

Influence of Age and Gender on Sandplay Creations

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Bowyer used five criteria in evaluating the trays: (1) area of tray used, (2) themes of aggression, (3) control and coherence of tray, (4) use of sand, and (5) content. Her findings were:

- 1 *Area of tray used.* In the "Worlds" of her normal subjects, Bowyer found that, with increasing age, a greater area of the tray was used. In addition, older children evidenced a firmer sense of boundaries by staying within the edges of the tray more clearly. For example, the youngest subjects, aged two to three, used only a small portion of the tray and ignored the boundaries completely, sometimes placing small heaps of toys outside of the tray. Four- to five-year-olds seemed to be in transition, with some children using a small portion of the tray and others placing toys at intervals throughout the tray. After the age of five, the "Worlds" of the normal population appeared to extend to most of the area of the tray, while the clinical population sometimes used only a portion of the tray.
- 2 *Themes of aggression.* Bowyer studied themes of aggression at various ages. In the youngest age-group (two to three years old), toys were most often poked, flung, and buried. Four- to six-year-olds used dramatic activity, moving toys in the tray while making noises. After seven years of age, children were able to arrange toys to represent aggressive action in the tray, rather than having to actually move the toys around. After twelve years of age and through adulthood, the difference was that subjects seemed to be *cognitively* aware of their aggressive feelings and appeared content to depict these feelings in the tray.
A particularly interesting finding was that the trays of children of the same age showed great similarities below eight years; it was not until after eight years of age that the individual differences in the trays became increasingly apparent.
- 3 *Control and coherence of tray.* Bowyer found that control and coherence increased with age in the "Worlds" of normal subjects. Little or no control was shown by the two- to three-year-olds, whose "Worlds" were chaotic. Some three- to four-year-olds managed coherent detail in separate areas within the tray. From five to ten years of age, fencing increased; ten was the peak age for fencing. After eleven years, there was less use of literal controls (i.e., fences) and more conceptual and symbolic controls (e.g., policemen). Issues of control were also observed in the total Gestalt of the tray after eleven years old, in which complex patterns and themes of control were more often integrated into a whole. For example, topological features such as mountains and streams were included to control and unify the scene.
- 4 *Use of sand.* Bowyer discussed the use of sand by two- to four-year-olds and by subjects over the age of seven. She found that the younger group used the sand for pouring, pushing, and burying. After age seven, the constructive use of sand (creating roads, waterways, and paths in the sand) depended on individual personality characteristics more than on age differences and indicated a mature use of imaginative inner resources to find ways of enlarging or restructuring the tray.
- 5 *Content.* With increasing age, realism increased, the toys were more integrated with the scene, and a time-perspective was often included in the theme.