

Visual Voices: Children's Family and Media Experiences

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Abstract:

The study explores how children of typical and atypical families perceive their family structure and what kind of media they consume. It also describes the functional uses of media for the children.

By analyzing the narratives of the children-informants and interpreting their respective illustrations of their family and media experiences, there were themes, patterns, and integrative concepts that became apparent, such as the value of family cohesiveness and stability, no matter and whatever variant the families were. The media perceptions and media consumption patterns of the children also were evident.

Media continue to be trailblazers - pioneering new communication channels that open new communication styles. The pervasiveness of media – both traditional and new – is a product of the continuing technological developments that have resulted to a convergence of all media formats. Today, there is no particular medium that monopolizes the information that is received. Now, audiences are not only in the receiving end of the process. They are interactive consumers who have the power to create and send their own messages.

The children in this study prefer computers and other technological gadgets for gaming and music. They are engaged in individual activities which are recognized as legitimate media users' option such as reading, music listening, and gaming on personal computers and handheld units. The multitude of media choices also divides the hours that children spend on one media type or format. Yet the ubiquity of the traditional and new media makes access convenient.

Key Words: typical family, atypical family, traditional and new media

Introduction

The family is a unit ideally composed of a man and woman joined together by a socially recognized union, such as marriage, and their children – biological or adopted. The typical family is made up of a father or husband, a mother or wife and their children.

Although it is not wise to generalize what a modern family is, still there are patterns and

traits that are known as typical or similar which stand out among the families of a particular culture.

Today, there are more and more families with varied in composition and structure such as the solo-parent family (due to reasons of migration for work abroad, dissolution of marriage, death of a spouse, or bearing a child out of wedlock). Other emerging forms of families are children left in the care and protection of extended family members – more commonly with their grandparents; blended or reconstituted families (partners who had previous relationships bring their children together into the new relationship) and monogamous gay or lesbian partnerships with biological or adopted children.

In a 2001 Youth Study undertaken by NFO-Trends involving 1420 youths, results revealed that, one out of every four families is crippled by either the absence of one parent (17%) or both parents (8%). For these “seasonal orphans”, as Carandang (2008) termed the children, more fathers are away (21%) than mothers (12%) and the lack of a two-parent home is more pronounced among the middle class (39%). The 2006 McCann Inter-generation Study came out with the same findings regarding parental absenteeism. Of the 500 youth-specific participants in the study, almost half do not have either one (or both) parent around most of the time. Similar to the 2001 study, more fathers are away (20%) than mothers (5%). Not far from the percentage of either one parent away, almost half of those involved (23%) had both parents away.

However, in listing other family forms such as blended family (commonly known as step family), family composed of siblings without parents, family composed of a childless couple, and a family formed by gays and lesbians, Medina (2001) noted that there are no accurate data on these non-traditional family forms since they are believed to constitute a

small proportion of the total number of Filipino families. The incidence of gay and lesbian monogamous partnerships is not known because the law does not recognize these kinds of living arrangements and often frowned upon by society. If at all, there is a muted acceptance of these types of atypical families.

Due to technological advancement, more and more of these families have particular levels of media consumption. Media are organizations that distribute cultural products or messages that affect and reflect the culture of society; provide information simultaneously to large heterogeneous audiences (Littljohn, 1989 p. 252). In this study, media refers to the channel of communication that the participating children of the families consume. These could be the traditional mass media of television, radio, print, and film or the new media that are information-technology based like computers and cellphones.

The media play a large role in the information, entertainment, education, and persuasion needs of families. Debates on the effects and influences of these media forms on their audience – especially the young - opened the doors to an ever-continuing research, experimentation, and discussion. Just when concerned parents, educators, and experts in the different social science fields started partnering with media practitioners to find ways on how best to use these technologies, the new media, that is, computers which ushered global communications through the Internet, brought more sense of wonder, amazement and speculations.

There is no doubt that forthcoming researches on media will cover more and more broad areas in communication. Surely, media's omnipresence in modern societies – be it the traditional mass media or new media – is now acknowledged as part of creating a culture, a social reality, and a worldview.

Families, as systems themselves working and functioning for their members, are seen as seated or nested in other sub-systems. These are the extended family, the church, the school, media and government – all exerting their own influences on the families and their members in particular time.

The families of the 21st century are challenged by the developments unfolding in the global village. Values and beliefs continue to evolve, economies reach their highs and lows, and technology becomes more sophisticated by the minute. In the face of these advancements, specifically of media and technology, the family remains; but the impact of the environment takes its toll on its structure, characteristics, and functioning. Thus, the traditional families exist side by side with the non-traditional or emerging atypical varieties today. More and more studies attest to difficulty in interviewing intact nuclear families and in their stead extended families and re-structured families were more available.

The reasons for the changing family structure, as accounted for by research and conceptual literature, are two-pronged; that is, media and society based. Accordingly, media feature the new lifestyles, shifting from the standard to the ideal. On the other hand, a change in society gives way to labor migration, improvement on the status and opportunities for women, shifting values, and rising rates of separation.

Aside from the observations of family variability, more studies on how the family uses the media revealed that the modern families are technocentric; that is, having access to more broadcast media and new media of computers and satellite communications. Therefore, these media are common experiences of everyone, which has an effect on shared worldview. In this light, it was found out that more audience makes sense of the media based on their personal experiences.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives.

The issues and trends of the 21st century continuously challenge the Filipino family. In this context of change, this study aimed to explore and answer the following question: How do the children of typical and atypical families perceive their family structure through the kind of media that they consume?

Specifically, the study aimed:

1. To draw a profile of the children-informants and identify the type of families the children belong to;
2. To describe the children-informants' s perception of their family structure as seen in the visual presentations of the children;
3. To find out the functional uses of media for the children.

Methodology

A multiple case narrative, which is defined as a method of narrative study of a large number of cases (Shkedi, 2005), was used in the study. This strategy is not different from other case study methods (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 1999; Arce, 2001) except for the multiplicity of units studied. The multiple case narratives elects the researcher and other humans as the primary data-gathering instrument (Lincoln and Guba, cited in Shkedi, 2005) where the researcher makes no attempt to manipulate, control, or eliminate variables but accepts the complexity of the phenomenon as a whole. Further, the researcher places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's actions, words, and records (Shkedi, 2005). The preceding procedures guided the collection of the children's casual

sharing of their media experience and descriptions of their families. The researcher is at the same time a narrator of the lived media experiences of the boys and girls.

The data appear in words (Miles and Huberman as cited in Arce, 2001; Creswell, 2003) taken from transcription of recorded interviews as shared expositions of the children participants' drawings. Interaction with the multiple units of analyses, which are called cases, was done in the natural setting (Arce, 2001).

Purposeful sampling was used for the selection of the 12 participants. The participants came from eight middle-income families from typical to atypical structures fitting into the following categories: male-income family, double-income family, single-parent family due to annulment, single-parent family due to death of spouse, single-parent family due to non-marriage, blended family, and grandparents as surrogates.

The children aged 12 years old and below, were asked to draw their media experience (Appendix A) using paper and other coloring materials, which the researcher provided. Each child was asked to draw three situations – his/her own family; the child with his/her favorite media (the researcher mentioned the different traditional and new media as guide); and what the child sees, hears, or read from his/her favorite media. The creative output was supplemented with a casual conversation where the child explained what he/she has drawn.

There were 12 children from eight families who made a visual presentation of their family and media experience using pencils, paper, and other coloring materials. Each child was able to complete three drawings. The drawings of the children participants contributed to the perspectives on media choices and use. The illustrations also added an aesthetic aspect to the research – a fresh facet - as the researcher narrated and weaved the media stories of the children.

Document analysis was used for the drawings of media experiences. The graphic or visual representations of the children's media experiences contributed to the essence of the narratives.

The researcher read through each of the encoded conversation records thoroughly. The illustrations of the children's representation of their families and media experiences were discussed. In the discussion, the words and expressions that the participants shared were drawn out to produce rich description of the findings.

The family and media drawings were presented to a practicing child psychologist who has an MA in Counseling Psychology. The structure of each family and the transitions that it went through (if there were any) were briefly explained to the child psychologist before she looked at the different drawings of the children. In the course of her interpretation of the drawings, the outcome of the researcher's casual conversation with the children were shared and found helpful in crosschecking certain details. The child psychologist affirmed what the researcher saw as pertinent in the drawings. Other features from the children's sketches were pointed out by the expert who gave a visual *voice* to the children-participants.

As the narrator, the researcher weaved the experiences of the children in the midst of a media-filled environment. The drawings of the children come together as a whole and their stories begin.

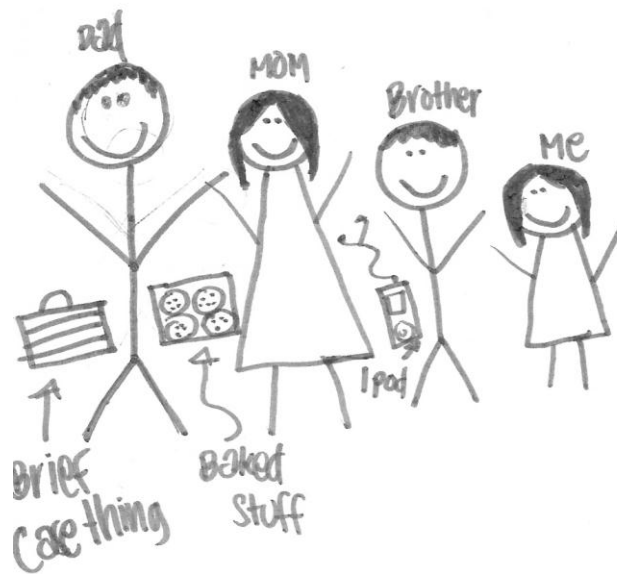
Results

Lisa, 12 years old

In the course of establishing their family, Homer and Marge – Liza's parents - have set up a family transaction model that works well for them. Homer holds a job and Marge manages their home. This is the male-income family.

Liza is enrolled in private school for girls and is the second-born of the two children in this family.

Drawing 1 is Lisa's illustration of her family. The four happy faces representing *dad*, *mom*, *brother*, and *me* are in consonance with the disposition of the family as described by Lisa – that is, “my family is a happy family”. She said that during weekends this is how she sees her family - Dad with his “brief case thing”, mom with some “baked stuff”, and brother with his “iPod”. The brief case, she associates with her father's office work while the baked stuff is for what her mom enjoys doing. As for her brother, she describes him as always listening to his iPod.



Drawing 1. The Simpson family as executed by Lisa.

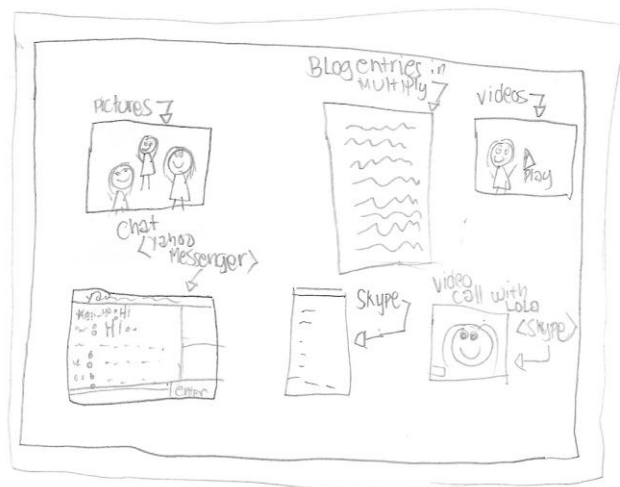
Curiously there was nothing Lisa associated herself with unlike what she did for the members of her family. So, the researcher asked what she actually enjoys doing and she said she likes to read and use the computer. That gave the researcher the impression that beyond the mainstream mass media exposure, the children in this family are the classic example of the youth of the new millennium – they are digital kids.

From the point-of-view of the child psychologist, Lisa identifies with her mother as a homemaker (as shown by the identical drawing of herself and her mother), that is, her mother does everything for the family but perhaps nothing for herself. This may be the reason that Lisa, through modeling, did not identify anything with herself in her family drawing whereas she associated specific objects for the rest (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication)

Lisa enjoys reading, watching television and logging on the Internet. She also enjoys tuning in to the MTV channel and added to that, Nickelodeon and Disney channels are also her favorites. As for computer gaming, she likes the games *Sim City* and *Club Penguin*.

Drawing 2 shows Lisa's most favorite media gadget - the computer. She described the drawing as what she sees on the computer screen. Tracing the screen clockwise from the left she said:

These are the pictures that I usually see when my friends send them to me and these are the blog entries in Multiply, the blog entries of my friends, and videos in YouTube. And on weekends, I go online in Skype and go video calling with my *lola* (grandmother) in the States and I chat with my friends in Yahoo Messenger.



Drawing 2. My favorite media as illustrated by Lisa.

Regarding the detailed drawing of the computer screen, the child psychologist was concerned that Lisa might be absorbing too much stimulation, which can be confusing to children her age. The expert noted that, as an adolescent, Lisa needed to be guided with all that she is absorbing from the media. Adolescents like her need an output or a release to balance all the input (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

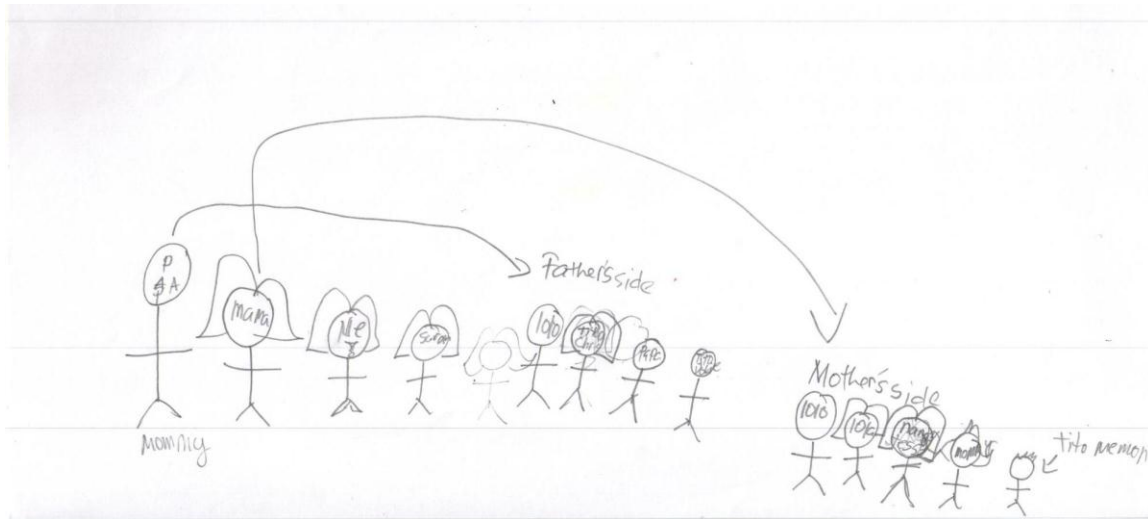
The time Lisa is able to use the computer is when her brother is not using it. Twice or thrice a week, for over an hour, Lisa is on the computer with her classmates and friends. Her top choice activity online is Yahoo messaging where sometimes there could be ten of them logged on at the same time. Asked what they talk about online, she said: "School." On weekends, chatting online with her friends can run as long as five hours. Other computer use for Lisa is editing random pictures (she uses the program Adobe Photoshop for this), which she posts in her social network site Multiply, and Kodak Gallery for collecting her albums online. Blogging, an evolved type of diary keeping and in many ways online journalism is also a staple in Lisa's computer use. She does this on weekends and account for "stuff that happened in school and important things." Lisa also enjoys visiting the video site YouTube.com to watch the latest music videos of her favorite American rock band, Fall Out Boy. The computer is also used for schoolwork especially for concept papers and other researches.

Tintin, 10 years old and Sasa, 7 year old

In 1995, Nono and Nini sealed their two year relationship with the blessings of the Catholic Church. Nono at 48 is eleven years the senior of Nini. Much like a May-December love affair, theirs is the classic love story – building engineer actively searching for love sweeps young bank employee off her feet. Now, they have two lovely daughters – Tintin

who is 10 years old and Sasa, 7 years old. The children are enrolled in private school for girls. This is the double-income family.

Drawings 3 and 4 are the respective interpretations of their family on paper by Tintin and Sasa. Tintin, being the older sister drew not only her family of origin but also her extended family from both the father and mother sides. The researcher could only surmise that she was trying to draw a complete two-generation family. She identified each stick drawing and tried to label them. Noticeably, in her father side, there is no identification of a *lola* (grandmother) because she passed away when they were very small. Also, although she has cousins on both sides – some older, others younger than her – she did not draw them anymore.



Drawing 3. Tintin's drawing of her family.

As for Sasa's colorful interpretation, she drew her nuclear family with smiling faces. Sasa, being the younger sibling idolizes her *Ate Tintin* (sister). The drawing is an expression of that feeling; she drew herself almost identical with Tintin, except in size.



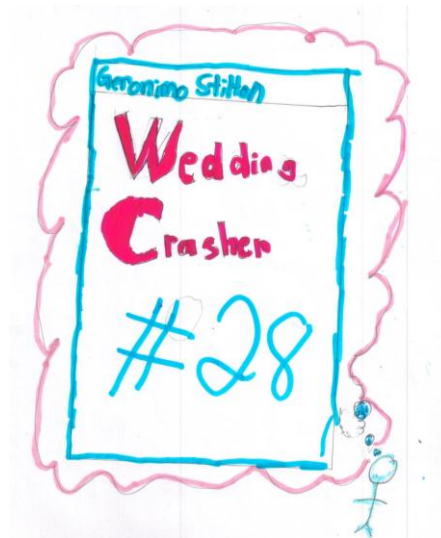
Drawing 4. The Vinala family as drawn by Sasa.

The child psychologist shared that Sasa revealed, through her drawing, the big role that her mother plays in their family as disciplinarian because of the big mother figure. The father, in between the children and their mother, appears to be thinner than the rest of the figures which may indicate that he does not assert himself much and may be the one cushioning the control of the mother (B.A. L. Sison, personal communication).

Drawing 5 is Tintin's favorite media – a children's pocket book collection called *Geronimo Stilton*.^{*} In the illustration, she sees herself thinking of the specific issue, #28 titled *The Wedding Crasher*. Asked to further explain what she drew, Tintin said: "...I have this issue. *Geronimo Stilton* is action packed adventures and he is funny." She continued to share that she reads the books when she has time and that is either in the car or in her bedroom.

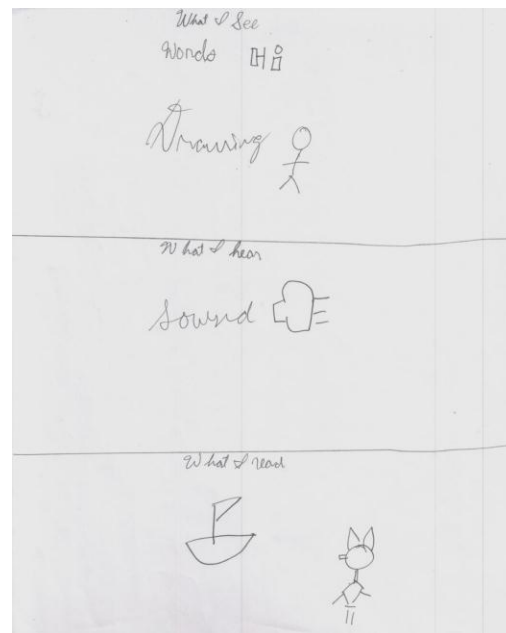
When further asked about what she sees or hears while using her favorite media, Tintin was able to note her multi-sensory experience while reading her favorite book in *Drawing 6*. Accordingly, she sees words and drawings on the book. She also hears sounds. The researcher had to clarify that answer since she knows that the book was not an interactive book thus no sound could be produced. Then she answered, "...when the car is

^{*} The Adventures of Geronimo Stilton, the main character, is a children's pocket book collection with a talking mouse. Scholastic Corporation publishes the book series.



Drawing 5. Tintin's favorite title: Geronimo Stilton.

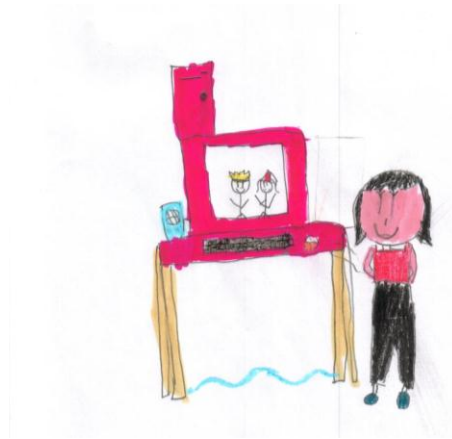
moving.” The researcher realized that she was referring to the sounds outside of the car that she hears while reading her favorite book. In this particular book, she read about sailboats, people, and mysteries.



Drawing 6. Tintin's multi-sensory experience using her favorite media.

Sasa's media preference is playing the computer and not watching television.

Drawing 7 is a detailed picture of Sasa playing a game on the computer. She annotated the name of each hardware drawn saying: "That's the monitor, the CPU, that's the sound (referring to the speaker), the mouse and keyboard."



Drawing 7. Sasa's interaction with the computer, her favorite medium.

Computer time for Sasa is when her mother is doing something and she does not have any assignments. These are the times that she logs on to Millsberry – an online website which offers an array of games for both the young and old. The account to access the Milberry site belongs to Tintin but Sasa is able to play. Nevertheless, Sasa still wants to have her own account. When asked where the computer is located in their house, she innocently answered, "Beside the fish bowl." That left a smile on the researcher's face; she realized that the articulate and well-mannered girl she was talking to was actually just seven years old. So in the researcher's head, the computer is beside a fish bowl somewhere in the Vinala family's house.

The third drawing of Sasa, *Drawing 8*, is proof of her multi-media experience. Instead of drawing what she sees on the computer – a media she claimed to be her favorite as shown in her previous drawings – she illustrated what she sees in television cartoons, that is,

Clifford playing with a cat. Then, the researcher surmised that her parents were not totally wrong after all when they shared that their children love to watch television – at least in Sasa’s case.



Drawing 8. Clifford, the red big dog and a cat: Sasa’s TV experience.

Marco, 5 years old

Reuben and Clarisse were high school sweethearts. They were exclusively dating for 15 years before they exchanged their marriage vows in 2000. They now have Marco, who keeps them busy – not only because he is such an active and curious lad but also because he has entered a big private school for boys in the Quezon City area. This is another double income family.

Marco shares that his family is happy. This is seen in *Drawing 9*. Marco described his work by pointing at each item: “This is a house; this is a cloud, the flower and the grass. This is me, papa, and mama.” Asked what the family is doing, he beamed and said: “Smiling.”



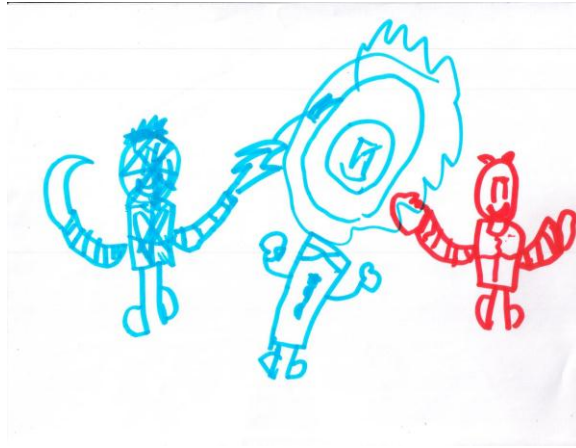
Drawing 9. Marco's smiling family.

Comics are Marco's favorite as shown in *Drawing 10*. He drew what is supposedly a sample of Marvel comics. He explained that he wrote his name on it, as a form of ownership, and the title is on the left side.



Drawing 10. Marco's favorite media: Marvel comics.

The characters that Marco loves to read about are executed in *Drawing 11*. He enumerated the Marvel superheroes he drew as Spiderman, Ghost Rider, and Daredevil.



Drawing 11. Marvel superheroes as interpreted by Marco.

The child psychologist relayed that children fantasize about what they watch or read that is why they engage in it over and over again. As in the case of Marco, his love for superheroes like Spiderman, Ghost Rider, and Daredevil is manifested in his family drawing when he drew himself floating, as if he was flying. “Even *yung house niya nakalipad* (Even his house is flying),” the expert said (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

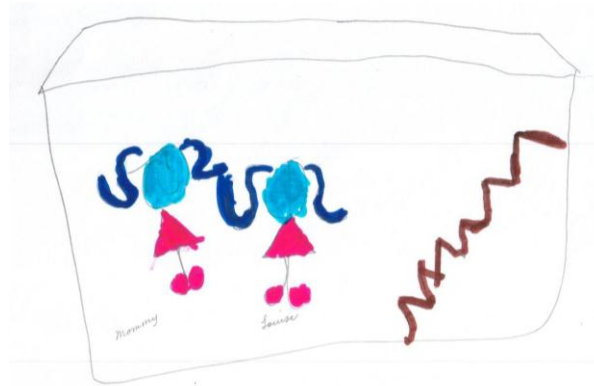
Louise, 4 years old

Paz Villa – Uy was 40 years old when she was widowed in 2004. Her husband, Philip Uy was diagnosed with colon cancer when their daughter Louise (who came ten years after their marriage) was only six months old. After a year, he passed away. This is a single parent family due to death of spouse.

Louise is in pre-school and is an only child. *Drawing 12* is Louise’s interpretation of her family. She drew herself, identical with her mother in everyway, even in size, except drawn in a lower position. She identified the box like structure as a house and in that house, a staircase. Asked what she and her mother were doing in her illustration she said:

“*Naglalaro kami ng Snakes and Ladder.* (We are playing Snakes and Ladder.)” When asked

if anyone won the game, she said she did because she got to the hundred first. Louise remembers the fun times and gladly it is with her *mommy*.



Drawing 12. Me and my mommy as executed by Louise.

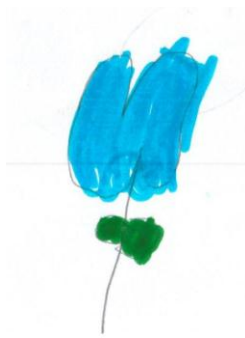
The child psychologist noted that with no difference in the sizes of the figures, Louise does not see herself as a child even if she is only four years old. This can also mean that she sees her mother as a peer (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

Drawing 13 confirms that Louise enjoys televiewing. She expressed that she drew herself while watching TV. When asked where the TV was in her drawing, she shyly shared that she doesn't know how to draw a television set that is why there is none in the illustration.



Drawing 13. Watching TV, as accounted by Louise.

When asked what Louise sees in media, given that her preference is television, she illustrated a blue flower with leaves as seen in *Drawing 14*.



Drawing 14. Blue flower by Louise.

Asked what program or cartoons she sees in this flower, she declined to answer and did not speak again. It looked like the conversation between her and the researcher has just ended. From there, she immediately slipped down from her chair and called to her playmates for another round of child's play - this is characteristic of an active four-year old girl.

Angelique, 12 years old and Ceejay, 7 years old

In the house that they built ten years ago, Lolo Jose and Lola Belen live with their eldest daughter Liezel (and her son CeeJay) and are surrogates to four of their six grandchildren. They are Angelique, 12 years old; and her cousins CeeJay who is seven years old; Mela, three years old, and Nico who is almost two years old. The circumstances leading to why they take care of their grandchildren were mostly because of the jobs that their own children hold. The mother and father of Angelique work in the United States. The parents of Mela and Nico are both doctors who practice their professions in Laguna and would come home only on the weekends. As for Liezel, the mother of CeeJay, it is due to unemployment and being a single parent that Lolo Jose and Lola Belen took it upon themselves to have mother and son into their fold.

Cousins, Angelique and CeeJay, are enrolled in private schools in Quezon City.

Drawings 15 and 16 are Angelique's and CeeJay's drawings of their family, respectively.

As can be seen in Angelique's drawing, she is beside her Lola Belen; all her cousins who are living in the same house are drawn and labeled with CeeJay immediately on her left; her mom and dad are in the farther end of the drawing – observably in the opposite side of where her Lolo and Lola are. Angelique shared that her parents are not in Manila because they work as managers in a Love Boat, which is based in the United States.

The child psychologist assessed that Angelique's drawing shows the close relationship she has with her *Lola* – she is positioned next to her. It also showed the possibly detached relationship with her mother and father – who are abroad – as seen in the position of her figures and sketchy, faint strokes as she drew her parents (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).



Drawing 15. The Nicolas Family: Angelique's version.

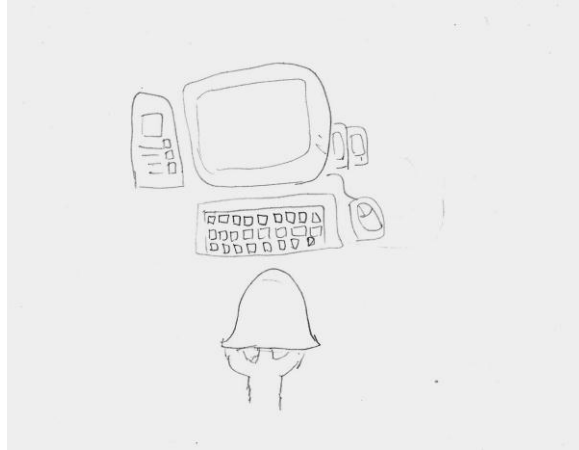
CeeJay's drawing initially had only three colored ladies labeled as *Mama*, *Ate Angelique*, and *Mela*. He took time to make the ladies look beautiful. Later on he added the other members of the family (that was after his Lola Belen prodded him), as seen in the pencil sketches of the heads labeled *Tito*, *Lola*, *Lolo*, and *CeeJay*.



Drawing 16. The Nicolas Family: CeeJay's version.

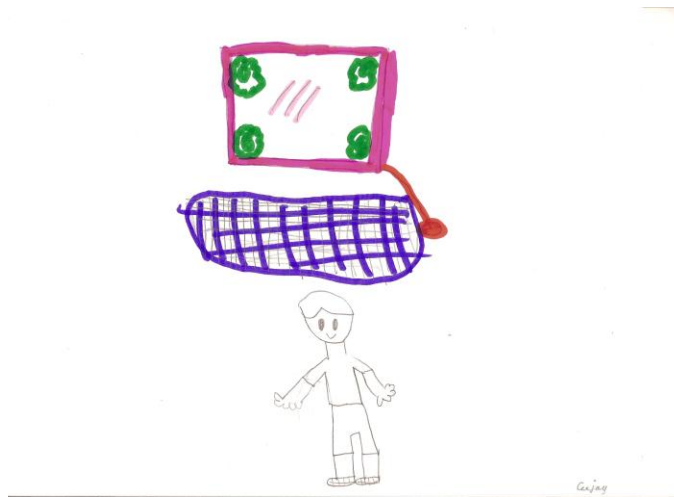
The child psychologist interpreted the big, colorful drawings as significant influence of the ladies in CeeJay's life. His surrogates, on the other hand, being quick sketches may be an indication that he does not find emotional connections to them. The hollow drawing of his mother, no color on her dress compared to the others, made the expert question the kind of relationship that this mother and son has (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

Angelique and CeeJay, being students are the ones who occupy the study room and both expressed that their favorite media is the computer. *Drawings 17 and 18* are the illustrations of the children while engaged in what they like the most. For Angelique, she loves to surf the net especially on weekends. That is the time that she is able to chat with her friends and classmates. Whenever necessary, she also does her research for homework through the Internet. On weekdays, computer access is limited because aside from doing her school assignments, she also has training in swimming – being an awarded young athlete in the sport.



Drawing 17. Angelique while surfing the net.

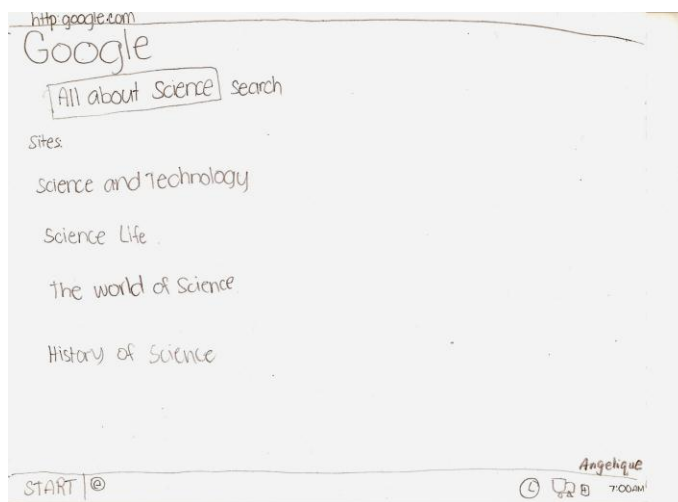
As for CeeJay, his computer experience involves visiting YouTube to see clips of his favorite Disney movie *High School Musical*. Sometimes he goes online to chat but he enjoys it more when he plays the *High School Musical* game.



Drawing 18. CeeJay with his favorite: computer.

The children, using cable TV, more often but finds some hilarious programs in the free channel, laughs to their hearts desire as they watch *Mister Bean*, *America's Funniest Videos*, and the local version of it, *Bitoy's Funniest*.

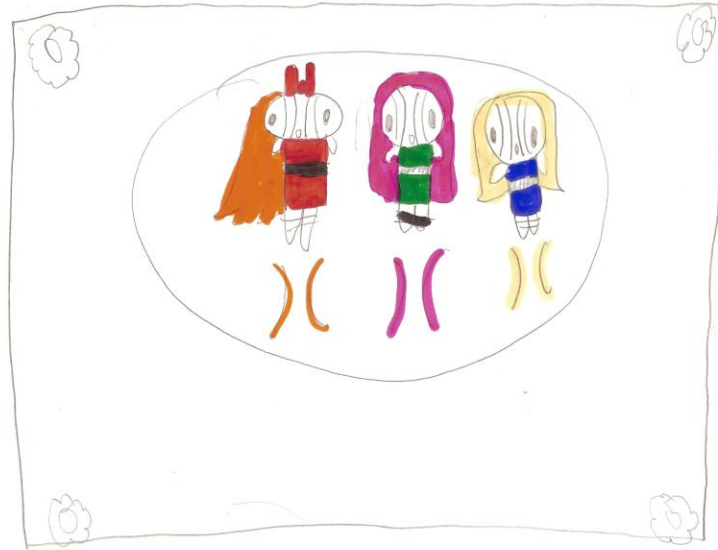
Add to what the children prefer in media, Angelique drew her choice as seen in *Drawing 19*. She explained that whenever she logs on to the computer she uses Google as the search engine. Listed in her drawing are sites, which she is interested in namely: Science and Technology, Science Life, the World of Science and History of Science.



Drawing 19. Angelique's choice: Googling Science.

As Angelique uses the computer to do research and learn, CeeJay prefers to be entertained over his choice as seen in *Drawing 20*. He identified a game that he feels happy with whenever he plays it. He said it is called *Power Puff Girls* and he mentioned the characters in this game as: “Blossom, Buttercup, Bubbles” – the same characters in his illustration. He shared what the *Power Puff Girls* do in the game:

Lumilipad sila tapos lahat ng tao na nangangailangan ng tulong sinisave nila. Papakainin mo sila ng mga pagkain nila tapos lilipad na sila tapos isesave nila yung mga tao. (They fly and they save the people who need help. You feed them with their food and then they can already fly to save the people.)



Drawing 20. CeeJay's favorite game online: Power Puff Girls.

From the sharing of their individual choices of media formats and programs; media have a multiple function for the children which begins with information, continues to education, and then to the most enjoyable – entertainment.

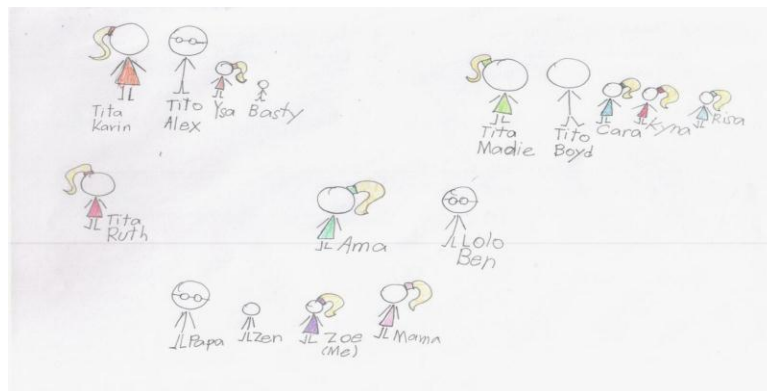
Zoe, 10 years old and Zen, 11 years old

Zoe and Zen live with their father. He is a single parent after his marriage was annulled when Zen was just 4 years old. Given full custody of the children, the rest of the members of the family have been so used to not having their mother around.

Ben, Zoe and Zen are very close to each other. They describe their family as young, simple, and small – reasons that allow them to talk a lot with each other and enjoy each other's company. They stay in one room together in a house, which the children's paternal grandfather and grandmother have set up for their children in Quezon City. The extended family set-up works well because even if the structure of this family is incomplete, by the

standards of a typical Filipino, the presence of other members in the home make up for the absence of the ex-wife.

When the researcher asked Zoe and Zen to draw their family, the two children had different representations. *Drawing 21* is Zoe's illustration of her large family - all the members of the extended family included.



Drawing 21. Zoe's illustration of her family.

Zen, on the other hand, drew his nuclear family as seen in *Drawing 22*. He represented his family completely, all four of them – father, mother, and two children.



Drawing 22. Zen's illustration of his family.

The children's illustrations of their family of origin were both complete even if the current family arrangement no longer includes their mother. Perhaps this is their wishful thinking.

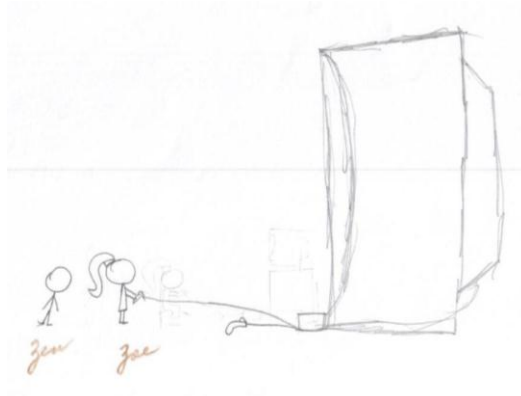
The child psychologist expressed that Zen is perhaps more hopeful of the relationship of his parents as he showed his father and mother side by side, hands almost touching. The expert also noticed the faint strokes and small drawings that Zen made and said that he appears to be less confident than Zoe. He may be the one who is more affected by the separation and the psychologist doubts that the issue of the separation has been resolved in this family (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

The children are free to move from one family room to the other especially when they come together to play. Consequently, the number of media increases for their use. The house contains five television sets, three radio components, three video players (DVD and VCD formats), and four computers. One newspaper is delivered daily; there is a monthly subscription to Time Magazine; and the residents of the house regularly buy different magazine titles from home styling to feung shui. Books are also available, depending on individual choices.

There are gaming consoles and handheld game units aside from the television, video players, radio, and computer in the family room. The family regularly uses the car stereo and iPod because they love to travel in and outside of the city while listening to their favorite music.

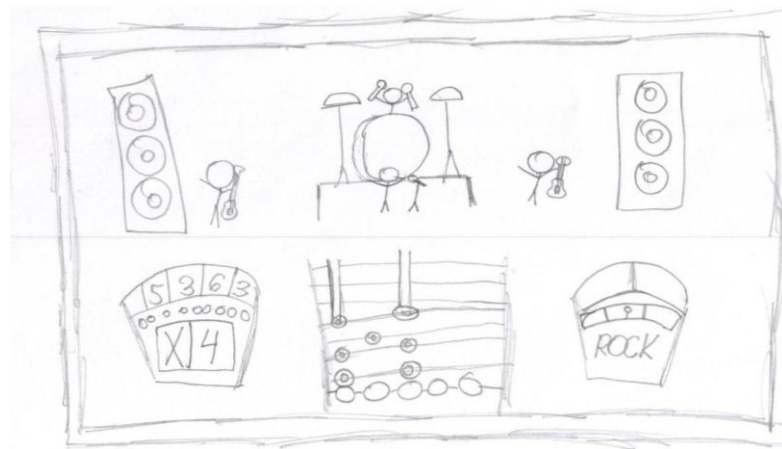
There are individual media favorites that keep Zoe and Zen entertained. Zoe prefers the play station (PS) and Zen enjoys televiewing. *Drawing 23* shows Zoe's drawing of her favorite media. She illustrated herself playing the gaming console attached to a huge television set as Zen stayed in the background. She explained that in the afternoons she is free to play. There are so many play station games that she loves but her most favorite are *Sims* (a simulation game that lets the player control everything in the environment, the

challenge of which is to sustain the environment that has been set up) and *Guitar Hero* (the game comes with a guitar like controller that allows the player to follow the chords on the screen and virtually become a rock star). The size of the television is a dream that she wishes will come true, “We don’t have a big TV.”



Drawing 23. Zoe’s choice, the Play Station.

Zoe continued her sharing saying that what she sees in the TV monitor is the *Guitar Hero* screen when she plays her favorite PS game. *Drawing 24* is the visual illustration of the screen.



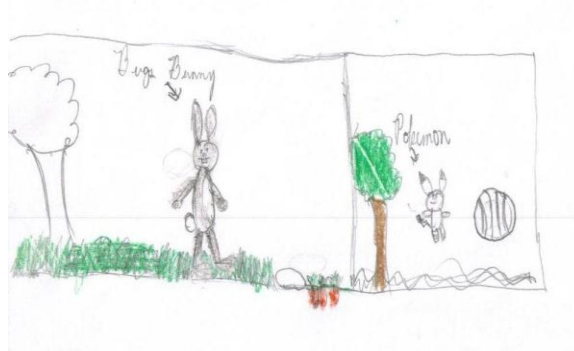
Drawing 24. Zoe’s favorite on screen, Guitar Hero.

Zen's drawing as seen in *Drawing 25* is a representation of his favorite media. He said that when he has time, he goes to their room and there he watches his favorite cartoons on television.



Drawing 25. Zen's favorite media, TV.

Zen also enjoys playing a handheld game unit called Gameboy. *Drawing 26* shows Pokemon and Bugs Bunny, this is where he accounted for what he sees as a part of his gaming experience.



Drawing 26. Zen's gaming experience.

Carmela, 9 years old

In 1996, Reena Aquino was finally hired by a multi-national company as an executive secretary. Her dream was to get into this prestigious company no matter the job offer. Thus, given a position that she has actually developed the skills for (having worked as a secretary in two local companies previously), was more than what she expected.

Well into completing her first year at work, she got another surprise. This time, she did not wish for it and yet it happened. She was pregnant! What made matters more complicated was that she was not married but the father of her unborn child is – and he has his own children. Reena left her dream company before anybody could find out that she was with a child out-of-wedlock.

What happened next is history, so they say. Her daughter is already nine years old. Reena and Carmela live with their extended family in Quezon City. This is the same place where Reena grew up and the hearth where she kept to herself until Carmela was finally born.

Carmela's family is seen in *Drawing 27*. She explained her illustration: "We are two in the family, my mom and me. I don't have a father and I don't have any brothers and sisters." When asked what else she can say about her family, she continued to share in a soft voice: "Sometimes we quarrel and sometimes we just make friends together again."



Drawing 27. Mommy Reena and Baby Carmela by Carmela.

Carmela, a grade-school student in an exclusive girls' school, identifies with her mother as seen in “the same dress, necklace, everything,” as the child psychologist observed. The colors are bold indicating a lot of intense feelings which possibly originates from her deep desire to know about her father and yet her mother would not allow it (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication).

Below is *Drawing 28* showing Carmela's favorite medium. She explained what she drew:

I drew me reading books, actually holding a book. I drew a shelf of Harry Potter books and I'm holding a book about dogs because I want to train my pet Hazel by reading this book. I love Harry Potter...I didn't have enough time to draw a Mary Kate and Ashley shelf but I don't read Mary Kate and Ashley that much.

Drawing 29 is what Carmela sees when engaged in her favorite media – books.

She explained: “I drew a picture of Garfield, one of the books of Garfield because I love to read. So I made here a little story about Garfield and the story is about *Garfield: The Marriage*.”

When Carmela tunes in to her favorite *Cartoon Network* or *Disney Channel* – especially *Hannah Montana*, she is not only entertained. She is also persuaded to go and join the activities that the networks sponsor when in the Philippines.



Carmela reading books. Carmela holding books.

Drawing 28. Carmela's favorite media: Books.



Drawing 29. Carmela recalls a scene in *Garfield*.*

Prince, 8 years old and Princess, 11 years old

This is the blended family of King and Queen. They were married in a civil ceremony, witnessed by family and friends, in 2005. They could not have a church wedding because King was just granted a court annulment of his marriage to the mother of Prince and Princess. They were waiting for the church annulment.

King brought with him his two children from a previous marriage and in 2007, King and Queen had their own child.

Prince is eight year-old, a Grade Two boy enrolled in an exclusive Catholic school for boys in Quezon City. Noticeably, he was very articulate in the English language and in the course of the conversation and his drawing activity he was found to be funny and quite entertaining. He interpreted his family in *Drawing 30*. It was through his sharing that the pseudonym for this family was born. They are the *Royal Family* – he is Prince, his older

* Text on the drawing of Carmela: Garfield came from the dump. He went home to say to John give me some lasagna and then Garfield sat beside the picture of Liz then John said I love you very much. I will never leave you, will you marry me? Garfield thought John was talking to him. Garfield got the picture and threw it inside the kitchen and John went to get it. While John was there Garfield put on loud music to make John turn it down so Garfield could sneak to the kitchen and hide the picture.

sister is Princess, his little brother is Li'l Prince, and their father is King, their mother, Queen.

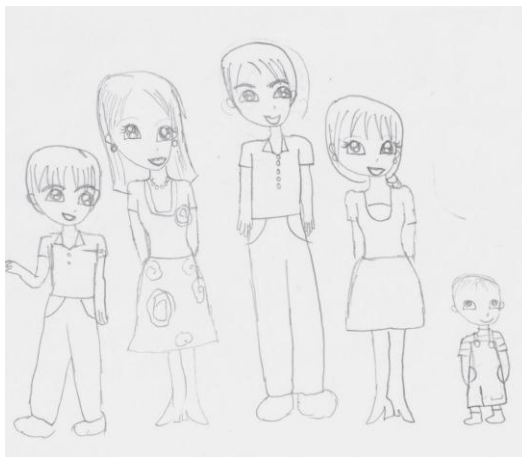
This is the story behind the name:



Drawing 30. Prince's Royal Family. His dad, the King; his mom, the Queen; Princess; Li'l Prince; and Prince.

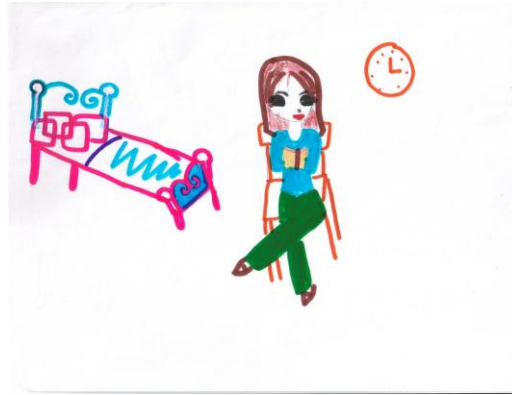
Prince explained his drawing, "This is Li'l Prince, stick body and me with a big head and this is Princess, very small." The researcher had to ask about Princess because she is actually older; she is 11 years old, and bigger than Prince, "Why is Princess smaller than you?" He answered, "Because I don't know." When asked about Li'l Prince, "Why is Li'l Prince a stick drawing?" He replied, "Because he is small. And then this is my mom," he continued. Another question had to be asked, yet again, knowing the history of the blended family, "Mommy who?" He answered, quite exasperated, "Queen! Ok, she has a crown and boots here, actually she don't (*sic*) have that much boots here. And here is dad he is doing like that..." He was not quite sure what word to use; then the researcher volunteered, "Posing?" He was glad for the word and affirmed, "Yah! Then he (King) smiled." Curious of the headdress on the parents, the researcher inquired, "Why do you have a crown on mommy's head?" He retorted, pointing at each member of his family, "Because I'm a Prince, she's the Princess, he's the Prince too and she's the Queen, he's the King."

Princess, the first born child, is 11 years old and is in Grade Five in an all girls' Catholic school in Quezon City. Though she did not have the same perception of her family as her brother's – being a royal family – she nevertheless, had another way of introducing her family. Her opening to *Drawing 31*: “(This is) my wacky family. It's easy to say that because mom is wacky, dad is wacky, Prince is wacky, Li'l Prince is wacky and I'm wacky...” Asked what *wacky* means she answered, “Funny, never tired, jumpy, crazy.” Then she continued to explain what she drew, “My brother Prince trying to escape from the photo shoot, Mom trying to look sophisticated as usual; daddy's being still, me trying to get my cute pictures and Li'l Prince just minding his own business.”



Drawing 31. Princess' Wacky Family.

Beyond their parents' requirements in terms of media exposure, the children have their own favorites. *Drawing 32* is Princess, “In my future room, my future own room reading *Nancy Drew*.”

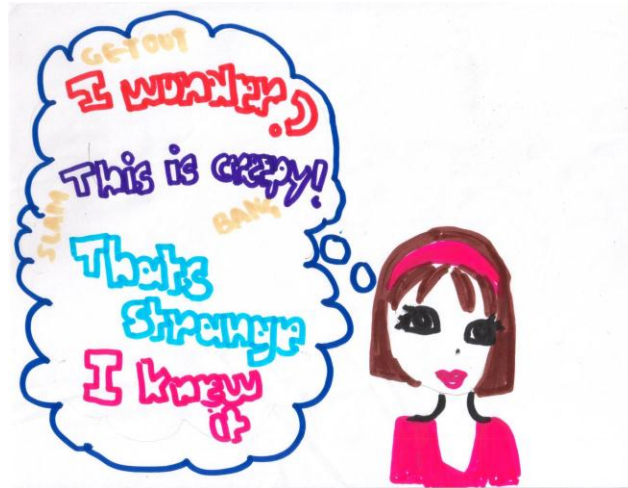


Drawing 32. Princess reading a book in her *future* own room.

Her desire for having her own room in their home was very evident because she did not only stress the words but let them slowly roll out of her mouth. She explained her drawing further, “I just wanted to highlight, the bed and the clock. Because, it’s like connected - like I can go there if I like to read there and the clock, it’s like I have been reading for hours...” Then she narrated why she loves to read *Nancy Drew*:

I love mystery that is one. I like solving stuff, not just mystery like ghost; just solving stuff. I like interesting stuff, extraordinary stuff. Because I’m so curious about everything that’s why it’s just mysteries, that’s the only thing I can be curious about...it makes me want to think.

Drawing 33 is what Princess imagines when she is reading. She said that while reading her book, words come alive in her head like, “*Get Out! Slam! Bang!*” Then she wonders if *Nancy Drew*, the character in the book, is making any progress in solving the mystery. Further along in reading the book she thinks, “*This is creepy or that’s strange.*” And when the mystery is finally solved, “*I knew it.*”



Drawing 33. Princess with “thoughts that popped-up in my head while reading.”

As for Prince, being a young boy who loves to play, his media choice is the computer and his favorite game is *Counter Strike*. The researcher knows of this game through her experience as a mother and teacher. She could only describe it as violent since the gamer is a shooter – either on the terrorist or counter-terrorist side. Points or scores come after a kill. Prince confirmed what little knowledge the researcher has of the game in his drawings. *Drawings 34* and *35* are consistent interpretations of Prince’s experience while on the computer.

In *Drawing 34*, Prince excitedly shared that this is he while playing *Counter Strike* on the computer where, “I used a shotgun at all my enemies and all the heads fall down.” He said he plays in the *other house* referring to the house of his grandmother in the province. He described the other objects on his drawing namely the red box, where he puts his cheat-codes or tips in order for gamers to advance in points; he also mentioned the keyboard which is the control center of the game.



Drawing 34. Prince on his favorite media: the computer.

Drawing 35 is the screen that Prince sees when he plays his favorite game. The words that he wrote beside the computer, that is, *Oooh! Aah! Uuh*, are sounds that he hears when shooting begins. The scene shows barracks and helicopters; soldiers and terrorists



Drawing 35. Prince's interpretation of the game *Counter Strike*.

shooting at each other. Prince claimed that in the drawing, "I got shot twenty times! I like it when I kill the hostage." The gaming happens in *Lolo* and *Lola's* house.

The child psychologist surmised that Prince is more excited and fascinated about the game when he cannot experience it at home (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication). Thus

he looks forward to weekly visits to the place that allows him to bask in the power that he imagines he has and be exposed to the violence built in the game.

Key Findings and Analysis

All of the middle-income family participants in this study were from Quezon City Metro Manila area. Being an urban center, the metropolis offered a wide selection of multi-media channels and activities, which the children enjoy and take advantage of.

The structure of the families varied. There were typical families that were complete, i.e., father, mother, and children. Others were atypical such as the blended family; single parent families; family under the care of grandparents. In terms of the number of members, the families were relatively small; parents had one or two children. The school-age children are currently enrolled in private schools. The families are Roman Catholics who regularly go to Sunday mass and try to observe all holidays of obligation.

Based on the family drawings, the child psychologist reckons that generally the children come from average families, that is, they are not dysfunctional (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication). Even when they have gone through certain transitions it seems that the parents or surrogates were able to handle them well. In most cases, the parents and surrogates were able to manage the transition in such a way that they maintained the emotional equilibrium of the family. “There are issues that you can see (within the family) but nothing major,” she said.

Over all, the drawings showed that the definition and profile of families were not just mother and father. In cases where the mother was physically absent, there was always a mother figure. It is in the kind of set-up that children perceive their families. As the children

grow older, they get a sense of history of their families that is why some drew their extended families.

The drawings of twelve children* illustrating their families; their favorite media; and what they see, hear, or read in media are the children's truths and experiences. The interpretation of the drawings was based on the casual conversations with the children. The narratives allowed the readers to have a glimpse of the participating children's realities.

The family drawings of the children presented the members of their respective families and in all instances the members of the nuclear set were drawn. Children from the typical families like Lisa, sisters Tintin and Sasa, and Marco, drew their mothers, fathers, their siblings (if there are any), and themselves. In one instance though, Tintin from the double-income family, drew the extended members from both her mother and father's sides. This suggests the value ascribed to families and their importance among the children. Regardless of the family type, the children's visual voices revealed that their world revolves around a family member or members.

The children from the atypical families illustrated the same with the current set-up of the families more evident in some than in others. Louise, whose father died when she was barely a year-old, and Carmela, who has never met her father, drew their mothers and themselves only, even though their current family set up is more extended since they live with the families of origin of their mothers. Angelique and CeeJay, whose grandparents are their surrogates, represented their extended families. In the drawings were *Lolo* and *Lola*; their cousins who are also under the care of their grandparents; and Mama for CeeJay and

* Of the twelve children, eight are girls and four are boys. The names and ages of the girls are as follows: Lisa (11 years old); Tintin (10 years old); Sasa (7 years old); Angelique (12 years old); Louise (4 years old); Zoe (10 years old); Carmela (nine years old); and Princess (11 years old). The names and ages of the boys are as follows: Marco (5 years old); CeeJay (7 years old); Zen (11 years old); and Prince (8 years old).

Mom and Dad for Angelique. Zoe and Zen, under the care of their single-father after annulment of his marriage, drew their family with their mother in it as if she was still living with them. Zen represented his nuclear family – father, mother, Zoe, and himself. Zoe, on the other hand, represented her nuclear family with the extended members who lived in the same household; grandparents, uncles, aunties, and cousins – all sixteen of them on her paper. From the blended family, Princess and Prince sketched their family's current set-up acknowledging their stepmother, whom they call *mom*, and their half-brother.

The children's drawings on the media were as revealing as their family drawings. With the multiple choices of media that these *tech-savvy* children have within their reach, their media favorites were limited to three, namely, the computers, television, and books or comics. Most of them enjoyed the electronic media. Their drawing of themselves showed them engaged on the computer while gaming, surfing the net, chatting, and blogging. They also represented themselves watching television, tuned in to their favorite cartoons, or while gaming using the PlayStation connected to the TV set. Those who enjoyed reading book series were girls while the five year-old boy loved his comic serials.

The children were able to validate their media favorites with the drawings of what they see, hear, or read from their media choices. When they claim that they love to read, then they sketched or drew what they read or what their thoughts were while they were reading. When their choices were the computers or television, they write the titles of the games and shows they like and/or draw what they see on the electronic media. There were two instances though that the media favorites were not reflected on what the children see. Sasa, whose favorite was playing the computer, illustrated Clifford, the red dog and a cat saying that she sees them on TV. It is the same with Zen who claimed that he likes television but he

drew his favorite games as he sees them in his handheld gaming unit. For these two children, they did not distinguish the television screen, with the computer monitor, nor with the double-screen of the handheld unit – that is, these all project and display images and signals.

With many media formats available in the homes of the families, then the children have wider options.

There were children who expressed their love for reading. There were children who also revealed a choice of media over another, like computers over books. Books are legitimate individual media format; that is, one expects to be alone and confined to the material.

The younger ones also have a heavy preference for television and their contents such as cartoons, music videos, and educational programs. Some children, particularly the girls, enjoy reading books during their free time. The radio (AM stations for news and FM stations for music) and digital music gadgets such as iPods (portable and personalized music storage units) are popular among the parents and children, respectively.

The new media such as computers and other gaming units (such as PSP, PS2, and Gameboy) are favorites too. All of the children, from five years old and above, reported the regularly use of these new media. The computers are used for communicating via social network sites such as Yahoo Messenger, Friendster, and Facebook, and going online for interactive and role-playing games. The children also use the computers for school research and other academic inquiries and outputs. The handheld gaming units and consoles, on the other hand, are used to while away extra time and serve as options when someone – a brother or sister - is already on the computer.

As for the media drawings, the child psychologist pointed out that media – especially the electronic media – are very influential as far as the children in this study are concerned (B.A.L. Sison, personal communication). This is evident since the children participants drew the favorite media with the same characteristics; that is, they were big in comparison to the sizes of the children themselves; they were colorful; and detailed as seen in the complete drawing of the different parts and hardware of the computers.

The *Information, Education, Entertainment* and *Communication* function of media manifest in the everyday use of the family members. Clearly, there is an inclination among and across families to enjoy electronic media. Add to that, the new media of computers and artificial intelligence become part of the very dense media environment of the families.

For the adolescents and the teen-agers, their music is more often played or ‘downloaded’ from their computers and ‘uploaded’ to their iPods for pure listening enjoyment. The computers are connectivity channels. The information, education and entertainment functions of this new media are so fluid that there is almost no distinction among them. Users often surf the World Wide Web, also known as websites, for these purposes. On the other hand, the communication function is observed through social network sites. In these sites, diary keeping among the youth is not as private as it used to be. The personal blogs account for everything and anything and access to these is easy. Real time chat, on the other hand, has replaced expensive phone calls and snail mails. Now, information is passed on in a matter of seconds.

Conclusion

The families presented in the study consisted of typical and atypical families, the

choice of whom provided some comparative data and basis for concluding that, regardless of the nature or type of their families, the children were still close to at least one or all members of the family. The closeness and desire to be together were reflected in their drawings, which the author termed as visual voices. The sketches and pictures drawn bespeak of the longings and desire to be always together. This highlights the importance of the family and suggests what we Filipinos value most.

The drawings on the media show how influential the media or the gadgets in the children's lives. They serve as companions filling up the time they play games as children, this time, using the more advanced technological gadgets.

The children's preference for computers and other technological gadgets for gaming and music make them legitimate media users as they engaged in individual activities, such as reading, music listening, and gaming on personal computers and handheld units. More importantly, as users of media, the children acquire power to create and send their own messages. Their world as reflected in the drawings shows a different set of children born in a technological age and seemed unaware of the traditional games or play toys that their parents must have played.

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APPENDIX A

Drawing of Media Experience

The younger children were asked by the researcher to draw on bond papers using pencils and other coloring materials. The researcher supplied all materials.

Guide for the drawing exercise:

1. Draw your family.
2. Draw yourself while using your favorite media.
3. Draw what you see, hear, or read in using your favorite media.

Supplement interview question:

Please explain what you have drawn.