

SAND

ITS IMPORTANCE, CONNECTIONS & ROLE IN HEALING

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Sandplay Topic Paper #2

October 2, 2018

THE NATURE OF SAND

*Ever shifting, deeply revealing
An insight into what we are truly feeling
Hidden, unwritten
Without words, we say so much
Sand connects us to the earth by touch
In the box we find the story
Sand reminds us of the temporary nature of life
Be willing to show all you cannot say
The picture you create is the deepest part of you
Allow healing to exist all around
Welcome a picture without sound
As the objects glow
A story is told
The nature of sand
May just be
To help us understand.*

-Mark David Cohen, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Sand is considered the most important solid material on planet earth. Every individual, whether conscious or not, has come in contact with sand either in nature, urban areas, the arts, or through sand's symbolic connections to earth, time, and boundaries. In sandplay therapy, sand is a physical, creative, and symbolic medium for psychic healing. In my work as a sandplay therapist I am in awe at the endless ways clients engage and explore their inner selves in the sand. The introductory poem, *The Nature of Sand* (Cohen, 2014), was written by a man who could not find words to express his profound trauma and grief. Yet, like many others, he found healing through the sensory and symbolic language of sandplay. Each person who engages in sandplay brings their own unique approach, hand gestures, body movements, facial expressions, sounds, and non-verbal expressions to the sand. I am fascinated with the relationships clients

have with the sand and the importance it plays in each person's individual healing. This paper explores "sand"; what it is, my personal connections to it, and the roles it plays in life and healing. Sand's symbolic meanings, the ways it is handled and appears in sandplay, and clinical examples will be presented.

My first introduction to sand occurred when I was a young child at the beach in Chicago. During the summers, my mother would take my brother and me to a magical place called Rainbow Beach (See Appendix A). The sand looked like tiny crystals sparkling in the sun as we played at the water's edge. In the sand, life was simple and fun. We were free to play, get dirty, and laugh as loud as we wanted. Toys were not necessary, we were taken in by the world of imagination. We buried each other in the sand, pretended to "dig to China," and collected rocks, stones, shells, soda straws, sticks, gum wrappers, and pop bottle tops to create elaborate villages of sand castles similar to those Carl Jung described of those he built as a child and then again as an adult on the shores of Lake Zurich (Jung, 1963). While my mother was often distracted and involved with her own life's challenges she was happy when we were on sand (See Appendix A). She was present, available, engaged, playful, and relaxed. The sand and the warmth brought out the best in her. I would like to believe that the happiness my mother exuded when at the beach was because she felt grounded and nurtured by the sand and Mother Earth. Today when I think of my mother, I instantly connect with her love of nature and the earth. Throughout my life I have always lived with sand nearby, affirming my deep childhood connection to my mother, sand, and Mother Earth.

WHAT IS SAND?

Sand is created by the erosion of rock, shells, or minerals. Therefore, sand is of the Earth, it IS earth, made from the four basic elements; earth, wind, fire, and water. Sand's texture may be gritty, rough, soft, or powder-like. Grains of earthly material measuring less than 2 millimeters and larger than 1/8th millimeter are considered to be "sand" according to the Udden-Wentworth scale of particle size (Willis, 2013). There are three main types of sand based a grain's original material. Mineral sand is derived from the erosion of rock. Biogenic sand is the result of the break down of past living organisms such as shells and coral. Precipitated sand comes from the degradation of mineral solutions (Greenberg, 2010). Sand is found in almost all geographic locations and varies greatly in color, shape, and texture. Sand's color is the result of its original location and composition. For example; the erosion of volcanic lava is the basis of the black sand on the beaches of the Big Island of Hawaii, green sand found on Lumahai Beach, Kauai, contains the bright green mineral olivine, and microscopic fragments of shells and coral are what create the white and pink sand found in the Bahamas. In addition to the different colors of sand, there are several different types and chemical formulas of sand. It may be made up of silicon dioxide (silica), feldspar, mica, calcium carbonate, glass, various minerals, as well as clear and colored quartz crystals (Castro, 2018). In some environments, buried sand can be transformed back into "sandstone" and then when exposed over time to the elements, erodes and becomes sand again. This cycle has potential to repeat, over and over again (Willis, 2013).

Sand is a primal, formless, natural material that is moved by waves, water currents, rivers, rain, and when dry it is carried by the wind. Sand is found in different shapes depending on the way it was formed. For example, erosion with water creates complex, puzzle piece shaped

grains, whereas erosion from wind creates smooth, round, or oval grains. Sand is often referred to by its place of origin such as beach sand, desert sand, or riverbed sand, or by its composition such as, construction sand, silica sand, industrial sand, or glass sand.

In addition to nature, sand is found around us almost everywhere; on golf courses, baseball diamonds, playgrounds, and in landscaping. It is a basic component of glass, plaster, concrete, cement, stucco, tile, grout, brick, and asphalt. Purified sand is used in the making of semiconductors (Welland, 2009) and are found in laboratory, industrial, home, and pool filtration applications. Foundry sand is used in the casting of copper, aluminum, iron, and steel products which are used to build homes, buildings, bridges, roads, vehicles, and levees. Sand is also used in drilling for oil and natural gas. It can etch glass and plastic, and at high pressure, can remove paint or rust, and is used as a cleaning agent, abrasive, leveling material, and fire retardant. Non-skid surfaces such as painted stairs, walkways, and swimming pools include sand.

Artistically, sand is used in dry sand paintings developed by the Navajo, in decorative terrariums, dish gardens, sand jars, candle making, and as a texturizing material applied to objects and canvas. Sand animation and some specialized performance artists create designs with sand that are manipulated in front of a live audience or photographed and made into films. Sand is the basic material used in sand castle art, sand brushing, sand carving, and sand sculpture. The beach and desert can become natural canvases when they are used to create enormous designs seen from the air, a place to profess ones love, or to offer marriage proposals. And, should a tiny grain of sand make its way into an oyster, a jewel in the form of a pearl will naturally be formed.

After college I worked for a chemical company as a chromatography specialist selling highly purified silica sand for laboratory research applications in drug development, diagnostics,

forensic laboratories, biomedical applications, chemical analysis, the food and wine industry, and blood testing laboratories. As the biotechnology industry blossomed so did the applications for silica sand. I initially chose a career in the sciences to potentially help people. Using sand as a medium for healing the psyche is an application I never imagined. I am moved by the synchronicity of being in the business of “selling sand,” and three decades later, I get to directly help people using “healing sand.”

Arenophiles are people who love and collect sand. They look for sand with different textures, mineral compositions, and origins. Sand’s identity is a glimpse into its history and time. There are no specific rules about what kind of sand should be used in sandplay and therapists who have sand trays may have a special story of how they acquired “their sand.” Since becoming a sandplay therapist, I have collected “my sand” from special places and events. I know that over time, I will continue to collect and add new sand to the diverse sand in my current trays.

SYMBOLIC MEANING OF SAND

Whether we notice it or not, sand plays a number of roles in our everyday lives. Also important are the symbolic associations we have with sand. It connects us to Earth, to the Mother, the Mother within, the feminine, and the collective maternal. “Earth’s connection with the maternal and the unconscious seem to lay the theoretical foundation to how we conceptualize the symbolism of the sand” (Grishko, 2014, p. 67). In native stories, myths, and folklore, Earth is frequently referred to as Mother Earth. “Sand is the border between ocean and earth, symbolizing the element earth, the Mother, the permanent strong base of reality, containing, nurturing, and absorbing” (Steinhardt, 2000, p.88).

Sand is also considered a symbol of infinity because of its seemingly endless number of individual grains. As Blake (1803) wrote, “*To see a world in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour.*” In the Bible, sand is often used to symbolize countless multitudes of something such as; the children of Israel, the enemies of Israel, the thoughts of God, infinite wisdom, God’s understanding, and of hidden treasures (Orr, 1915). An example from Psalms speaks of the thoughts of God in this way, “They are more in number than the sand” (Psalms 139:18 as cited in Orr, 1915). *Footprints in the Sand* (See Appendix A) is one of my favorite inspirational stories. It connects sand as a symbol of infinity to affirm God’s never ending love and omnipresence (Stevenson, 1936).

The passage of time is also symbolized by sand. The phrase “the sands of time” comes from the image of grains of sand flowing through an hour-glass, a physical demonstration that time moves forward and is indifferent to outside forces, including nature.

Sand’s connection to the earth is physically and symbolically grounding, offering a sense of stability and security, yet it is also symbolic of impermanence, indifference, and constant change. The way sand moves beneath our feet when walking or standing at the water’s edge demonstrates this grounding yet shifting experience; the need to slow down and walk with purpose, or “dig in,” to feel the slipping, adjusting, balancing, or trying to get one’s “footing.”

Sand can be associated with dream-like imagery. Most of us are familiar with the mythological “Sandman” from childhood. The Sandman has the special power to put people to sleep and bring good dreams by sprinkling magical sand on one’s eyes. I remember learning that when we sleep we return to the Great Mother or the unconscious (L. Bobo, personal communication, August 13, 2011). Is it possible that the Sandman’s sand symbolically returns us

to the unconscious, to the Great Mother? I have read references to sandplay as being a “waking dream,” which is often my personal experience.

In myths, fairy tales, comic books, novels, and films, sand is often used as a symbol. For example, in the 1960’s Marvel Comics (2013) introduced a new character called “Sandman.” He is a shapeshifter who has the power to transform his body into sand, shaping and dispersing his sand however he wishes, for good or evil. Years ago, I read the science fiction series *Dune* by Frank Herbert. I still have mental pictures of the sandstorms and enormous sandworms that moved like earthquakes under the sand that covers the planet *Dune*. Herbert uses the symbolic imagery of sand throughout, ever reminding the reader that nothing is stable or permanent on *Dune*. In the movie “Woman in the Dunes,” unsettling and sensual images of sand are used to symbolize the uncertainty and vastness of one woman’s quest for her identity (Eggert, 2010).

WHY AND HOW IS SAND USED IN THERAPY

Sand has the ability to stimulate multi-sensory associations to unspoken or unconscious material. It is as if sand invites us to touch it and when we do our senses are ignited to its texture, temperature, dryness, moisture, odor, and its subtle sounds. Sand is malleable and flowing, is unstructured and indifferent to how it is touched, moved, or experienced. It may appear as a flat, two dimensional surface or as a three dimensional landscape.

Several different healing rituals and therapeutic modalities use sand as a medium for meditation or healing of the psyche. The Navajo use sand in paintings created in sacred ceremonies. They consider these sand paintings as a “place where the Gods come and go” (Navajo Sandpaintings, 2011). Tibetan Buddhist monks have a lengthy meditative ritual that takes days of designing and creating an intricate mandala of colored sand. While the mandala is

being created, other monks pray and chant to release the mandala's positive healing energies into the world (Sand Mandalas, n.d.). In both the Navajo and Tibetan practices, the created image is ceremoniously dismantled, the sand is blessed, and then returned to the earth.

Many therapists including art therapists and play therapists have sand trays available to their clients as a medium to work with, either with or without miniatures. Sand tray therapy is a conscious use of sand, water, miniatures, directive exchanges, and talk therapy. Margaret Lowenfeld, a play therapist and the inventor of "The World Technique" was one of the early contributors to Dora Kalff, the founder of Sandplay therapy. Lowenfeld gave the credit for the development of her technique to the children themselves who, she said naturally brought sand, water, and figures together in play therapy (Cunningham, L. 2007). Play with sand and water brings about physical, emotional, and tactile sensations unlike working with other materials such as paint, clay, or free play (Steinhardt, 2000).

Sandplay therapy uses sand, water, miniatures, and a tray with a blue interior made of a specific size to hold the users total vision. A fundamental principle of sandplay therapy came from Dora Kalff's knowledge and study of Buddhism. She emphasized the importance of the sandplay therapist's role in the therapeutic process, teaching that it is the therapist's responsibility to create and hold a *free and protected space* to provide freedom and safety for clients to explore their inner selves and heal through the act of play (Kalff, D. 1986). The sand in sandplay has a vital role in the sensory experience that stimulates the unconscious. Individuation, a process of self-realization, takes place by bringing unconscious material into consciousness. It is through the sand, water, the non-verbal language of symbolic imagery, and an attuned therapist that the client is able to access the unconscious, transform, and change.

Jung believed that The Self has its roots in the elements of the Earth and therefore, the feminine. Sand, an element of the Earth is therefore feminine. The mere act of creating is a natural connection to the feminine. “The primary thrust of sandplay is the reestablishment of access to the feminine elements of the psyche in both men and women” (Weinrib, 2004, p.39). During sandplay there are no rules or “right ways” to play, thus lack of rules or interpretation are experiential and have the quality of feminine acceptance. The feminine qualities of patience and relatedness are accessed when creating in the sand. A large part of modern culture is based on thinking and doing (masculine), rather than feeling and being (feminine). As sandplay therapists, we hold (be) the safe and protected space and sense (feel) the client’s non-verbal expressions in the sand, allowing us to connect with our own feminine side. Sandplay offers the love of The Mother through the sand, the safe and protected space offered by the attuned therapist, and containment is provided by the tray; all which are needed for the inner child to heal and grow.

In the client’s journey toward wholeness, he or she faces opposing ideas, and the dualities of life. During the sandplay process clients have an opportunity to see and hold the opposites within themselves. Jung believed that psychological transformation required a type of sacrifice where the consciousness surrenders its power to the unconscious, making a union of the two. Jung claimed the tension of opposites has an energy charge that creates a living third; a living suspension between opposites that, through the transcendent function, leads to a new level of being and a new way of living (Jung, 1959). Sandplay itself is a dance of opposites. It can connect the unconscious to the conscious, it is both an internal and external experience, it allows the invisible to become visible, and is grounding yet impermanent. The sand also holds its opposites; dry and wet, earth and water, smooth and rough, as well as its behavior of acting more

like water when dry and more like a solid when wet. And when sand is molded it will hold its shape yet once dry, it loses form.

APPROACHING THE SAND IN SANDPLAY

I learned about sandplay as a student, when I read of an interesting method that included a sandbox, sand, water, and miniatures. I was intrigued with the theory, took an introductory sandplay class, and scheduled an appointment for a personal sandplay session. When I arrived, I was mesmerized by the miniatures on the shelves, but uncomfortable about the sand. As a child, I loved playing in the sand, but as an adult, I was self-conscious and anxious. What if I disturbed the orderliness of the shelves, or used water and ruined the beautiful wooden sand box? Since the sand is connected symbolically to the Mother, was my fear directly related to my critical mother? I know that both my mother and grandmother had deep conflicts with their mothers. As mothers, they both were intensely critical and often emotionally unavailable to their deeply loved children. During my own sandplay process, I realized that like me, my mother and grandmother were sensitive and loving women who were intensely connected to the earth and like Mother Earth, we all could be nurturing and highly creative, as well as cold, remote, harsh, and stormy.

I work mainly with adults and teens who often have similar hesitations about touching the sand as I did. I wonder if the collective unconscious brings us together. Like me, many of my clients have seen several therapists yet are still seeking wholeness, have unresolved loss and trauma, have mother issues, and are fearful of touching the sand.

The way clients react to sandplay varies greatly. Sandplay begins with the sand; it is the start of a witnessed journey. The initial engagement might be as simple as just touching the sand or placing a single figure upon the sand. The sandplay process is ignited by directly touching the

sand or indirectly through an object or one's senses. I have observed clients who cock their heads as if they are listening as they create or are watching from a far. They might sit and stare, or move around the tray observing from different perspectives. They may ask questions, tell stories, hum, mutter, click their tongues, or sing. Additionally, emotion may be expressed verbally, or silently by weeping, crying deeply, or by the manner in which the client engages with the sand.

The hands are primary instruments of doing and creating, and can silently convey universal meanings. They are considered lightning rods for psyche energy. "The hand conveys thoughts and feelings that would otherwise remain unseen and unknown. An inner mental picture comes to life through the hands" (Brock, 2014, p. 69). In sandplay, hand movements and gestures are another non-verbal aspect of the client's process. Intensity of feelings, hesitation, acceptance and other emotions might come forth through the way the figures and sand are touched. Each person's sandplay comes from a deep inner place. No two individuals will use their hands in exactly the same way and are part of a personal and artistic expression of one's inner story (Mackrell, 2018). Attempting to interpret the sand tray or the hand movements of the sandplayer would be to bring the whole process into consciousness and the left side of brain where language resides, thereby squelching the non-verbal experience arising from the unconscious to the creative right brain. As sandplay therapists, it is our responsibility to provide the free and protected space. Letting go of our own mental urge to "meaning-make" or interpret while we are witnessing our client's sandplay, honors their personal process allowing unconscious material to rise and their inner selves to be freely expressed. Without interpretation or analysis, noting the quality and feelings felt by the therapist as the sandplayer works the sand may be worth including in our documentation.

MOVEMENTS AND REPRESENTATIONS IN THE SAND

The appearance of the sand in each sandtray as it is being created and once completed is as unique as each individual and is different with each encounter. The sand in the dry tray may appear arid, desert-like, windswept, snowy, transient, lifeless, playful, peaceful, calm, serene, or have a luminous quality. The sand in the wet tray may look churned up, dense, pounded, shaped, muddy, flooded, fluffy, teased, smooth, solid, sturdy, or flattened. Clients may use one or both hands; moving slowly, hesitantly, calmly, methodically, fast, excitedly, with determination, or carelessly. Clients may use open or closed fingers, tools or objects to dig, pile, rake, mold, excavate, build, bury, or destroy. As they work, their faces and body language shift with an endless array of expressions ranging from blank, pensive, serious, agitated, angry, smiling, playful, care-free, and/or relaxed. Sometimes it appears that the client touches the sand just to touch it, as if their senses are being awakened as they caress it, or they are energized by touching the sand, or they may appear that they are just “getting to know” it.

Clients might not touch the sand at all. They may be indifferent to it, or want to avoid it, or are afraid to touch, or may want to use it as a two dimensional canvas, or simply may be content to accept the sand as they found it. “Untouched sand may represent the archetypal good mother, who constantly supports, nurtures, and accepts unconditionally (Steinhardt, 2000).

As I watch client’s hands sweep, scoop, sprinkle, push, or pull the sand, I am compelled to ask if the hand movements used in sandplay are universal in some way? Could the hand movements used in sandplay be connected to the hand motions used by spiritual leaders, such as Rabbis, Priests, Ministers, Buddhists, Native Shamans, or Chiefs? Is it possible that the sand players’ hands move similarly to those used in meditative healing practices such as yoga, Tai

Chi, Qi Gong, or Reiki. Are the hand motions used in sandplay linked to the hand movements used in the dances of American Indians, tribal peoples of other continents, island cultural dances such as hula, or of the silent hand languages of the deaf? I think that exploring these types of connections could be an interesting future research topic. For example, when the hands are cupped and sweep the sand toward or away from the body, I often sense a spiritual energy in the room. When a client gently pulls the sand toward themselves with cupped hands, it appears similar to the way I was taught as a young Jewish woman to use my hands when lighting the holiday or weekly sabbath candles. In this candle lighting ritual, the spirit of holiness is brought toward oneself by cupping the hands and using a gentle circular sweeping motion to wave the light toward the body (Rovovsky, n.d.). Smudging rituals use herbal smoke, bells, and essential oils waved in similar circular movements to cleanse energy or bring spirit close. Sweeping motions are also used in Healing Touch, Reiki, and chakra balancing techniques where negative energy is swept away from the body and positive energy is swept toward the body.

The way the sand is prepared by the sandplayer may be a non-verbal expression of different emotional states. Kalf, M. (2007) offers that flattening the sand could be a desire to control emotions, or a fear from unconscious material, or an obsessive defense. Tapping or pounding the sand may be done to create a base for the placement of objects or it could be an expression of frustration, anger, a need to “hold” things in place, or a desire for solid ground.

When ripples are made with the fingers, I often sense flow. Wavy free formed lines may appear playful and light. Are the fingers open or closed? The use of open fingers may indicate a need to filter and sort and closed cupped fingers may repress the holding of a fragile or delicate idea (Sand Body, n.d.). I have noticed that at times when clients are moving their fingers gently

through the sand with a wistful manner, their head is often tilted to the side as if the movements in the sand are taking them to a memory or a dreamy place.

When lines are drawn in the sand, I note if the tray is divided evenly, unevenly, vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, as well as the client's manner and movements. How gently or deep do they drag their fingers or tool through the sand and do the movements seem deliberate, serious, or introspective? As the client works the sand, does it feel that they are attempting to create order, structure, boundaries, and/or greater containment? A single line, intentionally created may indicate, "Do not cross, this is my line in the sand." In art therapy, straight lines are associated with seriousness and determination. Zig-zag lines are linked to tension and nervousness. Tangled and interwoven masses of lines may indicate confusion and disorder, while wavy lines have a quality of playfulness, curiosity, and fantasy (Steinhardt, 2000).

When clients shove the sand away from their bodies in a pushing type movement, it perhaps indicates a need to clear the way, to create an opening, or to declare, "not here, not now." When a client makes designs in the sand, whether conscious or not, the drawing may be connected to universal symbols. For example, a spiral drawn from the outside swirling in, may symbolize going deep or inward. A spiral made from the inside out, may symbolize expansion, an opening, or an emergence out of one's own depths (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). The symbol of infinity is often linked to the number eight in numerology. Numbers have significance in almost every culture. Numerology is an ancient method of giving symbolic meaning to numbers. If a shape in the sand resembles a certain number, noting those numbers and their meanings in numerology may be useful later when reviewing case material.

As clients shape and build in the sand they may look like a potter or sculptor. A sense of creative energy may fill the room as they mold, carve, pat, smooth, scoop, burrow, pile, and dig. Dora Kalff (1986) taught that as we observe, we see the act of shaping can become an emotionally felt experience leading to wholeness. The flat appearance of the sand may take on texture and dimension. The energy of the client and the room may shift as we see the sand rise, possibly indicating an ascent to higher realms, or when a downward opening is created, we may sense a descent to a deeper place, grounding, seeking guidance, or an expression of sadness, despair, or a symbolic death. Creating in the center of the tray may indicate a need for centering, where as the corners may point to feeling stuck, pushed into a corner, or sitting on the sidelines.

The mound and mountain are symbolic of the Great Mother and the center of creativity. The mountain is where heaven and earth meet and may be associated with revelation, transition, and spiritual ascent (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). If a mound or mountain is built in the center of the tray it may be representation of the Self, and may appear as if declaring, “this is me.” The top of the mountain offers a view of the big picture while still being connected to the earth. A hill may appear like a pregnant belly or a uterus; full of potential and life. Depending on the client’s demeanor and process, a hill may indicate a steep climb ahead or behind, or that something must be or has been conquered. The journey of psychogenic development begins with the uroboric stage and may be seen symbolically in the sand by representations of the earthly features such as mounds, mountains, valleys, and bodies of water (Bobo, 1997). The cave is symbolic of a dark realm or womb, a container for rebirth and transformation (Lucana, 2016). A valley symbolizes earthly depth and inner exploration, the womb, soul searching, discovery from the depths, or

unconscious knowledge. A hole may represent an opening into the unknown, buried feelings, and nothingness (Matthews, 1998).

The burying of items in the sand involves the process of digging, covering, or tucking an item under or inside the sand or an object. The hands may scoop, sift, and pour sand on top of the hidden item. Could these movements symbolic of planting and sowing the seeds for the future, indicate a buried treasure, a symbolic burial, the need to protect something precious, or does it foretell something the client is not ready to see? Is the hiding place cave-like, in a mound, and maybe the hidden item is waiting for birth or rebirth?

When faces, bodies, and body parts are depicted in the sand, they may indicate the client's need for personal expression (Kalff, M. 2007). Imprints made in the sand with the hands, fingers, objects, or tools may be reflective of a need to "leave one's mark" (Steinhardt, 2000). Barriers or walls might indicate a need to protect, contain, or "wall off" something that the client is not ready to face or wants to protect. Creating round shapes may have more of a feminine and emotional quality whereas trays with geometrical, exact shapes may feel more masculine or intellectual (Kalff, M., 2007). Castles and forts are symbolic of the phallus, the Father, and the fulfillment of all positive wishes (Matthews, 1988).

Water is represented in sandplay either by clearing the sand to show the tray's blue bottom or by the addition of water to the tray itself. The place where water meets land may represent the space between unconscious and the conscious. When water shows itself in the sandplay process, it may be an indication of movement, flow, washing, and cleansing (M. Anderson, personal communication, September 14, 2011). The way water is added or "unearthed" by moving the sand to expose the blue bottom of the tray may give us the sense that

unconscious material is rising to the conscious. It may be worth noting how water emerges in the tray. It may be poured directly into the sand or the sand may be formed into a pool, waiting for water. Is water added gently, playfully, haphazardly, with determination, or done to create symbols or designs in the sand? Rivers created in the sand may run in every imaginable direction and may be seen with and without water, or with or without natural items such as stones, crystals, or objects. Kalff, M. (2007) suggests noting if water is confined, blocked, channelled, or open, and if it appears to be flowing toward or away from the client.

IMPACT OF GRIEF & TRAUMA ON THE LANDSCAPE OF THE SAND

Most of my practice is dedicated to clients with complicated grief, loss, and/or trauma. The life's landscape of these clients has been altered forever. They come into therapy trying to make sense of something they cannot explain or begin to understand. These clients are often relieved when I explain that sandplay is a "non-verbal" form of therapy and I will hold a safe and protected space for them to be witnessed and heal. In most cases, they have lost what gave their lives meaning, a sense of belonging, and stability.

Using sandplay to treat clients with profound grief and trauma offers a type of therapy that helps the brain integrate and resolve their experiences. The images and emotions associated with trauma and grief are experienced in the right hemisphere of the brain along with creative expression and making meaning out of life's ever changing events. The left hemisphere of the brain is the home of language, logic, and linear thinking. Grief and trauma are not logical or linearly experienced and the client rarely has words to express their emotions. In the process of resolving trauma both sides of the brain must be treated. By participating in sandplay, the client is able to non-verbally connect both hemispheres of the brain leading to resolution. While

working with the sand, water, and figures, the unconscious is activated and previously locked emotions can be expressed through the power of symbolic language (Siegel, 2015).

Many deeply grieving and traumatized clients, do not want to touch the sand. They are overwhelmed and just scanning the collection of sandplay figures may cause them to sit with their backs to the collection. Kalff, M. (2007) suggests, “reluctance to touch the sand may be fear from unconscious contents or difficulty to the physical side of life” (p.58). At first, sand’s symbolic representation of the impermanence of life may be too confrontative. Grief and trauma freezes the deep inner space. If a client chooses to try sandplay, their early trays may have a lifeless or cold quality. I have witnessed clients depicting traumatic events and natural disasters in the sand such as; erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, snow storms, and collapsing mountains. I have learned that it is best to just sit, witness, and “be” with with the client’s pain while they are in the frozen or tumultuous place. I have also observed that if water is used, it will appear much later in the process, suggesting that a grief and trauma client’s psyche needs time for integration before it is ready to move to a deeper place.

CLINICAL EXAMPLES

Rape can be one of the most traumatic events for a victim to resolve. The trauma may cause long lasting devastating distress including major depression, anxiety disorders, and other psychological challenges. I worked with a 15-year old female, Jessica, who was raped by an acquaintance while at a small party. She never suspected she was in danger and the attack totally blindsided her. Jessica described pervasive nightmares, flashbacks, confusion, anger, and self-blame. At one point she became suicidal, dropped out of school, and needed to be hospitalized. Once stabilized, she started working in the sand. Jessica would sit in front of the dry sand tray,

drop her hands in the sand, wait a few moments and then push, pull, knead, smooth, stroke, then clap and rub the sand off her hands, only to begin again. Jessica rocked her body back and forth while her hands moved deeply through the sand. It appeared that she was in deep communication with the sand. As I held the space, I witnessed her pain silently being expressed in the sand. I felt that Jessica's repetitive movements were soothing her inner soul, the part of her that was so deeply wounded, and leading her towards resolution. "Sand without figures represents the body and the soul lives in the body" (L. Rowland, personal communication, February 10, 2017).

Jessica rarely used figures and at times, would pinch and grab the sand, hold it for a moment then squeeze it through her fingers. I wondered if she was trying to "get a grip," or "get a hold" of herself, or was she begging for release? The tray showed repetitive movements that are often needed for the psyche to integrate and resolve trauma. After much work in therapy and assistance from law enforcement, Jessica was able to confront her perpetrator giving her a sense of validation and empowerment. Eventually, Jessica began socializing again and went back to school.

Trauma can cause a survivor to feel that they exist in a foreign land, exiled, and alone. They often feel empty, powerless, numb, and immobilized. These clients long to have their lives back but may not be ready or know how. I worked with a man named Baxter, who was in his 80's, yet appeared much younger. He was very engaged in his life, which included doting on his wife of 50 years, visiting friends, family, and playing with his grandchildren. He attributed his sound, alert mind; and youthful, fit body to daily exercise and engagement with people. Part of Baxter's daily routine was taking long, vigorous walks around his neighborhood or on the boardwalk at the beach. This was a favorite part of his day because he got to socialize with all

the people and dogs he encountered along the way. All of that ended the morning he was attacked by an untethered pit bull. The dog caused very serious physical injuries requiring hospitalization and rehabilitation. Baxter adored dogs yet after the attack he was terrified of any dog, large or small. Old traumatic events of his childhood, which he thought were healed, resurfaced. Baxter was riddled with nightmares, painful physical wounds, and psychological trauma which led to isolation, depression, and physical deterioration.

Often sandplay scenes created by grief and trauma clients appear hardly touched, relatively empty, and barren. These trays present a visual image of the alien landscape the client may be experiencing. After months of working Baxter, he finally agreed to try sandplay. He began by staring at the tray for a long time, then rose from his chair and approached the shelves of miniatures. Very quickly, he picked only one item, a Norman Rockwell figurine of a barefoot boy walking with school books dragging behind him. Baxter placed the image in the dry tray without ever touching the sand. Baxter then emotionally declared, "I just want to go for a walk, I want my health and my life back!" The image and the energy in the room was filled with both sadness and hope. I wondered if Baxter's unconscious was attempting to ignite his youthful vitality and boost his courage to begin walking and socializing again. This tray was the beginning. The sand, The Mother Earth, the womb, the container, is where the first stage of healing begins (BoBo, 1997). After a few months of sandplay and brief exposure therapy, Baxter's physical injuries healed and he felt strong enough to venture out again. Baxter shifted from feeling that he was a vulnerable, barefoot boy walking through a desolate, untouched, empty environment, to feeling ready to be a part of the world again. Baxter concluded therapy

when he reported comfortably walking and talking his way around his neighborhood and the beach boardwalk, with a new sense of confidence.

I worked with a woman, Annie, whose husband died of cancer. She was deeply grieving the loss of her beloved life partner. She reported that nothing felt secure or familiar, she just wanted life to go back to being “normal” again. Annie understood the non-linear cycles of grief. She sought counseling after the initial shock and numbness wore off and she was flooded with emotions. She needed to process her feelings and scattered thoughts, and slowly began integrating the enormity of her loss. Annie was dedicated to finding her way in her new life situation. She was reorganizing her disorganized internal and external self. After months of working together, she worked in the sand and took her time constructing a long and winding road, twisting and turning through the entire tray. Features such as roads, trails, and tunnels may express being on a journey, passage from one phase of life to another, or moving from the dark to the “light at the end of the tunnel” (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010). The curving roadway she created was carefully formed using water and sand, then she became silent, appeared to drop to a deep internal place, and looked at the tray for a long time. Slowly, she added images that thought made daily life “normal,” such as welcoming friends to her home, visiting others, cooking, shopping, going for a drive along the coastline, and enjoying the seasons change. As Annie added figures, the scene evolved into a depiction of everyday life. Annie was moving through her grief journey with purpose and a strong desire to feel whole again. She finished the scene by adding a magic wand. I think she intuitively knew that something magical was shifting inside allowing her to function better in daily life. “When energies in the form of “living symbols” are touched upon in the personal and collective unconscious, healing can happen spontaneously within a person at

an unconscious level. As a more harmonious relationship between the conscious and unconscious develops, the ego is restructured and strengthened” (Cunningham 1997). Not long after Annie created the tray with “the long and winding road,” a widower joined her grief support group. She welcomed him as a friend, they began spending time together, and were supportive of each other’s separate, yet similar journeys. She enjoyed cooking again, going for drives to watch the sunset, and sitting on her patio enjoying nature. About a year later they married. They each had resolved and integrated their grief and found their “new normal” individually and together.

CONCLUSION

Sand is the most prevalent and utilized natural resource on earth. It is found in many colors, grades, chemical formulas, and has an endless number of applications in our modern world. Sand is used in industry, science, recreation, art, entertainment, and literature. Sand is symbolically connected to Mother Earth, the Mother, the feminine, infinity, time, dreaming, grounding, uncertainty, and impermanence. Several rituals and ceremonies use sand and it is incorporated into many different therapeutic interventions.

In sandplay therapy, the journey begins with the sand, the Earth, and The Mother. Touching and interacting with sand is a multi-sensory and elemental experience. Sandplay is a form of meditation, a “waking dream,” a way of igniting the unconscious, and bringing about transformation. In sandplay, the familiarity of sand to children helps them feel comfortable and secure, and once an adult’s anxiety and self-consciousness abates, the sand gives them freedom from the confines of language and threat of judgement. Clients often shift from avoiding or not touching the sand, to working “on it,” “in it,” “through it,” “under it,” and then, we have the

honor of seeing the sand “working on them.” Clients often begin sandplay declaring, “I just don’t get it?” and my heart warms when they finish saying, “Wow, I’ve got a lot to think about!”

As sandplay therapists, we witness the movements of the sandplayer; each turn of the hand, each motion forward and backward, each pull and push, every movement that creates the landscape of the sand, and how each figure is viewed, touched, collected, and placed into the tray. The collection of a client’s hand movements are expressions of the inner self, witnessed by us as each sand scene is created. We have an opportunity to learn from the way our clients use their hands, the sand, water, and miniatures during the course of their sandplay process. The client’s hand motions and the way we respond internally to those movements, as the client’s sandplay evolves, are additional non-verbal aspects of sandplay. Also, the hand movements in sandplay may have universal connections to other spiritual, healing, and ancient practices. Without analysis or assigning meaning, I suggest including these observations for later review or further study.

The sand in sandplay is the catalyst that starts the process and remains throughout. Water may or may not be used, the miniatures and their placement changes, the client may choose to work in a different trays, or may even change sandplay therapists. As sand is ever changing, the sand in sandplay scenes continually changes, yet SAND is present in every sandplay; it is the constant element. We witness the miracle of transformation and psychic healing right before our eyes and the eyes of our clients. I concur with the introductory poem’s conclusion, “*The nature of sand, May just be, To help us understand*” (Cohen, 2014).

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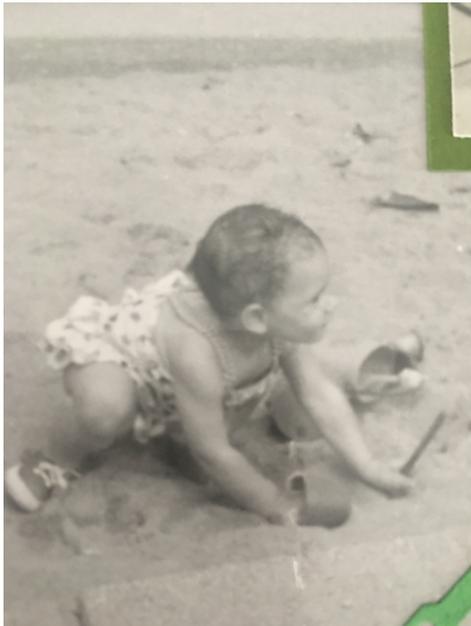
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Appendix A



Myself and my mother, Rainbow Beach, 1958



My mother and myself, Pipeline, Oahu 1987

Appendix B

Footprints in the Sand

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.
This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord,
“You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there has only been one set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?”
The Lord replied, “The years when you have seen only one set of footprints,
my child, is when I carried you.”*

Mary Stevenson, 1936