Effects of audience types on children's drawings of emotionally significant human figures for a peer or an adult audience

Dr Esther Burkitt

Department of Psychology and Counselling

University of Chichester

Introduction

- Children tend to depict features differentially when depicting human figures that they feel negatively or positively towards.
- They can alter a range of literal (e.g., facial features), content (e.g., bright weather), and abstract non figurative features (e.g., line pressure and colour) in affect appropriate ways increasingly with age (Brechet & Jolley, 2014; Jolley, Fenn & Jones, 2004).
- Children often draw to communicate emotional information (Burkitt, 2016), yet the impact of audience types on children's affective drawings is relatively under researched.
- It is important to understand if audience types impact upon on children's drawings of emotionally significant figures as children's drawings continue to be interpreted for emotional information often without consideration of the contextual cues, such as audience type, that might shape the drawings (Bekhit, Thomas & Jolley, 2005).

Aim

To assess the impact of audience type on drawing features of emotionally characterized human figure drawings.

Method

Participants

Seventy -five children (40 boys, 35 girls) aged between 6 years 1 month and 6 years 11 months (M= 6 years, 5 months) were allocated to three conditions (reference, child and adult).

Materials

Nine coloured crayons (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, black, brown), A4 white paper, lead pencils and a 5-point smiley face Likert scale were used.

Procedure

- All children drew a neutral uncharacterised figure, followed by drawings of a sad and a happy man in counterbalanced order.
- The reference group were not informed of an audience and children in the child and adult audience conditions received audience appropriate instructions.
- Affect ratings towards the drawn topics were taken immediately after completion of each drawing using the 5 point scale.

Results: Key findings

Coding: Two independent raters ($K=0.97$) generated feature categories for each drawing blind to emotion and audience type. Table 1 shows the percentage of children who included each feature category within each drawing type.

Analysis: Pearson Chi square tests of independence were conducted to evaluate associations between feature use and audience type. Where a significant association was found, three simple comparison (2 × 2) Pearson Chi square tests of independence were conducted to investigate where audience was associated with feature use.

Features by audience and emotion type:

- Many of the features used to depict a positive or negative emotion in the children's drawings were associated with the existence and type of audience by emotion type.
- **Happy drawings:** Waving figures were associated with both audience types (χ^2 (1, N= 49) = 16.34, p < .001), and most associated with the adult audience (χ^2 (1, N= 50) = 11.88, p = .001). More flower giving, as illustrated in Fig. 1, was associated with the adult audience group (χ^2 (1, N= 50) = 9.64, p = .004).
- **Sad drawings:** More figures showing a thumbs down were associated with an adult audience (χ^2 (1, N= 50) = 4.33, p = .048), whereas stomping figures were more associated with a peer audience (χ^2 (1, N= 51) = 4.75, p = .04).

Affect ratings towards figure types: ANOVA confirmed that children rated the happy figures (M= 4.03, SD = 0.45) more positively than both the baseline (M= 2.89, SD= 0.67) and sad (M= 1.03, SD= 0.38) figures, and the baseline more positively than the sad figures.

Figure 1: *A happy figure drawn by a 6 year 6 month old boy gift giving in the adult audience condition*

Table 1*: Percentage of features within each category by drawing and audience type*

Feature	Drawing type	Reference (n = 24)	Child (n = 25)	Adult (n = 26)	Total
		Audience Type			
Smile	Neutral	66.7	76.0	61.5	68.1
	Happy	91.7	100	100	97.2
	Sad	0	0	0	0
Wave	Neutral	12.5	4.0	7.7	8.1
	Happy	8.3	64.0	53.8	42.0
	Sad	0	0	0	0
Flower(s)	Neutral	4.2	8.0	7.7	6.6
	Happy	29.2	28.0	73.1	43.4
	Sad	0	0	0	0
Tear(s)	Neutral	0	0	0	0
	Happy	0	0	0	0
	Sad	50.0	48.0	73.1	57.0
Frown	Neutral	4.2	8.0	0	6.6
	Happy	0	0	0	0
	Sad	70.8	64.0	65.4	66.7
Thumb down	Neutral	0	0	0	0
	Happy	0	0	0	0
	Sad	25.0	32.0	53.8	37.0
Stomp	Neutral	0	0	7.7	2.6
	Happy	0	0	0	0
	Sad	12.5	48	19.2	26.6

Conclusions

- Children drew specific positive or negative features differently depending upon whether they thought an audience, more specifically, an adult or a peer audience would view and decode their drawings.
- It is possible that drawings are shaped by children's developing understanding of social display rules as certain positive behaviours were drawn for an adult audience, such as flower giving, and negative features, such as stomping, for a peer audience.
- Interpretation of emotional information in children's drawings can be informed by knowledge of who children believe will decode their drawings.
- This line of study could be extended to assess a range of real or imagined personal and professional audience types, more complex emotions and additional familiar drawing topics to further inform adult interpretation of children's affective drawings.

References

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