



What can play therapists learn from researchers who use children's art as data?

Elizabeth (Lisa) A. Gassin, Ph.D., LPC

Nerd that I am, I am toying with the idea of doing a study of children's experiences of religious ritual. While that sounds light years away from my work in play therapy, there's actually an overlap: I would probably have my child-participants draw about their ritual experiences. This has led me into the literature on how researchers have used art in their scholarship, which in turn, has me reflecting on how I use art in the play room.

Some of you probably know about the "doll studies" of Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Conducted back in the mid-1900s, these studies asked African American children to respond to a variety of questions (e.g., "which doll is the pretty one?") by pointing at either a White or African American doll. If you're not familiar with these studies, you can read a quick blurb [here](#). The Clarks' data were important evidence in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that ended racial segregation in schools.

It turns out that the Clarks also developed something called the "Coloring Test," where children were asked to color outlined figures in the same color as their skin and in the color they like people to be (Clark & Clark, 1950). A significant minority of very dark children colored the figure of themselves with white or yellow crayons, and over 30% of the overall sample colored the ideal child as white or yellow.

Reading about the Clarks' Color Test reminded me of my use of the Kinetic Family Drawing test (Burns & Kaufman, 1987) when evaluating families. Many of you are familiar with this measure, but for those who aren't, it simply asks each person involved to draw members of the family, including themselves,

doing something. It's always interesting to see what happens when a family has a child of a different ethnic background. Does that child draw themselves in the same color as the other family members? If so, what might that mean? Does the child use approximately correct colors to draw themselves and others in the family? If so, how do they think and feel about the fact that their skin is a different color? How does each family member react to what the child is saying in response to such a question? What does all this imply about the child's acceptance into the family? His or her view of himself?

Another interesting line of work explores children's views of occupations via their drawings. Given America's strong interest in promoting science education since the Sputnik era of the 1950s, perhaps it is not surprising that the two main manifestations of such assessments are the *Draw-A-Scientist Test* (Chambers, 1983) and *Draw-An-Engineer Test* (Ganesh, 2011). The first of these has been used in many studies over the last few decades to explore stereotypes about scientists and the impact of various programs designed to encourage under-represented populations to go into scientific fields. In his original work, Chambers (1983) found that elementary-aged children usually drew scientists with lab coats, eyeglasses, and facial hair....the latter being a tip-off to the gender they assumed scientists to be. In addition, on first request about 5% of children drew a "mad scientist," and upon request to "draw another scientist," an even larger proportion did so. Perhaps most obviously, such an approach could be used by mental health professionals

APT National Conference

October 4-9, 2016
Louisville, KY

Please consider joining play therapists from all over the USA for APT's national conference this year! It will be held in Louisville, KY... not too far away from many of us.

There are over 60 workshops to choose from, and Dr. Eliana Gil will be the keynote speaker.

See the following URL for more details:

<http://www.a4pt.org/?page=2016AnnualConference>

If you are interested in connecting with other Illinois branch members for carpooling and sharing hotel rooms, please contact Christie Mason, IL-APT VP, by e-mail before Sept 1 at cmason3@luc.edu.



Spring 2016 Wrap-Up

IL-APT enjoyed a busy first half of 2016. In February, we held our annual branch meeting with Dr. Kim Vander Dussen, who spoke on two topics: identifying and working with sensory issues, and using superheroes in play therapy. Both days were instructive, and the second day—especially entertaining! IL-APT also hosted *A Morning of Play* networking and training event on April 16th. We had a fabulous group of 12 play therapists and students who came together to discuss two intriguing topics: (1) using narrative play therapy to treat childhood addictions and (2) developmental play therapy supervision. A special shout out to presenters Laura Tejada, Susan Stutzman, and Pam Davis; and a huge thanks to Alicen McGowen who secured the perfect venue for us at a greatly reduced rate!

Play Therapy 101....Online!

Wednesday, August 31st, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Learn about play therapy from the comfort of your own home! IL-APT will be offering web-based training introducing basic concepts & practices in play therapy, including types of play, theories of play therapy, & essential play therapy skills. By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- 1) Articulate a rationale for using play-based interventions with children;
- 2) Summarize the evidence base for play therapy;
- 3) Identify several models of play therapy intervention, including child-centered, cognitive-behavioral & psychodynamic play therapies;
- 4) Understand basic play therapy skills such as verbal tracking, mirroring, & the use of metaphor;

Online training info cont'd on final page

New APT continuing education provider logo

When enrolling for CEU opportunities, look for the new APT CE provider logo (to the right) to be sure the hours will count towards earning or maintaining your RPT/S. Of course, the Illinois branch of APT is an approved provider: Every educational opportunity we provide helps you earn or maintain your registration!



Cont'd from p. 1:

engaged in career education at any level. Do students'/clients' drawings of certain careers imply exclusion of certain groups? Do they imply one must have certain personality characteristics to succeed? Are those implications reflective of reality?

By extension, the general technique of "Draw-A-____" could be used to explore a client's view of any social role. How would the middle-aged male client who is dissatisfied with his relationship with his children "draw-a-dad"? Does his drawing portray a man dressed for his profession? A man in a suit with a briefcase, or dressed in a construction worker's orange? Are there others in the picture? What might all this mean for his conception of his role as a father? Is he "just" a provider, with no interpersonal connection? If he were challenged to draw other parts of being a dad, what would he draw?

I hasten to add that it is not our role to interpret client drawings. Research attempting to link certain personal traits (e.g., anger) or experiences (e.g., abuse) to characteristics of artwork finds, at best, only weak relationships. As we all learned in our graduate programs, drawings fall into the category of projective assessment measures, which tend to have relatively low reliability and validity. However, a client's drawings *can* provide very helpful stimuli for forming ideas about what *might* be going on in the client's life, which in turn provide fodder for discussion with the client. As play therapists, we take the researchers' work one step further: they use drawings to gather information, but we can use them to gather information that in turn is used for healing.

References listed on the final page of this newsletter.

Are you one of 1.7 billion?

Users of Facebook, that is...

If so, be sure to "like" our Illinois Association for Play Therapy page on Facebook. Then, to make sure you actually see our posts in your news feed, click the triangle next to the "Liked" button at the bottom right of our cover photo and check "See first."

Looking for Student Ambassadors!

IL-APT has an opening two (2) student ambassadors. The duties of a Student Ambassador include, but are not limited to:

- *Attendance to quarterly IL-APT Board meetings*
- *Assistance with IL-APT social media (marketing, posts on Facebook, etc. regarding IL-APT events)*
- *Assistance during the annual IL-APT Conference*

These positions are open to students working toward their Master's degree in the mental

Continued on final page

A Dollop of Data

Examples of recent research related to play therapy

Fantasy play and executive function: Researchers assigned pre-school aged children to one of three groups: "fantastical pretend play" (FPP), non-imaginative play, and a control group. The first group showed significantly more improvement in executive functioning by the end of the study. Interestingly, the differences between the FPP group and the non-imaginative play group were usually bigger than the differences between the FPP and control groups. **See:** Thibodeau et al. (2016). The effects of fantastical pretend play on executive functioning: An intervention study. *J. of Experimental Child Psychology, 145*, 120-138.

As we hear so often around APT:

**PLAY
THERAPY
WORKS!**

References for *What Can Play Therapists Learn...*

Burns, R. C., & Kaufman, S. H. (1987). *Kinetic Family Drawings (K-F-D): An introduction to understanding children through kinetic drawings*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

Chambers, D. W. (1983). Stereotypic images of the scientist: The Draw-A-Scientist Test. *Science Education*, 67, 255-265.

Clark, K., & Clark, M. P. (1950). The Negro child in the American social order. *Journal of Negro Education*, 19, 341-350.

Ganesh, T. G. (2011). Children-produced drawings: An interpretive and analytic tool for researchers. In E. Margolis & L. Pauwels (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of visual research methods* (pp. 214-240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Upcoming Online Training, cont'd:

5) Identify play therapy modalities such as art, sand, & pretend play

This training is ideal for beginning play therapists. Registration is \$20 and can be completed at the following [link](#). Registered participants will be provided login information via email prior to the training session. Participation requires an internet connection, web browser, & headphones; a microphone is optional, & no video camera is required. Please contact Christie Mason, IL-A4PT Vice President, with questions at cmason3@luc.edu.

Next IL-APT Board Meeting

Open to everyone!

Sunday, August 21st, 1:30-3:30 p

Thomas Ford Memorial Library

Western Springs, IL

Board Room

Hope to see you there!

Your IL-APT Board Members

Pam Davis, *President*

Christie Mason, *Vice President*

Laura Tejada, *Secretary*

Cheryl Welsh, *Treasurer*

Lisa Gassin, *Newsletter*

Simone Schmale & Erin Brumfield Grima, *Membership & Media Co-Chairs*

Mary-Alice Wentling & June Stroner, *Training Co-Chairs*

Education for all via APT!

Don't forget that APT offers educational resources for professionals and parents. Visit the Education & Training tab at a4pt.org for professional opportunities, and have parents visit the [Parents' Corner](#) at the same site to learn more about play therapy and children's mental health!

Looking for student ambassadors, cont'd.:

health field (counseling, social work, marriage and family). In exchange for this assistance the Student Ambassadors would receive free attendance to the annual 2-day IL-APT Conference.

Applicants may submit their Letters of Interest and CV to mawentling@hotmail.com by September 30, 2016. The IL-APT Board will review applications during the first week of October and notify applicants of their standing.

Have feedback, questions, and/or ideas about IL-APT's *On the Go* newsletter? Wish to contribute an article or other content to future additions? Contact the newsletter coordinator, Lisa Gassin, at lgassin@olivet.edu.