

Children's Drawings with Genitals: Art Works from Children Who Co-Sleep with Adults

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Abstract

Children's drawings have been used by several therapist as a rare window into the subconscious of the child. One area which has benefitted much from this is sexual abuse of children. Several therapists agree that the presence of genitals in a child's drawing is a strong indication of a possible abuse. However, these recommendations do not speak much of the social background of the child who produced the drawing. It was therefore necessary to find out whether the presence of genitals in the drawings of children who are in environments where mother showed breasts in the open during breastfeeding; and grandmothers seldom covered their chests. The study was conducted in two metropolitan areas in Ghana, one in the northern part and the other in the south. Children were asked to draw their families and these drawings were screened for genitals. Those which had genitals were separated and these children were taken through processes to understand the why genitals were present in their drawings. The study concludes that environment has influence on the drawings of children and when parents expose genitals to children in the environment without abusing the children, these genitals will find their way in the drawing of the child.

Keywords: co-sleep, human figure drawing, kinetic family drawing, genital

1 Background and statement of the problem

Globally there has been increased attempts to use the drawings of children to diagnose issues that affect them for which they might not be bold to express verbally (Koplewicz & Goodman, 1999). One of such areas of critical interest to researchers is the sexual molesting of children. Some therapists have proposed indicators which when present in a child's drawing gives a strong indication that the child might have been sexually abused. Such indicators include breasts, vagina, and penis. The placement and the detailing of the particular genital also give some clues. However, it could be said that most of these studies were performed in cultures where children seldom co-slept with parents and where elderly women such as mothers or grandmothers probably never exposed their naked bodies to children. In some societies in Africa, children co-sleep with parents and in some cases are present when parents are dressing in the room. Also, elderly women in these societies often perform duties in the home with only a cloth around their waist without covering the breast area. These exposures have the tendency of influencing the drawings of the child since children tell and interpret their life experiences through drawing (Enti, 2008). Due to these, it was the target of the researchers to find out whether drawings of children which have genitals in them had any bearing on child sexual abuse in societies where children co-slept with parents.

1.1 children's drawings

Children's drawings has been used as a window into the innermost part of the child. Children at every stage have peculiar style of representing the human figure. A study of children's drawing by DiLeo (1977) revealed that children between birth and 4 years scribble spontaneously and circles tend to dominate around ages 3 and 4. Between ages 4-7, the child draws what is inside him/her and not what is actually seen. The child from age 7 can now draw with more realistic proportions of the human figure. Major deviations from these stereotypes raise eyebrows for art therapists. The drawing of genitals, mostly breasts, by children is believed to be a major indication of sexual abuse by many researchers (Pardeck, 1989; Faller 1996; Malchiodi, 1998; Weiner, 2003)

Children tell a lot in their drawings than they would express verbally. During the drawing process of the HFDs children put enough clues in each drawing that indicates whether they are being abused or not. Peterson, Hardin & Nitsch (1995) used a qualitative system to identify some indicators in HFDs of children that are important in screening for sexual abuse. They were statistically separating abused children from non-abused children in a population of 842 children between the ages of 6 and 10. In the study, it was revealed that children put indicators in their drawings. Out of all the indicators, seven occurred frequently throughout the drawings of abused children and these they termed the "serious seven" indicators. After the study, it was realised that *explicit drawing of genitals* was statistically significant among the other indicators. They found out that 15.8% of molested children drew genitals in their HFDs, while less than 0.5% of all other children included this in their drawings. 14.7% of molested children *concealed genitals*. They also found out that 10% of molested children omitted the genital regions in their HFDs.

The drawings of children from societies which are highly developed and sophisticated reflect the kind of societies these children reside. In the same manner, when children from societies where children have their own

bedrooms separate from parents and other siblings; where parents and grandparents do not walk half naked or older siblings/parents do not bath with younger children, produce drawings which have a lot of genitals in them, it raises questions. It might however be perfectly normal for children from developing societies where mothers breastfeed in the open and where grandmothers seldom wear blouse to cover their breasts, to produce drawings with genitals in them. This assertion is based on the understanding that children draw what they experienced in their daily life (Enti, 2008; Adjei, 2012)

Children from developing societies have not developed their drawing skills much and hence try to represent the essential parts of the body in their drawings without necessarily flattering their drawings. In a study by Martlew and Connolly in 1996 (Berk, 2006:p235) in the Jimi valley in Papua New Guinea, it was found out that 10-15 year old children produced scribbles which are comparable to the drawings of preschool children in developed societies. In the human figure drawings of the children “sticks” and contours were used to represent the human figure. The children represented the heads, hands, legs and in some cases stomachs which perhaps are the most essential body parts that the children are used to.

1.2 Human Figure Drawing (HFD)

This is a projective analysis and it is generally considered as the child’s representative of the self. The qualitative hypothesis is that when a child is asked to “Draw a picture of a person”, thus a whole person and not sticks or portrait, the child projects himself/ herself into the drawing of the human figure (Peterson, Hardin & Nitsch., 1995). The HFD relates intimately to the impulse, anxiety and conflict characteristics of the individual producing the HFD (Machover, 1955). How well a drawing is composed is of great importance to the qualitative method, these include the formal structure of the drawing, placement, thickness of lines and even pencil pressure. According to Machover (1955), emphasis should be placed on all aspects of the body parts including size, shape, position and erasures. However, children at different developmental stages approach drawing differently. To effectively analyse the HFD requires that one takes into account the developmental stage of the child who drew the HFD. The work of DiLeo (1977), is of great importance here. He documented the normal developmental stages in a child’s art. He observed that children between birth and 4 years scribble spontaneously and circles tend to dominate around ages 3 and 4. Between ages 4-7, the child draws what is inside him/her and not what is actually seen. The child from ages 7 to 12 can now draw with more realistic proportions of the human figure and from age 12 onwards, the child lose interest in drawing.

1.3 Kinetic Family Drawings (KFDs)

The Kinetic Family Drawings is the child’s interpretation of himself/herself with his/her family in an activity. The aim is to explain the actions and indicators within the drawing to assess the presence or absence of support from the family (Peterson, Hardin & Nitsch, 1995). This method of analysis was first developed by Burns and Kaufman (1972). In the KFD process, the client (child) is asked to “Draw everyone in the family doing something”, Burns and Kaufman found out that the KFD helped uncovered problems with self-esteem, body image and affective status of the child as well as displayed problems in the family or home. The KFDs often reflects primary disturbances much more quickly and adequately than interviews or other probing techniques (Burns & Kaufman, 1972).

The KFD employs both qualitative and quantitative method for the analysis. The examiner looks initially at the qualitative aspect of the drawing which includes the feelings or emotions that the drawing evoke, followed by the size, shape and rendering of family members, whether there are distortions or not, and finally the examiner employs quantitative method to analyse the presence or absence of actions with negative aspects (aggression, weapons, fear or anxiety) treatment of figure and styles (slanting figures, encapsulation, compartmentalisation and barriers).

2 Materials and Methods

A qualitative research method was chosen for the study with emphasis on descriptive research. The study was conducted in two regions of Ghana, namely: the Greater Accra region and the Upper East region. In the Greater Accra Region, Ashaiman Metropolitan area purposefully was selected due to the cosmopolitan nature of the settlements in the area. Four schools were randomly selected for the study. In the Upper East region, the Bolgatanga Municipal area was selected since the people in this area had families who co-slept and two schools were also randomly selected. Table 1 gives a graphical representation of the respondents for the study.

Table 1: Population distribution of respondents

Region/ Metropolitan area	School	Number of respondents
Greater Accra / Ashaiman Metropolitan Area	Methodist Schools Complex	26
	Zenu No. 1 Junior High School	30
	Zenu No.2 Junior High School	27
	Afa Cambridge International School	28
Upper East / Bolgatanga Municipal Area	Kulbia Primary and Junior High School	35
	St. Anthony Primary and Junior High School	37
	Total	183

The study involved children between the ages of 7 to 18 years as a result permission letters were taken to each school to seek the consent of the head teachers before the study begun. The children in each drawing session were provided with pencils, a set of crayons, markers and white A4 sized bond sheet. All the children started their drawings with pencils before proceeding to the use of any of the colouring materials of their choice. Before each drawing session, the children were asked to write their names, ages, and classes at the back of the sheets. Some of the children who could not write were assisted to do so.

The study involved the use of two main kinds of project drawing techniques; Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD) and Human Figure Drawing (HFD). For the KFD, the children were asked to draw their immediate families in any activity. Averagely, the children used 40 minutes to finish each drawing session in the KFD. The HFD's were also produced with themes such as "draw yourself in any activity", "draw your father alone", and "draw your mother alone". The drawings yielded 549 drawings. All the drawings were gathered and screened. All drawings included genitals were separated from the lot and this yielded 18 Drawings. The researchers analysed the drawings using eclectic of techniques. First the initial feelings evoked by the drawings were recorded. Looking at the drawings, the researchers took note of the type of genitals displayed in the drawing, be it breasts, penis or vagina; the position of the genitals whether it is proportionally placed or not; the size of the genital in relation to the rest of the body; how the genitals have been treated, whether emphasis has been placed on the genital or not; and whether the genital is placed on the clothes of the person or on the naked body.

The second stage in the analysis was to interview the children individually on what they had drawn. The children were asked to identify the people in the drawings. Also, they were asked to tell what the person(s) was (were) doing in the drawing. The children were then asked questions relating to the genitals in their drawings. Where it mattered, the stories revealed by the children were confirmed by informers which included the teachers in these schools.

3. Interpretation of findings

The children from the Ashaiman metropolis produced bigger figures with bold line, forms and emphasis in some cases were laid on certain body parts and accessories such as hair styles and clothing designs. They also had well demarcated body parts as well as were able to use the colouring media better. The drawings in some cases revealed the city life which can be found in the metropolis. On the contrary, the children from the Bolgatanga municipality made drawings which showed timidity and fear. They used moderate accessories for the dresses in their drawings and averagely produced smaller figures. Only breast were indicated in the drawings from Ashaiman Metropolitan area. Breast, penis, scrotum and vagina were all seen in the drawings from the Bolgatanga municipality.

3.1 Drawings from Bolgatanga Municipality

Figure 1 is a KFD of a 12 year old child from Sumbrungu. In the composition, he has drawn his father, mother, sister, brother and himself. The male figures are lined up at the top of the paper whilst the female ones are at the bottom. The male figures are in shirts with buttons on the front opening tucked into their trousers. The noses of the figures are big and the fingers and toes are not well drawn. The figure with father written beside it has the left hand holding something with the shape of the letter 'T'. There is also a thick short line with two circles at each side drawn between the thighs of the figure. The figure has a zigzag line at the left side of it with only one eye. The child explains that the father is old and uses walking stick. He also explains that the thick short line with the two circles around it is the penis and testicles of the father. On the issue of the head, he was trying to draw the side view of the father's head. The features on the father in the KFD are all present in the HFD of the fathers as shown in figure 2.



Figure 1: A drawing showing breasts, vagina and penis



Figure 2: A drawing of father showing penis and scrotum

The figure with mother written beneath it had two circles at the chest area with a dot in each. Also there is a semi-circle at the waist area of it. He indicates that the circles are the breasts of the mother while the semi-circle is the vagina of the mother. A further enquiry revealed that the whole family co-sleep in the same room and the child indicates that he often see the nakedness of both parents when they are dressing or undressing.

Figure 3 is a Kinetic Figure Drawing of a 12 year old boy in Basic School class 2. It is a family of five consisting of himself, brother, sister, father and mother. The heads of the figures are in frontal view except that of the father whose head is in profile view to the right. The upper limbs of the children are apart whiles that of the mother are on her waist and the father's left hand is bent at an angle towards his right. The feet of all the figures are turned towards the right except the drawing of himself which are turned toward the left. The figures of the mother and the sister have circles at the chest area with dots in them indicating breast. He explains that the circles indicate the breasts of the mom and sister. He says the sister is older than him but they sleep together and sometimes bath together. These activities therefore exposes him to the nakedness of the sister. When asked if he has had any sexual abuse in the past, he responded in the negative.



Figure 3: KFD of a family of five showing breasts

3.2 Drawings from Ashaiman metropolis

In the detection of sexual abuse indicators in children's drawings, Peterson, Hardin & Nitsch (1995) suggested that the presence of genitalia in a child's drawing could be a positive indicator of abuse in Western culture. Some of the drawings of the pupils indicated genitals but interviews with these children discovered that the children either wanted to indicate the female sex by using the breasts or because they have been exposed to the nakedness of their mothers and/or elder siblings in the homes, the breasts of a woman is almost always shown in female figure drawings.

Figure 4 is a human figure drawing of a 13 year old girl from Zenu No 1 JHS. The drawing is a girl with breasts showing through her dress and wearing a red belt on violet trousers. The hands of the girl are rigidly stretched beside her. Upon an interview with the child, it was established that the drawing depicts a woman she saw in the Ashaiman Township with her breasts almost popping out of her brazier. The girl however did not indicate why she chose to draw this particular woman whom she knew not.



Figure 4: A girl portraying a woman with breasts



Figure 5: The drawing of breasts in children's expression of womanhood

Figure 5 is the work of a 16 year old girl. The drawing is relatively below the developmental level of the girl. She has the longest neck compared to the other two figures. The hands are straight without joints except the left hand of the father which is bent at the elbow and all the feet are turned to the right. The mother and herself have breasts in the chest area. The three figures again have similar attire from the waist to the knee level. The female figures have two circles at the chest area with a dot in each. She explain that, those are the breasts of the mother and herself. The mother is wearing a hat while she has a hair style which is not covered. During an interview, she made it clear that women have breasts which could be seen even when they are dressed, so when drawing female figures she prefers to indicate that.

Figure 6 is the KFD of a 12 year old girl who is depicting her mother, father and herself in the drawing. In the work, she uses breasts to identify the women in the work. A look at her breasts and that of the mother reveals that her breasts are relatively smaller and rounder than that of her mother. A talk with her established that she simply brought in the breasts because she knows that women have breasts and these protrude on the chest even when they are dressed.

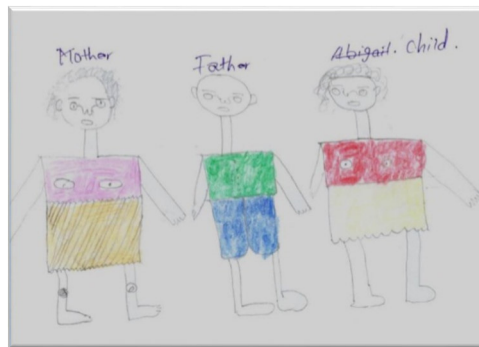


Figure 6: A family of three with the women showing their breasts.

Figure 7 is a Human Figure Drawing of a 10 year old girl. In an interview with her, she indicated that the drawing depicts herself dressed for a programme with her hand bag to match her dress. She stresses that the breasts in the drawing is not an indication of her being sexually abused but rather to indicate that she has big breasts.



Figure 7: A girl depicting breasts with legs wide opened

The interviews with the children, teachers and some parents from the Bolgatanga Municipal area revealed that even though it is a requirement for children learn how draw during the creative art lesson period, this was not so. The teachers attributed this to lack of learning materials for the pupils to practice with. In the homes, children had little opportunity to practice drawing since the parent claim the children do not have drawing materials. This deficiency could be seen in the drawings as compared to the drawings from the Ashaiman Metropolitan area where some children had better opportunities at drawing. Children from less endowed homes / families share the same bed rooms with their parents and other siblings in Africa and other parts of the world (Damon, et al, 2007; Moorcroft, 2013). This exposes them in some cases to the nakedness of the parents or other siblings in the house. In some areas in Ghana, children bath with parents and other older siblings. In the traditional houses visited, elderly women and mothers rampantly expose the upper parts of their body while they do household chores or chatting. Also, nursing mothers rarely cover their breasts when children are around during breast feeding. These scenarios expose children to genitals in the environment and as such it might not be surprising for children to include these genitals in their drawing of the human figure when asked to draw any human figure. As has been pointed out by Wakefield & Underwager (2014), though drawings may be useful in diagnosing a child who has suffered an abuse, the account of the child is crucial in understanding the drawing which will lead to uncovering the challenges of the child.

4 Conclusions

Children's drawings are a representation of activities that occur repeatedly in the life of the child in other words, children produce what their eyes consume. When children are asked to draw on a certain theme, they will draw images or scenes that they have been exposed to on countless number of times which have formed an imprint on their minds. Children who draw genitals in the HFD and KFD may have been exposed to these genitals in their environment be it in the home, school or playground. Culturally, children in Ghana from less endowed families are most often exposed to the nakedness of their parents and siblings and these are highly represented in their art

works.

The drawings of children alone is not enough grounds to draw conclusion but verbal interrogation of the child vis a vis the cultural and social environment within which the child lives needs to be taken into account. Also information about the child through informers are helpful in knowing the child.

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