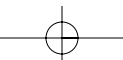
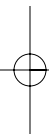
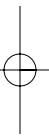


PART ONE

GAMES TO ELICIT
COMMUNICATION
AND FANTASY
EXPRESSION



CHAPTER ONE

Using the *Imagine* Game as a Projective Technique

HAROLD F. BURKS

The *Imagine* game is constructed to be a psychological tool whose functions are based on the projective analysis and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal observations stimulated by fairy tale symbols together with an investigation of the related affinity given these mythological motifs.

Why concentrate on fairy tale symbols as a basis for acquiring significant projective content?

To begin, fairy tales apparently are faithful and amazing chronicles of imperative psychological stages occurring in human development (Bettelheim, 1976). Further, they seem to arouse more emotional responses than do other kinds of stimuli. While it is true that humans are compulsive anthropomorphizers (Budiansky, 1999)—always on the lookout for behaviors (animate and inanimate) that imitate, even superficially, human social phenomena, such as bravery, loyalty, reciprocal love, anger, and jealousy—some types of stimulation elicit more projective material than others do. It has occurred to me that placing a game setting in an old western pioneer town would supply players with opportunities to relate to many characters of that period: cowboy, Indian, saloon keeper, sheriff, mayor, and so on. But it is my impression that stories of the Old West are learned later in development and do not carry the emotional significance

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attributed to fairy tales and myths, which are related to children at early and impressionable stages of living. The symbols in fairy stories (human and otherwise) excite keen interest because listeners intuitively understand inherent mythological meanings. For instance, small children recognize the signification behind the story of the three pigs. Age brings smarts. The littlest pig is stupid—making a house out of straw that can be blown away at the first sign of stress. The next pig, being older, is brighter; he builds his (psychological) defenses more sturdily. The most mature pig, because he erects the strongest defenses, is the one who will survive when things get rough.

Are fairy tales shared unconscious fantasies? Some researchers (Bettelheim, 1976; Heuscher, 1974) believe they are. Beneath the shimmer of castles, kings and queens, trolls and elves, fairy tales carry the accumulated wisdom of the ages and teach solutions to the deepest turmoils of the human spirit. Further, the themes in the stories symbolize universal concerns humans find hard to face in isolation. Sharing troubling preoccupations is comforting. The *Imagine* game takes fairy tale symbols, uses them to activate and nourish imagination, promote creative thinking, and increase opportunities to resolve difficulties, all in the company of others.

The *Imagine* game employs several procedures to elicit projective responses. These techniques include:

Verbal methods. Players can be asked questions (either oral or written) about the meaning of game board symbols. Of course, verbal techniques presuppose that subjects possess adequate language skills and can hear or read words. Users of *Imagine* will find the projective queries quick and easy to administer.

Visual methods. Much like the Rorschach test (Rorschach, 1949) and the Thematic Apperception Test (Murray, 1943), the *Imagine* game employs two-dimensional visual stimuli requiring verbal responses. The interpretation of the replies depends, naturally, on the theoretical orientation of the clinician and on the purpose of the investigation. No normative studies or scoring systems have been established. Clinicians must intuitively analyze contents for understanding moods, attitudes, and conflicts.

Other methods. The astute diagnostician should be aware that projective material can be derived from *Imagine* game play through techniques

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other than verbal or visual. Some youngsters express themselves by drawing. They wish to copy the game board figures and are encouraged to do so. The drawn figures can provide additional projective data. Other children will reveal themselves best through physical movement (which is also encouraged). Finally, when youngsters write down stories the clinician will seek meanings not available in previously outlined methods.

Just like any other projective technique, the *Imagine* game, as an adjunct diagnostic and therapeutic device, is not suitable for use with all subjects.

GAME DESCRIPTION

The *Imagine* game is composed of a large game board (17.5 × 29 inches) with 40 dispersed figures (human and otherwise) from fairy tales and mythology. The board and images are in color. A game trail or path shaped like a four-leaf clover is printed on the board. Players begin the game by placing colored plastic markers in the middle of the board, on top of the Wise Wizard. Participants employ the path to advance or go back in any direction by counting out the number of spaces indicated on a thrown dice. Wherever a player lands, instructions on the space tell the person either to do something directly, such as "Use the Amazing Telephone to talk to anyone on the game board," or to draw a card from the Imagination or Pretend deck of cards. These cards have printed directions that instruct the players to do something such as "Tell a story about the Flying Horse."

Players follow the directions on the board or on the cards only if they choose to. A player who does not wish to participate simply says "I pass." If other members decide they would like to share in the question turned down by the original player, they ask that individual for permission to do so. Even if the original player has obeyed the board request, he or she may want to grant permission to others to talk about the subject of the board request. When a player has completed his or her turn, another participant may inquire, "May I ask a question about your answer?" The original player may accept or decline the request, but even when the question is accepted, the first player is not required to answer.

Players are urged to talk but are cautioned not to interrupt each other.

Directions for participating in the game are outlined on the inside of the box cover. In general, these instructions permit great scope in player

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actions (only answer as you desire, come and go as you wish, move about as you like, etc.).

The *Imagine* game was constructed with a number of psychological and educational beliefs in mind (Burks, 1993, 1999), all designed to encourage player participation and creative thinking. Participants are asked to:

Understand that “winning” or “losing” is not possible.

Fantasize at will.

Refrain from negative monitoring.

Listen carefully to story output of others.

Applaud the efforts of others.

Play or not play the game as desired.

Leave or come back to the game as desired.

Search imagination.

Play in a spirit of fun.

Use humor whenever possible.

Help one another.

Look over a large number of possible answers.

Act out stories physically, if desired.

Draw game board figures, if inclined.

Write down stories, if wished.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In tracing the background and rationale for the *Imagine* game (Burks, 1993), I feel it proper to give credit for its early construction to a small 8-year-old boy named Sammy. Sammy was a patient under my treatment. When I first saw him he was residing in his fourth foster placement home; the first three foster families had given up because of his behavior difficulties and the present foster parents were about ready to call it quits, too.

Sammy and I quickly became good friends. During office visits he thought it only right he tidy up the room, set out the refreshments I provided, and help in any way he could. I often felt as though he had adopted me. My part of the bargain was to go to bat for him by instructing the foster parents and school personnel about the nature of his emotional problems and how I thought they could be handled better. Whenever he got into trouble at school, Sammy and I would sit down with the teacher to

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discuss problems and misunderstandings. The teacher was happy to cooperate. I think she, too, had a soft spot in her heart for Sammy.

Sammy was intensely interested in a game I was trying to devise using fairy tale symbols.

In a corner of my office I placed the cut-out symbols (figures and objects) of the most famous fairy tales (Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, etc.) on a table. As children came in for conferences I would ask them to recall the stories and to improve on them, if possible, or to try to continue the stories beyond their usual endings and to formulate different conclusions to the tales. None of these attempts, in my opinion, produced satisfactory results.

It was Sammy who taught me what needed to be done. When he studied the symbols he was distressed to find no mother figure he could use in a story he was trying to make up (he was always trying to find out about my own mother and whether she looked after me), so he reached over and preempted the queen emblem used in another tale and put her in his tale. He did the same with a figure of a giant, incorporating it in his story as a manifestation of a threatening father. To symbolize a dangerous child (Sammy was afraid of the children at school), he utilized the angry troll.

I got the point. The mythological symbols should be scattered about a game board to be employed whenever needed in story fabrications. Each figure, hopefully, should be designed to represent a particular feeling, attitude, or need, and game participants should be encouraged to use disparate symbols as required for stories.

As soon as Sammy caught on to possible projective meanings of fairy tale symbols, he became even more creative. He insisted that a child figure be included that showed someone "scared" (as he put it). I suggested we put in frightened-looking boy peering over a wall. He agreed, saying that the wall (psychological defense?) could protect the boy. For some reason that now escapes me, the wall was to be called the Lonely Wall. We discussed children who could be lost, and so, on the game board, a small boy and girl are shown wandering down a path. The king and queen figures especially intrigued Sammy. He insisted they be shown next to each other. "Mothers and fathers should stay together," he said emphatically. The house (castle) should be near children of the royal pair so they could "talk to the mother and father whenever they needed to." Sammy was conflicted about the Candy House. He wasn't sure whether or not a person should try to eat as

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much of the house as possible when coming on the dwelling in a forest because, as he put it, "If you don't, you may not find the house again when you leave it and then you would go hungry."

SYMBOL PLACEMENT

Should the fairy tale representations be placed haphazardly on the game board? In some cases, I thought not. For instance, the prince and princess, representing a more immature level of sexual development (i.e., they had not yet established completely, at this adolescent period, the ideal melding of feminine and masculine characteristics), should probably be separated. If players wanted to bring them together, they could do so. The king and queen, having attained a more exalted state of sexual union, should, as Sammy indicated, be placed next to each other. The Talking Tree (guiding father) could have a childlike, irresponsible monkey hanging from a branch that possibly needed training or discipline. The Enchanted Lake, a calm transitional area, could be placed next to the Dark Forest, another transitional locale but possibly more threatening in nature. Someone who has experienced danger in the woods might want to relax and be reborn in the waters of the lake (water being both a feminine symbol and a representation of the unconscious). The threatening Giant (dangerous father?) could be placed over the Puzzling Cave (feminine sexual symbol?) as a possible representation of the Oedipus complex. The Little Mouse (helpless child) should be placed next to the Interesting House (mother figure) because a house is a natural habitat of mice and because maternal representations should be in close proximity to child symbols. It seemed natural to put the Wise Wizard (perhaps the only adult attribute depicted in the game) in the middle of the board at the crossroads of the paths, as he was the one most likely to be consulted about perplexities brought up in stories. In short, he could be readily available to players for advice, consolation, or reassurance.

Many of the remaining symbols bear little obvious relationship to one another and are placed haphazardly on the board.

SOME MYTHOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF GAME BOARD FIGURES

Although it is true that (1) images and motifs from fairy stories carry special meanings for different people, and (2) the figures take their

significance from the context of the tales in which they are used, and (3) it is an unrealizable task to try to comprehend the ultimate meanings of any story theme, it is still possible to assume that the game board images carry rich meanings to the players that may or may not be communicated to others. The images are not simple metaphors; they do not correspond to physical persons or objects in the concrete world. The correspondence to dreams or hallucinations seems slight. Nevertheless, I go along with the idea that projective analyses of responses to game board figures (even though their validity is difficult to prove) can be superior to formalized personality tests because the participants are less guarded and less likely to give controlled responses thought to please test givers.

We cannot, of course, assume that the use of a game board figure implies the storyteller is employing it for profound psychological reasons. It may be put in the story for superficial, satirical, moralizing, or entertainment purposes.

The deeper, unconscious possible meanings of the game board fairy tale figures have been categorized by Burks (1993) and Heuscher (1974) and are classified according to the possible and essential differences listed below.

BEINGS THAT FUSE HUMAN AND INFRAHUMAN CHARACTERISTICS

Characters in this classification are understood to have peculiar powers (both good and evil). Fairies, trolls, witches, elves, and sirens are such creatures. Game board characters under this heading include the Elf (primitive, childlike impulses); the Genie ("bottled-up" feelings, male sexual impulses, out-of-control feelings); the Giant (fear of father, oedipal tension); the Old Witch (bad mother, angry feelings, regressed stage of life, depression-oriented tendencies); the Troll (chronic anger, poor manners, overbearing conscience, meanness); the Wise Wizard (adult part of the personality, higher mental faculties, deliberate reasoning powers).

REPRESENTATIVES OF PROFESSIONS AND ROLES

Entities in this classification are not assumed to have paranormal powers. Instead, the roles they play reflect the deepest qualities of their basic condition (i.e., ego purposes dealing with reality as opposed to beings in the previous section, who display superego determinations, and characters in the next section, who reflect instinctual or id qualities). To illustrate ego functions, we may say that a shoemaker could be the trade of someone who

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reaches for the proper balance between material essence (the ground) and spirituality (the human's erect and agreeable walk through life).

Beings fitting this category include the Handsome Prince and Beautiful Princess (the adolescent personality with some immature impulses, the coming union of masculine and feminine personality aspects, the coming solution to the oedipal conflict); the King and Queen (good mother and father, higher functions of the personality, protective figures); the Lost Children (stage where child is trying to separate from parents, feelings of loneliness, sibling rivalry); the Tin Soldier (the good child who obeys rules, the handicapped individual, or a person with flaws).

ANIMAL PORTRAYALS

Animals appear to us to embody the primitive, instinctual qualities that exist in humans. For that reason, animals have become important symbols in fables. We use expressions all the time that validate the use of animals for this purpose ("stubborn as a mule," "sneaky as a weasel," "blind as a bat," "greedy as a pig," etc.). Although some of the figures illustrate obvious meanings, others do not. A horse, for instance, can be seen as both helpful or aggressive and dangerous. The little pig is stupid but not threatening, the mouse clever but weak.

Storytellers who turn to animals as assisting, helpful beings may tend to have had good "mothering" in early years. They see the world in optimistic ways. Those who concentrate on dangerous, threatening animals perhaps did not experience this kind of nurturing experience (of course, feeling threatened by animals could have other causations, sexual or otherwise). The individual who focuses on wild and untamed animals as admired subjects may possess impulses not subject to superego control.

Animals on the game board that fit this classification include the Flying Horse (friendly helper, masculine sexual force, id impulses under control, higher cortex functions, rescuer); the Frog (nonassertive, untamable impulses; represents the fluid, psychic realm of water and the firm, physical world of land; messenger with prophetic sexual knowledge); the Gossipy Parrot (nonaggressive and tamable, not free because tied to perch, not bright, difficult to teach, lacks judgment, uncaring but friendly); the Little Mouse (nonassertive, untamable, helpless, unseen, uses wits to survive, inhabits dark and dirty corners—all characteristics of small children); the Little Pig (nonaggressive, tamable, helpless,

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greedy and oral without proper ego restraints, messy, lives for pleasure, uncaring); Mickey the Monkey (complete child: carefree, cute, fun loving, mischievous, lovable, impulsive, shows ability to act naturally, if bothered can be aggressive, possesses little superego); the Prickly Porcupine (primitive instinctual personality, "burned child," arouses sympathy because misunderstood); Stinky Skunk (independent but not aggressive but can be dangerous if pushed; avoided for unpleasant characteristics, arouses sympathy because ostracized); the Three Bears (aggressive but tamable, evoke image of solid family with mutual concerns, intelligent and resourceful with strong ego); Wiley Wolf (sexually aggressive, dangerous, untamable, strong, quick, cunning, no superego, orally greedy, hostile).

DWELLINGS

From an unconscious point of view, dwellings (caves, houses, castles) may be observed as structures that house the human spirit (much as the body of a person does), or they can be seen as the representations of development learned in relation to the mother figure. Various expressions ("bats in the belfry," "feeling at home," "he or she lacks a good foundation") all point to the fact that a house can represent aspects of a human's personality.

Childhood experiences in the home give the house a concentrated and intense association to family relationships and home life. Responses to game board dwellings indicating the participant is alienated from structures may lead the clinician to believe the individual is alienated from his or her private self or body.

The following game board structures fit this category: the Candy House (regressed stage of development, the "good" or "bad" mother, indication of oral stage of development); the Interesting House (the mother figure, the body or self of the player, reflection of how rules and regulations were introjected); the Puzzling Cave (the primitive mother, sexual symbol, place to reflect, indication of depression); the Stone Castle (restrictive parent, the "armored" personality, great psychic strength).

MANUFACTURED OBJECTS

Any article made by humans represents something of worth, separating humans from the animal kingdom and giving us the ability to make life easier and to acquire more power over nature. Objects serve many purposes; all are useful in wish fulfillment.

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The following game objects fit this classification: the Amazing Telephone (making contact with valued others); the Bag of Gold (the acquisitive, the needy, and the introspective sides of the personality); the Curious Bag (feminine symbol, introspective abilities); the Flying Carpet (passivity needs, nature of relationship to mother, wish to avoid reality); the Lonely Wall (nature of defenses, representation of life difficulties); the Magic Shoes (nature of impulses or compulsions); the Special Gold Key (availability of treasures of life, male sexual symbol); the Talking Mirror (reflection of inner life); the Treasure Chest (availability of life treasures); the Wonderful Well (symbol of unconscious).

VEGETATIVE MOTIFS

Growing objects represent various aspects of life and psychic functions, both good and bad. These motifs can nourish or poison human activities (note the role of the apple in the tale of Snow White). They may also connote sexual concerns.

Game board motifs that fit this category include the Astonishing Apple (signifies aspects of life, love, and sex, strong sexual meanings); the Talking Tree (masculine symbol, guiding agent, primitive personality core); the Toadstools (feminine symbols, need for primitive shelter).

GEOGRAPHICAL MOTIFS

Themes in fairy tales involving lakes, springs, ponds, or fountains are common. We may assume they are referents to the nourishing sources of life. They, along with forests, can also stand for areas of renewal (a jumping-off place to another stage of development).

Game board symbols fitting this classification include the Dark Forest (a developmental barrier, transitional area) and the Enchanted Lake (ambiguous transitional area, reflection of unconscious activity).

 CASE ILLUSTRATIONS
Uses with Individuals

One of the most intriguing characteristics of Sammy (the boy in his fourth foster placement home) was his ability to stand up to me in those matters where he thought he knew best how the game should be played. For instance, he never completely accepted the idea that there was no way to "win." I explained, as best I could, that winning and losing presupposes

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there are right and wrong ways to make up stories and that some youngsters would be turned off if they thought that to be the case. He bought into this idea of “no win–no lose” game playing only because he knew his stories would be better than any of the tales told by other children!

The comments by Sammy in response to game board stimuli helped me understand the nature of his motives, attitudes, and modes of school and home adjustments. From board responses and office conversations I knew he was intensely concerned and conflicted about the proper roles of parent figures (shown in confusing stories he made up about the King and Queen and the family of Three Bears symbols). The parent characteristics of these motifs, in his estimation, could not be counted on for reliable support and affection. These unhappy responses led me to demonstrate that I was always available to him for reassurance and help (telephone calls immediately answered, school visits whenever needed). I offered him refreshments each time we met (giving food, I thought, equated to presenting him with tokens of affection). I also knew he was afraid of many pupils at school (his symbolic defense against his fear: He identified with the Prickly Porcupine who could fight anyone off “even if they were bigger”).

But what about this capacity to stand up for his rights, to spar verbally with me, to face up to other kids even though he was frightened of them? It reminded me of military air crew comrades I admired during war service—men who never gave up regardless of the stress facing them. What was the source of this ego strength? My hypothesis was that he possessed a core of psychic resilience. Fostered by what? Early good mothering? He was orphaned at 3, the parents killed in an auto crash. In those infant years, before the parents were lost, had he experienced satisfactory nurturing?

To test this postulation, I asked him to give me observations about the Curious Bag, the Treasure Chest, the Wonderful Well, and the Interesting House. Following are his replies along with my interpretations of the responses.

The Curious Bag (studies it for a long time): “Well, there’s something alive in there. I think it is a monkey who might bite you if you reached in. But he’s not a really bad monkey—he’s just kinda shy and scared. If he liked you he would be a good pet.”

Interpretation: The bag (feminine symbol) contains something valuable, a monkey that could be a friendly pet (indicating possible optimism on the part of the storyteller). Is Sammy telling us that a disagreeable part of his nature (burned child?) could become more attractive if approached properly? Anyway, a monkey is an interesting figure to put in the story. Monkeys are active, alert, strong, and generally fun loving—all attributes of a healthy personality.

The Treasure Chest: “There is something valuable in the chest but there is a big problem. The chest has a lock on it and it is hard to open. Somebody

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has the key but nobody knows where to find the guy who has the key. Hey, Doc, maybe you know where the guy is!"

Interpretation: Again, we have a hint about the existence of a positive introject. Sammy possibly indicates a valuable part of his personality is locked in the Treasure Chest. Can it be accessed? A good sign emerges. He looks to his therapist as possibly having a key to this asset.

The Wonderful Well: "Boy, you could fall down that well and really hurt yourself! That's the trouble with wells, you have to have water but you could break your neck falling down one. If you wanted to I guess you could get into a bucket and go down to see what is at the bottom—that is, if someone would help you by winding you down. What's at the bottom? I dunno, maybe some dimes and nickels that people have thrown into the well."

Interpretation: Once again, we have interpretive evidence indicating this youngster is able to discern nourishing unconscious material when he reflects on a symbol directing him to look down (inside himself?). He even finds money at the bottom of the well, a substance that allows persons to fulfill desires. Of course, we must take cognizance of the fact that Sammy is telling us he feels it might be dangerous to examine the unconscious realm (i.e., fall down the well and hurt the self). The clinician is being warned to tread carefully when examining this area of the personality.

The Interesting House: "This house is old. Nobody lives there right now. It's cold in the house—see, there's no smoke coming out of the chimney. (Did people used to live there?) Yes, yes, they did but they went away. (Would people live there again?) Maybe."

Interpretation: Long experience with the House-Tree-Person projective test (Buck, 1948) confirms my belief that the house symbol largely reflects the previous introjection of mother-figure characteristics. The devastating loss of the natural parents is, I think, reflected in Sammy's comments about the house. In a sense, the house is dead to him, but I suppose we must note that he has not entirely given up on the notion that it might be habitable (brought back to life) in the future.

The interpretations given to Sammy's comments to the above game board motifs are interesting but would be useless if they did not bear on therapy outcomes. Did the notion that early developmental experiences (in the main, adequate mothering) give the youngster enough healthy personality underpinnings to allow us to make the assumption that therapy would produce positive results? Yes, I believe it did. Let me summarize the counseling consequences. Sammy stayed in my care for two years. He gradually (according to the foster parents and teachers) became more adjusted to home and school life. His greatest fear, that he would be rejected by his current foster family, was abated when the foster parents and I held a ceremony in

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the home to present the now 10-year-old Sammy with a gold-embellished certificate vouching he could never be let go by the foster parents. Sammy graduated from high school and went on to higher education. Now and then, for a long time, I received notes from my good friend Sammy.

Every so often, while using the *Imagine* game, I have received a response from an individual that almost perfectly illustrates the nature of a dilemma suffered by the person (Burks, 1993). An 11-year-old male patient came into therapy because the parents were concerned about his unhappiness and lack of friends. Tom suffers from diabetes. He has been placed on a rigid medical regimen. He tells his parents that he monitors his blood sugar levels but actually does not. This upsets the parents. They endeavor to correct his evasive actions by lecturing him. Speeches end with Tom in tears. Everyone is frustrated.

This child appeared apprehensive to me. Talking with him was difficult. He came to therapy with a chip on his shoulder. I finally asked him if he would like to play the *Imagine* game with me. He assented but looked disconcerted on seeing the game. At least, I thought, his decision to perform indicated some degree of ego strength. We sat down on the floor to begin play.

As we proceeded Tom relaxed. He looked more directly at the symbols. I asked him what he thought of the board. He answered by saying that it was certainly different. When queried as to the symbol he liked the most, he replied that he really preferred the Enchanted Lake because "it was so peaceful." When asked what it was he didn't care for, he said, stabbing his finger at the Troll, "I can sure tell you that, it's that troll. He looks mad!"

Eventually, Tom drew a Pretend card with the following message printed on it: "Pretend you put on the Magic Shoes. One shoe wants to do one thing and the other shoe wants to do something else. What happens?" The question stumped this boy for a period of time. He finally said, "Well, I think I remember that when you put on them shoes you can't take them off." He appeared distressed. Struggling with the impasse for a time he said, "Well, I guess the only thing to do is split myself down the middle so that each shoe can do what it wants."

This provocative remark brings us up short. If anything could instruct us about the inner rigidities of this youngster, his stated solution to the dilemma of the two demanding but separate-minded shoes certainly should. He is immobilized by an ethical predicament: how to gratify the contradictory wishes of both shoes. Tom is unable to alter learned symbol rules (i.e., the shoes must not be removed). Powers of imagination are paralyzed. Quite unlike most children and the majority of adults, he cannot lightheartedly say that he would let one shoe do what it wants for awhile and then let the other shoe perform. We may assume, I believe, that his solution, painful as it is, represents the resolution Tom usually employs when facing problems—that is, psychologically to split himself down the middle (and to weep miserably)

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when confronted with clashing demands. Subsequent talks with this child brought forth the facts that he deeply resented being “different” from peers (forced on him by his illness). He wanted to act just like them. On the other hand, giving in to the parents meant he would have to follow the demands of the medical regimen, which also caused him to feel alienated. His answer? Sob painfully.

The diagnostic—but not the reparative—value of the *Imagine* game is illustrated by the above case. To show possible healing properties, let us consider the following study (repeated from an illustration employed by the author for the manual accompanying the game board; Burks, 1993).

While experimenting with the game I had occasion to record stories from 8- and 9-year-old disturbed youngsters. One boy fixated on the plight of the Little Worm. At the end of a tale about this character he had a large bird dive down to swallow the worm. The surrounding group of children enthusiastically congratulated him for relating such a fascinating story. I could tell, though, that he wasn't completely satisfied. At the end of the meeting he came to me and said, “You know, Dr. Burks, that's not the end of the story. When the Little Worm found himself in the stomach of the bird he started to puff himself up. He got bigger and bigger until all of a sudden, POW! The bird blew up and the Little Worm floated to the ground and crawled away!”

What's going on here? The child was exhilarated by this fresh and ingenious ending to the tale. He was laughing, his cheeks flushed. Evidently, the little Worm (himself?) had outfoxed and defeated a dangerous and stronger figure (symbol of authority?). The creative act of imagining a story had transformed itself into an emotionally gratifying experience because it could be communicated to a compassionate other it was even more satisfying.

Hammer (1975) has emphasized the therapeutic need for this kind of experience. He notes the close relationship between the act of creativity and elemental personality strivings. Hammer also contends that creative expression reveals needs more clearly and directly than other types of human endeavor. Ye Burno (1989), an experienced clinician, encourages his patients to engage in creative acts because, in his opinion, these accomplishments are related to greater emotional stability. DeAngelis (1992) concurs. He narrates positive changes in physiological well-being in those employing verbal techniques to reveal inner emotions.

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Apparently, creativity (such as imagining stories) is closely allied to the full and healthy expression of the personality.

The therapeutic (in addition to the diagnostic) value of the *Imagine* game was an unexpected but welcome finding. Does it matter if the clinician fails to understand the projective meanings inherent in a player's statements? Not really. The psychological benefits derived by the child who told the story about the Little Worm and the swooping bird would no doubt have occurred whether or not the clinician comprehended deeper story explanations. Further, it must be pointed out that players, particularly children, do not gain assistance from a psychological analysis of stories. The stimulation a participant derives from dreaming up a story is not improved, in fact, may well be decreased, by listening to an anatomization of narrative meanings. Diagnosis remains suspect. As Ekstein (1989) explains, analysis of verbal free associations do not explain psychological illnesses and do not cure disorders.

The foregoing examples of responses to game symbols by individuals hopefully give the reader some insights into the diagnostic and therapeutic uses of *Imagine*. But the full flavor of the game cannot be grasped until the impact of its employment in group situations is understood.

USES WITH GROUPS

During game construction I deliberately tried to incorporate features that encourage creative group expression. Many ideas were gained from readings by Torrance (1962a, 1962b, 1981). Following is a description of properties that apparently promote imagination:

1. *Players independently choose to play the game or not.* In group work I never push a child to participate. Experience demonstrates that most individuals become so intrigued watching others play they quickly volunteer to participate.
2. *No player is forced to continue play when he or she wishes to stop.* Some children tire quickly. Weary participants concentrate on feelings of fatigue rather than on the wish to free associate.
3. *When enthusiasm for the game diminishes, the game is stopped.* One cannot expect excitement to continue indefinitely. It's a good idea to stop play while players are still stimulated. This tends to ensure they will want to return to the game in the near future.

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4. *Environmental stimuli is kept to a minimum.* Fantasy is engendered more efficiently in a nondistracting milieu. Supervising adults are advised to keep verbal participation to a minimum, enabling game participants to concentrate on stories rather than on needs of adults.
5. *Freedom of bodily movement is encouraged.* Children, in particular, need to move about when playing. Williams (1973) found that many youngsters, when focusing on a problem, demonstrate nervous mannerisms (scratching, picking, tapping, etc.). This activity apparently enhances concentration. Some players communicate better through movement than through speech. The game should be played in an informal atmosphere with players coming and going as they wish, perhaps sitting on the floor or walking around.
6. *No one is forced to play in a hurry.* Haste can defeat efforts to fantasize. The process needed to formulate original and complex thought patterns requires time, although the duration of this interval varies from person to person. When a player displays an air of finality and satisfaction after telling a story, we may be sure the necessary time for creative thought has occurred.
7. *A spirit of fun is encouraged.* Genuine creativity resides in the "child" side of the personality structure (Steiner, 1974). The child ego is identified with the characteristics of spontaneity, innovation, and a willingness to take risks. Playful thinking reinforces efforts to be creative (Siegelman, 1990). The child ego can be stifled if adults ask for or demand prescribed responses. Creativity withers on command.
8. *Responses are not monitored.* The native intelligence of small children is discounted when responses are interpreted in a literal, straightforward way. Repetitive questioning can make children uncertain of replies, forcing some to change responses. Critiquing the direction or outcome of stories can indicate story elements are inadequate or inferior. These negative perceptions may stifle imagination. To enhance player comfort, no scoffing at stories is permitted.
9. *Responses are never analyzed.* As has been pointed out, players (in particular, children) do not benefit from psychological story interpretations. In any case, sentence-like external representations of imagery can never fully account for fantasy (Rollins, 1989).
10. *Encouragement is offered to verbalize hidden impulses.* Hiding unpleasant or dangerous thoughts is a universal occurrence. Menacing

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thoughts, in particular, are kept out of consciousness because individuals may be afraid they will be translated into harmful actions if admitted into conscious thought. Repression, however, ordinarily exacerbates the strength of morbid impulses, making the threat of their emergence even more troublesome. The game of *Imagine* offers avenues of thinking and expression where these urges can be experienced safely.

The reader may gather a comprehensive feeling for the *Imagine* game as it relates to group interactions if I relate a recent experience with elementary-age students. My son, Tom, teaches a class of fourth-graders. He wanted to see how the children (mostly disadvantaged youngsters, many of Spanish American extraction) would react to the game. When I entered the classroom, Tom explained that I was his father. This created a commotion. The pupils were anxious to know about their teacher's childhood: Was he a good boy? Did I have to spank him a lot? Did I give him many toys? Where was his mother? After this barrage of questions (clearly with projective meanings in themselves), the youngsters wanted to know what kind of game it was that I brought to the classroom. They were intrigued by the game board cover. The cover, containing many colorful fairy tale figures, is intrinsically interesting to youngsters.

At this point, I would like to say that one of the advantages of the game is that it is quick and easy to administer and supervise. Children immediately see it as something challenging and attractive. My personal preference is to let them study the colorful board for as long as they like. Typically, comments such as "Gee, look at that mean old witch!", "I wish I had all the gold in that bag!", "I wonder what's in the Treasure Chest?", and "Look at the stupid little pig!" are forthcoming. Sometimes these observations provide projective material to the clinician who observes which objects seem to have the most meaning to participants and which symbols provoke the greatest number of commentaries.

These fourth-graders reacted to the game no differently than any other group of children I have observed. They inspected the covers with avid interest and then tore off the plastic to get at the board. My son and I divided the class into five groups, each with a game. Many sat on the floor or on and around tables. The six students at my table spent about five minutes studying and commenting on the board symbols. The largest boy in my group (actually the biggest pupil in the room), an African American child,

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climbed up on my chair, sat himself up against me, and proceeded to run the game. He started out by telling the other players when they could speak and when to keep quiet. These actions, of course, violated the spirit of spontaneity necessary for productive playing. I gently told George that everybody got to speak when they wanted to. He was uncomfortable with this imperative but finally gave in after I interrupted him several times to remind him of the requirement.

Typically, a child or two in every group takes a long time to become involved. In my assemblage, one little Spanish American girl sat quietly for about 10 minutes, but she could not bring herself to stay out of the interplay. She finally crept up to the board and said she liked the princess. The other children studied the symbol, and one girl asked her what she liked about the princess. The reply was that she thought the clothes were nice. Now, this may not sound like much of a contribution, but for this youngster it was an act of constructive aggression not evident in ordinary class participations (this according to my son).

Except for George, the students in my group did not give lengthy stories and the quality of the tales was uneven. George was fascinated with the giant figure and wove a tale about a giant who went about the land forcing his will on others. Fortunately, the giant was benevolent in nature. He simply needed to rule others because they were "too dumb" and because he knew what was good for them. We will hear from George in years to come.

We must not concentrate on final story narratives to the exclusion of other indications of productive mental involvement. The children in my group (much like those in similar gatherings) gave the following indices of creative activity (from a checklist compiled by Torrance, 1962a):

1. Many evidences of *intense animation and physical involvement* (seen more often in younger than older subjects).
2. Many suggestions of *bodily engagement of an intense nature in writing, reading, and drawing* (many children want to write their stories or draw game board symbols).
3. Many intimations that children want to *study and look at symbols closely* (seen in children of all ages).
4. Many signs of *intense absorption in listening, observing, and doing* (seen in youngsters of all ages).

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5. Many indications of *eagerness to tell others about discoveries* (children want to tell stories to each other).
6. Many manifestations of the wish to *show relationships between apparently unrelated symbols or ideas* (youngsters bring coherence to the affinity they seen in game motifs).
7. Many intimations of *heightened curiosity* (participants become interested in one another's stories and want to know more).
8. Many wishes to *check story sources* (memories of fairy stories are checked among players).
9. Many demonstrated desires to *consider or toy with strange ideas* (much of the originality demonstrated in stories springs from this desire).
10. Many tendencies to *lose awareness of time* (many players have to be asked to stop play).
11. Many indications of a wish to make an *intense and honest search for truth of inner feelings* (children identify with emotions thought to be felt by game symbols).
12. Many evidences of *excitement in voices concerning game discoveries* (seen mostly in younger children).
13. Many signs of *analogies being employed in speech patterns* (employed by nearly all players, particularly when confronting emotion-arousing symbols: witch can be "old bag," "old grouch," "old hag," etc.).
14. Much *spontaneous employment of experimental approaches* (applies, in the main, to the extent players judge the impact of stories on others).
15. Many indications of willingness to *manipulate ideas and objects to form new combinations* (very evident when players feel free from criticism to do this).
16. Many signs that players want to *take independent actions* (game is constructed to encourage attempts to make up individual stories, to write them down, and to illustrate them).
17. Many indications of *self-initiated learning* (true to the extent that few children want to be left out of the game).
18. An evident wish to *challenge ideas of authority* (happens when child attacks or questions adult authority).
19. Tendencies to *search out and explore new game board possibilities* (children like to change story endings or make up a new hero).
20. Evidence among some pupils to *concoct bold stories* (game encourages children to propose aggressive solutions to story conundrums).

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21. Many signs children want to *test story outcomes* (seen when players are interested in the give-and-take reactions of others to invented tales).
22. Many manifestations of *penetrating questions and observations* (stories raise level of curiosity about contents of particular tales).
23. Many signs of wishes to *follow through on ideas set in motion by stories* (players continue to build on stories after game ends).
24. Many expressed wishes to *continue playing after game officially ends* (most groups evidence this desire).

The above phenomena are noted, in the main, during play of groups made up of children but are not generally seen in adult gatherings. This is true for the following obvious reasons: (1) Adults think it somewhat embarrassing to play what to them is a childish activity, almost "silly" in nature; and (2) adults are not as close as children to the primitive or magical side of their natures, the part that can suspend belief about the logical or realistic condition of the universe.

Under particular circumstances, I have found the game useful with adult groups. During marathon sessions, seminars lasting for 24 hours or more, participants tend to let down defenses, lie down on the floor like children, and play *Imagine* in playful and even mischievous ways. Certain game board symbols, like the Amazing Telephone, are capable of eliciting strong emotional responses. One woman, when asked to speak to someone she missed, pretended to call her deceased mother but immediately broke down into tears. This episode precipitated a long discussion about unresolved conflicts with her mother, frictions that had never previously been reviewed. This opened up for inspection personality problems central to the reasons she entered therapy.

The *Imagine* game, I believe, has also proven useful in family therapy interactions. Fairy tales, in the main, involve parent and child ego aspects of the personality (the adult ego is largely ignored), and fables place characters in universally well-known roles (the hard-working mother or father, the neglected child, the authoritarian, nonunderstanding grown-up, the youngster innocently wandering into trouble, etc.), and members can identify with these figures, elaborate on their attributes, and relate to difficulties faced by mythological subjects.

An example illustrates these processes. A father, mother, and two children played the game during a counseling session. The father, the most

resistant member of the group and the most unwilling to talk, had to be urged to join in play. The question came up as to what character or symbol the players thought they were most like. When it came to the father's turn, he stared at the board for some time and finally muttered that he thought he was the one-legged Tin Soldier. His wife glanced at him in sharp surprise. The children, with uninhibited ardor, thought his reply explained why he always looked stiff and at attention and, like most sentries, quiet. One child got up, stood on a single leg, saluted the father, and imitated his grim visage. The wife was the one who would not let his choice of game board symbol pass without comment. She had good reason to do this because the principal motive for entering family therapy lay in the displeasure she experienced concerning her husband's reticence and evident discomfort in family relationships. She had told me in a private session that she was thinking of leaving him because he seemed like a stranger to her. "John," she asked, "please explain to us why you feel like a soldier—one with only a single leg." To everyone's astonishment, this man began to tear up. He mumbled, almost incoherently, that he always felt like an outsider, that he was overworked, had to guard the family, and was not gaining enough pleasure from life. Then he started to weep. The children flung themselves on him, telling him that they loved him. His wife also embraced him.

This incident changed the course and outcome of therapy for this family. The husband found he could let down his defenses without catastrophic results; the children were delighted they could comfort and feel closer to their father; and the wife, to her eventual surprise, learned that she was not giving enough solace and understanding to her mate because she was so involved with the children and their interests and with outside duties. The husband later told his wife he had come to feel of no importance in the family circle.

Glowing examples of the efficacy of the *Imagine* game should not obscure the fact that there are limitations to the efficient use of any projective counseling device.

LIMITATIONS OF PROJECTIVE COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

Once upon a time, I had high hopes for a projective technique I entitled "The Path of Life." In counseling sessions I would ask clients to imagine

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they were on a path in the wilderness. After they visualized this scene and told me about it, I would take them along the path to different situations (e.g., see a house, an animal, a dangerous spot, other persons, etc., and describe possible conflict characteristics of imagined settings). This exercise was an effective diagnostic tool. It gave me significant information about a patient's attitudes, motivations, current emotional conflicts, and so on, but did little for his or her mental health. In short, no reparative process was occurring because *no significant emotional affect accompanied patient statements*. If an imagined scene does not arouse feelings of apprehension, anxiety, fear, dread, or, hopefully, depression (all emotions, experienced and repressed in early years), then the patient *is not experiencing the emergence of unconscious and unwanted motives that must be confronted if therapy is eventually to be successful*.

Of course, not all individuals seen in the counseling office suffer undue neurotic symptoms. Some clinicians working in schools, public health clinics, prisons, or hospitals encounter subjects lacking proper superego controls who are not emotionally conflicted enough. They may also suffer impulse control deficiencies and be unable to reflect inwardly (many refuse to become depressed when frustrated). Is the game of *Imagine* a useful counseling instrument with these individuals? Perhaps to the degree it supplies diagnostic information, but not to the extent it offers therapeutic assistance. Unconforming teens, for instance, may show contempt for game board subjects by flouting accepted rules of conduct (e.g., the advice of the Wise Wizard is ridiculed, wild animals like the Wolf are admired). Outside of diagnostic hints, I have not found the game to be particularly effective as far as helping these subjects acquire insights or change unethical behaviors for the better.

It goes without saying that the genetic makeup of an examined individual influences the quality and amount of diagnostic material derived from the use of any projective device. Most children with normally functioning nervous systems produce satisfactory stories and other evidence of imagery because they are able to employ rich fantasy lives that nourish egos with imagery that can be employed in the service of solving problems and making life tolerable and productive.

This is not so true for many children with attention-deficit (Burks, 1957, 1960, 1964, 1985, 1993). Many of these youngsters cannot enlist the assistance of a functioning fantasy life. As a result, their conduct is characterized by impulsivity, poor attention, and sometimes by hyperactivity.

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This style of overreaction to environmental stimulation evidently occurs because an impetus to act is translated at once into muscle action rather than being mediated through imaginative thought processes.

Some physiologically healthy individuals cannot employ active fantasy lives apparently because they have been taught in early stages of development to fear inner imagery. I consider these persons to be “constipated in the head” (Burks, 1993). Sometimes, therapy can free them from bondage to the restrictive rulings. The *Imagine* game can be helpful in this regard, particularly when used with children.

Then there are normal individuals who apparently cannot fantasize. Thinking occurs in literal ways, and imaginative skill training brings few encouraging results. As a clinician for many years, my impression is that most become engineers whose pedantic conduct drives spouses insane.

Finally, we must be aware that some subjects possess an imagination that knows few boundaries. Reality appears to be a nuisance. I have had a few youngsters with proclivities to overfantasize when playing *Imagine* and remain puzzled how to interpret these free flows of consciousness. At times, I think it an indication of pathology; at other times, I believe some have been encouraged to employ unrestricted fantasy. This proved true in one instance: The mother of a 9-year-old daydreaming girl admitted she had immersed her daughter in romantic stories and encouraged her to engage in wild imaginings. I suggested she limit this unusual form of stimulation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The *Imagine* game, I believe, has withstood the test of usage. It achieves at least two purposes: (1) It obtains significant diagnostic information from game participants; and (2) it enables some contestants to achieve greater emotional stability. Story thought processes transmute contrary preoccupations and hurtful emotions like jealousy, anger, and revenge into creative works, constructive and adaptive in nature, leading to positive changes in physiological and emotional health (DeAngelis, 1992).

These aims may suffice for most clinicians, but other, unexpected but welcome aspects of the game must be considered. The *Imagine* game has proven popular with classroom teachers, hospital workers, and parents—most with limited exposure to psychological theory. Why, then, the enthusiasm shown by these individuals? Simply because they felt *Imagine*

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achieved two other purposes, that the intellectual and social development of youngsters was furthered because: (1) participants became more *creative*, and (2) players learned to *communicate* better with each other.

I will not devote a great deal of space to these apparently agreeable findings, except to say that the act of creativity is closely tied to the need for self-expression (Glover, Ronning, & Reynolds, 1989) and to mention that disadvantaged and unusually silent children are more powerfully affected to use speech by visual stimuli than by auditory cues. Formal instruction (because it tends to inhibit creativity) leaves them unconcerned. *Imagine* encourages communication by allowing players to "run the show" and by encouraging them to fantasize at will.

It is worth pointing out one more time that strivings to be more creative and acts of self-expression apparently contribute to greater emotional stability (Godmun, Smith, & Carlsson, 1990). Sarasan (1990) expands on this reasoning: He holds the urgency to give voice to internal imaginings to be a universal and constructive propensity (even though it is often stifled by social structures). Current educational practices, unfortunately, stress logical-scientific thinking to the detriment of abilities to contemplate and voice the unconscious realm.

SOME CAUTIONARY NOTES

Now, a word of warning to clinicians who use projective game techniques in classrooms or similar situations: Adults, teachers, aides, and other supporting personnel are usually not prepared to understand the sexual meanings inherent in ancient myths. They may even be offended by erotic interpretations. Let me give an example. Some time ago, I gave a talk to a large group of teachers about the mechanics of the *Imagine* game. In discussing the analytic meanings of fairy tales, I mentioned that the story of Little Red Riding Hood was probably a narration about the sexual maturation of females and went on to discuss menstruation and phallic symbols employed in ancient stories. The audience (consisting mostly of younger female teachers) froze. Rapport between speaker and listeners vanished.

I don't give talks like that anymore.

My personal preference, when talking to individuals with limited psychological training, is to discuss game stories in transactional terms (Berne, 1964). Listeners catch on quickly to the idea that there are three

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major ego sides of the personality: (1) the child state, which is considered to be spontaneous and free and is the origin of creative activities; (2) the parent state, which takes on the task of teaching rules and regulations (much of this knowledge is used in the formation of the super-ego); and (3) the adult state, which adopts the role of decision making and logical reasoning.

Many *Imagine* symbols are employed to represent the child state, such as the Magic Shoes, Mickey the Monkey, Little Pig, Lost Children, and Little Mouse. The parent ego state is denoted by the King and Queen, the Old Witch, the Talking Tree, and the Giant. The adult ego condition is less easy to classify. I placed the Wise Wizard in the middle of the game board to represent someone who, so to speak, "directs traffic" and is endowed with judicial sagacity. Not many other symbols are seen to embody adult characteristics, although, at times, the King and Queen, as role players in stories, may be allowed to make intelligent choices.

We should be aware that fairy tales are nearly always made up of parent and child figures (scant interest is paid to adult types). This should not surprise us. Fairy stories are faithful chronicles of psychological complications faced by children at diverse stages of development. In the beginning, children must endeavor to control and direct untamed impulses and to deal with adults who govern them. The ability and the necessity to make adultlike judgments occur in later years.

CHOICE OF PROJECTIVE INSTRUMENTS

A final word about effective uses of projective devices such as the *Imagine* game: The basic rule is identical to that employed for other psychological tests: Utilize the simplest and most economical instruments in terms of time and effort. Most disturbed children, for instance, can be identified through the employment of standard screening devices like the *Burks Behavior Rating Scales* (Burks, 1977), an instrument used to screen millions of children over the past thirty years. Most of the youngsters identified by these scales as having social, emotional, and academic problems do not need further elaborate diagnostic testing. But some do. For these troubled individuals, those with problems whose sources remain a riddle to the clinician (Chua-Eoan, 1999), diagnostic instruments should be administered but only if they contribute specific information not obtainable more quickly and easily by other means. In addition, chosen test devices should

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offer a maximum of information, and this is accomplished when applied instruments can be analyzed in several different ways.

The game of *Imagine*, in certain circumstances, may be an instrument of choice. With withdrawn or reluctant subjects, the game is a good ice-breaker because children see it as a fun undertaking. Unlike most projective devices, the game can be played in association with others, and this allows the diagnostician to note participant social abilities and dysfunctions. Creative thinking abilities and communicative skills can also be estimated. Another possible strength of the game resides in its capability to sustain the interest of subjects. They want to play it again and again, offering the clinician renewed opportunities to analyze projective content. Finally, because game play can incorporate activities like drawing, writing, and bodily movement, the diagnostician is provided additional sources of projective information.

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