

Children's Drawings and People's Subjective Well-Being

Subjects: [Literary Reviews](#)

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Applying the thinking and visual characteristics of children's paintings in artwork can stimulate people's happiness, inspire artists, and arouse the public's happiness by visual means.

children's paintings' characteristics

people's subjective well-being

people's happiness

1. The Thinking Characteristics of Children's Drawings

Drawing is seen as a symbol that children use to communicate and is equally important as a visual language. Drawing is a communicator of self, while drawing is a processor of knowledge and a process of play ^[1]. In essence, children's drawings reflect their upbringing and psychological condition. The characteristics of these drawings change as the child grows, and children translate their perceptions into images that people can understand and observe ^[2]. Research on how young children's drawings change and develop is well documented, with a large body of literature on the field dating back to the 19th century. However, most of this literature focused on the developmental aspects ^[3].

There are typical visual features in children's drawings ^[4]. Numerous studies have shown that children learn about their environment and nature from direct experience. Children show a high degree of randomness in the drawing process. Children's drawings involve their imaginative, expressive, and creative abilities ^[5], and during the drawing process, the children's perspectives are fluid. Children's drawings also do not have a fixed shape; they add their favorite images at will. Hence, the development of their drawings is related to their cognitive abilities ^[6].

Since the 1990s, academic research on children's art has become more advanced, in their studies, scholars analyzed in detail the features of children's thinking and the exaggerated expressiveness of their drawings ^[7]. Children's drawings contain the primary features of the depicted objects, which indicates that children can observe ^[8]. In other words, this means that the child would retain the most basic structural features of the object in the drawing process. All shapes represent a symbolic character. However, scholars' understanding of children's drawings varies considerably, depending on the different cultural backgrounds of the scholars ^[9].

The random and fun nature of children's drawings can stimulate children's enthusiasm and interest in creativity and can help children improve their imagination, creativity, and observation in the process of drawing ^[10]. Drawing is imbued with personal creativity by children where drawing is one way to express people's imagination ^[11]. Children's drawings are influenced by the drawing environment and drawing materials, and children's drawings are

derived from their life and drawing experiences ^[12]. The distinctive characteristics of children's drawings can be observed during the silent, symbolic, and creative periods.

Although scholars and artists have studied children's drawings in depth, the current findings suggest that there is considerable controversy in scholars' understanding of children's drawings and children's art. Carothers argues that, although children's drawings have been studied from several perspectives by previous authors, their status as works of art has not been considered ^[13]. Metin offers his own unique perspective, arguing that gifted children and normally developing children have similar drawing characteristics while acknowledging that the differences between boys and girls are not significant and that the differences between children's drawings are age-related ^[14]. Barraza shares Mine's view that children with significant cultural differences show more similarities than differences in their drawings ^[15]. However, Metin only selected a small number of children for his study and did not mention more regions and countries ^[16]. Similarly, Barraza only focused on children's drawings in the United Kingdom and Mexico ^[17], and the study would have been more comprehensive if it had covered more regions.

In general, researchers agreed with Hodgson and Khorshidi that it is important to respect and understand the characteristics of children's thinking in drawings, such as exaggeration, randomness, and creativity, and to analyze the characteristics of children's drawings. Children break through stereotypes and are naturally positive. They also express their emotions and personalities through art. Moreover, Kudryavtsev's point of view is supported. The randomness and fun nature of children's drawings are the driving force of children's creativity. Thus, based on Wright's view, researchers on the types of children's drawings, artistic expressions, and artistic characteristics. Children's ability to "borrow" sensory and emotion-based language to metaphorically describe ideas is common, not only in the visual arts, but also in drama, dance, and music. Finally, researchers explored the randomness, exaggeration, symbolism, uniqueness, and playfulness of children's drawings to increase our knowledge of the artistic thinking process.

2. Visual Features of Children's Drawings

The process of children's psychological development influences the content in children's drawings, and the drawings of children of different ages reflect their understanding of visual information ^[17]. The content of a drawing determines its quality, which is represented by the composition, line, color, and shape ^[18]. Hence, children's drawings have their own characteristics in terms of expression.

The development of children's painting is closely related to the psychological development of children. Simplicity and generality are the more prominent features of children's paintings, and the linear development of children's paintings has obvious differences in different age groups. Differences in children's paintings are closely related to children's long-term living environment and personality characteristics ^[19]. Children's drawings have their own unique characteristics of shape, color, and composition. The simplicity of generalized shapes and bright colors as well as the free and random composition in children's paintings are appealing ^[20]. When young children first begin to draw, they are less expressive ^[21]; as a result, their drawings are simple in shape and lack details, moreover, the objects in their drawings are mostly composed of lines. There will be obvious differences in the graphics and tools

that children use when drawing the same object, and their artistic characteristics can be classified and studied during the research process [22].

Semiotic art in children's drawing can realize communication without borders, and semiotics can help analyze the art of children's drawing in art education [23]. Typically, 2- to 5-year-old children draw people like tadpoles. Children between the ages of five and seven draw people like sticks. By the time a child is 7 to 9 years old, the figure is more complete, and the characteristics of the figure's gender and costume can be distinguished [1]. Color is the first impression of the world that people perceive visually, and children are no exception. When children observe an object, they first analyze the color characteristics and, then, have a specific understanding of the whole thing through the color characteristics [24]. Children always pay special attention to the color of things, and bright colors attract children's attention [25]. Children's paintings boldly use contrasting colors that are composed of high-purity colors without mixing. Bright colors and high-purity colors are in line with children's aesthetic feelings [26].

The main characteristics of messy compositions are having no fixed arrangement in the pictures and people can draw according to their own feelings. Children have poor control over the size of objects and ignore the details [27]. Children often use lines to divide their paintings, which forms a unique way of composition. The main feature of the baseline composition is to draw a baseline under the drawn shape, such as a line to separate the ground from the sky. This means of composition makes the picture to start becoming orderly. The appearance of a baseline composition indicates that the child has the idea of arranging elements in a sequence. As the children develop, thematic compositions would emerge in the painting. By arranging the main image and the secondary image, the main expressed content is highlighted, thus forming the theme of the picture and expressing the artist's own ideas. Lijima, however, differs slightly from other scholars in his view that there are gender differences in children's freehand drawings in terms of subject matter, color, character composition, and expression [28]. Boys prefer to paint moving and mechanical objects in dark or cool colors and often use bird's-eye compositions when painting, while girls prefer to paint figure patterns (especially girls and women), flowers, and butterflies, use light and warm colors, and tend to arrange patterns in succession on the ground [28].

There are some questionable assumptions in the study of children's artistic development. One view is that children's drawings follow universal patterns in their early years, regardless of their culture or gender, and that the patterns of children's artistic development do not change in the early stages of so-called primitive art, regardless of where they were born. Piaget analyzed the universality of children's artistic development based on cognitive development, and that the universal patterns present in children's drawings in all cultures and countries vary between stages change [29]. In terms of the visual characteristics of children's drawings, this issue is still not fully explored, despite several studies having been conducted by researchers. At the beginning of the 20th century, studies on children's drawings were focused on visual data: space; line; perspective ability; etc. [16][26][30]. In terms of the visual characteristics of children's drawings, Soylu only focused on describing the patterns and characteristics of children's drawing line development, without discussing other elements of their drawings [19]. In contrast, Turkcana focused only on using semiotics to analyze elementary school students' drawings, which would have been more scholarly if the study had been broader in scope [23].

In general, researchers agreed with Rubenstein in summarizing and analyzing the modeling features (such as simplicity, generality, flat modeling, parallel vision, independent modeling, and positive perspective expression), color features (such as bright colors, bold contrast, high purity), and composition features (such as messy, baseline, thematic compositions, free, casual, and highlighting the theme) of children's paintings. Researchers propose to follow Soylu in examining children's paintings and analyzing the elements and characteristics of children's paintings. Additionally, researchers propose to explore the visual characteristics of children's painting art such as simple and independent shape, bold contrast, and high purity of color, and free, casual, and prominent subject composition, which are conducive to the wider application of many elements of children's painting in art creation.

3. The Impact of Children's Drawings on People's Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

SWB is defined as well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, and it is closely related to hedonic mental states as it depends on how an individual feels at certain specific times ^[31]. At the beginning of the twentieth century, children's art became the subject of serious study by scholars, enabling it to be considered as art ^[32]. Art has a unique charm, and works of art not only enrich and regulate people's spiritual life, but also relieve various social pressures ^[33]. As an important field of art, children's painting is inextricably linked with people's happiness.

Happiness is one of the oldest themes in philosophical research ^[34]. The various definitions of the overall happiness of individuals have been understood differently at separate times. The question of how to define one's overall happiness refers back to the philosophical debates of ancient Greece; "happiness" versus "hedonism". The school of hedonism, which was led by Epicurus, believed that happiness came from the enjoyment and pleasure of life ^[35]. Children's drawings are known to induce feelings of relaxation and pleasure. Therefore, visual art, such as children's drawings, can stimulate a sense of well-being ^[36]. The creation of children's art is not an individual endeavor and questions the assumption that artworks are mirrors of children's thoughts ^[25]. Art is often thought to enhance people's well-being ^[26]. There is an interplay between children's art and avant-garde art. The participatory nature of children's art is particularly emphasized by the artist Paul Klee, who collected works created by children and saw them as a path to art ^[37].

The surrealist elements in the paintings of the famous artist Miro are inextricably linked to children's art, thus opening up new territories. Most of the artist's works are characterized by simple shapes, a child-like freedom of expression, and a high degree of spontaneity and randomness, through the use of things stored in his memory since childhood ^[38]. Children's paintings have attracted the attention of artists with their honest childishness, vivid colors, and unbridled imagination. Children's drawings not only occupy a unique place in the field of art, but they can also be visually enjoyable ^[7].

The innocence and naturalness of children's paintings give people positive emotions, so children's paintings can influence people's happiness from the visual aspect ^[39]. Children's paintings are the most primitive and valuable

way of presenting the mind. If primitive art is the origin of all art, then children's art can be said to be the true embodiment of the artist's heart. There is no doubt that innocence and childishness are very positive. They naturally resonate with people, bring them into a state of deep relaxation and freedom, and also bring them a sense of well-being. Innocence and childlike interest are the source and goal of artistic creation ^[20]. There are many similarities between the works of modern art masters and children's paintings ^{[16][22]}.

Huang Shanwu, a famous Chinese public artist, said in an interview with the first author, "There is no doubt that children's paintings can bring joy to people. I aspire to think like a child without any complicated emotions when I create. I want to express what I want to express in a simple and pure way. I like to work in an uninhibited way, somewhat like children's painting. In my own work, for example, I look for particularly bright lines and light, and I often use very simple shapes to convey the charm of the art". However, the art of children's painting can not only enhance the happiness of adults, but also help children to form a unique aesthetic concept and improve their aesthetic ability, as well as satisfy their need for self-expression of emotions, which is also important for enhancing children's happiness ^[40].

The current research results show that there is a great deal of controversy about the actual meaning of children's paintings. However, not all scholars and the general public believe that children's drawings are valuable. Some people think that children's drawings are difficult to understand, and there are no figurative images and high-quality lines in children's drawings. Children's drawings are messy in composition and do not clearly express the subject matter of the drawing. Painting is a way for children to communicate with the world. The unique form of expression may go beyond the emotions that language can express and empathize with the public. Nowadays, under conditions of fast-paced lives and pressure, people prefer to see simple, pure, and connotative art forms that can create emotional resonance and enhance their sense of well-being ^[41].

However, in considering the differences between children's paintings, the public recognizes children's art and celebrates adult art. Researchers believed that it is possible to be happy with children's artworks, because in their artworks we can see the very first signs of future achievements. The artistic value of children's work is determined by the viewer's perception such that educators see it as a way to see through aesthetic development, psychologists see it as a key to understanding children's behavior, and artists see it as the most direct expression of children's inner emotions. However, educators, psychologists, and artists alike are recommended to see children's artistic development as a unique and integral part of their overall education ^[42]. According to Gardner, "it is the child's approach to art, the child's subconscious sense of form, the willingness to explore and resolve emergence, the ability to take risks and the emotional needs that must emerge in the symbolic realm" ^[42].

In general, researchers supported Węziak Białowolska that people's subjective well-being comes from enjoyment and pleasure in life. Researchers recommended Totterdell's view that children's drawings not only occupy a unique place in the field of art but can also be visually pleasing. Researchers also promoted Khayif and Kümmerling's view that children's drawings can provide creative ideas and inspiration for artists. Researchers agreed with Wang Likun's view that the art of children's paintings can provide a new source of inspiration for artworks. By analyzing the artistic characteristics of children's paintings from four perspectives: point, line, surface, and color, researchers

concluded that its strong generalization, imaginative creativity, and combination with elemental modeling, color use, composition, and expression in other art forms can be realized if based on the artistic expression of children's painting. Researchers posited that children's paintings not only provide an artistic experience but can also relieve people's mental stress, inspire artists, and stimulate a sense of subjective well-being through visual images.

4. The Process of Conceptual Framework Formation

Researchers aimed to explore how children's paintings can arouse people's happiness. Researchers recorded the analysis of the thinking and visual characteristics behind children's paintings to determine which type of children's painting is likely to arouse people's happiness. The results show that exploring the thinking characteristics of children's paintings, such as randomness, exaggeration, symbolism, uniqueness, and interest, can increase the cognition of children's painting art thinking process. The study proposes to explore the visual characteristics of children's painting art (such as simple and independent modeling, bold color contrast, high purity, free, casual, and prominent theme composition) and to apply them to wider applications in art creation. As an important category of art, children's paintings can provide an artistic experience to relieve people's mental pressure, stimulate artists' inspiration, and stimulate people's subjective well-being through visual images. The results show that the characteristics of children's paintings can stimulate people's happiness and have a profound impact on art. Adding the characteristics of children's paintings to the artist's artistic work can increase the artist's creative materials and also improve the creativity of the artist's works, thus stimulating the joy of the audience. In summing up, researchers proposed to focus on analyzing the specific characteristics of children's paintings in two areas—thinking and visual characteristics—that would inspire artists and hence arouse the public's pleasurable happiness through visual means. Figure 1 is the proposed conceptual framework.

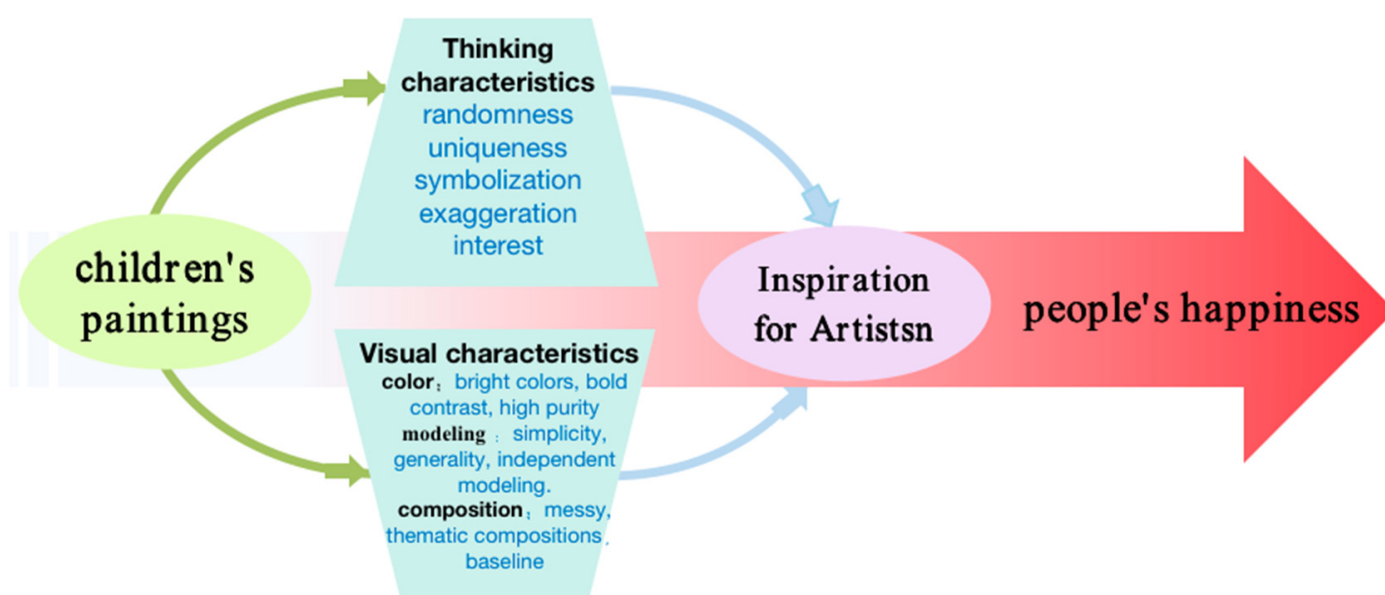


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework for influence of children's paintings' features on people's well-being.

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