





Art therapy as a Tool for Treatment of Couples' Dynamics in Relocation

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The Professional School of Psychology

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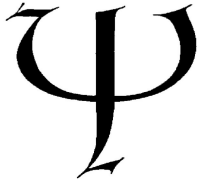


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***“Art therapy as a Tool for Treatment of Couples’  
Dynamics in Relocation”***

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The Professional School of Psychology  
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Abstract of the Dissertation

Art therapy as a Tool for Treatment of Couples Dynamics in Relocation

By

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The research aims at identifying the advantages and overall benefit of using art therapy to treat couples in relocation. The couple in the case began their relocation with no proper preparation, lacking the needed depth in their relationship to cope with the challenges of relocation and as a result, their relationship deteriorated.

The results of this study reveal that pivotal moments in the therapy were created directly by the implementation of art therapy.

The research identified seven themes that are list below. Each theme had an implicit impact on the relations of the case study's subjects, on their wellbeing as a relocated couple, and on the success and fulfillment of their relocation assignment:

- Expectations from the Relocation
- Separation from a Significant Figure
- Stress Factors in the Relocation
- Social Aspects of the Relocation
- Couple Relations
- Spousal Adjustment
- The Home Perception in Relocation



These themes were identified and treated using art therapy skills, techniques and tools including observing, hypothesizing, questioning, refining, and evidence seeking. The specific contribution of art therapy to the particular case of couples in relocation has been highlighted followed by a suggestion for a constructed method for the optimal use of art therapy to address the themes in cases with similar characteristics.

Art therapy had a substantial positive impact and contribution to the case's progress; It allowed the couple to perceive and map significant events of their life, and the effect of the relocation on it. It facilitated a rapid identification of attachment styles and thus acknowledge the differences in the partners' reality perception towards the creation of common ground. Joint and parallel artwork brought the couple to physical closeness while creating intimacy between them. It facilitated a quick expression of the couple's dynamics, the status of each of them and differences in their interpretations of changes caused by relocation. Art therapy played a significant role in allowing the couple to externalize their distress caused by the relocation, which they were, otherwise, not aware of. During the therapy, art expression helped create consensual metaphoric imagery, that provides psychological insights beyond their linear rationality. Art created a framework for action-oriented mood aimed at problem-solving and a set of tangible evidence, that the couple return to, throughout the treatment and possibly after, for resolution of recurrent problems. Those evidence became a tangible record of the therapy process that demonstrated change and progress. Overall art therapy facilitated immediate analysis during the sessions, the possibility of immediate response to arising needs, and progress under dictated time constraints.

I found interest and value in researching the use of art therapy for treating the globally growing population of couples in relocation. The abrupt change of their social fabric, distancing from their family and friends, experiencing cultural change and increased stress at work, places many relocated families in turmoil. Couples in relocation are often not prepared for the stress they encounter and are not aware of its sources and causes. Many couples seek therapy after being relocated although their couple relations prior to relocation did not require any intervention. Such predicament is therefore often driven by relocation. Relocation usually affects the partners in different ways. Treating relocated couples, I am used to hearing adverse narratives from the relocated partner and the trailing partner. I find it efficient and beneficial to start a couple therapy in such cases by holding individual meetings, establishing a therapeutic alliance and getting to know the personal narrative. Experiencing relocation for many years in different countries and practicing art therapy, I became familiar with the need



for further research and for new tools to improve the efficiency of art therapy in this particular case.

A qualitative, single case study methodology has been applied. The research is posteriori to the case. It is based on an antecedent case treated and concluded by the time it was chosen to be the researcher's case study. Case records were used as the primary source of data which was triangulated by the literature.

This research is done with the hope that it will contribute to further research to apply art therapy for particular cases and to intensify the use of art therapy in general. Ultimately, I hope that the particular application of art therapy and the suggested model will be further researched and developed.



## Acknowledgment

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Thanks to the participants in this research who consented to share their art and their story. Their identities have remained obscured in this text but I will always remember them fondly. Thanks to all the expat couples with whom I worked along the years, for inspiring me to do this research and to be able to better help other families in relocation.

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## Introduction

*Relocation* is a common phenomenon in the global world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ornoy, 2009). The term *relocation* translates literally in English as “repositioning” and is used in the social context of stationing an employee or a student in a country that is not his country of origin for a specified period (Cambridge dictionary, 2018). Scholarly literature sometimes makes use of the term “uprooting” to describe relocation (Baldrige, Eddelston & Veiga, 2006), a term that emphasizes the severity of the event despite it being temporary. A person who is the subject of relocation is referred to by the term *expatriate* or, in short, *expat*. A relocated employee often relocates with their spouse and children.

The term relocation differs substantially from immigration, in both the motives for the move and the mechanism of moving, as well as its transitory nature, as compared to the intent to end the relationship with the country of origin, which characterizes immigration (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2018). From a psychological standpoint, relocation creates what is considered a *crisis event* (Lavee, Mccubbin & Patterson, 1985). A crisis is seen to be a traumatic event, regardless of the relocation’s ultimate success (Hausman & Reed, 1991). The crisis in the context of relocation is time-limited when the individual and the family face social and psychological changes where their adjustment skills are challenged. The individuals find themselves in a new set of circumstances undergoing the negative psychological symptoms of *culture shock* (Oberg, 1960), where they lose all or most familiar cultural cues and social rules and would find themselves often insecure, vulnerable, and frustrated. The family members leave their relatives and friends behind and establish a new social network (Ali, van der Zee & Sanders, 2003).

Relocation is unique in the sense that psychological distress may escalate in severity due to the extreme change of conditions and increased level of stress, even more so when a couple or family relocate altogether (Minter, 2008). When a family relocates, one’s crisis risks cascading to others and unbalancing different equilibriums in the family. It is also common that extreme change causes the exacerbation of other conditions. In such cases, existing conditions that have been dormant or not critical before the relocation worsen and trigger a crisis (Ruszczynski, 1993).

I found that when treating mature family members in relocation, the role of the couple as the significant core of the family unit played a major role in distorting a balanced lifestyle for the expatriates. Therefore, I focused my research on the treatment of couples.



*Art therapy*, serving as therapy medium in this research, is defined by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA, 2017) as “an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship” (p. 1). The AATA recommends the use of art therapy to improve cognitive and sensory-motor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills and reduce and resolve conflicts and distress (AATA, 2017); Art therapy is used in individuals, couples and family therapy. Art therapy provides a unique set of tools that has served me efficiently in my work with couples in relocation. It is a well-established modality for use in couples therapy, but to my best knowledge, no research links it to relocation. I found special interest in this topic and hence chose to dedicate my thesis to it.

### *My Interest in This Research Study*

Being an expatriate mother and wife in the last 16 years, I have experienced, together with my family, the beauties and challenges involved in relocation. Interacting privately and professionally with dozens of relocated expats and families, I became increasingly interested and involved in the subject.

I relocated from Israel to India in 2002 following the placement of my husband in New Delhi as the representative of an Israeli technology company. I was overwhelmed by the intensity of the local culture and how different it was from what I was accustomed to and by the changes in lifestyle that it imposed in almost every aspect of my life, from high-level social differences such as the lack of independence in women, lack of personal security and compromised health services, to essential daily and logistical functions at home such as the challenge to buy sanitary products or obtain necessary services. The increase in income and living in a so-called high standard residence provided only partial remedies. I felt a complete loss of my social support system, being away from friends and family and cut off from my earlier career path after graduating with a bachelor's degree. I found no options to continue studying within my domain of interest and no employment options. Initially, I tried to socialize with other expats and locals and establish a new social network, but this provided only partial support. Most attempts proved more disappointing than supportive, while very few friendships were even significant. The frequent departure of friends back home or to a different country created an even bigger distress as I experienced a sense of loss and grief at



every departure; what would have been an exotic touristic experience turned into a daily challenge. I found myself increasingly depressed, frustrated, and angry.

My husband experienced the relocation differently. He was focused on the new professional opportunity, made new social contacts at work, traveled occasionally and had an overall fulfilling experience. The difference in the way we experienced the relocation caused increasing tensions that eventually led to a decision to leave India after two years. We then relocated to Singapore and stayed there for the next 13 years, during which my husband worked for several firms. Singapore was much more accommodating in comparison to India; it is a highly organized society with values and a culture in which I felt much more comfortable. On the cultural level, Singapore was less discriminatory towards expat women, offering much more development and work options. It was also more efficient and accommodating with regard to daily tasks. During this time, I graduated with a master's degree in art therapy and developed a fulfilling career. Challenges manifested in different ways during this period. My husband's lack of stability at work, combined with the extremely high costs of living and the constant threat of termination of his employment contract along with the frequent departure of friends created a strong sense of instability and uncertainty for the family. This was a reason for growing stress and pressure. It led us to decide to move to a more stable environment.

Singapore has the highest rate of expatriate to locals in the world. The department of statistics in Singapore reports that out of a total of about 5.7M, only 3.5M are Citizens (DOS, 2018). In my work as a therapist, and through social encounters, I became increasingly aware of a broad range of challenges that expatriates experience when relocating. These are intense and disruptive in nature, affecting many individuals, couples, and families negatively. I found that across the board, individuals and families enter the process of relocation with no psychological preparation and support, and often with wrong expectations.

In my practice, I found that art therapy served me well and was an effective vehicle for treating couples in relocation. Art therapy facilitates the bridging over of cultures and language barriers, and provides tools that are dynamic, genuine and spontaneous, creating a fast track to the unconscious mind. Art therapy offers safe, non-judgemental settings for couples to express, explore, and improve their dynamics. I gradually developed the knowledge and sensitivities towards the topic and am pleased to present them here in the



form of thematic research based on an in-depth case study that represents well the efficacy and advantages of treating couples in relocation with the use of art therapy.

### *The Importance and Contribution of the Research*

Relocation is a growing phenomenon, expected to grow further thanks to globalization trends. It affects the lives of millions and under unique circumstances creates types of stress that have not been researched thoroughly. It is known that relocation has a high rate of failure of 10-20% (Harvard Business Review, 1999), and not only creates pressure on individuals and families but also involves significant losses in resources for corporations. Focused research and new methodologies of treatment can, therefore, improve the lifestyles of many by providing better tools for individuals and families to be able to cope and reduce both the rates of failures and financial losses. While individual and couples therapy are well-researched fields in both art therapy and psychotherapy, I found very little research dealing with couples undergoing relocation. Therefore, I feel that my research can shed new light on the topic and contributes meaningful value to both therapists treating such cases and families in distress.

The American Art Therapy Association journal (AATA) has covered different links between art therapy and human transitory modes between places and cultures such as immigration, movement of refugees, multiculturalism and social action (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Linesch, Ojeda, Fuster, Moreno & Solis, 2014; Kapitan, 2015) but I found no publications that cover the link between art therapy and relocation. As such, the number of publications that I found which associate art therapy with relocation is negligible. The few that were found concern children and adolescents, and I did not find any publication that links relocation to art therapy as a tool for diagnosis and treatment in adults in general or couples in particular. This supports the pioneering nature of the proposed research and its potential contribution.

### *Purpose and Objectives*

#### *Presumptions:*

The following were formulated:

1. Relocation creates a layer of influential circumstances on the relocated couple and should be explored as such and in distinction from the more commonly treated individual and couples therapy. Such layer can be treated separately in research and therapy.



2. Relocated spouses and trailing spouses are affected in significantly different ways and require different measures of therapy.

3. Besides specific differences in strength, relocations share common influencing factors, and thus can be treated by a structured model.

4. Art therapy treating the influential circumstances that create the problematic couple relations caused by the relocation also affects the basic level of couple relations.

### *The Research Question*

This research attempts to address the question of how art therapy makes a unique contribution to the diagnosis and treatment of couples undergoing relocation.

The research attempts to demonstrate a special efficacy of art therapy as a therapeutic modality for couples in relocation and suggests a model for the efficient application of art therapy in such cases.



## Literature Review

This review is confined to three relevant subjects that represent the theoretical pillars for my research:

- *The phenomenon of relocation.* This section will cover the literature and research related to relocation, its definition, and characteristics from the social viewpoint and the psychological effects of relocation on expats.
- *The therapy approaches used in the studied case.* This section will briefly review the attachment theory, the emotional focus therapy (EFT) and the theory behind couples therapy.
- *The research of art therapy* focuses on couples therapy, EFT and the benefits of art therapy in couples therapy.

While research exists on each topic, there is less research on interlinked topics, and none found on the overall subject of art therapy with couples in relocation. This was one of the drives for me to pursue this research.

### *Relocation*

This section reviews relocation from social and psychological perspectives. On the latter, I make references to the impact on individuals as well as to couples and its bearing on their well-being and their relations.

Globalization, an important phenomenon in international business in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has influenced organizations to search for competitive advantages, opportunities and possibilities by expanding their business and business activities to other countries, leading to the existence of multinational corporations (MNCs). As a result, there were 850,000 subsidiaries of MNCs operating globally in 2008 (Colakoglu & Caligiuri, 2008). One of the consequences of operating internationally is the increasing need for employees who are able and willing to work on international assignments with the requirement of relocation for a specific period of time. These employees, called expatriates, are internationally deployed by MNCs (Deen, 2011).

In 2017 there were 56.8M expatriates in relocation (defined as employees in 6 months to 5 years of temporary assignment), with an anticipated annual growth of 2-3% (Finaccord, 2017), and an estimated between 60-80% of such documented expatriate workers reporting having family members that relocate along with them (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008).



The complexity and potentially severe impact of relocation on individuals and families is demonstrated by the abundance of articles dedicated to the legal aspects of relocation, mainly when children are involved. Two examples of publications that cover such topics are: *The Psychological Effects of Relocation for Children of Divorce* (Gindes, 1998), *Relocation of Children after Divorce and Children's Best Interests, New Evidence and Legal Considerations* (Ellman, 2003), and *Relocation Following Parental Separation, The Welfare and Best Interests of Children* (Taylor, Gollop & Henaghan, 2010). Expatriates are considered a primary stakeholder in determining the achievement of organizational goals, (Takeuchi, 2010) hence the need to motivate them to relocate. Their employment budget is significantly higher compared to that of an employee serving same function in the firms' headquarters. Expats sometimes earn the highest salaries in their company outside of the fact that employers commonly pay well beyond wages, usually for the move itself, and some costs of living (schools, housing, transportation, and home visits).

An MNC must deal with the potential risks of failure of the expat's assignment in the form of premature termination and compromised productivity. The success of an expat's assignment is, therefore, an area of increasing interest for the employer. Albeit this, relocation is mainly dealt with in publications dedicated to human resources management, business management and others, which are focused on the organizational concerns and interests (Rawls, 2016) rather than the point of view of the relocated individual.

As reported in the *Harvard Business Review* (Black & Gregersen, 1999), between 10% and 20% of managers sent abroad returned early because of job dissatisfaction or difficulties in adjusting to a foreign country. There is, therefore, a growing interest in recent years in the root reasons for relocation assignment failure which in turn widens the related research. Companies that were interested in the past interested in the selection and assessment of the international assignee realize that there is a need to explore the failures and successes of the assignment more broadly (Global Relocation Trends Survey Report, 2011). The imported role that the employer takes in the expat's life is unique compared to the position of an employer towards its domestic employees. The employer is rightly regarded by the employee as the cause and drive for his or her life-changing experience. As such, the employer potentially has a significant role in the relocated employee's wellbeing, both by selecting candidates that are well-fitted to adjust to the relocation conditions and to cope with the challenges of relocation, as well as by providing them with adequate support.



Adjustment is defined as the degree of physical or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel concerning a specific context, such as a new living environment, culture, work environment or interaction (Deen, 2011), these different aspects refer to the work and the non-work domain. International adjustment is considered a multi-dimensional concept (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991), consisting of psychological, sociocultural and professional adjustment. The first two aspects are relevant to the assignee as well as to their trailing spouse. Psychological adjustment refers to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction. Sociocultural adjustment refers to external psychological outcomes that link the individual to the new environment, such as the ability to deal with daily problems in the host country (Ali, van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2007).

An understanding of expatriate psychographics is an important area in expatriate adjustment because personal psychological factors such as motivation, relational skills, flexibility/adaptability, and extra-cultural openness have a direct impact on expatriate adjustment (Mol, Born, Willemsen & van Der Molen, 2005). In their model of expatriate adjustment, Naithanki and Jha (2009) added that “Psychological factors such as individual’s personality, emotional maturity, and adaptability help cope up with work and performance related pressures in a new country, and extra-cultural openness helps an expatriate to adjust socially and culturally” (p. 38).

### *Stress Factors in Relocation*

Expatriates leave behind family members and friends, familiar activities, religious centers, jobs and schools. These losses can be ambiguous and difficult to express, leaving individuals confused and unable to fully identify the sources of their grief (Boss, 1999). The geographic distance can add stress: time differences can minimize the window of availability of the support network in the home country, for example, or even the very thought of physical difference. Home visits, which are often done yearly, and friends’ and families’ visiting the hosting country can add stress. In isolation and absence of a support network, what may start as minor issues in daily life (e.g., trouble with school, transportation, language) may altogether evolve into anxiety, irritability and a feeling of helplessness. An expat tends to depend on other long-termers from the same country (Hånberg & Österdahl, 2009) rather than integrate into the new social environment. Emotional ambiguity can also be triggered by job ambiguity; expatriates commonly face entirely new job roles, which might come with the



need for a new set of job knowledge and technical skills (Mol et al., 2005). When job roles are ambiguous, role ambiguity adds on to the negative impact on work adjustment (Beauchamp & Bray, 2001). Results from several studies show that expatriate adjustment can influence organizational commitment, performance and lead to withdrawal (Deen, 2011).

Couples conflicts in relocation were described by Waldron and Kelley (2009). In a chapter headed "Understanding the relocation experience," in which they state, "relocation can be taxing at any life stage. It is considered by social workers and health professionals to be one of the most taxing events in a person's life, potentially as stressful as the death of a parent or a divorce" (p. 180). While the expat's adjustment process takes place in a more familiar organizational context in which the employee usually arrives with a predefined role, a set of responsibilities inherent in the job (Eriksson & Lindström, 2013), and a present organizational support system, the trailing spouse's adjustment process takes place in a new context (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The trailing spouse often gives up their studies, job or career, and are placed in a completely new social environment. As a result, the trailing spouse has no access to support systems in the new country at the entry point of the assignment (Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002).

Expat spouses, 84% of whom are women, find problems obtaining work abroad, despite most of them being highly educated, with about half holding a post-graduate degree. Only 24% of trailing spouses have jobs in the host country, mainly because of many countries' restrictive rules on work visas for family members who are accompanying the primary wage earner in a family. 20% of trailing spouses were looking for work with another 20% already working part-time. Almost two-thirds of the spouses said they found relocating abroad and having to give up previous careers to be "very hard" (Von Plato & Zeeck, 2017).

To conclude, the trailing spouse may experience difficulties in adjusting to a new living environment, including a new, unfamiliar context and not being able to lean on a social network for support. As a result, several negative issues may arise, such as isolation, insecurity, and stress (Takeuchi et al., 2002), particularly in the early periods of the assignment (Punnett, 1997). In cases where the family has children, additional challenges arise, such as children's anxiety and decreases in self-confidence, the breaking-up of friendships, and the disruption of schooling (Deen, 2011). The inability of the spouse to adjust is the top reason leading to expats' assignment failure (Ko, 2014). Thompson (1986) reports that friendships with other expatriate spouses of the same or different nationality



make it easier to overcome feelings of boredom and “redundancy” experienced after relocation (Eriksson & Lindström, 2013). The family’s and spouse’s adaptations are highly important as a source of support for the expat. The importance of family adaptability was emphasized by Harvey (1985 & 1998), who suggested that family support is probably the deciding factor behind expat success, and that the expat’s family plays a crucial role of in providing him/her an indispensable source of motivation and mental security (Harvey, 1985).

*Wrong expectations.* Expectations of relocation and their effect on the relocation success are scantily researched. Wrong expectations of relocation are a significant cause of stress (Cole, 2011), not only in the context of culture and the workplace but more significantly in relation to a lack of self-fulfillment. Individuals and couples expect relocation to bring about significant positive changes in their life, such as the receiving opportunities for self-fulfillment, improvements in their lifestyle, and the spending of more quality time with the spouse and family. When faced with a different reality, they may experience regret, disappointment and stress.

*Exacerbation of conditions.* Some problems that can be attributed to relocation arise from the exacerbation of the individual’s psychological condition and/or conflicts in relationships that had existed before the relocation, both conscious and unconscious (Ruszczynski, 1993). Conditions that may be exacerbated vary from mental health issues, addiction, the tendency to feel stress and anxiety, other conditions that the individual or couple experienced and learned to balance and live with. These might resurface abruptly under stress or the loss of balances in a relationship due to the relocation. An empirical study written by McNulty (2015) attributes the first cause of expat divorce to core issues in the marriage that existed before relocation and have been exacerbated, such as “mental health problems and alcoholism. The second cause of divorce is related to the negative influence of the expatriate culture that influences one or both spouses to such an extent that results in “behaviors such as infidelity and sexual misconduct” (p. 109).

*Disruption of family balance and the need to rebalance.* Issues such as higher demands for commitment of the employee from the employer, along with the nature of work dynamics, often frequent travels, and social events tend to create struggles within families (Rawls, 2016). van Erp (2011) suggests the *Role of Justice* as an explanation for the shift of balance in relocating couples. She suggests that such shifts have to do with feelings of justice or injustice experienced by those involved. In general, the importance individuals attach to



justice can be explained both by concerns about controlling one's outcomes and from a need for the gratification of important group memberships. The decision of the assignee to relocate usually affects the couple as a whole and may drastically change their prior arrangements such as familial, financial and functional responsibilities.

Consequently, "the personal well-being of the expat and the spouse become increasingly intertwined" (van Erp, 2011, p. 25). Besides proving the existence of spousal influences, other studies focus on how these influences work. For example, Mukanzi and Senaji (2017) demonstrate in their research the links and balances between work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflicts (FWC) and employee commitment (EC) (Mukanzi & Senaji, 2017). The research measures such linkages empirically and their influence on the struggle for balance between employees, their families and the employer. They propose ways to moderate such conflicts and ensure better work-life balance among employees. Expatriate stress experienced at work or home influences the stress or strain on the spouse and vice versa (Takeuchi et al., 2002). This means that problems of the spouse cross over to the expatriate. As a consequence, stressful experiences in the family domain may spill over to the work domain (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Thus, the concept of *spillover* and *crossover* is a possible factor to explain spousal influences. In the meantime, the expatriate must establish a new balance between the domains of family and work.

The intensity and likelihood of spillover and crossover effects are magnified during an international assignment is magnified. Takeuchi, Yun and Tesluk (2002) found that this comes from "a probable reduction in available psychosocial and physical support systems, resulting in a greater frequency and degree of interaction between partners, and consequently the influence they exert upon one another" (p. 658).

*Culture shock.* In many cases, the expat is relocating from one culture to another. This aspect is broadly documented as a psychological phenomenon termed *culture shock* (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock is a consequence of the strain and anxiety that seems to occur due to contact with a dissimilar culture, and the feelings of loss and confusion resulting from losing most or all familiar cultural cues and social rules (Eriksson & Lindström, 2013). Culture shock occurs when individuals interact with members of a different culture and experience a loss in the understanding of their new social and behavioural environment over a period of time. Moving into a new culture poses challenges to existing modes of adaptive functioning and often requires several complex adjustments for even simple tasks (O'Keeffe, 2003).



Examples include grocery shopping, recycling rules, traffic rules and language. Culture shock is a normal and common effect that majority of all expatriates' experience. Even those who have been on many international assignments before continue to experience culture shock upon each assignment (Hånberg & Österdahl, 2009). Cross-cultural adjustment is a prime factor in expatriate adjustment, as success in the host country is often dependent on the expatriate and accompanying family's cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2005). Moving into a new culture can be associated with "greater states of anger, anxiety, acting-out, withdrawal, distress, or other stress-related reactions such as depression, over/under eating, hives, substance abuse and marital and familial conflicts" (Rawls, 2016, p. 8). Expatriate adjustment in a foreign country has a direct psychological impact on personal self-esteem and may also impair personal relationships (Templer, Tay & Chandrasekar, 2006). Relocation may be seen as an extreme case of losing the *home*, as described by Matri (2005) in his book *Psyche's Home*, where he emphasizes the mental and behavioural effects that can occur when one loses his/her home. Additionally, members of the family may experience culture shock to different extents and for different durations.

### *Therapy Approaches*

The need for couples therapy arises from a vast variety of relational concerns. The most common reason for couples to seek counseling is relational issues. This includes emotional disengagement, waning commitment, power struggles, problem-solving, communication difficulties, jealousy and extramarital involvements, value and role conflicts, sexual dissatisfaction, abuse, and violence. Relocation adds isolation, culture shock, uncertainty, and more. Attachment theory and its evolution establishes an important foundation for my therapeutic work and hence provides an important theoretical basis for the research. I make use of theory to understand the individual's and partner's interworking patterns of communication and the mechanisms behind them to propose a therapy plan.

The following section describes the evolution of therapeutic theories that form an important foundation in my work. These include Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory as a form of groundwork along with Mary Ainsworth's (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) definition of the three attachment styles, Bowlby's (1973) *Internal Working Models*, Hazan and Shaver's (1987) formulation of the adult romantic attachment, and Johnson and Greenberg's (1987) Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), which highlights the underlying emotions related to attachment needs in individuals and couples.



### *Attachment*

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) suggests that individuals develop an attachment style, or a cognitive-behavioral representation of an *Internal Working Model* of attachment, based on early life experiences with their primary caregivers. These internal working models of the self and others guide later interpersonal beliefs, behaviors, and information processing abilities. Attachment styles and the internal working models help us to understand the behavior patterns of adults. Kurth (2013) explains, "Attachment patterns with respect to relevant attachment figures, developed in early childhood, become more and more internalized by the child in the course of its further development" (p. 5). Schore and Schore (2007), emphasize that it is important to recognize that the "attachment experiences are thus imprinted in an internal working model that encodes strategies of affect regulation that acts at implicit non-conscious levels" (p. 3). These models are subject to change and develop according to changing experiences in relationships. At adolescence and adulthood, these internal working models consolidate into one *state of mind*, which is how an adult process and organizes attachment-related effects (Scharf & Mayseless, 2007).

Bowlby and Ainsworth developed their theory based on intuition and confirmed it through quantitative empirical research. Today, brain science confirms those suppositions as states of the mind are aroused in the face of attachment-related stress rather than absolute brain structures and unremitting personalities (Nolte et al., 2013). Bowlby defined the reactions of the infant to the attachment figure implicitly as *attachment behaviors*. Bowlby's colleague Ainsworth (1978) further contributed to the theory through the explicit definition of three patterns of behavior: *secure*, *anxious-resistant* and *avoidant* (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). These patterns are called *attachment patterns*, *attachment styles* or *attachment categories*.

Research on Bowlby's theory of attachment showed that infants placed in an unfamiliar situation and separated from their parent(s) would generally react in one of three ways upon reunion with the parent(s) (Fraley, 2010). These styles would define the individuals' coping mechanisms in their adolescence and adulthood:

1. *Secure attachment* – infants showed distress upon separation but sought comfort and were easily comforted when the parent(s) returned.



2. *Anxious-resistant attachment* – a smaller portion of infants experienced greater levels of distress and, upon reuniting with the parent(s), seemed to both seek comfort and attempt to “punish” the parent(s) for leaving.
3. *Avoidant attachment* – infants in the third category of attachment style showed no stress or minimal stress upon separation from the parent(s) and either ignored the parent(s) upon reuniting, or actively avoided the parent(s).

The attachment figure serves as a *safe haven* to which one can return for comfort and safety when facing fear or threat. Hofman (2001) explained that “the child forms *cognitive-affective constructs* in relation to the way its attachment figures behave, and these *working models* afterward function as prototypes for relationships and will later affect its perceptions and its behavior “(Hofman, 2001 as cited in Kurth, 2003, p. 5). When people feel secure, they will be able to overcome the separation distress and remove themselves from the attachment figure in the process of exploration. The existence of an attachment figure that is close, accessible, and attentive will ensure that the child will develop a sense of security and love and as a result, their behavior will be sociable, and they will show interest in the environment. “Individuals low on both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (classified as secure) have learned, through sensitive caregiving, to trust the responsiveness and good intentions of others as well as their own capacity for problem-solving” (Snir & Wiseman, 2010, p.117). While Bowlby and Ainsworth developed their theory in the context of individuals, Hazan and Shaver (1987) explored it in the context of romantic relations between adults. They concluded that love, the emotional bond that develops between adult romantic partners, is partly a function of the same motivational system which they call the *attachment behavioral system*.

#### *Attachment and Couples*

As people build new relationships, they rely partly on previous expectations about how others are likely to behave and feel towards them, and subsequently use these models to interpret the goals or intentions of their partners. In this respect, the theory suggests continuity in the way people relate to others across different relationships. Moreover, the theory suggests that early caregiving experiences influence, at least in part, how people behave in their adult romantic relationships. “Adults attachment styles internalize the repetitive and meaningful expectations built during formative caregiver and intimate partnership into complex, feeling-based working models. Life-enduring attachment patterns



may alter during negative experiences or very positive ones.” (Findlay et al., 2008, p. 193). The inclusion of adult romantic love as a form of attachment provided insight into the ways in which we can look at *romantic patterns’ attachment styles*. Hudson, Fraley, Brumbaugh and Vicary (2014) contend that the impact of romantic partners’ attachment styles on one another indicates the importance of investigating the dyadic process. Furthermore, emotionally-focused treatment was found to provide a strong emphasis on attachment and couples’ treatment. “Attachment theory can provide a theoretical basis for understanding the nature of marital distress and adult love in general” (Johnson, 1999, p. 75). Parker (2005) indicated that a couples’ relationship draws on the conscious and unconscious perceptions of the individuals based on their attachment styles. It is hence crucial to understand the attachment styles of the individuals and the dynamics brought about by the interaction of these styles in order to plan effective interventions. Parker suggests that the goals of couple’s therapy are therefore to help each partner become more secure in their individual attachment style, and to then develop more secure interpersonal communication. This is achieved, according to Parker, by helping them to communicate more empathically with their partner. The couple must learn how to remain relatively calm during a conflict and work toward repairing affective ruptures. They need to feel safe enough in the relationship to share deeper feelings and thoughts with their partner, fostering greater emotional intimacy. If the couple can accomplish these goals, they will become more securely attached individually and in their relationship. The distinction and importance that Parker finds of the necessity to reinforce the individual’s attachment style before being able to work on interpersonal communication is important in my research and will be referred to in the case study.

The attachment system is activated in times of stressful, threatening situations, such as during relocation, with the primary goal of establishing proximity to the attachment figure (Davis et al., 2014). Secure attachment with a caregiver has been shown to increase one’s ability to regulate emotions in an appropriate manner, and may buffer against the negative consequences of stress. Unconscious internal models of attachment are subject to change accompanying successful long-term relationships in marriages but are vulnerable to trauma and chronic psychosocial stressors (Findlay et al., 2008). This explains the absolute importance of a significant, healthy, and balanced relationship within the couple in relocation, in order to regulate related stress and to provide an adequate substitute for other significant family members such as parents.

#### *Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)*



According to Gruman and Fraenkel (2002), four main approaches characterize couple therapy today; Behavioural Marital Therapy (BMT), Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy (EFT), Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT), and Psychodynamic Couple Therapy. Besides these, there are other approaches and therapies, some old such as the Bowen theory, Structural Family Therapy, and others more recent such as the Restoring Reciprocal Empathic Responsiveness Couple Therapy (RER).

Out of those approaches, EFT is used in my practice as a preferred method for the analysis and treatment of core couples-related issues. Emotionally-focused therapy, or EFT, is a couples related treatment theory that draws on attachment theory and was conceptualized and published by Johnson and Greenberg (1987), and further developed by Johnson (Wooley, 2007). EFT asserts that humans are hardwired for strong emotional bonds with others (Tartakovsky, 2016). It sees emotion as the primary organizer of intimate relational experiences, significantly influencing both interactional tendencies, patterns, perceptions, as well as meaning attribution (Gruman & Fraenkel, 2002). On the therapeutic level, it suggests an intervention based on the scientific study of adult love and bonding processes in couples and is designed to address distress in the intimate relationships of adults. EFT assumes that reshaped emotions, emotional signals and new sequences of responsive interaction are necessary to transform an attachment relationship (Johnson, 2008a). According to EFT, couples have relationship problems when they experience emotional disconnection with their partner at key moments. It therefore provides a tangible explanation as to why emotionally disruptive life experiences such as relocation can have a strong negative impact on the couple's relationship. When mapping critical family challenges in relocated families, the Global Mobility Trends Survey (2014) found that 48% of respondents indicated spouse resistance during the adjustment period. Such resistance often bulwarks a wall of negative sentiments between the couple contributing to the deterioration of relationships.

EFT, thus views marital conflict and harmony as dependent upon the degree to which the marital partners' basic needs for bonding or attachment are satisfied. The effective practice of EFT requires a very high level of therapist skill to evoke and contain unexpressed feelings, and a relatively high level of partner-partner trust. EFT therapists do not typically explore the past, interpret unconscious motivations, or teach interpersonal skills (Gruman & Fraenkel, 2002). In that sense, EFT makes a clear distinction between an individuals' need for therapy which, may be required preliminarily and, the EFT intervention; the latter is purely targeted at resolving couples' conflicts on an interpersonal level. Another prerequisite for effective



engagement in the couple's change process is a safe, collaborating, validating alliance with the therapist, such that the therapy session becomes *a safe haven* and a secure base from which to explore and move into new experiences (Johnson, 2009).

The EFT treatment model (Johnson, 2004) consists of three phases:

1. *Cycle de-escalation*: Identifying the negative interaction cycle and each partner's position in the cycle. Access unacknowledged emotions underlying interactional positions and reframing the problem in terms of underlying feelings, attachment needs and negative cycles.
2. *Changing interactional positions and creating new bonding events*: Promote identification with disowned attachment emotions, needs and aspects of the self and integrate them into relationship interactions. Promote acceptance of the other partner's emotional experience. Facilitate the expression of needs and wants and create emotional engagement and bonding that redefines the attachment between the partners.
3. *Consolidation/integration*: Facilitating the emergence of a new solution to old relationship problems and consolidate new positions and new cycles of attachment behaviors.

*EFT in Practice*. Along with establishing a safe place for the couples, the therapist, together with the couple, seeks to identify and map their individual attachment styles and how they are viewed in the eyes of the partner. The therapist seeks a positive correlation between the partners' level of attachment security (Hudson et al., 2014). For example, when one partner displays elevated levels of attachment insecurity, an elevation in the other partner's level of avoidance is likely to occur (Hudson et al., 2014). According to Crawley and Grant (2005), an emotional response is triggered when one partner experiences distress, pain, or a threat to the couple's relationship. The type of emotional response triggered is dependent on the individual's attachment style and serves to provoke behavior from the other partner that will re-establish a sense of safety and stability within the relationship. It is essential to give attention to the emotions that the couple brings into the therapy session, specifically anger, sadness, longing, shame, and fear (Dalgleish et al., 2015). These emotions occur on two levels: primary emotions which are the deeper, more vulnerable emotions such as sadness, hurt, fear, shame and loneliness and secondary emotions which are more reactive emotions such as anger, jealousy, resentment and frustration. They occur as a reaction to



primary emotions (Woolley, 2007). Throughout the treatment stages, EFT utilizes interventions such as empathetic reflections, validation, evocative responses, heightening, empathic conjectures, and enactments (Hinkle, Radomski & Decker, 2015). Using these interventions, the couple can become more aware of their interactions and gain awareness of their attachment needs. Continuing to use the interventions encourages the couple to interact in different ways, therefore creating and solidifying change (Hinkle, et al., 2015).

### *Couples Therapy*

Couple therapy is a conjoint therapy designed to treat the couple. It can involve whole-family meetings and individual sessions but the emphasis throughout the therapy is on the prototypic case that focuses primarily on dyadic relational elements (Gruman & Fraenkel, 2002). The theory provides a way to preserve an early psychoanalytic insight about adult relational patterns without introducing controversial psychoanalytic mechanisms such as regression or fixation. Johnson (2008a) links couple therapy with the fact that "millions of couples persist in seeking out therapists, perhaps because, as recent surveys tell us, most people in North America rate finding a loving relationship as their main life goal" (para. 1). It is generally perceived as a challenging domain of therapy as "dealing with two people, two sets of hot emotions, escalating fights, and clients who hurt but do not want to slow down, be more reasonable and negotiate is not for the faint of heart." Beginning in the late 1970s to mid-1980s, the field of couple and family therapy was challenged to question many of its fundamental assumptions. The challenge came from three overlapping sources that, in turn, mutually influence one another: feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism (Gruman & Fraenkel, 2002):

*Feminism.* The experienced therapist Johnson (2008) stated that the best predictors of good outcomes in emotionally focused couple therapy are the strength of the therapeutic alliance and the female partner's belief that her male partner still cares about her. Female empowerment often reveals itself in relocation cases. As demonstrated in the case study, the act of relocation provides a window for women, commonly in the trailing position, to aspire for self-fulfillment. These aspirations are not necessarily fulfilled, a fact that can end in disappointment and frustration. A growing number of expatriated spouses are women, while the trailing spouse is the man. I had seen cases of couples that adapted well, even when trailing men had to abandon their career. In other cases, the new situation created tensions.



*Multiculturalism.* The researched couple came from the same country and the same culture. This case study, therefore, does not demonstrate how art or couples' therapy is practiced on a couple of different cultures. The point is however relevant and worth mentioning as a significant number of couples that I have been treating were of mixed cultures. Even in cases of people coming from the same country, interracial marriages and marriage between immigrants originating from different cultures are more common. Even people coming from different regions in a country may bring into the relationship significantly diverse values and habits, such as the norms regarding the quality and quantity of intimacy, the distribution of power between partners, the degree of involvement of other persons in the couple's life (such as friends, other lovers, extended family), in the couple's life, and other core aspects of couple life may vary across couples depending on their ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds. The advent of the multicultural perspective in couple's therapy has wide-ranging implications for theory, practice, and training. Sensitivity to the impact of differences in cultural affiliations and the accompanying oppression/privilege dimensions, requires a focus not only on the experiences, beliefs, and process of the client couple, but also on the cultural affiliations and accompanying experiences, beliefs, and level of privilege/oppression of therapists (Gruman & Fraenkel, 2002). I chose to emphasize this point also because I find that art therapy provides a favorable tool to deal with intercultural gaps between the partners, and between the therapist and the couple.

*Postmodernism.* This trend leads to re-examination of therapeutic positioning. It refers to the way people construct their subjective reality and whether distinct theoretical models serve the same usefulness in the field. The focus on diversity, pluralism, and the search for meaning has pushed some leading therapists towards a holistic approach where boundaries between models are blurred (Bond, 2009). Those findings are noteworthy but without direct contribution to the particular research question. Interestingly, Bond (2009) linked postmodernism trends to a renewed interest towards Bowlby's early attachment model, which has been reviewed here as a useful construct for understanding the vicissitudes of human relating.

### *Art Therapy*

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication. Art can be used as a medium to address emotional issues that may be confusing and distressing (Rubin, 2001). Huss (2015) claims, "art is the vital



transitional symbolic space within which people can individuate and connect to others, and within which relationships are worked through.” (p.21) The term *art therapy* was coined by the British artist Adrian Hill in 1942 when he discovered the healthful benefits of painting and drawing while recovering from tuberculosis. Using creative art as a methodology, similar to verbal expression, was started by Margaret Naumburg, often described as the *mother of art therapy*, prior Hill’s conceptualisation in 1915. Art therapy (or arts therapy) is a way of using the arts as a gateway into the unconscious world of the client, instead of or alongside verbal language as used in other psychotherapies (Vick, 2011).

Art therapy is a process used to stimulate verbal and graphic information and serves as a personalized opportunity to externalize inner feelings and conflicts (Barth & Kinder, 1985). The images which are created and reacted to in therapy are spontaneous and genuine and are less guarded by defense mechanisms than traditional verbal expressions (Ricco, 2007). Similar to symbolic dream images, art created and processed in therapy can be a fast track to the unconscious (Wadeson, 1980). The relation between art therapy and different psychotherapy theories was explored only scantily. Art therapists have been inspired by theories such as attachment-based psychotherapy and follow different psychotherapy models, including psychodynamic, humanistic, systemic, and cognitive models (Rubin, 2001). From these varied conceptual bases, art therapists have developed different balances in their work of image analysis, process analysis, and experiential process (Shalmon, McLaughlin & Keefler, 2012). The practice of art therapy generates a desire to “show” data on the part of both participants and therapist. “The presentation of imagery is a natural extension of the therapeutic process and a primary feature of artistic activity. In showing images produced in art therapy, we also reflect upon how they connect to experiences we have with clients in therapy” (McNiff, 1998, p. 93).

The goal of every therapy is to create change. On the psychological level, an inner change may be defined as "an individual movement from one state, which for some reason is considered inadequate, to a more appropriate state, where increased knowledge and insight may lead to a change of enhanced well-being" (Klimovsky et al., 1994). Holmqvist et al. found many examples of art therapists who could see changes as a result of their therapy, such as enhanced well-being, overcoming of difficulties and challenges, and personal exploration and growth (Holmqvist et al., 2017).

### *Art Therapy in Couples’ Treatment*



Art therapy is also used as a treatment modality when working with couples. According to Sarrel and Sarrel (1981), art therapy is valuable in uncovering potentially important intrapsychic characteristics of the individual within the couple. The primary purpose of using art therapy techniques is to highlight the underlying interactional processes within the relationship between the individuals. Similarly, Hinkle, Radomski and Decker (2015) claim that creative interventions were found to strengthen the connections between the self and others to increase authenticity, empathy, expression, and growth. Art therapy was found to be beneficial in helping couples feel comfortable in releasing and recognizing their attitudes, emotions, fantasies, and interpersonal aspects of the relationship (Barth & Kinder, 1985). Art therapy can be assimilated into a broad range of theoretical approaches (Riley, 1993). In my practice, I found that using art therapy in conjunction with attachment theory and its couples-related evolution - especially the EFT framework - was beneficial for a faster and more sustainable treatment.

#### *Art Therapy and Attachment*

Cormier (1999) wrote a dissertation on the links between the art therapy process and products, and the basic tenets of attachment theory. Malchiodi (2013) has elaborated on this therapeutic connection. Art therapy has been shown to benefit people of all ages. Her research and practice indicate that art therapy can improve communication and can help reduce feelings of isolation. It has also been shown to lead to increases in self-esteem, confidence, self-awareness, and to improve concentration. Malchiodi and Crenshaw (2014) claim:

The use of art therapy to address attachment issues is based both in concepts from object relations theory and in a contemporary understanding of neurodevelopment and neuroplasticity. These conceptual frameworks underscore that it is possible to revisit the window of opportunity for the development of secure attachment through sensory-based interventions and reinforcement of positive relationships.” (p.52).

Kaplan (2008) relates basic information concerning the structure and functions of the various areas of the brain to the process and product of art therapy, and that “doing art affects the brain and hence the mind” (p. 14). One of the articles in her book relates the brain and nervous system to attachment theory, claiming that “art therapy training can assist art therapists in working towards an earned attachment status” (Findlay et al., 2008, p. 193). Empirical research reveals a dynamic interplay between the nervous system, particularly the



brain, with a person's environment, in which artwork is a concrete representation of mind-body connectivity (Haas-Cohen, 2008). Neuroscience suggests that there is a link between attachment theory and art therapy through the human brain and the nervous system. (Kapitan, 2014; Hass- Cohen & Carr, 2008). Art therapy is therefore one way to engage the body and mind through experiential learning. It provides opportunities for mutual attunement, a principle central to successful interpersonal relationships and attachment (Badenoch, 2008). Malchiodi, (2014) writes about three main concepts in the clinical application of art therapy: (1) Donald Winnicott's *good enough* parent; (2) *transitional objects* and *transitional space*; and (3) the art therapist's *third hand*. The good enough parent, borrowed from Winnicott's object relation theory, supports the child's self-efficacy and sense of safety during exploration, experimentation, and learning. Malchiodi and Crenshaw (2014) widen this term to adults' relations and explains how art therapists often temporarily assume the role of the good enough parent through their strategic use of art activities. Art expression itself functions as a transitional object (Klorer, 2009). It supports self-relationship, empowerment, and connection with the therapist and helps to create a variety of metaphors through art. Transitional space is defined as an intermediate area of experience where there is no clear distinction between inner and outer reality (Winnicott, 1971). Transitional spaces offer ways for individuals to bridge subjective and objective realities and to practice attachment and relationships. "Transitional space is also a type of holding environment; in art therapy, the art therapist creates and facilitates a holding environment that includes a safe place where all creative expression is accepted, respected, and valued unconditionally" (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014, p. 54). The *third hand*, a concept coined by Kramer (1993), refers to the art therapist's use of suggestion, metaphors, or other techniques to enhance the individual's progress in therapy. An effective art therapist must have a command of the third hand to enhance a client's creativity without being intrusive, imposing the therapist's own style or artistic values, and/or misinterpreting meanings found in images (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014).

### *Art Therapy and EFT*

Art therapy can be beneficial in addressing attachment issues in couples. In art therapy, artwork and verbal discussion together highlight the interactional processes that underlie the relationship between the individuals (Sarrel, Sarrel & Berman, 1981). By incorporating



creative experiential interventions into EFT, the present moment experience is deepened, which increases the couple and individual's awareness of their feelings and provides an opportunity to process (Hinkle et al. 2015).

Through art assessments and dyadic work, art therapy proves to be a vital tool in marital and couple's therapy. As referenced by Barth and Kinder (1985), art therapy is a successful technique used to stimulate verbal and graphic information and serves as a personalized opportunity to externalize inner feelings and conflicts. Art therapy allows the couple to express their feelings and thoughts in a creative way. Creative interventions have been found to strengthen the connections between the self and others in order to increase authenticity, empathy, expression, and growth (Hinkle et al., 2015). Additionally, art therapy was also found to be beneficial in helping couples feel comfortable in releasing and recognizing their attitudes, emotions, fantasies, and interpersonal aspects of the relationship (Barth & Kinder, 1985). Art therapy was shown to be effective in emotionally-focused couples' therapy as well.

In reflection of the situation during sessions, the therapist can offer a variety of alternative meanings that have been revealed but overlooked in the narrative (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994). Using art therapy from a narrative perspective allows for it to become an exploration in which the goal is to find a new outcome for an old non-productive story. This new outcome aims to co-construct a more creative meaning to the events in one's life. The therapist will expect clients to express their own interpretations and to be able to change the interactional positions in which the couple will be encouraged to accept each other's emotional experience and to identify with one's disowned needs.

#### *Tools of Art Therapy in Couples Therapy*

Strategies of intervention with art therapy in couples therapy were formulated by Riley (2003b) and Malchiodi (2003). These were aimed to identify roles and to reframe behaviors. An overview of the use of art therapy in couple therapy was written by Shalmon, McLaughlin & Keefler (2012). They describe different art therapy assessment tools and intervention strategies designed for work with couples and families. Now, I will describe art therapy tools that were used in the studied case.

*Joint drawing.* The joint drawing technique is informally utilized by art therapists as an assessment tool to identify the balance between the needs for intimacy and individuality. The first known research regarding this technique was only recently conducted by Snir and



Wiseman (2010). The interactive art task, henceforth referred to *joint drawing* requires two partners to collaborate and to draw together in a single artwork on a shared space. Snir and Hazut (2012) showed how this interactive joint work brings out interpersonal themes and meaningful aspects of the couple's relational space. During the creative work, the therapist observes the couple working together. He is also able to observe cooperation or non-cooperation, the distance between the partners, contact between the marks of the two partners, similarities or differences in the drawing style, the occupation of areas versus separation between images, coherence of the resulting product, symbolism of style, images in the drawing that are significant to understanding the relationship, behaviour over the course of the drawing process, and transitions between the drawings. The relevant significant segment of the joint drawing as a psychotherapeutic intervention tool is the post-drawing observation, in which the creators and the therapist recall and reflect upon the product together, in a process known as '*joint drawing interpersonal recall*' (JDIR).

Joint drawing, as a "doing together" task in couple therapy, enables the therapist to witness the couple in an actual, real-time, shared task that highlights the interactional processes underlying the relationship, which are concretized in the drawing (Wadeson, 2010). Themes of relatedness and individuality, such as boundaries, hierarchy, roles, dependency, autonomy, balance of power (Landgarten, 2013), closeness, distance, similarities and differences, and communication patterns (Wadeson, 2010) can be clearly seen through behavioral and pictorial phenomena. "In joint visual symbolization, the joint movements are actually executed and not merely simulated. As a result, intensification of this process might occur and may explain the influence of the joint process on dyadic interaction and the empathy that can develop" (Markman, 2014, p. 11).

*Lifeline.* The lifeline is another tool which helps foster a discussion of difficult issues from the past that impact individual's current relationships. It is conducted separately with each partner individually first, and later together. The objectives of drawing and writing a lifeline in therapy are to establish rapport with each client as an individual, to identify personally significant life events, and to provide a catalyst for the processing and working through of unresolved emotions and conflicts (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). The therapist later brings the couple together to discuss each other's lifeline. "Looking at each other's lifeline with the therapist provides the couple a rare view into past events that shaped each individual, providing cathartic release and promoting empathy" (p. 225).



*Metaphor.* Metaphors hold information that hides meanings in symbolic forms (Moon, 2007). “The metaphoric image in art psychotherapy is commonly seen as representing something meaningful about the patient and their relationships” (Havsteen-Franklin, 2016 p. 19). Metaphors can be a powerful bridge between thought and emotions; they often become a central theme that can both contain and extend emotional awareness. “Metaphoric imagery can provide clients and therapists psychological insights that go beyond linear rationality” (Moon, 2007, p. 4). Artwork allows the client to express symbolism, metaphors and feeling with much of the freedom of dreams. Simultaneously with the art, the person moves in and out of the repertoire of practical and psychological skills, which are part of being a mindfully growing person. Keyes (1983) finds “that using art materials to make images, and connecting them to feelings and body states, brings emotions and thoughts that have been only vaguely sensed into the open. Closure becomes possible for unfinished issues that push for resolution” (Keyes, 1983, P. 104). The use of metaphor in art therapy is less confrontational and psychologically threatening than direct statement. Artistic metaphors also provide opportunities for clients to reframe their experiences by looking at situations from new perspectives and making them concrete in visual images (Nguyen, 2015).

*The Mask in art therapy.* Designing masks enables clients to project their thoughts onto objects that can be viewed as self-representative. The goal of mask making in therapy is mainly personal and may vary throughout the client’s progress in therapy, and the themes that emerge are often quite varied (Bontempi, n.d). Mask making is used traditionally to denote life transitions (Dunn-Snow & Joy-Smellie, 2000). Masks can be embellished on the inside and/or the outside, depending on the goals of the therapy project. Decorating the inside and the outside of masks represents what the client allows others to see and what he personally feels wearing it. The inside provides a greater opportunity for clients to see what parts of their personality they hide and who they present to the world. This dual concept of self can be applied to feelings of grief (Gussak & Rosal, 2016, p. 267). Mask making can also promote self-exploration and hidden aspects of the self (Wadeson, 2000). Often, art therapists use mask making to help bring creative transformations in treatment, in which creativity also enhances self-identity and awareness (Brown & Kerr, 2013).

#### *Advantages of Art Therapy in Couples Therapy*

Wadeson (1980) summarized five advantages for using art in couple’s therapy sessions: (1) the immediacy of doing a task together; (2) the genuineness of unexpected material



revealed in pictures (which may challenge old assumptions or beliefs that the couple holds onto firmly), (3) the spatial expression of pictures which can symbolically reveal the couple's life space, (4) the permanence encountered whereby the drawing provides a concrete object to study, react to, use for clarification and review, and (5) the shared pleasure that picture making can provide for a couple which no longer finds themselves having fun together. Immediacy, as it is referred to in art therapy, is defined as being engaged in the immediate task of making pictures. The couple is able to look at their manner of handling the task, particularly at the way they relate to each other when they are making a picture together. This provides a field of "doing together" that is not often seen in conventional verbal therapy (Wadeson, 1980). Because understanding the advantages of art therapy is key to my research, I would like to elaborate on Wadeson's observations. I also chose a slightly modified thematic abstraction with as much focus as possible on couples in relocation.

*Broader spectrum of expression.* Riley (2003), who worked with couples, has stated that "art expressions can make marital issues visible and thus provide the opportunity for both clients and therapist to establish goals and create a treatment plan" (p. 387). Images are systemic – they have an inherent capacity to synthesize and express multiple aspects of a subject or theme in a way that words do not (Riley & Malchiodi, 2003). Wadeson (1980) points out that the drawing is concrete and tangible and can be referenced by the therapist and the couple over the course of treatment, acting as a source for continued exploration and documentation of the couple's progress. Furthermore, Wadeson states further that the creative and physical work that the couple does together results in dramatic new communications and insights. Art therapy sets up relational dynamics that are uniquely different from those in verbal psychotherapy. "The relationship includes not only the patients' dyad and the therapist; it also includes the art process itself and the art products created by the dyad" (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014, p. 52).

*Facilitation of communication.* The drawing permits the couple to observe themselves and their situation and take a *reflective stance* (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994). The drawing is an extension of the client and images are forms of nonverbal communication (Malchiodi, 2007). The moments following the creative process are considered highly important for processing, observing and contemplating the creative product and its significance to the creator (Snir & Regev, 2014). Wadeson (1980), who developed art therapy assessments for couples, stated that "images often convey more than words, especially for those with difficulty articulating" (Wadeson, 1980, as cited in Hoshino, 2008, p. 47).



*Unbiased expression.* A dominant need that prevails with all couples entering counseling is that each partner wishes that the other partner sees the world through his or her lens (Riley, 2003). Each member of the dyad is convinced that all would be well and subsequent negative behaviors would be alleviated if the other could only see their perspective of the problem.

To see is the key. To see is not possible with words alone; therefore, it becomes logical to introduce the visual form of therapy because it responds to the declared need of the client. Art therapy makes “seeing” a reality as it adds descriptions of problems. (p. 388)

Couple partners tend not to be aware that they are exposing their couple dynamics through their artwork and are often less defensive than when verbally discussing their problems (Riley & Malchiodi, 2003). During therapy the couple system is revealed through the interplay of three important areas of consideration: the conscious and unconscious symbolic material communicated intentionally and unintentionally in the art products, the here and now interactive art-making process - which includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviour - and the verbal associations made by family members once the art products have been completed (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994; Rubin, 1978). This process emphasizes that there are multiple meanings and possible interpretations of any event in one’s life.

*An impactful form of expression.* Researchers strive to find creative solutions to address the issue of the rise in dissolutions of marriages (Ricco, 2007). Art expressions can greatly improve the likelihood of a positive outcome for couple therapy. The artwork can reveal a myriad of issues in a relationship which reflect beliefs from the past, roles that society has imposed, and the differing viewpoints of men and women. These issues can be made visible through the use of art and, when made visible, transform abstract words into material that can be altered (Riley, 2003). The illumination of true issues in a safe and creative environment is paramount to growth and positive long-term changes in marital satisfaction. Part of personal transformation as a result of art activity derives from the visually implied expectation of change. The energy surfacing in the creative process or the images themselves can imply, and therefore release, understanding and new ways of relating. Ricco (2007) suggests that for the artist, consciously and unconsciously, these can serve as concrete suggestions and induction for change. Art images, then, reach deep into the psyche and are actively held there for long periods of time.



*Multidimensional expression.* Art expression reveals a spatial matrix. Art productions are not confined by the linear restrictions of language, time, relationship in space, and the rational logic of order. As such, art process and images may better represent the human experience, particularly in areas where linear verbal expression is insufficient.

The artwork is a tangible record which provides permanence. When something as complex as the understanding of a marital relationship is being explored, studying and reacting to a concrete object that represents many facets of the relationship may be paramount to achieving treatment goals. The images produced in treatment are also used as placeholders that are revisited over time. They are impervious to the distortions of memory and provide both the couple and the therapist with a permanent record of change (Ricco, 2007). The therapist will engage in non-judgmental dialogue. The therapist's role is to create, together with the clients, a new perspective on their difficulties. This approach is referred to as narrative and is given the term *reauthoring the dominant story*. The focus is on finding alternate descriptions of events. These descriptions offer multiple opportunities to interpret events and provide more satisfactory endings to ongoing situations that have been seen by the couple as irreconcilable (Ricco, 2007).

*Action-oriented and resolution induced therapy.* Art therapy gives the couple an action-oriented mode of problem solving. The action is based on the creative process, both in the execution of art expressions and in the invitation to be innovative in solving problems (Ricco, 2007). A verbal description is sequential in nature. With art expression, the couple's pattern is experienced all at once in any given moment. "Art making can reveal and transcend the verbal block and the unconscious interplay and dialogue that are repetitive, unproductive, and fixed. The art process encourages clients to move from the frame of a rigid, unsolvable problem to one that is more manageable and resolvable" (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994, p. 122). When both individuals can present their views with clarity and respect to a certain issue, radically different views become clear (Ricco, 2007), which opens a door for the therapist to introduce suitable therapy such as the Jungian theory or types or EFT.

*Empowerment.* Artwork elicits the active participation of both couple members in treatment, including the nonverbal and less articulate. It gives a voice to the marginalized and less powerful partner or to the withdrawn, submissive, and avoidant who may be reluctant to verbally share opinions and perceptions during sessions (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994; Riley & Malchiodi, 2003). Although the primary focus of dyadic therapy is the couple's relationship,



the therapist must still be well acquainted with personality development theory (Weeks, 1989). The dynamics that contribute to the formation of each individual lead to the development of identity and a personality style which directly affects the way an individual relates to other people. It becomes necessary in couple's therapy to give both parties an opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts, their sense perceptions, and intuitions in their own characteristic ways (Singer, 1972).

*Accelerated analysis.* Art therapy assessment may assist in quickening the process and successfully resolving assessment issues by removing the obstacles typically encountered when using traditional verbal therapy alone (Ricco, 2007, p. 26).

*Facilitation of intercultural communication.* Although not demonstrated in my case study in which the researched couple comes from Israel and both members grew up in a similar cultural background, I find it worth mentioning to provide a complete review and as it is relevant for therapists working in the setting of foreign culture and with mixed culture couples. When couple's therapy incorporates art therapy, it is a particularly appropriate treatment to allow client and therapist to overcome gaps, and sometimes even linguistic, cultural, and social barriers that stem from relocation. Art therapy is advantageous when working with people all over the world. A linguistic barrier can add stress when you are looking for therapy, especially in relocation. "The art therapy enables communication and means of expression beyond the spoken language. It is (also) extremely important, as the language gap may be one of the very reasons for treated stress" (Waller, 2006, p. 271). The artistic act and the universal appreciation of art and creativity are used to bridge the possible gap, conceptual and cultural, between client and therapist and facilitate the creation of a therapeutic relationship between the client and the therapist who come from different social and cultural backgrounds - a situation typical of relocation (Coleman & Farris-Dufrene, 2013; Lofgern, 1981; Hoshino & Cameron, 2008). Moving between cultures has been given attention by the American Association of Art Therapy (AATA) as a significant issue in art therapy. Standards of multicultural competence are listed in its code of ethics and are defined as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and politics that enable art therapists to work effectively in a cross-cultural situation" (AATA, 2001, p. 7). The association has recently changed the term 'competence' to 'awareness'. Thus, the art therapist should try to "focus on awareness rather than competence" (George, Greene & Blackwell, 2005, p.132).



*Conclusion*

Art therapy is a well-established and researched domain of therapy. There is a wealth of studies and publications but only a few deal directly with art therapy in couples therapy. More specific publications and research regarding issues such as the treatment of problems arising from relocation - are rare and there is room for more targeted uses of art in therapy for similar populations, groups and cases. I have however managed to cover in the literature review topics and building blocks that are relevant to the research and to establish a solid theoretical ground. In summary, the chapter covers the key building blocks of an integrative approach to couples art therapy in order to address the adverse psychological effects of relocation on relocated couples due to its unique characteristics and challenges.



## Research Method and Design

*Methodology*

The research approach I consider most appropriate for this research is case-study qualitative research, applied within a constructivist approach (Shkedi, 2003). Shkedi (2005) elaborates “constructivist qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people’s words, actions and records” (p. 7). The researcher is required to immerse himself in the setting, context and minds of the participants. Constructivist qualitative research usually starts with a dilemma or an issue that interests the researcher, and not with theory and defined hypothesis (Shkedi, 2003). These characteristics fit very well with art therapy and with this research. Qualitative research will usually put emphasis on verbal expression (Shkedi, 2015), but when it involves art therapy, it will refer to artistic expression as well.

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory form of research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. This is distinct from quantitative research which is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics.

Qualitative Research is subjective in its approach, as it seeks to understand human behavior and reasons that govern such behavior. It describes a problem or condition from the point of view of those experiencing it. Researchers thus have the tendency to become subjectively immersed in it when using this methodology. Qualitative research is usually an inductive process used to formulate theories or hypotheses. Its methods include but are not limited to focus groups, in-depth interviews, and reviews of documents for types of themes. Its validity and reliability largely depend on the skill and rigor of the researcher.

Qualitative research provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. This approach is not based on objectivity, and as such allows for the involvement of the researcher and empathy with the participants (Shkedi, 2015), as expected from a psychotherapist. The renowned art therapist and researcher McNiff (1998) states that in order to accomplish effective art therapy research, it is imperative to combine case studies with artistic imagery, along with conventional clinical modes of investigation. “It is inconceivable to imagine art therapy research without its narratives, case studies and more conventional clinical modes of investigating the work we do. The practice of art therapy generates a desire to “show” data on the part of both



participants and therapist. The presentation of imagery is a natural extension of the therapeutic process and a primary feature of artistic activity” (p. 93). By portraying images produced in art therapy we also “reflect upon how they connect to experiences we have with clients in therapy.”

This research uses the presentation and interpretation of artwork done during therapy as a main tool for achieving *evidence-based practice* (EBP) (Edwards, 1999). The term *qualitative research* was not established in Freud’s days but even he had grasped its essence and wrote: “Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and are treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from presuppositions” (Freud, 1958, p. 114).

### *Design*

#### *The Research Paradigm*

The relevant paradigm type for this research is classified by Shkedi (2003) as one that establishes ways to collect and establish knowledge, typically defined as the methodological question. This study seeks to answer the question: “How does art therapy make a unique contribution to the diagnosis and treatment of couples in relocation?” This research aims to “identify processes which may not have hitherto been recognized within therapy” (Widdowson, 2011, p. 27) and not to build a theory.

#### *Theoretical Assumptions*

McNiff (1998) refers to the challenges and uniqueness of art therapy: “in the case of art therapy, it is the process and imagery of creation which are the basic conditions of inquiry rather than research theories” (p. 114). The practical nature of this type of research does not prevent it from being based on theoretical assumptions and themes. Those assumptions form part of the personal and professional experience of the researcher, from earlier research, reading, and even prejudice. This theoretical approach is often referred to as *thematic perspective* according to Creswell (2013).

The key assumptions on which the research and my work are based is that relocation creates stress among the relocating couple, driving a negative impact on the couple dynamics and their quality of life. Art therapy, being a well-researched methodology of therapy in



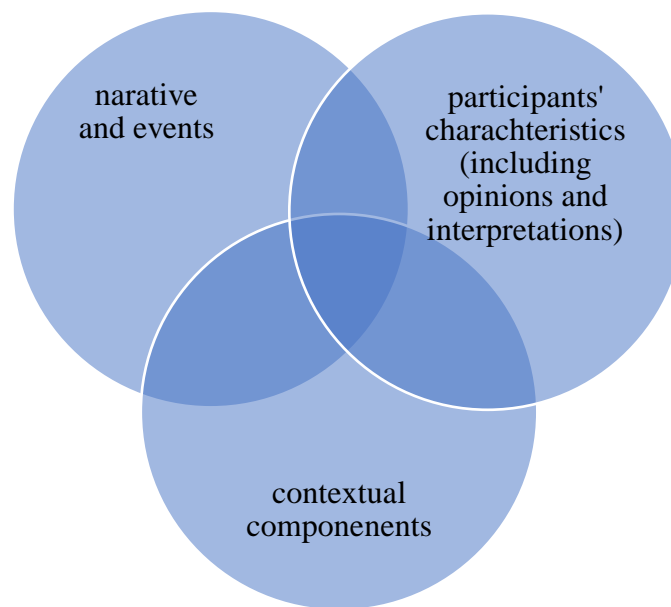
treating individuals and couples, is assumed to be effective. I immerse in the criteria of couples and relocation but distance from the criteria of individual “traditional” therapy which is well-researched and assumed fundamental.

### *Case Study*

I found *case studies* a suitable method of data collection for this research. It is becoming increasingly influential in psychotherapy research (Widdowson, 2011). McNiff (1998) finds case studies as a specifically suitable research methodology for art therapy: “Case studies fit nicely within this (art therapy) narrative world-view and this accounts for their preponderance in the creative arts therapy literature.... the process of gaining understanding through personal descriptions of experience is also an essential feature of phenomenological inquiry” (p. 94). A case study is an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (Gerring, 2004). Yin (1984) defines case study research methods as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context: when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). Creswell (2013) phrases this in other words saying that the case study method “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information... and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97).

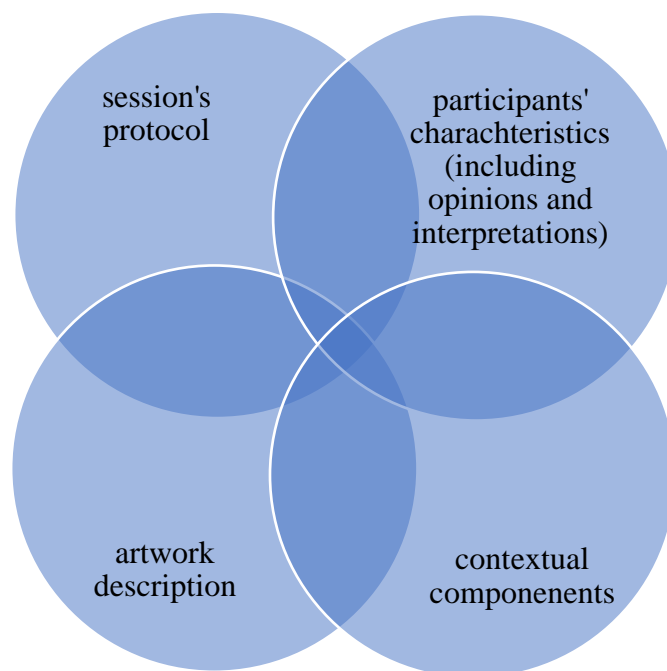
The descriptive reports of the case in this research will have a *narrative style*, as opposed to a *categorical style*. Referring to the chronological dimension, the description will be diachronic, portraying a sequence of events (Shkedi, 2003). Events occurring during art therapy are different from those that occur in settings with no artwork, as the artwork itself is an event and carries primary and secondary data. When doing artwork, the verbal and physical expressions, as well as the description of the product itself, yield primary data, while the therapist’s interpretations yield secondary data. Shkedi draws a diagram (figure 1) of the components of the *narrative-focused* description of a case study as shown (Shkedi, 2003, p.215).





*Figure 1* - Components of the 'narrative-focused' description

In order to fit an art therapy case study, the diagram is adopted as follows (figure 2):



*Figure 2* - Art therapy adapted components of the 'narrative-focused' description



In this research, the case study incorporated direct observations, open-ended conversations with the participants, archival records, participants' observations, tangible artworks which have been created by clients during therapy, and structured observations of clients throughout the entire treatment during the artistic activity and conversation. Analysis of the products will be done similarly to analyzing transcripts of interviews.

### *Single Case Study*

My research focused on one case of couple therapy. It is a methodology “in which a single individual, group, or important example is studied extensively, and varied data are collected and used to formulate interpretations applicable to the specific case” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 13). A *single case study* is also referred to by Stake (1994) as intrinsic. Kapitan (2014) claims:

Valid case study research is created through detailed, in-depth data collection, and systematic analysis from multiple sources such as treatment records, interviews data, observations, documents, text, or artworks. Ultimately the researcher is interested in discovering what can be learned from a particular encounter or encounters in the field that have bearing on art therapy practice. (p. 103)

Some researchers argue that single case studies are better than multiple cases because a single case study produces a better theory. When a single case study is used, the researcher can question old theoretical relationships and explore new ones because a more careful study is made. This also helps the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the subject (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991).

According to Siggelkow (2007), the existence of phenomena can opulently be described by single case studies and Gustafsson adds “single case studies richly can describe the existence of phenomenon” (p. 9). Yin (2003) even claims that it is better to make a single case study when the researcher wants to study for example a person or a group of people. In this research, I present one case study in order to explore the phenomenon shared among a specific group of people: expatriate couples with a distinguished context of relocation and thus a common set of characteristics. This single case study also helps to explore and substantiate new theoretical relationships - in this case, vaguely researched links between art therapy, couples and relocation.

### *Ethical Issues*



This research will adhere to the ethical rules required of the art therapy profession in Singapore (ATAS, 2015) and in the USA (AATA, 2017). It will also include the ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct by the American Psychological Association (APA) (2017). These rules relate to safeguarding the rights and welfare of the client, confidentiality of therapy in all aspects, preserving the art materials created by the client and stipulations on making any use of them beyond the needs of the therapy itself. The ethical code of art therapists in Singapore and the United States includes a particular emphasis on the cultural competence of the therapist. This competence must be responsive to the variety of religions, beliefs, cultures, and languages characteristic of the country and which the state authorities have persisted over the years in maintaining, one alongside the other. The code specifies, amongst other things, the need to understand symbols and visual imagery in their cultural context and the need to recognize and relate to dynamics that may stem from cultural differences. At the starting point of the research, the meaning of verbal and graphic products and the need to use them and save them throughout and after treatment was explained to the participants. I requested and received their consent to make professional use of these materials discreetly. Participants are referred to by fictitious names. A qualified supervisor supervised the therapy.

### *Research Participants*

There are no active participants in this research. The case I present and analyze was completed before I selected it as the research subject. I will use this section to give the reader a short review of the couple whom I treated in therapy.

The case was chosen because it deals with a couple that was treated by me in my clinic over the past years and their therapy was concluded and archived. I opted for therapy with a married couple, which has undergone relocation as a family unit for a period of over one year and lived in Singapore. The couple wished to work on their relationship dynamics. Among the couples that I have seen, this couple needed to terminate their relocation while on therapy which makes the case more significant and interesting with regard to the relocation. The couple are from the same country of origin as I was, which is not a mandatory criterion but did serve as an advantage. The interpretation of artwork, as well as” observation and interview, could lead researchers to interpret the world of the participants according to their own cultural perception” (Shkedi, 2014a, p. 82). Being of the same cultural background as the couple chosen for this research eliminates this threat. Other biases can arise from not



sharing the same mother tongue. The therapy with this couple was conducted at their request in Hebrew which is their's, as well as my own mother tongue.

### *Demographics*

The chosen couple are May and Ron (fictitious names), who have relocated to Singapore from Israel. Ron and May are a good-looking couple. They are parenting three daughters. Both have an academic degree. Ron represented an Israeli company, and May is a stay home mother. Ron and May lived together for two years before getting married. Three months after the marriage, May got pregnant and after six months, they relocated to Singapore. Ron's relocation contract was for two years and was later extended. His job required frequent travels in Asia as well as return visits to the company offices in Israel from time to time. Further introduction to the couple will be included as part of their intake.

The case was compelling and suitable for the research as it met the above criterion and demonstrated depth and complexity, reflecting a broad spectrum of issues and representing my work with the population of expat couples well. It is a *purposeful case* as defined by Kapitan (2014): a purposely selected case that "illuminates best practices" (p. 87). It also demonstrates varied applications of mediums, techniques, and processes to create an information-rich and in-depth study.

### *Procedures*

#### *Data Collection*

Art making by its very nature is a creative method through which the researcher can both generate data and examine and clarify multiple relationships, patterns, and meanings in the data (Sullivan, 2004). Qualitative research allows the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. Unlike quantitative research, it does not require the use of standardized measures to fit the different perspectives of people into a number of predetermined responses to which numbers are assigned. The qualitative researcher is considered to be the key instrument involved closely with the data collection and analysis. (DeFranzo, 2011).

As mentioned above, qualitative data collection methods are not necessarily structured in the same way as those used in quantitative research. They vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions),



individual interviews, and participant/observation. The sample size of qualitative research is typically small.

Shkedi (2003) elaborates on the researcher's role in the research: "The qualitative constructivist researcher chooses to use him/herself and other people as the main vessel for data collection" (p. 29). The most constructive way to conduct research in this context is to observe, talk, listen, and participate in the natural environment of the research subjects. To achieve this goal the researcher can use multiple, non-mathematical methods and avoid completely or reduce the use of quantitative techniques (Straus, 1978). "Such research attempts to capture what people say and as well as do and the way they interpret their world as it is reflected through their speech and behavior." (Shkedi, 2003, p. 29). McNiff (1998) comments on the pivotal importance of combining imagery and interpersonal reflections within case studies as a primary data collection and research methodology of art therapy; "Since the art therapy relationship is a partnership between artistic and interpersonal phenomena, we need to find ways to conduct research which engages both elements" (p. 92). Data sources of this research are collected from the case study that I present in the transcript. They consist of the therapist's notes, reflections and observations, as noted during the therapy itself. In addition, the data sources will include secondary observations obtained by the therapist with some perspective over time and distance, while linking events and assessing the therapy progress. The notes also include a layer of thematic abstraction. Explicit abstraction is added to the notes at various points in time. While I repeatedly return to the transcript, initial notes are added right after the sessions without having a full perspective. Those are based on the therapist's views, reflecting theory and experience built upon multiple cases and the reality of this individual case. I later returned to the transcript multiple times when processing the research themes. I initially marked paragraphs that adhered to the research paradigm and searched for common concepts, focusing on some, distancing from others and extracting them into themes. Further in the process, and after establishing a broader theoretical foundation in the literature review, I will establish and substantiate a line of thought linking the data to relevant literature and theory. Finally, a more abstract development of themes is extracted from the transcript and recorded as findings.

### *Credibility*

Testing the validity of qualitative research is the subject of contention for many publications and textbooks. This is even more problematic when the research involves art



making and the research evidence is artwork. Artwork cannot be reproduced or replicated even by the original maker. Though, in a research based on art therapy, the artwork is probably the principal evidence. Before being interpreted, it forms an *objective evidence* (McLeod, 2010). The use of such objective evidence is done by returning to it in different phases of the research, namely case description, analysis, and conclusions.

Three measures used to intensify the validity of quantitative research are suggested by Shkedi (2003): “the first is maintaining the *chain of evidence* by keeping all the records produced during the research. Second is writing the research report as a *thick description*” (p. 233) that includes detailed information on the context, quote of informants, and an open conceptual debate. The third is *Triangulation*. In this research, I include an almost full record of the therapy within the case study description. I used a rich description of the setting, the context and the course of the sessions referring to triangulation, with the research based on real-life therapy. Triangulation is done by comparing the conclusions to the literature.

Meaning, according to Ghesquiere, Maes, and Vandenberghe (2004), is constructed within a social and cultural context. Therefore, the quality of the data collected is influenced by the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The choice of a couple that shares the same culture as mine is, therefore, significant to the validity of the findings. The researchers’ position in qualitative research is unique as they are required to be involved using personal experience to direct the research and in analyzing the evidence. The researcher may therefore be subjective and biased. In this research, potential bias is limited because it is not referring to the clinical outcomes of the therapy, but to the suitability of art therapy to the particular case. Moreover, the research is not based on the researcher’s involvement in the case. The researcher merely uses materials gathered during therapy, defines what can be used as data, and explores the relevance of this data to the research question. Since there is a significant gap in time and context between my role as a therapist and that of a researcher, this study is not what Pressick-Kilborn and Sainsbury (2002) refer to as *research in your own backyard*. All of this is done according to the sets of ideas and practices I acquired during years of studying and practice, which is referred to as *schema* by McLeod (2010). Being research of records from a closed case, triangulation cannot be done with clients. It is done therefore by referring to literature in a repetitive cyclic mode.

Yin (1994) claims that reliability refers to the possibility to repeat a form of research through the same process and obtain the same results. Others admit that in qualitative



research it is difficult to expect that other researchers would achieve the same results even in an identical situation (Merrick, 1999 & Schofield, 1989, as cited in Shkedi, 2014b). This research involves personal interpretation and drawn conclusions. Still, I believe that every art therapist and every researcher that analyzes case studies of art therapy with relocated couples will come to the conclusion that art therapy is suitable, has its advantages and yields the benefits that this research found. Furthermore, if therapist uses the suggested model, they will find it efficient even if different themes are addressed.

There are different opinions regarding the generalizability of qualitative research. Qualitative methods produce a large amount of detailed information about a smaller number of people, which results in rich understanding but is thought by some to reduce generalizability. This is in contrast to the statistical data of quantitative methods obtained from many people and results in a broad, generalizable set of findings. However, Kapitan (2014) claims similarly that “case studies, if well-constructed and based on systematic inquiry, can be generalized - provided that persons are the focus of study rather than variables” (p. 103). Although case study research is not effective for generalizing to larger populations, they can be generalized to theoretical propositions or to those people who share commonalities of experience. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) claim that generalization can be achieved when “a single individual, group, or important example is studied extensively, and varied data are collected and used to formulate interpretations applicable to the specific case or to provide useful generalizations” (p. 13).

Multiple case design can be adopted for real-life events that show numerous sources of evidence through replication rather than sampling logic. According to Yin (1994) generalization of results from case studies from either single or multiple designs stems on theory, rather than on populations. By replicating the case through pattern matching, a technique linking several pieces of information from the same case study may be related to some theoretical proposition. Zaniel (2007) adds, “multiple case design enhances and supports the previous results. This helps raise the level of confidence in the robustness of the method” (p. 1). As for generalization in qualitative research, Yin’s (2012) opinion is “the ultimate generalization is not likely to achieve the status of ‘proof’ in geometry, but the claims must be presented soundly and resist logical challenge” (p. 19). The relevant “theory” may be more than a series of hypotheses or even a single hypothesis. Cronbach (1978) further clarifies that the sought-after generalization is not that of conclusion but, rather, more like a *working hypothesis*. “Confidence in the hypothesis can then be built as new case studies -



again, as new experiments - continue to produce findings related to the same theoretical propositions” (Yin, 1994, p. 19).

This research design is based on a limited number of subjects and does not allow for statistical treatment of the findings to draw conclusions. However, psychologist Fromm (1992) has already determined that it is definitely possible “to apply the findings won by the observation of individuals to gain a psychological understanding of groups” (p. 97). Shkedi (2015) argues that it is possible to generalize the findings of qualitative research, even from one case to another. He contends that this is one of the characteristics of qualitative research. In this research, this is a fundamental position in light of my personal identification with the content discussed in the therapy. Shkedi (2003) also states that the user of the research is the one who determines the generalizability of the research and its applicability to other contexts.

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and the *themes* within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. The key feature of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. The research processes the therapy records into *categories* and identifies research themes. Categories refer to explicit contents of text and are simple descriptions of the participants’ accounts. In this research, they are the clinical phenomena observed in the therapy records by the researcher. Themes refer to more implicit and abstract concepts, which require interpretation. Here they refer to the distinct influences of relocation on couple relations. The research will focus on the way art therapy treats those influences with a particular benefit. When researchers raise the participant’s perspective to an abstract level of conceptualization and seek the underlying meaning in the participants’ words, implicit themes tend to emerge (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016).

The qualitative analysis process cycles without finite interpretation and requires researchers to return repeatedly to the data and the coding process throughout the analysis process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016) propose four phases of theme development: initialization, construction, rectification and finalization. *Initialization* includes reading transcriptions, highlighting meanings, coding, and searching



for abstractions. *Construction* comprises of labeling, defining and describing abstractions, immersion, and distancing. *Rectification* involves relating themes to established knowledge and the stabilization of these themes, while *finalization* refers to developing a coherent storyline. Figure 3 shows the cyclic flow of research from therapy records to research findings.

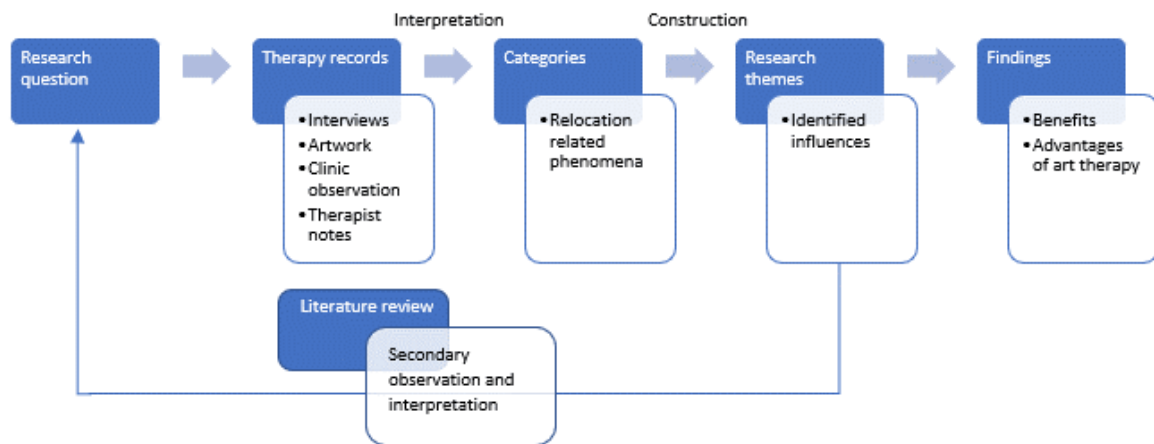


Figure 3 - Cyclic analysis

Initialization takes place after defining the research question and ends with defining categories. In the construction phases, the categories are scanned in order to extract the themes which are rectified in a cyclic process where the records and the primary assumptions are tested again and triangulated against the literature. The finalization phase defines the research findings that finally answer the research question.

### Research Design

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the topic, a qualitative research was applied. The research makes use of a single case study (Kapitan, 2014) which has an in-depth analysis to obtain information pertaining to a specific situation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The case is conducted in a real-life setting and thus has a high degree of realism, as it focuses on a couple relocated to Singapore and treated in my clinic. This realism comes at the expense of the level of control (Runeson & Host, 2008). In the therapy I used attachment theory and EFT approaches as analysis and treatment tools. The thorough clinical description, often beyond the boundaries of the research question, is aimed to provide the reader with a context and to be loyal to the methodological guidelines of a single case study, by providing a deep



description to establish reliability (Kapitan, 2014). The case describes the therapeutic process from intake to closure. It describes how art therapy is applied to expose the psychological difficulties that brought this couple to therapy which stem from relocation. A session analysis is added to the case study for the purpose of this thesis. It draws partially on the therapist's notes as recorded during and between the therapy sessions with late research notes that form the first phase of categorization towards thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In a cyclic analysis process the data is abstracted into categories and themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The research is concluded with a proposition of a model for art therapy sequence for the particular case of couples in relocation, encapsulating a few years of experience with similar cases and settings of treating couples in relocation.

*Setting.* The clinic is located in a private building occupied by different users, with a separate private access. It comprises of a waiting hall, therapy room, toilet, separate sink and a small kitchen. The therapy room has a separate door. The room overlooks the green scenery of a jungle. It is a large room, divided into two areas; a sitting area with armchairs around a coffee table and working area with a large table and surrounding chairs. Along the walls, there are open shelves and boxes with art materials, brushes, paints and more. The therapist usually sits with her back to the big window and the clients face it.



## Case Description

*Introduction to the Therapy Case**Background and Reason for Referral*

May and Ron relocated from Israel to Singapore about four years before I first met them. I was working with one of their daughters for a year and a half. May approached me in order to address her four-year-old daughter's social behavior. She expressed concerns regarding the girl's communications and socializing skills. At that time, they had another daughter who was two years old. They came to see me on a regular weekly basis. Both parents took turns in bringing the daughter to therapy, and both were interested and involved. They cooperated in the adjustments and changes as long as it involved the girl's benefit. The therapy was conducted in Hebrew and English. During therapy with their daughter, I had invited the parents to four guidance sessions in order to share with them my evaluations and her therapeutic program. I also guided them on how to support the process with their own behavior with their daughter at home. The daughter made significant progress during our therapy sessions. This affected her ability to build friendships at kindergarten and the transition to the international school, as well as her behavior at home.

While wrapping up the daughter's treatment, I observed the mother, May, becoming more anxious and stressed. It seemed that terminating the therapeutic support that we had built made her worried. In my last meeting with their daughter, May spontaneously shared with me the fact that she is in the early stages of pregnancy with their third daughter. She was not sure she wanted another baby, while Ron could not even think of not having it. May seemed to be lost and alone in this situation and became depressed. I felt that her need to continue a therapeutic relationship should not be linked to her daughter's therapy. I suggested to May that she could see me separately, and she said she would think about it. A few months after the baby was born, May called me asking to see me for individual therapy. I felt it is possible that treating their daughter lead to changes in the family homeostasis, which led to May's decision to work on herself as an individual. I had sensed tension and stress between May and Ron in the last of their daughter's sessions. My observations of their communication at this time revealed cynical comments directed towards each other and eyebrows raising. Considering this, and May's initiative to start individual sessions, I recommended couple's therapy. Ron said that he would follow May's decision, wishing for things to get better. They accepted my recommendation. May asked me to start with her, and to conduct this therapy in



Hebrew, in to facilitate the expression of her emotions. Before beginning the therapy, I consulted my supervisor. I asked for her opinion on whether I should start the therapy with a joint session. I shared with her my concerns resulting from my acquaintance with the couple so far, through meeting them along the course of their daughter's therapy sessions. I sensed they had some emotional responses to one another that might block their engagement in the marital sessions (Johnson, 2004), should I have started with those. I decided to begin the treatment with at least one individual session with May and Ron to accommodate May, who initiated the therapy, and to explore responses and identify their attachment styles and working models before beginning the couples therapy. Parker (2005) indicated that "a couple's relationship draws on the conscious and unconscious perceptions of the individuals based on their attachment styles." (p. 2). Hence, it is crucial to understand the attachment styles of the individuals and the dynamics brought about by the interaction of these styles to plan effective interventions. From my experience in working with couples, I took into account that in some cases there is a dominant individual background that has a strong influence on the couple's dynamics. Such conditions often be exacerbated in relocation (Ruszczyński, 1993), and one of the first goals during intake is to identify and map out the causes of imbalance.

May had seven individual sessions, while Ron had six individual sessions. The couples therapy lasted half a year during which I had ten sessions. Both May and Ron attended all the sessions, and all of them took place in my clinic and were conducted in Hebrew. In this case study, I will present a partial description of these sessions, as well as drawings that were completed during the session and at home. I will also bring my reflections of the therapy sessions which are significant to this thesis. Every session's description is followed by a session analysis that was written in retrospectively for this thesis.

### *Individual Sessions with May*

#### *Session No. 1 – Intake*

May is a good-looking woman, 34 years old, married with three young daughters, all whom were born in Singapore. I asked her to describe her expectations from the therapy. She said she felt a need for support in dealing with issues as a woman, as a daughter, as a mother, and as a wife. During her daughter's therapy, May was dressed casually. This time, she came dressed formally, as if she had come for an interview. She sat upright and controlled her gestures. She also took a few seconds before answering my questions. She acted this way



during the first half of the session before she was able to relax and behave naturally, the way she did in past meetings. I explained to her that we had to agree upon, and write up, a contract between us. I needed to reassure her of the confidentiality of our sessions but explained that I might recall some of the topics when Ron would join us for couple's therapy. I assured her that she always had the option of avoiding discussion of anything that came up as she pleases. May sat on the sofa, and I handed her a clipboard with my intake form and asked her to fill in the required information. May filled in her personal details very slowly and handed the form back to me. I noticed that she did not complete it thoroughly and did not add elaboration to her answers. She did not fill in any information regarding her family history, parents, occupation, or her history. I looked briefly at the form and decided to put it aside.

I asked her to tell me about her life as a background for our couple therapy. It was hard for May to focus on herself, and she found it much easier for to talk about her three daughters instead. I asked May to be more specific and talk about why she felt the need to see me, and why only at this point. She said that after I terminated working with her daughter, she realized that it would be helpful for her to express her feelings. May said that she was confused; she did not know "who she [was]." She said she was a mother of three great daughters, a wife, and that was about it. She was not sure about her marriage and she did not feel love or friendship with her husband. She felt like they were together only because of the girls. May said she left Israel with a BA diploma, she was five months pregnant, and she decided to give up her status as a working woman to become a full-time mother. Since then they had two more daughters and she did not resume her studies or work. It had been five years, and now, she was too afraid to start anything new. She said she was lonely and did not know what she wanted to do.

Unlike other expat spouses thatshe had met, she had made no friends in Singapore, and she disliked most of her acquaintances, claiming that she could not relate to them. During the first half of this session, May was stressed and looked frequently at her watch. She said that she did not like to leave her younger daughter with the helper for too long, and added that she felt that had not as devoted to her third daughter's upbringing as she had been with her older two. She said, "I am not happy, I am not sure I am a good mother!" I asked her how she would define her status, and she said that her only function was as a mother. When she only had one daughter, she was happy to be a mother, but now, she no longer felt the same sense of fulfillment. She dedicated herself to the girls, but it had been the same way for so long that she felt suffocated. She had mentioned shamefully that she had spent the most quality time



with her first daughter, devoting her time to playgroups and classes. Now, with her third daughter, she said, "I wish I did not need to go..." All three girls received much less attention as she was not functioning as a devoted mother according to her expectations anymore. May kept cracking her fingers while talking and continued to say that she did not feel like meeting other mothers, Israelis or foreigners, because she could not relate to them." She could not engage in a conversation for a long time while the girls were around, and she felt that meeting other mothers without the girls was a waste of time.

She said she had experienced mood swings, anger, and frustration. Sometimes she wanted to shout and would cope by cleaning and tidying up the house. She felt a constant need to keep everything in its place: "like soldiers," everything had to be in the right order. May knew she had the helper to do this work, yet, she needed to be occupied with the cleaning in order to calm down. I asked her how often this occurred, and she said every day, sometimes even twice a day. When she said this, it was like she was unloading a burden off of her chest. May was not ready to draw or paint. I offered for her to make a drawing and she refused. Towards the end of the session, she was smiling. She said that she thought she would be able to share more in the next session. She added that she knows that in art therapy she is expected to make art, but she was not ready for it just yet.

*Intake insights.* May exhibited anxious and rigid behavior. During this session, she chose to talk only about three concerns that troubled her: her status as a mother, her lack of social interaction, and her emotional instability. May avoided revealing any information about her earlier history and relationships with family members, other than her three daughters. She did not refer to her marital relations, nor did she talk about Ron. The issue of motherhood played a significant role in May's life. She was stressed by the conflict between motherhood duties and her desire for independence and self-fulfillment. May expressed her difficulty in building a social relationship. It seemed as if she was keen to have one (or more), but she lacked the experience and skills to develop them. May shared her concerns regarding her mood swings, identifying feelings such as anger, frustration, and loneliness. In her expectations, she mentioned the issue of being a daughter, but she did not refer to it during the session. I was aware of her reluctance to draw this time; she was aware of the need to engage with art in the next sessions. My goals for the individual sessions with May were:



- To create a 'transitional space' within which there would be enough trust to deal with painful emotions (Huss, 2015). This would allow May to be able to share her feelings verbally and creatively, possibly reaching deeper into the roots of her challenges.
- To identify the core feelings that make her uncomfortable with relationships, especially with Ron.
- To help her to understand her needs to 'calm herself' and to guide her towards how to regulate her emotions.
- To explore what she defined as "blockages" using art materials.
- To explore her attachment style with her family of origin and to help her to identify and become aware of her attachment styles with her close ones.
- To build her confidence, stability, and trust with people while interacting in social situations.
- To help her to look at social situations from new angles so she can develop flexibility with herself and others.

*Session analysis.* During this session, I was able to identify some of the typical challenges of expatriation, as described in the literature review (*stress factors in relocation*) in the context of Ron and May. Some of these concerns were as following:

- a. Lack of preparation before May's and Ron's decision to relocate.
- b. A general increase in stress levels caused by the separation of May's close social relationships, especially that with her mother.
- c. Increasing imbalances in the couple.
- d. Change of status and related imbalances - May's initial complaints and the cause of her desire for therapy.
- e. Lack of social support.
- f. There was no significant presentation that May experienced culture shock.

#### *Session No. 2*

I started this session by directing May to the working table and explained that we were to open up with some artwork. I explained that a lifeline is a tool for identifying significant life events, and asked her to draw her lifeline and encouraged her to include more than the limited information than she had given me during the intake session. I handed her a sheet of A3 paper



and asked her to choose drawing materials from the variety that was on the table. I instructed her further in what a lifeline drawing requires; I asked her to draw a line that represented her life from birth to the present and to mark significant life events. A drawing of the event would preferably accompany each mark. I said that we could discuss her lifeline while she was drawing or once she felt it was complete, whatever would be more comfortable for her. The discussion of each event, and the identification of unresolved emotions or conflicts contributing to present-day interactions in relationships was conducted. May hesitated and then took a light purple colour pencil but did not start drawing. To get her started, I suggested she began at her childhood and tried to recollect and evaluate what she would consider as an event worth including in a lifeline. May started talking about her childhood. She grew up in a small agricultural community. Her father was a military man, who was frequently away from home, and her mother was a successful architect. She had an older sister and a younger brother. At this point, she stopped talking; I moved the paper closer to her. Now she started drawing.



*Drawing 1 - May's lifeline*

She drew a sequence of a growing flower. All the stages of the flower's growth were connected by a line from the bottom left corner to the top right corner (Drawing 1). She drew slowly and hardly put pressure on the pencil. May was quiet and seemed concentrated and emotional. For a moment, she began crying, and had to wipe tears away; she was very quiet, avoiding eye contact with me. She started apologizing very quietly for being emotional. She



said that she did not expect "to fall apart so early." I reassured her that it was safe, and normal, for her to feel this way. When she finished drawing, she explained that she drew herself as a flower, and chose this metaphor to represent her growth along her lifeline. I asked her to elaborate. There was a noticeable dissonance between the simplicity and innocence of the drawing and the emotional state she was in. I decided, therefore, to let her take the lead on her story without interfering. She said that the flowers represented her growth since childhood. The first flower had four petals and no stalk, which May referred to as "me as a child," the second one had four petals and a short stalk representing "the abuse." I did not ask her to elaborate, and she did not make any eye contact. The third flower had four petals and a longer stalk. This one represented "[May] as an adolescent, [and] as a dancer." On the fourth one, which had six petals, May added one leaf on the right side of the stalk and said "the army service." The fifth had five petals and had grown in size; May also added four leaves, two on each side of the stalk: "my independent life." The gap between the fifth and the sixth flower was wider than the previous gaps. On the sixth, she added another flower to the right side but omitted the leaves, "Ron and me." For the seventh, she added one more flower to represent "Ron, our first daughter, and me." Both additional flowers were on the right, and their stems started from the root of the main flower. They were both bending to the right; no leaves on the stalks. The flower which represented herself had six petals, while the other two had four petals. The last drawing included a whole bouquet she traced from the bottom of the chain and contained five flowers - "our family." This flower stemmed from the root. The flowers in the chain were all connected by the petals. She left the background empty.

The drawing came out so light that at some points, it was hard to distinguish all the details she described; I pointed this out to her. May said she did not want to use an intense colour. She looked at me and said that once she started to draw, things appeared on the paper and would not disappear. She was familiar with the process because she had attended dyadic sessions with her daughter. I asked her why she became so emotional while she was drawing, since the metaphor of growing as a flower seemed like a pleasant way to reflect on her life and suggested a positive outlook. May put the pencil down and started sharing with me her childhood experience. She was a happy girl in a small agricultural community until, at the age of ten, a neighbor and a close friend of her parents abused her sexually. She kept it as a secret for a year and then told her older sister, who repeated May's confession to their mother. Once the secret was revealed, May asked her mother not to confront the abuser. Both families continued to live in the same community, but her parents ended their relationship



with him and his family. May did not want to elaborate about the abuse, and I felt she was not ready to do so. May said that it was hard for her to trust people and it was even harder for her to open up. Her childhood friends knew about the abuse but in a very formative way. Within her family, no one ever spoke about it. I asked whether Ron knew, and she told me that she had shared some facts with him sometime after they had begun to date.

May's mother believed that therapy could help May deal with the abuse but May thought it was not beneficial. On the contrary, it increased her aggression toward her mother. Unable to bear this change in her daughter, May's mother decided to stop working full time to become more present and involved at home. With her mother's encouragement, May immersed herself in dance and ballet throughout her adolescence. Her mother chauffeured her to classes and pushed her to achieve excellence in the field. She was a good student. She noted that she had good friends among the dancers, but she was wholly invested in dance. She continued dancing until she was enlisted to the army service, after which she then she discontinued.

During the period of her pubescence, her right breast did not develop normally. As a dancer, she was preoccupied with hiding this defect. During her army service, she "mastered" the art of hiding by covering herself up and finding excuses to shower and dress alone. After her time in the military, she underwent breast surgery; which her mother had promised her once it was medically approved. The first surgery did not go well, and she needed to wait for another one. She said that the family was stressed because of their financial situation at that time. The second operation went well, and after a long recovery, she moved from her home to Tel Aviv, where for the first time she lived by herself. May said that this was the best time of her life, as she felt independent and free, felt as if she was finally in control of her life. She studied, worked, and supported herself. She did not elaborate on her job, and it seemed that she was not satisfied with her position as a junior secretary. Still, it was vital for her because it kept her independent, supplied a routine, and gave her the status of a working girl.

During that time, she used to talk with her mother on the phone almost every day and visited her parents on the weekends. On these weekends, she would spend time with her best childhood friends. She did not have relationships with men, but she was aware that men were looking at her. She said that at that time she was ambitious and hoped "to become somebody," but in her eyes, she never achieved this goal. At the age of 27, she met Ron. They dated, and after a short time, they got married. May elaborated from our earlier



discussion that she had shared her story of abuse with Ron while they were dating, but they had never discussed it in depth, and that she had just “reported it.” I asked her for his reaction, and she replied, “he was okay.” May was not ready to address the issue of communication with Ron. I noticed that her body language changed, and she started clicking her fingers and looking at her watch. May told me that she felt relieved from our discussion about her abuse. I did not want her to leave the room feeling exposed and fragile. I said that the psychological work should continue between sessions and encouraged her to start writing reflections on our sessions, by drawing, or just doodling at home.

*Session Analysis.* I introduced the lifeline assessment to May. Letting May choose her materials was a significant decision especially when the subject of the artwork was not up to her. Rubin (1984) pointed out the importance and value of letting clients choose their own materials; this way the therapist can notice the decisions made as symbolic expressions and responses by the client with clinical sensitivity and discernment. May picked only one colour pencil. My first insight came from this choice- drawing materials are in general marking and altering the surface to which they are applied (Moon, 2010), and have controllable and predictable results, which make them useful for clients who need to express intense emotions within a safe, containing context. The specific use of a hard lead pencil, which is considered a resistive material, demonstrated May’s choice to distance herself from her image (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). I decided to start our session with the lifeline assessment. Drawing the lifeline enabled May to reveal details which she was not able to share verbally. It also helped me to look at how she had coped thus far, and still continued to cope, with emotional issues throughout her life. The drawing was very light, and there was hardly any pressure on the pencil. Her chain of flowers started from the bottom left to the top right side of the page. The flowers were very simple, with no extra decorations, and the background space was left completely empty. May used only one colour. Reflecting on May’s comment, “once she started to draw, things appear on the paper and will not disappear,” I could understand her fear, and maybe embarrassment. These feelings had caused detachment and avoidance.

The flowers were not rooted in the ground; they were connected to the petals. Even in the last three flowers, when she added Ron and the girls, she still did not draw them as connected to herself. Her family of origin was absent. Two flowers which represented her independent life and army service had leaves on them. Once she drew Ron and the girls, there were no longer any leaves on the stems. May omitted the leaves once she drew Ron and herself, and she had not indicated the relocation, the move or any particular changes in her life, such as



quitting her job, her pregnancy and Singapore. The next flower represented her daughter. While reflecting on her drawing, her voice and gestures were emotionless.

The lifeline helped her to organize her line of thought and the overwhelming feeling that she had experienced in her life. Putting the images or symbols on paper took a lot of courage. She started the process by “breaking through her well-honed defenses” (Moschini, 2005, p. 2). It was the first time May had mentioned details about her childhood to me, and by indicating the abuse, she had committed herself to this subject of discussion. I felt that May was able to trust me. She had not sought out therapy to work on her past issues, instead asking to work on her relationship with Ron. I was wondering about the long-term impact of the abuse on the relationship between May and Ron. I was aware of May’s willingness to work on her relationship with Ron, but I strongly felt that she needed to work on separate issues first. She needed to become available to exploring and changing patterns and behaviors with Ron. “The treatment of attachment difficulties begins with the regulation of emotions, stress reduction, and restoration of feelings of safety” (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014, p.8). I asked May to use a notebook to continue writing or drawing her emotions at home, hoping for her to be able to self-regulate by using this form. At this point in the therapy, it became apparent that May’s trauma had a significant effect on the couplehood. To build a secure attachment with Ron while being remote from other significant figures, the trauma would need to be dealt with thoroughly.

### *Session No. 3*

I began our third session by expressing an appreciation of her courage and willingness to share the last time we met. With her permission, I took her drawing from the previous session out from a drawer, so that we could discuss it further. I explained that I would expect to see clues in her drawing from a change between the flowers to represent her troublesome childhood and adolescence, as well as from the flower representing the point where she met Ron; however, nothing had really changed. I pointed at the images: the colour, the size, the pressure of the pencil. I said, intentionally and dramatically, that it felt like each flower was copy-pasted.

May looked at me, pointed to one of the flowers, and explained that it represented the event of their first meeting. Without showing any emotional reaction, she went on and said they were introduced, started dating, but lived separately. After a few months they decided to upgrade their relationship and, as such, moved in together into his apartment, giving up her



rented apartment. Ron had to fly abroad often, and May said that she loved to be alone. When Ron was at home, she would compromise her "private time" and do what she felt was expected of her as a partner. Secretly, she waited for him to travel again so that she could go back to "being free." They got married two years after they met. Three months after the wedding, she got pregnant, and they left for their relocation to Singapore - their first adventure as a couple. She said that the decision regarding relocation was unanimous after discussions. They both shared the same idea regarding relocation- they saw it as an opportunity, as well as an adventure. May got pregnant just before they left Israel. She said she had felt connected to the baby in her womb. She was happy. It was her biggest achievement- to get pregnant and to be expecting to become a mother. She said that the first few months of their relocation was a pleasant time for them. They looked for a place to stay, they were together when Ron did not travel, and they did not have any strings attached to their old life in Israel. May did not make new friends or become attached to anyone new, although she spoke to her mother daily. Ron travelled often, which gave May the space and the time to bond with her nearly born daughter. When they were together, they looked for "stuff" for the baby. It sounded that May was alone but kept herself busy.

I asked May if she felt connected to Ron at that time and if she shared her pregnancy with him, particularly her fears, dreams, and fantasies. May said that in some ways, yes, and in others, no. They never really shared feelings or desires, but they were always good partners in working toward a project. To her, having a baby was a "project" that she and Ron could work together towards achieving, and feelings were not a part of this equation - "feelings are personal." May said that she did not feel pressure to fit in culturally or emotionally after relocating, as she was nesting for the coming birth which kept her occupied. May gave birth earlier than expected and stayed in the hospital because of some complications. She did not breastfeed. May asked Ron to invite her mother to stay with them for three months. Her mother came to Singapore right after the birth. She told them that she came to take care of May and the baby. She indeed took over and left less for May and Ron to do. May said that her mother and Ron never got along too well. During the mother's stay, Ron was left out of making decisions regarding taking care of the baby, or herself. He stepped aside and May's mother took control over the family. May said, "she felt it was good for her that her mother was there, but she did not think Ron felt the same." Her mother's departure, after three months left a big hole in May's heart. Now she was alone with the new baby, far away from home. I asked May whether she was able to share more with Ron once her mother left. May



hesitated to answer, and I felt the need to alter the question and asked if she tried to talk to other young mothers that were going through or had been through similar experiences. May replied that she knew she needed to take control and she did not expect anyone to help her. When she had doubts, she called her mother. She did not have friends and did not want to be judged by others' opinions. I understood from her reply that May did not see friendship, at least in Singapore, as potential source of support. I wondered whether this had been so also in Israel but decided to leave social relationships to a later stage in the therapy.

I felt that we touched points that had never been shared before. May seemed to be reluctant to continue this line of talk and diverted the conversation to different issues. She positioned herself on the sofa. May started to speak fluently and jumped from one subject to another. I felt she did not want me to interrupt or ask any more questions. She said she enjoyed motherhood. At that time, she did not have a helper (it is prevalent in Singapore to have a live-in helper to cook, clean, and help with the children) and enjoyed cooking and spending all her time with her new-born daughter, but that it was also exhausting. She said that Ron was a fantastic father. He was funny, creative, and much more spontaneous than her. Two years later, May was pregnant with their second daughter. Her mother announced that she would come to Singapore to help, but Ron informed her that they were going to hire a helper and there would be no need for her help. They did hire a helper. This required a big adjustment from May, as she had to share and trust someone with her daughters, especially when one of them was so young. At that time, May gave up the idea of returning to work. May did not want to draw during this session. She said that she started drawing in her private notebook at home and showed me the notebook. She said that she would write as well. I reminded her that this notebook was her private journey, and praised her for using it and encouraged her to continue. I was pleased to see and hear that May was able to work with her notebook and use it as a safe space to explore while she was outside the clinic.

*Session Analysis.* My impression was that since the abuse, May never shared her feelings with anyone. She did not feel secure enough to expose herself emotionally or physically. May was ten years old when the abuse happened, and it lasted a year. For a year she kept her secret of the abuse, during which feelings were not allowed because no one could help anyway. She did not feel secure enough to share with her mother, as what was happening almost every night occurred when her mother's best friend used to put her to sleep. May felt helpless. This event had a dramatic influence on May's attachment style and working models.



Her intrapersonal world revolved around the circumstances of the abuse. Intrapersonal communication can be defined as the communication with one's self, and that may include self-talk, acts of imagination and visualization, and even recall and memory (McLean, 2005). She said that she used to talk to herself to calm herself down while it happened. Her inner dialogue, or internal self-talk, was her way of coping at that time. I believe May continued using this internal talk for self-regulation when she felt overwhelmed or anxious. May's attachment style at that time could be described as "avoidant." In the next sessions, I would have to explore May's attachment style in more depth. Twenty years later, May was still not able to share her thoughts, anxiety, and feelings with others, including her husband. In fact, she completely avoided sharing any of her feelings with Ron. Their interpersonal relationship involved inquiries and information, but not feelings and intimacy. Although the abuse history was first revealed verbally, I believed that art making would be an important part in the upcoming sessions to further explore and unload.

The relocation had no particular record in May's lifeline. It was attached to the birth of her first daughter. It can be interpreted as giving the two events similar importance. It was, however, an act that drastically changed her life in a few dimensions: her relations with Ron, her attitude towards living an independent life, her relations with her mother, and her attitude towards returning to work. Her attitudes towards these aspects of her life would have a significant impact on her ability to cope with the challenges of relocation and to build a stronger, deeper relationship with Ron - points to be addressed as the individual and couple's therapy evolved. The relocation detached May from her mother and did not substitute her with another significant figure (Findlay et al., 2008). The couple's relationship may have been sufficiently healthier in a more supportive environment, but it seemed that May's social isolation in relocation created a necessity for a more intimate relationship with Ron, while her mother's role should have been sidelined. I decided to move on in the next session to more recent events that had more to do with the relocation.

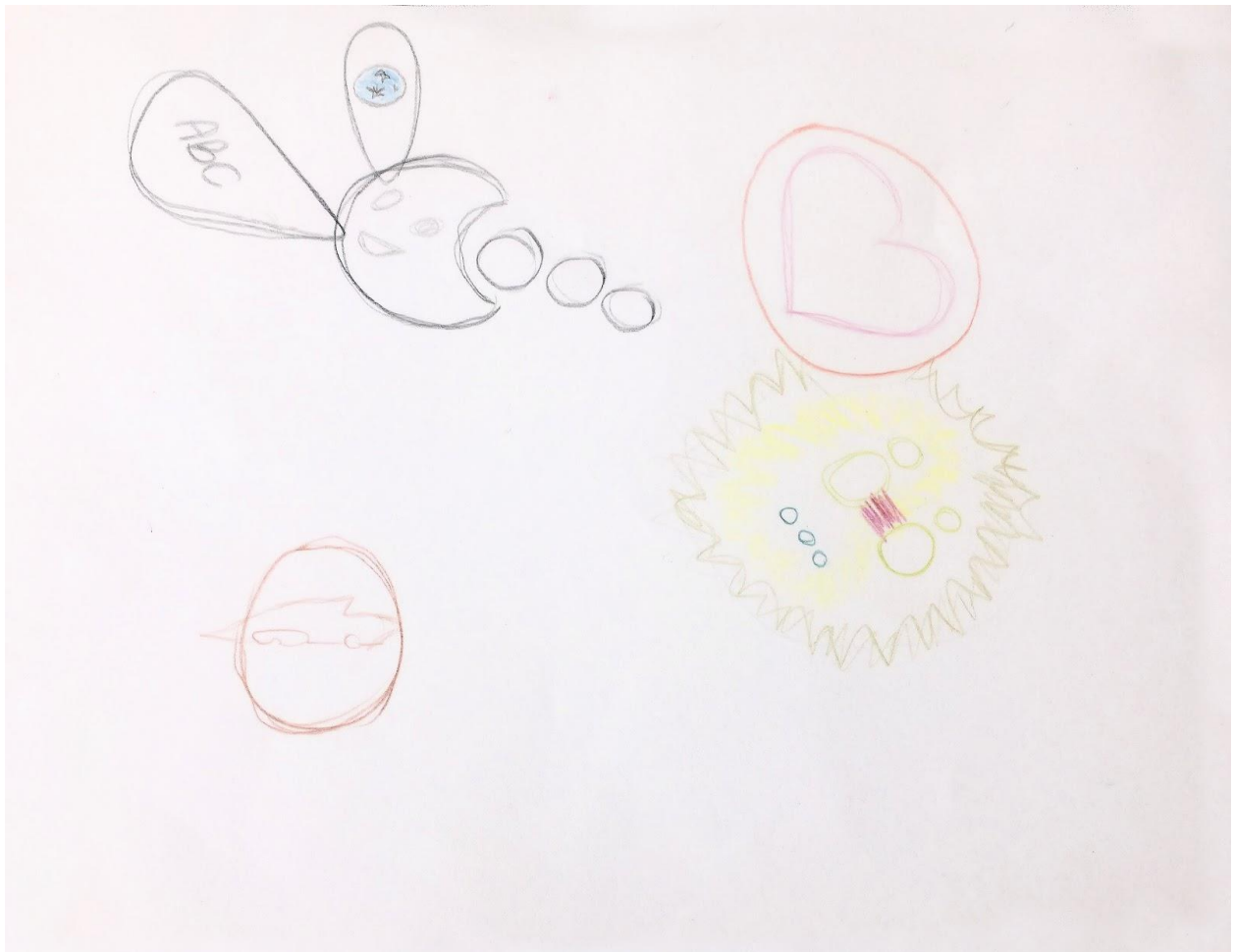
#### *Session No. 4*

I asked May to tell me about her expectations of relocating to Singapore. She said she had been looking forward to improving their standard of living. She mentioned that she felt comfortable knowing that Ron would be the only provider. She expected that being apart from their families would bring them closer together. She was looking forward to improving her English, to traveling, and to exposing herself to new cultures and new people. She



thought she might continue her studies. She hoped to build her self-confidence and "to start everything fresh."

I asked her if she could draw her initial expectations from relocating to Singapore. I decided to offer May a small piece of A4 paper. She seemed satisfied as if she was expecting this request. She chose a few colour pencils and drew very quickly as if it was already planned. May kept moving the page while drawing. She drew three (the fourth figure was added later) separate schematic figures (Drawing 2).



*Drawing 2 - May's expectations from relocation*

On the top left corner, she drew a smiling moon shape with three small circles and two drop shapes. One drop had the letters ABC inside of it; the other drop had a blue circle with small star-like shapes inside it. On the right side, she drew an orange circle with a big pink heart in it. At the bottom left corner, a brown oval shape with a miniature map of Israel (turned 90 degrees to the right) was added. She did not talk while drawing. Once she was



done, she put the pencils back in their box. She looked at me, arranged herself back on the chair, and stated that this was what she could express in drawing. We both looked at the drawing for a short while, and May asked if I needed an explanation. I smiled and said, "of course – your interpretation is much more important than mine. It is your story." She started by saying that she did not think she had explored and benefited from Singapore as much as she thought she would. She planned on improving her English, becoming open to new horizons, making friends with new people, studying, and overall improving herself. Pointing to the heart, she said she expected for her and her husband to become closer when they were far away from their families. The small map represented her expectations that leaving Israel meant she could leave behind her troubled childhood, "to close a chapter and detach." I asked May how come, when she spoke about her expectations, she seemed happy and cheerful, but when I looked at the drawing, I could see only information, almost like a shopping list: small, very contained images that expressed no feelings. May said that if she had the chance to draw her expectations before they relocated, the drawing probably would have looked very different. She knew now that most of her expectations were not fulfilled. They did not travel much because it was too hard for her to travel with the girls. She took a trip to Japan by herself once, and Ron traveled by himself for a surfing vacation once a year.

She said she did not make opportunities to meet people, as she did not like to socialize. May could not create close friendships with other mothers in Singapore. She explained that she felt that in friendships you needed to share, and she did not want to share about her abuse. May did mention that once she tried to build a mature friendship with a Japanese woman. Unfortunately, that woman relocated from Singapore a few months later. May said that she could not experience this disappointment again and again. She did not study or develop herself in Singapore, and did not even improve her English, explaining that "I needed to be with the girls." I asked May whether she and Ron had discussed their expectations and whether they felt that they had achieved them. She said they never talked about it as a whole subject. They talked about not having social relations, about her missing work or further studies, not traveling around together, and so on. Their discussions always ended in saying that their daughters are her first priority.

I asked May about their relationship with the family in Israel; it seemed to be a crucial aspect of their relationship. May could not address it verbally at this point. Therefore, she took the paper, chose new colour pencils and added to her drawing. I asked her to explain the additions she had included. The green sharp line contour represented them as a family,



protected from "the outside." The jagged yellow circle represented her motherhood, containing her and her daughters, and the red represented her relationship with Ron, who was excluded from the circle. She said that she mostly wanted to distance herself from the larger family to better establish themselves as a real and independent nuclear family. I brought up the mention of her the motherhood in yellow and asked whether Ron was a part of her motherhood. May replied, "no, he is part of the family, but I have my style of being a mom for our daughters, and he is not like me." May looked straight to me and added, "he does things in a different style, more spontaneous and less controlled. So, we are a family, but things are not great."

In a very strong sense, I could feel how protective May was over herself and her relationship with her daughters. The shapes in the drawing were not touching each other. The background was empty. The drawing was very symbolic, fragmented, impersonal and reflected no emotions. This description of initial expectations from relocation exhibited a very shallow attitude to such a dramatic change in life. I felt I should not follow this issue at this stage. I asked her about visiting their families. May said that every visit to Israel involved stress and complications. They usually stayed at their parents' houses and rotated during their vacation. Ron did not feel good at her parents' house, and therefore she did not try to be happy at his parents. When asked about family visits to Singapore she said, "my mother came to visit me after giving birth, and that was a catastrophe. She took over." At first, it was a relief for May, but she felt that Ron was not able to appreciate her mother's help, and so her mother's presence became a burden. It was a battlefield, albeit a silent one. She said Ron would not shout, but you could tell when he became tense and angry. He could be very sarcastic, but not rude, preferring to remain silent. I asked if Ron's parents visited them, and she said that they were supposed to, but it never happened.

*Session Analysis.* I felt that May needed my intervention after showing resistance in the last session, in order to feel safe. Offering her a small piece of paper would help her limit her space by setting fundamental boundaries that serve a limit-setting function (Lusebrink, 1990). In addition, a smaller piece of paper can be provided as a "way to limit or contain the ideas or affects expressed" (Gussak & Rosal, 2016, p.136). It is interesting to see how May used the drawing to mark her thoughts. The images were separated from each other, as there was hardly any connection between her experiences and emotions. May did try to use different colours to express some of the dynamics to which she related. The girls, Ron, and her mother are separated from each other and from herself. At the same time, and in the same drawing,



she defined and hedged her nuclear family from the outside world. It seemed like May traced apparent boundaries and protections for them; there was no place for flexibility. I found that more profound layers were unraveling; the inherent imbalances in her relationship with Ron, the strong impact of the extended family on the couple's dynamic, and the way these imbalances had been intensified due to the relocation. May expressed stress that was derived from difficulty in adjustment to a new living environment and lack of social network (Takeuchi et al., 2002).

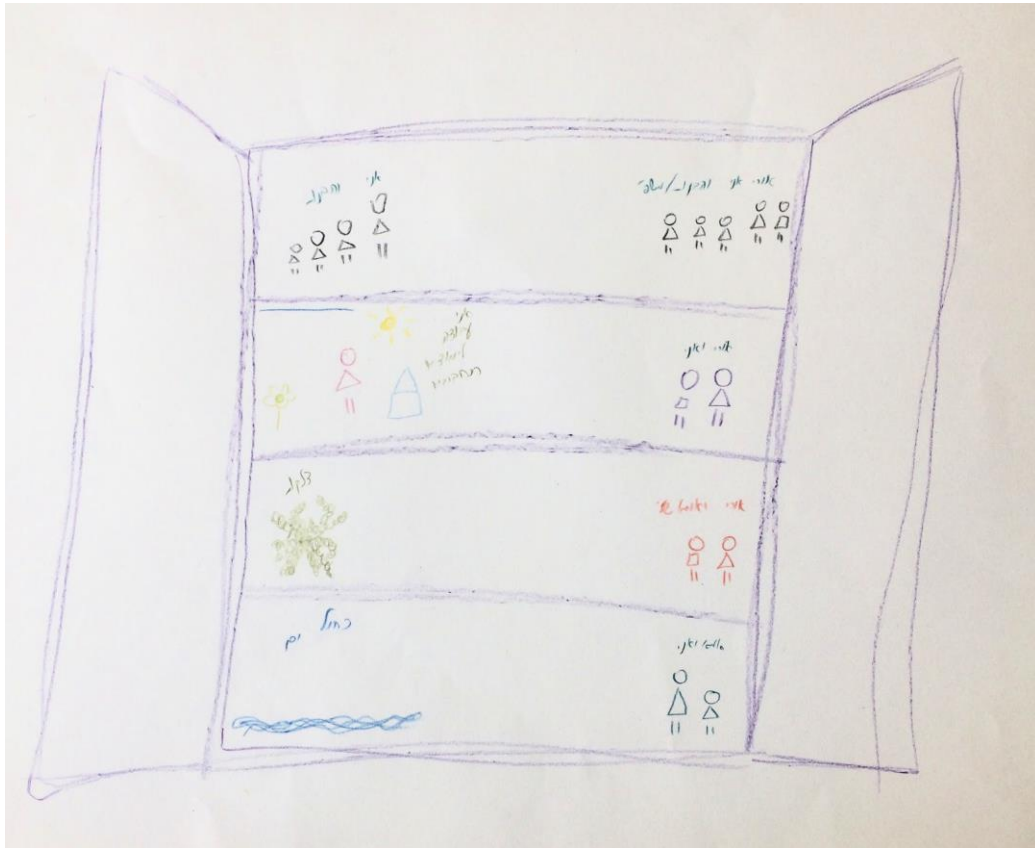
May needed to practice how to build relationships with others in the sense of defining boundaries. She felt lonely in Singapore because of her inability to engage in small talk and normal socialization. She avoided forming new close relationships and even sabotaged some new ones to "protect herself" from feeling exposed. A single failed attempt was sufficient for May to give up on the entire idea of new friendships, and thus, damned her to remain isolated. May shared in this drawing her disappointment and feelings of unfulfillment from the relocation. It is a well-known phenomenon with trailing spouses in relocation (Cole, 2011). She was not able to express or admit this before drawing her expectations. May was showing an increasing level of comfort with the art medium and an increased level of comfort in our therapeutic alliance.

While reflecting on her drawing, May expressed strong representation of an unfulfilled expectation gap, which served as a major trigger for stress and disappointment. At the same time, I felt that a lot had yet to be covered so far, and it was time to take a careful first step towards reflecting on the reality from a different angle by the use of a metaphor. Metaphors often present the listener with a mental picture of something conceptual that resonates on a deeper level (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014).

#### *Session No. 5*

At the beginning of our session, I encouraged May to use a metaphor of a closet to help her externalize what she had achieved during her years with Ron. It was important that she could *see* further than the disappointing parts of her journey so far. I decided to ask her to draw a closet, as I felt she needed the boundaries and the frame to feel safe to explore. I asked May to imagine her life as a closet and draw it open, to show "what is inside."





*Drawing 3 - May's closet*

I let her choose the size of the paper and materials. May surprised me by choosing a large A3 page. She took a few colour pencils and drew a diagrammatic picture of an open closet with four shelves (Drawing 3). May did not ask for explanations. I felt the closet was a safe image for her. The contents, which she drew from bottom to top, were divided into two columns. Symbolic figures and Hebrew words appeared in different colours. On the bottom left, the first shelf, she wrote the words “sea” and “blue” (in Hebrew), and in blue, she drew 5 overlapping lines to represent the sea. On the left of the second shelf, she drew and labeled “scars” in green (in Hebrew). On the third shelf on the left, she drew a triangle, a circle, and two lines to create a stick figure in pink, a green flower, triangle and square together forming a simple house icon in blue, the sun is yellow and a blue line on the top. She wrote in Hebrew “me,” “work,” “studies,” and “hobbies.” On the top shelf, she drew four human figures in black ordered so that the smallest is on the left, and the figures get larger towards the right. Above the biggest figure she wrote, in turquoise, “me,” and above the three others she wrote, “and the girls.”

On the right side of the closet, on the bottom shelf, she drew two human figures; a tall one and a short one. She wrote above the figures in turquoise, “mom and me.” On the second



shelf, she drew figures to represent a man and woman in orange. She wrote, "Ron" above the woman's figure and "my mother" above the man's figure. On the third shelf, she drew a man in purple, and wrote above it, in turquoise, "me," and a woman with the name "Ron" above her in turquoise. On the fourth shelf, she drew five human figures: three women together, and a separate couple, all in black. Above the figures, she wrote "Ron," "me," and "the girls/family." She was changing the colour pencils very quickly, choosing them intentionally.

She drew intensely and silently and seemed very concentrated. After she finished, she said that the left side was what was "hers." She explained that the blue line drawn on the top of the third shelf represented what she was able to achieve by herself. Above the line, she drew items she "shared with Ron, in order to become a mother." On the right side, she drew "items with which [she had] relations."

When May finished drawing, she took some time to look at her closet. On the left side were her life experiences since childhood, and on the right side were the people in her life. Then, she commented that her mother appeared on three shelves. The way she said this was as if it was a revelation. I noticed that her mother appeared on two shelves and Ron appeared on three. I did not correct May for her mistake. The drawing in itself was informative. May drew herself and her relationships with her close ones as stick figures. The lack of emotional details could indicate her attachment style and working models. I made a note of the fact that she, or her mother, were represented by a male figure, and Ron as a female in both. The bottom shelf that presented "my mother and me" on the right and "sea blue" on the left, portrayed the opposite sense of feeling of the shelf above it, presenting "scars" in green on the left, and "Ron and my mother," in orange on the right. May did not talk much about her father. It was apparent that her mother was the most dominant character in her family.

May mentioned that when she disclosed the abuse to her sister for the first time, her father was away. May never spoke about how her father handled the abuse. I sensed that May felt unsafe around male figures. The drawing helped her to mirror the intensity of her mother's presence in her life and how it affected her relationships with others. The mother figure appeared in the drawing in the represented stages of childhood, through the abuse, as well as in relation to Ron. It was interesting to see that May placed the scars, Ron, and her mother on the same shelf. Until now, May described her relationship with her mother as good, and protective. She did not share her feelings regarding the abuse or her mother's emotional support to her. May was very distant while talking about her family. The initial



idea of the session was to help May to map her achievements, but instead, she decided to divide the closest to into two parts, in which she spread her relationships with her close ones. The power of the images helped us to look at her attachment relationships. For the first time, May could see how dominant her mother's presence was in her life. May said that her mother's opinions were firm and unnegotiable. Usually, there was no discussion while sharing with her. May added, "but she was the only one who was always there for me!" May could not share an intimate, secure relationship with her mother. She described physical dependency, but lack of emotional support. On the other hand, May understood that she did not ask for emotional support from Ron. In the intake, May asked to improve her relationship with Ron, to get to know each other, and to be more intimate. The reflection on this drawing helped May to realize the need for a change.

*Session Analysis.* May used the colour pencils again, as well as hard tip colours. These are considered resistive materials; "harder leads will allow for increased distance between the participant and his or her image due to increased resistance, the softer leads with smoother application can provide a greater sensory experience" (Gussak & Rosal, 2016, p.149). Conveying her life story through the expressive modality of drawing was easier than verbalization (Malchiodi & Crenshaw, 2014). May's stick figures portrayed no emotions, but the content of the closet gave important information (Edwards, 2004). May drew Ron as a female and her mother a male, indicative of sexual concerns (Huss, 2015), or gender dominance concerns. The drawing also proposed the use of experientially-based methods, which could help individuals become aware of sensations, emotions, images, and relationships (Siegel, 2012).

The session provided an initial insight into May's attachment style: the abuse she experienced imprinted an insecure-avoidant attachment style. During the year of the abuse, May avoided her close ones, keeping to herself. After revealing the abuse to her sister, who shared with her mother, the dynamics of the family had changed. Her mother became more anxious, taking much closer care of May, who in turn became more dependent on her mother. It seemed as if the trauma and the inconsistency of the caregiving changed May's attachment to one that was more anxious, towards her mother in particular. Strong dependence, but lack of sensory and emotional attachment, with her mother may have perpetuated her insecurity and enhanced an anxious behavior (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001). The dependency was accelerated after the relocation, where May and her mother were physically far apart. The process of separation caused strong distress for May. From the attachment



perspective, “if attachment seeking behavior [does] not evoke comforting contact and responsiveness from an attachment figure, a process of angry protest, clinging, depression and despair occurs, resulting eventually in detachment” (Woolley, 2007 p. 30).

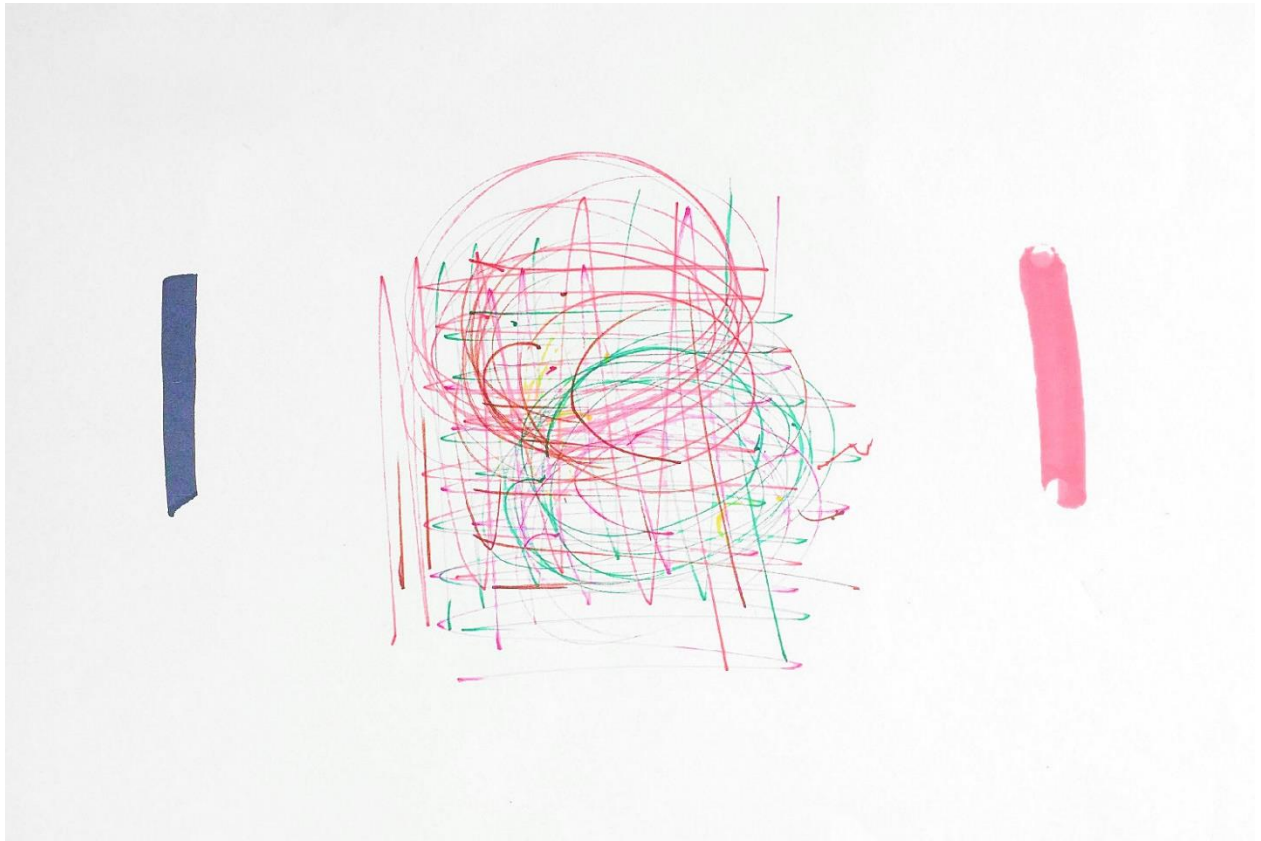
May avoided sharing her feelings and thoughts with Ron, even before the relocation. Their relationship was built on an avoidant attachment style. People with this attachment pattern are more likely to feel uncomfortable with intimacy (Edelstein & Shaver, 2004), tend to neutralize the attachment system in situations of intimacy and perceive others negatively in order to reduce and avoid a sense of need for the attachment figure (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006). I decided that May was ready to explore her relationship with Ron after realizing the impact of her mother on their relationship. The awareness helped her to release how her working models work. She also understood why her relationships with Ron are built on avoidance.

In this drawing, I could see stronger representation to artistic, multidimensional expression. May’s increasing comfort with the medium produced more complex images. These images have a wealth of data in symbols that allow focused and fast progress. They are also representational of the reflective nature of art therapy- the art became a distanced transitional space (Huss, 2015) within which May was now able to explore and reflect, allowing focused and accelerated progress.

#### *Session No. 6*

Making reference to the fact that May presented her family in her closet drawing on separate shelves, I asked her to give a graphic expression of her family relations. She started with two thick markers, black and pink, and drew two lines on the sides of the paper. Then she took thin markers and randomly drew circles and lines in different colours. It is evident that she meant to draw no precise figure and no details, just drawing an entanglement. May stayed in the middle of the paper and confined her space between the lines.





*Drawing 4 - May exploring relationships*

Once she was done, she said, “from here to there, with lots of layers in the middle.” She put down the paper and sat back. I asked her if she could explain her drawing and her statement. May said that until she started attending our sessions, she always knew how to control her feelings:

I used to close myself in the room, or go for a run, or talk to my mom, or organize the house. These things would calm me down until the next breakdown, but I was in control. After having organized my life in the “closet,” I understood that to reach from here to there I need to untangle the layers.

I told May that I was very proud of her for addressing the issue of her relations and for reaching out for help instead of avoiding it. I could feel that May trusted me and felt safe to feel, share, explore, and take risks. I asked her what she would call her way of dealing with problems such as “[closing herself] in the room,” “[going] for a run,” and “[talking] to [her] mother.” She said that this was her way of running away from the problem. I explained to May about attachment and asked her to help me define her attachment style with her mother and her attachment style with Ron.



We identified the differences: with her mother, she was more anxious, dependent but not sharing emotionally, while with Ron she was avoidant. We tried to check where and when she was triggered, and how her internal working models were making her respond automatically to the patterns that she knew. I helped her to see that her work with her daughter changed the way she was attached to her daughters and asked her if she also wished to build a safe and secure attachment with Ron. May said that recently she called her mother only once or twice a week, not daily as she did before. She thought that now, distance from her mother would be good for her. She also added that she would like to be alone less often when she is unhappy or stressed and that she should be with Ron. May added that she used the notebook at home sometimes instead of starting to organize the house. She said writing notes and drawing in her notebook helped her to relax. May said that she tried to organize more playdates for the girls and she went with them to the playground where she could meet other expat wives and even a few other Israelis. “It is not natural for me to have those small talks, and sometimes I feel as though we talk about nothing, but I guess that this is what expat moms do. None of them are working; they are all busy with sports activities and lunches, pedicures, and shopping. It is hard for me to connect to that part.” May added, “don't get me wrong, I can pamper myself sometimes, but I cannot make it as a regular thing. I miss studying or working, feeling that someone else besides the girls needs me.”

*Session Analysis.* Art processes enable the regression to early stages of development that in turn enable access to early calcified conflicts (Huss, 2015). May expressed her repressed anger towards her past sexual abuse and her feelings about her relationship with Ron through making a “mess.” For the first time in our sessions, she used markers. When using markers, the line created is clear and cannot be changed; the predictability of the result may ease anxiety nonetheless (Moon, 2010). It seemed to me that the choice of a small A4 piece of paper, and the restricted boundaries that May drew, represented her strong feelings and deterrent emotions. This drawing emphasized that she comprehended all the relations in her world as existing and screening between her and Ron. No relations existed between her and what surrounded her as if she never adjusted to her new environment. It also seemed that since her childhood, May never really had a safe relationship with anyone, she was not trusting and was always alert. May convinced herself that helping herself to self-regulate, and not to interact, while she was in what she would perceive as a threatening situation would give her the best results. She was not able to share feelings or intimate moments with others: not with Ron, not with her mother, and especially not with friends.



I was happy to hear that May was more available, open to reaching out and exploring different activities and to socialize, despite her criticisms of such actions. I was pleased to learn that she was becoming aware of her loneliness and began allowing herself to compromise her social choices. May appeared calmer and softer. She was relaxed and often smiled during our session. May described situations of self-regulation at home, and of “letting go” of her strict rules in the house for the family, and towards herself. She said she could now enjoy watching at the girls playing spontaneously, simply by watching them, or while reading a book. She shared that she wished Ron could see her change. May has made significant progress so far and was making new revelations. She showed trust in me and in the process, and was keen to explore further. I shared with May my intent to use the next session to wrap up our individual sessions and move further towards the couple’s therapy.

*Session No. 7*

Session 6 ended with my statement about transitioning to the next phase of therapy, about which May was a bit apprehensive. In our final session, May entered the room and handed me a drawing that she produced at home. She told me that she would like us to talk about it. I complimented May for her work. I said that I was pleased to see that she found the time and peace of mind to make such an invested drawing at home. May smiled, she seemed eager to start talking about her work.



*Drawing 5 - The house in Israel*



May said this was where 'was' is now. She pointed at the words she had written on the page and read them aloud to me: "The house in Israel," "What did you do so far?" "You didn't study," "You didn't work," "Looking from the window," "In," "Out," "Airplane window," "House window," "Five V." The last phrase was written with a darker colour. After reading, she looked at me. I smiled and asked her if she could talk about what she drew. May said this was the garden of their house in Israel. "The five plants on the right side (green, red, orange, yellow, and brown) represent our family. There are bushes, a water hose, a big window, a pair of bicycles, and a path leading to the house." May said that she felt as if she could see the outside, but not the inside of the house. "The window is not transparent because I am not sure that I see clear." The path was the dominant item. It was drawn very coarsely, compared to other items.

A few of the bushes were messier than others. I asked why the round bushes were so messy. She said, "that is all the issues we still need to work on." I asked her to explain why she drew the path so wide and coarse and she said, "it is not a smooth walk along it." I asked her who stood on this path. May hesitated then said, "I think Ron and me." I asked her if they were together looking forward or touching each other. She said, "yes holding hands, hoping not to fall. The tiles are not straight, it's not a smooth way."

Just before leaving the clinic, she said that she had mentioned to Ron that today she would have her last individual session. Ron then told her that he had no expectations from couple's therapy. He admitted that the daughter's therapy was successful, but had agreed to go with her to this therapy mainly because of his good nature and his will to please her. May shared her concerns about stopping her individual sessions with me. I reassured her that she made a significant effort, but to continue the process we would need to work together with Ron.

*Session Analysis.* May's drawing was A4-sized, and she worked with colour pencils. It seemed that she planned the drawing before starting but added unplanned marks throughout the process of making it. Compared to previous drawings, she used a larger variety of colours. The intensity of the mark making was stronger and more emotional. She had created a story, and I felt that it represented progression. May could start looking at her life as a whole and not as fragments. For the first time, the drawing covered the whole paper and left no voids. Her pencil marks were strong and repetitive. Without being able to look at her while drawing, I had the impression of her being decisive, perhaps even aggressive. Like in



most of her former drawings, she added Hebrew words. These were written very lightly. I felt that May was engaged in her therapeutic process and even dared to process our discussions and her feelings, at home between our weekly sessions.

In this drawing, May demonstrated *developed creating*, which is one of the terms used to define an inner change by the client (Holmqvist et al., 2017). It was interesting to see that May chose to draw her house in Israel from the outside. The house had been “theorized [to symbolize] the main place wherein affection and security are sought” (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 93). In a way, May’s decision to draw a house gave me some reassurance, regarding her change in looking for support. The outside represented her need to “structure [the] environment more completely - which is associated with feelings of insecurity or needing of exercising control in interpersonal contact” (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 94). We discussed these things in our sessions. May was able to draw her nuclear family as shrubs, giving each one a different colour. According to MAPD (2018), “shrubs drawn around the house can indicate insecure feelings and the need to erect self-protective barriers” (MAPD, 2018, p. 27). I was happy to see that May related to the family in this colourful way. They were not stick figures anymore. She drew a big window, expressing a “desire for contact” (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 93) and said that she was looking “outside but not inside.” They had never lived in this house. It was built for them, and it was being rented out. The house was mentioned in our first session. It triggered a conflict within the family of origin. May did not share much about that, yet she addressed the house in the drawing as their house in Israel. May was able to look outside but was very unclear about the inside. She was able to see that there were issues to work on with the family system. It was important for her to hear that she could see herself with Ron, holding hands and trying to walk together towards the house in Israel. During our individual sessions, we were able to create a safe and holding environment for May to explore, see, and express her life. May was able to share about her childhood and talk about traumatic events that unfortunately determined her way of coping with life.

The evolution of the artwork over 7 sessions reflected how the patient adopted art as a tool for self-expression and deep reflection. The drawing provided a snapshot of the multi-layered emotional complexity behind relocation. A fading iconic position of an old home and its position in a patient’s conscious, strong uncertainty, the position of the family, marital relationship, and the criticality of ‘the route’, representing a journey, change, challenges and the need to adapt. The session concluded May’s preparation towards couple’s sessions well. It represented a case where an individual’s condition derived from a historical trauma had



been exacerbated and disrupted the patient's quality of life and their couplehood. It is therefore significant to the therapy, and to the patient's adjustment in relocation. Even though the patient's individual history is not directly the subject of my research, the case represented well the fact that in some instances, the individual's history and deriving condition must be understood and addressed prior to the couple's therapy.

### *Conclusion of May's Individual Therapy*

The individual sessions with May aimed to prepare her, and myself, for the upcoming couple therapy. I saw May for seven sessions. May was engaged in the therapy. These sessions revealed issues that were significant for the couple relations: May's history with abuse, her attachment styles and working models, her relations with her mother, her relationship with Ron, and the relocation. May found a safe place in the therapy and expressed trust in me with most issues. Her need for support and guidance was partially fulfilled, and she was ready to express herself both verbally and in her artwork.

### *The abuse*

The sexual abuse experienced at the age of 10 was the most significant event in May's life. It had a bearing on her attachment style, and thus affected her personal relations with her family and with others, as well as social skills and self-esteem. It had never been treated thoroughly. It is well-established that "adults, who were traumatized in childhood, may develop unhealthy attachment styles with their romantic partners" (Yumbul, Cavusoglu & Geyimci, 2010, p. 1742). May actually demonstrated actions that affirmed the claim that "Individuals who were abused or neglected in childhood may develop dysfunctional patterns of emotional closeness, intimacy, safety-seeking and building trust in romantic relations due to their despaired attachment systems" (p. 1744).

May suppressed the event and avoided talking about it in detail. In her drawing of her lifeline (Drawing 1), she did not give the abuse any graphical representation. She did not mark it in a different colour or change the image in any way. The abuse was portrayed in the same very light purple colour and the same size as all the rest of her symbols, and it had always been there as part of her chain of flowers - part of her life. May did not fully share the abuse with Ron. Although, she informed him of the event, they never discussed it, and he had never addressed it -possibly never fully understanding its full meaning and effect. The implications of the abuse on May's relations with her mother and her husband are recognized by Yumbul, Cavusoglu, and Geyimci (2010): "The effect of childhood trauma may be



observed in the way individuals form relationships with their family, friends, and especially partners as well"(p. 1741).

### *The Mother*

May's relationship with her mother was functional and dependant. However, a safe a safe relationship was never formed between May and her mother, and as such this dependency was not an *effective dependency* as defined by Johnson (2008a): "a secure base from which to go confidently out into the world" (para. 2). The presence of her mother in the "closet drawing" (Drawing 3) attested to this more than May could realize or admit verbally. May tried to change her patterns and dependencies along her life, but she could not rely on Ron to help her. In two drawings (Drawings 2 & 5), she expressed her initial expectation of easing her mother's hold by relocating, and a remaining hope to still achieve this. It seemed that replacing the authority of her mother with the authority of the therapist during individual therapy, enabled her to examine the past and decide to take care of the present. Winnicott (1971) focused on how characteristics of the introjected relationship are projected on to symbolic transitional objects and spaces that help the client to engage with, and also to separate from, the real object. Transitional space is the playful zone within which one learns to interact with people and to internalize positive concepts of self and of other (Huss, 2015).

### *Attachment*

May's relations with Ron are affected by their attachment styles and working models. The individual sessions revealed her attachment style and internal working model. As explained above (Session 5, session analysis), since the abuse, May had developed an avoidant and anxious attachment with her family. Her relations with her father and sister were scant, but her mother developed a very active and protective relationship with her. She caused May to become very dependent on her, such that May was driven to attend to her mother's needs instead of her own needs.

May developed a coping mechanism which included keeping herself obsessively busy by tidying the house. Closing her door was also a substitute for her need to exploring and interact with people. The trauma from the abuse, coupled with her mother's new attitude to her, shaped the way May perceived the world and her interpretations of emotions, behaviors, and mental concepts. May did not trust people. With her inner working model, she was incapable of exploring and looking for potentially trustworthy, new attachment figures



(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As explained by Lyons-Ruth (2003) when the attachment system is disrupted due to trauma, individuals main focus turns to issues like security and safety while falling behind on development of other areas such as interpersonal relationship, exploration and learning, areas defined as *daily action systems*. It is therefore likely that the trauma affected May in a way that impaired the development of her interpersonal relationship.

### *Relations with Ron*

When May met Ron, and throughout their marital years, she did not change her attachment style or her internal working systems. She maintained functional relations with him and by the relocation, she became dependant on him for her financial security. May and Ron's romantic relationship before their relocation and before becoming a family was not developed into a healthy and safe relationship. May described her relationship with Ron as "distant and not intimate." She said, "it is like we don't even know each other." Research has shown the connection between traumatized childhood and attachment styles in a romantic relationship. "The adults, who were traumatized in childhood, may develop unhealthy attachment styles with their romantic partners due to this disruption to their attachment system" (Yumbul et al., 2010, p. 1742). "Childhood maltreatment increases the risk for insecure attachment. The internal working models of self and others associated with insecure attachment may impact the processing of socially relevant information, particularly emotion conveyed in facial expressions." (Davis, et al., 2014). At this point, May was avoiding interactions with Ron when she was stressed or anxious. The physical distance between May and her mother pushed May to look for a different source of support. She started looking into changing her avoidant attachment style with Ron. During the therapy, she became aware that their relationship could change if she could become more aware of her working models. She understood that when she felt a threatend or anxious, it would be easier for her to share and to look for Ron's support. In theory, she was ready to try. In practice, we spoke about how Ron would need to participate and change his way of connecting, as he had his own issues. May understood that she would need to share her feelings more openly with Ron if she wanted him to understand her and support her. She was not aware of the extreme impact of her attachment with her mother until we started working together. Nothing of it was portrayed in her lifeline. Although her lifeline (Drawing. 1) contained only a few details and yielded scarce information, it provided a detail that would later expose a deep conflict in May's self-perception. It served, as defined by Gussak and Rosal (2016), as a catalyst for processing and



working through unresolved emotions and conflicts. Both drawings referred very strongly to a conflict resulting from the couple's relocation. May's interpersonal relationship with Ron took a different turn. She did not seek proximity with Ron. She shared information with him, but, emotionally and intimately, she did not trust him to support her. She avoided explanations, details, and intimate moments. She was afraid that he would not be able to contain her. In the drawing "closet" (Drawing. 3) May was able to understand her relationship with her mother and how dependent she was on her. She could also see that Ron appeared there as a symbol, not as a real partner. The drawing also represented her mother as a male figure and Ron as a female figure.

Over the course of our sessions, I needed to reach a point where May understood her attachment mechanisms, her patterns of behavior, and to help her to engage with her feelings. It was important that May would be able to feel the containment as a *good enough mother* (Winnicott, 1971) and to be able to internalize positive experiences, including secure attachments, without being overly protective (Malchiodi, 2014). As Casement (1985) suggests:

What is needed is a form of holding, such as a mother gives to her distressed child. There are various ways in which one adult can offer to another this holding (or containment), and it can be crucial for a patient to be thus held, in order to recover or to discover maybe for the first time, a capacity for managing life and life's difficulties without continued avoidance or suppression. (p. 133)

By allowing May to express and share in a safe space, I was able to create for her a form of holding.

### *Relocation*

Although many of the roots of May's personal challenges and their reflections on the couple's relationship stemmed from May's unresolved past, the relocation contributed to May's individual challenges, which surfaced because of distress that had been enhanced to a boiling point. The effects of the relocation on May included many factors. It is not possible to itemize them because they are a complex set of influences. I will try to summarise some of them under few categories:

- Unfulfilled expectations
- Social relations



- Loss of status

*Unfulfilled expectations.* Contrary to her expectations of easing her dependence on her mother when living far away, May's relations with her mother have been exacerbated by relocating to such an extent that she now wished to fence her nuclear family off against intrusions by her mother, and perhaps others as well. The drawings of her expectations (Drawing 2) indicated her past wishes, most of which were not fulfilled. The dramatic changes of status in her life were overwhelming. In her mind, the relocation should have given her opportunities, but the reality was that she had lost more than she gained. Externalizing her thoughts and feelings through art helped her to realize those losses. May realized that she was so busy and engaged with her daughters, and with over-occupying herself, that she did not let herself explore her dreams. She did not travel, make new friends nor learned about new cultures. She felt as if she was left behind professionally, and now, as a mother with three children, she did not know how to make her life more meaningful.

*Social relations.* By relocating, May was detached from her friends. She lacked social skills, and her internal working model was not fit to create new friendships. May did not feel comfortable with social interaction, and did not engage with Ron's friends. She kept her loneliness to herself and lived with it. In her single attempt to form social relations, she felt like she had failed because the other family had relocated again. Her inner working model did not serve her well in the process of trying to further create social contacts.

*Loss of status.* The relocation changed the physical availability that May had with her mother. In the first few years, May was mostly occupied with raising their two daughters, and being a mother was her achievement and determined her status. By relocating, May also gave up her status as a working woman. Before relocating, both she and her husband worked and earned money. After relocating, Ron was the only provider, and May became 'just a trailing spouse.' For a while, the status of a mother was a sufficient substitute, but with time it became insufficient, and her satisfaction from motherhood was replaced with disappointment and lack of self-fulfillment. As a result, she further lost her self-confidence and self-esteem. When describing the drawing of her expectations from relocating (Drawing 2), May started with the more common expectations such as studying English and traveling. She ignored her ambition to "become someone" and only later she added the wish to improve the nuclear family relations and to prevent an intrusion from the outside. However, most of May's expectations from relocating were still not achieved at this point in the therapy.



Perhaps as a result of the therapy, or with the help of the therapy, May was able to define and verbalize new expectations. She expressed a new set of expectations in her second drawing, different from those in the first drawing. Contrary to the closed and distant figure of the map of Israel in her “expectations” (Drawing 2), in the “house” drawing (Drawing 5), she demonstrated a yearning to see her nuclear family returned home from relocation with neutralized relations between her family and her in-laws, defused from strong dependencies and emotional load.

A comparison of the image of May's family in three different drawings gives a clear impression of her relationship with them. The image of the family in the lifeline drawing (Drawing 1) and in the "closet" (Drawing 3) are both schematic, single-coloured, pencil drawings, and convey no emotion. In the beginning, she showed intense defensiveness in her art, such as high boundaries - elements not touching each other on the page (Drawings 2 & 3) and levels of control – seen through intense neatness and using only felt-tip pens that enable full control. The images became a place to raise these defenses to consciousness, and to confront them. Over time, May became more flexible, with shapes touching and colours connecting, showing a move to more adaptive defenses. This was her present image of the family. The coloured, tiny, and delicate bushes at the "house" (Drawing 5) portrayed an optimistic and emotional view of her family in a more natural environment.

During our sessions, May realized that she and Ron functioned as formal partners but avoided emotional sharing. They shared the duties of husband and wife, and even enjoyed occasionally doing “projects” together. May referred to a “project” as execution of necessities that they could handle together, such as buying furniture or planning a trip together, but they would not enjoy themselves as a couple while they were engaged in it. They could not share intimate moments or enjoy time alone together, and instead filled these empty spaces up with casual conversations that focused on their daughters' lives. May seemed to become more relaxed from one session to another.

### *Individual Sessions with Ron*

#### *Session No. 1 – Intake*

I started seeing Ron after ending the individual sessions with May. I explained to him the way that we needed to have individual sessions in order to reach a point where we could work on their issues as a couple further down the process. I described to him how they would be conducted, as well as the confidentiality agreement we had to set, as I had done with his



wife. Ron is a handsome Mediterranean man, aged 38 but with a more youthful appearance. He is thin and a bit shorter than his wife. Ron has a stutter, the extent of which – as I noticed in previous meetings – changed from very light to intense. He was not talkative and spoke in mostly short sentences.

Ron served a compulsory service in the military as a technician. After this service, he studied and graduated with a B.A. in Business Administration. He worked for an Israeli company involved in IT project development with a function that was mostly technical. Ron worked for this company before meeting May. He used to travel from Israel to Asia quite frequently and would stay for a few days at a time. Ron and May knew one another for two years before getting married. Three months after their marriage, May got pregnant. Ron and May took the opportunity for relocation that was offered to them by Ron's employer when May was three months pregnant with their first child. His relocation contract was for two years and was later extended for additional years. A few times a year he was sent back to Israel for job training, and once a year Ron and his family spent a few weeks there as well.

I asked Ron to tell me about his family of origin. He said, "they are a normal good family." I asked if they used to spend time together and he said, "my parents' house was always open. Friends always felt welcome and used to come and go. My parents are warm and positive." Ron could not recall any traumatic childhood and adolescent events upon being asked about them. He was not willing to speak about May's family either. I felt I should not inquire anymore at that moment. I asked him about his expectations for our individual meetings, and he said that he understood it was a preparation for the couple's therapy. He shared with me that he could see some changes in May's behavior at home since my individual sessions with her began, but he had doubts about whether the changes would endure. He also added that his therapy (probably referring to our individual meetings) would probably be concluded with fewer meetings than hers. Ron took his time answering my questions. I felt that he was restrained and felt blocked when discussing himself. On the other hand, he had no problem talking about his relationship with May. He understood that he was not happy with the situation at home, but he was not going to give up. He complained about May's obsessiveness with doing everything alone and not trusting him, nor the helper, at home. He seemed committed to giving the couple's therapy a chance.

Ron mentioned briefly that he was familiar with therapy and had gone through therapy in the past. After he completed his army service, he decided to see someone to help him with his



stutter. He said that the therapist he had seen helped him to understand the problem, but not solve it; he did not want to further elaborate on the subject. It was a challenging intake as Ron seemed willing to share- he was open and had a positive attitude, but I could feel his resistance and fragility. He seemed excited during the session, but, did not want to do any artwork. Ron wanted to improve his marriage and couple's dynamics, but it was not easy for him to be in the room for himself. Ron shared his concerns about May's behavior at home and the effects on their daughters in an informative style. He shared that he usually never commented to May in front of their daughters and avoided interacting while she would be shouting, cleaning, or demanding to tidy up the house. He said, "not to make things worse, I would turn to my phone."

I asked Ron about his current job. He mentioned that moving to Singapore was very stressful for him workwise: logistics, time management, negotiation, attitudes towards work and colleagues, etc. varied greatly between Israel and Singapore. He could not eat or sleep and felt that he had to perform well in order to justify the move. He told me that he had a superior with whom he was very comfortable with - they had a close relationship for several years - but this man left the company, and it was a challenge for Ron to adapt to a new superior. Ron shared that his social interactions were minimal, and he held May responsible for that. He said that although he knew he was safe in the company for now, he nevertheless felt growing tension and frustration. I asked him if he ever thought about changing his job. He replied that it would be a risk and he was not sure he could go through changes like that now. I asked Ron if he was able to share with May what he felt about his current job. He said he usually did not share what happens at work with May, and preferred to keep his work outside of family's discussions. Although I offered it, Ron was not ready to work with art materials.

*Intake insights.* Although Ron's company was a multinational one that deploys many expatriates, Ron had not experienced a placement process or training focused on the family's resilience to such a move, suitability to expatriation, and preparation for the move. Despite the fact, that he had traveled frequently before relocating. Ron was surprised at how unprepared he had been for the challenges that the relocation introduced. Staying abroad for short periods when all expenses were covered was much more convenient than living abroad with the family. Ron said that he felt safe now, but the threat was always there. He did not share his feelings regarding the ongoing threat and stress from work, and was clear about not



sharing his concerns with May. I felt that dealing with prolonged stress caused additional tensions between them.

I could feel Ron's resistance to do some artwork, in comparison to seeing him with his daughter in the room. Back then, he initiated and was creative. During this session, I experienced Ron's behavior as avoiding. "Clients assessed with insecure dismissing attachment have a tendency to avoid feelings and rely on intellect and cognitive function. They are dismissive of attachment needs" (Gussak & Rosal, 2016, p. 517). I recognized the need to establish rapport in a manner that allowed trust to develop so that Ron's feelings could be explored. "This might involve joining on a thinking level before introducing, perhaps, a psycho-educational plan for teaching the importance of emotional identification and expression" (p. 517).

Ron chose to talk only about how to "fix" the problems between him and May. He was able to share detailed information regarding facts and answered my questions, but he did so without showing any emotional involvement. He seemed to be cooperative and well-mannered, but avoided intimate or emotional questions. He emphasized May's struggles and felt that he was coming to therapy to help her. Although so early, this intake echoed my impression from May's sessions. It seemed that an equilibrium that may have worked in the country of origin was disrupted. There was a will on both sides to work on the relationship and care between the couple which is very important as a starting point, but there was a significant disconnect in the way the two saw and described the relationship's shortcomings.

My goals for the individual sessions with Ron were:

1. To create a safe place for Ron to be able to share his feelings verbally and creatively.
2. To help him to understand his needs to be the "okay guy."
3. To help him to stop avoiding situations in life.
4. To explore his attachment style with May's family of origin.

I bore in mind Malchiodi's claim that "The overall goal of attachment work in therapy generally involves re-creating experiences that recapture what the individual may have missed in early relationships" (Malchiodi, 2014. p. 3). I would start our next session by introducing art. I wanted to ask Ron to draw his lifeline in order to have a better understanding of the events in his life.



*Session No. 2*

In our second individual session, I explained to Ron about the life-line drawing and asked him to draw one. Ron refused to draw and did not wish to explain why. I asked him to tell me about his family. This time, he responded positively, but, was very brief. He came from an urban family, and has two sisters and a brother. He is the youngest child. He mentioned that his childhood was very different from May's. According to his description, his family functioned within a patriarchal hierarchy, in accordance to structured and defined roles. Ron stammered while he was talking. I reminded him that he spoke shortly about his stammering during our first session and asked him if he could to share more on that. Ron said that he experienced stammering all his life and restated that he even underwent therapy to try solve it.

Ron continued saying that he understood that psychological therapy is a positive thing. He said he knew how the therapy helped their daughter and how things improved for her. He looked at me and smiled, then added that he thought it could provide tools for coping with difficult situations and emotions. Ron paused, looked at me, and said, "I saw a therapist many years ago..... I think it can help..." He looked at me directly, and said, "please give me a toolbox, and we will fix it..." Ron smiled, pleased with himself. I explained that everyone can buy a toolbox and put tools in it, but in our sessions, he would have to find the right tools, and that he had to learn how to use them when he felt that he needed to. He had to figure out why and how to use those tools, and only then he would be able to carry the "toolbox" with him. Carrying the toolbox would give him awareness and independence. It could help him to have more control over his life and ability to look at situations from different angles. The toolbox metaphor was helpful. Once I felt Ron understood the metaphor, I knew I would be able to use it again.

Ron shared that despite therapy in the past, the stammering did not stop. Sadly, in his family, therapy was not seen in a positive light, seen, instead with a negative stereotypical image. He mentioned that his parents never suggested to him to treat the stammering with any form of therapy. He continued saying that as a child, he was not confident with speaking in the class or in public, and his outlet was to play music. He said that even during his army service, it was an obstacle. When he finished his army service and became an official adult, he went secretly went for therapy. I asked him whether it had an influence on his social life. Ron talked about his friendships in Israel with his old friends. He said he had two close



friends with whom he shared his experiences and thoughts. He could laugh with them, and share successes and failures. They understood his cynical sense of humor, and he missed them very much. I asked him if May knew these friends and he answered that she did. He believed that she understood the importance of these friends to him, yet she was not friends with them herself.

Ron explained that his attempts to bring his friends together with his wife had failed. Thus they each had a few of their separate friends. Since their relocation to Singapore, he had continued communicating with them, often over the phone, and met them whenever he was in Israel. Unfortunately, he could not say that he had found anyone in Singapore with whom he felt like he could build this kind of relationship. Ron was quiet. When asked if he could describe himself, he responded that he was "a simple and straightforward guy", and was "always okay, with everybody: at home, at work, and with friends." When asked about himself as a child, and he said that he felt like he had always been this way. Ron felt held back by May's discomfort in social situations, especially in Singapore, such that their social interactions were usually only linked to the girls in the form of playdates, and school. He said that this was potentially one of the reasons they did not spend time together. Ron also said that they could not leave the girls and go out because it was always difficult for May to not be there when they were going to bed. I asked Ron what he liked to do in his free time, which did not involve May and the daughters. Ron said he liked to ride his bicycle, go for runs, and play music on the guitar and the piano. He also took an annual surfing trip without his wife and daughters, which he had always been looking forward to. He traveled alone to different places in Asia to surf, meet new people, and enjoy his freedom. I offered Ron a sketchbook and asked him to use it between our sessions; I told him he could write or draw in order to reflect his thoughts and feelings as he pleases. I assured him that I would not ask him to bring it or to share its contents with me, but if he wished to do so, that he could. I explained that the purpose of his journal would be for him to have a place to discharge his feelings, and to reflect on and understand them.

*Session Analysis.* Ron expressed that he had a pleasant childhood; he grew up with good relations with his parents. Nevertheless, he showed great difficulty in talking about the emotional aspect of his relationships with his parents and wife, or with regards to talking about any other emotional subject for that matter. A discussion involving emotions triggered stammering. In our past meetings, while working with his daughter and in their dyadic sessions, I noticed that Ron had a stutter. This was particularly obvious when the topic he



spoke about was personal or emotional. When May mentioned it in our parent guidance meeting, Ron described the stutter as a part of himself and avoided any further discussion. Ron resisted doing any artwork. Corey (1996) defined resistance such as in this case "any idea, attitude, feeling, or action that fosters the status quo and gets in the way of change" (p. 119) and contended that, "although taxing, resistance may serve as a defense mechanism that should be respected as an avenue for further understanding the client" (p. 119). His overall attitude indicated to me that he may not necessarily resist couple's therapy, but that he may not have yet understood his part in the couple's imbalance. While being motivated to improve the relationship, he resisted the need to work on his own changes, being perhaps in denial of his role in the ailing relationship. I decided he would need time to reach a realization, and I did not want to push him too hard. Ron was able to describe in this session how he avoided interactions or what he felt were judgmental responses from others all his life. Ron could not compromise his image of being, as he said it, "the okay guy", and this led to a lack of self-exploration and the adoption of a passive position.

It was clear that Ron's way to deal with situations and conflict was avoidance. To me, he seemed uncomfortable and insecure. However, I was optimistic because he was an active and positive driver of the earlier therapy for his daughter, while they both were striving to solve problems without avoidance.

Ron expressed frustration with regards to his lack of social connections. He missed his close friends from Israel and was unable to use his workplace to build a new social network. This commonly happens in relocations. He blamed May for not being able to socialize and make new friends in Singapore- this is where secondary feelings of anger and frustration towards his wife began to surface. I felt that, in contrast to what he had implied, Ron himself showed no desires or initiatives towards creating new relationships for himself. I put this thought aside as currently, it was important for the therapy to focus on him as an individual, rather than on their relationship. Ron could not share or unload with May his stress and anxiety from work. He was alone. He mentioned to me that he felt freedom while traveling without his family on his annual surfing getaways, where he could potentially make friends on his own. He allowed himself to explore when he was far from May. It was interesting that outside of what was supposed to be his "home" and "safe" place, he felt more open. After observing the way Ron described his enjoyment while he surfed, I decided I could use his surfing experiences in our sessions to help him begin expressing himself more comfortably.



*Session No. 3*

When Ron came to the third individual session, he looked indifferent. I put a piece of A3 drawing paper on the table in front of him and told him to "draw me a path. [He could] use any of the art materials [he could] see on the table". He said nothing, picked a blue pencil and started drawing a wavy line from the left bottom to the right along two-thirds of the page. Then he drew a simple image of a windsurfing board with a triangle sail using orange, purple and black pencils.



*Drawing 6 - Ron's path*

On the top left corner, he added in blue a simple icon of a house, without windows, doors, or any other details. On the right corner, he scribbled lines in brown and purple. Then, he marked small purple "lines" spread from the top left and converging to the bottom right corner. He surrounded the drawing with a brown mark. He looked at his drawing and then added a tree, in brown and green, inside the surrounding mark. He was drawing slowly as if he was stretching the time. He chose different pencils from the pencil box and returned each one to the box right after he finished using it. Most of the marks were done softly. The surfboard and sail were relatively punctuated portraying the central item of the drawing. Ron seemed to be relaxed while drawing. He smiled to himself from time to time. I did not interfere while he was drawing. I was happy to see that he did not ask for directions or reassurance. He was immersed in drawing for about ten minutes. After putting the last pencil in the box, he looked at me, smiled, and let out a relieved sigh. I asked Ron to describe his drawing. Reminding him that it was important for me to hear his interpretation of his



drawing. Ron nodded and said, "It is a wide path so that there will be enough space for anything to happen." "Narrow," he said "equals fast, equals to get there not prepared, to miss out."

I felt that Ron was looking for a rational, sophisticated explanation for the drawing that he did as a response to my request for drawing a path. I asked him to describe the drawing. He started with, "I drew a beautiful tree under which one can sit." I looked at him smiling and nodding, waiting for him to relate to what he drew, and probably wanted to talk about. It took Ron a while, but he finally came out of his comfort zone. Faced with the artwork, he was no longer able to rationalize his defenses, and allowed himself to experience the feelings. He looked at me for a while and then said, expressing his excitement with his hands, "the Sea!" Then, he started with a long, fractured monologue:

So, I will be able to stop everything and go surfing. This is the best meditation. It is a supernatural experience. You are fast, you are by yourself. You are leaning against the wind. You scream. You have no control over the sea, but it accepts you. You don't see the end. You are a part of something which is sublime. I trust the sea, and I feel no restraint. I am free and happy. *Ron paused and then continued*, it is like a cycle where you always need to go back to the safe place, a safe haven.

I was pleased to see him excited and happy. I asked how often he went surfing, knowing that surfing is not an activity available in Singapore. He said that he planned a surfing trip abroad once or twice a year. I asked for more details about the trip, to get a deeper understanding of what he described to me in the previous session. He smiled and said, "I go alone, and I enjoy surfing with strangers." Ron explained that he wished to socialize under his own terms with no obligations or expectations. He wanted to be judged only for his surfing skills and liked to feel that only he controlled his social interactions and could terminate them when he felt uncomfortable. He added that when he traveled to Israel, he would usually surf with his brother. He mentioned, "my brother is a "character," he had ups and downs in his life, but he is someone I admire, and he makes me laugh. "I was surprised to hear about his brother, but once I asked about their relationship, Ron avoided the question and said, "that's for another session."

I asked if he could bring May and the daughters along for his trips. He nodded and said that they could wait on the beach, but it would not be the same. Ron was excited while talking about the freedom, sensation, and release that he felt while he was surfing. I suddenly



noticed that he had not stammered since he started talking about surfing. I drew his attention to this fact. He said that he knew that when he felt happy, safe, and free from judgment, he stopped stammering. Then he said, "it is because at home I feel as if I am in a square box." He pointed at the house in his drawing, "May's squares, where everything must be organized, perfect. Even emotions must be in control. The only way I can show my real emotions at home is when I am playing music to the girls or taking them to the pool while May stays at home." Ron lost his excitement. He looked at me with sad eyes and said that he was also stuck in his own box. I asked him to think about his "box" and to reflect on his thoughts and feelings in his journal. When the time of this session was up, Ron said he looked forward to our next meeting.

*Session Analysis.* Opening up to the idea of making art was progress, indicating a *trustful therapeutic alliance* towards me. (Holmqvist et al., 2017). It was a clear indication of Ron's willingness to open up and provide personal explorations. I gave him instructions facilitating the initiation, keeping him thinking rather than being emotional. It was not much of a surprise for me to see Ron choosing colour pencils as the media to work with. Coloured pencils are considered to be more resistive and allow precision and detail and are easier to control than other mediums (Malchiodi, 2007). Ron used most of the space on the paper while changing colours and the pressure of his grip, yet the drawing was very light, and there were not too many details. He did not place himself on the path. None of the images were coloured in. He did trace the route that must have been taking him through the "path." Ron drew a symbol of a small house on the left top corner of the paper. The house was simple; no windows, no doors and it seemed to be remote from the other items. "The small size of the house indicated withdrawal tendencies, feelings of inadequacy, rejection of home/home life and regression" (MAPD, 2018, p. 25). It evoked questions: whose house is it? Why is it so naked of any detail? Does it represent an emptiness of emotions? This is contrary to the notion that "The house, in theory, symbolizes the main place wherein affection and security are sought" (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 93). Ron placed the house far away from where he described as a safe and peaceful place.

Following the drawing, I asked Ron to describe and interpret his work, as recommended by Oster and Crown (2004), "It is also vital when using drawings to inquire about the client's own interpretation of their drawing instead of imposing the view of the clinician" (p. 26). It was interesting to hear Ron's first interpretation of his drawing by intellectualizing the drawing and rushing to conclusions. Intellectualization is a defense mechanism that Ron uses.



“It is defined as an emotional response, or impulse, that is controlled by thinking instead of experiencing. The thoughts are a protection, or defense, against anxiety due to unacceptable impulses” (Moschini, 2005, p. 21). When I asked for a description of the drawing, Ron was able to describe it and added his feelings and thoughts. He used words such as "freedom," "safe," "non-judgemental," and "control" to describe the feelings he had while he was taking the path. While talking about the drawing, he said that he could place himself on the surfing board, or on the beach. Ron did not wish to elaborate about the house besides the fact that it was part of his path. The house had no door and windows which could have been an indication of extreme difficulty in allowing accessibility to others (Oster & Crone, 2004). It also suggested hostility or withdrawal and indicated a distance from family relations and feelings of isolation from others (MAPD, 2018).

While talking about his drawing, Ron seemed enthusiastic and expressed emotions, although this was not expressed on the drawing itself. I was happy that Ron was able to see where he was and to acknowledge that things were not as simple as “being okay” all the time. “Aspects of a person’s inner life are transcribed on paper and become visible and this visibility influences the mark maker’s mark” (Moon, 2010, p. 21). I believe the opportunity to draw helped Ron to express thoughts and feelings that were hard for him to externalize otherwise. He was able to start sharing feelings about himself and the way he saw his interactions with May, such as the contrast between home and the sea, a controlled environment versus somewhere he felt free. I felt that without the drawing, I would not have been able to reach this level of sharing so early. It was interesting that Ron chose to draw and talk about a hobby that he could rarely enjoy while living in Singapore. Even the small symbolic drawing of the sail evokes questions. Ron bothered to use three different colours to draw it, but the triangle sail was not a vertical surfing sail. Ron mentioned again that while he surfed he could make short-term friendships. He said that the sea accepted him; the sea did not judge. I had the impression that within him, there was a denial of the true self in favor of a false self, according to Winnicott (Mann-Shalvi, 2015). Ron, through his false self, denied existing tensions and adapted himself to the demands of the environment. He tried to keep everyone happy while he himself was subject to stress and frustrations without being aware of it. Despite the uninterrupted facade, Ron was highly sensitive to his position in social settings, and his stammering was connected to how he processed his emotions.

I made a note to bring the gaps between Ron's freedom at sea to his controlled self at home with May, which were portrayed strongly in Ron’s descriptions of his drawing, to the



couple's therapy. I wondered if May was aware of it. I also noted to continue to use the art medium with Ron to help him externalize and further engage with the process of self-exploration, especially since he felt comfortable and less judged doing so.

*Session No. 4*

Opening this session, I reminded Ron that we ended our previous session talking about his emotions while surfing, in contrast to those he had at home. I asked him to think about himself as a child or teenager and try to recall if he felt the same back then. It took him some time to process. After a while, Ron said, "yes, I did not surf, but I used to play music. That was my freedom, I could sing without feeling that someone was judging me." I asked him whether his stammering affected his singing, and he said that he did not feel like stammering when he sang. Ron referred to his stammering openly. He repeated how hard it was for him to grow up stammering, and that his parents had never discussed the issue or tried to solve it. I asked him if he ever spoke with his parents about it, or if he was angry with them for not helping him. Ron said, "no, I cannot be angry with them, they were good parents!" He mentioned in a previous session that he had gone to therapy for his stuttering as a young adult, and now confessed that he was not sure his parents even knew about it to that day. He could recall his previous therapist asking him to draw where he was in the world, and he drew a sort of door or opening to a cave. I wanted to continue our discussion with the use of the door he had drawn in the past as a metaphor and asked him whether it would be possible for him to leave the door slightly open so that he could look at the outside from a new perspective. Ron refrained from returning to this issue and expressing any emotions. His talking style became technical and fractured.

I looked for a subject that would bring up good memories, and something from his past that he could relate to. I asked him to tell me about his relations with May prior to the birth of their first daughter. He said that they enjoyed each other's company, and that he had fallen in love with her. "She is sweet and has an amazing taste and style, we were good together." Two years after they met, they decided to get married and she got pregnant three months later. "We were so happy," he said. When May was six months pregnant, they decided to accept the offer to relocate to Singapore. Ron described the first three months in Singapore with enthusiasm. He said they had looked for a place together, organized stuff, and looked for doctors and hospitals for the coming birth. They slowly settled into the apartment they had rented. He said the location was perfect, near a shopping center and by the river. Ron added



with a smile, "May could go for a walk with the baby after giving birth and sit by the river if it was not too warm and humid." He seemed happy talking about their first months of relocation. I told him that in psychology they call this period of time during relocation the "honeymoon stage." Ron said, "I couldn't agree more." He said it was great, but at work, he was very stressed, and that he wanted to perform and excel. I asked him if May knew how he felt at work. He said no, she was busy "nesting." He smiled and said "that's what you call it, right? I didn't want to make her more stressed." I asked if he had anyone to share his feelings about work with, and he responded, "no, not really."

Ron continued to share memories: three months later, May gave birth in Singapore. It was not an easy birth. He mentioned that there were some complications, but did not elaborate further. Then he said, "she asked her mother to come to Singapore to stay with us for three months." While saying this, Ron's expression and voice changed. He then mentioned, to my surprise, that he thought their time together was not long enough to establish deep relations and emotions. He said that their marriage, as well as the relocation, were dealt with as "projects." Ron and his wife operated as a good team when dealing with projects.

I asked Ron to share with me some memories from the time they were dating before they got married. Ron could not, or would not, elaborate about this. Ron was then asked to explain why they chose to relocate at such an early stage, right after their marriage, and while May was pregnant. He said that he was asked by his superior to go and decided to accept it. I asked how he and May prepared themselves for the relocation. He said they went to consult with a colleague at work who had relocated to Singapore and returned recently. Ron himself had visited Singapore a few times for short work visits and had a favorable impression of the country. I asked him whether they had set any common goals for this move. He said that each one of them had their own expectations, but as a couple, they were looking at the financial benefits of relocating to Singapore, the opportunity to enjoy a high standard of living, and to travel and see the world.

I asked Ron to draw, as much as he could recall, his expectations from the relocation when they made their decision. I put an A4 sheet of paper on the table in front of him and asked him to use any of the variety of art materials that were available in the clinic. Ron reacted with a smile, saying, "it is much easier to talk." I said, "let's start with a drawing and then we can talk." He took the pencils box and said, "it is a whirlpool." I looked at him,



confused by his comment. He smiled and said, "you know, it means stress." Ron seemed pleased using images to express his emotional state. I was happy that he had started embracing the narrative technique. Ron took a blue pencil and drew, very decisively, a dollar mark on the left side. Then he drew an orange line parallel to the bottom of the page and added a simple house with a wide door but with no windows. He changed to green and drew two stick figures and a stroller, and then changed to a pink pencil and added two smaller figures. He drew a yellow sun on the top left corner and two separate clouds in blue. When he was finished, he put the pencils back on the table and looked at me.



*Drawing 7 - Ron's expectations from the relocation*

I pointed at the big black dollar mark and made a questioning gesture. Ron smiled and said that relocation was a chance to save money. It also enabled them to give up May's work and allowed her to be a full-time mother. They thought the move would establish their economic security for the future. He paused for a while and said that accepting the relocation offer was a serious decision for him. All his plans would be interrupted if the relocation was suddenly terminated for any reason. The lack of control that this gave Ron throughout all aspects of his life forced him to remain tense and to compromise his personal ways of dealing



with big changes for his company. He was dependent on them. "The longer [he was] dependent, the more frustrated [he got], as if [he felt] like [he was] losing [him]self." Ron added that "in the first year I was so stressed, I couldn't sleep or eat. I lost weight and was constantly worried." I asked whether he thought May felt this tension in him and he replied, "she shows hardly any interest in my work, and I do not share with her my daily experiences. She hardly knows any of my colleagues. Though, she knows that they had a three-year contract and were eager to prolong it." I asked him to return to the drawing. Ron said, "I used light colours because relocation to Singapore meant for us a peaceful and comfortable life, away from the intensity of living in Israel. We looked at it as a positive opportunity to start building our nuclear family by ourselves." I asked him why they gave up help from their families, which could have been very supportive when they were going to have their first child. He said, "well, we did give it up, but we wanted to avoid the influence of the families. Our families are very different from one another."

Ron did not talk about his parents or his in-laws, and did not allow me explore of the nature of the family relationships. He complained vigorously about stress around any topic in the broader family, except for raising their daughters. Ron continued by saying, "separating the girls from birth from my mother-in-law's influence gave us distance from the difficult relationship that I, and also May, have with her. I thought it could also help neutralize the tensions at home." Ron sounded very angry, and it felt as if he needed to talk, but his avoidance was blocking him again. He went back to his drawing.

I asked him if there was any significance to the house with no windows or any other detail. He said, "the house is a charged issue in our family. Does it matter whether it has windows?" I remarked that the house he drew in the first session had no opening and this one had a door. He smiled and said, "indeed, this house is more sophisticated in the sense that it can open a door. Maybe this was one of my expectations from the relocation. Still, had I remembered the way I drew it, then I would draw the same here." I inquired about the fact that in his drawing, although in reality, at the time May was only pregnant with their first born, he had drawn a family with three children. He said that he always wanted to have a big family. He then started laughing and said, "now I have become an interpreter of my drawing." I ended the session by asking him to digest the contents of this meeting and think about the future, and his expectations from the couple's therapy. I asked him to define these verbally to himself.



*Session Analysis.* I was trying to encourage Ron to connect with his experiences and memories. Ron seemed to avoid discussing subjects that he was not comfortable with, often by changing the subject or keeping quiet. Yet, Ron did not resist drawing his expectations, and commented, “It is a whirlpool,” indicating to me that his drawing reflected his stress. Ron followed the instructions given and drew his obvious expectations: saving money and extending his family. Verbally, he added the desire to stay far from the intensity of living in Israel, and probably achieved these expectations. The drawing represented Ron’s expectation on the surface. While talking about what he drew, Ron was able to connect his thoughts to the images and share more in-depth information. The artistic activity was becoming an intuitive place that could access Ron’s inner self (Huss, 2015). In that sense, the drawing fulfilled the role of a transitional object, allowing the individual, especially when in stress and being uncomfortable in a situation, to direct and route emotions and expressions towards an external object.

When Ron described the drawing, he was able to talk about the stress caused by relocation, uncertainty, and compromises he needed to make at work. He described that consequently, he was “losing himself.” Ron did not mention May and the girls. He dismissed May when I asked him about how she felt about his work-induced stress. I could also hear his fear of disappointing her, or himself, in case he failed with the relocation. It became clear that the unknown, and the feelings of insecurity regarding the move, was another significant unspoken element contributing to the tension in their relationship, as it was for many couples in relocation. Ron’s expectation to have a large family was accomplished. Unlike May, Ron did not express his wish to live far away from the family or from Israel. No symbol or mark represented Israel or their families of origin. Nonetheless, Ron mentioned his wish to separate the girls from his mother-in-law. I wondered if Ron developed this expectation along the years, and why. Ron did not give much information regarding his relationship with his mother-in-law. I noticed the big sun he drew on the left side, which could have indicated the “feeling of inadequacy, particularly with regard to authority figure relations” (MAPD, 2018, p. 6). I also noticed the two clouds on the top right side of his drawing which could have possibly indicated anxiety (MAPD, 2018). I understood that Ron never shared with May how he felt about her mother, before or after the relocation. He avoided it, just as he regularly avoided any confrontation or exposure with May.

One of the images that Ron had drawn was a house. I wondered if this house represented his home in Israel before relocating, their house in Singapore, or the one they built in Israel



after the relocation. Alternatively, was it a representation of an unconscious desire to have stability and a house as a safe space? Did it represent the same house that he had drawn on the path? The house probably projected unconscious desires and conflicts, as well as defenses, onto the composition (Huss, 2015). I considered the house meaningful as it appeared twice in his drawing. When asked about the house, Ron became more talkative. He made a connection between his drawing to his reality, which allowed me to have a better understanding of his feelings.

Ron added a door to the house in this drawing. In his previous drawing, the house was bare. I was happy to see small signs that Ron was capable of allowing accessibility to his inner-self through his drawing. However, Ron did not include locks or handles on his door to allow the option of opening it, and this could have represented difficulty and resistance in allowing this accessibility (Oster & Crone, 2004). I was happy to hear from Ron that he knew his door represented the opportunity to access his inner-self. However, his use of the word "can" in his explanation showed that he felt this was conditional. Ron did not take responsibility to be more open and, becoming angry, shared his disappointment. From his statement, "still, did I remember the way I drew it then, I would have drawn the same here," I could feel that he was backing off from our discussion. I did not want him to withdraw. I felt that the house bore even more layers yet to be uncovered, though as of this session, I was unclear of what these issues could be. While Ron seemed to be more comfortable being asked about himself, rather than his wife or family, I wished for him to shift from expressing secondary emotions to expressing prime, core emotions. Ron was not ready for that. Goldman and Greenberg (2013) explained that "when identity is threatened, people act and interact to protect their identities. Shame, fear, and anger are the resulting emotions" (p. 66). Ron was looking for ways to blame May for their tensions and lack of communication as a couple. Goldman and Greenberg further explain that "people attempt to exert influence and control to regulate their effect that is, to not feel the shame of diminishment and the fear of loss of control or to feel the pride of recognition and the joy of efficacy."

#### *Session No. 5*

Ron arrived to this session very excited. He said he was confused. On this day, he was not going to draw anything. I asked him what had happened, whether everything was normal at home and at work. He said that nothing had occurred. Instead, his contemplation of our previous session and the analysis of his drawings had made him angry. "You probably know



about the issue with our house in Israel. No way May did not tell you her version about it." I said that our individual sessions are confidential. If he wished to talk about the issue, he could start with his story. This is exactly what he proceeded with. Right after their marriage and before he was offered to relocate, they had purchased a small plot. May's mother, who is a retired architect, announced that she would design and "build a home for May". Ron said he should have protested at that time, but he wanted to avoid a conflict with his new mother-in-law. The design started immediately. He was not involved, other than being asked how many rooms he wanted. He was not sure whether May was fully aware of the design or involved in it. Formally, May showed him the plans, and he approved them. "May's mother belongs to the kind of architects that take control over the client," Ron said.

The planning was done during their preparations for relocation. They wanted to build their "dream house," and the relocation made it financially possible. Ron said he felt helpless because May's mother managed the project and he could not interfere. The plans and the design continued when May gave birth, and her mother came to stay with them. While Ron's mother-in-law was visiting, May and her mother discussed the plans and Ron felt left out. Sometime after May's mother left Singapore, the building permit was granted, and the works began. Soon, various contracts with the main contractor arose. Ron asked his father to get involved in the project and that "ignited a war between the two families." May's mother viewed the intervening as a great insult. She called Ron, but only after ignoring him for a long time. In an exchange between them, she expressed contempt for him and stated that if Ron and May accept his father's proposals, she would leave the project. "At that time, the tension between May and I was almost unbearable. May used to talk to her mother, closing the door behind me so I would not hear. She always came to me after making decisions. I was not involved in the conversation. We were remotely trying to help solve the problem and agreed to increase payments. After May's mother spoke to me, I had a phone call from my father, and I understood she was even more brutal to him than she had been to me. The result was that both families were completely cut off."

Ron was distraught while talking about the way his wife's mother spoke to him, and even more upset when he described how he felt for his father. I let Ron continue his sharing, hoping he would express more of his feelings. His delivery of the story was very emotional, and I felt that he was overwhelmed by this anomaly. He took a deep breath and then summarized by saying, "May and I needed to discuss the financial issues but did not go into blaming anyone or discussing family relations or emotions anymore." He added, "It was



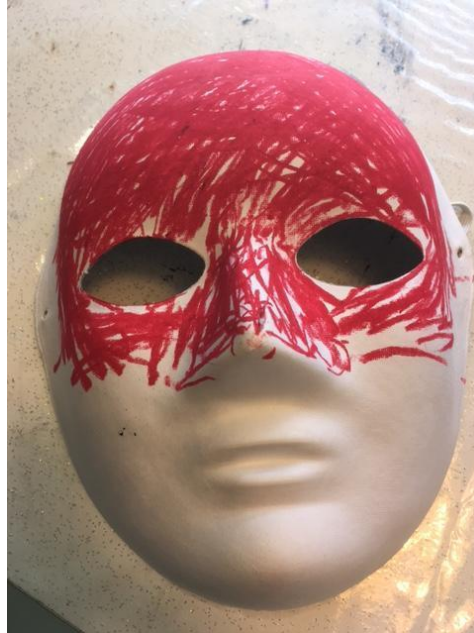
never my dream house.” I did not provoke or ask Ron anything at that moment; even though I felt he had more to say. Ron said that he should have known that leaving the house project to May's mother was wrong. He continued with the fact that he felt pushed aside when she came to Singapore with the aim of supporting them; she took over their new house, the care of their new-born, and the care of his wife. He felt like May did not need him. I asked Ron why he did not stand up for his rights and duties as a husband and father, especially if he felt so strongly, and whether he shared his emotions with May. Ron said, “the mother came over for only three months. I felt that it was better to step aside until she [left], and in the meanwhile, I was busy with calming myself with music. I thought that avoiding interaction would be better.” It sounded to me that Ron's anger towards his mother-in-law at the time was extreme. Ron had great difficulty addressing his disappointment. He continued and said that he knew that while he was away at work, May and her mother would go over the plans.

I asked Ron about the relationship with the families today. He said, “As time passes I feel that the relationship with the mother does not find a correction.” During visits to Israel, the tension was immense. They divided the visits between the two families, but when he would be with her parents, he would not say a word. Ron added that he appreciated May's father and thought they had a lot in common. May's father does not confront his wife either, a fact this is perhaps their strongest common denominator. During their visits to his parents, May would become distant, and he never understood why, as he saw no reason for this behavioral change. I asked Ron about how he felt about his relationship with May in this context and their familial relationships. He explained to me that the situation was very complicated and he did not think of it as solvable. I stopped him and asked him to express his feelings. He said he felt “helpless! Every time the subject [arose], [he] want[ed] to enter [his] box and close it.” I told Ron that “entering the box” is characteristic of the way he responded to emotional situations. He used to break away to music when he was a child and continued doing so today. This act caused him to neutralize himself from the environment that he was troubled with. Ron usually disengaged from emotional situations, not sharing and not allowing himself to express feelings. Even in a family conflict that had lasted for three years, he did not share feelings, did not try to cope, and rather entered his mind's windowless house with doors that do not open. Ron blushed, with an agitated expression.

During his response to what I had stated, he stammered heavily. He agreed with my reflection, yet said he felt better when he was cut off and closed within himself. I said that he seemed to be suffering and asked how he could maintain a good relationship with his



daughters when he had to hide such strong sentiments. Ron found no words to answer. Despite his declaration at the beginning of the session, I gave him a blank paper mask, simply putting it on the table in front of him. He grabbed the mask, took a red oil pastel, and moved from his chair next to the table to an armchair on the other side of the room. He looked overwhelmed but excited.



*Drawing 8 - Ron's mask*

It was the first time Ron had chosen anything other than colour pencils for his artwork. He covered only half of the mask from the outside, did not draw on the inside of the mask.

It was already time to end the session, but I did not want Ron to leave yet, because of how overwhelmed he evidently felt. I asked him whether he felt as if he had left some of his anger on the mask and whether he wanted to take the mask with him or leave it in the clinic. He said he knew he wore a mask in order to portray that everything was okay. Everything was “cool” about him, but this mask showed a true, underlying sentimental layer. He was angry! He said, “I cannot take it from the clinic. I want it to stay here with you.” I thanked Ron for sharing with me and for “opening a door.” I said that I was sure he would find the way to open a door for May and for other people that are important to him. I asked him to process this session at home and try to express it in his journal.

*Session Analysis.* The image of the house, and our reflection on the image, from the last session stayed with Ron during the week and triggered agitation. Ron’s recollection of an artwork he did during our session was a remarkable example to the potential advantage of



using art therapy. It was also a turning point in Ron's therapy. This recollection had opened up a tunnel of thoughts, experiences, and emotions from the past. Transferring his emotions into tangible images helped Ron express himself and build confidence to open up. Ron expressed his thoughts and feelings regarding his relationship with May and her mother. He was fluent, engaged, and very emotional and was able to unload his anger and frustration thanks to our therapeutic alliance.

The couple's house story had a critical significance. It encapsulated some of the core negative elements of the couple's relationship. The strong symbolism of the house of (broken) dreams represented no communication, no windows, no path; these characteristics dominated the relationship. In the last session, Ron expressed how the relocation remoted them, but at the same time how it is an opportunity for resolution. Ron was going through a process of connecting the dots in his own life story, linking the cognitive to the emotional, which helped him begin identifying the causes for the lack of interaction with May. I was not sure he understood the core feelings, but during this session, he stopped denying and suppressing his feelings. Ron's processing of our work between sessions and continuation of his dialogue with the images encouraged me to be more assertive and dictate art making and its materials.

Ron did not need instructions this time. The mask, with its strong connotative meanings, can evoke strong expressions. I felt that Ron was ready for such expressions and could benefit from it. Ron chose a strong red oil pastel colour, which could express raw emotions. He worked aggressively, quickly, and decisively. The half-painted mask, with an intense portrayal of unfiltered emotions, was a strong expression of feelings, rarely displayed by Ron. The mask provoked underlying and strong primary emotions for Ron. He was able to confront those primary feelings and own them (Ivanir, 2016). The process of reflecting and owning the feelings show that Ron was now able to allow others to see him with no mask (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). It was a significant change for Ron. Ron left the mask in the room. It stayed as a record of his change and progress in the therapy (Ramm, 2005). He was now able to understand that he did not need to be "okay" all the time and that sharing emotions could be a relief and could help to solve problems.

#### *Session No. 6*

Ron sat at the table and said, "you are going to be proud of me. I did 'open a door' to May". He told me he had a phone call from his mother telling him that his father was



hospitalized. Unlike in former cases, in which he used to report to May in a brief and factual style, he told May all the details of the conversation and shared with her his emotions of anxiety regarding what may happen to his father. He said that he thought this sharing surprised May. I told him that I was indeed proud of him and that a change of behavior requires awareness of existing behavior patterns and determination.

Ron said, "as long as we avoid talking about May's mother, I think we can make a change together." I said that with this being our last individual session, he might want to leave other items besides the mask. My comment triggered him. He said, "that's as far as it concerns the relations with May's mother, I feel betrayed! Instead of standing up for our couplehood, May accepted her mother's rules. She went along with every dictate of her mother." He paused and then added, "I do not know what I could leave in the clinic in order to ever fix these relations." I told him that he had to be open to unfolding the issues together with May in our upcoming couple's therapy. He replied, "as long as we live far away from our families, then we can deal with these relations, but I cannot imagine how we could live in Israel and cope."

I asked Ron to define himself as active or passive in relation systems. He asked if I was referring to his relations with May, to which I responded that I was referring to human relations in general. He smiled and said, "you know, like in the sea, I flow." I said, "are you sure you just flow in the sea?" He reconsidered, "no. I have to keep my stability, to steer and to control the sail." He then added, "you know, when there is no wind, I have to create the motion." "So," I said, "you have to be active and initiate in order to get to where you wish to be." He nodded in approval. I said that in relationships it is good to initiate things, that this is how we interact, and it is what helps us to maintain our interpersonal relationships, that it is good to be active and not passive. I gave him an example: it would be good for him to decide what activities he wished to do with the daughters. Ron interrupted me and said, "I do that, I spend time with the girls. Usually, it is when I am at home and May asks me to take care of them, so she can have some time for herself." I mentioned that I knew from the treatment of their daughter that he is a great father, but it was important that he initiated activities without the need to wait for May's instructions.

I gave him a few more examples: to participate in ongoing decisions in-house management and design, buying his own clothes and not only wearing what May chose for him, initiating meetings with colleagues and other social interactions, and making friends.



I explained to Ron that it was not enough to open the door, but that it should be kept open. I reminded him that in a previous session he said that he wished to have a toolbox to work with to change his behaviors. Now he had acquired two tools: the open door, for talking and sharing what is occurring in his life, as well as the initiation from his sailing boat, for creating his own plans, taking part in activities, and being more involved in what he wanted, when he wanted. He could now apply the use of these tools to help him deal with his tense family relations. I told him, "now each of you (Ron and his wife) have a toolbox for a start. We shall see how you can operate the tools together in the couple's therapy." I asked Ron if he felt ready for that. Ron said, "this is what I am here for."

*Session Analysis.* I was aware that Ron had only just started the process of change. I felt that he could benefit from continuing personal therapy, but when we started our journey we agreed to have individual sessions only as a preparation for the couple's therapy. Ron was able to see the progress he made in the therapy thus far. I was pleased to hear that he was making efforts to connect with May and had shared some of his daily life experiences with her. It was important for me that Ron felt more confident even when he was emotional. I felt that he needed closure to our individual sessions that would circle back to when we first began: his request for a "toolbox." I thought that our sessions had helped him acquire the figurative first tools in the box that he sought out for. I felt that Ron was ready to work together with May and that I knew Ron and understood him enough to start the couple therapy.

#### *Conclusion of Individual Sessions with Ron*

In this section, I will summarize the individual sessions with Ron and the insights I drew from them. These insights would be later used during the couple's therapy.

The individual work with Ron took six sessions. He was cooperative, although he did not speak openly about his family, and was not enthusiastic about doing artwork. He also did not have any entries in the suggested journal. He made only two drawings, following directive instructions. He used colour pencils, which kept him safe from "getting dirty." He did try to use different colours and enjoyed changing them, which encouraged me to see his livelihood. The one-time Ron chose the oil pastel marked his engagement with his anger (Drawing 8).

Ron was very technical and used symbolic images. His drawings were very light. In each drawing, he had one punctuated item: the surfing board (Drawing 6), where he used three different colours, and the Dollar mark (Drawing 7), drawn with a black marker, making these



the eye-catching figures in the drawings. Both were remarkable fractions of Ron's drawings and were simple symbolic figures.

Ron drew two different houses on separate occasions. He could not actually explain their relevance to the subject of the drawing, or the difference between the two. In both drawings (Drawings 1 & 2) there were no windows. According to theory, the house represented and symbolized affection and security (Oster & Crone 2004). For Ron personally, it also encapsulated metaphorical danger. It took Ron a few sessions to come to talk about how his house, which was built in Israel, had a negative impact on his family. While in his own house in Singapore, Ron did not feel he could express himself or enjoy his time. Ron described how he had grown up in a home where he always felt open and comfortable, yet both of the houses in his drawings included no windows nor other details. In drawing 2, Ron added a door, which could have been representative of his unconscious way of allowing himself to let people in.

Ron continued to contemplate his artworks and our cooperative reflections of them outside of our sessions. He told me that the art he had created made him angry. For me as a therapist, this indicated that the images triggered his unconscious mind and the denied feelings that he had been carrying within himself for a long time. Ron described himself as being helpless. He was able to see the dissonance between the way he viewed himself and the way he really felt about himself. Ron usually tried to speak with confidence, yet every time he approached a private, emotional conversation, he would stutter. He enjoyed being sarcastic and felt that this was a part of his sense of humor. Ron would often avoid engagement or revealing weakness. He believed that if he was 'okay' with everyone, then things would be 'okay.'

While he was drawing, he would take his time, feeling calm and showing no emotion. When reflecting on his drawings, he would start by explaining something supposedly rational that he thought could satisfy my expectations, and then would move to more profound emotional outpouring that would shift from subject to subject. The description of Drawing .6 allowed him to talk metaphorically, which helped him explain what really happened to him emotionally while surfing. Both drawings and their following interpretations showed a gap between the way Ron initially intended to portray himself and what he was like in reality. Ron described himself through a metaphor about surfing. At first, he believed he was "flowing" and easy-going like the waves. Upon further collaborative discussion, he realized



that during surfing, he had little control over navigation. The unfolding of his own analogy helped him to realize that although he believed he was free and relaxed, he was in fact constrained and aggravated by a lack of control over his life.

There was a clear difference between Ron's emotional engagement in his drawings and spoken metaphors, which he mostly tried to avoid, and his emotional state of mind. Ron often used metaphoric language rather than talking directly about his issues, which made it easier for him to open up. The artwork allowed him to visualize his metaphors and connect them to his reality. Once he agreed to make art, we could use the images he created to talk about his experiences and emotions. Ron decided to share his concerns about his father's health, and the way he felt about this subject, with May for the first time. This was an act of engagement with our therapy sessions, complying with my instructions rather than cognition or awareness of the potential benefits to his relationship with his wife. The individual sessions with Ron brought up a few main themes:

*Ron's stammering.* Ron's happy childhood was overshadowed by his stammering. It was dismissed by his parents and maybe even disregarded by his close friends, but the fact that he went to therapy for it proved that it had indeed affected his self-confidence and his social skills. It may be a factor in the couple's ability to associate with new acquaintances. However, it seemed to have no direct influence on the couple's relations. It was possible that Ron adapted his avoidant behavior as a defense because of his insecurities about stuttering from an early age. He used, and still continued to use, playing music and spending time surfing as avoidant behaviours. Notably, both activities are done without requiring speech.

*Attachment.* Ron's tendency to be 'okay' did not encourage him to engage in problematic situations or even to clarify them in depth, but rather to pacify everyone instead. From the attachment perspective, Ron had an avoidant attachment when it came to his parents. He loved his parents very much and looked up to them, but as a child, and even now as an adult, he never shared his feelings with them. Instead, he used music as an escape to keep away from emotional situations, as this was his safe space. He learned to regulate his emotions by keeping to himself and disconnecting from the environment. He did not want to disappoint, to be needy, and wanted to be always "okay." Ron thought of himself as a social person, who, even as an adult, would go surfing, and had his friends as an ad-hoc solution for his social needs. Other than this, Ron's avoidance minimized his desire for socialization over the years. Regarding people with the same attachment style as Ron, Ogden, Minton and Pain (2006)



said that “as they have a compromised social engagement system and have defended and cut themselves cut-off from internal states of feelings these adults typically minimize their attachment needs” (Ogden, Minton, and Pain, 2006, as cited in Boyd, 2011, para,3).

When Ron started living with May and established his romantic relations with her, he continued with this style of attachment. Ron said that he had never shared his work life with his wife. He did not share with her how deeply hurt he became when her mother took over his husbandly and fatherly duties in their house in Singapore, preferring auto-regulation and self-reliance instead of interactive support (Boyd, 2011). Ron felt that there was no safe engagement. His attachment needs were suppressed, and he chose to focus on tasks and how to limit distressing his engagement with May. It was probable that he found dependence “frightening or unpleasant and avoid situations that would stimulate attachment or intimacy needs” (Siegel, 1999, as cited in Boyd, 2011. para. 3).

During our sessions, Ron became aware of the way he addressed problems mechanically - without involving emotions. He started learning how to relate to his feelings and to consider them while reacting to different situations. Ron had an opportunity to acknowledge the situations that happened at home. Approach and avoidance are predominantly governed by how stimuli make us feel. For Ron, the unconditioned stimuli were essentially stages of feeling and need. We avoid a particular situation because we avoid feeling the fear associated with it (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013). From session to session, Ron showed more awareness to his avoidance tendencies. He also started learning that his image of being an ‘okay guy’ was just a mask and that if he wished to change he would have to remove it. This was a big challenge for him.

*May.* Ron loves May, cares for her, and declared he was committed to the therapy, wishing to establish better couplehood. Ron resented the fact that May administered the domestic activities in their household, including the activity of their daughters. She also maintained her relations with her mother in a manner that left him isolated, yet, he never acted to change the situation. During our sessions, he became able to allow himself to share some of his core feelings regarding his and May’s relationship with his mother-in-law. Ron realized that he and May refrained from talking about their feelings or from being intimate. They solved problems and worked on "projects" without involving any emotional aspects. He was often uncertain about May's feelings, commonly using the term "I think" when describing how she would feel in certain situations. He had never enquired or clarified her



actual feelings with her. He also came to realize that he had always avoided sharing his feelings with her.

*May's mother.* The only thing that caused Ron to lose his temper was our discussions concerning May's mother. The first unconscious indication of his mother-in-law, as I had noticed, was in his "expectations" drawing (Drawing 7), where he drew a big image of the sun. Ron was not able to share the story at that session. After describing to me what had stirred up their relationship, I gave Ron the mask to design. He did so without the need for instructions, and through his drawing process and design, he expressed deep anger and resentment. Ron mentioned that May's mother had a dominant influence on the couple's relationship that shadowed their everyday routine. Strong emotional feelings, such as anger and frustration and maybe even betrayal, related to his mother-in-law blocking him from connecting emotionally to May. Her role in the couple relations would have to be explored in the couple's therapy.

*Relocation.* Ron relocated to Singapore with a desire to improve his family's standard of living. Contrary to his wife, he recalled no problems in settling down and felt that they shared an enjoyable and easy-going transitional period, quite like a honeymoon. He felt that being away from their families contributed to their wellness. A birth often has an impact on couple's relations, and the husband has to find his way when settling into his new role as a father. May's mother entered this process and took his place beside May. In response to this, Ron thoroughly closed himself in his 'box', disrupting his stages of adjustment to relocation.

Ron did not go through some of the final stages of relocation, such as acceptance or integration. For this, he blamed May. He felt that the fact that he remained in the stage of mental isolation was due to her incapability to socialize. In fact, he did not try to socialize either, having no friends in Singapore and had only a few childhood friends in Israel with whom he stayed in touch with. They did not share friends as a couple. They also did not spend time together outside of the home, nor did he socialize on his own in his day-to-day routine.

The relocation, mainly the physical distance, enabled Ron to avoid solving the problems between his and May's families, particularly with May's mother. Ron found himself able to live his life without the need or demand to engage with his family-in-law. He amassed frustration as a result of the gaps between the mentality and culture that he had adapted to and that of his new superior, with whom he was unaccustomed to working with. He knew that he



had no choice but to remain working for the company that he was no longer comfortable with, as he did not have the emotional resources to look for another job. Sadly, Ron could not reach out for emotional help during the past few years since his relocation because of his avoidant tendencies. Ron's fantasy from before the relocation was to create a happy family together with May. He realized that the physical distance from their family of origin could have been an opportunity to develop his relationship with her. In reality, the contrary has happened because Ron was unable to turn into a significant emotional figure for May, substituting her mother. Moreover, his pressure at work and his tendency to avoid sharing his work life and day-to-day thoughts with May have further distanced them emotionally. Ron did not share his pain with his friends or his parents. The more he felt the pain of betrayal, the more emotionally isolated he became. His stress further escalated when his superior at work changed, and he had difficulties to adjust to a new one.

A change in the client's perception and behavior is often a result or an effect of art therapy (Holmqvist, at el., 2017). My sessions with Ron have not matured into a complete individual therapy, but I nonetheless observed early changes. These sessions prepared Ron and I for the upcoming couple's therapy. In the therapy, I intended to bring the couple together in order to define common expectations from their couplehood for the future and make them establish a joint working model based on sharing emotions and supporting each other.

### *Couple Therapy Sessions*

#### *Background to the Couple Therapy*

##### *Highlights from the individual sessions:*

1. Relocation created significant pressures on both parties as individuals and as a couple due to day-to-day challenges. However, they both showed a keenness to prolong their stay in relocation, both for financial reasons and the thought that the distance from the family held the key to strengthening their relationship.
2. Ron and May, each separately expressed concerns about their intimate relationship. May's sexual abuse as a child had been exposed in her individual therapy but hadn't been dealt with. It may appear as a factor in the couple's sexual symptomatology (Scharff & Scharff, 2018) and may play a significant role in the couple's imbalances. They felt emotionally distant from one another.



3. The couple's relationship is dominated by their attachment styles. They functioned well in routine, but in intense situations, each of them turned away from the other. May turned to her mother or became obsessively occupied with household duties, and Ron turned to his work and hobbies. There were whole days of silence between them where they exchanged words only regarding the girls.
4. Other roadblocks that dominated their relationship were related to May's mother who dominated May's life on one hand and antagonized Ron on the other.
5. Ron's stammering appeared to be influential on his confidence and self-esteem. Ron did not relate his stammering to any interpersonal relationships.
6. Socially, they had not adapted well to the new environment. Each of them left behind the few intimate friends that they had before they left for relocation, and neither established any social connections that could fill this gap. Ron had professional contacts in his work that did not evolve into social contacts, and May had almost no social engagement.
7. Their expectations of each other and their behaviors during an argument or lack of coordination revealed problematic patterns of communication. Both expressed a desire to solve the distress because they could no longer bear the silences and the solitude. They aspired to revive the love between them that they had experienced in the past.

*Therapy goals.* While I believed that the individual sessions revealed the personal stories of each of the couple, their viewpoints of the other, and the family fabric, key individual stress points were identified but not treated. I set the following goals for the therapy:

- a. To facilitate communication, such that a healthier and more open couplehood could be established.
- b. I would have to bring May and Ron to understand each other's attachment styles and working models.
- c. Help the couple to see their negative cycle using their creative work, the therapeutic alliance, and the holding environment.
- d. To de-escalate the negative cycle by providing them a safe space to practice therapeutic alliance. Using creative work and metaphor would allow them to have a tangible experience and proof of their progress in the process.
- e. To restructure their attachment.
- f. To create a bonding conversation in a safe space.



- g. To guide them to create new opportunities outside the therapy room so they would be able to connect and be more spontaneous with each other.
- h. To consolidate and create a new narrative in their relationship.

*Session No. 1*

Ron and May came into my clinic, both with serious expressions. They sat down at the working table, May on the right side and Ron next to her. I went to the other side of the table and sat down in the chair. I reminded them that I would not reveal in the couples therapy anything that was said or done in the individual sessions without asking for their consent.

I placed an A2 drawing paper in front of them and asked them to choose one colour each and draw together without talking. They asked what they should draw, and I responded that they should communicate through the drawing without talking. I decided to start the couple dynamic work with the “joint drawing” assessment, choosing not to give them a theme. I was curious to see how the work on one joint paper would bring out interpersonal themes. Ron chose an orange pencil and May a black one. May turned away from Ron, almost turning her whole back to him, and started drawing three undefined shapes on the right side of the paper. She applied pressure on the pencil, and her gestures were brisk, like manifesting her presence. Ron, on the left side, drew five cloud shapes, very lightly, almost hard to distinguish. Then he looked at May's images. He stopped and backed off from the table. She did not notice this and continued. After a short while, Ron started drawing lines and waves in different directions, some of them stretching to May's half of the page. No one touched the other, and no sound was made.

May tried to add some lines to Ron's side, and he did not respond. She then went back to her shapes and covered one of them with lines very aggressively. Ron kept working on his lines. He seemed a bit stressed when May used more power while drawing. May then tried to overlap Ron's drawing, adding four circular shapes. Ron gave up and put down his pencil. May drew a curved line from the left to the middle and created a spiral. She then filled it up with circular scribbles and blackened the middle. During May's last act, Ron observed her. May put down her pencil. Both did not talk or look at each other. They looked at me waiting for reaction or instructions.



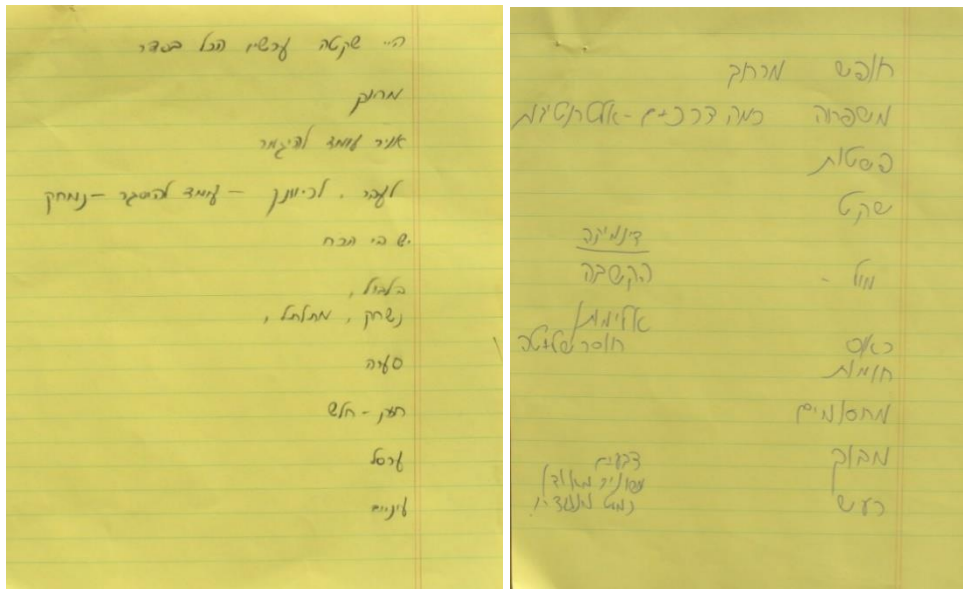


Drawing 9 - *Joint drawing, no subject*

I asked them to write on a sheet of lined paper their reflections on what happened while they were drawing and how they felt. Once both finished, I asked if they would mind sharing with each other. They gave their consent.

May wrote in separate lines (in Hebrew): "Be still, all is fine now," "suffocation, no air, towards you – closing down – erasing," "I have the power in me," "confusion," "eroding and shaky," "storm," "strong-weak," "hammock," and "eyes". She became very emotional when she was writing.





*Drawing 10 - May's reflections*

*Drawing 11 - Ron's reflections*

Ron rationally organized his reflections. Positive expressions including "freedom," "family," "simplicity," and "silence" were written on the top right. Linked to this group of words, by the word "vis-à-vis," was a group of negative expressions: "chaos," "walls," "barriers," "maze," and "noise," on the bottom right. Two other groups on the left side were "dynamics," "hearkening," "violence," "lack of control" in the middle, and on the bottom left, the words "colours," "very different," and "almost opposite." Both used strong words manifesting deeper sentiments that they had not shared so far such as "chaos," "confusion," and "maze." May's spiral gave a graphic expression to her confusion.

Ron was the first to speak. He said he did not expect to be asked to do anything creative in this session, but rather to talk. This forced him to be spontaneous. He said that he wrote words that popped up in his mind which expressed his emotions and how he felt about the dynamics between him and May. He paused, and then said that he wondered whether their choice of colours had any meaning, such as "pretty and gloomy."

May responded, saying black was natural for her. Ron ignored her comment and continued talking about the joint drawing. He said that he drew a big open beautiful space with a peaceful horizon. The five clouds represented their family. The rectangle represented a road sign which, in turn, represented a variety of paths; there is more than one way to go. He pointed at May's spiral and said that there was a great noise in the maze: "if you enter the whirlpool you get lost." Facing me he said that "it is terrifying, there is access, but you would not want to enter, knowing you might drown." He then pointed at May's aggressively-



covered shape and said that he felt as if she had darkened the walls between them. "I think this encircles May, and I am afraid to enter it." Ron was very fluent and direct, unlike before. Moments ago, he was backing off the drawing and avoiding contact. Now, when interpreting May's work, he used words with strong negative connotation such as "maze," "aggressiveness," and "darkness." In his drawing, he used images that carried a more positive meaning such as "open," "beautiful space," "horizon fantasy," and "different paths."

When Ron stopped, I asked May whether she wished to share. She read her written reflections aloud. She said she used to hum or sing the first line that she wrote, a Hebrew song that was interpreted as pacification after being abused, every time she needed to be strong. She then repeated, "black is natural for me." She pointed at the three shapes on the right and said they were "amoebas." "There is life in them. Each of us is alive but we have no ties out of our self. Ron meets people at work, but I have no one to talk to." May continued, her voice changing while she was talking but she did not make eye contact with Ron, "The separation from my mother was not an easy process for me. She provided me security, and I am afraid to be alone. You are not there for me, even when I reach out to you. Now she is the only one I can talk to whenever I need it." Ron said, "the amoeba changes its form." May said, "we can change too." He then responded, "The amoeba has no social contacts."

There was a short silence. They were looking at the drawing. May said that she felt Ron was very judgmental when talking about her drawing. He stared at her, astonished. She went on saying, "I want to be able to say... I want to feel comfortable to say... I am not standing against you; my voice is not heard." Ron said it was not his judgment, just his interpretation.

The drawing and their personal reflections enabled them to start expressing thoughts and feelings. They expressed their fears, ideas, and expectations at this point. While concluding the session, I explained to them that I felt the aggression, frustration, and isolation that each of them was feeling. Each brought to the session their own unique voice and looked at the situation from their own viewpoint. Each was dramatically different, which created a negative cycle of interaction. The art and accompanying reflection helped to shed light on those differences. The negative cycle brought them to a point where there was no interaction. In this session, we began to share about their feelings and talk about their interaction. We would continue with this work in the coming sessions. I asked them to schedule a date before our next meeting and go out as a couple, but not to a movie. They should regard this outing from now on as a weekly assignment.



*Session analysis.* The joint drawing, and their reflections enabled me to witness the couple in an actual, real-time shared task that highlighted their interactional process. It strongly reflected their different attachment styles, attachment needs, and how those differences created and perpetuated a *negative cycle of interaction* (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013). May and Ron worked on a joint drawing. Most of the time, each was drawing on their own side of the paper, with only two attempts made by May to cross over to Ron's side. In the post-drawing observation, when they were invited to reflect on the artwork, there was a difficulty in generating a dialog, and their individual interpretations on the "amoebas" drawn by May were very different. Ron's interpretation was reflected in a judgemental manner.

Their gestures while drawing portrayed distance, aggression, and loneliness. May took the initiative to begin the work but, turned her back to Ron for the duration of her creating. Ron was indifferent to this body language. They began the artwork as two separate individuals with no interaction making no attempt to invite, involve, or observe the other person. May was dominant in every aspect through taking the first steps, changing directions, and eventually making an attempt to reach out to Ron, as well as the pressure applied on her pencil, and her use of intense expressions. Ron was neither passive or reactive, and consistently rejected May's attempts to communicate. The drawing ended with Ron's gesture of moving away from the table, and May continuing to overlap her amoebas.

Their behavior patterns when working on the joint drawing represented their behaviours and interactions in real life very well. Little of what they did could be defined as cooperation. May was self-centered and was in strong emotional distress. It was known to Ron, to an extent, but he was not taking part in May's emotional world. May interpreted Ron's passivity as him being inaccessible. Feeling isolated and abandoned, she protested, for example, at home, by slamming a door and avoiding communication – a pattern defined as *angry criticism* in EFT (Woolley, 2007). Ron felt threatened by her protests and would back off and avoid the situation, for the same example, at home, by retreating to his phone. This drove expression of negative emotions from both partners. These emotions, however, were *secondary emotions* (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013), only expressing their frustration and anger. There were no significant expressions of prime emotions yet.

The consequences of this pattern were that both are neither accessible, nor responsive, there was no safe engagement, and their attachment needs were suppressed. Both would turn their focus on to tasks to find out how to limit distressing engagement with each other. The



relocation worsened this cycle as May had not had access to her mother, her attachment figure, nor had she any alternative. May attempted to enter Ron's side of the drawing paper, which aligned with the fact that she initiated the therapy to become closer with Ron. Her action was, however, both hesitant and late. Moreover, drawing over Ron's drawing could easily be interpreted as intrusive, far from an invitation to communicate. Ron did not feel comfortable in the situation but retreated to an avoidant state instead of taking action to help ease his discomfort.

The artwork and the reflection session placed Ron and May in a situation where they had to engage and express unacknowledged thoughts and emotions that were long suppressed. In that sense, the session surfaced and made the partners aware of, their perpetual patterns of interaction. This felt very uncomfortable for both of them, which was an indication that the session drove both of them out of their "comfort zones". It also served as a strong visual record for both of them to refer to along the therapy and at home. I felt that the session was an adequate opening for the couple's therapy.

Combining written language and the artwork is expected to yield details that could not be gathered through the artwork and conversation alone. This is supported by Morrell's (2011) claim that "thoughtful switching between art and language modes may affect positive change in art therapy clients" (p. 31).

A weekly date is an exercise requested early in the therapeutic process aimed to rehearse the therapy outcome, and with time, promote emotional bonding, share experiences and fondness, and build positive mutual feelings. This date may have come early in the process when May and Ron were not fully prepared, but it signaled to them that they have time allocated to true dialog.

### *Session No. 2*

May and Ron arrived with tense facial expressions. Ron started by saying, "May will tell you, it was a hard week!" May said, "Indeed!" They chose to sit on the sofas at the back of the clinic, and not beside the work table, where they sat in the former session.

I identified and described the previous session in brief, also reminding the couple that May's wish for therapy was to change their ways of communication. May was triggered. Suddenly, she spoke up and said she could not be in this situation anymore where they were speaking, then not speaking: "I know that you are angry, and your anger is directed towards my mother, but you are mixing this anger with your attitude towards me". She kept her eyes

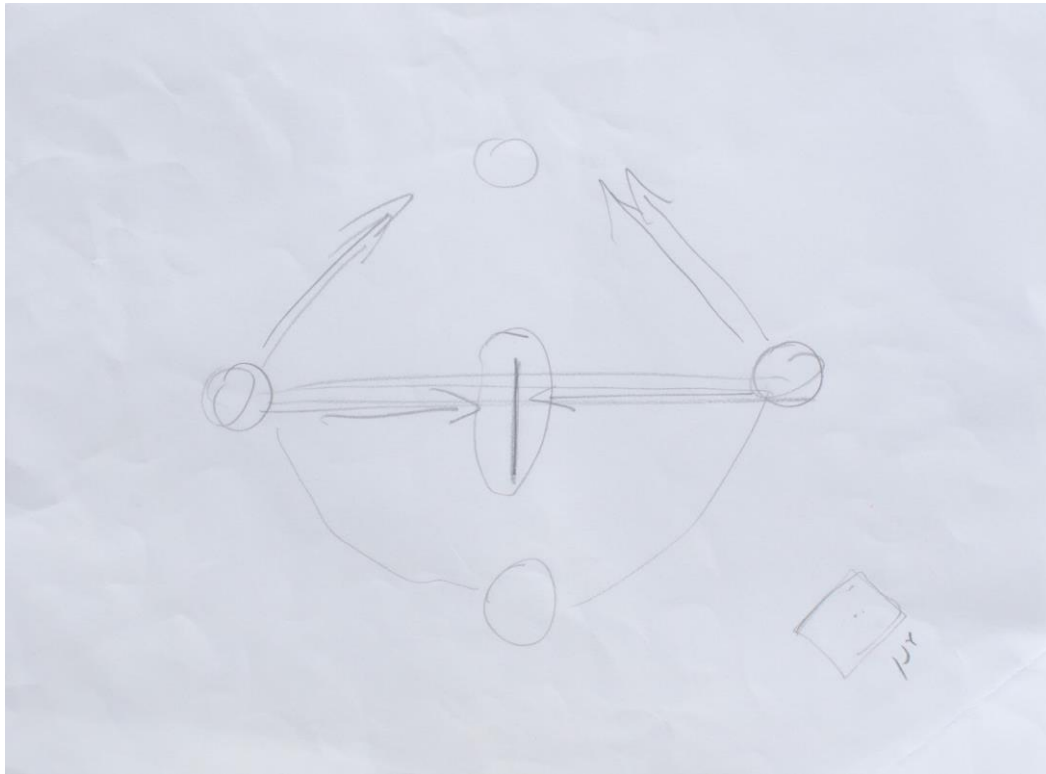


on me but was talking to Ron. "With the girls, you are like another person. You are spontaneous and happy. I am trying to change. I am not calling my mother as often as I used to. I decided to loosen my control over the baby and trust the helper to spend time with her without feeling guilty." She became more emotional with every phrase. "I know you wish that I will occupy myself with activities out of home, and I started looking for such activities. Maybe you do not realize this, but I cannot portray it to you all the time." She gradually raised her voice, and still did not make eye contact with him. She started crying. Ron looked at me and did not respond. I asked Ron whether he wanted to say anything in response. Ron responded:

You are never consulting with me. Indeed, with the girls, you try to be less controlling and rely on the helper and me. At social events, I know you are having a hard time being there and you always find an excuse not to join at the last minute. You cannot do anything spontaneously. Also, I am not willing to be kind to your mother because I have tried everything, and you always take her side.

I asked Ron, "what do you feel when you see May crying?" He responded, "I know why she is crying, but since we are here, please give us the tools to solve the problems." Ron did not answer my question regarding how he felt. We were sitting on the sofas, where there was a small circular table in front of them. I decided not to ask them to move to the big table. I put an A3 sheet of paper in front of them and a grey pencil. I drew a short vertical line in the middle and four small circles around it. I asked them to demonstrate their ways of communication just now through a drawing on this diagram. May took the pencil and drew two arrows towards the short line in the middle. Ron asked for the pencil and drew arrows towards the upper circle.





*Drawing 12 - Joint drawing – couple dynamics*

After a few seconds, I asked them to explain, and May said, "we both wish to do well for the girls, so we meet in the center." Ron said, "we use different ways to handle this case."

"The line in the middle prevents us from meeting." He drew a circle around the short line and said, "something is blocking us from meeting, let's find another meeting point." He pointed at his four arrows, which pointed to another circle on the top. That was Ron's way to find a solution. I told them that their drawing could help us to see how they communicated with each other – once they could realize this, it would bring their attention to change the way they engaged or disengaged when the situation repeated. Their way to engage was avoidance: to ignore or to be aggressive towards each other. This is what I would call "acting out," instead of "checking" with each other what could really be going on. The times when they felt blocked would be exactly when they should be pausing and changing their mode of operation to find alternative routes. Ron nodded and added two curved lines at the bottom of the page, "we must form our own circle."

I explained that one of the tools they could use would be the "understanding of feelings", represented by placing my hand on my heart, not what they would think or want, represented by pointing to my head. Ron was looking at the floor, and said, with a heavy stutter, "I feel sad and helpless. Maybe I want to hug her, and I do not know what to do." He did not look at



May in the eyes and did not touch her. I asked May, "what do you feel when you hear that Ron is sad and feeling helpless?" May explained, "I cry and apologize for crying. I feel the same. I do not know how we will ever solve the problem with my mother when he blames her for everything." Ron combatted:

I do not blame her for everything, but you are always the one who felt the need to talk to her, you call her several times a day. I'm here and you do not come to me and ask for my advice. You know I care about solving the problems, but I cannot stand it when you close yourself up, slam the door, go to be alone, and then you do not talk to me for a few days. *After a long pause, Ron added,* I hoped that when we relocated so far away, you will leave your dependency on your mother behind.

I was watching them and I got the impression that some unseen obstacle hung between them. I said, "the obstacle in the middle is like a dark cloud that hangs between you and prevents you from seeing each other clearly." May said, "I know it. This 'cloud' is my mother!" Ron took the pencil, drew a small sign on the right bottom corner and wrote the word "cloud" (in Hebrew), stating, "now she is out of our small family circle."

For the first time, they exchanged looks, and smiled. It was a relief to see them both smiling at each other. We did not share core feelings, but we identified one of the causes for their negative emotions. The "mother problem" was now defined and visually placed outside the circle.

I asked them if they managed to go for a date. May said they could not go because one of the girls did not feel well, and she would not leave her.

I concluded the session by saying that naming a situation by a metaphor could be a tool used to investigate a situation from an external viewpoint - once we externalize the problem, it is easier to look at it from a different perspective. I complimented them for their work in the session, hoping that they would internalize their metaphor and other findings.

We had scheduled weekly sessions, but Ron had to travel for work, so we had to cancel the following two sessions. After the first week of his absence, May called and asked to meet me. I asked her whether there was any urgency and she said no, she just wanted to talk. I reminded her that as per our couple's therapy contract, I could not hold individual meetings with them. I suggested for her to send Ron a message and talk to him about what she intended to tell me.



*Session analysis.* In this session, we were able to practice *emotional engagement*, creating a new sense of bonding through emotional sharing that redefined the attachment between the partners (Woolley, 2007). Ron and May both expressed their emotions namely anger, blame, shame and frustration. In part, they explained the drivers for their secondary emotions, and then touched core, primary emotions towards each other. The paper allowed Ron to distance himself from the problem, thus externalizing it (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). The visuality of the drawing helped May and Ron search and propose a new, creative way to solve their communication problems.

The session demonstrated the importance of the therapist as a *third hand* (Kremer, 1993). My Initiation of an artwork in the form of four simple, equal circles and a line encouraged the couple to associate themselves with a shape, interpret links, and work in tandem. In contrast to the first session's drawing, each one associated themselves with a shape on the simple drawing. My initiation had set some 'ground rules' on the paper, which helped the couple communicate within confined boundaries and focus. It provided a rational image that helped Ron associate with, as well as initiate for the first time, solutions and discussions about prime feelings.

The use of the cloud as a *metaphor* symbolizing May's mother and the obstacle in their relationship was significant. Keyes (1983) found that "using art materials to make images, and connecting them to feelings and body states, brings into the open emotions and thoughts that have been only vaguely sensed. Closure becomes possible for unfinished issues that push for resolution" (p. 31). It was both a point in time in which the couple reached a consensus about a key disruptive factor in their relationship and defined it with a symbol they commonly agreed upon, and where they could agree that the obstacle had to be removed.

The session also surfaced an aspect of Ron's expectation from relocation. His hope that distancing from May's mother would solve his main struggle in the couple's relations did not materialize. The expectation had never been communicated directly with May, a taboo that the artwork had helped surface.

### *Session No. 3*

Our next session took place after Ron's return. They came in and sat on the sofas again, looking calmer than in the former session. I mentioned this observation to them and asked them to share with me what had happened in the past weeks.



May said that she took my advice and texted Ron every day. Apart from concerning the girls as she used to do, she also shared with him about her search for employment and the social interactions that were stemming from it. She met a mother of her daughter's friend in the playground and shared her plan to start working despite having no work permit. The mother said that she could introduce May to the Jewish School, where they could hire her as a relief teacher due to her Hebrew schooling. Ron was looking at her approvingly. He said that he was surprised to hear of this when he received the messages, and that he was glad that she had sent them. They looked very pleased when they talked. It was the first time I had heard them sharing positive details about their personal life. I was happy to learn that they had started communicating in this new manner, even if it was only through text messages. Their new way of communication was a big step towards face-to-face communication with no expectations or judgmental reactions.

May said, "we even went out for a date, and it was good." She added that she missed him when he was away. I complimented their achievements: talking, sharing, dating and missing one another. I decided to continue the discussion from our previous session about their relations with their families, bearing in mind that both did not like to talk to each other about their families. I asked them to move to the big table and placed two A5 papers on the table. They moved to the table and waited peacefully for instructions. I asked them each to draw the way they saw their relations with their families of origin. They could choose any material to work with. On the table, there were crayons, markers, and pencils. On a shelf beside the table, within reach, there were paints and chalks. They both choose pencils again.

I decided to frame the subject to give them some boundaries, such that they would produce a drawing relevant to the topic, and not escape from the subject.





*Drawing 13 - Family relations - May*

May used blue and pink pencils. She started on the left side with the blue, drawing a big closed shape, and coloured it. She added a line going downwards, with one small circle at the end of it, then drew a very short line towards the right, with a circle on the end of this one as well, so that the short line connected the two circles. She then added a line with a wide curve, placed as if it were holding the two small circles in a nest. She moved on to the right of the page, where she used a pink pencil instead of the blue one. She drew two 'amoeba' shapes, the left one was neatly coloured, and the right one was loosely scribbled in. She drew two small circles towards the bottom of the page, to mirror the other two small circles on the left, except not connected. She then drew lines connecting the left circle to both "amoebas," and the right circle only to the left one. Centred in the bottom of the page, she drew one pink amoeba towards the left, and one blue one towards the right. These two amoebas were overlapped halfway.





*Drawing 14 - Family relations - Ron*

Ron started drawing with an orange pencil and drew two stick figures on the right side of his page, one a woman, and one a man - the right one had no facial details. He changed to a green marker and drew a line under the figures, about half page long. He added two scribbles of grass on the line. He next took a green pencil and drew in the middle of the page something that looked like a high pillar with a feminine stick figure on top. On the left side of the pillar, he drew, in a grey pencil, a curved line with a stick figure with no face on the left. He took a yellow pencil and added a sun in the upper right corner. He took a black marker and drew a cloud. He changed to a blue pencil and drew, on the bottom of the whole page, two wavy lines. He then took the green pencil and drew a surfboard with a sail on the right side of the waves and added a few extra waves in green. He paused for a second, then in brown, added smiley facial features and hair on the right-most stick figure that was originally drawn with none. To conclude, he used the grey pencil to add facial features to the left-most stick figure, as well as two birds flying above the figures on the right. It was not a spontaneous or unplanned drawing. He took pencils and markers from the box and put them back.

Once they were done, I asked them to share their interpretations of the drawings. I reminded them that when we were looking at someone else's work, it was better to hear the story before we jumped to our own, sometimes judgmental, interpretations.



May started, "it is a blue cloud. It represented Ron's parents. They have a good couple relationship. They are a team. Below them (pointing at the small circles) it is me and Ron linked together in a nest. On the top right, I drew my mother. I placed her higher and bigger. Only I have access to her. Both Ron and I have access to my father, who is the second shape, on the left. "To me, my parents seem like a team, but when it is about us, they are not experienced. At the mid-bottom, I drew two separate clouds that represent Ron and me. We are equal in size and have an overlapping area." May was very accurate and confident with her speech when delivering her reflection. I asked May why Ron's family was displayed in one shape while hers was in two separate shapes. She replied that the more she worked on her emotional separation from her mother, the more she saw that her parents were not a real team and were in actuality were emotionally very similar to Ron and her. I noticed that the cloud representing Ron's parents was filled with neatly drawn lines, while the cloud representing May's mother was filled in a messy manner, and her father's cloud was filled to make it opaque. Ron seemed attentive. May smiled and told us she was done with her interpretation.

I gestured to Ron as a cue for him to begin explaining his drawing. Ron pointed to the right half of his page and explained, "my parents, relaxing and good, something simple and pastoral, secure, no effort." He pointed to the left and directed his speech to May, "your parents. Grey, flat. I am not interested." He pointed at the black cloud; "I backed off, I was burned, I take precaution. Your parents are higher, and they come before me. Your father is the man; your mother is the cloud. The cloud blocks your father from approaching us. You are standing "on the fence": you are observing, assessing, and taking your time. The fence is very safe." I asked Ron if he was in this scene and he said, "I cannot place myself because I am avoiding. I am in the sea," and he pointed at the surfboard. Then he said that he was not really busy with this hobby all the time, but he had his duty to work and to provide for the family which kept him detached from the family anyway.

After they displayed their perception of their family relations, I pointed out that the drawings both portrayed their own views about their own families and the other's family towards them. They also reflected how the couple communicated with their families regarding trusting, sharing and solving problems. I asked them if they ever spoke about how each other saw their in-law's dynamics or relationship, pointing out that May drew her and Ron communicating with his parents together, but they were drawn communicating with her parents individually. They both said that they had never discussed that, but they "thought they knew" what the other felt. I repeated the words "thought they knew" and reminded them that



assuming and thinking without checking could become judgmental, and as a result, they both avoided the situation altogether. I pointed out this point to them and challenged Ron to try to build his confidence because May needed his support - together in the nest, she needed him, out of the sea, and instead together on the fence. I asked him, “you said it is safe there, why don't you join her?” He was confused and did not respond. May looked at her watch and said she had leave on time because of their daughter. Ron looked at her and said that he needed to go back to the office. I wanted them to leave the clinic with a feeling of accomplishment, and thus decided not to impose the issue.

May and Ron were relaxed and seemed comfortable. I asked them to continue talking and sharing and reminded them how relaxed and pleased they were when they talked at the beginning of the session.

*Session analysis.* The session focused on the exploration of the families of origin. Malchiodi (2007) highlighted the importance of the expression of a problem within the family to explore one's emotional problems. In relocation in general, and in Ron and May's case, distancing from the family of origin disrupts balances and renders relationships with the family extra important.

This session's artwork demonstrated an advantage of art therapy that was titled in the literature review as a *broader and multidirectional form of expression* (Malchiodi, 2005). The drawings and metaphors helped Ron and May articulate their interpretations of the situation, but the expression went well beyond their verbal reflections, transitioning from a complex map of positions and interrelationships that each of them saw to a comparative view of how their symbolisms differed, and the different ways in which they positioned themselves in the drawing: May was decisive and well defined, Ron was absent. Another advantage, defined in the literature review as “*action-oriented and resolution-induced therapy*” was demonstrated here- the art allowed the couple to distance from old patterns of blaming, and share a complex idea through the safe protection of the drawing (Riley, 2003).

May drew amorphous shapes to describe family members. In her interpretation, she called them “clouds.” She differentiated the clouds by colours; blue for Ron and his parents, pink for her and her parents. This was very dichotomous. The single point at which the colours overlapped was where she represented herself and Ron. The clear depiction of two distinct colours easily reflected the different families, with a single link between the couple, placed the couple as the center of the family universe, and thus, showed how Ron was



shifting towards the position of an attachment figure for May. She was able to look beyond the obstacles and depict what seemed to be a healthy relationship.

Ron's, on the contrary, was focused on the obstacles. Although they agreed on the significance of the cloud metaphor, only Ron depicted it as a threat. Ron struggled to see himself with May. He chose to symbolize himself only through the surfing board. It was a strong statement that confirmed that Ron was distancing himself and avoiding. May felt safe to discuss issues that she wished to solve; her art reflected organized thoughts. Ron was still struggling- his expression was less coherent, and he appeared to be in the process of recognising of issues. It was not certain whether he had grasped the implications of him being absent and passive. It was apparent, however, that he had built confidence, was becoming more active and most importantly, was able to express prime feelings and reveal opinions that were so far assumed to be known or taboos.

The art in this session gave me an perspective of what had already been achieved in 3 sessions, but also an indication of the gaps, and what had yet to be achieved.

#### *Session No. 4*

May and Ron entered the clinic, and I directed them to sit at the work table. May sat on the left side of the table, and Ron sat beside her. Following our last session, I decided to lead Ron and May to explore the practical aspects of their relationship further. I wished for them to explore new experiences and new relationship events. I hoped for them to find the things they had in common, to discuss the things they did together, things that they did separately, and maybe even to share some of their dreams and wishes. I offered them the chance to draw another joint drawing, this time giving instructions and boundaries. I hoped that by allowing them to share a common ground and their individual expectations, both would be able to reconstruct the family bond and their relationship. I drew two overlapping circles on an A3 paper – a Venn-diagram - and asked them to express what was individually important to each person, and what had a common value to them. I asked them to use different colours and to do it simultaneously.

Ron chose a black pencil. He thought for a while and said it was too complicated for him to draw anything, so he would just write, but maybe May could draw for him. He took the paper and wrote very quickly. He wrote, on the right, the following words (in Hebrew): "family," "hobbies," "friends," and "work." In the common zone, he wrote "girls," "understanding," "power," "attention," "stability," and "containment." When he finished



writing, he passed the paper to May. May wrote on the left, using a blue pencil: “family,” “hobbies,” “freedom,” (could also be translated to leisure) and “girl-friends.” Underneath Ron's words in the common zone, she wrote “intimacy,” “honesty,” “hanging out,” “girls,” “families,” “studies,” “work,” “love,” and “home.” Ron added the word “home” near hers. They looked at each other and smiled. While they were writing the last words, they got closer together and turned slightly in towards each other. When they finished writing, they did not move apart.

*Drawing 15* - Joint drawing - things in common

Ron took initiative in the creative process and was keen to share. He seemed confident and secure while writing and talking. I pointed out that Ron took over most of the common area with his writing, expressing dominance. He realized that “actually, we have many things in common.” May smiled. Her writing was squeezed in the space Ron left for her.

I asked them what it meant that each one wrote the word “family” in their private areas, and not in the common area. May said that she referred to her own family when she wrote the word, knowing that Ron did not see her family as his own. She could accept this because he could still be around them. Ron said he thought the same about May with regards to his



family. They agreed some things and ideas could be kept separate and not forced on each other.

I pointed out that both wrote “hobbies” in the private section and asked whether they had any hobby in common. May said they fostered the girls together. Ron said that he could not share surfing with May. May said that she was not interested in surfing, and she was happy that he was doing it without her. Ron added it was also fine to have separate hobbies, but that maybe they needed to find mutual ones too.

I pointed to the word “intimacy,” written by May in the common area. I noticed that below it, she wrote “going out,” “girls,” and “love.” I asked May to explain what she meant when she wrote “intimacy.” May said that she did not feel that they shared these types of moments together. She referred to them as spending time alone and sharing their thoughts and feelings. May said that lately, since I requested that they spent more time together, they had been trying to do so. However, when they walked down the street, they never held hands, and they never hugged. May was sharing her wishes for a more intimate and physical relationship. Ron did not respond to this, but I could feel their closeness, as their body gestures were softer and more intimate than I had ever seen before. They smiled.

We spoke about the importance of keeping their individuality in the relationship and that it would be easier to straighten out once their relationship felt safe. At their age, it was important to live their lives and fulfill themselves, not only for the girls. Ron said he was about to travel a lot in the coming weeks. He would only be at home on the weekends and thus could not attend sessions. After this period, they planned to have their annual holiday in Israel. Both said that they were tense and expressed a strong need to hold another session before they travelled to Israel. They said that they felt there was an improvement to be made in the way they were communicating at home and reaching out for each other. May said she texted Ron sometimes during work and shared things with him, and Ron expressed that he liked when she did this and knew he should do it too. After hearing this, I asked if they would be able to share why they were anxious regarding the coming trip. Ron said that he was afraid that May would turn back to her mother and he would be left out again. May said that she was hoping she could avoid doing this, but she needed his support to help her.

*Session analysis.* While earlier sessions focused on the exploration of different viewpoints and styles, in this session, I wanted to help Ron and May establish their



commonalities, a bonding exchange which would allow them to restructure their attachment (Ivanir, 2016).

Ron took the initiative in this task. It expressed a change of strength in him, and was reflected on May, empowering both of them. The paper was placed in front of them, but both wrote in inclination, to their own side. Ron wrote with larger letters, and words came naturally and were easy for him to put on paper, while May used tiny letters. They were patient towards each other, reading each other's words and adding new things spontaneously. Ron used empathic words that he had never used earlier, such as “understanding,” “power,” “attention,” “stability,” and “containment”- words that indicated his *attunement* towards May (Ivanir, 2016). What stood out in the comparison between May and Ron in the common zone was May’s wishes for intimacy and emotion, words that were still absent from Ron’s list. In the context of EFT, there was an emotional engagement that needed to be further developed.

Table No.1 lists the words used in the Venn diagram. The common section is further divided into words that are common to both vs. words that are different.

Table 1 - *Things in common*

May	Common Zone - May	Common Zone - Ron	Ron
family friends hobbies freedom/leisure	girls home	girls home	family friends hobbies work
	intimacy honesty hanging out girls families studies work love	understanding power stability containment attention	

#### *Session No. 5*

The next session was scheduled a week before their trip to Israel. They were late and came in very tense. They sat on the sofa. I asked whether they had done their “weekly homework” and been out together. May said that they went shopping together - in the past she used to go out alone to buy Ron his clothing. Ron confirmed and said, "she knows what I



need, and I love her taste." He looked at May and smiled and she smiled back. May responded, "this time it is your own taste." She seemed pleased with the fact that he had chosen something for himself, and he too had a satisfied look on his face. May said suddenly, "you had the power to choose for yourself." Ron looked at her confused. She reminded him that in last session he wrote the word "power" in the common area. Ron smiled. I was pleased to hear the comment referring to their last drawing. Ron added that they had another date, and had gone out for dinner in a restaurant. May said it was really nice and tasted good. She then added:

During the meal I became very emotional, I felt overwhelmed with feelings I was not sure why but I decided to share it with Ron, choosing not to disappear to the restroom or to avoid his eye contact. Suddenly, I had the urge to share with him some of what we spoke about in our individual sessions, I really wanted him to hear me out.

Ron said that she did not just share verbally with him, but also started crying. This was unusual, because at home, whenever she became very emotional, she used to close the door and call her mother for relief. May nodded. Ron went on and said that at first, he was not sure what to do, and kept looking around and was afraid that others would be watching. He looked at me and said that instead of just staring at her, he decided to hug her and to embrace her until she calmed down. He said that it was weird for him to see her like that, lacking control and being emotional in public, but that time, he knew that he needed to get closer to her and comfort her. He added he felt uncomfortable at first, doing it in a public place, but it seemed to work. I told May that she had made a big progress by allowing herself to share with Ron her primary, painful feelings. I looked at Ron and praised him for becoming able to be more empathetic towards May needs, to support her when she needed him. I told them that being able to comfort each other was part of the mutual regulation, and that they were able to "read" the signal of threat and act on it to help each other.

I addressed that this session was important to prepare them for their upcoming visit to Israel, reminding them that stress and tension could unconsciously trigger defense mechanisms and working models. Ron pointed out that it would be their first visit since they had started working on their relationship and added that he did not share that they had issues with his parents, so it could be awkward for him to behave differently. May said that she did not share it with her family either. I nodded and said that I did not see that as a problem.



I asked them to describe their past visits to Israel. Ron took some time to organize his thoughts and then said, "it was terrible." They were always tense for weeks before their trips. They used to divide their stay between the two families and were apparently unhappy in both homes. While at her parents' home, May kept herself obsessively busy, usually cleaning and tidying their house. Ron stayed passive and refrained from communicating with her mother and spoke with her father only after being addressed. I asked him how he could explain this behavior, asking him to use the terms that were used in our therapy. He said that he felt May's tension, and that a conflict could erupt any minute. He was certain that he had nothing in common with her mother, and would regard her as a "cloud" that might hide him from the sun, but he could always keep in mind that this would last for only a short time until they left. May's father was dominated by her mother and limited his communication with Ron. Staying calm and avoiding causing any friction would be the best way to deal with the situation. May listened to Ron attentively.

I asked Ron if he thought that their recent bonding experiences of sharing, with each other, being there for each other and being comforting and supporting gave him the confidence and strength to change his old patterns of behavior - was he capable of making an effort to use the new pattern of communication between them? Ron said that he understood how May coped with the anxiety and stress between her mother and him. He said that he wished May could be more relaxed and stay calm. They would do their utmost to let the girls enjoy their visit to their grandparents. Ron said he understood how he could be there for May. I asked him to elaborate. He said, "okay, I can make sure to make eye contact with her, I can hold her hand, I can reassure her that I am here because I want to be here with her and not because I must." I asked May if that would help to ease her stress. May said she hoped so. I also reminded them that they had, and should use, the option to step aside together; they could go to a room alone together, or outside to the garden, to speak their minds and feelings before frustrations built up. I asked May to share with Ron what she hoped he could do while they were at her parents' house. She said she understood that at this time, they might not be fully comfortable to talk to each other in the way that I suggested, but that she hoped he could at least respond to her mother if she spoke to him. He could also be more involved and take more initiative with the girls. Ron agreed. May said that at his parents' house she felt more comfortable. Last year she did not try to fit in, to smile, or to enjoy, because it did not seem fair that he could behave that way towards her parents. After saying that, she smiled and said, "I know it is a bit childish."



I asked May how she would help Ron. She said, “I will try to be less ‘busy’ and less tense.” She would pay more attention to Ron and would sit next to him whenever she could. May said she understood now that her way to cope with her anxiety was to clean and organize the space, looking at me and mentioning “self-regulation.” She followed with, “I was not aware that it caused stress to the people around me.”

I asked May if she thought that her mother was the only cause for her restlessness, stress, and anxiety. May said that when she was at her parents’ home she liked thinking that this was the only problem, but when she was outside of their house and around the neighborhood, she obsessively thought about what would happen if she were to see “him.” May referred to her childhood abuser, who was still living near her parents’ house. She said that last year she saw him at the local supermarket and it was a terrible experience. She was with the girls and felt like she could not breathe. She had not told anyone about that. Ron’s face was frozen – he was not aware that it had happened. May turned to Ron and said, “I did not tell you because I was not sure how you would react.” She said they usually did not speak about what happened, and actually, she did not even know how he felt about it. She said, “I know I was the one who did not want to share, but maybe now I am ready to - if you think you can.”

It was almost time to finish the session. I felt that addressing the abuse needed time and attention and that this was not the right session for it. I asked them if they felt safe with each other to talk about it alone - if they would be able to be empathetic to one another and relate to their core feelings, to be honest and open with each other and give support. May and Ron looked at each other and said they could try. Ron added that if they felt unable to do it, they would contact me.

I drew their attention to the fact that during their last few visits, their families were part of their negative interaction, and accepted their behavior. The change in May and Ron’s interactions could be noticeable to their families and that they had to keep that in mind. May said they would do their best to put aside all their negative feelings, avoid talking about their house, and try to meet their old friends together instead of separately. Ron said they would take the girls to the beach and watch the surfers. May said, “no, you will have the time for surfing, and I will play with the girls.” I added that I trusted that they already had the tools to help and support each other, and offered for them to contact me if they thought they needed any external support.



*Session analysis.* In the context of relocation, this session represented the importance of preparation towards a home visit when relationships with family or families are loaded. Although no art was practiced and there was no planned progress in their therapy, the session was dedicated to consolidating and substantiating a new narrative for their relationship, with which they would be able to practice on their own, under potential pressure. It provided a foundation for a crucial upcoming event that they could put to the test in the real world without the therapist's support.

Ron was becoming more confident and initiating. May, cooperating with his initiatives rather than initiating, seemed content and under less pressure. The initiation of discussion about May's trauma was an indication of her trust and willingness to rely emotionally on Ron. It was a significant progress towards the next sessions.

#### *Session No. 6*

Their vacation in Israel lasted three weeks. During their stay in Israel, they texted me saying that they were doing well and "holding the umbrella together."

This session took place after they returned from their vacation in Israel. May and Ron sat beside the working table. I suggested that they made a joint painting using finger paints. May was happy with the idea, but Ron rejected it. With a gesture of his hand, he said, "not for me. I will not smear myself with paints." May seemed disappointed and embarrassed, then she replied "that's fine, we can do it at home. We really want to share today about our holiday." They were very talkative throughout this session, and were anxious to tell me all the news from Israel, as well as to describe their activities and experiences in detail. They stayed at both parents' places, and both stays went smoothly. Whenever they were alone, they coordinated how they should behave to avoid causing any tension. They planned ahead most of the time so that both families could enjoy having time with the girls. May complimented Ron for his efforts when they stayed with her mother. Ron nodded in agreement. He said it was the first time May did not clean and tidy her parents' house, and that it was nice to see her more relaxed. They both said they felt different and much closer than they were before.

I asked whether the two families met each other during the visit. May replied, "no." Before I was able to comment, Ron spoke up and said that he wanted me to know that while in Israel, he had a meeting at his company's headquarters where he was told that his relocation might be terminated in the near future. In this case, they would have to make tough decisions. May said that upon their return from their trip, she was surprised to receive a



positive answer to her application to teach twice a week in the Jewish School, and that the school would arrange a work visa for her. She said that she was a bit stressed regarding the way she would handle their daughters, and whether she was really capable of doing the job. Ron looked at her and said that she was going to be amazing and that they had already started thinking about how he could work from home on these days.

May and Ron seemed excited and engaged. Suddenly, May said that she knew that she might lose this opportunity to work, which was one of her expectations in relocating, in the case that Ron could not prolong the relocation or find another job in Singapore. I asked them how they felt about the situation to which May said, “ups and downs.” She was excited about the opportunity to work and concerned due to an unknown future, but this time, unlike before their initial relocation, they were discussing the issue and checking for alternatives together. May added that this time, she was much more involved, and Ron was sharing with her his thoughts and ideas. Ron said he was very proud and happy that May was offered this position, and that it would be a real pity to miss it in the case that they would have to leave. He was still hoping to stay in relocation for another term. They were discussing the options but left it open until it was decided by the company.

I let them talk without steering the conversation and rarely interfered throughout the entire session. Towards the end of the session, I reminded them that we did not make art. May said, “we can try doing that at home.” I suggested doing a finger painting. May was excited and this time, Ron did not reject the idea.

*Session analysis.* The vacation was a success in terms of the couple’s therapy. I observed a shift in their interactional positions. There was much more accessibility and sensitivity towards one another; a new “dance.” Their communication patterns were changing and both were able to be empathetic towards one another. They were responding to one another physically, not just cognitively, but actually *tuning in* while they were conversing (Ivanir, 2016).

May’s opportunity to change status and fulfill her expectations caused stress, but Ron was giving her the support that she needed. The news regarding the uncertainty of their termination of relocation created new anxiety and stress, a very common situation in relocation. There are very few expats that can terminate their relocations on their own terms. This stress was likely to escalate and introduce new challenges to the therapy. I felt that it



would be good for them to be engaged in creative work outside of the therapy room, especially since it was proposed by May.

*Session No. 7*

May and Ron sat on the sofas, where May handed me what she called their “homework.” I told them that I was pleased to see that they extended our work beyond the formal sessions and that they had made some art together at home. I asked them how they felt while doing the artwork outside the *safe place* of the clinic. Ron said he did not enjoy it and added that “it was rather difficult to do.” May said she was thrilled to do it since they had never before done such activity together before, although it was just a simple artwork. She said she encouraged him to participate and she enjoyed it all together.



*Drawing 16 - Finger painting - homework*

I asked them to describe the process of painting. May started. They sat at their dining table in the kitchen after the girls and the helper went to sleep. She brought the paints and a sheet of paper. May apologized that she did not have a big paper at home - she had to tape 4 A4 papers to make one. She fixed it to their dining table with tape so it would not move, and played music "to create a pleasant atmosphere." Without talking, she took some yellow paint, and started smearing it on the upper left corner. She said that she enjoyed the feeling of the



paint and went on to the lower corner. She said that she had to encourage Ron until he took some blue paint with his fingers, dropped it on the other half of the paper and started moving his fingers monotonously in a repetitive pattern. She said that she wanted it to become a joint artwork, so she took some of the blue paint and used it, leaving her finger marks in a similar pattern to his. After this, Ron started to overlap on the yellow painted areas.

Ron said they used only one hand each, claiming that "two hands would be too much." They went on painting for about 10 minutes. May laughed and said that in retrospect, it seemed like a very long time considering the outcome. I pointed out that Ron's fingerprints were repetitive and restrained. He said that he was hesitant about invading May's space since he had never seen her so free and spontaneous, and seemed distant and embarrassed while talking.

It was an intimate experience for both of them. I asked May how she felt while encouraging Ron to be present and to participate. May said that she was disappointed and hoped to raise it in our next session. I asked how they concluded their artwork. She said they both had a feeling that they were too repetitive, and just stopped. She added that they did not discuss it anymore and took some time to clean the table together.

I asked them to try explaining why they could not discuss their emotions during or after painting. They did not respond and just kept looking at me. I explained to them my rational decision to end the former session and send them home with the encouragement to finger paint at home. Finger paints represent a less controlled, sensual, and playful experience, thus fostering intimacy. Until now, they always chose pencils and markers, which are used in a controlled way, and agreeing to use finger paints suggested that they were ready and willing to take a challenge.

I reminded them that May's wish at the beginning of the therapy was to get more intimate, to talk more, and to spend time together as a couple. Ron became impatient, moving in his chair and looking around the room. I asked, "what is now most messy in your life?" Ron said, "it is the volatile situation of my work." He said that it looked as though they had to conclude their stay here much faster than they thought. The company was possibly not even going to wait until the end of their daughters' school year. May said that she was looking forward to her new job, adding that she finally had an opportunity to do something for herself in this relocation, and she would probably need to give it up. Ron looked at May, then at me, and said they would have liked to prolong their stay in Singapore, but it was not up to them.



It was time for closure. I explained that sending them home with this kind of a task, and letting them get organized without me, forced them to expedite the process of experiencing uncontrolled situations and coping with them together. Now that there was the likely possibility that they would have to move sooner, we would probably have to refocus the therapy.

They both looked exhausted and stressed. I asked them to allow themselves to feel and to try to connect with these present feelings, as well as to share them. I reminded them of what they had told me that when they were there for each other, they both performed better, and that it was imperative for them not to allow any of their feelings to interfere with their relationship and reverse what they had achieved. Ron and May agreed that it was much better when they felt that they could share their thoughts, feelings, and fears, even if it did not fully solve the problem. I thanked them for continuing the work and encouraged them to keep holding each other.

A few days after this session, May texted me and happily announced that she was starting her teaching job in a week.

*Session analysis.* Finger painting can elicit powerful, usually positive responses. Use of this material can produce excitement as a result of contact, the chances of getting dirty, the possible lack of control, and difficulties in being precise (Snir & Regev, 2013). I was hoping to get the couple engaged in an activity that would stimulate positive feelings and evoke the motivational system to promote emotional bonding (Goldman & Greenberg, 2013). While I was aware of the risk of sending them home with homework to complete outside the safe space, and away from the *all-knowing* therapist (Ivanir, 1996), hoping that they would be able to explore an intimate situation without me, using their natural abilities.

During our individual sessions, May shared her need for intimacy. She wished to get to know Ron better, to talk more, laugh, and build their friendship. Intimacy was, however, never on Ron's wish list. I saw progress in the fact that May initiated an invitation for an intimate "project." Until now, May preferred doing things by herself, as did Ron. Mutual activities were only of practical nature, an indication of changing dynamics. Ron was less excited and even seemed overwhelmed. May felt his discomfort yet was persistent but reacted sensitively. Their work was not harmonious, but it certainly felt like a mutual artwork. Unlike May, Ron was not ready to explore intimacy, and could not engage with his feelings. To justify the emotional barrier, he said that he was not willing to invade her space. The intimate



situation triggered Ron's avoidance, excluding the possibility of intimacy. In order to reach intimacy, both couple members would have to be ready, willing, and remain in contact (Boyd, 2011).

The threat of the termination by Ron's employer changed the therapy's reality abruptly and escalated stress. This was a challenge that I encountered very often. Decisions are often taken by the employer under pressure, leaving little space for adjustment. These are often highly disruptive - they are beyond the couple's control, have potential dramatic influences on the family, like the risk of leaving school in the middle of the year, and risk shadowing the positive experience of the relocation altogether.

Limited time triggered constraints and change of priorities. While continuing to practice EFT and focus on the couple core relations, emphasis needed to be put on preparing the couple for high levels of uncertainty or for the actual move. Anxiety and stress increased the risk of going back to their old patterns of avoidance.

#### *Session No. 8*

Ron and May sat down on the sofa chairs without looking at each other, both staring through the window. Ron opened the session by telling me that they had experienced a crisis at home. He said that no one slammed doors and that instead they had a quiet discussion until they felt that everything was said. May did not agree or disagree, simply sitting on the sofa. She seemed relatively relaxed and comfortable while Ron talked, and did not interfere. They did not share with me what this crisis was about, and I did not inquire.

I complimented them for coping with the problem together. I suggested to express their experience and feelings in an artwork, allowing them to work individually and where they were seated, at the armchairs and not at the table. I handed each of them an A4 paper on a clipboard and a box of pencils, asking them to draw or doodle whatever was going on in their minds; feelings, thoughts, worries, fears, and so on. May was relaxed and started to draw on her lap. She chose different pencils from the box while drawing. Ron was tense and bent over the small table. He started by choosing four pencils and used them one after the other.





*Drawing 17 - Ron's "absurd"*

When Ron completed his drawing, he put the pencils in the box and announced, "I finished." May looked at him, said "I enjoy drawing," and went on for few more minutes. May seemed more confident and present than before, while Ron seemed even more stressed by her reaction. He put down his paper on the table, and May continued drawing.

Initially, Ron only drew two big circle shapes with sharp spikes across the middle of the paper, strongly gripping the pencil and pressing it down hard. The left circle had long and short spikes pointing toward the top and bottom of the page. The right circle also had similar spikes, but here the long spikes were directed to the left circle, and one was even impaling it. He used red, pink and orange to scribble on the inside of the circle, without covering the whole circle. I was surprised by the strong grip and intense motions he made while drawing. Ron, I assume remembering the regular process, said, "the title of this drawing is *Absurd!*" It was the first time Ron was so straightforward, expressing himself loud and clear. May did not seem to be bothered. When she completed her artwork, she looked at me and nodded, without exposing her paper. Ron said he would like to share. I asked May whether she was ready and she replied "yes," still keeping her artwork to herself. Ron seemed intrigued. He started talking after May confirmed she was ready, beginning by saying that their relocation would



probably end, and he would be expected, by his company, to move back to Israel in two months. This came at a bad time, and they were both very tense. I asked him if he would like to say more. Ron said that he was angry, "I am not a toy! My life cannot be controlled by others", and was very assertive. It was probably the first time I had seen him like that while May was beside him. I said that I could feel Ron's strong emotions being expressed and I asked if May could be the one to explain further.

May said that he was initially very confident that they would stay for a longer time in Singapore, and now felt as if the world had turned against him. On top of this, yesterday the "mother" issue had come back into the picture. The day before our session, Ron had mentioned to May that she would soon be close to her mother again, and their relations could regress to what they were before the therapy. They were discussing their options and came to talk about their house in Israel, and so he came to discuss her mother. May said that she was less concerned with the future, and more by the fact that Ron decided to bring back their issues with her mother to the picture. May continued, "instead of being assertive, talking with me and addressing the issue, he went back to the 'cave,' to his 'box.'" She said that he came back from work while she was busy with the girls, and that their helper was sick and she did not have the time to make dinner. She ate a light dinner with the girls, but Ron did not join them. He did not ask for food, and just went straight to bed. She was too busy and too tired to confront him. She said she was afraid that he was turning back to his pattern of avoidance. I mentioned that she used a therapeutic term, and asked Ron if he agreed with her apprehension. He did not respond.

I asked Ron what had happened all of a sudden - what triggered him to turn back to his old patterns of avoiding? Ron said, "I am not sure, but I feel humiliated, under-estimated and stupid. I feel so small." As intense as the conversation was, I did not feel tension in the room. I was relieved to learn that the cause for this "crisis" was external to the couple relations and did not stem from a drawback. For the first time, I heard Ron expressing his core feelings.





*Drawing 18 - May's growth*

Suddenly, May exposed her drawing and said “I feel growth; I drew a tree with fruits. I feel the blossom. I feel that we are moving forward. I feel that Ron just said what he wanted to say for so many years.” The drawing filled almost the whole paper, leaving only the bottom empty. The tree in the drawing had no roots, and there was no ground line as if the whole drawing was floating. May used faint, broken lines. She added pink dots to a green tree, which she described as fruits. May seemed to be comfortable and calm while drawing - she even continued drawing after Ron announced he was done. She disregarded his urge to reflect on his drawing. Ron looked at May and said, “I need you on my side. I do not wish to feel like that when I lose my confidence.” Ron took back his paper and added two new overlapping circles at the bottom of it, this time, the sharp spikes faced outward. In the overlapping area, he coloured pink, and in the middle of each circle, he coloured orange. Ron said, “this is how I want us to be together.” May and Ron smiled towards each other.

The news about their departure in two months triggered greater stress for the couple. They needed to find schools for their daughters, and a house to move into. Ron was promised that he could keep his job if he returned to Israel but May needed to announce that she would



leave the teaching position. The couple was forced to adapt to a timetable that they were not used to. The uncertainty of the situation, which is very typical for a family in relocation, involved both Ron and May.

I reminded them of their statements regarding handling “a project together.” They both said that once they have a common project, they can cooperate well. It was important to emphasize that in their situation, even though Ron was the one who supported the family financially and that the crisis concerned his work, the family was going through the process together. I asked Ron what he felt regarding the loss of his job. Ron said, “if we return to Israel, I will still have a job in this company, but I do not want to repatriate, not now.”

I asked him if he had the energy to search for another job. He looked at me and said that he had been working for this company for many years. I asked him if he would be able to try a new job. I mentioned that I understood that he liked his comfort zone and looking for a job in another company would mean starting from scratch but had to look at all the experience he had gained so far. Ron said he was thinking of it, but he did not even know where to start. He also said that maybe looking outside the box could be a solution for not going back to Israel.

I looked at their drawings again and commented, “I feel there is a change in the way both of you express your feelings and thoughts.” May was comfortable with herself for the first time. She seemed positive, having felt a positive change in her status and defined it as “growth.” Her drawing was not complete because it represented a process. Her body gestures indicated peacefulness. I asked Ron if he could see that. Ron said, smiling, that it was so different from before. He said that May was more emotionally available to the girls, to herself, and if he tried more, she would probably be available for him. I said to May, “you said it is the first time you hear Ron authentically sharing his feelings. What do *you* feel?” May said, “It feels real, it feels good. It is not easy to hear that he is afraid that I will turn back, but he needs to trust me.”

Working with couples in relocation who have lost their job, and even being in this situation myself, I am familiar with the strong feelings of failure, guilt, anger, and shame on the husband’s side (it was the husband who was the relocated one in most of the cases I have dealt with, as well as my own). I asked Ron if he felt that he could relate to these emotions. Ron said, “no, I don’t feel guilt and shame. I feel responsibility and anger!” He said they had decided to relocate together, so there was no reason to feel guilt or shame. In the years of their relocation, they had created a beautiful family. They did not meet all their expectations



and did not reach the good couplehood they expected to have, but in the past few months, things had changed. Things were much better. He did admit that he felt bad about needing to end the therapy so soon. I brought the session to end by saying that we still had a short opportunity to prepare them to face their expected changes together.

*Session analysis.* During the session, May and Ron started practicing new interactional cycles. They shared their experiences at home and were able to do so in the clinic. Both expressed secondary emotions and were empathetic and reassuring of each other. Ron's drawing also changed his language. In our individual sessions, Ron needed instruction; he rationalized and used more verbal language to express and describe situations. For the first time, Ron was using strong images, sharp lines and aggressive positioning in his drawing. He used colours to fill the insides of his shapes but did not finish the colouring. I could feel that he was anxious and very emotional, finishing quickly and was eager to speak. He titled the drawing "Absurd." Ron was able to share his anger, frustration, and fear in his drawing, and portrayed it to May. It was the first drawing in which Ron had added anything new after their interpretations, drawing May and himself together.

May's tree expressed her situation. "Tree drawings are thought to be related to one's life role, and one's capacity to obtain perceived reinforcement from the environment" (Oster & Crone, 2004, p. 101). In contradiction to the name of the drawing and the subject displayed in it, May used faint lines, which could indicate feelings of inadequacy and indecisiveness (Oster & Crone, 2004). There was no ground line in her drawing, which could indicate vulnerability to stress. To draw the branches and the trunk, she used broken lines, which could indicate overt anxiety. Considering the background of this drawing, the lack of ground line and roots, it could be assumed that the drawing showed the tension felt by May, caused by the termination of the relocation. This assumption is backed by the rich drawing of the path she drew in her last individual session (Session No. 7, Drawing 5). Ron and May's drawings were very different, although they were drawn in reaction to the same crisis (the announced end of the relocation). Ron experienced and depicted a threat, while May expressed growth and loss. The drastic contrast between their drawings showed the couple that they could experience feelings in a different way, yet they were able to share their emotions and be exposed to each other.



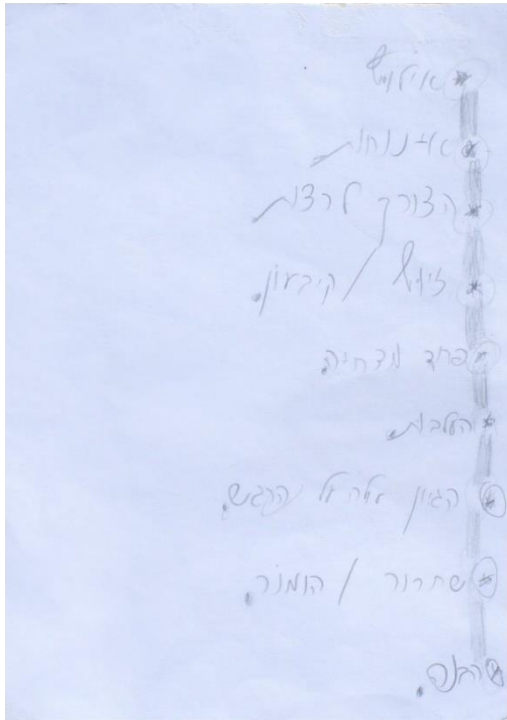
*Session No. 9*

The couple came into the clinic holding hands for the first time. They sat on the sofas. Ron started the session by telling me that the end of their relocation was final. He was bound by his contract to return to Israel for one year. He was going to Israel soon, and it seemed that we would only have time for one more session. I mentioned that the need to relocate right now was probably very stressful. May said that it was not what she wanted, especially after she had finally started to work. The girls were settled in school, and Ron and May had started making some new acquaintances with the other parents in school. In their relationship, they felt more comfortable with each other than ever before. Only now, after such a long time in Singapore, had she felt like she had adjusted.

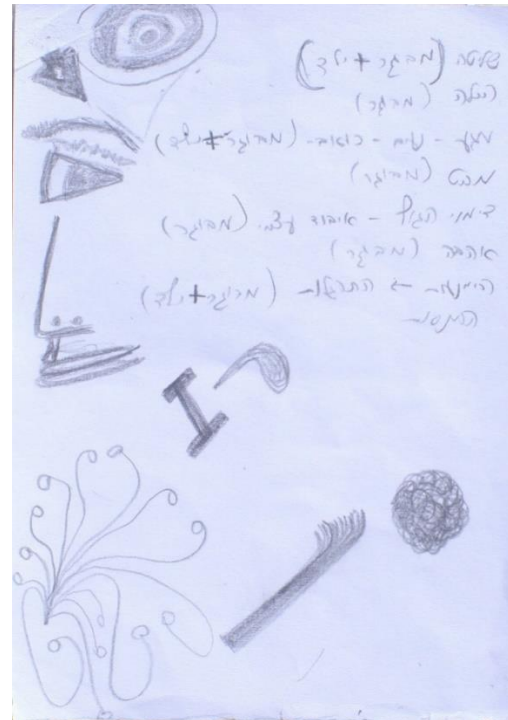
Ron agreed, looking at her and smiling empathetically. He added that they spent hours together thinking about the new situation and its consequences. He agreed that it was not what they would have chosen, had been given a choice. I asked whether repatriating to Israel would be different from relocating elsewhere. After a short pause, May said that she was afraid that the return to Israel would bring back issues that we dealt with during her individual sessions. I mentioned that according to our agreement, I could not share anything that was discussed in the individual session.

I asked them to move to the working table where I handed each of them a sheet of paper and asked them to express thoughts and emotions that they still carried from the past that could surface again in the face of their repatriation. Ron was very decisive. He took a paper and wrote the words “constraint,” “discomfort,” “the need to please,” “forgery (or “fake”)/fixation,” “fear of rejection,” “wretchedness,” “logic transcends emotion,” “release/humor,” and “understanding.”





*Drawing 19 - Ron's thoughts*



*Drawing 20 - May's thoughts*

May followed Ron and started writing a list too, consisting of the following words (excluding those in parentheses, which were added later): “control (adult plus child),” “containment (adult),” “contact - pleasant - painful (adult plus child),” “look (adult),” “body image – loss of self (adult),” “love(adult),” “avoidance – getting used to (adult plus child),” and “experimenting.”

After that, she added the drawings. She drew an eye, a noise, circles, the letter I, some form of a flower and a thick doodle of circles, all in grey pencil, using strong lines. Ron looked at her drawing and then added bullet points on his paper, giving his list a more artistic look. Ron spaced his writing over the whole length of the paper, applying pressure on the pencil, leaving relatively even spaces between the words. May used the upper side of the paper to write, and the rest to draw. Her handwriting was sloppy but in straight lines.

When they both ended their activity, I asked who was willing to share. Ron said that he had written a list of words that had crossed his mind in the past, but he had never shared out loud. Some of them, he understood now, were his ways of explaining to himself the way he experiences situations. Others were things that he did not need to encounter while he was far from his friends, family, and colleagues. He usually would not discuss these things, but while being honest in this space, he did not mind sharing with May, knowing he would not be



judged. May looked at him and smiled warmly. I choose not to say anything, feeling that it was a true moment of acceptance and empathy.

May read out her words and added the words in parentheses: “Adult + child” and “adult.” She said that going back to Israel brought back her memories of the abuse and her complex relations with her mother. After our individual sessions and our couple therapy sessions, she was able to talk and share with Ron more about her fears. She added that she did not know how going back to Israel would affect her self-confidence after it had just improved.

She said that since the abuse in her childhood, she had been avoiding physical closeness. She still needed to be the little girl who was wrapped and protected as she was after the abuse. In intimate situations, she felt detached and lacking in control. Even having sex with Ron was difficult for her. Recently, they became closer emotionally and she could share her fears with Ron. She did not like the nights and the darkness and felt restless and alone. She ended her monologue by saying that she had even started to be more confident with her looks. That was her first comment in any of our sessions about her visual self-image.

We looked at her artwork and then she added, “some of the words relate to me as a child.” She said that now she could look at them as an adult. She understood, for instance, that as a child, she had no control over her life, and now, she was aware that sometimes she related her present lack of control to the little child in her. I asked her if this little child could sometimes give her strength. She said, “she is inside a cage, and I am outside in nature.” She added that until now, it was easier to stay in the “cage,” because it felt safe. Now, some of these boundaries were less clear for her, and she realized that she was reaching out to Ron when she felt unsafe, and for her, these were intimate moments.

We paused for a short while and then I said that there is an inner child in every one of us that needs love and support. Every person’s inner child projects what they need from the outer adult. I asked them to listen to this voice and not to avoid or reject it when they would hear it. May started talking again; “When that neighbor, the abuser, used to touch me at night, I used to look outside the window and pretend that I am out of my body. That’s how I used to cope with it.” Ron did not react looking down to the floor. I felt it was courageous of May to share this with Ron, and for him to be able to “be there” and hear what she had to say.

I asked her what she felt regarding Ron when they are intimate. She said that when they had sex, she always felt as if he were investigating her mentioning that sex was always one of her “marital duties.” She knew that he has needs, and therefore she was fine with it, but she



could never be spontaneous. Now, she felt a bit differently. She started wanting to have intimacy and even began trying to change their routine during sex. I asked what she meant by that. May said that they could leave the light on, or she would allow for him to look at her when she was naked. Ron now looked at her while she was talking and had tears in his eyes.

I turned to Ron. He said he was avoiding being intimate too often because he could never tell if she liked it. He said that he felt that there were expectations from him, and that would be when he got stuck, even when they were intimate. He said, "I am not made of stone, I have feelings and thoughts. I follow your lead because I am afraid to change or dare to initiate anything new as I do not want to scare you." I looked at them and smiled. I said, "what you both shared now is very intimate." I turned to Ron and asked him how he related to what he wrote on his paper. Ron said that he had been avoiding situations or pretending and faking that all was good since he was a child. He said that he tried his best to take more responsibility while communicating with others, and not just be concerned with his image. It was the first time Ron had shared with May the way he felt about himself. May listened and looked at him. He then added that he agreed with May, and that felt she was changing too. She even began seeming pleased when he dared to compliment her. May smiled at him and said, "many things are changing between us." Ron said that sharing this was a relief because they never talked about these subjects in the past.

I said that they were now facing the new "crisis" of repatriation. This time, they seemed better prepared to cope with a big change. The initial relocation caused them excitement, anxiety, confusion, and frustration for a long time, during which each of them coped alone. Now, taking decisions together and talking openly about everything would make it much easier. I asked if they had consulted their families. They said that the families knew they were repatriating, but they did not discuss the situation with them and took all decisions without sharing with their families. Ron said that they both felt that they had each other's backs now. They hoped that their couple dynamics would not change back to what they were before knowing that they had the tools to cope with this new situation. I said that this safe place allowed them to expose their most intimate thoughts. They had reached the stage in which they could talk freely about everything.

I concluded the session by saying that it was a pity that the therapy was coming to an early end and that this is why I quickly lead them to the topic of intimacy. After hearing what



they had shared, I felt that they would be able to open up to each other, and discuss intimate issues, thoughts, and emotions, even outside of the therapy room.

*Session Analysis.* The need to conclude and reach closure under the pressure of time dictates working on two fronts. Following EFT, I felt that the issue of intimacy needed to be addressed, and I felt the couple was ready for that. At the same time, there was a need to address repatriation.

Repatriation is a potential crisis that many couples are not prepared for. Expats often perceive repatriation as a return to a familiar environment as if they were going back in time. Most find that eventually, they return into a different social and emotional “home”, experiencing home differently and sometimes facing new challenges that were never there before they left. The short time remaining did not allow addressing it in depth. I felt that the highest priority would be to bring Ron and May to a state where their bond was resilient, and that they could repatriate as a strong team and at an excellent position to continue working on their relationship.

Ron was more self-deprecatory, saying that satisfying everyone since his childhood was often a façade. It was strongly expressed in the words “the need to please” and “fake” in his work. In that sense, Ron aborted his ‘passive’ position and began to take responsibility. At the same time, he had progressed dramatically in being able to express prime feelings. He was there for May, not just being touched by her expression of feelings, but by actively responding to her needs. He was also sharing his viewpoint of their intimacy and did so with increased sensitivity.

May drew a few images that were not integrated into a story. The images she drew were clear and emphasized, showing no hesitation. This was different from most of her recent drawings. The way she drew, and the big capital letter “I,” portrayed traits of a decisive woman that, this time, was not just a trailing spouse to an expat, but a full partner in the relocation process. She did, however, include the circles and the petal, which represented a turmoil, disorder, and uncertainty, probably caused by the coming repatriation.

Intimacy was dealt with and shared with maturity and sensitivity. Both shared insights for the first time. When May shared her coping methods for her abuse with Ron, she spoke very sincerely. I believe that her ability to reveal herself openly and feel safe with Ron, as I had witnessed in this session for the first time, indicated her openness to romantic relations and emotions. Ron was there for her.

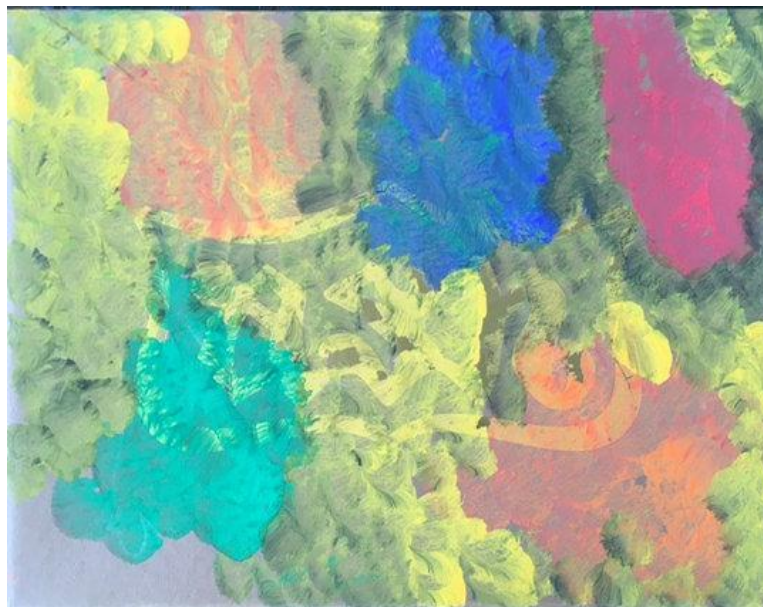


May and Ron planned for May to travel to Israel to find schools for the girls in less than a week. A week after her return, they were to leave Singapore all together for a holiday trip to Australia. We agreed to have our last session upon May's return before they left for their trip.

*Session No. 10 – Closure*

I explained that with this being our last session, this was the closure of their therapy. I reminded them that they had made three joint drawings, which were all important tools for the assessment of their couple dynamics. For their closure, I asked them to complete a fourth artwork. I asked them to pick one cardboard box out of a collection of boxes and decorate it. They touched and checked a few boxes, and finally chose a shoe box with a cover. Ron suggested, to “build a home” to which May agreed with a smile. They consulted about how they would decorate it and decided to paint it with gouache colours. They chose two brushes of the same size. Ron declared that they had to have good coverage because the box was printed. They chose five colours, and Ron asked for a knife to cut a window in one of the box's walls.

While he was cutting, May started to decorate the cover, which was their roof. After colouring the top surface, she put it aside and joined Ron on the work of the main box.



*Drawing 21 - The cover*

They were working simultaneously, using the same colours without disturbing each other. They were turning the box so that each had a chance to face all of the four walls. When one wanted to colour the bottom of the wall, one would lift the box accordingly, and the other



would wait patiently for the box to be placed back down to continue. They did not mind overlapping each other's work. They chatted about what they were doing in a good mood. They occasionally looked at each other and laughed. On one of the walls, May coloured what she said was "family." When this wall faced Ron, he added a few minor touches of colour.

They worked together for about 30 minutes before I asked them to stop doing their artwork and leave some time for reflection and closure. They put the brushes aside in a cup of water. Ron mentioned, the roof and May said, "when the paint dries, the cover should be put on, and then the work will be completed." I asked them why there was no door. They seemed embarrassed. Ron said, "whoever is inside is part of our core family and whoever is not is just outside."



*Drawing 22 - Joint artwork - "Family"*



*Drawing 23 - Side wall*





*Drawing 24 - "Home" with a window*

Ron said that for him, the repatriation was very much like relocation. This time their relocation would be much easier. They both had similar expectations, and these were based on their knowledge of the country and were more realistic than those they had during their initial relocation. At that time, he took the decision to relocate, but they knew that May was not going to find work and that they would have a baby. His first experience of living in a foreign country, learning the mentality of a new culture and adapting to work with people of different nationalities, was very stressful. Ron turned to May and said, “I know I did not share with you how stressful it was and how scared I was, it is a huge responsibility to handle.” Now he was less stressed, knowing that they would be able to cope with every new problem together.

Ron added that since they had made up their mind to go, they had been working as a team, deciding what they would pack or buy in Singapore, and where it would be in their house in Israel. I asked him who had made the decisions and they both smiled and agreed, “both of us and only us”, as if they had recited it. They shared that they booked a flight to Australia to travel with the girls for two weeks and were looking forward to this trip. They thought they would be able to enjoy spending time together with the girls and would be able to cope with spontaneous moments.



May said that their experiences in the last few months, where they had started expressing their thoughts and emotions, and began listening to each other – in sessions and at home - had increased her confidence in their couplehood. She felt that she was not alone anymore.

Ron added that he felt they could now handle old problems, as well as new ones, as a team. I said that with the end of our therapy sessions, they had reached a healthy couple relation: they shared intimate memories and thoughts and learned to confide in each other trustingly. They had the right base for a new adventure, much stronger than what they had from their marriage to their relocation.

In conclusion of the couple therapy, I summarized the therapy and highlighted their progress and achievements. I reminded them that they needed to work together to achieve results and that they needed to keep each other safe. I encouraged them to call me if they felt like they needed any guidance. When they got up from their seats, Ron placed the roof over the “home.”

*Session analysis.* The box was an adequate exercise for a closure session, allowing the couple to practice their new ways of interaction. The therapeutic use of boxes as a means for building of the self was discussed by Farrell- Kirk (2001) in her article *Secrets, symbols, synthesis and safety*. Boxes are symbolically known to conceal secrets for protection of something that holds certain value. They represent both, or either, a body, or what is found within. They create a physically enclosed space through their floor, roof, and walls. When something is placed inside of a box, its value can be highlighted or amplified.

Ron and May took part in this artwork willingly and were keen to use the gouache paints. Similar to finger paints, gouache paints enable the expression of emotion and frivolity (Snir & Regev, 2013). May and Ron built their house and metaphorically enclosed their relationship and family within it. Their real house was a cause of many conflicts between May, Ron, and their families. In former sessions, it was May who had given the house a significant place in their life, while Ron avoided the topic. All his drawings of houses were simple symbols, and he even added the word “house” to his list (Drawing 15) but did not speak of it. Now, Ron suggested building their house together. The aspiration to have their steadfast home was expressed by their artwork. Ron was creative, playful, and messy. He was engaged with the work while still being attentive to May. He was leading the creation of the artwork, cutting box and creating a window. In his individual sessions, he could hardly draw a window in his houses; he wanted to have the control, not allowing others to look inside. In



this joint work, perhaps he felt more comfortable and confident to give others the chance to look through the window, while the family was still safe on the inside. May painted the family on the inside of the box. May was able to “be” inside the house she painted it, and decorated it. In her individual session (Drawing 16), she kept herself outside their house and said she could not look inside.

Ron and May created safe and clear boundaries for their family. They expressed their wishes to retain control in decision making with no interference from the outside world. Until now, the house which they built in Israel was not considered a mutual “project.” It was clear that they wished to change that. The house represented a safe space for the family, where both could make decisions together and would have open communication.

*Conclusion of the couple therapy.* The case encompasses most of the typical psychological characteristics of relocation on the individual and couple: increased of stress levels; increasing imbalances in the couple; lack of preparation; change of status and related imbalances; and a lack of social support. The case had no strong representation of culture shock, or of cultural differences between the therapist and the patient or between the couple. The couple therapy lasted ten sessions with each being an important milestone with visible progress. The couple therapy ended abruptly because of their short notice for termination and repatriation.

The couple understood their attachment styles and working models as:

- They learned to identify and access underlying emotions, to open up to one another and express feelings without fear.
- They learned how to trust, support and attend to each other’s needs.
- They created new cycles of interactions
- They experienced intimacy through conversation and art.
- They consolidated new cycles of trust, connection, and safety, and they applied these to old problems that may still be relevant.

We dedicated the last two sessions to repatriation and a closure of the therapy.

A week later, they left for the trip to Australia, and following their return, they moved back to Israel. A month after they had permanently left Singapore, Ron sent me an e-mail. He wrote that he was working for the same company, and everything was fine. May and the girls



were missing Singapore. They had not yet fully settled in and were staying with May's parents.

About two months later, May wrote that they had moved into their home, and were finding it very comfortable. She had started studying to become a school teacher. The older girls had already started going to school and kindergarten, while the youngest was having adjustment difficulties in the kindergarten, and she asked me to refer her to a therapist.



## Findings

In the previous chapter, I presented the clinical sessions and their clinical analyses in depth and chronologically. In this chapter, I collect art-related exhibits that include the artistic and verbal expressions and gestures made by the couple along the therapy sessions and categorized them under themes.

This chapter is a result of a cyclic process in which I focus, collect and categorize exhibits that are relevant to the research question, and distance from those that are not. This data has been further inductively abstracted into themes (Merriam, 1998). An exhaustive initial list of prospective themes was collected. On the list were any significant psychological effects on couples in relocation. The list was then triangulated with both the literature and the case study and through a *criteria-focused search* (Shkedi, 2014). I looked for the occurrences of each theme along the therapy. I then evaluated the significance and weight of each in order to define those which were meaningful and were well-backed by the case study. These were chosen as themes for research. Theoretical themes that could not be clearly demonstrated in the case were omitted. In the process of defining the themes and collecting the data, intersections might occur. For example, “social aspects of relocation” is an upper category by itself but may be referred to as a subcategory under “spousal adjustment” or “stress factors in relocation”.

For clarity, while collecting data, I distanced from categories and themes that are associated with general individual and couple therapy and are not uniquely related to relocation and to art therapy. In certain cases, the distinction may be debatable.

Such themes as May’s abuse and Ron’s stammering, although captured a significant part of the therapy and have a strong clinical importance, were excluded from the selected themes because of their strong individual context and their link to the study can be, at most, associated to exacerbation due to relocation. As indicated by Ruszczynski (1993), conditions that may exacerbate due to relocation vary from mental health issues, addiction, the tendency to stress and anxiety, are broad and would be difficult to generalize.

The end result is a set of findings that are presented under their corresponding themes. The themes are the following significant factors that have a treatable, significant psychological effect on couples in relocation which are apparent in the case study:

- a. Expectations from the relocation
- b. Separation from a significant figure



- c. Stress factors in the relocation
- d. Social aspects of the relocation
- e. Couple relations
- f. Spousal adjustment in the relocation
- g. The “home” perception in relocation

This chapter provides a review of each of the themes and how they transpire in the case’s narrative. Where progress is observed, exhibits are collected and presented in a table.

### *Expectations from the Relocation*

May and Ron were not aware of the direct and indirect influence of the relocation on their couplehood and wellbeing. May did not even draw the relocation as a significant issue in her lifeline drawing (D.1). This disregard emphasized the need to explore the effects of the relocation, the couple’s expectations before the relocation, and the fulfillment of their expectations of the relocation in the early stages of the therapy.

In the researched case, expectations of the relocation, or more specifically, unfulfilled expectations, were a significant element of what affected the couple’s relations. Unfulfilled expectations are one of the strongest causes of stress among expats, and in many cases, even cause failure of relocations (Cole, 2011). People tend not to admit failures and, neither May nor Ron referred to a failure in the beginning of their therapy.

The issue of unfulfilled expectations emerged very early in the therapy. After May ignored the relocation in her lifeline drawing (Drawing 1), I asked her to draw her expectations of the relocation. Through her “expectations” drawing (Drawing 2), May came to understand her unfulfillment and her unconscious disappointment compared to what she had wanted to achieve before moving. She did not explore and benefit from moving to Singapore as much as she thought she would. She planned on improving her English, opening new horizons, making new friends, studying, and overall improving herself. Looking back, she could see that none of these expectations were accomplished. All the expectations from the relocation included in May’s drawing (Drawing 2) ended up being a list of disappointments and failures. May had hoped that being in relocation would distance her, Ron, and their daughters from their families. This was physically achieved, but there was no benefit. It did not emotionally separate her from her family, nor did it bring her and Ron closer together, as she expected and expressed by drawing the pink heart (Drawing 2). May symbolized her hope to “close a chapter and detach” from Israel by drawing a miniature map



of the country enclosed in a circle, although there was no indication of any troubling issue to do with Israel besides her family issues and the memory of the abuse. May's main concern in distancing from her family was, in fact, the wish to find closure from the issue of the abuse and detach from it. This was not achieved and it still haunted her. I noticed that there was a contrast between her spoken language and the small informative and contained figures she drew. The figures were very symbolic, fragmentary, impersonal, and reflected no emotions, while her tone of voice was becoming more emotional, and her choice of words expressed sadness. Reflecting on the drawing, May said that if she had had the chance to draw her expectations before they relocated, they probably would have looked very different.

In Ron's "expectations from relocation" drawing (Drawing 7), he drew a three-child family strolling towards a house with a door. It was an optimistic scene, with the sun shining, and blue clouds decorating the sky. His main expectation from relocation was to have this happy family. He used light colours to symbolize a peaceful and comfortable life that he was expecting to have in Singapore, opposing the intensity of living in Israel. He drew a dark blue "\$" as a symbol of economic security and explained that it meant that he would be working and providing, while May would be with the baby. Ron said they both wished to give May the opportunity to be a full-time mother for their first baby. Ron's wish for a three-child family was materialized, but his wish for this life to be peaceful was not fulfilled. He could not express any other expectations at this stage of the therapy. I noticed that Ron drew a house with a door. He explained that "the house [in Drawing 7 was] more sophisticated [than that of Drawing 6] in the sense that it can open a door". Maybe this was one of his expectations from the relocation.

Ron often expressed his frustration from the relocation while interpreting his drawings. In Drawing 6, Ron drew a surf board in the sea. Verbally, he described how he could control the surfboard, and in a way, he could interact and socialize with other surfers. He did not sound convinced about this description. He continued his interpretation, and as he went on, he began talking about his stress and pressure at work, and he became more convinced and confident in his speech. He expressed frustration regarding the lack of control he had in his life, especially the dependency he had to have on his company. Ron agreed to create a joint artwork at home (Drawing 16). Although he did not want to participate, he agreed in order to please May. In the following session, he understood that at the time, the stress from the company's upcoming decision was triggering him to his return to his old patterns of avoidance. In a final reflection, it could be understood that in an indirect way, the surfboard



that Ron drew at the beginning of the therapy process (Drawing 6) emphasized the fact that Ron's overall influencing expectation of the relocation was to succeed in his assignment.

As such, May and Ron had clearly addressed their expectations in the initial directive drawings (Drawing 2, Drawing 7), and that later revealed more unconscious expectations in other artworks (such as Drawing 6 & Drawing 16). Through their interpretations and reflections, it was clear they had not and were not achieving what they wanted, triggering stress and tension in their relationship. The theme of expectations demonstrated the notion that making artwork and reflecting on it surfaces insights that the patient was not ready to admit or was not even aware.

### *Separation from a Significant Figure*

Separation from a significant figure exists (Simpson & Rholes, 2017) potentially in every relocation. Distancing a couple from its family and its social circles may entail distancing from a figure that has special significance to the couple or to one of the spouses. This issue is common to every case that I have treated involving relocation. In the present case, the significant figure is the primary attachment figure of May.

May's mother appeared as May's significant figure during the intake and was present at almost every session after that. She was involved in almost every aspect of their relationship, thus having a distinct graphic presentation in their artwork.

After the abuse, May's mother took her to therapy, and even stopped working full time to be more present at home and more involved in May's life. May was dependent on her mother and used to have daily long phone conversations with her after they moved. There was no direct evidence for her mother's involvement in the couple's life until the relocation, but indirectly, in May's "expectations" drawing (Drawing 2), May drew a clear fence to protect her core family from any intrusion from the outside. There had never been any reference to anyone, other than her mother, posing a threat to the core family circle. Thus, the fence implied keeping her mother out. After describing the relations between May and her mother, May unconsciously included her mother twice in the "closet" drawing (Drawing 3). Her mother was depicted beside May on one shelf of the closet, and beside Ron on another. Her mother was represented here through a male stick figure, who was bigger than Ron. Ron was depicted as a female stick figure. The mother was perceived and depicted by May as a dominating person.



While reflecting on this drawing, May expressed surprise in realizing the intensity of her mother's presence in her life, and how this affected her relationships with Ron. When compared to her mother, May could not see her husband as a protective or supportive partner. The drawing emphasized to May that the physical distance caused by the relocation was not enough for her to separate from her mother.

The influence of May's mother on the couple's relations had been exacerbated during the relocation. Its main impact was focused in two cases. Firstly, when May gave birth, her mother stayed with them in Singapore to support May, separating Ron from May and the newborn. May became more dependent and more attached to her mother while Ron's negative feelings towards the mother deepened. Secondly, during the episode of building their house, May's mother took it upon herself to build a house for May, and through her process of doing this, once again positioned herself between Ron and May. Ron's emotions towards her continued to intensify. Besides these cases and the daily conversations with May, May's mother was not actively involved in their life.

As such, the "closet" drawing (Drawing 3) and its accompanying reflection helped May to reach the phase of "increased insight" where the drawing presented something to her that she had not been aware of prior to creating it (Holmqvist et al., 2017). Consequentially, she was able to join Ron in a critical conversation about her mother's position as an obstacle in their relationship.

While discussing their dynamics as a couple through making their drawing in Drawing 12, Ron and May agreed that there were some obscure obstacles hanging in between them that held them back, preventing them from maintaining emotional relations and communicating with each other. I suggested the idea of a "cloud" to describe this obstacle. May immediately verbally identified it as her mother. Ron took the pencil, drew a small sign on the right bottom corner of the page and wrote the word "cloud", saying, "now she is out of our small family circle". From then on, they used the cloud metaphor graphically and verbally. Ron's graphical act of moving the cloud involved making choices and decisions which helped the couple find a way to solve the problem through art. In this process, they can *beneficially apply* (Curl, 2008, p. 165) these choices to their real life. Both May and Ron overcame their constraints in talking about May's mother when they identified her mother as "the obstacle" and changed the notion of her mother into a metaphor. Addressing her mother by this metaphor enabled May to accept Ron's action of "taking her out" of the core family



circle and eased the process of improving their couple relations. This was a pivotal moment in the therapy and was certainly facilitated by art.

The act of using a metaphor in place of May's mother had another therapeutic effect. When Ron moved the cloud out of the family circle, he demonstrated for the first time in the therapy *ego strength* (Holmqvist et al., 2017). This move was authentic and showed a correlation between his graphic artwork and his verbal comments.

In their third couple session, May and Ron already realized the grasp that May's mother had over them and understood that her influence on their relations had to be mitigated. In this session, they were asked to draw their family relations. May admitted in her drawing (Drawing 13) that only she had any link to her mother, while she and Ron are both linked to her father and to both his parents. She depicted them nestled together in their linkage to Ron's parents and separate in their links with her parents. Ron was extreme in his drawing that session (Drawing 14). He drew his parents as two detailed stick figures, May's father as an expressionless figure, and her mother as a black cloud floating above.

Before they went to Israel for their yearly vacation, the couple was very apprehensive of seeing May's mother. We dedicated a session (Session 5) to preparing them for their trip to Israel, exploring new ways to cope with challenges and stress. While in Israel, Ron texted me and reassured me that they were doing okay and "holding the umbrella together", referring to the metaphor of May's mother as a rain cloud. This episode demonstrated Wadeson's (1980) statement that "an image is concrete and tangible and can be referenced by the therapist and the family over the course of treatment, acting as a rich source for continued exploration and a "permanent record of change" documenting the family's progress" (p.248).

Once they came back to Singapore, they experienced very tense days after being informed about the possible termination of the relocation. Ron expressed his fear of moving back to Israel and being closer to May's mother. He said that he did not want to lose May again. May reassured Ron that their relationship and bond was important and stronger as reflected in her 'growth' drawing (Drawing 18). A final gesture of the separation from May's mother was expressed in the therapy closure session (couple session No.10). After creating the home (Drawings 21-24) in their joint work and drawing the core family inside of it, Ron said, "whoever is inside is part of our core family and whoever is not is just outside". May joined him, supporting the idea.



Table 2 demonstrates how the representations of May's mother through the therapy changed as a consequence of the couple's awareness of her influence on their relations.

Table 2 - *Representations of May's mother*



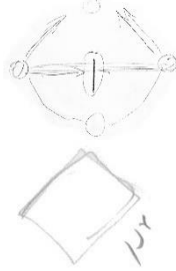





Session and Drawing number	The drawing (detail)	Verbal expression	Insight
Drawing 3: May - The Closet  First shelf (detail)  Second shelf (detail)	 	"Mom and me"  "Ron", "My mother"	May became aware of her attachment relation with her mother.  May became aware of her mother's dominance in her life and her relationships with others. She understood that the physical distance was not enough for a separation process.
Drawing 12: Joint drawing – couple dynamics (detail)  Ron's added detail		Identifying an obstacle between them  Taking the cloud out of the family circle	May and Ron identified May's mother as an obstacle. They used the metaphor of a cloud.  A new solution was initiated by Ron and May- they removed the cloud from their cycle of interaction.
Session 3, Drawing 13: May - Family relations (detail)  May's mother (detail)		May's parents linked separately to May and to Ron	Different links with the two families. May's attachment to her mother is weakening. Her drawing has an artistic acknowledgment of the separation process. (her mother's figure is scribbled, contrary to Ron's parents' figures which are neatly coloured).



Table 2 (continued)

Session 3, Drawing 14: Ron - Family relations (detail)		Ron: "May's parents"	Ron drew May's mother as a black cloud, developing the metaphor from the previous session. Ron is still threatened by her mother.
Between sessions, while visiting Israel	No artwork	Using verbally the metaphor of cloud:" holding the umbrella together"	Sharing stories about their holiday. They both celebrated their achievements.
Drawing 17:		"soon be close to her mother and our relationship might regress..."	Ron expressed his fear of moving back to Israel and being closer to May's mother
Drawing 18:		"I feel growth"	May expressed her concerns to Ron's behavior regarding her and her mother
Drawings 21-24: Family		Leaving May's mother out of the home they build: "whoever is inside is part of our core family and whoever is not is just outside"	Building their own home together, keeping boundaries and protecting their nuclear family not mentioning May's mother.

May's mother was part of the *negative cycle* - a repetitive pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feelings that causes distress (Johnson, 2004) - of this couples' relationship.

Using the artistic expressions, they were able to bypass the repeating verbal expressions and linear perspective and exchanged them with a fresh view of the family system (Riley, 1994; Wadeson, 1980). Agreeing on the cloud metaphor and making common use of it broke this cycle and opened the path to dealing with other elements that affected the couple's relations.



*Stress Factors in the Relocation*

Stress is often manifested in high intensity by couples in relocation who come to therapy. “Expatriate families who deal with stress usually develop dysfunctional transactional patterns in their attempt to handle the stress” (Bowser, 2015, p. 23). It is known that both expat and spouse are affected by the relocation. Luring and Selmer (2009) found that “Most studies appear to agree that the expatriate experience could be both disruptive and demanding for everybody involved and for the accompanying expatriate spouse or partner in particular” (p. 59). Stress factors which are characteristic to relocation were not addressed. Such factors are entangled with couple dynamics and relations. Typical relocation-related stress factors were reviewed in the literature review, and others are related to individual character and to basic couple relations. This section will deal with the presentation of stress factors through artwork and the interpretation of the artwork in the researched case.

In the researched case, May and Ron took no actions to handle their stress and deal with their couple relations before coming to therapy. They came to therapy when the family’s very foundations were already at risk. Ron was under stress from the day he accepted the relocation assignment. It was mainly his decision and responsibility. Knowing the importance of his success in the assignment and the high cost of a failure, he could not divide his attention to any other issue. This job-related stress escalated when his boss was replaced and then reached a climax when job insecurity was added. Along their individual sessions, May and Ron expressed their stresses. Each described how they react in order to alleviate the stress. Both told me how May engages obsessively in household activities, especially cleaning and organising, when she was stressed. Ron explained how he turns to playing music or going surfing overseas to relieve his stress. May described her stress as stemming from the flawed relations and the odd behaviour of Ron, and Ron related it to May’s dependence on her mother and her lack of attention and empathy to him. Both did not feel secure in their attachment relationship and were living with a negative interactional cycle because of that.

The first graphic expression was made by May. After interpreting her “expectations” drawing (Drawing 2), she added a symbolic image of her family, her motherhood and her relations with Ron to the initial drawing, all of which were surrounded by a spikey contour in a way that contrasted with the serenity that her initial figures were depicted in. May’s organizing and cleaning as an effort to reduce stress were depicted in her “closet” drawing



(Drawing 3). She arranged the contents of the closet in different shelves, with a clear division between left and right, all very tightly and in proportion. The order of items in the closet showed no emotional engagement. May described herself as lonely, (Session 1, May) she made no friends and felt that Ron is not accessible (S.5, couple). May's loneliness escalated her stress, not being able to share what she was going through during her day. Drawing the "amoebas" in Drawing 9, she defined her isolation to others as one of the sources of her stress- "There is life in them. Each of us is alive but we have no ties out of our self. Ron meets people at work, but I have no one to talk to."

Ron expressed the pressure he felt to succeed in the assignment. In his "expectation" drawing (Drawing 6), he drew a dark blue "\$" mark, symbolizing money. His first interpretation of this was that one of his expectations was to have a financially secure future. Looking later at the complete drawing, he realized that this mark indirectly expressed the stress he put on himself to perform well in his assignment in order to maintain their new lifestyle. While Ron reflected on his drawing (Drawing 7), he was able to talk about the stress caused by relocation, the uncertainty that was weighing him down, and the compromises he needed to make at work. This situation, in his own words, was causing Ron to "lose [himself]." Ron commented that all his plans would be interrupted if the relocation was suddenly terminated for any reason. In a way, he did not exert control over his life, which kept him tense and forced him to compromise his ways of dealing with situations in the company.

The drawing (Drawing 7), depicted a serene scene that had no connotations to stress, but when Ron described his state of mind reflected in the scene, he chose to use metaphoric language ("It is a whirlpool") to deepen the meaning. This metaphor will be used again in the following drawing (Drawing 9 Joint drawing - no subject), where he metaphorically referred to his life as a whirlpool. Ron used surfing lingo to describe situations in life. As a surfer, one would avoid going into a whirlpool where one has no control and does not know what will happen. Ron's stress was caused by factors related to his job, as well as by factors related to their relations. Until this point where they drew and talked about their couple relations, May said, regarding her behavior, "I was not aware that it caused stress to the people around me."

Upon their return from their holiday to Israel, Ron and May described how they were able to support each other and hold each other's hands before and during the visit. Upon their first session after the return, Ron shared the news about the possible termination of their



relocation. His behavior during the session manifested a regression to his old patterns - he was tense and refused to make art. Ron said that now was not a good time for them to go back, and knew that May would need to give up her new job if that would be the case. May seemed to cope with the news more positively. Her stress was related to her starting the new work, and her separation from her daughters. May described the situation as full of “ups and downs.” She was excited, and then frightened, because of the potential change and unknown future. The impact of the stress affected Ron. He was reluctant to share any intimate moments again, started avoiding situations once again, and went back to being the “okay guy.” Doing Drawing 16, he pleased May by agreeing to use finger paints, but said that he did not like it.

The “absurd” drawing (Drawing 17) portrayed a climax of Ron’s stress. It was the first time in the couple therapy that Ron was able to express primary emotions in his drawings in such a direct way. Ron commented on his drawing “I am not a toy! My life cannot be controlled by others”. Drawing the “absurd”, Ron demonstrated his ego strength once more (the first time being when he moved the cloud out of the family circle in Drawing 12).

In Drawing 19, Ron wrote: “constraint,” “discomfort,” “the need to please,” “forgery,” (or fake) / fixation,” “fear of rejection,” “wretchedness,” and “logic transcends emotion.” Ron expressed how he used to please others and did not share his stress and pain. After writing these words, he added “release/ humor” and “understanding,” expressing optimism despite his stress.

May was stressed as well. The termination of the relocation would prevent her from assuming the teaching position she was granted, and she harbored many other mixed feelings. In the same activity, she wrote the words (Drawing 20) “control,” “containment,” “contact - pleasant – painful,” “look,” “body image – loss of self,” “love,” “avoidance – getting used to,” and “experimenting.” She was able to elaborate on her fear of losing her confidence and facing the trauma again. May expressed her stress by holding her drawing close to her chest and revealing it only at the last moment after Ron finished talking.



Table 3 - *Expressions of stress*

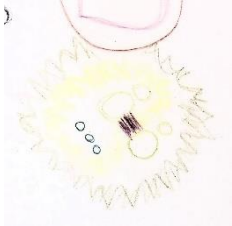
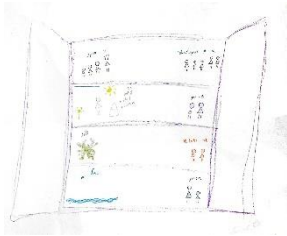
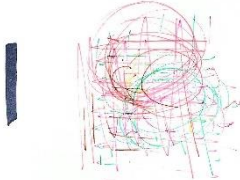
Drawing's details	Clinical observation	Artwork	Insights
May Drawing 2: expectations - detail - late addition	May drew her expectations; she was drawing quickly, she did not talk while drawing. She was quiet.	<p>Spikey contour surrounding the core family and her motherhood. Detail 'collides' with former drawing.</p> 	Stressful reaction to reflection on unfulfilled expectations and relations with family.
May Drawing 3: 'Closet'	May chose a large A3 page and pencils. She was engaged in her drawing. She did not comply with the instructions to draw her achievements.		May's way to reduce stress at home was portrayed in her artwork. The drawing reflects order and tidiness.
May - Drawing 4: May - exploring relationship	May used markers. She drew very fast and decisively.		May explained her drawing as a present set of relations that must be untangled.
Ron's Individual sessions 1. and 2: Ron refused to make art.	Ron seemed uncomfortable and stressed.	No artwork	Ron refused to make art. He was avoiding interaction.



Table 3 (continued)

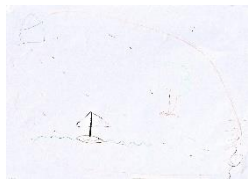

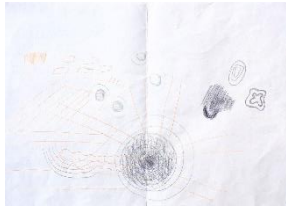
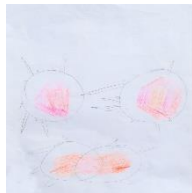
Drawing 6: Ron's path	Ron spoke passionately about "freedom" and "control".		Ron was absent from the scene he drew. He interpreted the drawing as the opposite of what he experienced at home.
Ron - Drawing 8: Mask	Ron refused to make art, but when I presented the mask he coloured it. Ron seemed very tense. When he finished he seemed relieved.		Ron was very emotional while describing the issue of their house. High levels of stress related to loss of control.
Joint drawing Drawing 9: no subject	They Sat back to back. The atmosphere was tense. May was rigid and repetitive, using strong and soft pencil marks. She had a few attempts to draw Ron's attention. Ron - disregarded and backed off the table. He was judgemental when he reflected on May's drawing.	 May: Black closed figures: The amoebas. Ron: Orange open lines: Big open beautiful space.	Ron - Expressed his emotions towards May's drawing by using the words 'maze', 'whirlpool', 'darkness'. He referred to his drawing with 'positive' words such as 'horizon', 'open space'. May- commented on specific images and commented that she felt Ron was being judgemental. Stress is expressed by their mixed drawing and by their body gestures and verbal reactions.
Ron - Drawing 17: Absurd	Ron was tense but decisive in his drawing. He wanted to talk about his drawing right away. May stayed relaxed.  They smiled with empathy. They		Ron felt a need to express his emotions using art and verbal expression. He was stressed confronting the repatriation and the new possible confrontation with May's mother.



Table 3 (continued)

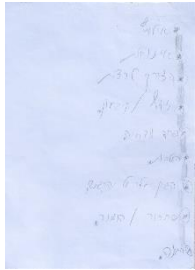

	shared about how they were thinking together and solving problems.		
Drawing 19 : May's - Thoughts about the situation	Ron and May held hands. Both wrote words and gave a verbal explanation to their words. They were very authentic and honest with each other.		Ron commented "sharing this was a relief because they never talked about these subjects in the past." May shared the stress and anxiety from the repatriation, linking it to the abuse.
Joint artwork. Drawings 21-24: Home	May and Ron sat close to each other, consulted with each other on the subject and exchanged materials.		Both were spontaneous and playful. There was no indication of stress.

Table 3 demonstrates the dramatic changes in the artwork and the couple's dynamics while doing it that occurred when the decision to terminate the relocation became final and the last remaining external cause for stress was eliminated. This was a second pivotal moment in the therapy.

### *Social Aspects of the Relocation*

Relocation distances expats from their social circles. The mere physical distance causes a psychological divide, often coupled with time differences narrowing windows of possible communication. It reduces the frequency and depth of communication with most old friends. The distance creates a social challenge to establish new acquaintances and social relations. This is typical to all expats. It does not have to evolve into a major problem, but nonetheless affects the expat's life. In the case that the expat has dulled social skills, the social challenge can become a major problem and affect their chances of succeeding in their assignment. This was the case with May and Ron. The social aspect of their life in relocation emerged very early in the therapy. May referred to this issue in her first individual session. By relocating,



May was detached from all her social circles causing her great distress. She lacked social skills, and her internal working model and past traumatic experiences proved the worst for creating new friendships or social relations. From the beginning of the therapy, May was well aware of this, and expressed her distress from her lack of social relations. Unlike Ron, she had no social encounters at all. She avoided interactions and was detached from all her social connections. To compensate for this deprivation, she spoke on the phone with her mother at least once a day and continued neglecting all efforts to socialize.

When May interpreted the drawing of her expectations from the relocation (Drawing 2), she mentioned improving her English and making friends with new people among her goals. Alas, she achieved neither, and this issue opened long discussions during this session (Session 4) and others to come. May could not acknowledge her poor social skills. She explained that she was afraid to risk revealing the abuse she had experienced in her youth and thus could not engage in small talk as other expat spouses would do in their social meetings based around their children. She isolated herself from strangers and made as little contact with others as possible. This social isolation was expressed in several of her drawings. She drew around and closed figures (Drawing 2, Drawing 9, Drawing 13) to represent this, and would surround her family figures with a fence (Drawing 2).

It is difficult to express a lack of social ties and activities through artwork. Lack of friendships is, in fact, apparent through their absence in both their work. Friends were however mentioned several times in their reflections. In her “closet” drawing (Drawing 3), May wrote the word “friends” on the third shelf and commented that she was referring to her old friends in Israel. Although she elaborated on other details of this drawing, she did not wish to talk more about her friends. May expressed her loneliness and her wish to make friends mostly verbally.

Contrary to May, Ron had made new acquaintances at work. While he did not make new friends, he had at least he had met colleagues and had personal encounters every day. He also maintained contact with his old friends in Israel and could see them often as he made common visits to the country for work. Just as he always liked to be the “okay guy,” he verbally portrayed himself as a very social person. The therapeutic analysis presents a different image. In his “path” drawing (Drawing 6), Ron presented himself surfing alone at sea. He explained that he enjoyed the company of strangers, with whom he could socialize on the beach without commitments. He said that what counts in surfing is your surfing skills and



not your conversation skills. However, Ron expressed that his best surfing partner is his brother, with whom he surfs once a year. This is obviously not an act of socializing outside of familiarity and creates no new social connections. Ron did not draw people in this drawing. This suggested that Ron may not be as social of a man as he thinks he is and verbally claims to be.

Like May, Ron was aware of the social dilemma in their life, and when talking about May's "amoebas" (Drawing 9) only remarked is that an "amoeba" has no social connections. Just like May, Ron looked for an excuse outside of his own personality to explain their lack of social connections, blaming May for not enabling such connections. In their joint drawing (Drawing 15), May and Ron both wrote the word "friends" in their individual zones. They wrote no friends in the common zone and gave "friends" the same level of importance as the word "family". Doing the joint artworks (Drawing 9 & Drawing 15) gave May and Ron their first opportunity to express to one another their feelings regarding their unfulfilled social needs. They had never before discussed or reflected on this issue together. It was the first time they were able to share their wishes for friends and to admit that they had none.

It became obvious that the couple's social skills were affected by two other personal shortcomings that had no graphic expression in this case, namely May's lack of confidence while speaking English, and Ron's stammering. I had the impression that since she had not accomplished her plan to learn and improve her English (Drawing 2), language became an obstacle for May when it came to socializing. As for Ron's stammering, it is known that stammering has a negative social effect (Hunsaker, 2011).

This category is not presented in a table. It has some expression in the drawings and being a very important aspect of a couple's well-being in relocation it was part of my therapy plan. However, time constraint and the early conclusion of the relocation assignment, reduced the topic's priority. Even without focus, there are indications that social aspect of the couple's life in relocation changed towards the end of therapy. May socialized at work and the couple made an effort to socialize with parents of their daughters' schoolmates. The short relationships that they made were not significant for them as they described, and leaving Singapore was not experienced as losing meaningful friends in this case.



*Couple Relations*

Couple relations between May and Ron were the main motive for this therapy. Couple relations are a complex theme which is influenced by many factors, part of which are relocation-related. The case indicated that the couple's relations were negatively affected by the relocation. A few of these factors had been exacerbated by the relocation and caused the couple's relations to deteriorate. The couple was not aware of some factors and refrained from exposing others. While engaging in artwork, they tended to be unaware that they were exposing their couple dynamics and thus, were often less defensive than when verbally discussing their problems (Riley & Malchiodi, 2003b).

This theme describes the changes of the couple's relations along the therapy and their presentation by art therapy. A significant part of the therapy, as reflected in the following table, makes use of joint drawing. The main ideas underlying the joint drawing technique are that the drawing process and product, which are considered nonverbal expressions of behaviors and attitudes, convey interpersonal themes and that the couple's use of the pictorial space represented the couple's life together (Wadeson, 1980).

The prime factor that molded the couple's relations is their attachment styles. The individual sessions enabled me to identify the couple's attachment styles, and later to understand their inner working models. May had an insecure-anxious attachment with her mother. Her romantic attachment with Ron was identified as avoidant, as described by Green (2014), "some of us grow up with a blend of avoidant and anxious attachment styles." (p. 35).

After physically moving far away from her significant figure, her mother, May was not able to form a secure attachment with her husband Ron, and her emotional dependence on her mother strengthened. Her attachment style with Ron limited her ability to share with him about her distress. They experienced days of silence and mainly talked about issues that concerned their daughters. It also impaired her self-confidence and her ability to create new social connections. May said that it was hard for her to trust people and even harder to share about herself. Ron was not suitable to substitute May's mother as her significant figure. His attachment style was identified as avoidance. Totally immersed in his work assignment and raising their daughters he was inattentive to May's needs in their new life circumstances. In his drawing of family relations (D. 14), Ron depicted two pairs of parents and May between them without links to any of them. Ron himself did not take a part in his scene of the families at all; he was avoidant.



There is no evidence to their couple relations prior to the relocation, but in her “expectations” drawing (Drawing 2), May wished that they would “come closer” after relocating and distancing from the families. Unfortunately, this expectation was not fulfilled. In that drawing, May added an expression of her desire to distance her nuclear family from the large family of origin. She drew the nuclear family surrounded by a spiked “fence”, when, in actuality, the couple's greatest problems could be found within the fence. The beginning of therapy in itself attests that couple relations had worsened along the relocation period to the point where the couple sought help. They both admitted the need for this help and willingly came to the therapy, but each of them had very different reasons. Even the decision on therapy was made with no debate - May suggested, and Ron agreed.

Communication between them was limited. They did not talk about any emotional subjects. In Ron's drawing of “the path” (Drawing 6), he interpreted the simplistic drawing of the house as a “square box”. He said, “May's squares, where everything must be organized, are perfect. Even emotions must be in control. The only way I can show my real emotions at home is when I am playing music to the girls or taking them to the pool while May stays at home.” As a result of their lack of communication, they could not identify each other's emotions. May mentioned (Drawing 10) a poem that she hummed when she felt stressed and insecure, and Ron did not respond. She openly spoke about her past and her abuse, and he did not show an interest. May claimed that she hardly knew Ron. She expressed a negative idea about him by drawing him in her “closet” (Drawing 3) together with her mother and her abuse “scars” on one shelf. On that shelf, her mother was displayed as a male stick figure, she took care of May and protected her. Beside her, Ron was a feminine stick figure, the one who did not stand for her. Reflecting on Drawing 9 & Drawing 10, May said that “the separation from my mother was not an easy process for me. She provided me security and I am afraid to be alone. You are not there for me, even when I reach out to you. Now she is the only one I can talk to whenever I need it.”

In Ron's eyes, there was no equilibrium between him and May. He experienced constant stress being in relocation, while he felt she was and should have been, enjoying it. She should have felt safe standing on the fence (Drawing 13), while he had to deal with the “maze,” “aggressiveness,” and “darkness” (Drawing 11). To him, she should have come to him for support, but instead, she turned to her mother. Ron perceived that May did not fully understand and appreciate his distress and his need for support. Ron's reaction was to be less attentive to her own distresses. This is a negative interactional cycle that was exacerbated



during the relocation period. While reflecting on his expectations (Drawing 7), Ron shared with me how he missed his old social contacts and friends and used to blame May for his loneliness. Ron translated May's close relations with her mother as an expression of betrayal. He could not see the need to share his life with May, to be able to engage with her or to be more authentic and empathetic towards her. The mask (Drawing 8) helped him to realize this. In the first couple session, Ron was able to become more authentic, realizing that his interpretations (Drawing 9) on situations were not necessarily always the truth. He also realized that avoiding or being far away would not solve his, or their, problems. Ron was able to share his feeling and distresses (Drawing 17), and started taking responsibility for how he avoided his true self (Drawing 18).

Table 4 shows aspects of the couple's relations that were expressed directly by their artworks ("artistic expression"), or indirectly by verbal explanations and reactions to the artwork ("verbal expressions"), as well as by gestures and behaviours of the couple during the sessions ("clinical observations").

Table 4 - *Couple relations*

Couple Session and drawing Numbers	Clinical observations			Artistic expressions	Verbal expressions
	Choice of seating place	Body gestures	Communication		
Session1 Joint artwork Drawing 9: joint drawing, no subject.	Sat by the working table, ready to do artwork	No eye-contact. May turned her back to Ron. Ron avoided contact until he backed off the table.	May made attempts to 'communicate'. Ron rejected the attempts and backed off the table. He was not attentive.	May - Amoebas, maze. Ron- horizon, path. whirlpool.	Ron kept blaming May by interpreting her part of the drawing – he was fixated and not open to hearing her interpretation. May identified his judgmental tone and complained that her voice is not heard. They mirrored their real-life dynamic.



Table 4 (continued)

Same session Drawing 10, Drawing 11: May's and Ron's written reflections		During the reflection, there was no eye contact. Ron was pointing at May's work aggressively and made judgemental remarks. May was calm.	Words only	Both wrote reflections on their artwork.	May expressed her emotional distress with words such as suffocation, confusion, eroding, shaky and storm. Ron expressed his constant stress. Their relations were linked to words such as chaos, walls, barriers, maze, violence, and lack of control which characterize his life in relocation.
Session 2 Joint artwork. Drawing 12: Couple dynamics.	Tense facial expression Sat on the sofa. They were asked to move to the working table.	No eye contact. May was emotional. Ron avoided her emotional cues.  While working they took turns. They shared ideas and listened to each other. Towards the end of the session they smiled.	Both were engaged in the conversation. Both agreed there was an obstacle in their relationship. They both smiled with relief after identifying and externalizing the problem.	Both- arrows, circles. Ron Placed the 'Cloud' (metaphoric representation of May's mother) away from the couple's system. May agreed.	While conversing on the artwork they were able to find a common phrasing. They practiced in real time how to solve a problem while using metaphors and the externalization of the problem. This experience helped them to practice mutual regulation. Showed the first steps of changes in their cycle of interaction.



Table 4 (continued)

Session 3 Separate artwork. Drawing 13: Drawing 14: Family relations.	Sitting on the sofa. They were asked to move to the working table.	They were relaxed and calm.	Both respectfully listened to each other. Empathetic to each other.	May- cloud figures representing the parents. The couple was in a 'nest' linked together to Ron's parents and in separate circles linked to May's. Ron and May as two overlapping clouds. Ron- parents were represented by stick figures with facial expressions. May's mother was drawn as a black cloud. May stood on a "safe fence" and Ron was absent. No couple in Ron's drawing.	Authentic expressions, positive details about their personal life outside the clinic. Both were dealing with the here and now. Authentic articulation and trust. Ron recognized changes in May's attachment to her mother. Shared feelings and insights which were expressed in the artwork for the first time. Ron was still struggling with trusting May.
Session 4 Joint artwork Drawing 15: Things in common.	I directed them to sit by the working table	Both were relaxed and calm. Ron used the artwork to express feelings and thoughts. May was looking for empathy and mutual regulation. Both able to "see" the common things they share, which allowed them to feel closer to each other.	They looked at each other and smiled. While they were writing the last words, they got closer together and turned slightly to each other. Ron was more open and accepting.	Ron used large letters and covered most of his individual zone and the common zone. May wrote small letters and did not spread over her zone.  The drawing presented their perception of the status of each other.	In the 'individual zone' they shared the values of hobbies, friends (each their own), family (each their family of origin) and occupation (he works she does not). There were however no identical values between them.



Table 4 (continued)

Session 5: No artwork. A week before the trip to their homeland.	Sat on the sofa.	Both seemed tense. They made eye contact as if they had nothing to hide from each other.	They complimented each other. They were talkative and engaged in the conversation.	No artwork	They spoke about their date and how they had emotions and supported each other. They expressed their concerns about meeting the families. They referred to May's mother by using the cloud metaphor. They would be attentive to each other and attend to each other's needs. They experienced another bonding experience which would help them to build their confidence and support each other in Israel
Session 6 No artwork. Returning from holiday. Being informed about the end of the relocation.	Sat beside the working table.	Ron seemed tense, not cooperating, refusing to make art, displaying negative attitude, but not being aggressive. May seemed peaceful and calm.	They started telling about the visit and Ron abruptly changed the subject and talked about the termination of the relocation. May followed, but also abruptly changed the subject to tell about a job offer she received.	No artwork	Each followed the narrative line of the other until deciding to change it. Towards the end of the session, they were able to think together and to look for ideas to support each other. May expressed a will to make art at home.







Table 4 (continued)

<p>Session 9 Drawing 19: Ron - Thoughts about the situation</p> <p>Drawing 20: May - Thoughts about the situation</p>	<p>They came to the clinic holding hands. Sat on the sofa. Moved to the working table willingly</p>	<p>May's story of the abuse touched Ron and brought him to tears. They were looking at each other, showing empathy.</p>	<p>Authentic communication.</p>	<p>Ron's list of words written in double spacing on the paper. He added bullet points later. May's list of words on the upper side of the paper. Her handwriting was sloppy but in straight lines. She drew an eye, a nose, circles, the letter I, some kind of a flower, thick doodles.</p>	<p>Ron said that he wrote words that crossed his mind in the past but never expressed out loud. He said that trusting May and not being judged by her made him feel good about himself. May spoke about her experience to build new boundaries in her life. She felt better with Ron and sought intimacy with him. Ron said that sharing emotions was a relief.</p>
<p>Session 10 Drawings 21-24: joint artwork - creating a home.</p> <p>Closure of therapy.</p>	<p>Entered the clinic and sat at the table. They were invited to choose art materials and make a non-directed artwork.</p>	<p>Relaxed, calm, happy and playful.</p>	<p>Being in a good friendly mood they touched each other while working, looked at each other and exchanged materials.</p>	<p>Together they chose the paints. Ron chose the box and then cut a window in it. May painted their family and the roof.</p>	<p>Ron said, "whoever is inside is part of our core family and whoever is not is just outside" He also said, "it is symbolic that now we are all packed in a box and ready to move on" May said she did not feel alone anymore. Ron said he felt they were now a team that could handle new problems.</p>



Table 4 shows the couple's interactional patterns. The joint artwork presented them with an opportunity to shift out of their rigid dynamic and invited them both to be present with one another, all while providing them with a meta-perspective of their interactional pattern. Creating artwork together, and mainly interacting in the joint drawing activities, gives the potential to provide a visual reflection of the non-verbal developments and shifts in the partner's relationship (Snir & Weisman, 2013).

May and Ron's lack of communication on emotional matters kept them unable to express different perceptions regarding personal issues. For example, the artwork helped them to identify the mother as an obstacle in their relationship. The couple failed to exchange ideas verbally prior to the therapy about May's mother impact on their relationship and possible resolution. Through art they were able to share ideas constructively. May learned to put boundaries and be less dependent on her mother while reaching out for emotional support from Ron. In her Drawing 13, distancing from her mother comes as a clear and strong statement. It is evident that for Ron, May's artwork reassured that she has gone through this process.

From couple session No. 2 (Drawing 12), the couple was able to communicate differently. Their joint work and the use of a metaphor of the cloud helped them to see beyond their linear rationality. They started sharing emotions and exhibited buds of earned secure attachment (Findlay et al., 2008). Barth and Kinder (2015) found the nonverbal joint drawing task to be beneficial in providing insight to the patterns of relating that may not be known by the couple. Use of this dyadic work would be beneficial not only to the therapist in assessment but also for couples, by bringing unknown patterns or behaviors to light. The family's visit to Israel after session No. 5 and the announced termination of the relocation threatened to start a regression in the couple's relations but instead solidified their relationship. In both cases, they were already in a stage of therapy that enabled them to cope with the situation, overcome the threat together, and support each other when facing threats.

The sessions following the two events yielded creative and expressive artworks, emphatic gestures, and led to emotional engagement. A change in their *dance* is apparent indicating a shift towards consolidation and integration.

### *Spousal Adjustment*

The working spouse's environmental and cultural adaptability is a topic that is commonly undervalued by the employer. Takeuchi, Yun and Tesluk (2002) show that



employers, even with a strong expatriation department, are doing little to evaluate adaptability in the placement process. This is due to multiple reasons, from a lack of knowledge to a preferred focus on the direct professional skills required for the job. Worse yet, is the lack of evaluation and preparation of the spouse (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Ko, 2014) Literature sources evaluate this as the root cause of the high rate of failure in expatriation, an idea that is confirmed by my work and experience.

Clients, in general, have a lack of self-awareness on their ability to adapt while the relocation is a first major opportunity to challenge this adaptability. Couples and employees that travel often for work or holiday mistakenly assume that short frequent travels are a good enough indication of their adaptability. In reality, this may not be sufficient to endure a long-term assignment. Individuals and couples are caught by surprise by the intensity of the challenges that affect almost every aspect of their life, often leading to a strong negative reaction. Relocation preparation was lacking in the case of May and Ron and could have prepared them for the required adjustments. In reality, there is a shortage of structured training programs for relocation.

Prior to the relocation, May was a working woman. She did not like her work but enjoyed the status. Coming to Singapore, she was not permitted to work, losing the status of a working woman. For a while, she fulfilled herself as a mother, but started questioning herself on whether motherhood was enough for her, seeming confused and frustrated, hurting her self-esteem. At the beginning of the therapy, her artworks reflected this low esteem. In her first drawing (Drawing 1), May hardly put pressure on the pencil, almost as if she was trying to disappear. She followed the chain line she created with no additional background, no grounding, and the flowers that marked the stations of her life had no roots. Her drawing of her expectations from relocation (Drawing 2) listed things she wished for but did not accomplish. It was an indirect expression of failure. In the first joint drawing (Drawing 6), she drew circular and other closed shapes. She repeated the curves as if to strengthen the insecure figure.

In the next joint drawing (Drawing 15), May was the second to draw, she filling in all of the gaps that Ron had left in the common zone. She wrote in small letters to be able to fit in all that she wanted. In the individual zone she wrote four words, as Ron did, repeating the ones he chose. May felt safe to write words that expressed her wishes for closeness with Ron in the common zone. Being able to express herself more freely and openly with Ron showed



a change in her self-esteem. This low self-esteem can be directly linked to relocation only after analyzing May's last two drawings (Drawing 18 & Drawing 20), which were drawn after she began working. From the moment the opportunity to work was introduced and even more so when she began working her confidence and assertiveness grew. Growth became a theme in her art (Drawing 18) and had a positive effect on the couple relations. She commented: "I feel growth; I drew a tree with fruits. I feel the blossom. I feel that we are moving forward..."

In her drawing (Drawing 20), May wrote words that described situations where she identified the differences between her as a child and as an adult. She commented that she now she felt safe with Ron, which would help her cope with her trauma. This demonstrates how the couple's adjustment contributes to their resilience.

As reviewed in the literature review above, in many cases, a culture shock is a characteristic of relocation (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2013; Oberg, 1960; O'keeffe, 2003). In this studied case, Ron did not experience any culture shock. He was familiar with working in the Far East, particularly in Singapore. May did experience a culture shock due to her transition from a specific society of working people to a society comprising mostly of expat ladies of leisure, in which she could not find her place. In reaction to this, May sunk intensively into housekeeping duties and blocked herself from all other activities. In drawings Drawing 3 & Drawing 5), she mentioned "hobbies" as one of the things she would have liked to explore. Truthfully, she was interested in certain things, but never actually took any initiative to try them.

Externalizing her thoughts and feelings through art helped May to realize her losses. May realized that she was so busy and engaged with her daughters, or with unnecessarily over-occupying herself, that she never let herself explore her hopes or even simply her expectations. She did not travel, did not make new friends, and did not learn about new cultures. She felt as if she had been left behind professionally, and now as a mother with three children, she did not know how to make her life more meaningful.



Table 5 - *May's self-esteem as reflected in artwork along the therapy*


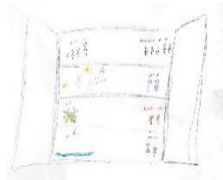
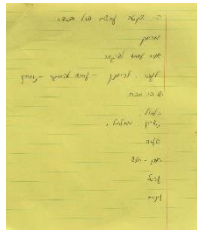
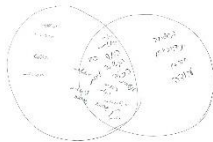

Session and drawing No.	Verbal expressions and clinical observations	Graphical expression	Insights
Ind. Session Drawing 1: Lifeline	May said: "once I started to draw, things appear on the paper and will not disappear". May was emotional while drawing. The lifeline helped her organize her line of thought and overwhelming feelings of her past. She felt relief after sharing her secret.		May's trauma has a significant role in their couplehood. There was no indication of the relocation in the drawing. May needed to become available to explore and change patterns and behaviours with Ron.
Ind. Session Drawing 3: The Closet	She drew silently, pausing to plan her drawing. Changes colours intentionally.		Obsessive order represented by small stick figures. Low self-esteem.
Couple Session Directed drawing Drawing 10 - May's reflections	Expressing sadness, suffocation, confusion, storm.		Interpreting this drawing and comparing it to Ron's, May became aware of her status in the family.
Couple Session Directed drawing Drawing 15- Things in common	Weak verbal expression. Repeating Ron's words.		May followed Ron's initiative to fill up the circles. Small letters. Filling the space in the common zone. Trying to match Ron's part.
Couple Session Session 8 Non-Directed drawing Drawing 18: Growth	May enjoyed drawing. She took the time and continued drawing even after Ron completed his drawing. She did not expose her drawing immediately.		Determined, aware of the change she wanted. Ready to surprise Ron.



Table 5 (continued)


<p>Couple Session Session 9 Non- directed drawing Drawing 20: Thoughts about the situation</p>	<p>Using terms: control, containment</p>		<p>Strong self-image, feeling safe and free to do artwork although Ron did not. Use of the whole space.</p>
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Table 5 shows the progress in May's self-esteem along the therapy. The therapy did not change the circumstances of May's adjustment, but affected her awareness of the issue. A better understanding of her couple relations, as well as the causes of her stress and of Ron's stress, facilitated her to improve her self-esteem. The significant act of getting a job created a drastic change in her adjustment to the relocation, and as a result, increased her self-esteem. Moon (1994), described art therapy as a kind of psychological therapy that uses art as a tool for facilitating therapeutic growth. May's self-esteem started strengthening through the therapy and her last six artworks (Drawing 18 - Drawing 24) demonstrate this.

As the prospect of early termination was raised on the sixth session, the matter of spousal and social adjustment had been raised but not fully addressed due to priorities and lack of time. It is, however, a key aspect for the success of a long and healthy relocation.

### *The Home Perception in Relocation*

"The home" has a special significance in psychology - psychologists see it in different ways: Freud stated that "the home" is one of the symbols of the human body, while Jung saw it as an image of the soul (Fox, 2016). Malchiodi (1998) found that "the house" in a drawing can mirror an environment, and C. Marcus wrote about the "house as a mirror of self" (2006). In art therapy, "the home" is interpreted by the way it is drawn, by the context of the drawing, and by the verbal expression that comes with it.

The idea of "home" appeared relatively frequently in the individual and couple' sessions along the therapy of this case study. It appeared several times in drawings, and was eventually very meaningful in the couple's perception of their situation in the relocation, and in their desires for change. It could be linked to the feeling of belonging, or not belonging, to



Singapore, but could also bear other images as will be indicated. It should be noted that I, the therapist, never asked them to draw a home or a house.

Here, I will refer to the aspects of home drawings that are relevant to relocation and not to those that are relevant to other clinical issues.

In her “closet” (Drawing 3), May wrote a few words: “me,” “hobbies,” “studies,” and “work.” She expressed three activities that defined her wishes. She added a small house icon comprising of just a square and a triangle for the roof. The link between the activities and “home” is not explicable at this stage of the therapy but will later be interpreted as her expressing of a wish to accomplish the three goals in her homeland, after failing to accomplish them in the relocation as per her expectations. “The home” appears next in one of May’s more vibrant drawings (Drawing 5), labeled “the house in Israel”. It was drawn at home, on her own initiative. She drew a large, closed, oval window that portrayed the home and a wide, black, coarsely-coloured path, which did not lead anywhere, but instead divided the drawing into two parts. The home was on one side of the path, and the family, represented by coloured bushes, was on the other. “The home”, which is the main place in which affection and security are sought (Oster & Crone, 2004), was not yet reachable to the family. This was a strong graphic indication of one of relocation characteristics - May was in constant stress, caused by being far and detached from her home, be it the couple’s home or their motherland in general. In her interpretation, she saw herself and Ron, holding hands, striding along the path to the home. She might have been expressing a wish to terminate the relocation. May’s drawing, and its name, clearly indicated that, as in Matri’s book *Psyche’s home* (Matri, 2005), “the home” is emotionally the need to belong to a place and feel a part of it. The house May and Ron built in Israel was the cause of a quarrel between their families. May did not represent this in her drawings.

Ron’s first house appeared in his drawing of “the path” (Drawing 6). He drew the same house icon as May did in Drawing 3, a square with a triangle. His house was floating in the upper left corner of the drawing, with no ground or background. Interpreting his drawing, he said the house was “May’s square”, where everything had to be in place. At this stage of the therapy, as well as of the relocation, Ron showed no emotion regarding the house. The lack of an opening to the house could be an indication of a lack of accessibility (Oster & Crone, 2004). Ron’s next house had a door (Drawing 7). It stood on the ground, and his family was walking towards it. This drawing was called “Ron’s expectations”. Here, the house, after only



one week, had a meaning. It was not floating in the air but was grounded and served as a destination. Ron's expectations at this stage of the relocation were condensed into "having a family and going home". Completing the joint drawing (Drawing 15), May wrote the word 'home' in the common zone. When Ron saw this, he waited until she finished her drawing, and then added the same word in the same zone again. "Home" became a definitive common desire for them.

The joint artwork at the end of the therapy (Drawings 21-24), demonstrated the fact that both had changed their perception of the houses they lived in during the relocation. They both developed a common perception of their permanent house, in which they aspired to live in after terminating their relocation and repatriating to their homeland. In their last session of the therapy, Ron suggested to "build a home", using a cardboard box. May agreed happily, and they started working with gouache paints. For the first time, Ron let himself get "dirty" with paints. He mixed colours, cut a window in the box, and became playful. He did not perceive his longing for their home in Israel as a failure of his assignment. Their interactional communication and their artistic work demonstrated harmony and intimacy.

Their house in this artwork was accessible, and the inner side was of their interests. They decorated it all around and inside, and drew their daughters as a part of it. This joint artwork, unlike all former joint drawings, even the 'homework' finger painting they completed, was the first one that displayed a shared pleasure and playfulness. This was our last artwork before the couple's departure from Singapore. The joint work, and as part of it, the couple's decision making and bodily gestures, all indicated decreased levels of stress, and a better preparation for their repatriation than what they had for the relocation.

Every single image of the home throughout the therapy had a clinical significance. The evolution of the house image expressed clinical diagnoses, and also their overall perception of the relocation.

Table 6 - *Evolution of the home image along the therapy*


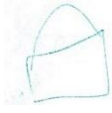






Stages of awareness	Ron's drawing	May's drawing	Description of the house and its meaning
The home where she symbolised her development.		Drawing 3 (detail) 	Square and a triangle. No openings



Table 6 (continued)

Not relating the house to the relocation. The house is not safe	Drawing 6 (detail) 		The home as a symbol to the pre-relocation past
May's homework. Initiated by her.  Relating to the home where she wishes for them to live together as a family		Drawing 5 (detail) 	Home in Israel  A place of expectation (erga)
Raising awareness for accessibility. In his expectations for a house.	Drawing 7 (detail) 		Square and a triangle with a window
The meaning of the house changes to a place they can share.	Drawing 10 Joint work (detail) 	Drawing 10 Joint work (detail) 	Writing "home" in the common zone
Right after termination of the relocation.  Both are creative, playful, happy.	Drawing 24 Joint work (detail) 	Drawing 23 Joint work (detail) 	Creating a home from a box. Cutting the window. Painting.

The final joint artwork was done after it was confirmed that the relocation would be terminated. May and Ron's newly increased levels of intimacy were expressed through their gestures and laughter, their cooperation, their patience towards each other, and their closeness during their work. This session highlighted the fact that the structured stress of relocation was



removed. The couple was able, through the therapy process, to build a secure romantic attachment, which helped them to have an open communication with each other.

Table 6 illustrates the different meanings that Ron and May related to “the home” along the therapy sessions. For Ron, the house was at first a place of confrontation and contained no emotions. It was a place where he was not free to behave naturally, as he was constrained by May. In his hopes, he saw the home as a destination for the family. He later defined “home” as a place of common interest for him and his wife, and lastly, a place of longing and fulfillment. In the beginning, May perceived ‘the home’ as a reminder of her past, linked to her memory of the abuse. She fantasized about their home in Israel as an unreachable destination. Later, she mentioned the home as being of common interest between her and Ron. At the end of the therapy, “the home” was a subject that symbolized unity, cooperation, security, and hope.

The house is a well-known assessment tool in art therapy (Oster & Crone, 2004; Horovitz & Eksten, 2009). In cases of relocation, the home has a special significance. Relocation affects the home of the past with all its emotional significance, and the home of the present with expectations and the day-to-day reality. Based on my experience, an expat will find it difficult to verbally express negative thought relating to “the home” but may draw it on her own initiative and thus supply important insights.



### *Practical Implications*

This chapter presents the way art therapy facilitates the exposure, and in some cases, even makes it possible to expose the unconscious reasoning of behaviors and emotions of relocated couples, and to facilitate the therapy to treat them.

Other couples in relocation who come to therapy might present a different set of categories. A good example can be categories observed in couples from different cultures. I feel strongly, however, that the categories and themes observed in the researched case are common to a wide population of couples in relocation and therefore support the generalization of the conclusions.

The research identified seven themes that are typical issues in the treatment of couples in relocation. Each theme had an influence on the couple of the case study's relations, the wellbeing of the expat and spouse, and on the success and fulfillment of the assignment. These themes were identified and treated using art therapy skills, techniques and tools including observing, hypothesizing, questioning, refining, and evidence-seeking. The advantages of using art therapy in couple's therapy have been established by researchers and are brought in the literature review under the chapter: Advantages of art therapy in couple's therapy. This research demonstrates particular advantages and benefits of the use of art therapy in cases of couple relocation. This chapter will highlight and focus on the special contribution of art therapy to the particular case of couples in relocation and suggest a constructed method for the optimal use of art therapy in this case.

### *Advantages and Benefits*

In this section, I summarize the advantages and benefit of art therapy tools as they are manifested in this case:

1. Rapid identification of clients' *perception of the significant events* of their life, and the status of the relocation in their lifeline (Gussak & Rosal, 2016).
2. Rapid identification of *attachment styles* (Cormier, 1999).
3. *Understanding and acknowledging the differences* in the partners' reality perceptions after changes caused by relocation and creation of a common ground by both spouses (Riley, 2003; Barth & Kinder, 1985)
4. *A quick expression of the couple's dynamics*, and the status of each of them, as a result of the change caused by relocation, achieved by doing joint and parallel work (Riley & Malchiodi, 2003b).



5. Expression of *different interpretations*: when both spouses expressed their own interpretations of a drawing, it was possible to show them the differences in their perceptions. It also allowed the therapist to guide the couple and direct their perceptions to progress the treatment. It is done via a transitional object that serves as clear evidence (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994).
6. *Externalization of unconscious distress*: the treatment, using art, allowed patients to externalize their distress caused by the relocation, which they were not aware of (Edwards, 2004).
7. Creation of consensual *metaphoric imagery* that provides clients and therapist with psychological insights beyond linear rationality (Havsteen-Franklin, 2016).
8. Creation of action-oriented mood aimed at *problem-solving* (Riley & Malchiodi, 1994).
9. Creation of a *tangible evidence* that clients and therapist can return to throughout the treatment for the solution of recurrent problems (Wadeson, 1980).
10. Creating a *tangible record* of the therapy process that demonstrates change and advancement (Snir & Hazut, 2012).
11. Bringing the couple to *physical closeness* while doing a joint artwork and revealing the levels of closeness and intimacy between them (Wadeson, 2010).
12. Achieving *immediate initial analysis* during the meeting, and the possibility of immediate response to arising need in cases that the therapy is disrupted (Ricco, 2007).

### *Suggested Therapy Model*

The model comprises of a set of tools to address the specific therapy of couples in relocation. This topic was not well researched and documented, and thus assumed not frequently treated as a particular couple's therapy.

The model suggests a sequence of actions that were applied and tested in the case study. It is based on three assumptions:

1. Relocation is a significant event in the couples' life that causes significant changes in their life reality and creates a set of problems that bring them to therapy. This influence can be perceived as an outer layer over their couple issues that are treated by couple's therapy.



2. The effects of relocation affect the individuals in different ways, requiring individual intake, assessment, and preparation for couple's therapy.
3. The familiarity of the therapist with the phenomenon of relocation and its effects on the couple is essential for effective therapy.

This suggested model for couple's therapy uses the themes established in this research. The themes, being distinct characteristics of relations, serve as a way to focus the therapy in the model. Each therapy and therapist require an adaptation of the themes, as dictated by the specific case. The individual sessions serve the initial mapping of issues that arise prior to the relocation, as well as those that are generated by the relocation. Additionally, these sessions create a therapeutic alliance with each client, and make them familiar with the artistic aspect of the therapy. When the therapeutic alliance is established, clients tend to share with the therapist personal, emotional issues that were not shared with the spouse. The therapy model is presented in the following table (Table 7) which breaks down the therapy process into main stages and to specific actions in each stage. Each action can take one session or more, according to the advancement of the action. The therapist should link the action subject to the recent artwork, and to those of former sessions. The suggested sources and tools are basic recommendations, and therapists should use whichever art therapy tools they find suitable.

Table 7 - *Suggested therapy model.*

Stage of therapy	Action	Suggested tools and sources
Therapist preparation	Familiarity with relocation  Knowledge and understanding of relocation influence on couples  Familiarity with clients' cultural background and language	Literature  Literature and case studies; Former experience  Inherited or acquired







Table 7 (continued)

Couple sessions	Exploring couple dynamics	Joint artwork, no subject, no talking (Wadeson, 2010) Directed individual artwork, interpretation, and reflection (Snir & Wiseman 2014)
	Exploring stress sources	Joint directed artwork, interpretation of artwork and reflection on the experience (Snir & Regev, 2014)
	Exploring romantic attachment	Joint directed artwork, interpretation of artwork and reflection on the experience (Ricco, 2007)
	Creating clients' awareness to relocation impact and influence	Interpreting and reflecting on individual 'expectations' drawings.
	Mapping obstacles in couplehood	Joint dynamic and annotated artwork (Gottman, 1999)
	Exploring spouse adjustment	
	Exploring social adjustment	Directed joint artwork, Individual artwork in tandem; interpretation
	Exploring home perception of clients (if not dealt with by this stage)	Directed joint artwork on couple relations; interpretation
	Setting goals for the near future	Individual directed artwork and interpretation
		Joint free artwork on goals. Reflection (Gottman, 1999)
Closure	Closure talk	Joint free artwork



## Conclusion

The focussed specialization of practitioners as well as researchers in narrow sectors of medical and therapeutic professions is common in the last years. An orthopaedist specializes in hand or foot orthopedy while few years ago he or she would treat the entire body. Similar trend is common in mental care where professionals focus on specific domains; for example: child abuse (Kenny & Abreu, 2015), parental divorce (Strohschein, 2005) or family relocation (Bowser, 2015; Rawls, 2016). In art therapy research, it would be beneficiary to focus on cases where art therapy has inherited advantages, such as cases of overcoming verbal limitations.

In the course of a few years of practicing art therapy I gained experience in treating individuals, couples and families who experienced problems resulting from relocation. I have formulated concepts and principles for adjusting the therapy to this particular domain. This research led me to organize my working system and to transform it into a model, which I find effective and efficient. The treatment concept I presented and the model proposed here could be adapted to other particular cases. The adjustment of the suggested model to other particular cases would require further research as suggested below.

### *Suggestions for Further Research*

The purpose of this research, that is, to enhance the use of art therapy for a particular case, will be complemented by further research in the following areas, directions, or domains:

- a. Research of the general efficacy of prior individual assessment to a couple's therapy, as was done in this research.
- b. Further study of the research question of this thesis in order to widen the researched population and add more insight referring to the research themes.
- c. Similar research focused on particular populations and particular circumstances of couple's therapy, exploring the special contribution of art therapy to each particular case.
- d. A similar study of the research question concerning family dynamics in relocation.



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## Appendixes

*Annex 1 - Review of research protocol*

## The Professional School of Psychology

### *Human Subjects Review Committee - Review of Research Protocol*

Student's/Researcher's Name: Sivan Golan Weinstein

Purpose of Review (cross out):                      Class Project      Dissertation      Other Study

Title of Proposed Research: Art Therapy as a Tool for Assessment and Treatment of Couples in Relocation

Student's/Researcher's Signature:

Chairperson's Signature:

Sivan Golan Weinstein

#### Administrative Use Only

Type of Review (cross out): Exempt                      Regular                      Non-Sensitive      Sensitive

**Full  
Approval**

**Conditional  
Approval**

**Returned  
for Revision**

Comments:

Reviewer:

Date: 14.11.16

Second Reviewer:

(If Sensitive)

Date:

🍏 Original/ File

🍏 Chair

🍏 Student



## Annex 1 (continued)

## Human Subject Review – Statement

## 1. Description of Research

My research deals with couples that experience problems related to being internationally relocated and were treated by me. Subjects of the research are couples with or without children (treatment was administered to the parents only) that are stationed in Singapore.

The research will showcase three cases that were treated by me in my clinic in Singapore during the past two years. Subjects were not 'recruited' but rather chosen retroactively after termination of the therapy.

Sessions' protocols, art works, e-mails and my notes are the data gathered during the therapy. Data gathering is part of the therapy and is done along the duration of the therapy.

## 2. Confidentiality

Consent forms for documenting the sessions and my professional notes, as well as, all art works done during sessions are signed by all my clients prior to any treatment, assessment or report in their case.

During therapy I gather information and data in written files, drawings on paper and digitals of 3-d art - work and drawings.

All art works being done during sessions are kept in folders and locked at the clinic. Art works that are digitized are kept in a separate memory.

All my clinical documentation is destroyed after being kept for four years.

All the cases in my research are identified by ..... and all identifying details are omitted.

I do not plan to have any assistance.

Along my work I do undertake regular supervision according to the Art Therapy association of ANZATA (Singapore included).

During supervision I don't reveal the clients identity.

## 3. Minors

Minors will not be involved in this research. I will address couples and family issues through treating the parents only. No minors take part in 'family drawings' or in sessions at all.

## 4. Feedback

I intend to write a summery of my research, to forward it to the subjects and to offer them a free individual meeting to discuss it.

## 5. Risks

The subjects will be exposed to Minimal Risk through their participation in this research. Processing of all documentary matter of the therapy will take place after accomplishing the therapy. Cases for this research were chosen from a



## Annex 1 (continued)

variety of cases I have treated throw the last 2 years. Subjects as well as my self were not aware of the fact that the therapy was being done in the service of a research. Forms of consent were signed by them once their case was tentatively chosen by me for the research.

6. Benefits

The subjects will have no benefits from participating in my research beside their contribution to the filed of couple therapy.

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*Annex 2 - Client's research consent form*

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_

1. I hereby authorize Sivan Golan Weinstein, of The Professional School of Psychology, to gather information from me on the topic of my relocation experience with my spouse and our children.  
I have freely and voluntarily consented to participate in this study, with no coercion, psychological or otherwise, used to elicit my cooperation.  
I understand that my participation will involve the use of my therapy documentation.
2. I understand that there is no physical or psychological risk involved in this participation.
3. I understand that I may terminate participation in this study at any time.
4. I understand that my participation or nonparticipation in this study will no way affect any new treatment at Sivan's clinic if required.
5. I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue distress that may have been provoked by my participation, consultation will be available to me.
6. These procedures have been explained to me by Sivan Golan Weinstein

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

---



*Annex 3 - Client clinic forms***CLIENT CONSENT FORM****Client's Name**

I hereby consent to participate fully in the Art Therapy Sessions conducted by Sivan Golan Weinstein at her studio.

I agree to abide by all of the policies, procedures, rules and regulations of the sessions as explained to me by Sivan Golan Weinstein and set forth in any materials that I may receive.

I also hold Sivan Golan Weinstein free of any responsibility for any damage to or theft of my personal property, which may result from my participation in any of the activities in the studio. In brief, I am responsible for my personal property and belongings. I also hold Sivan Golan Weinstein free of any responsibility out side of the studio area ( garden, road, stair case to the studio) in case of physical injuries I will take responsibility for me or my child.

I understand that Sivan Golan Weinstein is free to communicate with her supervisor or parents. ,

I have been given the opportunity to discuss this consent form and to ask questions about the sessions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness



## Annex 3 (continued)

**ART THERAPY CONSENT FORM**

My permission is granted to: Sivan Golan Weinstein to photograph or display \_\_\_\_\_'s artwork for supervision/ educational/presentations purposes.

I understand that comments and case material may be used for scientific and educational purposes and also for supervision purposes.

I have been assured that such artwork or reproductions will be presented in a professional manner for educational purposes, research, publication, or presentation.

Confidentiality of the client's name will be maintained unless there is a danger or a case of concern for the client's well being.

As part of the therapy agreement the art works will be kept with Sivan Golan Weinstein in a safe place.

( ) Art Therapy students will need to attend a weekly therapy session.

Client's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian)



## Annex 3 (continued)



## Art Therapy Intake Packet

CLIENT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DOB \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

M F

NRIC/passport  
number \_\_\_\_\_Home  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian/Foster Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Hand Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Person to contact to schedule appointment \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact Phone  
Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Client \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by \_\_\_\_\_



## Annex 3 (continued)

Reason for Referral

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Personal information:

How long have you been in Singapore? Is that your first relocation? \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you have any siblings? What age? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are your hobbies?/ How do you spend your time? \_\_\_\_\_

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Which school are you attending? \_\_\_\_\_

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**POLICY FOR MISSED OR LATE APPOINTMENTS**

The Art Therapy Studio's policy regarding missed or late appointments states that if you miss a scheduled appointment and do not give at least twenty four (24) hours notification, charges for the full session will be incurred.

I/We understand that in order to cancel an appointment with no charge, I, or my care giver must call the Sivan Golan Weinstein at least 24 hours prior to be beginning of the scheduled appointment. If there is no answer, please leave your name, phone number and time of call via sms.

Phone#: +65 91882559

Name of Client \_\_\_\_\_

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Parent/Guardian Signature      Date \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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