & Abraham, 2004).

The goal of this study was to inquire into children's internal experiences of attachment and early nurturing as reflected in their bird nest creations. A phenomenological method was appropriate for this goal because as a research method, its purpose is "to obtain a view into research participants' life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings constructed from their life experiences" (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 315). The phenomenological interview is "akin to an initial therapeutic interview when the focus is also on understanding the [participant's] reality" (Munhill & Boyd, 1993, p. 75). In this research, four children were asked to make two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of a bird's nest and a family of birds, and then engage in open-ended interviews about their creations. While prior research used the bird's nest as projective to identify graphic indicators of attachment patterns in adults (Francis, Kaiser, & Deaver, 2003; Kaiser, 1996), this study approached the art task as a springboard to elucidate children's narratives about their lived experiences. The guiding qualitative inquiry was: "Could artistic creations of a bird's nest metaphor contribute to the articulation of internal experiences and working models of attachment in school age children?" The research objective was to enhance the understanding of the particular nuances of these children's attachment patterns.

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Review of the Literature

Attachment Theory

Attachment, a biologically-programmed internalized behavioral control system, originates in infancy for the purpose of promoting survival, safety, and felt security through relationship with a clearly identified individual: namely, the attachment figure or caregiver (Bowlby, 1982). Insecure attachment, according to Bowlby (1988), is a defensive condition resulting from early social and relationship experiences that limit a person's ability to adaptively connect with other human beings, to form healthy attachments, or to view the world as a reasonably trustworthy place. Because of maladaptive psychic structures that distort perceptions and expectations, subsequent behavioral strategies used by these children to increase attachment often are not optimally effective for developing emotional regulation and/or healthy social competence (Cassidy & Mohr, 2001). Cassidy and Mohr identified such strategies as unduly seeking attention; becoming easily frustrated and unable to self-soothe; bullying others; and/or exhibiting controlling, aggressive, and antisocial behaviors. Without an internalized model of felt security, insecurely attached children may not have adequate emotional commitment or identification with attachment figures during their school age years. The lack of an attachment relationship that provides the child with a sense of felt security may contribute to increasing acting-out and inappropriate behaviors at a time when peers and others outside the family take on more importance for the child (Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997).

The Bird's Nest Drawing (BND)

Kaiser (1996) developed the Bird's Nest Drawing (BND) projective assessment to evoke representations of attachment from adults. She proposed that the bird's nest visually and emotionally conveys the experience of attachment as well as metaphorical concepts of safety and protection. Kaiser thought that the BND would elicit projective material similar to a family drawing but with more emotional distance, and thus would be less threatening to the client and less likely to mobilize defenses. She developed an Attachment Rating Scale (ARS) to identify and measure specific graphic characteristics or indicators of secure and insecure attachment in drawings.

Francis, Kaiser, & Deaver (2003) extended research on the BND in a subsequent exploratory research project that measured and compared attachment patterns of adult substance abusers and non-substance abusers. Results indicated that a correlation exists between substance abuse and insecure attachment. Statistical significance was reached for some of the graphic indicators in the ARS when compared with the participants' identified attachment patterns. Participants also were asked to write two- to five-sentence stories about their BND in order to illuminate themes related to their internal representations of family and attachment relationships. The drawings were then compared to participants' self-reports derived from an adapted version of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire (RQ).

Understanding Psychological Organization of Attachment from Children's Perspectives

Currently, BND research has focused on the extent attachment patterns are revealed through assessing adult drawings. Most research in children's attachment to date has focused primarily on assessing behavior patterns and the BND has not been used. Munhill (1994) theorized that understanding the meaning a person attaches to an experience may have far greater value than focusing on behavioral patterns. Recognizing that research with children that asks them to respond to direct questions about the underlying meaning of their experiences may be difficult given their limited language and lack of abstract conceptual capabilities, the use of a metaphoric process to assist with children's communication seemed warranted and appropriate. Cox and Theilgaard (1987) postulated that the use of metaphor allows an individual to express the inexpressible and to reach the depths of internal experience without disturbing the surface of needed defenses. Therefore, I did not use the BND to screen for insecure attachment. I proposed instead to use the BND and a Bird's Nest Sculpture (BNS) as a metaphoric process to assist communication, potentially uncovering school age children's emotional root attachment experiences.

Method

Design

Data were collected from an art making session combined with an open-ended phenomenological interview. Four children participants were separately interviewed after creating a drawing (BND) and sculpture (BNS) of a bird's nest and "the birds that live there." The BNS, using clay, twigs, and Spanish moss, created a three-dimensional source of corroborating data from the BND. I proposed that the sensory, tactile, and flexible qualities of three-dimensional artistic materials would stimulate risk-taking and assist in the development of concepts and communication of ideas. In addition, I expected that using both two-dimensional and three-dimensional media together would offer a broader mode of perception. As Smilansky, Hagan, and Lewis (1988) hypothesized, "conceiving an object or concept through several types of [art] media allows children to focus on different aspects of the same idea" (p. 29).

Recruitment and Participants

Children who volunteered for this study were identified by the research facility as being in the initial stage of retaining therapeutic services due to insecure attachment. A routine initial screening and battery of assessment tests for insecure attachment included the Randolph Attachment Disorder Questionnaire, the Behavior Assessment System for Children, The Marschak Interaction Method, the Trauma Symptom Checklist, and the Test of Variables of

Attention. Inclusion criteria included being between the ages of 7 and 11 and not exhibiting extreme violent behavior, extreme hyperactivity, and/or severe mental retardation. Once identified, children participants and parents were given invitations to participate and an informed consent meeting was scheduled for those parents and children who expressed an interest. Because of time restraints, recruitment stopped when four participants (3 girls and 1 boy) agreed to participate in the study. There was no access to any confidential information other than what was necessary for the inclusion criteria of the study. Pseudonyms are used in this article to protect confidentiality.

Investigational Methods and Procedures

Initially, to help assure study validity, a reflective phenomenological process known as "Epoche" identified and set aside predisposing assumptions and biases (Moustakas, 1994). The assumption that insecurely attached children would find it difficult to relate to and/or trust the research interviewer, thus hampering communication, was set aside. Another assumption set aside was the belief that insecurely attached children have incoherent and conflicting working models, making it difficult to communicate about attachment experiences. Then, in-depth artistic and verbal audiotaped interview data collection sessions, each taking approximately 1-1/2 hours, were undertaken with the children individually in a familiar setting at the research facility. Each child was offered a variety of art supplies: non-hardening plastina colored modeling clay, carving tools, a tray to be used as a base for the sculpture, a pencil and eraser, assorted colored pencils, assorted markers both broad and fine tipped, crayons, and 11" x 14" white paper. In order to enhance the potential tactile and sensory experience, twigs and Spanish moss were also supplied for the sculptural procedure of creating and building the bird's nest.

The directive given to each participant was: "You may use any of these art materials to make a drawing and a clay sculpture about a bird's nest, the birds that live there, and where the bird's nest is located. After you are finished, I will ask you questions and let you tell a story about your creations. You may start with either the drawing or the sculpture using clay." These directions expanded the directive used in the Francis, Kaiser, and Deaver (2003) study with adults to: "Draw a picture with a bird's nest" (p. 128). Based upon cognitive developmental theory, the modification of the directions to incorporate more concrete specifics was considered justified in that school age children, who exhibit concrete-operational thinking, may better understand what was being asked of them under the modified directions.

Engagement with the children in open-ended responsive interviews about their created art and their experiences of drawing and sculpting art as vehicles for verbal expression followed typical phenomenology inquiry that does not adhere to rigid, pre-determined questions. Fontana and Frey (2000) suggested that this kind of unstructured interview "can provide a greater breadth of data" than other types of interviews as it relies upon broad-based questions and subsequent probing for more depth in response to participants' descriptions (p. 652). Phenomenological interviews are bound by specific research objectives in order to eliminate the risk of probing beyond the purpose of the research. Explorations of the children's attachment experiences were sought through verbal exchanges with the children that built on themes from their emerging visual representations of bird's nests. Images in the children's art of mother birds, father birds, baby birds, secure or insecure construction of the nests (Kaiser, 1996), nest surroundings, location, and proximity of birds to one another were observed and used to help focus communication on the children's internal working models of attachment and relationships. The objectives were to understand the children's experiences of care, protection, and nurture, as well as their underlying goals, beliefs, and perceptions informing attachment behaviors. In addition, the children were asked to reflect on their experiences of making art to better understand how and to what extent, if any, the use of art making assists in communicating attachment and relationship experiences.

Analysis

Audio taped interviews were reviewed and transcribed verbatim, deleting personal confidential information. Original art was photographed and then returned to the child participants. An inductive reduction process of analysis was used in order to extrapolate general conclusions from the children's many specific statements (Moustakas, 1994; Munhill & Boyd, 1993). Steps in this process involved taking raw narratives, breaking down component parts into categories called meaning units, identifying essential themes, and then re-describing the participants' experiences of attachment in a more condensed and coherent manner. As part of the analysis, an imaginative variation process—making up a story about the noted phenomenon using an alternative alien context—was used. This effort to maintain openness and skepticism about noted patterns and descriptions led to revisions of the meaning units and themes. Data collection from each participant was first analyzed individually and then later a composite description of the common experience of all four participants was undertaken.

The Experience of Insecure Attachment

Through the children's bird's nest narratives, the children communicated their perceptions and expectations about available care, nurture, and interrelationships with caregivers. Representations of negative or absent interchanges with attachment figures seemed to support internal schemas of not being able to be protected, cared-for, or nurtured. The children expressed a view that the world is a dangerous and hurtful place in which the birds in the stories felt vulnerable. The essence of the experience of using the BND and the BNS to communicate early pre-verbal attachment experiences is that creating art was enjoyable for these children. They were able to easily convey thoughts, emotions,

and perceptions about care giving experiences through their metaphorical representations of a bird's nest and a family of birds. The following is a description of some of the thematic categories or domains common to the children.

A Lack of Feeling Safe Within a Home Base, With or Without Attachment Figures

Although given the opportunity to create bird's nests of their choosing, the children all created nests that they communicated were not safe. Susan's concern for safety involved the nest being in a low tree vulnerable to environmental influences. Unable to rely on their mother who stayed behind, the baby birds were no longer in this nest (Figure 1). Jane articulated concern that squirrels were going to climb over the nest, mess with the birds, and eat the food in the birdfeeder (Figure 3). Danger was extended when she said the branch where the nest resided was "thin" and "not so secure," and, "If a bird is stupid enough to live on a thin branch and not notice, it would fall off." The presence of attachment figures did not seem to affect concerns for safety. Being significantly focused on hiding birds in the nest he created (Figure 5), Robert expressed concern that attachment figures would have to be bigger in order to provide safety, Mary sculpted a baby bird standing on the edge of the nest and then articulated that birds are vulnerable to falling off edges, being eaten by hawks, and freezing in the night air even when caregivers are there (Figure 7).

Negative and/or Abandonment Experiences with Attachment Figures

Attachment figures were described as either not able to adequately protect, nurture, or provide; or not there when needed. Susan created the nest without baby birds, saying they were somewhere unknown. The mother bird she put in the nest stayed asleep, alone and angry (Figure 1). Later she articulated that the mother bird never talked, played, or interacted with the babies, except to occasionally feed them. When feeding the babies, "the babies are thinking they are still hungry." Jane drew baby birds in the nest without the mother, stating, "The mother bird just probably left and didn't care about the nest" (Figure 3). "The baby is thinking, 'I want to have another worm, [I'm] hungry,' yet the mom hasn't thought nothing like being hungry." Mary said about her nest (Figure 7):

> The babies are not very protected because they can't fly and they don't have enough food, and they don't even know where they are going, because they didn't even see the real world yet, except for their nest…they don't have any life protection or anything like that around them, so they just have to live with it.

In several stories, eggs hatched without the presence or protection of caregivers. While explaining her drawing, Susan insisted that although the mother was there, the egg cracked open by itself (Figure 2). Jane, whose drawn nest included eggs without the mother, said, "Well, mom just came back and her wings are tired. She's just staying there for like five seconds, then she's gonna go over to her. Well, she didn't notice she hatched and she's trying to look for a worm. Oh, she found one and she is going to go down" (Figure 3). Robert claimed there could not be any eggs because they would be some other bird's eggs. His narrative was filled with vignettes of birds attacking, being attacked, getting hurt, and stealing other bird's eggs.

Figure 1 7-year-old Susan's Sculpture

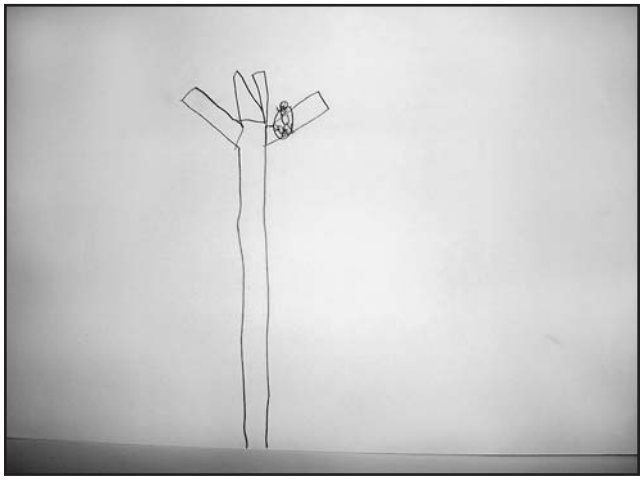

Figure 2 7-year-old Susan's Drawing

In some instances, internal working models included being fearful of attachment figures who seemed frightening themselves. This is consistent with research indicating that where there may be child abuse, parental mental illness, or depression, the child subsequently may have a disorganized insecure attachment pattern (Cassidy & Mohr, 2001). Susan expressed fear regarding attachment figures in the bird family, saying, "No one in the family tells anything or talks to each other. The babies can't talk. They have no idea what mom or dad are thinking or feeling." Jane identified her birds as "bluejays who are not very nice and take other bird's eggs" (Figure 4). She said, "The babies feel scared, but they are with their mom." Later in her story she explained, "I think this mom is going to be a friendly blue-

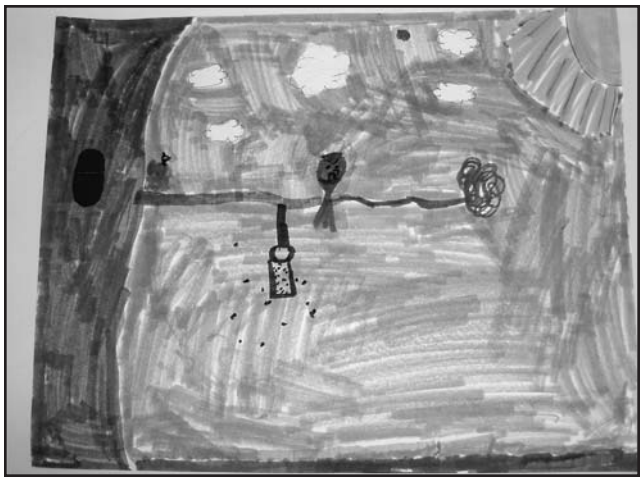

Figure 3 9-year-old Jane's Drawing

Figure 5 9-1/2-year-old Robert's Sculpture

Figure 4 9-year-old Jane's Sculpture

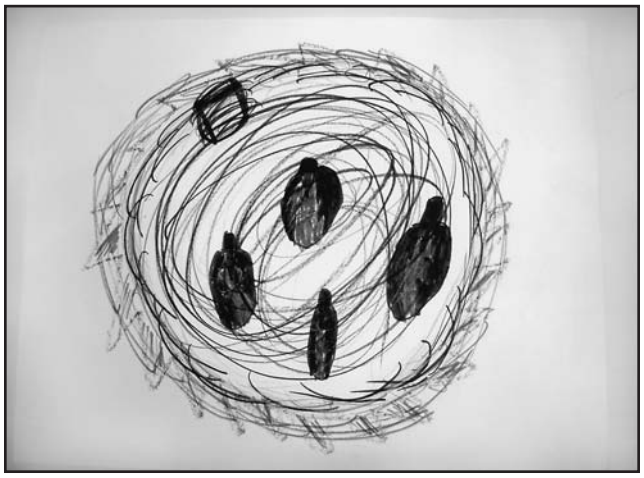

Figure 6 9-1/2-year-old Robert's Drawing

jay, and it is going to cradle the eggs." Mary stated, "They might feel a little nervous when their mom is there because maybe it's not their real mom and they got the wrong nest" (Figure 8). She went on to say that:

> Maybe [the babies] think it is not the real mom because it might look the same but maybe it's not the same. Maybe the way she acts and the way she feels doesn't seem real…like the way she feeds them…the mom that's not real, maybe the mom wouldn't think she had three babies (chuckles). She would think she only had two and they would think she is a little wacko, 'cause they think it's hers and…the not real mother would forget the bird that didn't listen and stay in the nest.

For some of the children, father figures were portrayed as frightening. Susan, in describing Figure 2, was adamant about the mother and father never talking or doing anything together, and the babies not being protected. She claimed, "Kids are kinda nervous when being watched by dad. Dad is really, really, really strong." While sculpting the father figure, Jane claimed, "Daddy will have the biggest beak and it will be opened like the mom. But, he doesn't have a tongue. He's not a really good father. He doesn't have a face or anything" (Figure 4). In her story, the father was always pecking at other birds and disturbing humans. "He is going to peck all over their body. They are gonna get really hurt." Then while stretching her arms out, she claimed, "They are gonna have a humungous band-aid like this whenever the bird pecks at them."

Seeing the World as a Dangerous Place

Children expressed feeling an overall lack of safety and helplessness in a dangerous world. Jane expressed concern, stating, "Now between the time they would fall out of the nest and the time mom would come, maybe a hawk or something, and then they would be eaten" (Figure 3). Mary talked about birds being vulnerable to falling off nest edges, being eaten by hawks, being hit by tire swings, being abandoned, not being fed, or freezing from the night air (Figures 7 & 8). She said that the birds felt "pretty helpless." Even the "brave bird" acted "brave, but he's not really." She went on to describe bad dreams birds have about

something coming after them. Future concern was expressed for the birds. "Once these babies grow up, maybe they could go away and then they have babies, and then the thing goes on again…they can do whatever they want but are still unprotected." Robert claimed his birds were "eagles," who are an "endangered species" that need protection (Figures 5 & 6). His story was filled with tales of hunters catching and shooting eagles because the nest was easily spotted and insecurely placed in a high tree. He positioned the birds in his drawing facing down so they could not see above them, where danger resided. The sense of helplessness was also conveyed by Mary when she said, "No way are they protected. If danger comes by I don't think they would communicate and no one would care if they were left, would leave, 'cause some of the birds don't even know them" (Figures 7 & 8).

Figure 7 11-year-old Mary's Sculpture

Strategies to Make Up for Lack of Security, Protection and Care

The children expressed varied strategies for dealing with not feeling secure or nurtured. Two of the children included schemas that involved others providing protection or comfort instead of attachment figures. Jane chose to draw an owl hole and to include an owl as a protective figure for the birds (Figure 3), claiming:

> The owl is their friend. If mom does not come back, they would have the owl. If the branch broke, well, the owl is really big and can catch the birds with the baby. The mom can just move to another nest, and the owl can bring it up there and then the owl can set down back and bring his stuff and all that.

Robert claimed that multiple bird families could live together and "be in a flock" to "gang up and attack" (Figure 5).

Although not secure with attachment figures, some children wanted their bird families to stay close to home. Jane, who expressed seeing the world as "mean and unsafe," insisted that the nest would have to be in her backyard, a familiar surrounding, because if not, "the birds would not get treated right" (Figure 3). When talking about surrounding danger, Robert said, "The kid birds will have to go out on their own…but live close to their family, or be maybe like right next to them in the same tree" (Figure 5). He continued, "It is good to have more grown-ups to distract them and attack too…like four against two…grown-ups and kids would both attack. Well, mean birds can really *kill* 'em, that's one thing."

These children communicated fascination with danger and violence. In her drawing, Jane created a huge sun, saying, "It is hot! Looks like the [mother] bird is about to melt…aahh… melting …in the *Wizard of Oz,* the witch melts, I think. If would be funny if [the mother bird] was like a jay with the fire colors on it…funny and scary" (Figure 3). Robert created his child birds with "claws," so sharp he said they looked like "blades," that grabbed and hurt others. He also claimed that "thorns" were around the nest as sharp as "blades on a chain saw." He went on to describe experiences of watching birds and other insects attacking and eating each other.

Mary's response to feeling vulnerable, fearful, and insecure was for her birds to have difficulty managing strong emotions. While talking about the bird at the edge of her sculpted nest, she said, "The bird at the edge doesn't have any sense of danger. He is really taking a risk and not protecting himself because he is not listening. He can't handle all the feelings, so he stops listening" (Figure 7). In reference to her drawing, she stammered, "They are feeling anxious, like anxious and, like I don't know like feeling is for mad, for like sad, and scared, and happy? Sort of whatever…" After entitling her art, "A Nervous Wreck" (Figure 8), she said, "You can never like feel the same feelings, like feel relaxed…that's why I think [the birds] fly around too much. They get hyper when they're anxious and looking around." She claimed her own experience of "receiving so many mixed messages" and "never knowing when something awful could happen" made it difficult for her to modulate or understand her own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.

Experiencing Feeling Safer at Night

All the children expressed the idea that nighttime seemed safer. Susan claimed that it was a nice place with stars at night (Figure 2). She went on to say, "The babies get fed at nighttime, yet during the day they are nervous."

Discussing feeling safer at night, Robert explained:

> Kids only go out in the early morning or sometimes at night 'cause hunters, um, if it was in the early morning the hunters would probably still be tired, grown-ups in the morning are tired, 'cause they have to sleep, and when it's dark they would be sleepy too, so that's why.

Mary expressed how nighttime made the birds relax:

> Maybe the nighttime makes them relax. But sometimes, you might never know when things can happen at night. But, it's more relaxing because there are lots of birds chirping around

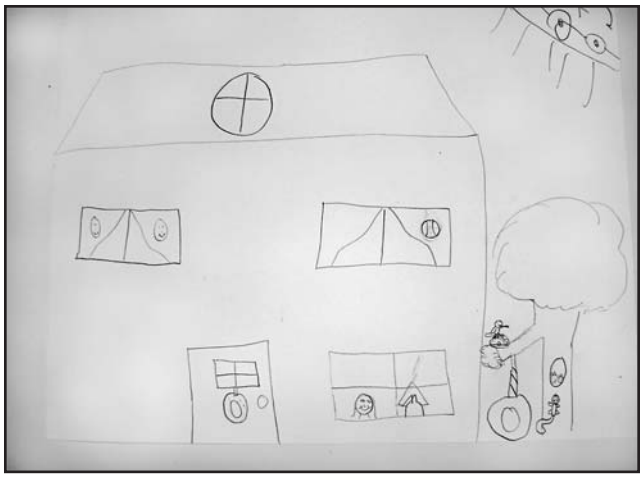

Figure 8 11-year-old Mary's Drawing

them and there's lots of squirrels doing scratching and eating acorns, and tires cracking and stuff, so I think they would relax at night because they need some sleep.

Making Art is a Positive Experience Leading to Enhanced Communication

When asked if art making helped them remember and talk about relationship experiences, all the children responded affirmatively. Three of the children stated that the sculpture helped them better than the drawing. Jane said, "It's more fun, and I like talking when doing that stuff." Robert said, "Well, one reason was 'cause it took me longer and you are actually building it, the longer you do stuff, you think of more stuff on the subject that you are doing." All expressed enjoyment in the art making experience, particularly with the experience of sculpting. Mary said, "I like feeling clay and I like how it feels, it feels funny, all sticky and sweaty." Later she let out a deep breath, sighed, and said, "Working with the sculpture helps me relax from feeling nervous and anxious and other stuff." As research suggests, manipulating the sculpted materials (pounding, punching, stabbing, pulling, and cutting) may have led to appropriate discharge of energies and thus a release of anxiety (Smilansky, Hagan, & Lewis, 1988).

Discussion

Limitations and Recommendations

Because the small sample precludes the possibility of being able to generalize results of this study to a larger population, the descriptive nature of the data offers only the meaning of the point of view of the research participants. However, themes such as a lack of feeling secure within close relationships, a sense of abandonment, a sense of vulnerability or danger, and the absence of protection or nurture were consistent with previous research (Francis, Kaiser, & Deaver, 2003).

The scope of this study being limited by Drexel University Institutional Review Board (IRB) precluded access to medical record information as further support for research conclusions. Therefore, I was not able to use additional data to support any of my research assumptions. However, after completion of the study, staff at the research facility substantiated the accuracy of the findings, and subsequently used much of the information developed through the study for therapeutic advancement of the children.

In accordance with human subjects research ethical guidelines, the one-time meeting for the data collection session was designed to minimize psychological risk and physical fatigue for an at-risk population of children. Therefore, another limitation of this study was the inability to use prolonged engagement or, more importantly, member checks, which would have solicited the children's views on the credibility and accuracy of the researcher's findings. There was, however, a short informal debriefing after the data collection process as the children opted to share their art and review some of their statements with their parents upon reunion.

In lieu of being able to conduct more than one interview in prolonged engagement with study participants, I opted to use persistent and continual reading, refinement, and engagement with the data. In an attempt to accurately interpret and present the voices and felt experiences of the participants, I also maintained vigilance about possible presuppositions and researcher bias. Although I was not able to go back and test the accuracy of the developing meaning units and themes with study participants, extensive external audits by a research committee from Drexel University were used for the purpose of helping to verify the accuracy and limit the inherent biases in the inductive data analysis process. I also tested plausible meanings of the emergent rich descriptions by evaluating possible alternative explanations through the imaginative variation process as described in the data analysis section.

Although the focus of my research did not address identifying graphic indicators, I could make a case for the appearance of similar graphic symbols in my study to those outlined in the Francis, Kaiser, and Deaver study (2003) and the Kaiser study (1996). For example, tilted nests or the appearance that nest contents could fall out, and the omission of eggs, babies, or parent birds from the nest all were noted. Trustworthiness of the descriptions could be considered established by triangulation of the data collection and comparing content in the children's verbalizations with what they portrayed in their artwork.

Recommended for future studies is using more rigorous validated attachment measures, such as the MacArthur Preschool Strange Situation (Cassidy & Marvin, 1992), to identify children's attachment categories. In this way, researchers could identify specific insecure attachment categories (insecure/resistant-ambivalent, insecure/avoidant, disorganized or role-reversed controlling, or insecure-other) to enhance understanding of how children's internal experiences relate to their use of different strategies. Also recommended is study replication with a larger participant sample size that includes a control group of children identified as securely-attached.

Implications and Conclusion

The inclusion of children participant perspectives is a critical addition to the needed knowledge base of insecure attachment patterns. The lack of felt security and protection from attachment figures and home bases expressed by these children may predispose them to transfer feelings of insecurity towards others in their environment. As Waldinger, Toth, and Gerber (2001) proposed, new situations may be predicted to be like old familiar situations, and children may act in ways that result in repetition of disturbed interpersonal patterns. In addition, insecure attachment is hypothesized to be a risk factor for maladapted responses to future environmental traumatic stressors such as child abuse or domestic violence (Lieberman & Amaya-Jackson, 2005). Using the bird's nest metaphor may better enable clinicians to understand internal structures children have of early preverbal relationship experiences that affect subsequent relationships. By revealing nuances of children's subjective experiences that reflect their emotions, beliefs, and behaviors through phenomenology (versus simply classifying children's behaviors into categories of insecure attachment organization and reducing their stories to standardized measures), a clinician's understanding of a child's insecure attachment may be measurably enhanced. Understanding, early on, the particular internal experiences and structures of children may enable early intervention before untreated and/or unrecognized maladaptive patterns increase the risk for future pathology.

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