BILATERAL ART:
AN INTEGRATION OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY, ART THERAPY, AND
NEUROSCIENCE

by

Carole M. McNamee

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APPROVED:

Scott Johnson, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Anna Beth Benningfield, Ph.D.
Lisa Driscoll, Ph.D.
David Hutchins, Ph.D.
Lenore McWey, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Bilateral art is a neurologically-based therapeutic intervention that engages both dominant and non-dominant hands in the creation of images in response to polarized beliefs, cognitions, or feelings. Advances in neuroscience that integrate attachment theory and experience with neuronal development argue for use of the intervention. Retrospective case studies using enhancements of the bilateral art intervention protocol for individuals support these arguments. These case studies demonstrate clinical application of the intervention to a range of presenting problems including differentiation from family of origin, parenting problems, loss, trauma, and self-esteem concerns and provide the first documented evidence of the effectiveness of the bilateral art intervention. Additional case studies reflect development of two different bilateral art intervention protocols that facilitate exploration of relationships. The first protocol adapts the use of bilateral art with individuals to use with couples and it has a dual purpose: to facilitate both openness and integration of polarized thoughts or feelings in one member of a couple and to increase empathy in the other. The second protocol facilitates exploration of and reflection upon a relationship and is applied in the case study to the supervisor-supervisee dyad that is an integral part of the training of marriage and family therapists. Experiences reveal possible contraindications as well as indications for the use of these protocols.
DEDICATION

To Mark, Beth, Mark, and Katie who are the joys of my life.
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There have been many people who have aided and abetted my transition from computer scientist to therapist. In the Marriage and Family Therapy program my advisor, Scott Johnson, was present many times when I needed him to be. Anna Beth Benningfield provided the encouragement to proceed with my use of art with clients. Lenore McWey shared her infectious enthusiasm and passion for research. The all shared a faith in me before I found it, but more importantly, they all shared themselves and I feel privileged to have been able to work with them. I thank committee members Lisa Driscoll and David Hutchins for their willingness to serve on my committee despite the many other demands upon their time and no obligation to do so. I take with me Lisa’s enthusiasm and David’s shared passion for art. And I thank all of them for their thoughtful comments on this manuscript; they have only served to improve it.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Rationale  
Biases and Limitations  
Contributions and Implications  
Summary  

## 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Art Therapy and Family Therapy  
Art Therapy and Neuroscience  
Neuroscience and Family Therapy  
Origins of Bilateral Art  
Summary  

## 3 METHODOLOGY: THE CASE STUDY AND BILATERAL ART PROTOCOLS

The Case Study  
Sample Selection  
Case Study Limitations  
Bilateral Art Intervention Methodologies  
Using Bilateral Art Protocol with Individuals  
Extensions to the Protocol with Individuals  
Using Bilateral Art with Relationships  
A Bilateral Art Protocol for Increasing Openness and Empathy  
A Bilateral Art Protocol for Exploring the Self and Relationship  
Summary  

## 4 CLINICAL EXPERIENCES USING BILATERAL ART WITH INDIVIDUALS

Extensive Case Study (Case 1)  
Case 1  
Additional Case Examples (Cases 2-8)  
Case 2  
Case 3  
Case 4
5 CLINICAL EXPERIENCES USING BILATERAL ART WITH RELATIONSHIPS

Increasing Openness and Empathy: Using Relational Protocol 1 59
Examining the Supervisor/Supervisee Relationship in Marriage and Family Therapy Training: Using Protocol 2 61
  Supervisor/Supervisee Dyad 1 62
  Supervisor/Supervisee Dyad 2 66
  Discussion 70
Summary 70

6 INTEGRATED ANALYSIS
Handedness and Association with Positive and Negative Elements 72
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Intervention Scaling 73
Comparison of Change in Scaling of Positive and Negative Elements 76
Comparison of Positive and Negative Element Color Selections 77
Summary 82

7 DISCUSSION
Observed and Reported Changes in Behavior 84
Indicators for Use of Bilateral Art 87
Research and Clinical Implications 90
Limitations 91
Future Research 92
Conclusions 94

REFERENCES 96
APPENDIX A 102
APPENDIX B 104
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>4.8</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>4.11</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>4.12</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<td>41</td>
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<td>4.15</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>4.16</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

6.1 Association of opposing positive and negative elements with dominant and nondominant hands 73
6.2 Strength of belief in opposing positive and negative elements pre- and post-intervention 74
6.3 Means and standard deviations for strengths of belief and changes in strengths of belief 75
6.4 Color selections for response to opposing positive and negative elements 78
6.5 Frequency distribution of positive element color selections 79
6.6 Frequency distribution of negative element color selections 80
7.1 Observed and reported changes in behavior and drawings 85