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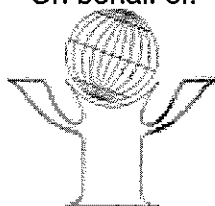
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Children's Drawings

A Cross-Cultural Analysis from Japan and the United States

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ABSTRACT Research suggests that children's drawings are reflective of their culture. In the drawings of seven and eight year old children from Japan and the United States it was found that Japanese children drew significantly fewer smiles, a higher number of details and larger figures. Findings are interpreted within cultural differences.

Introduction

The power of projective techniques such as children's drawings has been widely acknowledged. (Readers interested in a review of the literature are referred to Koppitz and Casullo [1983].) Some researchers (Daoud, 1976; Schofield, 1978; Smart and Smart, 1975) have found a child's drawing to be reflective of environment and culture. Dennis (1966) asserted that children's drawings represent an understanding of self and culture, not just a visual reflection. He states that children draw

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things which are socially accepted within their culture and that group values are represented in their pictures. Steward et al. (1982) suggest that children's drawings not only mirror their immediate environment, they also reveal their culture's values or preferences.

The present study looked at culture as it is manifested in human figure drawing. Specifically, we were interested in the cultural values for public emotion, attention to detail and the social evaluation of self, in drawings of children from Japan and the United States.

Smile

Research (Honkavaara, 1961; Plutchik, 1962) suggests that the public expression of emotion is controlled by certain social pressures.¹ Ekman and Friesen (1969) state that management of facial expression typically occurs in public situations and that the techniques for such control are learned early in life. Lutz (1988) states that emotion is 'a social rather than an individual achievement' (p. 5).

Differences in Japanese and American cultures in their expression of emotion have been noted (Frymier et al., 1990; Matsumoto et al., 1988; Mauro et al., 1992). Doi's (1986) description of the *omote* or presentational self and Lebra's (1992) explanation of *tatemaie*, or appearance, speak to the Japanese duality of public and private expressions of emotion. Barnlund (1975) characterizes Japanese people as having a 'highly contained self which is controlled and cautiously expressed' (p. 52), and Americans as having a 'larger public self that is expressed more completely and candidly' (p. 54).

An indication of a culture's sanction of public displays of emotion can be found in the frequency with which children include smiles on the drawn human figure (Dennis, 1966; Gardiner, 1972; Iwawaki and Vandewiele, 1989). If the Japanese value emotional restraint in public, then we would expect Japanese children to draw fewer smiles.

Details

Alland (1983) and Fassler (1986) have noted cultural differences in the number of details drawn. Iwawaki and Vandewiele (1989) found Japanese children drew detailed persons with carefully sketched dress, hands with fingers and nails and well integrated hair. DiLeo (1977), noted a tendency for children from the US to draw very simplistic figures.

Japanese students place great importance on orderliness (Kikuchi and Gordon, 1970), perseverance and concentration (Shigaki, 1983). The Japanese are taught to value process over product. Attention to detail is emphasized early in the education of young children (White, 1985). An elementary school teacher in Japan (M. Ishinaka, personal communication, April 11, 1996) stated that children are taught to pay close attention

to particulars in pictures (e.g. they are told to take note of the wrinkles in a person's hand).

The detail of a picture is measured by the number of drawn items included which are not necessary for the identification of an object (e.g. fingernails on fingers, buttons or collars on shirts). If Japanese people place a higher value on detail we would expect to find a greater number of what Buck (1966) terms 'unnecessary' details.

Esteem

The third cultural contrast relates to the evaluation of self within a social context. Here we are interested not in *self-esteem*, but in how the child views his or her worth within the society – a *sociocultural-esteem* of self.

Maccoby (1980) states that a social self begins to emerge early in the development of a child's identity. Children understand both who they are within the social structure and how they are valued. This understanding is the result of a complex evolutionary procedure as well as a dialectical process between the personal and the social (La Voy et al., 1992). Identification with a positive reference group provides a child with a measure of stability (Maccoby, 1980) and a sense of belonging (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) which contributes to the child's feelings of worth.

The sociocultural image of these groups may be dissimilar because of the way the child identifies with the group and how the group values the child. With respect to group identification, it has been suggested that Japanese children learn a more collective orientation (Kuwayama, 1992; Tobin, 1992). On the other hand, research has shown that Americans value independence and individuality highly (Kashima et al., 1995; Stephan et al. 1996; Triandis et al., 1986). The Freudian notion that good mental health comes from strong definition of self, as distinct from others, has been a mainstay of western thought and childrearing practices.

Other research (Iritani, 1979) suggests that the Japanese culture places a high social value on its children. Work in this area states that the Japanese family structure is child-centered (White, 1985) and that parents try to create in their children a sense of being loved and wanted (Doi, 1977).

It has been suggested that the size of the human figure may be an indicator of the artist's self-esteem; however, reviews by Roback (1968) and Swenson (1968) find the evidence to be equivocal. Drawing once again on Dennis' (1966) theory, we suggest that the size of the drawn figure may more accurately reflect the child's view of his or her worth within the culture, or sociocultural-esteem of self. Clear indications of culture in the size of the drawn human figure were found by de la Serna et al. (1979). If Japanese children feel they are part of a larger self, or

group and that they are highly valued by their culture, we would expect their human figure drawings to be taller.

This study looked at the social factors of (1) emotional expression as demonstrated by the presence or absence of a smile, (2) detail as measured by the number of unnecessary items found in a drawing, and (3) the child's perception of his/her societal worth as measured by the height of the drawn figure.

Method

Fifty two primary school children, ages seven and eight, participated in the study. Japanese and American males and females were equally represented in the sample. Similar to Buck (1966), children in a classroom setting were given paper (8.5" × 11") and pencil (#2, with eraser), asked to draw a house, a tree and a person and allowed five minutes to complete each drawing.

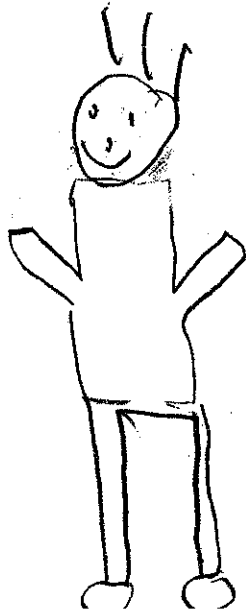
For this study only the person drawing was analyzed and three separate measurements were empirically derived. In line with Dennis' (1966) rule, a smile was determined if both corners of the mouth turned upward. Following Buck's (1966) instructions, the number of non-essential details were counted (e.g. ears, fingers, fingernails, buttons, belts, shoes). Finally, the height of the figure was measured from top to bottom. Each drawing was evaluated by four persons. Items that did not receive 100% interjudge agreement were not included in the final analyses.

Results

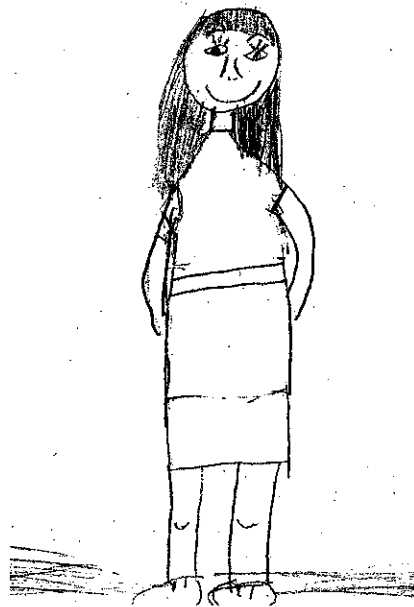
A Pearson chi-square analysis confirmed a significant difference between cultures for smiles; $X^2(1, N = 52) = 17.53, p < 0.001$. Twenty American children drew a smile, while only five of the Japanese drawings contained a smile.

An analysis of variance verified a difference in the number of details for the variable of culture, $F(1, 48) = 21.00, p < 0.001$, but not for gender, $F(1, 48) = 0.09, p > 0.10$. Interaction between culture and gender was nonsignificant, $F(1, 48) = 2.33, p > 0.10$. The mean number of details for Japanese drawings was 10.04 (SD = 4.303). The mean for those from the US was 5.19 (SD = 3.287).

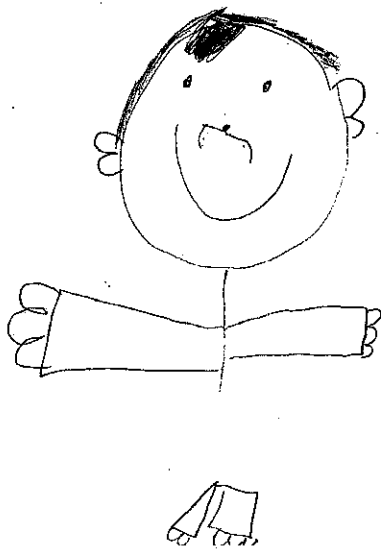
Analyses for height revealed significant main effects for gender, $F(1, 48) = 8.88, p < 0.01$ and culture, $F(1, 48) = 17.20, p < 0.001$ (interaction was nonsignificant, $F(1, 48) = 0.34, p > 0.10$). Mean height was 17.49 cm (SD = 6.42 cm) for females and 12.79 cm (SD = 6.59 cm) for males. For culture, the mean height for Japanese drawings was 18.41 cm (SD = 6.77 cm) compared to the 11.87 cm (SD = 5.31 cm) average for the US.



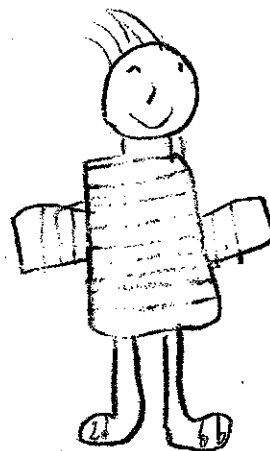
FEMALE AGE 7 FIGURE HEIGHT 11.2CM



FEMALE AGE 8 FIGURE HEIGHT 12.5 CM

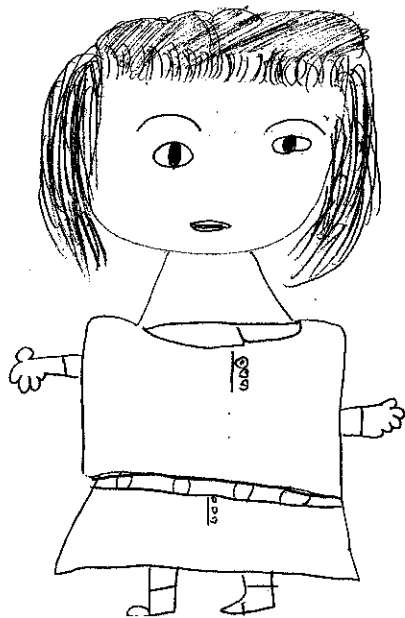


MALE AGE 7 FIGURE HEIGHT 17.2CM

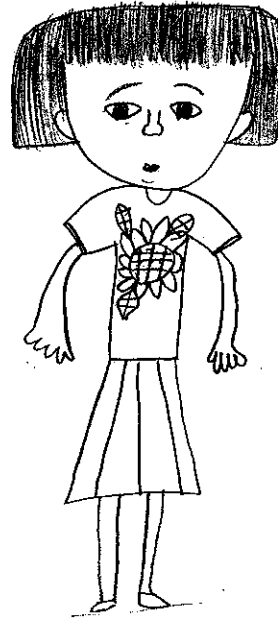


MALE AGE 8 FIGURE HEIGHT 6.0 CM

Figure 1 *Children's drawings from United States*



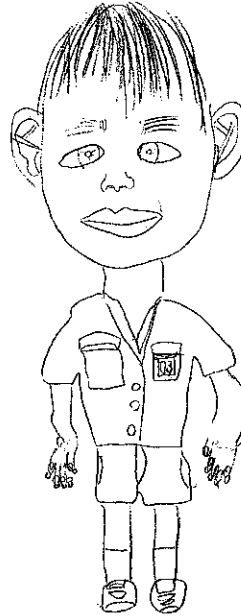
FEMALE AGE 7 FIGURE HEIGHT 25.4 CM



FEMALE AGE 8 FIGURE HEIGHT 20.6 CM



MALE AGE 7 FIGURE HEIGHT 16.1 CM



MALE AGE 8 FIGURE HEIGHT 21.3 CM

Figure 2 *Children's drawings from Japan*

To determine if the house and tree drawings of Japanese children were larger, simple *t*-tests were conducted and no significant differences were found. Results for the tree drawings were, $t = 1.381$, $df = 50$, $p = 0.173$, with means of 22.29 cm (SD = 4.59 cm) for the Japanese sample and 20.24 cm (SD = 5.98 cm) for the sample from the US. Results for the house drawings were, $t = 0.883$, $df = 50$, $p = 0.381$, with means of 19.66 cm (SD = 5.38 cm) and 18.35 cm (SD = 5.30 cm) for the Japanese and US samples, respectively. Examples of human figure drawings from the US can be found in Figure 1. The Japanese children's drawings of the human figure may be seen in Figure 2.

Discussion

Smile

Confirmation of the three hypotheses lend support to Dennis' (1966) suggestion that children draw what is both familiar to them and valued by their culture. Children in the United States were raised with a social value for public emotion (Barnlund, 1975), but Japanese children have developed strong boundaries between the private or personal aspects of self and the public persona – *omote vs ura* (Doi, 1986). They have been taught to monitor or mute their emotional expressions (Matsumoto et al., 1988) which means the appearance, or *tatemae*, which is presented to others may be quite different from the real feelings, or *honne*, they actually experience (Lebra, 1992). Our conclusion of cultural variance is consistent with the work of Gardiner (1972) and Dennis (1966) who assert that smiles are drawn with a frequency proportionate to the degree to which the public display of emotion is a culturally sanctioned goal.

An alternative explanation for the lower frequency of smiles in the Japanese sample might be that the children from the United States are simply taught that the inclusion of a smile is the proper way to draw the human figure. However, if children are being taught this, the social agents that are sending these messages (e.g. teachers, parents, other children) are passing on a social value for smiling. Clearly, the higher incidence of smiles is not a function of greater detail, as the Japanese drawings contained far more detail overall.

Detail

In understanding the results of greater detail in the Japanese sample, we turn once again to Dennis' (1966) hypotheses. Attention to detail is an important component in the education of Japanese children; they learn the importance of particulars very early in life. As a function of their high value for process (White, 1985), it appears the Japanese

children are more likely to take the opportunity to express a greater number of details in their drawings (e.g. fingernails, hairstyles). Findings (Kikuchi and Gordon, 1970; Shigaki, 1983) that suggest a higher incidence of perseverance, order and concentration in Japanese subjects would also support the use of greater detail in the drawn figure. Our results of greater detail in the drawings of Japanese children are consistent with those of Alland (1983) and Iwawaki and Vandewiele (1989).

Esteem

Group identification and a society's value of children help to explain the differences found in the size of the drawings. The Japanese emphasis on group identification creates greater feelings of belonging (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) and a larger, more stable sense of self (Maccoby, 1980). Further, the Japanese society's high social value for children (White, 1985) engenders a more positive and expansive sense of sociocultural-esteem.

The equivocal nature (Roback, 1968; Swenson, 1968) of research on the relationship between self-esteem and the size of the drawn figure may be a function of looking at self-esteem from an exclusively internal perspective. Western emphasis on the individual may colour the way in which we interpret the size/esteem issue. If children's drawings are reflective of their social values, then a better question might be, 'How do children reflect their sense of *sociocultural* worth in the human figure drawing?'

Although children in Japan are taught to draw larger objects (M. Ishinaka, personal communication, April 11, 1996), comparisons of the house and tree drawings did *not* reveal significant differences between the two cultures. Instruction or teaching methods can therefore be ruled out as a potential factor.

A possible explanation for the larger drawings by the females might be the greater group or social orientation of girls this age (Maccoby, 1980). To a degree, all of the positives associated with group identification outlined above are true for young girls who are more attuned to the group.

Conclusions

This study has potential implications for intercultural relations where it is important to understand that emotions may be expressed differently. Miscommunications can occur when cultural preconceptions about the meanings of emotional demonstrations are imposed. For example, the lack of an outward expression of happiness (e.g. a smile) might be interpreted as lack of feeling or interest, while in reality it may be an

indication of respect – a misunderstanding which may elicit an inappropriate reaction or response.

Intercultural interactions can also be impacted by differing values for detail. Emphasis on process, as opposed to end goal, may lead to a misjudgment of the value of the relationship. Focussing on different aspects of the relationship may lead to misconception or miscommunication as to the importance of the whole. International negotiations have been known to break down because participants insisted on the importance of different paths which eventually would have led to the same end (e.g. the Paris Peace Accords).

Understanding how a child sees him or herself within the culture can expand our knowledge about the development of identity and the interrelationships of its many components. Accepting only the primacy of the private-self, many western scholars have missed the import of the social-self in understanding the identity or self-concept of individuals from other cultures. An ethnocentric view of self can be an obstacle to meaningful interaction. Accurate understanding of self and other is critical to productive relationships.

Knowing that cultures perceive and value their children differently (not necessarily 'more' or 'less') is important. It can help us understand and accept another culture's priorities, their approach to education, and their parenting styles.

This study suggests that even at young ages children are impacted by their particular culture. There is much yet to be discovered, but the simplicity and honesty of children's drawings may offer an uncluttered approach to understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. To move beyond ethnocentrism and the conflict it creates, greater insight into one another is critical.

Notes

1. In addressing the notion that members of a culture are more or less likely to display an emotion in public, it should be made clear that the long-standing debate between 'facial universalists' and 'facial relativists' is not at issue (those interested in this debate are referred to Ekman [1992, 1994], Izard [1994], and Russel [1994]). The current question asks only whether or not an emotion is publicly expressed, not what meaning it holds.

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La Voy et al.: Children's Drawings

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