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# Reflection of sibling relationships into the kinetic family drawings during the preschool period

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## Abstract

This study is designed to show how sibling relationships are reflected into the results of kinetic family drawing test that is a projective drawing technique. For this aim, a kinetic family test was administered to a total of fifty-one children individually. The findings obtained, the information collected from the child's family as his/her teacher as drawings and their stories were all analysed using qualitative content analysis. Accordingly, meaning units and categories were developed. One of the emergent categories is that of sibling relationships. It is found that the meaning units that make up this category are the lack of sibling figure in the kinetic family drawing, the lack of sibling figure in the story of the drawing and in the drawings in regard to sibling, the sibling is far from the other family members and it is also found that all these qualities are reflected in the seven drawings.

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*Keywords:* Kinetic family drawings test; sibling; sibling relationships; projective techniques.

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## 1. Introduction

Siblings share a special and significant relationship within the family system. Unlike other relationships, sibling relationships prepare two persons for critical steps of life through emotional and physical ties. Siblings are participants of a never-ending relationship (Kaminsky, Dewey, 2001).

Stoneman and Brody (1993) define sibling relationships as a relationship that begins with the birth of the second child and that lasts until one of the siblings dies as well as that is the closest and longest relationship possible. They argue that some siblings are the best friend of each other while some always fight each other. For them, understanding the reasons for such a variance in regard to sibling relationships is very significant.

Given the cognitive and language development of the preschool children, it is quite clear that they could not efficiently express their emotions, fears, wants, anxiety as well as their familial and interpersonal relationships. Although preschool children's relationships with their siblings are very significant, having influences on their emotions and lives, they could not efficiently express their relationships with their siblings due to developmental limitations. Therefore, drawings and pictures that are means for non-verbal communication as a projective technique are employed with them in order to elicit their internal feelings.

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Projective drawings help the children to express themselves. Therefore, such a technique is a method that provides us with an opportunity to understand the pre-school children's internal conflicts, fears and their interactions with family members and their perceptions of them (Cummings 1986 in Gregory, 1992).

### *1.1. Measuring Tool*

The test of kinetic family drawing is one of the projective drawings used to elicit the children's internal feelings. Burns and Kaufman (1970) administered this test individually. In order to analyse drawings obtained from nearly ten thousand children in detailed way, four dimensions were developed: qualities of each figure, composition of the figures on the paper, symbols used and movements.

Burns and Kaufman (1972) analysed their findings obtained from almost ten thousand children by assigning scores in order to establish reliability and validity of the test. However, later it is determined by the subsequent research that such scoring is not enough to develop a reliable and valid test. Because of the nature of the projective drawing method, it is very difficult for a child to draw the same picture similarly after a while. Since this test reflects the feelings in regard to family-internal situation and such feelings are subject to change, it is important that the interpretation for each drawing should be the same, not the child should draw the same pictures in different sessions (Handler and Habenicht 1994). Handler and Habenicht (1994) based on their review of literature on the use of kinetic family drawings state that the reliability of the test ranges between 87 % and 95 %.

Although validity is a significant concern in research activity, some problems related to validity and reliability of the tests of kinetic family drawings are experiencing in the related research. Given that drawings are concrete reflections of one's feelings and ideas, using scores for drawings in order to make them valid measurement tools has negative effects on the meanings of the drawings produced. Although such an approach may give a general judgement about the drawings, the reasons for this judgement are ignored. Each picture certainly has its own sense. Even though ignoring these meanings make the method used by the researcher easier, the conclusions that are to be drawn cannot be reached by this way. This study analyses the children's family pictures based on the evaluation criteria developed by Burns and Kaufman.

## **2. Method**

The sample of the study includes a total of fifty-one six-year children whose families have the similar socio-economic status. The drawings of the subjects were categorized based on the story of the picture and information provided by the family and the teacher. This study examines the drawings in relation to the sibling relationships of the children involved. Therefore, other categories are not being investigated in the study.

The data of the study were collected through the use of kinetic family pictures. Children are tested individually in a quiet room free from any stimuli. For each subject, A4 paper, thirty-six colour pen, four pencils and an eraser. The subjects are told that they are asked to draw a picture while the interviewer takes notes. Later the instruction of "draw a family picture in which people are doing something."

The data collected were analysed through qualitative content analysis including the information provided by family members and the teachers in regard to relationships between the child and family members, principal caretaker for the child as well significant past experience of the child while the drawings and the story of the drawings are also analysed. The basic purpose of the qualitative content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can account for the data (Yıldırım and Şimsek, 2005). Qualitative content analysis involves all the data gathered as well as the information gained and these are evaluated. Therefore, the data of the study include raw data. Meaning units are the words, sentences or paragraphs that make up the raw data.

## **3. Findings**

A total of seven pictures among the drawings by the subjects are found to reflect sibling relationships. Among these pictures portraying the sibling relationships, two pictures reflect feelings and situation experience by the child in regard to newborn sibling. The remaining five pictures do include drawing of the siblings but they are given far away from the family or their gender is given different.



Figure 1. B6, G, 6 (code,gender,age)

The information given by the family of the subject produced the picture coded as B6 reveals that the child has no sibling and that the father is very disciplined and he was not at home during the picture was produced because of his occupation and he has some problems with the mother of the child. The teacher, on the other hand, stated that the family is waiting for a new child and that the subject is both withdrawn and adaptive without any problems with her peers but she is sad when her father is not at home. The story of the picture was expressed as follows: “My mother is cooking. My father is repairing something. I am playing. My sister is sleeping.”

In other words, in the picture there is a sibling who does not exist in real world. She represents this unreal sibling as sleeping in the picture. Her drawing of her ‘unreal’ sister is very small, indicating her emotions towards her. Those figures drawn smaller seem to represent those people who are not regarded as significant by the child (Saydam, 2004). Therefore, it may be argued that this subject is not so pleased to have a new sibling. On the other hand, she has drawn her mother firstly and on the left side of the paper. Parot argues that the order of the drawing the family members reflect the significance of these people assigned by the children. The person who drawn first is accepted to be the most significant person for the children. Moreover, Parot suggests that the significant people are drawn on the left side of the paper (as cited in Jourdan, 2000).

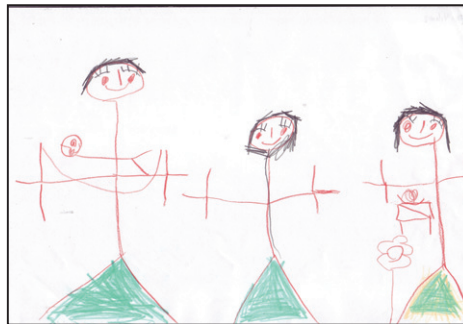


Figure 2. B11, B, 6 (code,gender,age)

The child who drawn the picture coded as B11 was described by the family members as one having positive and warm relationships with them. This child has a newborn sibling and both protect him and is withdrawn towards. His teacher described him as one who is joyful, withdrawn and adaptable and also one preferring to play with male peers and making groups with them in which he himself is the play leader. The story of his picture is stated by him as “I am looking at the flowers. My father is showing around to my brother. My mother is making yoghurt. My brother is wanting to stand up, he is a baby.”

In regard to this picture, it is found that the family members are drawn close to one another. Burns (1972) argues that figures drawn close to one another share a common point. The figure of the subject is similar to those of other family members. Jourdan (2000) states that if the child draws and paints his figure and others’ figures as the same, it reflects an enthusiastic identification. Positive representation of the newborn sibling may indicate that he accepts him. Burns (1972) dealing with the figure of baby cot as a symbol concludes that those children having newborn sibling use this symbol in their pictures. However, Burns (1972) argues that this symbol reflects a concern experienced by the child but it is not a negative emotion.

The problems experienced by the siblings may be a result of the fact that the age gap between them is high or that they are step-brothers or that there are many brothers and sisters. The child drawn the picture coded as B12 does not show his step brother and sister in his picture.



Figure 3. B12, G, 6 (code, gender,age)

The information collected from the family members about this child reveals that the father has two other children from his first marriage with the ages of 21 and 22. They live in the same home and the child experiences loneliness due to the age gap between them. The teacher states that he does not know the child's step brother and sister. The story of the picture is expressed as follows: "I am playing a game with my mother. My father is also playing with us."

The reason for not including his brother and sister in his picture may be age gap and the lack of closeness between them. Parot (1995) argues that if any family member is not shown in the picture, it is a reflection of negative emotions against them. Koppitz (1968) states that not showing any family member in the picture is important since it provide some significant information about family relationships. Therefore, this picture in which two siblings are not included may reflect communication problems between the child and the siblings.

The child has drawn the figure of his mother and that himself as the same figure indicating that he models his mother. Jourdan (2000) argues that if the child draws and paints his figure and others' figures as the same, it reflects an enthusiastic identification. As stated earlier, the significant person for the child is drawn firstly. Parot also states that significant person is mostly drawn on the left side of the paper (as cited in Jourdan, 2000). Saydam (2004) argues that those persons whose figures are drawn firstly and on the left side of the paper are those who are the most significant ones for the child and who the child wants to be identified with. As stated earlier, the child drew the figure of his mother first and on the left side of the paper.



Figure 4. A7, G, 6 (code, gender, age)

In the picture coded as A 7, all the family members are shown but one of the siblings is drawn differently in terms of the position of the picture. The family members of this child did not want to fill out the demographic form. The teacher of the child states that the child is jealous about his siblings and in a competition with them. It is also stated that the child may be withdrawn while entering into a new environment. The story of the picture is expressed as follows: "My sister and me are collecting the flowers. My brother is doing nothing. My mother and father are looking at my sister and me."

This picture seems to reflect his problems with the sibling who is drawn doing nothing. The first drawn figure and that drawn on the left side of the paper is that of his sister. As stated earlier, the significant person for the child is drawn firstly. Parot also states that significant person is mostly drawn on the left side of the paper (as cited in Jourdan, 2000). Saydam (2004) argues that those persons whose figures are drawn firstly and on the left side of the paper are those who are the most significant ones for the child and who the child wants to be identified with. Therefore, she identifies herself with her sister. The last drawn figure and placed on the far side of the paper is that of the other sibling. This representation may reflect her jealousy of the sibling.

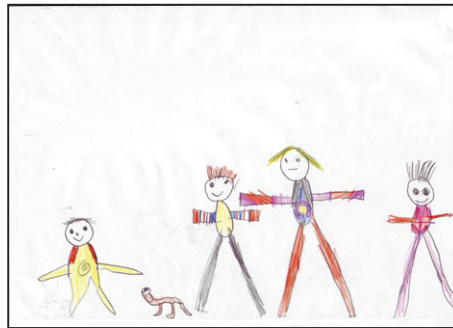


Figure 5. I6, B, 6 (code, gender, age)

In the picture coded as I6, all family members are represented closer to one another but the sibling figure is drawn differently. The family members state that she has a four-year old brother and is jealous of him. It is also stated that she shares her problems with them. The teacher of the child states that she is cheerful and adaptive and a popular child among her peers, loved by them. It is also expressed that she misses her father when he is away from the home. The story of the picture was expressed as follows: “My brother is playing either the cat. I am looking at them. My mom is doing nothing. My dad is having his breakfast.”

Since the figure of the sibling is drawn first and the smallest figure in the picture. This figure is also different from the other figures. All these features may reflect a problem that the child is experiencing with her younger brother. Saydam (2004) states that sometimes the children draw first and smaller the figure of a person whom they have conflicts with and problems in regard to having close relationships. The figures of the child herself, of the mother and the father are similar. However, the figure of the younger brother is different from the other figures and also drawn far away from the others. She draws her figure very close to the figure of the mother. It is thought that those figures drawn closely represent the persons sharing something while those figures drawn far away represent the persons having significant problems and lacking a consistent integration within the family (Burns, 1972). As stated earlier, the figures of the child herself, of the mother and the father are similar. However, the figure of the younger brother is different from the other figures and also drawn far away from the others. The reason for this representation may be the child's negative feelings against her younger brother. There is a symbol on the figure of her younger brother that is called as “belly button” by the child. Appelman (2007) states that such drawings may indicate the fact that there is still strong bond between the child and the mother, suggesting that there is no independent ego construction or development.



Figure 6. B3, G, 6 (code, gender, age)

Children sometimes may represent their siblings as children with the same gender of themselves if they are experiencing problems with their siblings. In the picture coded as B3 there is no representation of the child's older brother. Instead, another figure with the opposite gender of the older brother is included in the picture. The family member state that the child has a brother who is sixteen years old and that they do not have very positive relationship. The story of the picture is expressed as follows: "Mom and dad are at different rooms. Mom is cooking. Dad is watching TV. I am playing with my friend. My friend is older than me. She is like my older sister."

The problems the child is experiencing may be the reason for omitting him from the picture. Koppitz (1968) suggests that ignoring a family member in the picture reflects the strong negative emotions against this member. The first figure drawn by the child is that of the friend and this figure is very similar to the child's figure, suggesting that the child models and identifies with the friend. Jourdan (2000) argues that if the child draws and paints his figure and others' figures as the same, it reflects an enthusiastic identification.

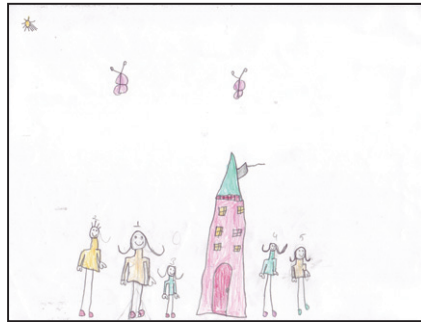


Figure 7. P8, G, 6 (code, gender, age)

In the picture coded as P8, the problems experienced by the siblings are represented in a different way. The family members state that they a newborn child. The subject is reported to have recent problems while going to the school. The teacher of the child states that the child is not so talkative and is withdrawn. The story of the picture is expressed as follows: "It is our home. We are going to my friends. Me sister is at home."

The figure of the mother is paid very much attention, suggesting that the child has a concern, ambiguous feelings towards the mother or is angry at her. Koppitz (1968) argues that erasing the basic figures in the picture reflects a concern towards these figures. Given that the mother should much more attention to the newborn, the child may experience a concern in regard to this behaviour of the mother. Although the child states that her younger brother is at home, she did not represent him in her picture. It may be a result of her reaction against him.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings obtained through the analysis of the seven pictures reflecting sibling relationships and sibling jealousy reveal the fact that the children express their feelings via pictures and drawings, otherwise they could not communicate these feelings.

These seven pictures provide some information about the children's relationships with their family members. Three children have newborn siblings. Of them, two children include the newborn siblings but the third one does not include the newborn instead talks about the baby. Although the two children who included their newborn siblings in the pictures seem to accept their siblings, they draw their newborn siblings as last, the smallest figure and these figures are placed at the most right side of the paper, suggesting that they have a tendency to reject their newborn siblings. Those figures that are drawn last or as the smallest may reflect those persons whom the children neglect or have negative emotions against them (Saydam, 2004). As stated earlier, one subject does not include the newborn sibling in the picture. Parot (1995) suggests that ignoring someone in the picture is a reflection of the rejection of this person (as cited in Jourdan, 2000).

Generally the siblings are not included in the pictures. Such siblings are those with whom the children have conflicts and whom they are angry at or jealous of resulting the ignorance of them (Saydam, 2004). In the study, three children found to ignore their siblings. One of them ignores the step brother, the other is one is older brother. The remaining one is a newborn sibling.

Another picture includes all family members but the brother whom the child is experiencing problems with is placed at a distant position on the paper. Children draw the figures of the persons whom they feel themselves close as closer to their own figures. They draw the figures of the people whom they have negative feelings against at a distant position. Aubin (1970) suggests that the distance among the figures in a picture shows a person's acceptance or rejection. The person who draws the picture puts the own figure closer to the figures of people who are trusted while not closer to the figures of people who are not trusted. In the same vein, the subjects put their own figure closer to the figures of their siblings who are trusted while not closer to the figures of their siblings who are not trusted. The figures of the siblings with whom the subjects are experiencing problems are drawn at the most right side of the paper. Such figures are found to be drawn last and the smallest figures (as cited in Jourdan, 2000).

Parot suggests that the order of the figures of the family members shows the value assigned by the children. It is generally assumed that the first drawn figure is the most significant person for the child. Furthermore, Parot points out that the figure of the most significant person is drawn on the left side of the paper. (as cited in Jourdan, 2000). Saydam (2004) also states that the significant family members are drawn firstly. In short, those figures drawn firstly and on the left side of the paper are those of the most significant family members for the child. However, such figures may reflect those with whom the children have negative relationships in the family.

If a child draws the figure of his sibling firstly and on the left side of the paper, s/he reflects his feelings toward the sibling in a different way. If they draw the figures of the siblings far away from the family members in the picture, it may signal a problematic sibling relationship.

The findings of the study indicate that newborn siblings, age gap between siblings, having step-siblings and having more siblings seem to have negative relationships on the sibling relationships.

The ways used by the subjects to reflect sibling problems are found to be as follows: not including the siblings in the pictures, drawing the sibling figures far away from the others' figures, differently representing the figures of the siblings, drawing the sibling figures at the right side of the paper and drawing the sibling figure smaller.

## 5. Suggestions

Preschool sibling relationships are reflected not only in the behavioural characteristics of the children but also in the drawings and pictures of the children. Projective methods used to get information about pre-school children are important since they provide information about the children's feelings that they could not easily externalize. However, in addition to this method, information given by the children's family and teachers is also valuable in evaluating the pictures and drawings produced by the children.

Educators may employ the drawings of the children as way to know and evaluate the children but they should be aware of the fact that it is not enough to be fully informed about the children and their families. In addition to pictures or drawings, both family and teacher are asked to provide information about the children. And this information should be used while interpreting and evaluating the children's pictures and drawings. Each picture is unique and the story of the picture should be taken into consideration while assessing the picture or drawing.

Overgeneralizations should be avoided during the picture evaluations that requires the information based on family members and the children's teachers. Since each child may have totally different experience in family, their messages conveyed by the drawings or pictures will be distinct.

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