

Near or far away? A proximity and emotion, not size and emotion effect using Russian dolls

Dunn, A. K., Taylor, N. & Baguley, T. (2013)

The size and emotion effect is the tendency for children to draw people/objects with a positive emotional charge larger than those with a negative or neutral charge. Here we explored the novel idea that drawing size might be acting as a proxy for depth (physical or perceived), in a 2D environment. Forty-two children (aged 3-11 years) chose, from 2 sets of Matryoshka dolls, a doll to represent a person with positive, negative or neutral charge, which they placed in front of themselves on a sheet of 3A paper. We found that the children used proximity and not perceived depth or size, to indicate emotional charge. This is consistent with the notion that, in drawings, children may be using size as a proxy for physical closeness (proximity) as they attempt, with varying success, to put positive charged items closer to, or negative and neutral charge items further away from, themselves.