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The mandala graphic of cancer patients: A particular way to express resilience

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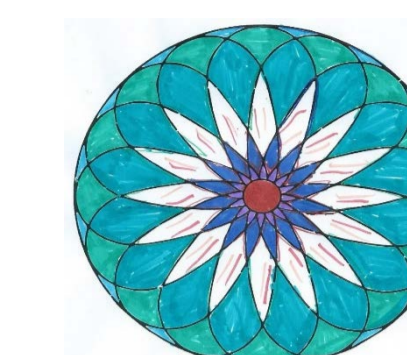
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INTRODUCTION

- Few articles are dedicated to the psychological care of patients using a mandala. Only Elkis-Abuhoff, Gaydos, Goldblatt, and Chen et Rose (2009) have used them when caring for cancer patients;
- From a psychotherapeutic perspective, with the aid of a mandala, patient evaluation can be carried out in groups, individually or in pairs. Conventionally, its use aims at restoring the person's internal stability, allowing him or her to express conscious and unconscious issues, and in reducing mental stress, it fosters the fullness of the healing. Psychological changes in the patient can be noticed;
- We have approached the mandala as a projective test, leaving all spiritual views to one side. The study of the psychological functioning of the patients in question was our aim.

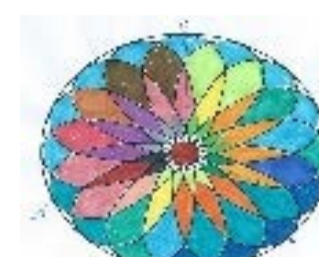
QUESTION OF RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESIS

Can the mandala show the level of resilience of cancer patients ?

The perception of temporality through the mandala, as well as the colors used should shed light on their resilience.

PROCEDURE

- 14 participants were interviewed individually ;
- administration of the resilience scale of Wagnild and Young (1993), translated by Jourdan-Ionescu, Ionescu, Lauzon, Tourigny and Ionescu-Jourdan (2010). This scale evaluates two dimensions which are self-confidence, confidence in the future and personal skills.
- They were asked to delineate three sections on a basic mandala. These sections represent their past, their present and their future. To color in the mandala circles, a set of 24 felt pens were at their disposal. The interview which followed the coloring consisted of pre-set questions (favorite color, least favorite color, appreciation of different periods of time represented on the mandala), then a time in which to speak freely.



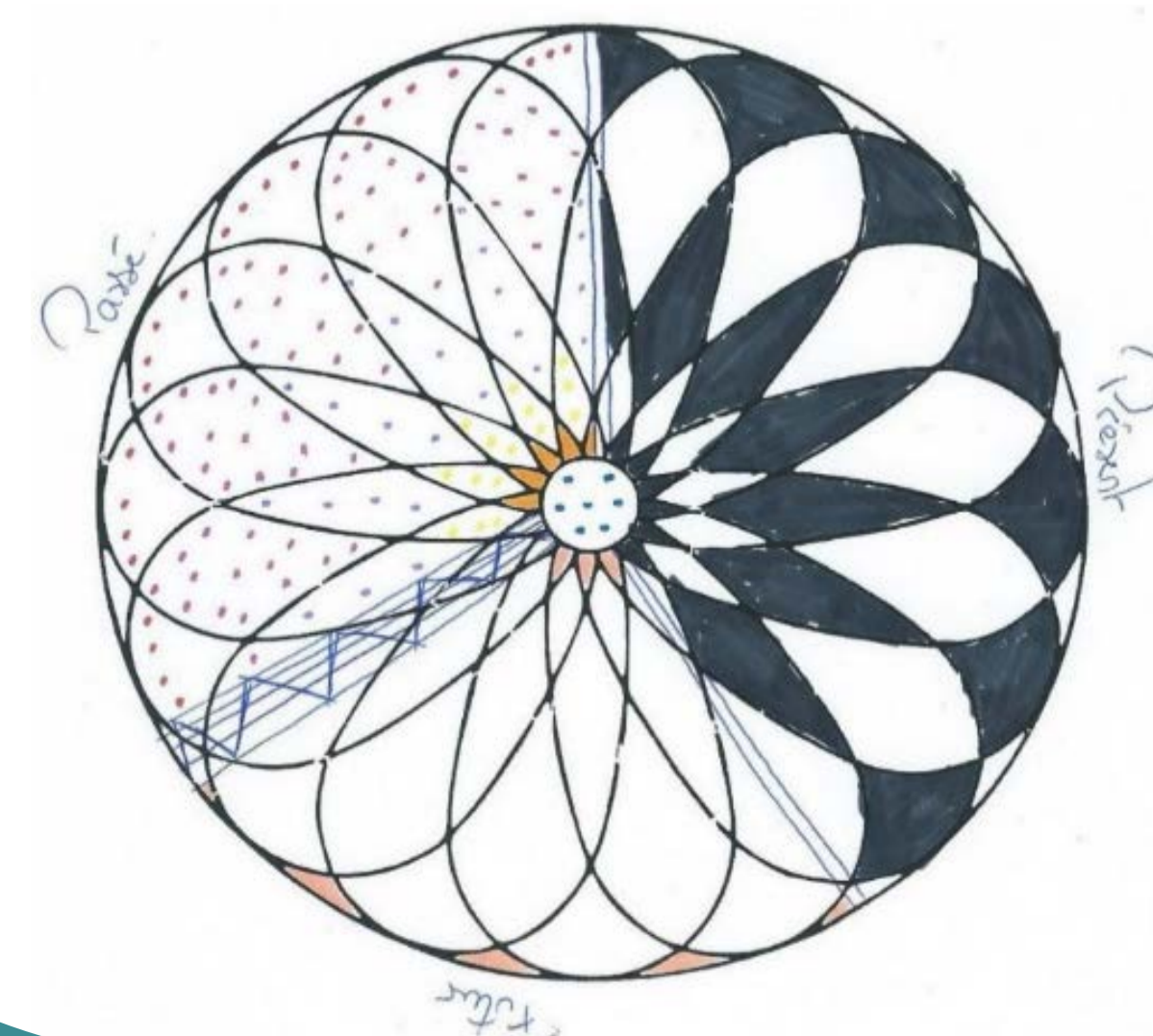
RESULTS



In this poster, the mandalas of two participants representing opposite ends of the resilience scale are presented.

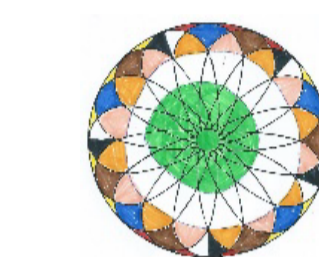
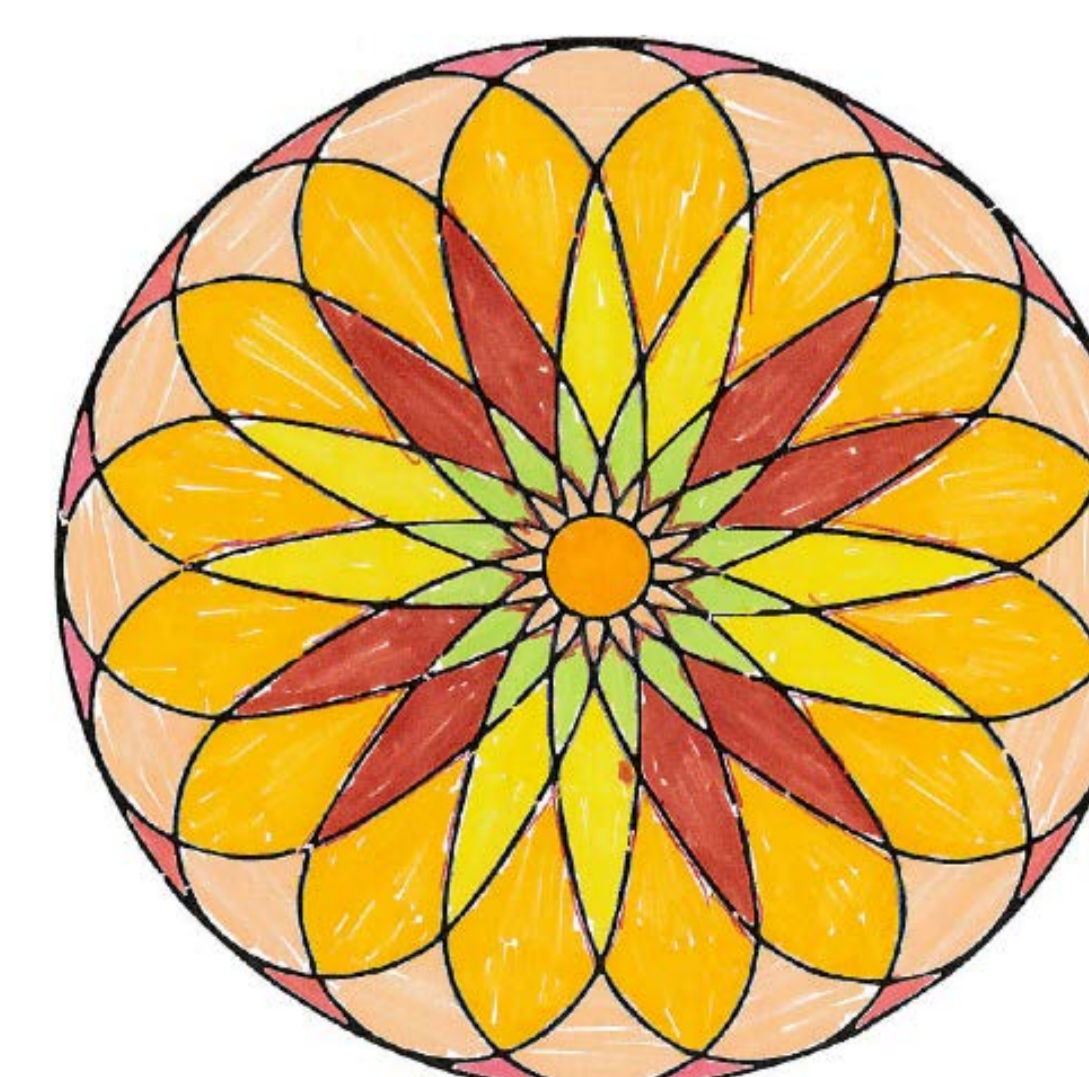
Participant 1

- woman aged 21, single, with Stage II breast cancer;
- Weak resilience level : 95;
- Order and time of establishing stages in her life on the mandala: 1/past (12'23), 2/present (9'45), 3/future (4'30);
- Past : She is unable to recollect events and has no memories, they are like « patterns of unconnected dots without any meaning ». The section representing the past is full of these little dots;
- Present : « I am weary of this illness , I have lost my hair, I have lost my friends, I have lost my job ... My life does not really have any meaning since I fell ill ... I used only black and white because that represents the way I see my life. »;
- Future : « The Future, I am unable to think about it, nor to see it taking shape, I hope it will be better. I hope there will not be a recurrence (silence). All the same, I put in some beige, one really needs a color a bit lighter than black (silence). »;
- The mandala allowed the participants to express their anguish and their serious depressive state linked with their illness, as much in their discourse as in the different time spaces and choice of colors;
- Following the coloring, the patient asked: « Do all the patients react to the illness like me ? I realize I am not doing very well. » Based on these findings, she was allowed to apply for psychological support.

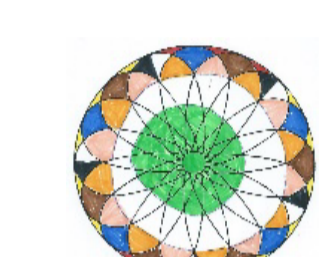


Participant 2

- Man aged 28, single, with testicular cancer;
- High resilience level : 153;
- Order and time of establishing stages in his life on the mandala: 1/past (3'10), 2/present (5'06), 3/future (12'49).
- Here the past is represented by the circle in the center and the primary sections are in a pink color. The present is defined by the green, yellow and red sections. The future corresponds to the orange, and the dark and light pink sections;
- Past : « This is the base of my life, of my person. I am very grateful for what I have been able to live, the events have made me what I am. »;
- Present : « I used green to represent the cancer, like in the comics, you know. I also used red and pink to show the love that is around me, and which I have felt more intensely since becoming ill, I pay more attention to it in fact. »;
- Future : « I have reprioritized my life, I think that the future will be more positive. Of course, I cannot say that everything will be rosy. There will be difficulties which will nuance this teddy bear world, it is for that reason that I used orange, it is an in-between color, for if I have difficulties, in the end they will be seen in perspective. »;
- The choice of colors does not change according to the periods of life. The participant explains that : "at the end of the day, it is all just the continuity of life, it does not matter, it is my path, I accept everything that comes my way. ».



CONCLUSIONS



At the level of the realization of the mandala :

- The situation of the participant with the weak level of resilience underlines the following paradox: adherence to the medical evidence (very positive care outcomes) leads the participant to define the future in a positive light. However, the colors unmask a poor investment (a reduced number of colors; mostly cold colors). The time taken to realize the mandala also reveals a difficult investment in the future (the sections representing the past and the present took two to three times longer). In conclusion, the patient's weak level of resilience is a true reflection of the coloring realized.
- The participant presenting a strong level of resilience gives a particular place to each period of his life, the past is given the least space; the future is the most developed. These periods are all given warm colors, and their arrangement in the mandala follows the time construction of the thread of life. This use of color shows the patient's capacity to position himself calmly in his present and future life. The section to which he devoted the most time was the future, indicating optimism and his important investment. The patient projects himself beyond the period of illness, without however denying its presence. He integrates the cancer as an experience in the process of shaping his life.

At the therapeutic care level :

The realization of the mandala went beyond its potential of expression of a psychic state. In publicizing the relation participant/psychologist, it allowed the patient to take stock of the place of the illness in his life and enabled him to elaborate it further. In the light of this, it seems entirely appropriate to consider this particular use of the mandala as a way of expressing a level of resilience. It is up to the professional to take it into account in patient care and follow-up.