



## Draw a Man, Make the very Best you can

**Bittmann S\*, Weissenstein A, Luchter E and Villalon G**

*Ped Mind Institute (PMI), Department of Pediatrics, Medical and Finance Center Epe, Germany*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Bittmann S, Ped Mind Institute (PMI), Department of Pediatrics, Medical and Finance Center Epe, Germany.

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### Abstract

Children's drawings are visual representations made with crayons, markers, or pencils that are generated for pleasure but can also be used for therapeutic purposes or developmental assessment. Children's art, especially a drawing, represents one of the delights of childhood. The child's artistic endeavors are mainly produced for pleasure and the exploration of art media. They can also be used for developmental and therapeutic assessment. Children's drawings obviously show artistic development and expression. In educational and clinical settings, they can be vehicles for assessing a child's personality, intellectual development, communication skills, and emotional adjustment.

**Keywords:** Children's Drawings; Colors;

### Introduction

Children's drawings can also aid in helping to diagnose learning disabilities. Law enforcement officers, social workers, and counselors often have children draw traumatic events, especially when they lack the communication skills to explain what they have witnessed or experienced. Children may also feel distanced from the traumatic event by drawing it and talking about what is happening in the picture, as if discussing a character in a book or on television. Color analysis has often been a means of determining a child's emotional state. A lot of black or red recurring in a child's drawing may be a troublesome sign. Black often is an indication of depression or feeling hopeless or restricted. Red may indicate intense anger. Blues and greens are usually calm colors, and yellows and oranges often indicate cheerfulness. Therapists are not ordinarily concerned if a child does one drawing in one of the troublesome colors but may want to investigate a series of dark drawings, especially if the content is also frightening or disturbing. Therapists may use the therapeutic session as a means of emotional release and may encourage a child to create drawings that express their deep fears and angers. Drawings in this case are not assessment instruments but become therapeutic tools.

### Historical aspects

The idea that spontaneous drawings of young children may throw light upon the psychology of child development is not a new one. In 1885, Cooke [1] published a report on children drawings and attracted much attention and had a decided influence upon educational practice. In 1887, Ricci [2] published a report of drawings of a group of Italian children whom he observed during a summer vacation. The collection of Ricci of children drawings is probably the earliest of which have been published. Similar investigations were undertaken later. Perez [3], Sully [4], Barnes [5], Baldwin [6], Shinn [7], Brown [8], Clark [9], Herrick [10], Lukens [11], Maitland [12], O'Shea [12] and Götze [14] are the best known of the earlier writers on this subject.

### Material and Methods

100 stickman drawings of 4 and 5 years-old children were analyzed. All parents agreed to publication and analysis of the pictures. Results were divided into a 0-14 point score, according to the scores of the Goodenough-Harris Drawing test. Each point correlated with each body part drawn by the child. Maximal point score was 14 (fourteen different aspects), the minimal 0. In all, there were 64

scoring items for each drawing. The results were presented in a microsoft excel table and analysed and discussed.

### Developmental aspects

One and one-half years to five years. At about 18 months of age, children begin to make marks on paper. Luquet (as cited in Thomas and Silk, 1990), and Piaget (as cited in Thomas and Silk) both regarded these early scribbles as pure play and exercise, rather than attempts to draw pictures. Usually around the age of 2 or 3, this scribbling begins to be interpreted as a picture, although the child waits until the drawing is complete and then states what the drawing represents. People and animals are typically drawn using a tadpole schema, with a circle for the head or for the head and trunk, and two dangling lines for legs. Facial features and arms may be included, but the figure has the look of a tadpole. Children are unaware of color choices and typically use whatever color is close at hand.

### Five years to eight years

According to Di Leo (1983), intellectual realism begins around 5 years of age. During this stage, children draw what they know about reality and sometimes depict the outside of a house, as well as what is inside the house, because they know that furniture and pictures are there, or they might show a person's arm even though it is hidden by the body. This type of drawing is called transparency or X-ray drawing (Di Leo, 1983) and might depict something that is not observable in the real world (Thomas and Silk, 1990) such as a bird with a worm in its stomach. Researchers state that around the time formal schooling begins, children find preferred ways of drawing things and repeat them. Children begin to connect color with what they see in the world around them, but it is difficult to know if the colors selected have a specific meaning, if they reflect what is seen in the environment, or if they indicate experimentation with different colors. The scaling and details of pictures become more realistic during this stage. Children typically stop drawing tadpole human figures and instead draw a head, a separate trunk, attached arms and legs, and details such as hands, fingers and clothing (Thomas and Silk, 1990). Children sometimes revert to earlier stages and in the same picture might draw one person using a tadpole schema and another using a more advanced mode of representation.

### Eight years to adolescence

Di Leo (1983) note that children at this stage produce visually realistic drawings which correspond to the stage of concrete op-

erations. Children begin to use perspective and draw only what is visible from a certain point of view. For example, children would not draw the outside of a house and show furniture inside, because they know you cannot see furniture from the outside of a house. Children tend to develop rules for the use of color, such as brown or black for a tree trunk and green for the leaves. Unusual color use may have more significance at this stage than at earlier stages. Many elementary school students willingly draw pictures at the request of a school counselor or other adult. Around 10 years of age, children begin to become dissatisfied, discouraged and self-critical with their drawing attempts, probably because they are unable to draw as well as they would like. At this time, children tend to draw cartoon or comic-strip characters, and their drawings are somewhat stereotyped, or conventional (Thomas and Silk, 1990). Middle and high school students, as well as some older elementary students, sometimes hesitate to draw because they doubt their artistic ability and are critical or self-conscious of their finished product. To encourage reluctant students to draw, Van Fleet suggests that school counselors draw "goofy" art and invite the student to add to the drawing. According to Di Leo 1983, young teenagers who are language-impaired and view the visual-motor area as a strength, immature adolescents, and artistically talented adolescents continue to take pleasure in drawing. When formulating hypotheses from a student's drawing, one must consider the student's drawing talent, as well as his or her developmental stage.

### Size of people

According to Di Leo (1983) children who draw small figures of people (about 1 to 3 inches high) frequently are timid, shy, insecure, and perhaps withdrawn, whereas drawings of very large people that take up most of the page may indicate children's aggressiveness with poor inner controls. Di Leo (1973) asserts that when children draw some people proportionately larger than others, it could connote that the larger drawn person is important to the child in some way, or it could also mean that the person is aggressive. Studies revealed black and white children's family drawings and found that in low-income families, the oldest child was often drawn in a more dominant position than other siblings.

### Placement on the page

Placing figures at or near the lower edge of the paper may be indicative of feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and a need for support. Di Leo (1973) states that drawing figures in the upper half of the paper suggests optimism and fantasy, while drawings that slant by 15 degrees or more imply imbalance and a lack of a secure

footing. Placing the figure of the person who represents the child doing the drawing close to other figures can mean that the child feels, or wants to feel, close to that person, or has a desire to be protected by that person. Different researchers studied children's drawings of family and found the placement of the child in the family indicates perceived closeness to specific persons. Researchers found that compared to girls, boys more often placed themselves in the center of the drawing and omitted mother.

## Discussion

Pediatricians and psychologists believe, that all people convey something of their emotional state when they draw a picture and that this information can be used in counseling. Drawings can be used in school settings with students who are struggling with normal developmental issues. Children's drawings are indicators of emotions, self-esteem, and social competence, as well as other aspects of personality [15,16], and are a way for children to call attention to topics that are personally important or emotionally significant [17]. Strong emotions emerge in the form of images instead of words. Art activities provide a safe and enjoyable means that encourage children to explore, make decisions, and solve problems, and provide a way for them to portray their inner world without having to rely to words. Researchers note that "drawings represent what a person is like on the day he does the drawing". Keeping that admonition in mind, first consider your overall impression of the picture. Examples of overall impressions are happy/sad, friendly/unfriendly, active/passive, and strong/weak. This general impression provides an idea of the child's mood at the time the picture was drawn. Also look for themes over several drawings. If the child has drawn more than one picture, a common impression of sadness provides a stronger indication that the child feels consistently sad than does one picture. Other aspects of the drawing to consider in forming an overall impression are the use of color, the size of the people, placement on the page, especially in relationship to each other, facial expressions, and indicators of feelings in the way body parts are drawn. Further suggests three principles in art interpretation: a) keep in mind your initial impression of a picture without sharing so as to allow the client's associations of inner world and drawings to develop, b) act as an open-minded researcher to look at focal points systematically, and c) synthesize what you have learned from individual components and assemble this information into a whole. School counselors can use these three principles to identify the focal points in the drawings and what can be learned from them. Suggestions for inter-

preting drawings will be discussed in the following. Developmental norms exist for the use of color in children's art as noted in an earlier section. Color has profound effects on the emotions, behavior, and body. Through the use of colors, the client can release various moods and emotions that could not be expressed by words, thus the work in color becomes a powerful tool for emotional balance. According to various researchers, the overuse of one color can lead to excessive emotional response, extreme reactions, and restlessness, whereas, the smearing and playing with bright colors enables the clients to experience various aspects of their personalities. Depressed clients use significantly fewer colors than those who are not depressed, and children who suffered recent traumas, such as earthquake, chose redder and blacker colors in drawing than others. Outgoing children often prefer warm colors like red and orange and find cool colors not stimulating enough, whereas introverts are more sensitive to cool, calming colors and report the warm colors to be distressing [18].

Although there is agreement that color is used to show feelings, mood, or tone in a drawing, there is lack of agreement on what specific colors represent. For example, rather than always interpreting red as standing for high emotions or danger and black as representing the unknown and fear or threat, it is more helpful to observe where color is used, its intensity and quantity, and what it is emphasizing or diminishing (Furth, as cited in Peterson and Hardin). A child might use a great quantity of black in a drawing and relate that to the sky at night, as when the family went camping and enjoyed sleeping outside. When the student chooses to share his/her own perception of a problem or solution, the school counselor may join the student in examining the harmony and balance of colors in the drawing, and support him/ her in balancing emotions and integrating solutions and problems.

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