

상징과 모래놀이치료, 제14권 제3호
Journal of Symbols & Sandplay Therapy
2023, 12, Vol. 14, No. 3, 213-225.
doi <https://doi.org/10.12964/jsst.23013>

**A psychological and legal analysis of the figurines
in the sand picture of a 12-year-old girl induced
into a “marriage” with a man in his late 40’s**

Rachael Kemigisha Juliet Tushemereirwe Rob McDonnell Ian Mc Cabe

A psychological and legal analysis of the figurines in the sand picture of a 12-year-old girl induced into a “marriage” with a man in his late 40’s*

Rachael Kemigisha** Juliet Tushemereirwe*** Rob McDonnell**** Ian Mc Cabe*****

<Abstract>

This article seeks to explore the symbolism of Sandplay figurines in relation to a 12-year-old girl who was induced into a child “marriage” with a man in his late forties. By analysing the Sandplay figurines, this article aims to shed light on the psychological and physical impact of child “marriage” on the child. The narrative expressed through the placement of figurines emphasizes the vulnerability and loss of childhood felt by the child, while also highlighting the involvement of archetypal key figures such as the stepmother, father, step sisters, close relatives and neighbours in the arrangement and the cajoling of the child into “marriage”. These archetypal figures tap into the collective unconscious and are represented in fairytales such as *Cinderella* and in the opera *Madame Butterfly*. The role of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which all African countries have ratified, will be considered. While the UNCRC does not specifically refer to Child “Marriage”, some of the articles can be used to condemn Child “Marriage” and protect child victims from what is a paedophilic practice. In contrast, the African Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), article 21(2), explicitly refers to child marriage, deems it to be illegal and makes several recommendations on how governments can protect and support child victims of this practice.

Keywords: Childhood loss, Sandplay, “marriage”, symbolic representation, human rights, paedophilia, UNCRC, ACRWC

* This article was funded by the Irish based charity, Jung Institute for Free Analysis for Children and Adolescents.

** Lead author, Psychologists in Primary Schools (Ireland)

*** Co-author, Jung Institute for Free Analysis for Children & Adolescents.

**** Co-author, Jung Institute for Free Analysis for Children & Adolescents.

***** Corresponding author, Jung Institute for Free Analysis for Children & Adolescents. (jamesianmccabe@gmail.com)



Copyright ©2023, Korean Society for Sandplay Therapy.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction

Sandplay Therapy has emerged as an effective therapeutic intervention to understand the psychological traumas and experiences of individuals, especially children. Sandplay figurines used in this therapeutic approach, often hold deep symbolic meanings for the child. The choice of figurines and their placement allow a child to activate their own unconscious healing mechanisms. This article focuses on the symbolic interpretation of several figurines, in particular the car as the promised dowry and its symbolic meaning in this context.

The concept of “girl child marriage” incorporates the concept of a “child,” an ambiguous and difficult term to define: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2010) refers to a child as being under the age of eighteen. International legal frameworks have played an important role in creating shared global norms defining and protecting childhood. As early as 1924, the League of Nations, a precursor to the United Nations (UN) identified children as an important and special population. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, set out the below article relating to the fundamental human right of a person (“of full age”) to choose whether to marry or not and if and when to have children. The UDHR also provides that marriage shall only be entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses:

Article 16:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

In 1959, UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. This international agreement confirmed that children had fundamental human rights. This in turn culminating in the UN assigning 1979 as the International Year of the Child. This was the impetus for the introduction in 1989 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNCRC was the most widely ratified treaty in the history of the UN. Except for America, every country in the world has ratified the Convention (UNCRC, 2010).

Marriage” and its impact on the children

Child “marriage”, refers to the formal or informal union of a girl-child under the age of eighteen. A child “marriage” does not involve a religious ceremony or civil registration since it is an illegal activity in most countries. Instead, a ritual similar to the actual marriage, in the opera *Madam Butterfly*, takes place whereby the parents, relatives and neighbours join together to act as a force of approval to encourage, cajole and pressurise the child to participate in their own violation. Child “marriage” can compromise a young girl’s individuation process, their physical and emotional development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at risk of domestic violence. If the “marriage” is to a male youth it may similarly place boys in an adult role for which they are unprepared and may place economic pressures on them and curtail their opportunities for further education or career advancement. Child “marriage” remains a grave violation of human rights and a persistent issue in many societies around the world. Beyond the legal and social implications, child “marriage” inflicts, physical damage and profound emotional and psychological trauma on its survivors.

Worldwide, an estimated 650 million girls and women alive today married before their 18th birthdays (Arora, 2021). One in every five girls is married, or in union, before reaching age 18 while in the least developed countries, 40 per cent of girls are married before age 18, and 12 per cent of girls are married before age 15. Child “marriage” is increasingly recognized as a key roadblock to global health, development, and gender equality, particularly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The uncrc: relevant articles and legal implications

The UNCRC, has been ratified by all African states and serves as a crucial legal framework for the protection of children.

Article 1 of the UNCRC defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” (The UN convention on the rights of the child, 2010)

Article 16 (1) states: No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

Article 16 (2) states: The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 19 (1) states: Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 19 (2) states: Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

As will be seen there was no social programme to support Violet, nor indeed any judicial involvement.

Article 34 states: Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
 - (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- In this instance Violet was coerced into unlawful sexual activity and exploited by being sold into unlawful sexual practices.

While child marriage is not explicitly referred to in the UNCRC, the articles can be interpreted as a condemnation of child “marriage”.

African charter on the rights and welfare of the child (acrwc)

In contrast to the UNCRC, Article 16 (2) of the ACRWC explicitly mentions “childhood marriage”:

States Parties to the present Charter shall take specific measures to protect the child from all forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

These measures shall include:

- (a) the setting of a minimum age of marriage and the raising of the age of marriage to a

level consistent with the full development of the child to protect the child from early and forced marriage.

b) the prohibition and effective elimination of harmful traditional practices affecting the health and physical and mental well-being of the child, including early childhood marriage and female genital mutilation.

Additionally, Article 21 of the ACRWC, specifically sets out the rights of a child as well as setting out a minimum age of 18 for marriage within the confines of an official registry.

Article 21.1 states: Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular:

(a) those customs and practices prejudicial to the health or life of the child; and

(b) those customs and practices discriminatory to the child -on the grounds of sex or other status

Article 21.2. states: Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be eighteen years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Background

Violet (not her real name), was born in September 2010. She does not remember her mother who died when she was an infant. She has no biological siblings. Violet attended primary school and completed school education and expected to attend a secondary school. This continuation of her education has been temporarily interrupted.

Her father remarried to a woman who has three children. Violet believes her step mother rules her father.

Shortly after her 12th birthday Violet began menstruating. She was then induced into a child "marriage". The "marriage", to a man that Violet had never seen before, was arranged by her stepmother and father. She was not asked for permission, nor her consent to any such arrangement. The "groom" told her that even her paternal uncles and some relatives were "in the know". Her relatives were present on the day that she was being taken away to the

1. Different quadrants of the sand tray represent different aspects of the psyche. For example, the upper left quadrant represents the intuitive and psychospiritual function. (Ref: Dr Cliff and Pam Mayes).

Classical religious oil paintings in art galleries often have the sun shining in from the top left hand side. This is a representation of the Spirit. In Violet's case, the top left hand quadrant is empty. It is indicative that sexual abuse of a child not only violates their physical body but is also a violation of their soul.

The attribution of qualities to a quadrant is an art and not a science and the absence of any figurines in a particular quadrant might in this case represent the absence of her mother or a mother figure.

2. A car in the extreme left lower corner: This was the "dowry" that was to be provided to the father in exchange for permitting the marriage to the man. - A car in the extreme left lower corner which the "proposed husband" had promised her parents. The promised vehicle was to be given later; presumably once Violet was acceptable as a "wife". The paedophile never actually handed over the car at the time but that was a promise he had made to Violet's parents.

The car may have been a symbol of the proposed dowry and could be in the form of handing over as a dowry, land, animals or money in return for her being sold into sexual slavery.

A car is a symbol of male "horse" power, for example some bonnets of cars are phallic symbols especially the Italian Bugatti car with its elongated bonnet (Spielrein, 2001).

3. A man standing next to the car is the "groom" to be. According to Violet the "groom" was "an old man in his late 40's."

4. An old man in the extreme right upper corner as the father of the girl.

The man in the extreme right lower corner is Violet's father. Violet said her father is always controlled by the stepmother. She "drags" him to do everything that she feels she wants.

5. In the centre of the tray, there are 5 people (the lady in the middle is the stepmother. The rest are her step siblings. The figurines she placed in the middle of the box, are her stepmother and her children; these figures are the centre of Violet's world. She said they always mocked her, she fetched their water, carried their firewood, cooked for them, and washed for them. Many times, she would be out of school because she was always working. One of the reasons that she thinks her stepmother was giving her away into marriage was

because she always told her that she knows how to do all the chores and so she would manage making her own home. (This is the archetypal story of Cinderella, though with a horrific ending.)

6. The figurine next to the car (with green and yellow colour) symbolizes a bicycle owned by the father. The bicycle is a symbol of self-propulsion but of lowly status compared to a car.

7. The two figurines lying down are dolls of the children of the family. Violet said she did not have any toys to take with her on her journey to her “husband’s” house.

8. The lady next to the dolls represents the girl’s paternal aunt with her daughter who had come to witness the marriage. Violet also commented about the paternal auntie and a neighbour who came to their home the day the proposed husband picked her from their home. Violet placed figurines in the sand box depicting the presence of her relatives “in the whole deal of the marriage”. (This has archetypal elements symbolised in the tragic Puccini opera *Madame Butterfly*, where the relatives gather to partake in the wedding ceremony of the 15-year-old butterfly to the American Naval officer, ironically named Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton.)

9. The figurine in the extreme right lower corner represents the stepmother’s brother. This figure looks like the hulk! A character in a child’s TV program that could transform from an ordinary man into a powerful giant like figure.

10. The miniature in the extreme upper part of the sand box represent the father’s friend who had also come as a witness to the wedding. No doubt the father would need the support of a friend to reassure him about his treacherous behaviour.

11. There are figurines outside the tray. These may represent ordinary passersby, or the governing powers who ignore Violet’s plight.

The Sandplay’s therapist’s interpretation of the figurines

It is probable that given the gathering of relatives, friends and neighbours, that after Violet was taken away by the paedophile there was a party afterwards to celebrate their combined good fortune from Violet’s violation. The car that was promised to the parents is a symbol of wealth. It may not necessarily be an actual car as in Violet’s case, but can represent other valuable items such as land, animals, especially goats and cows are promised as gifts

as and when the "marriage" works. This is a disguised payment of a dowry and a price paid for the "bride". When the intended "groom" is making the payments or the promises, members of the bigger family, like the presence of paternal relatives and neighbours, matters in order to sanction and act as witnesses to the verbal agreement and effectively to give their blessings to this illegal arrangement. This shows that the relatives are involved and have control and authority in whatever deal that they are engaged in. The culture of this African country demands that the relatives are involved to condone this practice because it is believed that their presence also normalises this illegal arrangement. It is possible the brother of the step mother who is symbolised as a hulk type figure would act as the "enforcer" of the agreement.

The presence of the figurines depicting siblings is significant. If it were a compassionate home, the children would not have been allowed to witness their stepsister's humiliation. Similarly, Violet would have been spared her stepsisters taking joy in her humiliation. (*schadenfreude*.)

Transference

Violet's present caretaker reports:

From the time that she came to stay with me, she does not talk much save for a time that I am available and she feels free to talk. Even at school, from the follow ups that I would make, she was always alone and would not talk much. She negatively talks of all men. She needs counselling all the time.

DEALING WITH FEELINGS OF GRIEF AND ANGER.

Violet has not expressed any feelings of loss or grief toward her father and step-mother. In fact she has feelings of anger and resentment towards her Father, Step mother and the neighbours that were present on the day that they were "marrying" her. These are reasonable and healthy reactions and show she is fighting back.

Dora Kalf believes that the sand tray represents a "free and protected space" which can help activate a self healing mechanism which is inherent in all psyches. Hopefully, sand play therapy will allow Violet's soul to shine again.

Countertransference: What violet's situation evoked from her therapist:

“Compared to her childhood, my parents were ever present and knew their responsibility. It made me appreciate them for bringing me up in a functional home. However, Violet's situation reminded me of a scenario when I went to visit one of my closest relatives and he attempted to rape me. In the same way, I felt anger and resentment towards him and all men in general because I felt betrayed by my own relative and from then on, I decided in my heart to hate all men because I felt that all men are the same and are capable of doing anything.

However, when I shared this experience with my parents, they counselled me and assured me that men are different. Some are good and others have evil intentions and this made me feel at peace. I forgave my cousin because he apologized for his ill acts. We reconciled and are now friends.”

Dad and Mum emphasized the need to prioritise education, though I never went to the best schools, my parents instilled in me the fact that material wealth cannot be compared to the life of a child and that instilled in me a very strong belief in justice, equality, and the protection of vulnerable individuals.”

Diagnosis and treatment

This is the first sandtray that Violet has presented. A full clinical assessment has not yet been undertaken. Based on reports and Violet's present behaviour in school, she is suffering from Post-traumatic stress disorder as exhibited by her condemnation and associated fear of all men and wish to distance herself from them. She may indeed now have an attachment “disorder”. The so called “disorders” should be viewed initially as healthy defences to protect her fragile true Self. Sadly she is suspicious of her environment and may have feelings of shame and feel she is in some way responsible for her abuse. This is unfortunately a reaction of some victims of rape. Violet had suffered a betrayal by her father and stepmother. It is hoped that now she is in the care of a kindly mothering figure and is receiving regular therapy from a female therapist that she will form a transference and see both figures as positive maternal role models that will guide her in her individuation process.

Jungian treatment of PTSD involves using techniques such as, puppetry, dream analysis, active imagination and of course Sandplay. These interventions may assist Violet to integrate the fragmented aspects of her psyche. However, more interventions should be offered such as,

Eye Movement, Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR). Perhaps controversially, if the paedophile is prosecuted and imprisoned then when Violet is older she might, as part of a process of restorative justice, be able to confront the rapist in prison and tell her story to him as part of a catharsis. This confrontation might empower her and assist her to gain control over the experience that leads a sense of wholeness.

Cinderella complex

The obvious similarities with Cinderella are that she has a wicked stepmother, a weak father and two step sisters who are unkind to her:

Violet's stepmother is a good example of the shadow archetype. Similarly, in the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel, there is a stepmother who has aspects of the wicked witch and wants to abandon "her" children. Arguably, Violet's step mother has aspects of both, Cinderella's and Hansel and Gretel's step mothers.

However, Violet has been rescued, not yet by a Prince, but by an earth mother and female therapist who are now taking care of her. This meeting with her caretaker and therapist represents her interacting with strong Anima figures who will support and guide her and act as good role models and assist her to access her strong anima which will help her in her individuation process to become a fully functioning person who can assimilate her trauma.

Discussion

Interestingly, the figurines in the sand tray are shadow figures in the sense that they are part of an illegal collective conspiracy to abuse Violet. There is not a decent single figure in the sand tray that is there to protect Violet. It is possible that in the past the practice of child marriages was acceptable and this has remained in the inter-generational collective memory. However, since Violet, knew that this practice was inherently wrong, it is probable that all the participants to witnessing this "marriage" also knew that it was wrong but permitted the truth to remain in their shadow.

It is too early to report any major improvements. Indeed, Violet may in the safety of her present container feel permission to "break down" so she can repair her psyche. Hopefully, her own therapist who was able to survive her own abusive experience may in some way be helpful to Violet. Ideally, her rapist should be imprisoned and Violet be allowed to give a victim impact statement and confront her abuser in order to remove any impression that he was a powerful and rich man. Ongoing sand play therapy, and perhaps eye movement

desensitization reprocessing (EMDR) would assist her to assimilate her experience. The reality is that being in the care of an “earth mother” caretaker will be one of the most beneficial remedies for Violet’s recovery.

Child “marriages” still take place in parts of Uganda. Its as though the legislation outlawing such “marriages” has not managed to suppress the archetypal collective forces that continue to enable such “marriages”. These archetypal forces in Jungian terms are shadow parts of the collective unconscious that still permits the “marriages” to occur. Active enforcement of the law against such unions would prevent young girls being psychologically damaged, perhaps for life: the damage that occurs by forcing an early sexual transition of a child will disrupt their natural process of individuation.

Overall, it may take collective shadow in Uganda time to fully accept the law against child marriages and this will involve a cultural and psychological transformation of society.

Conclusion

By examining the symbolism of all the sand play figurines in this sand tray and the background narrative this article highlights the adverse psychological and developmental impact of the practice of “marriage” on children. Additionally, it highlights the importance of the UNCRC and the AWRCA in providing a legal framework for combating child “marriage” and protecting children's rights.

In order to effectively address this issue, collaboration between mental health professionals, lawmakers, and community stakeholders is necessary to raise awareness, provide support, and enforce existing legislation. Only through such collective efforts can it be hoped to that forced child “marriage” will be eliminated. It is necessary for parents and relatives of these children to be aware that they are condoning and encouraging paedophilia in return for a dowry. Essentially, selling their children into sexual exploitation.

The symbolic figurines within the sand tray provide an understanding of the control, authority, and societal pressures exerted upon this child. The article highlights the need for increased awareness, intervention, and policy measures to address the challenges faced by survivors of child “marriage”. By amplifying their voices, we can contribute to dismantling the systemic barriers and advocating for the protection of human rights for all individuals, regardless of age or gender.

References

- Arora, A. (2021, August 3). *Child marriage: Latest trends and future prospects*. UNICEF DATA. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women new york, 18 December 1979*. OHCHR. (n.d.). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>
- May, C., May, P. <https://education.byu.edu/news/2006/01/01/healing-in-a-box-exploring-sand-tray-therapy>
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. (2003, July 1). <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/ProtocolontheRightsofWomen.pdf>
- Sharma A, Gupta S. Child's right to special care. ICCW New Bull [Internet]. 1991;39(3-4), 12-5 Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12317284/> [cited 2020 Jun 26].
- Spielrein, S. (2001). The motor car - a symbol of male power. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 46(1), 209-210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.00224>.
- The UN convention on the rights of the child*. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (2010, June). https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/information_sheets/files/SummaryUNCRC.pdf ISBN 0-9553005-4-1
- UNICEF. Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2020 Jun 5]. Available from: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/childmarriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Universal declaration of human rights*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Men%20and%20women%20of%20full,consent%20of%20the%20intending%20spouses>.

Received : September 28, 2023

Revised : December 15, 2023

Accepted : December 26, 2023