

*In memory of Elena Olegovna Smirnova*

## **A Preschooler's Emotional Well-being within a Family (Based on Psychological Analysis of Children's Drawings)**

Vladimir S. Sobkin<sup>a\*</sup>, Irina A. Ryabkova<sup>a</sup>, Irina V. Sozinova<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *The Center for Socio-Cultural Problems of Modern Education, The Federal Scientific Center for Psychological and Interdisciplinary Research, Moscow, Russia*

<sup>b</sup> *The Kindergarten "SmartTeam," Krasnogorsk, Russia*

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: sobkin@mail.ru

### **ABSTRACT**

**Background.** This article is devoted to the analysis of comparative drawings on the subject of "My Family" by preschoolers who are being brought up in either a two-parent or single-parent family. This topic is extremely relevant not only because of the increase in divorces in Russia and the associated difficulties in raising and nourishing young children, but also from the point of view of the data collection method. Typically, such studies use surveys of parents and other adults involved in a child's care, while the "child's voice" remains unaccounted for.

**Objective.** The purpose of our study was to explore the possibilities of using children's drawings to diagnose the uniqueness of the social situation of development in a modern family, as well as the child's emotional well-being in the family.

**Design.** The projective technique "Drawing of a family," as modified by the authors, was used. The sample consisted of 44 children from 4 years and 9 months to 7 years old (resulting in the average age of 5 years and 10 months); the sample included 18 boys and 26 girls (41% and 59%).

**Results.** The study results confirmed the invariance of the significance of various parameters of a child's drawings on the subject of "My Family" over the past 25 years. Three key bipolar factors were identified for assessing the children's drawings: 1) "Structured relationships in the family vs. Parental dominance;" 2) "Involvement in the family struc-

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ture vs. Detachment from the family;” and 3) “Child’s loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection with the father.”

**Conclusion.** The results allow us to draw the following conclusions. First, the girls’ drawings clearly demonstrated positive emotional well-being, identification with the mother, and orientation towards traditional gender-role relationships in the family, while the boys’ drawings were distinguished by the dominance of the adults’ parental position and the child’s identification with the family as a special social group. Second, the emotional well-being of children from single-parent families was clearly worse than that of children from two-parent families; boys from single-parent families found themselves in the most difficult social development situations.

**Keywords:** Preschoolers, family relationships, children’s drawings, “My Family” drawing, children from single-parent families, preschoolers’ gender differences, well-being of a preschooler

#### Highlights:

- Our results record positive changes in both the social situation of raising children in the family as well as in their emotional well-being. Compared to a study conducted in Russia at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries among children raised in two-parent families, the proportion of those who did not draw a father figure had decreased; in addition, the percentage of children who drew smiles on the depicted figures’ faces had grown. Moreover, this could be seen both in the drawings of children from two-parent as well as from single-parent families. However, this trend was especially clearly expressed in the girls’ drawings.
- The factor analysis of indicators characterizing the features of children’s drawings made it possible to identify a bipolar factor that differentiated the drawings of the boys and girls. In the girls’ drawings, positive emotional well-being, identification with the mother, and orientation towards traditional gender-role relationships in the family (the head of the family is the father) were clearly manifested. On the other hand, the boys’ drawings reflected the dominance of the adults’ parental position toward the child, and the child’s identification with the family as a special social community group.
- One factor that differentiated the drawings of the children from two-parent and single-parent families was also identified: in almost all the drawings of children from two-parent families, there was a father figure, while in the drawings of children from single-parent families, quite often there was no image of the father. These drawings also differed in terms of their emotional nature: children from two-parent families more often used warm colors, while children from single-parent families preferred neutral or cold colors, which indicated different levels of emotional well-being within the family in these two groups of children.
- Finally, another factor made it possible to differentiate the drawings of children from two-parent and single-parent families, *i.e.*, their gender characteristics. Analysis of the materials showed that boys from single-parent families found themselves in the most difficult social development situations and demonstrated insufficiently structured relationships in the family, a reduced emotional tone, emotional detachment from other family members, and feelings of loneliness.

#### АННОТАЦИЯ

**Актуальность.** Статья посвящена проблеме сравнительного анализа рисунков дошкольников на тему «Моя семья», воспитывающихся в полной или неполной семье. Данная тема крайне актуальна не только по причине роста разводов в России и связанными в связи с этим трудностями воспитания и развития маленьких детей, но и с точки зрения метода сбора данных. Обычно в подобных исследованиях

используются опросы родителей и других заботящихся взрослых, в то время как «голос ребенка» остается не уттенным.

**Цель.** Цель настоящей работы — исследовать возможности использования детского рисунка для диагностики своеобразия социальной ситуации развития в современной семье и эмоционального самочувствия ребенка в семье.

**Методики и выборка.** В работе использовалась проективная методика «Рисунок семьи» в модификации авторов. Выборка составила 44 ребенка от 4 лет 9 месяцев до 7 лет, средний возраст 5 лет 10 месяцев; 18 мальчиков и 26 девочек (41% и 59%).

**Результаты.** Результаты проведенного исследования позволили подтвердить инвариантность значимости различных параметров детского рисунка на тему «Моя семья» на протяжении последних 25-ти лет. Выявлены три ключевых биполярных фактора оценки детских рисунков семьи: «Структурированные отношения в семье — Доминирование взрослых», «Включенность в структуру семьи — Отстраненность от семьи» и «Одиночество — Позитивная эмоциональная связь с отцом».

**Выводы.** Полученные результаты позволяют сделать следующие выводы. Во-первых, в рисунках девочек отчетливо проявляется позитивное эмоциональное самочувствие, идентификация с матерью и ориентация на традиционные полоролевые отношения в семье, в то время как рисунки мальчиков отличает доминирование родительской позиции взрослых и идентификация ребенка с семьей как особой социальной группой. Во-вторых, эмоциональное самочувствие детей из неполных семей явно хуже, чем у детей из полных семей, причем в наиболее сложной социальной ситуации развития оказываются мальчики из неполных семей.

**Ключевые слова:** Дошкольники, семейные отношения, детские рисунки, рисунок «Моя семья», дети из неполных семей, гендерные различия дошкольников, благополучие дошкольника

#### **Ключевые положения:**

- Полученные в работе результаты фиксируют положительные изменения как в социальной ситуации воспитания детей в семье, так и в их эмоциональном самочувствии. По сравнению с исследованием, проведенным в России в конце 20-го — начале 21 веков, среди детей, воспитывающихся в полных семьях, уменьшилась доля тех, кто не рисует фигуру отца, и увеличился процент детей, рисующих улыбки на лицах изображаемых фигур. Причем это прослеживается как в рисунках детей из полных, так и неполных семей, но особенно отчетливо эта тенденция выражена в рисунках девочек.
- Результаты факторного анализа показателей, характеризующих особенности детских рисунков «Моя семья», позволили выделить биполярный фактор, дифференцирующий рисунки мальчиков и девочек: в рисунках девочек отчетливо проявляется позитивное эмоциональное самочувствие, идентификация с матерью и ориентация на традиционные полоролевые отношения в семье (глава семьи — отец); рисунки мальчиков отражают доминирование родительской позиции взрослых по отношению к ребенку и идентификацию ребенка с семьей как особой социальной групповой общностью.
- Также был выделен фактор, дифференцирующий рисунки детей из полных и неполных семей: практически во всех рисунках детей из полных семей присутствует фигура отца, в то время как в рисунках детей из неполных семей довольно часто изображение отца отсутствует. Отличаются эти рисунки и эмоциональным характером: дети из полных семей чаще используют теплые тона, в то время как дети из неполных семей отдают предпочтение нейтральным и холодным цветам, что свидетельствует о разном эмоциональном самочувствии внутри семьи у этих двух групп детей.

- Наконец, еще один фактор позволил провести сопоставление рисунков детей из полных и неполных семей с учетом их гендерных особенностей: анализ материалов показал, что мальчики из неполных семей оказываются в наиболее сложной социальной ситуации развития, демонстрируя недостаточно структурированные отношения в семье, сниженный эмоциональный фон, эмоциональную отстраненность от других членов семьи и переживание чувства одиночества.

## RESUMEN

**Relevancia.** El artículo está dedicado al problema del análisis comparativo de los dibujos de niños en edad preescolar sobre el tema «Mi familia», criados en una familia completa o monoparental. Este tema es extremadamente relevante no solamente debido al aumento de los divorcios en Rusia y las dificultades relacionadas con la educación y el desarrollo de los niños pequeños, sino también desde el punto de vista del método de recopilación de datos. Por lo general, este tipo de estudios utilizan encuestas de padres y otros adultos que cuidan, mientras que la «voz del niño» no se tiene en cuenta.

**El objetivo.** El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar las posibilidades de utilizar el dibujo infantil para diagnosticar la peculiaridad de la situación social del desarrollo en la familia moderna y el bienestar emocional del niño en la familia.

**Métodos y muestra.** La obra utilizó la técnica proyectiva «dibujo de la familia» en la modificación de los autores. La muestra fue de 44 niños desde 4 años y 9 meses hasta 7 años, con una edad promedio de 5 años y 10 meses; 18 niños y 26 niñas (41% y 59%).

**Resultados.** Los resultados del estudio permitieron confirmar la invariancia de la importancia de los diferentes parámetros del dibujo infantil sobre el tema «Mi familia» durante los últimos 25 años. Se identificaron tres factores bipolares clave para evaluar los dibujos familiares de los niños: «Relaciones familiares estructuradas — Dominio de los adultos», «Inclusión en la estructura familiar — Separación de la familia» y «Soledad — Conexión emocional positiva con el padre».

**Conclusiones.** Los resultados obtenidos permiten sacar las siguientes conclusiones. Primero, los dibujos de las niñas muestran claramente el bienestar emocional positivo, la identificación con la madre y la orientación hacia las relaciones tradicionales de la mitad de la familia, mientras que los dibujos de los niños se distinguen por el predominio de la posición parental de los adultos y la identificación del niño con la familia como un grupo social especial. Segundo, el bienestar emocional de los niños de familias monoparentales es claramente peor que el de los niños de familias completas, y los niños de familias monoparentales se encuentran en la situación social más difícil de desarrollo.

**Palabras clave:** Niños en edad preescolar, relaciones familiares, dibujos infantiles, dibujo de «Mi familia», niños de familias monoparentales, diferencias de género de niños en edad preescolar, bienestar de niños en edad preescolar

### Disposiciones clave:

- Los resultados obtenidos en el trabajo registran cambios positivos tanto en la situación social de la crianza de los hijos en la familia, como en su bienestar emocional. En comparación con un estudio realizado en Rusia a finales del siglo 20 y principios del siglo 21, entre los niños criados en familias completas, la proporción de aquellos que no dibujan la figura del padre disminuyó y el porcentaje de niños que dibujan sonrisas en las caras de las figuras representadas aumentó. Y esto se puede observar tanto en los dibujos de niños de familias completas como monoparentales, pero esta tendencia se expresa especialmente claramente en los dibujos de niñas.
- Los resultados del análisis factorial de los indicadores de las características de los dibujos infantiles «Mi familia» han permitido destacar el factor bipolar que dife-

rencia los dibujos de niños y niñas: en los dibujos de las niñas se manifiesta claramente el bienestar emocional positivo, la identificación con la madre y la orientación hacia las relaciones tradicionales de poder en la familia (el jefe de la familia es el padre); los dibujos de los niños reflejan el predominio de la posición parental de los adultos hacia el niño y la identificación del niño con la familia como una comunidad social especial de grupo.

- También se destacó el factor que distingue los dibujos de niños de familias completas y monoparentales: casi todos los dibujos de niños de familias completas contienen la figura del padre, mientras que los dibujos de niños de familias monoparentales a menudo carecen de la imagen del padre. Estas imágenes también difieren en la naturaleza emocional: los niños de familias completas a menudo usan tonos cálidos, mientras que los niños de familias monoparentales prefieren colores neutros y fríos, lo que indica un bienestar emocional diferente dentro de la familia en estos dos grupos de niños.
- Por último, otro factor permitió comparar los dibujos de los niños de familias completas y monoparentales en función de su género: el análisis de los materiales mostró que los niños de familias monoparentales se encontraban en la situación social más difícil de desarrollo, mostrando relaciones familiares poco estructuradas, antecedentes emocionales reducidos, separación emocional de otros miembros de la familia y sentimientos de soledad.

## RESUME

**Origines.** Cet article est consacré au problème de l'analyse comparative des dessins d'enfants d'âge préscolaire sur le thème « ma famille », élevés dans une famille complète ou monoparentale. Ce sujet est extrêmement pertinent non seulement en raison de l'augmentation des divorces en Russie et des difficultés associées pour élever et développer de jeunes enfants, mais aussi du point de vue de la méthode de collecte des données. Généralement, ces études utilisent des enquêtes auprès des parents et d'autres adultes attentionnés, sans que la « voix de l'enfant » ne soit prise en compte.

**Objectif.** Le but de ce travail est d'étudier les possibilités d'utiliser les dessins d'enfants pour diagnostiquer le caractère unique de la situation sociale de développement dans une famille moderne et le bien-être émotionnel de l'enfant dans la famille.

**Méthodes et échantillonnage.** Dans le cadre de cette étude on a utilisé le test projectif « le dessin de la famille » modifiée par les auteurs. L'échantillon était composé de 44 enfants âgés de 4 ans 9 mois à 7 ans, âge moyen 5 ans 10 mois ; 18 garçons et 26 filles (41% et 59%).

**Résultats.** Les résultats de l'étude ont permis de confirmer l'invariance de l'importance de divers paramètres du dessin d'un enfant sur le thème « Ma famille » au cours des 25 dernières années. Trois facteurs bipolaires clés ont été identifiés pour évaluer les dessins familiaux des enfants : « Relations structurées au sein de la famille — Dominance des adultes », « Inclusion dans la structure familiale — Détachement de la famille » et « Solitude — Lien émotionnel positif avec le père ».

**Conclusions.** Les résultats obtenus nous permettent de tirer les conclusions suivantes. Premièrement, les dessins des filles démontrent clairement un bien-être émotionnel positif, une identification à la mère et une orientation vers les relations traditionnelles entre les sexes dans la famille, tandis que les dessins des garçons se distinguent par la domination de la position parentale des adultes et l'identification de l'enfant à la famille en tant qu'un groupe social particulier. Deuxièmement, le bien-être émotionnel des enfants issus de familles monoparentales est nettement pire que celui des enfants issus de familles intactes, et les garçons issus de familles monoparentales se retrouvent dans la situation de développement social la plus difficile.

**Mots-clés:** Enfants d'âge préscolaire, relations familiales, dessins d'enfants, dessin "Ma famille", enfants issus de familles monoparentales, différences de genre chez les enfants d'âge préscolaire, bien-être d'un enfant d'âge préscolaire

**Points principaux:**

- Les résultats obtenus enregistrent des changements positifs tant dans la situation sociale de l'éducation des enfants dans la famille que dans leur bien-être émotionnel. Par rapport à une étude menée en Russie à la fin du XXe et au début du XXIe siècle, parmi les enfants élevés dans des familles biparentales, la proportion de ceux qui ne dessinent pas de figure paternelle a diminué, et le pourcentage d'enfants qui dessinent les sourires sur les visages des personnages représentés ont augmenté. De plus, cela se voit aussi bien dans les dessins d'enfants issus de familles complètes que monoparentales, mais cette tendance s'exprime particulièrement clairement dans les dessins de filles.
- Les résultats d'une analyse factorielle d'indicateurs caractérisant les traits spécifiques des dessins d'enfants « Ma Famille » ont permis d'identifier un facteur bipolaire qui différencie les dessins de garçons et de filles : dans les dessins de filles, bien-être émotionnel positif, identification à la mère et l'orientation vers les relations de genre traditionnelles dans la famille se manifestent clairement (le chef de famille est le père) ; Les dessins des garçons reflètent la domination de la position parentale des adultes à l'égard de l'enfant et l'identification de l'enfant à la famille en tant qu'un groupe social particulier.
- Un facteur a également été identifié qui différencie les dessins d'enfants de familles intactes et monoparentales : dans presque tous les dessins d'enfants de familles intactes, il y a une figure paternelle, tandis que dans les dessins d'enfants de familles monoparentales, il y a assez souvent aucune image du père. Ces dessins diffèrent également par leur caractère émotionnel : les enfants issus de familles intactes utilisent plus souvent des couleurs chaudes, tandis que les enfants issus de familles monoparentales préfèrent les couleurs neutres et froides, ce qui indique un bien-être émotionnel différent au sein de la famille dans ces deux groupes d'enfants.
- Enfin, un autre facteur a permis de comparer les dessins d'enfants issus de familles monoparentales et monoparentales, en tenant compte de leurs caractéristiques de genre : l'analyse des matériaux a montré que les garçons issus de familles monoparentales se retrouvent dans les conditions sociales les plus difficiles de développement, démontrant des relations familiales insuffisamment structurées, un fond émotionnel réduit, un détachement émotionnel des autres membres de la famille et un sentiment de solitude.

## Introduction

Drawing is one of the earliest manifestations of a child's creative activity (Vygotsky, Zaporozhets, Melik-Pashaev, etc.). This is largely due to the accessibility of this type of activity for young children: already at the age of three, children's drawings become thematic and reveal their ideas and interpretations. Drawing is an integral part of the preschoolers' aesthetic education; a child's drawing represents a means of self-expression, which also defines it as an artistic object. N. Fomina considers children's drawings as a phenomenon of artistic culture, reflecting "... a specific historical system of introduction to art..., a source for studying the history of artistic culture and education" (Fomina, 2023). A. Melik-Pashayev and Z. Novlyanskaya note that there are age-related characteristics that are prerequisites for abilities in artistic creativ-

ity (Melik-Pashaev, & Novlyanskaya, 2022). Probably, thanks to these characteristics, under favorable pedagogical conditions, almost all young children are able to create artistic images, using the means of fine art, that are of undoubted aesthetic value (Melik-Pashaev, & Novlyanskaya, 2014).

In addition to their aesthetic aspects, children's drawings reflect their psychological characteristics, and therefore are an informative diagnostic tool (Wenger, 2003; Vygotsky, 2005; Machover, 2020; Baird et al, 2022; Strauss, 2021; etc.). Traditionally they are used to assess mental development. Various authors identify similar stages in children's drawing development, which reflect the child's intellectual development level (Kerschensteiner, Buhler, Goodenough, Vygotsky, Wenger, etc.). Kerschensteiner, for example, identified four stages in children's mastery of drawing. First, the child's drawing results in a schematic image of a person, the so-called "tadpole person" or "headfooter". A little later, the drawings appear in the form of "X-rays," images of a person's body shape, followed by "putting" clothes on it. At senior preschool age, a transitional form arises between a schematic and "authentic" image. In this form, the drawing features of younger children's work are still preserved, but the drawing is increasingly close to the actual image (for example, more and more details appear - hair, fingers, feet, etc.). It is important to add that in the process of drawing, the child does not base his/her image on the direct perception of a person, but on their knowledge about him/her, *i.e.*, on their perception of the person's essential and permanent attributes (Vygotsky, 2005, p. 307).

According to L. Obukhova, apart from the normative idea of children's drawing development, their drawings can be classified according to typologies that make it possible to identify different development pathways (Obukhova, 2013). For example: N. Sakulina identified two types of drawing that develop by the age of five. The first is associated with a preference for drawing individual objects; children who create these drawings develop the ability to create an accurate picture, *i.e.*, drawing in itself. The second type of drawing is associated with the child's penchant for telling stories, composing plots while drawing; these children do not so much draw as *play* (Sakulina, 1963).

A similar position is shared by E. Trifonova, who, under the leadership of S. Novoselova, developed the "Star Boy" technique, which she subsequently significantly modified. E. Trifonova states that, in addition to the visual drawing itself, which is aimed at creating a product, preschoolers are also engaging in *director's play supported by the drawing*, a type of director's play based on the drawings, and not toys. Identification of this type of play formed the basis for the methodology mentioned above. It is important to note that such drawing is generally characteristic of a preschooler and reflects his/her cognitive development level — not only the actual one, but also the zone of proximal development (Trifonova, 2017).

If initially a person's drawings were used by psychologists to diagnose cognitive development, today children's personal characteristics are also studied through drawing tests. The drawing of a person was first (in 1926) proposed to be used by F. Goodenough to study cognitive abilities (Wenger, 2003). Later, criteria for assessing personal characteristics based on a person's drawing were gradually developed, and psychologists are still seeking to clarify them further (see, for example, Yim et



al, 2021). At the same time, drawing a person remains primarily a method for diagnosing intellectual development, while other specially developed and well-proven tests are used to study personal characteristics: for example, drawing of a non-existent animal, the “House, Tree, Person” test, the “Beautiful Drawing” test, and many others (Wenger, 2003; Machover, 2020).

One of the most informative and widely used techniques aimed at studying family relationships is a drawing of a family (Shearn, & Russell, 2000). It is believed that, unlike drawing a person, this technique is more associated with the personality's emotions. Thus, J. Dileo emphasizes that if, when drawing *a human figure*, a child reflects his/her ideas about the human body structure (and this aspect determines high correlations with standardized intelligence tests), then, when drawing *his/her family*, a child reflects his/her relationships with family members. When moving from a single figure of a person to an image of a family, a transition occurs from the mental component to the emotional one, which determines the high informativeness of the family drawing precisely from the point of view of the child's emotional well-being in the system of family relationships (John Dileo, 2012, p. 122). Thanks to these features, drawing of a family is one of the main methods used in psychotherapeutic practice at the diagnostic stage in order to study the family situation.

However, children's drawings are interesting not only as a means of individual psychological diagnostics, but also as a means of studying the generalized “portrait” held by a child raised in a certain sociocultural situation (Smirnova et al., 1999; Sobkin, 2001; Sobkin, & Marich, 2002; Moula et al., 2021; Mateos, 2021; Baird et al, 2022, Lee, 2023). Our work represented an attempt to analyze the well-being of preschool children in relation to sociocultural factors in their environment by using the “Family Drawing” technique. The goal was to explore the possibilities of drawing as a means of diagnosing the uniqueness of the social situation of development in a modern family. This topic seems extremely relevant, since for such tasks, parental surveys of usually used, and the “child's voice” is not taken into account. The use of a child's family drawing for these purposes allows us to study the child's well-being in the system of family relations from his/her (the child's) standpoint.

Our study examined two factors that influence the depiction of the family in children's drawings: gender and family structure (two-parent or single-parent). We hypothesized that:

- 1) the structure of a child's family drawing is invariant in different cultural and historical periods;
- 2) there are gender differences in drawings of a family; and
- 3) there are differences in the family drawings between children from families with different structures (two-parent and single-parent ones).

This research was based on the works of E. Smirnova, V. Sobkin, E. Marich, and O. Asadulina, which were carried out more than a quarter of a century ago (Smirnova et al., 1999; Sobkin, 2001; Sobkin, & Marich, 2002). The main empirical material for comparative analysis was a database of drawings by 5-7-year-old children from two-parent and single-parent families (623 children in total). The results showed significant differences in the drawings of the two groups of children. It was discovered



that boys from single-parent families found themselves in a rather difficult situation of emotional isolation; while girls from single-parent families often compensated for the absence of a father by having a close connection with their grandparents, the boys experienced an acute lack of close attachment to adults. Given these findings, it seemed appropriate to compare the results of these studies with the results of our research.

## Methods

Our study included administering the drawing technique “My Family” to preschool children and collecting data about the children.

The drawings were analyzed according to the following **parameters** (Sobkin, & Marich, 2002).

1. Emotional characteristics reflecting the child’s mood and his/her attitude to the family situation;
2. The child’s relationships in the family, which are revealed by his/her depiction of the features of their family members in relation to the child’s own image;
3. The nature of the child’s self-image and self-esteem, which can be clarified through analysis of the self-figure images and the drawing’s general plot.

As indicators of the drawing’s emotional characteristics of the drawing, we used:

- 1) color scheme (it is generally accepted that the warmer the color scheme of the picture, the more positive the child’s emotional mood; black and white tones or an outline indicate a negative state or alienation); there are three possible ratings in total — warm, cold, or neutral colors;
- 2) the presence of smiles on people’s faces (this parameter reflects the cheerful mood of the drawing’s author); the presence of at least one smile in the drawing or its absence was assessed;
- 3) the presence of decorations and symbols, such as sun, flowers, butterflies, etc. (This parameter is traditionally considered to be an indicator of a child’s positive attitude, a symbol of integration into the world, and involvement in reality; its absence is considered evidence of isolation from the world); the presence of at least one symbol in the picture or its absence was noted.

When analyzing the features of the images of the core family members (mother, father, grandparents), the following characteristics were taken into account:

- 1) the presence of a figure and the degree of detail depicted (*i.e.*, all significant family members for the child are depicted; the presence of facial features and clothing details is considered to be a good depiction level; the child draws an object that evokes positive emotions in detail; a negative attitude is expressed by a sketchy drawing or silhouette; children do not draw rejected (“unpleasant”) family members (or do not draw their faces); the image could be assigned a “good” or “bad” depiction level;
- 2) the size of a figure relative to others (the most significant of them are depicted larger than the others; the size of the figure may reflect its importance and

- superiority); according to this parameter, one of three ratings could be given: 1) the figure is the largest, 2) has average dimensions in relation to the others, or 3) is smaller than the others;
- 3) the order of the figure's location in relation to other characters — first, last, or between others (the sequence of family members depiction reflects the significance of their role; the most significant of them in European culture are usually depicted first, and thus on the left, and the least significant last and thus on the right);
  - 4) the color scheme in which the figures are depicted, and the coincidence of the colors of the child's self-figure with one or another family member (reflects the direction of the child's identification).

The nature of the self-image was analyzed using the same characteristics as the family members' images, and in addition, by identifying three types of drawings:

- 1) The "Lack of a self-figure" (the child does not depict himself/herself in the drawing; refusal to draw himself/herself is typical for children who experience a feeling of inadequacy and not belonging to the family);
- 2) "I am alone" (in the picture there is only the self-figure in the complete absence of other family members);
- 3) "I am among relatives" (the child depicts himself/herself among other family members — mother, father, brothers, sisters, etc.).

In addition to carrying out the drawing technique itself, the necessary data about the child and his/her family was collected: age, gender, and family structure (two-parent/single-parent one).

### ***Participants***

Our sample consisted of 44 children from 4 years and 9 months to 7 years old (resulting in the average age of 5 years and 10 months); the sample included 18 boys and 26 girls (41% and 59%). There were no significant differences in age between the boys and girls (Mann-Whitney  $U = 250.000$ ;  $p = 0.702$ ). There were no significant differences between the children from two-parent and single-parent families both in terms of the children's age (Mann-Whitney  $U = 300.000$ ;  $p = 0.156$ ), and in the number of boys (respectively: 37.5% and 45.0%) and girls (62.5% and 55.0%) (Pearson  $\chi^2 = 0.254$ ;  $p = 0.614$ ).

### ***Procedure***

The drawing task was administered individually with each child in a separate room. The child was asked to "Draw your family." If he/she asked additional questions, for example: "Who should I draw?," or "And my grandmother?," then the psychologist would answer: "I don't know who is in your family. You know this better than me."

During the drawing, the order in which the figures were depicted was recorded, and at the end, the child was asked to say whom he/she drew and what the figures were doing.

To carry out the exercise, an A4 sheet and 6 soft pencils were used: red and yellow (warm ones); green and blue (cold ones); and brown and black (neutral ones). Thus, the research procedure completely reproduced the one that was developed earlier (Smirnova et al., 1999).

## Results

**Age differences** in children's drawings were tested using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. The following differences were found:

- The children who drew smiles were older than the children who did not (Mann-Whitney  $U = 34.500$ ;  $p = 0.016$ );
- The children, who portrayed their fathers first and then others, were older than other children (Kruskal-Wallis  $H = 6.657$ ;  $p = 0.036$ ).

**Gender differences** in the drawings were analyzed using Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test. The most significant differences were related to affective tone: all the girls depicted a smile on their figures, while boys drew a smile in only 70% of cases ( $p = 0.004$ ).

Another indicator was related to self-figure: a larger number of girls depicted themselves more accurately than the boys did (respectively: 83.3% versus 47.1%;  $p = 0.014$ ).

Two more parameters were related to relationships within the family: first, the girls were significantly more likely to depict their mothers in their drawings (respectively: 92.3% versus 66.7%;  $p = 0.03$ ); and second, the girls drew their mothers better than the boys did (87.5% versus 58.3%;  $p = 0.047$ ).

**A comparison of the children's drawings from two-parent and single-parent families** was carried out using the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test. Differences were found in two indicators:

- First, the children from two-parent families were significantly more likely than those from single-parent families to depict a father figure in their drawings (95.8% versus 55%;  $p = 0.001$ );
- Second, children from two-parent families were much less likely to draw their grandparents than those from single-parent families (4.2% versus 25%;  $p = 0.045$ ).

**A comparison of the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families** was carried out using the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test (*Table 1*).

**Data comparison between 2002 and 2023.** In order to study the technique's invariance, a comparison of the data obtained in the study in 2002 with the data of this research (obtained in 2023) was made, using a two-sample z-test. For the vast majority of indicators, no differences were found. But the data for the following two indicators changed significantly (all differences were assessed at a significance level of 0.05):

- The presence of a smile. In 2002, 71.1% of subjects depicted a smile, but in 2023 there were 91.7% of such subjects; this was especially typical for girls compared to boys and true both for those from two-parent (respectively: 100% versus 54%), and single-parent families (respectively: 56.3% and 100%);

Table 1

*Differences between the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families (% of subjects)*

Indicators	Single-parent families		Two-parent families		The significance level *
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
The predominance of warm tones	22.2	27.3	44.4	33.3	
The predominance of cold tones	55.6	27.3	33.3	53.3	
The predominance of neutral tones	22.2	45.5	22.2	13.3	
The presence of a smile	<b>66.7</b>	<b>100</b>	77.8	100	<b>0.038</b>
The presence of symbols	44.4	63.6	55.6	60	
Father	<b>44.4</b>	63.6	<b>100</b>	93.3	<b>0.009</b>
Mother	55.6	81.8	77.8	100	
Self-figure	88.9	100	100	86.7	
Self-figure together with other relatives	66.7	81.8	100	86.7	
Self-figure only	22.2	18.2	0	0	
Father is the largest figure	100	42.9	55.6	53.8	
Mother is the largest figure	60	44.4	42.9	35.7	
Self-figure is the largest figure	25	27.3	11.1	7.7	
Father comes first	25	42.9	<b>22.2</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>0.045</b>
Mother comes first	20	44.4	42.9	28.6	
Self-figure comes first	50	18.2	11.1	15.4	
Detailed drawing of father	100	85.7	66.7	92.9	
Detailed drawing of mother	40	77.8	71.4	93.3	
Detailed drawing of self-figure	<b>37.5</b>	<b>81.8</b>	55.6	84.6	<b>0.048</b>
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the father	0	27.3	33.3	15.4	
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the mother	12.5	27.3	11.1	15.4	
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with other figures	37.5	9.1	44.4	23.1	
The color scheme of the child's does not match with other figures	50	27.3	11.1	46.2	

*Note. \*The significance level is indicated only for those pairs between which significant differences were found; these pairs and significance level are highlighted in bold and italics.*

- The absence of a father figure. In 2002 a third of children from two-parent families did not have a father depicted in the picture (32%), but in 2023 less than 5% of children from two-parent families did not depict a father; moreover, this result was true for both girls (respectively: 38.8% versus 6.7%) and boys (respectively: 25% versus 0%).

Table 2

*Loadings of children's drawings' indicators along the axes of the selected factors (weight loadings)*

Indicators	F1, 36.6%	F2, 33.7%	F3, 29.7%
The predominance of warm tones	-.01	.57	-.82
The predominance of cold tones	-.23	-.96	-.19
The predominance of neutral tones	.24	.59	.77
The presence of a smile	.99	.12	-.03
The presence of symbols	.89	.46	-.09
Father	.31	.34	-.89
Mother	.86	.04	-.51
Self-figure	-.03	.99	.16
Self-figure together with other relatives	.21	.65	-.73
Self-figure only	-.26	-.16	.95
Father is the largest figure	-.77	-.60	.22
Mother is the largest figure	-.77	-.23	.60
Self-figure is the largest figure	-.17	.09	.98
Father comes first	.94	-.34	-.03
Mother comes first	.35	.94	-.05
Self-figure comes first	-.59	-.59	.55
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the father	.09	-.87	.48
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the mother	.87	.18	-.46
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with other figures	.99	.13	-.10
The color scheme of the child's does not match with other figures	.32	.90	-.31
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the father	.69	.30	.66
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the mother	-.85	-.02	-.53
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with other figures	.07	-.96	.26

**Structural analysis of the children's drawings on the subject of "My Family."** In order to study the deeper content features of the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families, factor analysis was also applied (Principal Components method followed by Kaiser-Varimax rotation). This analysis was focused on identifying the drawings' structural features, which reflected the characteristics of emotional well-being that are typical of children raised in two-parent and single-parent families.

As a result of this analysis, three factors were identified that accounted for 100% of the total variance. The structure of the obtained factors was as follows (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 3

*Values along the axes of the selected factors for subsamples of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families*

Subsamples		F1+/-	F2+/-	F3+/-
Single-parent families	Boys	-1.1	-0.8	0.6
	Girls	0.8	0.7	1.1
Two-parent families	Boys	-0.6	1.0	-0.9
	Girls	0.9	-0.9	-0.8

**Factor F1** (contribution to the total variance = 36.6%). This bipolar factor can be characterized through the antinomy of "Structured relationships in the family, positive emotional well-being, and closeness with the mother vs. Parental dominance and orientation towards the age hierarchy."

Table 4

*Weight loadings of child drawing indicators that determine factor F1*

F1+		F1-	
The presence of a smile	.99	The coincidence of the child's color scheme with other figures	-.85
Detailed drawing of self-figure	.99	Father is the largest figure	-.77
Father comes first	.94	Mother is the largest figure	-.77
The presence of a symbols	.89		
Detailed drawing of mother	.87		
Mother	.86		
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the mother	.69		

The positive pole of this factor with high loadings (Table 4) is determined by indicators that recorded the child's positive emotional well-being in the family (the



presence of smiles and symbols in the picture) and the feeling of acceptance of oneself by other family members (a well-drawn self-figure). In addition, emotional closeness with the mother was emphasized (the color scheme of the figures of the child and mother coincided), as well as the structured status of role positions in a traditional family (the drawing includes a father, a mother, and a child; the father comes first). Thus, the children — the authors of these drawings — felt like a significant part of the family, and their ideas about the family were quite structured relative to the traditional gender role model.



Figure 1. Drawing of a girl. A father, a girl, a mother and a sister are depicted. Positive pole of factor F1

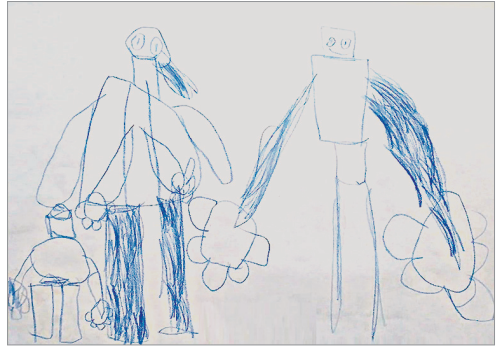


Figure 2. Drawing of a boy. A boy, a mother and a father are depicted. Negative pole of factor F1

The opposite negative pole (*Table 4*) with high weight loadings was determined by such indicators as the dominance of the father and mother figures (the largest figures), as well as the coincidence of the color scheme of the child's self-figure and all other figures. Therefore, this pole of the factor can be designated as "Parental dominance, and orientation toward the age hierarchy." At the same time, this indicated the child's desire to "fit" himself/herself into the family's structure, to feel a part of it.

Let's look at how the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families are located along the axis of factor F1. As can be seen from *Table 3*, the girls' drawings from two-parent and single-parent families had high values on the positive pole (0.9 and 0.8, respectively). The negative pole with high values was determined by the drawings of boys from two-parent and single-parent families (respectively: -0.6 and -1.1). Thus, this factor generally captured key differences in the drawings of the boys and girls.

As an illustration, we present typical drawings of boys and girls for the positive and negative poles (*Fig. 1* and *2*). It is crucial that if the indicators in the drawings on the factor's positive pole generally meant positive well-being and the presence of gender-role identification of girls with their mother, then the indicators of the drawings typical for boys, on the contrary, reflected the absence of a clearly expressed gender-role identification and indicated to a greater extent how the boys organized their

ideas about the family, highlighting the figure of an adult (both father and mother) as dominant in the family.

This distribution of the drawings by boys and girls can be explained by different options for the child's gender-role identification in the structure of intrafamily relationships. Girls, being in a closer emotional connection with their mother, tend to be more oriented towards the traditional family model, where the father is the head. Moreover, their drawings usually had a plot-event character, as evidenced by the use of various symbols. They created a drawing-story where the events and actions of family life (the organizer of which, as a rule, is the mother) were important.

The boys' drawings lacked this tendency to *depict a story*. They were rather "*gala photographs*" of the family, their portraits. Therefore, the characters were placed according to the principle of dominance shown by the size of the parental figures compared to the children's figures. In their meaning, they reflected the tendency of the child to maintain the age hierarchy. Thus, while the drawings of the preschool girls were focused on constructing a narrative associated with constructing a narrative (storytelling) with characteristic events and emotional experiences, the boys' drawings were usually monochrome "photographs," where the distribution of the hierarchy of parental positions according to the principle of dominance was of primary importance.

Furthermore, in these drawings the main meaning was expressed not so much to reflect *leadership*, but rather to show the distribution of *power* within the family. At the same time, the coincidence of the color scheme of all the figures depicted in the drawing indicated the need of boys to feel that they belonged to the family as to a social group.

**Factor F3** (contribution to the total variance = 29.7%). This bipolar factor can be characterized through the antinomy of "Child's loneliness vs. the child's positive emotional connection with the father."

Table 5 depicts the weight loadings of the indicators of the children's drawings that define the F3 factor's structure. As can be seen from the table, the positive pole of factor F3 was determined by indicators that emphasized either the dominance of the self-figure (the largest one) or its loneliness (only the self-figure is depicted in the drawing; the rest of the family members were not drawn). A characteristic feature is also the predominance of neutral colors. Thus, in terms of its content, this pole of the factor can be designated as "Child's loneliness."

Table 5  
Weight loadings of child drawing indicators that determine factor F3

F3+		F3-	
Self-figure is the largest figure	.98	Father	-.88
Self-figure only	.95	The predominance of warm tones	-.82
The predominance of neutral tones	.76		

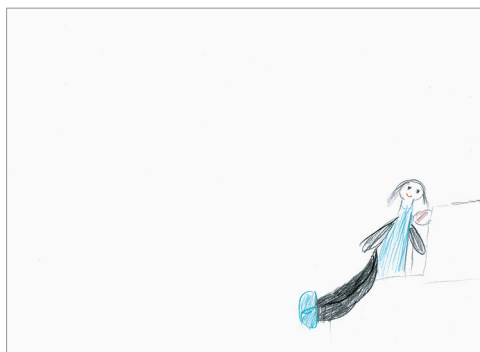


Figure 3. Drawing of a girl from a single-parent family. A girl is depicted (sitting on the sofa). Positive pole of factor F3



Figure 4. Drawing of a girl from a two-parent family. A mother, a brother, a father, a girl (top row), a brother, a sister, a grandmother, and a grandfather (bottom row) are depicted. Negative pole of factor F3

The opposite negative pole was determined by such indicators as the presence of a father figure and the predominance of warm tones. Its meaning can be interpreted as “Positive emotional connection of the child with the father.” As an illustration, we present drawings by girls which are typical of the positive and negative poles (Figure 3 and 4).

If we refer to the factor analysis’ results presented in Table 3, we can see that boys and girls from single-parent families were located at the positive pole of the factor with high positive values (respectively: 0.6 and 1.1). At the opposite negative pole were the drawings by boys and girls from two-parent families, with values of  $-0.9$  and  $-0.8$ , respectively. This allows us to conclude that this factor polarizes children’s drawings regarding such a parameter as completeness/incompleteness of the family. Drawings by children from single-parent families, located on the factor’s positive pole, clearly expressed the child’s feeling of loneliness, his/her concentration on himself/herself, and reduced emotional tone. On the contrary, children from two-parent families identified the father figure as an integral part of the family system and generally felt emotionally well.

In order to clarify the uniqueness of the emotional well-being of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families, let us consider the placement of their drawings over the range of factors F1–F3 (Figure 5).

As can be seen from the data presented in Figure 5, girls from two-parent families are located in the II quadrant of the space representing factors F1–F3. Their drawings were characterized by the presence of all family members and a warm color scheme. The drawings presented a variety of symbolism, which indicates that the drawing is constructed as a story. Typically, the drawings expressed not only the completeness of family members’ representation, but also the structure of family-role relationships relative to traditional relationships, where the head is the father. But, perhaps, the most significant aspect was the closeness of the relationship between the child and

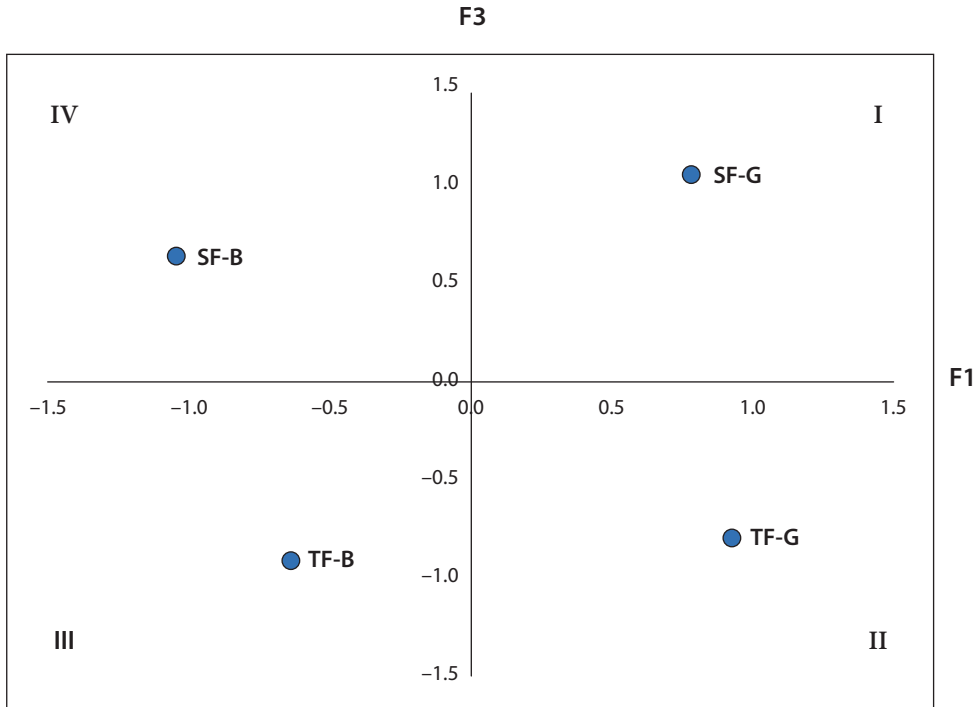


Figure 5. Placing the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in the space of factors F1 “Structured relationships in the family, positive emotional well-being, closeness with the mother vs Parental dominance, orientation towards the age hierarchy” and F3 “Child’s loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection of the child with the father.”

Note.

- SF-G — girls from the single-parent families
- TF-G — girls from the two-parent families
- SF-B — boys from the single-parent families
- TF-B — boys from the two-parent families

the mother, and the significance of the mother’s figure for the child (her figure was well-drawn and presented in the same color scheme as the figure of the girl herself). So, in general, the set of indicators characterized the positive emotional well-being of a girl from a complete family, a feeling of acceptance by her family (a well-defined self-figure), and emotional identification with her mother.

A somewhat different situation was typical for girls from single-parent families, whose drawings are located in quadrant I. A significant difference between their drawings and the drawings of girls from two-parent families was the tendency to depict themselves either as the largest figure in the drawing, or alone. They also clearly had a predominance of neutral tones. In general, the listed points allow us to conclude that the emotional well-being of a preschool girl raised in a single-parent family is not so good.

But perhaps the most important conclusion was the rather clear expression of the desire for dominance. Thus, these drawings reflected the reduced emotional state of girls from single-parent families, their concentration on themselves, as well as two trends in their development: one is associated with a feeling of loneliness, which is very typical for children from single-parent families, and the other reflects the desire to identify with mother and the value of emotional intimacy with her. It is also important to keep in mind that a girl from a single-parent family is oriented towards a structured family in its traditional model, where the father is the head.

As demonstrated by *Figure 5* above, boys from two-parent families are placed in quadrant III. Their drawings differed significantly from the drawings of girls from two-parent and single-parent families. Their drawings were typically characterized by the image of a father figure, which was combined with the warm color scheme of the entire picture, which can be seen not only as a reflection of the child's identification with the father, but also as an assessment of the father as an emotionally significant and positive figure in the structure of family relationships. Boys from two-parent families also depicted their parents as large figures, and all family members in the same color scheme. As a rule, these were portrait drawings that reflected the positive emotional well-being of children and adults in the unity of the family as a social entity. Thus, a boy in a two-parent family was focused on maintaining the age hierarchy and was prone to group self-identification with family members.

Finally, the drawings by the boys from single-parent families are located in the IV quadrant. In terms of their color scheme, these drawings were usually made in neutral tones. As for the size of the figures, two trends were clearly present here. One of them was associated with the child's image of himself/herself alone, basically his/her removal from the family. Another captured a contradictory trend: either the child's self-figure dominated relative to other family members, or the parents' figures turned out to be significantly larger in size than the child's figure. This may indicate a pronounced internal conflict in a boy from a single-parent family, associated with competition for dominance in the family. Therefore, the emotional well-being of boys from single-parent families was characterized by emotional distress, a feeling of loneliness, and the experience of internal conflict, which was based on the desire to dominate the family.

The placement of drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in different quadrants suggests that, in their structure, the drawings of these subsamples are fundamentally different. This captures the uniqueness of the emotional well-being of a preschool child in a two-parent and single-parent family.

In general, the drawings' location in the space of factors F1 — F3 indicates a less favorable social situation for the development of children from single-parent families than those from two-parent families. First of all, this was expressed in the child's reduced emotional well-being. Moreover, this was especially clearly manifested for boys who experience a deficit in communication with their father and the associated difficulties in gender-role identification.

Finally, let's consider the substantive features of **factor F2** (contribution to the total variance = 33.7%). This bipolar factor can be characterized through the antinomy of "Involvement into the family structure vs. Emotional detachment from the family."

Table 6  
 Weight loadings of child drawing indicators that determine factor F2

F2+		F2-	
Self-figure	.99	The predominance of cold tones	-.96
Mother comes first	.94	The color scheme of the child's does not match with other figures	-.96
The coincidence of the child's color scheme with the colors of the father	.90	Detailed drawing of father	-.87
Self-figure together with other relatives	.65	Self-figure comes first	-.59



Figure 6. Drawing of a girl. A mother, a father, and a girl are depicted. Positive pole of factor F2



Figure 7. Drawing of a boy. A father, a mother and a boy are depicted. Negative pole of factor F2

Table 6 shows the weight loadings of the indicators of children's drawings that determined the structure of factor F2. As demonstrated in the table, the positive pole of this factor was defined by parameters reflecting the connection of the self-figure with other family members: the image of the self-figure together with other relatives, recognition of the mother's leadership position (the first one in the figure), and emotional identification with the father (coincidence of the colors of the self-figure and father-figure).

The negative pole was determined by such parameters as the lack of the coincidence of the color scheme of the self-figure with other figures, and the fixation on the position of the self-figure as the first in the drawing, as well as the predominance of cold tones in the drawing. Overall, these three indicators show the child's detachment from the family. At the same time, the well-drawn figure of the father also attracts attention here. As an illustration, we present typical drawings of a boy and a girl for the positive and negative poles (Figure 6 and 7).

If we refer to the placement of drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families along the axis of factor F2 (Table 3), then the semantic interpretation of this factor turns out to be not as unambiguous as when considering



the previous two factors F1 and F3. So, indeed, at the F2 factor's positive pole were boys from two-parent families and, at the same time, girls from single-parent families (with values of 1.0 and 0.7, respectively) (Figure 8). On the negative pole were girls from two-parent families and boys from single-parent families (respectively: -0.9 and -0.8). In this case, as we see, the influence of the child's gender characteristics and the completeness of the family was manifested ambiguously: boys from two-parent families in their drawings showed their involvement in family relationships in the same way as girls from single-parent families did.

Conversely, there was a clear similarity regarding detachment from the family between boys from single-parent families and girls from two-parent families. To clarify the meaning of the noted contradictions, let us consider the placement features of the drawings by the boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in the space of factors F2 and F3 (Figure 8).

The drawings of boys from two-parent and single-parent families were placed in quadrants that were directly opposite in content. Thus, if the drawings of boys from

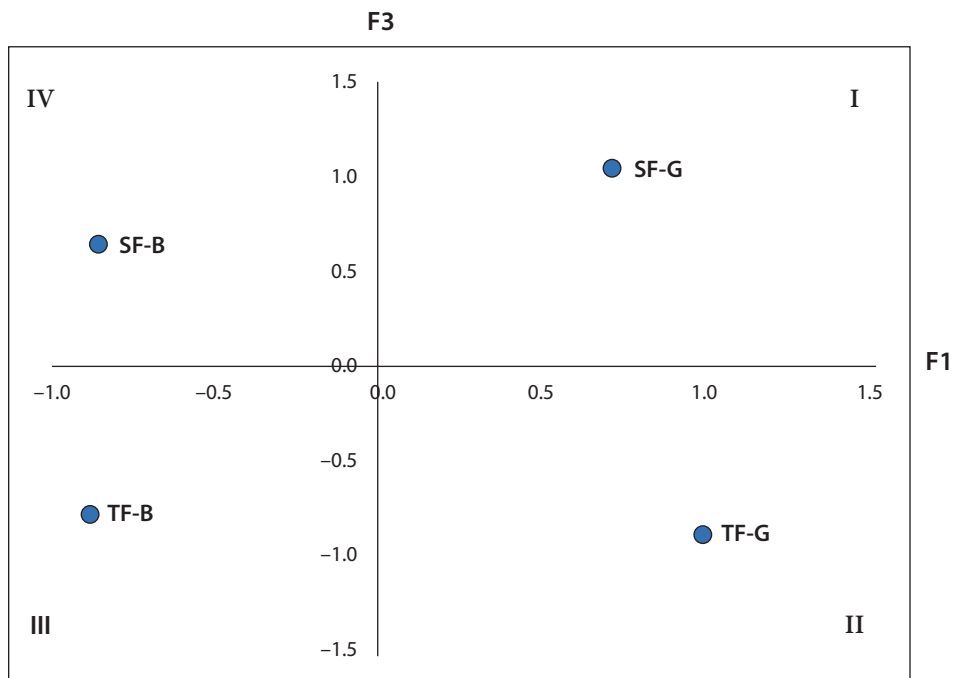


Figure 8. Placing the drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in the space of factors F2 “Involvement into the family structure vs. Emotional detachment from the family” and F3 “Child’s loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection of the child with the father.”

Note.

SF-G — girls from the single-parent families

TF-G — girls from the two-parent families

SF-B — boys from the single-parent families

TF-B — boys from the two-parent families

two-parent families reflected the positive gender-role identification of the child with the father (shown by the coincidence of the color scheme of these two figures), and at the same time, the inclusion of the child in the structure of family relationships, then the well-being of boys from single-parent families was characterized by emotional detachment from the family and a feeling of loneliness. Also, in addition to emotional identification with the father, in the drawings of boys from two-parent families, the mother, as a rule, occupied a leadership position (depicted first in the picture), and in this regard, she turned out to be clearly attractive to the son. Taking into account the fact that a boy from a two-parent family identifies himself with his father, as we noted above, we can assume that the tendency described by S. Freud as the "Oedipus complex" was manifested here.

A different trend was revealed when we compared the drawings of girls from two-parent and single-parent families. Thus, the drawings of girls from single-parent families, located in quadrant I, recorded the child's expressed feeling of inclusion in the family relationships' structure and at the same time a feeling of loneliness. The child felt her importance in the family circle (the self-figure is the largest). And equally, the drawing's color scheme was made in neutral tones, which indicated emotional distress. It is characteristic that the mother acted as a leader for a girl from a single-parent family (the first one in the picture), and at the same time, the girl felt an emotional connection with her father. This, in our opinion, revealed the uniqueness of the conflict experienced by a preschool girl from a single-parent family.

The opposite situation was reflected in girls from two-parent families, whose drawings are located in quadrant III. Here there was a clear trend toward the father's importance (the father's figure was present in all the drawings and was almost always well drawn). But at the same time, a girl in a two-parent family tended to emphasize her leadership in the family relationships' structure (her figure came first in the picture), as well as her uniqueness (the color scheme of the child's figure, as a rule, did not coincide with anyone else's). In other words, in this regard, a girl in a two-parent family clearly felt protected by her father and, at the same time, was confident in his readiness to support her leadership. It can be assumed that here we have a manifestation of a deep-seated psychosexual conflict with the mother (Electra complex). Thus, oddly enough, the drawings of boys and girls of preschool age made it possible to use classical psychoanalytic motives for their interpretation, such as the Electra complex and the Oedipus complex.

Therefore, this factor generally indicated a different social developmental situation for boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families, affecting the experience of emotional closeness, unity with the family, or emotional detachment and self-focus.

As an illustration, we present typical drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in the space of factors F2 "Involvement into the family structure vs Emotional detachment from the family" and F3 "Child's loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection of the child with the father" (Figure 9).

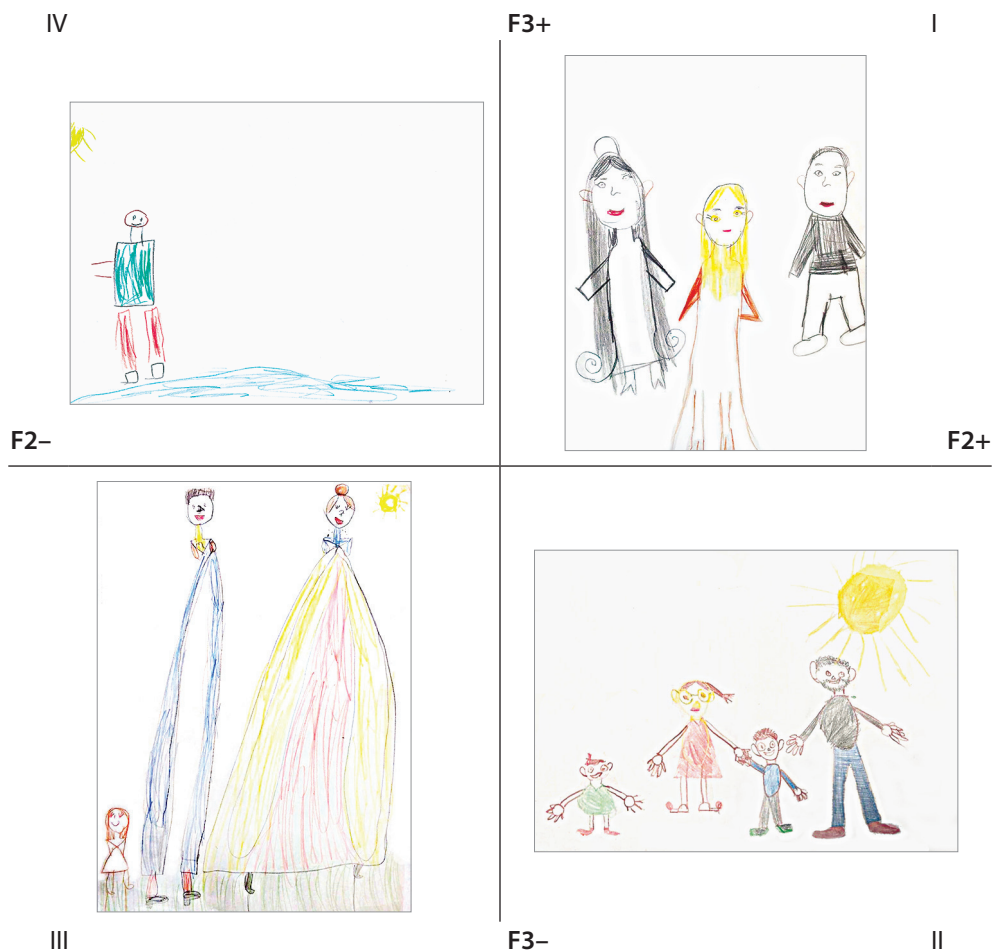


Figure 9. Drawings of boys and girls from two-parent and single-parent families in the space of factors F2–F3

Note.

Quadrant I. SF-G. A mother, a girl, and a father

Quadrant II. TF-B. A brother, a boy, a mother, and a father

Quadrant III. TF-G. A girl, a father, and a mother

Quadrant IV. SF-B. A boy

## Discussion

In the preface to this article, we put forward three main hypotheses which we have subsequently tested with the materials obtained during our study:

- 1) the structure of a child’s family drawing is invariant in different cultural and historical periods;
- 2) there are gender differences in drawings of a family;
- 3) there are differences in the family drawings between children from families with different structures (two-parent and single-parent ones).

Here we summarize the results.

1. A comparative analysis of the children's drawings examined a quarter of a century ago and of modern preschoolers indicated the absence of significant changes in the main parameters characterizing the preschoolers' drawings on the subject of "My Family" (color scheme, size and figures' depiction level, symbols' presence, etc.). In general, this allows us to conclude that the drawings of children from two-parent and single-parent families are invariant in their structural features relative to the selected parameters. At the same time, two trends in changes in drawings can be noted. One of them is related to the fact that among children raised in two-parent families, the proportion of those who did not draw a father figure has clearly decreased. Moreover, this trend can be seen in both boys and girls. This result can be explained by the fact that in a modern two-parent family, the father takes a large role in communicating with the child than before.

Another important trend is that the emotional state of modern children in the family can be assessed as more prosperous than that of their peers 20 years ago. The basis for this conclusion is the frequency of smiles on the depicted figures' faces. Moreover, this can be seen both in the drawings of children from two-parent as well as from single-parent families, but this trend is especially clearly expressed in the girls' drawings. Thus, the results we obtained recorded positive changes both in the social situation of children in the family and in their emotional well-being.

2. The results of a factor analysis of indicators characterizing features of the children's drawings on the subject of "My Family" made it possible to identify a bipolar factor differentiating the drawings of boys and girls ("Structured relationships in the family, positive emotional well-being, closeness with the mother vs. Parental dominance, orientation towards the age hierarchy"). While the girls' drawings clearly showed positive emotional well-being, identification with the mother, and an orientation towards traditional gender-role relationships in the family (the head of the family is the father), the main criterion that distinguished the boys' drawings was the dominance of the adults' parental position in relation to the child, and the child's identification with the family as a special social community group.

As a fundamental difference between the drawings of girls and boys, one should highlight the different psychological attitudes of the children of different sexes to the very method of drawing: while the creative activity of the girls was based on constructing a plot in a drawing of a family (*i.e.*, "drawing-story"), the boys' drawings emphasized the status relations of family members (as a social community) (*i.e.*, "drawing-photograph").

3. As for the differences in the drawings of children from two-parent and single-parent families, a differentiating factor was also identified ("Child's loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection of the child with the father"). This result was quite expected: in almost all the drawings of children from two-parent families, there was a father figure, while in the drawings of children from single-parent families, quite often there was no image of the father. These drawings also varied in terms of the child's emotional state: children from two-parent families more often used warm colors, while children from single-parent families preferred neutral and cold colors,

which indicated different emotional well-being within the family in these two groups of children.

At the same time, along with this clear and expected factor, another was also identified — “Involvement in the family structure vs. Emotional detachment from the family” — which made it possible to compare the drawings of children from two-parent and single-parent families, taking into account gender characteristics. Analysis of the materials showed that boys from single-parent families found themselves in the most difficult social developmental situations, demonstrating insufficiently structured relationships in the family, a reduced emotional tone, emotional detachment from other family members, and a feeling of loneliness.

In general, this factor, which characterizes the child’s sense of inclusion in family relationships, allows us to see the uniqueness of his/her identification with his/her father or mother, depending on the completeness of the family. And here we encountered a surprising result that was not expected when we developed the research program. Namely, it seems quite plausible to interpret the obtained data in the logic of classical psychoanalytic ideas about the formation in preschool childhood of two different affective complexes in boys and girls, determined by the mechanism of gender-role identification with the parent: the Electra and Oedipus complexes.

## **Conclusion**

This research focused on studying the uniqueness of the social situation of the development of preschool children from two-parent and single-parent families, using a psychological analysis of the children’s drawings on the subject of “My Family.” The results made it possible to confirm the invariance of the significance of various parameters of a child’s drawing on the topic of “My Family” over the past 25 years. Three key bipolar factors were identified for evaluating children’s family drawings: 1) “Structured relationships in the family, positive emotional well-being, closeness with the mother vs. Parental dominance, orientation towards the age hierarchy;” 2) “Involvement in the family structure vs. Emotional detachment from the family;” and 3) “Child’s loneliness vs. Positive emotional connection of the child with the father.” These factors make it possible to record the peculiarities of the emotional well-being of modern boys and girls raised in two-parent and single-parent families.

Prospects for further research include expanding the number of parameters for analyzing the projective technique of “Family Drawing,” as well as using the technique to study the emotional well-being of children from other age groups. In addition, it is planned to expand the topics of children’s drawings to include items such as “I am in the kindergarten,” “My family on the weekend,” etc.

These research findings may be of interest to researchers and practitioners involved in family and child psychology.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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