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### **A Study of Aesthetic Vocabulary Used by Boys Versus Girls in Picture Judgment**

Meredith Hawkins Henriksen

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**A STUDY OF AESTHETIC VOCABULARY USED BY BOYS VERSUS GIRLS**

**IN PICTURE JUDGMENT**

by

**Meredith Hawkins Henriksen**

**B.S., St. Olaf College, 1969**



**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty**

**of**

**St. Cloud State University**

**in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**for the Degree**

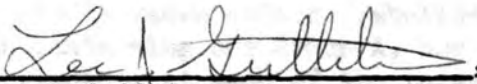
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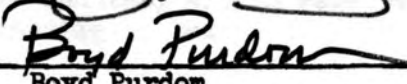
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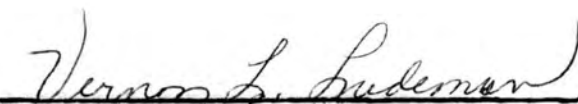
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This thesis submitted by Meredith Hawkins Henriksen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the Final Evaluation Committee.

  
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A STUDY OF AESTHETIC VOCABULARY USED BY BOYS VERSUS GIRLS  
IN PICTURE JUDGMENT

Meredith Hawkins Henriksen

PROBLEM:

The area of aesthetics is intriguing and elusive. Researchers have used the words "like best" to evoke an aesthetic response. The first aim of this thesis will be to determine whether the words "like best" receive the same aesthetic response as the words "most beautiful" when put to children. Secondly, with the concern of educators today regarding sex roles, this thesis will attempt to define differences in aesthetic responses of boys versus girls at three grade levels--first, third, and fifth.

PROCEDURE:

The writer selected art reproductions and placed them into three groups according to traditionally used labels: Group A, ones depicting women, soft colors or things of traditional beauty (traditionally labelled feminine qualities); Group B, ones depicting men or boys or painted in bold colors (traditionally labelled masculine qualities); Group C, no people depicted, landscapes, cityscapes, middle range colors (labelled neutral). Four sets were then composed, each containing one Group A, one Group B and two Group C reproductions. Forty students at each of the three grade levels were shown the four sets and asked to choose first the picture they "liked best" and secondly the one they thought was the "most beautiful." The sets were selected eliminating previously researched reasons for aesthetic choice (color, style and content) within each set. The results were tabulated as a whole and according to sex.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The only results that were significant to the .05 level when submitted to t-tests seemed to appear randomly. The sets, therefore, did not seem to all test the same things. To the contrary, the results seemed to be either so personal to each child that his or her sex was not a factor or the results appeared to be wholly dependent on the particular pictures used in each set. Choices were either made with originality or with some pattern that was not tested here.

November 1975  
Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

Lee Gutteter, Chairman  
Lee Gutteter

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to give special thanks to Dr. Howard Bird of the St. Cloud State Mathematics Department who gave freely of his time to assist me with statistics for this thesis and also to Dr. Lee Gutteter for his patience and guidance.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The area of aesthetics is, and always has been, an elusive one: "What perception is we do not know, nor what judgment is. We do not know too much even about sounds and colors, and we know still less about words and language as pure meaning."<sup>1</sup> The phrase "language as pure meaning" is an interesting one. It suggests that words in and by themselves have no universal meaning. It is therefore advisable to research into the way people use and understand words. Such research will help those in the field of art education to be more universally understood. A common vocabulary certainly forms the groundwork in discussing the area of aesthetics.

A review of research in aesthetics shows the following use of words. Leni and Neil Salkind, in their article "A Measure of Aesthetic Preference,"<sup>2</sup> asked elementary aged children to respond to the statement "I would like you to tell me which one you like best" from groups of painting reproductions. Frank Barron also used similar terminology

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<sup>1</sup>D. W. Prall, Aesthetic Judgment (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Leni Salkind and Neil Salkind, "A Measure of Aesthetic Preference," Studies in Art Education, Volume 15, Number 1 (Fall, 1973), p. 21.

in his studies "Personality Style and Perceptual Choice"<sup>3</sup> and "Artistic Perception as a Possible Factor in Personality Style: It's Measurement by a Figure Preference Test."<sup>4</sup> He had University students, artists and non-artists group pictures into "Like" and "Don't Like" categories and more specifically into "Like Best of All," "Like Much," "Like Moderately" and "Like Least of All." Are responses to questions of "Liking" (such as those cited above) aesthetic ones? In order to get at that question the word "Like" should be linked to the "beautiful." Since common beauty has been defined as "simply something liked for itself"<sup>5</sup> one might therefore assume that painting reproductions chosen as those "liked best" would be the same as those chosen as the "most beautiful." It appears that that was the assumption in the studies I cited above in the area of aesthetics. In this study that assumption will be questioned.

Leni and Neil Salkind were also aware of another interesting aspect in the area of aesthetic preference. This concerns the possible differences in aesthetic responses given by boys and by girls.<sup>6</sup> This study is designed, through the choice of painting reproductions used, to discover whether differences between boys and girls exist as a part of their aesthetic judgment.

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<sup>3</sup>Frank Barron, "Personality Style and Perceptual Choice," Journal of Personality, Volume 20, 1953, pp. 385-401.

<sup>4</sup>Frank Barron, "Artistic Perception as a Possible Factor in Personality Style: It's Measurement by a Figure Preference Test," Journal of Psychology, Volume 30, 1952, pp. 199-203.

<sup>5</sup>Stephen C. Pepper, Principles of Art Appreciation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Salkind, op. cit.

### Significance

It would appear that in order for people to truly communicate, words should be clarified and universally understood. Once an aesthetic vocabulary is defined the way is begun for further study into the area of aesthetics and aesthetic preferences. It is therefore important to know whether the query "which one do you like best" evokes an aesthetic choice based on a judgment of what is beautiful.

The results of the differences in aesthetic choice by boys and girls, if they exist, may point up some problems and/or lead to possible solutions to problems in dealing with the average elementary school class composed of both boys and girls. Perhaps girls are hearing and therefore responding to something different than are boys when ideas concerning beauty and aesthetic preference are approached. Girls may in fact be more at ease and interested in the discussion of the beautiful whereas boys may lose interest due to the "sissy" connotation of the word.<sup>7</sup>

### Objective

The purpose of this study is to research a small area of aesthetic preference in elementary aged school children. This will be done in two ways. The first is a question of language. Does a child respond to the query "which picture do you like best" in the same way he responds to the question "which picture is the most beautiful?" The answer to this and the reason for the child's choice should help define whether a response to "likes best" is an aesthetic response. The second

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<sup>7</sup>Gordon S. Plummer, Children's Art Judgment (William C. Brown Co., 1974), p. 2.

is a question of whether differences exist between boys and girls in the way they make the above responses. If wide differences exist in the responses of girls and boys there may be hidden difficulties in the average classroom when the subject of beauty is approached.

### Hypotheses

- 1) There will be no significant difference in the pictures the children choose as the "one they like best" and the one that is "most beautiful."
- 2) There will be no significant difference by sex in the number of children who choose the same picture for the "one they like best" and the one that is "most beautiful."
- 3) There will be no significant difference by sex in the number of children who choose pictures from Group B as the one they like best.
- 4) There will be no significant difference by sex in the number of children who choose pictures from Group A as the one that is most beautiful.

### Definition of Terms

Aesthetic judgment: qualitative reply which an individual makes to aspects of a work of art beyond mere recognition.

Aesthetic response: mere perception and a response of pleasure or displeasure to the formal qualities and elements of the work.<sup>8</sup>

Color: hue, value, saturation of pigment.

Common beauty: something liked for itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Pepper, op. cit., p. 12.

Content: ideas and imagery.

Emotional response: similar to aesthetic response immediate reaction without thought of color, content or style.

Group A: ones depicting women, soft colors or things of traditional beauty (traditionally labelled feminine qualities).

Group B: ones depicting men or boys or painted in bold colors (traditionally labelled masculine qualities).

Group C: no people depicted, landscapes, cityscapes, middle range colors (labelled neutral).

Likes best:<sup>10</sup> most attracted to or gets most pleasure from.

Style (clarity): clearness of the images.

Taste: develops from living within cultures, shaped by group standards and attitudes.

### Study Design

The children involved will be from each of three grade levels--first, third or fifth. They will be from midwestern schools in a city with a population of nearly 50,000. The majority of the children will come from middle-class home. As none of the schools have an elementary art program taught by specialists, the children will have had little formal art experience.

Each child will be interviewed individually. Each will be shown four sets of reproductions and asked to choose the one in each set he or she likes best. The student will then be asked to choose which one is the most beautiful. Each child will be told that there are no right or

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<sup>10</sup>Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company).

wrong answers and that the same or a different picture may be selected for each of the two queries.

The results will then be tabulated according to the choices made and according to the sex of the child. Results will be analyzed as a whole and separately as girls' and boys' results. (See Appendix A.)

The children will also be asked, "Why did you choose that one?" and the results of the answers classified and recorded. This will merely be used as a check in identifying factors I neglected to consider which may have interfered with the validity of the results of the study.

Reproductions will be chosen and grouped so that color will have a minimal influence upon the children's choices. In each set will be one "Group A" picture, one "Group B" picture and two "Group C" pictures. A definition of these groups appears under the Definition of Terms, page 5.

### Assumptions

In setting up the test for this study it is assumed that sets two, three and four are testing again the ideas in set one. A further assumption is that the writer's judgment is correct in placing the reproductions used in Group A, Group B or Group C. It will also be assumed that the choice of reproductions eliminated differences in color, style and content within each set. Further discussion of this appears under Review of Related Literature, Choices of Reproductions, page 10.

### Reproduction Sets

Set One		Groups
A	Sacre Cour de Montmartre and Passage Cottin Utrillo	C
B	Woman with a Sunshade Monet	A
C	Chestnut trees at the Jas de Bouffan Cezanne	C
D	Head with Blue Klee	B

<b>Set Two</b>		<b>Groups</b>
A The God of the Northern Woods	Klee	A
B Bird Cloud	Feininger	C
C Cavaliere	Marini	B
D Heavy Seas at Sunset	Nolde	C

<b>Set Three</b>		<b>Groups</b>
A Little Owl	Durer	C
B Self Portrait with Palette	Cezanne	B
C Path at Pontoise--right half	Pissaro	C
D Dancer in a Rose Dress	Degas	A

<b>Set Four</b>		<b>Groups</b>
A Mill at Pontoise	Cezanne	C
B Jean Renoir Drawing	Renoir	B
C Peonies, Lilacs and Leaves	Redon	A
D Factories	Utrillo	C

See Appendix B for photographs of reproductions.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Although there exists a lot of material concerning aesthetics most is of a philosophical rather than an experimental nature. People throughout history have attempted to define qualities that make up the beautiful and that concept of beauty has not remained fixed. We even find that beauty changes for the same person--or is it rather that the person changes? Certainly the object of the person's attention often doesn't change.<sup>11</sup>

Let us begin to get at aesthetics by defining the word. Webster's Dictionary describes aesthetic as "relating to the beautiful as distinguished from the merely pleasing, the moral and especially the useful and utilitarian" and as to be "appreciative or responsive to, or zealous about the beautiful." The same source gives the definition of beauty as "perfect combination of characteristics pleasureable to see."<sup>12</sup> "Another charm which contributes to some forms of beauty is the charm of fragility, delicacy, immaturity and helplessness--which evokes an impulse to protective and solicitous behavior. The beauty of flowers, small birds . . ."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Prall, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

<sup>12</sup>Webster's Dictionary, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Albert R. Chandler, Beauty and Human Nature Elements of Psychological Aesthetics (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1934), p. 24.



### Beauty and Great Art

The question of beauty and great works of art is an interesting one. "A traditional view of a work of art was that it was to constitute an object of beauty, which would inspire, profit and delight the beholder."<sup>14</sup> This idea is not likely to always be applied now in view of the host of modern art works on the scene. Picasso's Guernica is an excellent example of an art work which does not inspire and delight the viewer by its beauty and yet withstands criticism to remain a great work of art.

### Beauty and the Child

Although most "adults assume that children find beauty in the same things they themselves do" actually the "child's concept of what is beautiful often seems to be far removed from that of the adult, especially the adult with some background in art."<sup>15</sup> A child's concept of the beautiful is based more extensively on sense perceptions rather than just the visual perceptions. Therefore the "awareness of a picture as a beautiful thing comes as a belated thought and then mainly as a by-product of interest in its content."<sup>16</sup> If the content gives the child a feeling of horror or disgust he will be unable to appreciate the beauty it may contain. In contrast to Webster's definition of aesthetics cited

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<sup>14</sup>Ralph A. Smith, Aesthetics and Criticism in Art Education (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1966), p. 109.

<sup>15</sup>Lark-Horovitz, Hilda Lewis, and Mark Luca, Understanding Children's Art for Better Teaching (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1973), p. 212.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

earlier, we find that young children equate being beautiful with being good. It isn't until the age of nine or ten years that they begin to differentiate between the good and the beautiful. The moral sense is still strong, however, and still continues to dominate their acceptance of beauty.<sup>17</sup>

### Choice of Reproductions

There were several factors to be considered in selecting reproductions for use with children in a study. First, "children value a work of art primarily for its content, not for its artistic form."<sup>18</sup> It is usually this content and second the color used that account for the child liking or disliking a work of art.<sup>19</sup> Concerning style, it has been found that clarity elicits favorable comments and that the years from seven to fourteen bring about an increasing interest in realism with a corresponding negative attitude toward modern abstract art.<sup>20</sup>

More specifically regarding their choices, it has been found that "children can express feeling about a particular topic only if they have a reasonable background of experiences which are relatable to it."<sup>21</sup> Knowledge of media and process can help to bring forth an awareness of aesthetics and further appreciation regarding an art work. It is thus important to consider a subject's background and experience

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 214-218.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

regarding art before he or she is used in a study of aesthetics:

"exposure to art and working on art projects do increase aesthetic sensitivities."<sup>22</sup>

The choice of reproductions for this study was therefore made with attention to color, clarity and subject matter. Each set contains four reproductions which do not differ greatly in the colors used. The sets are homogeneous within themselves concerning the clarity and style of the works. Scenes which would seem very foreign or out of a child's range of experience were excluded. None of the schools had an elementary art program taught by specialists so the art experience of the children was minimal.

#### Development of the Child's Aesthetic Sense

The development of a person's taste is a gradual process and is shaped by group standards and attitudes from living within a culture.<sup>23</sup>

A child's mind is drawn first to the factual imagery of the picture:

"Children of all ages showed a startling preference for inferior pictures, possibly because the meaning was clearer and more familiar."<sup>24</sup>

It has been thought that only during adolescence does a true aesthetic attitude break through. Until about the age of thirteen, art interest is dependent on the general interests of both age levels and sex of the child. However, the pictures children like usually have little effect on

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<sup>22</sup>Plummer, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>24</sup>Lark-Horovitz, op. cit., p. 228.

the art work they do.<sup>25</sup>

### Girls Versus Boys

"Stereotyped notions of what is appropriate behavior for each sex act as a barrier to creative behavior."<sup>26</sup> Regarding the concept of beauty "girls, especially, may try to please the adult."<sup>27</sup> The following relates more directly to art: "in drawing as in other activities, girls and boys respond in ways that are consistent with the sex role as defined by their culture."<sup>28</sup> Sex roles also dictate that certain qualities apply to certain sexes. "Sensitivity in our culture is associated with femininity and independence with masculinity."<sup>29</sup>

Research such as that cited above indicates that there may be some stereotyping of the idea of beauty in our culture which would show up in the different way boys and girls react to art work. Thus hypotheses two, three and four appear as a significant part of this study.

There are a few other pieces of information that may apply to how the results of this study are viewed. "Girls tend to agree with experts less than boys in early years and more than boys in later years."<sup>30</sup> Girls have also been found to:

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 215, 224.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

- 1) take tasks more seriously
- 2) respond with more genuineness
- 3) be more obedient to the wishes of adults who are directing their activities in school
- 4) be more attentive to external stimuli<sup>31</sup>

The following statement ties in with the above "girls appear to be more susceptible to suggestion than boys, perhaps because they think they are expected to be compliant rather than independent."<sup>32</sup> Other ideas from research that may have some bearing on this study follow:

- 1) Girls with high I.Q.'s have more preference for monochromatic colors.
- 2) Younger\* children are attracted to bright colors and high contrasts, while older children appreciate tints, shades and increased subtlety.
- 3) Girls from a rural environment have been found to have a "real thirst for colors."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Irvin L. Child, Development of Sensitivity to Esthetic Values (New Haven, Connecticut: Cooperative Research Project Number 1748, Yale University, 1964), p. 32.

<sup>32</sup>Lark-Horovitz, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

## CHAPTER III

### INVESTIGATION

#### Population Description

The students used in this study were from three public elementary schools in a mid-sized midwestern city with a population of less than 50,000. The majority were middle-class with some upper-middle and some lower-middle class in the sample. The schools were composed of contained classrooms. The atmosphere in each school appeared to be one of cooperation--a congenial habitat for learning. The study was conducted during the last few weeks of the school year so in each case the children had nearly completed the grade in which they were interviewed. They had had no formal art instruction by a specialist as part of their elementary education. A minimum of forty children participated from each grade level--first, third and fifth.

#### Test Administration

The test was administered to the children individually in a separate, quiet part of the room. There appeared to be little comparing of notes by children who had already participated with those who were waiting to take part. In almost all cases the children appeared to respond honestly and seriously to the questions asked.

All the testing was conducted by the same person to assure uniformity. The following is an outline of the interview:

- 1) Hello. What is your name?
- 2) There are no right or wrong answers to the questions.
- 3) I just want to know what you think.
- 4) These pictures are all copies of ones made by famous artists.
- 5) Which of these pictures do you like the best? (Question repeated for each of four sets which were shown individually).  
Why?
- 6) Next time you may pick the same one or a different one.
- 7) Which picture do you think is the most beautiful? (This question followed the one above for each of the four sets).  
Why?

### Records

Recording sheets were prepared with spaces to record the child's name, sex, his choices and the reasons for his choices. Lark-Horowitz determined that there are three things which most often influence children's choices and columns were headed with them so that the testing would proceed more rapidly. The heading "emotional response" was added for those children who seemed to choose before considering the other three qualities. It was then necessary to merely check the columns headed 1) emotional, 2) content, 3) color and/or 4) clarity (style). (See Appendix A.)

Table F (continued)

Grade 5 Set 1  
2  
3  
4

CHAPTER IV  
CONCLUSIONS

no significance  
no significance  
no significance  
no significance

Limitations

The assumption was made in Chapter I that sets two, three and four were re-testing the ideas in set one. Upon further consideration, that assumption came into question. (See Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.)

TABLE 1

Statistics relating to Hypothesis I by sets showing the frequency with which children choose the same picture for both of the questions. (Results were subjected to t-tests.)

Set I	.226163	on 2 degrees	no significance
Set II	7.00819	on 2 degrees	significant to .05
Set III	1.93663		no significance
Set IV	2.19581	on 2 degrees	no significance

TABLE 2

Statistics relating to Hypothesis II by sets showing the frequency with which boys and girls choose the same picture for both questions.

Grade 1	Set 1	.875	no significance
	2	.418431	no significance
	3	.36403	no significance
	4	.875	no significance
Grade 3	Set 1	5.75425	significant to .05
	2	0	no significance
	3	0	no significance
	4	2.23602	no significance



Table 2 (continued)

Grade 5	Set 1	0	no significance
	2	0	no significance
	3	.882353	no significance
	4	0	no significance

TABLE 3

Statistics relating to Hypothesis III by sets showing the frequency with which boys compared to girls chose pictures from Group B for the one they liked best by grade level.

Grade 1	Set 1	4.86111	significant to .05
	2	2.52404	no significance
	3	3.63243	no significance
	4	2.48684	no significance
Grade 2	Set 1	0	no significance
	2	.1125	no significance
	3	0	no significance
	4	0	no significance
Grade 5	Set 1	.512821	no significance
	2	0	no significance
	3	.626223	no significance
	4	0	no significance

TABLE 4

Statistics relating to Hypothesis IV by sets showing the frequency with which boys compared to girls chose pictures from Group A as the one that is most beautiful.

Grade 1	Set 1	.065625	no significance
	2	1.99111	no significance
	3	6.25368	significant to .05
	4	0	no significance

Table 4 (continued)

Grade 3	Set 1	1.90476	no significance
	2	.68422	no significance
	3	2.47849	no significance
	4	.221538	no significance
Grade 5	Set 1	.564263	no significance
	2	.703125	no significance
	3	1.25	no significance
	4	1.56	no significance

---

It appears that merely by the use of different reproductions, the sets are not testing the same thing. The question of whether it would have been better to test more children using only one set was considered. It appeared that in that case conclusions may have been reached that would apply to that set only. The conclusions would be valid for those four reproductions only and could most likely not be generalized to other sets of reproductions. Thus the results of the study are limited by the question of whether the sets test the same things repeatedly or whether each set represents a difficult test. A statistical test to determine which is the case is discussed under Implications for Further Research, page 19.

In order to determine whether the sets appear to be testing the same ideas it was necessary to view the results by sets at each grade level. The figures in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 show that all of the hypotheses are true as stated. When results were subjected to t-tests the only significance to the .05 level seems to appear at random. No trends may be discerned according to grade level or by sex within the grade levels.

It would appear then, that the significance that does show up is either by random chance or dependent upon the particular reproductions chosen for that set. If the latter is the case, it appears to indicate that children make aesthetic choices independently of sex roles. It appears to be such an individual response that this study has not defined what determines a child's choice. It would then be color, content and style only or some other factor not tested here which determines aesthetic choice.

#### Implications for Further Research

Overall the children tested were less concerned with masculine and feminine images and roles than one might think. They appeared to respond as children rather than as boys and girls with tastes imposed by their sex. However, following the testing few children were informally asked, "Who do you think painted this picture--a man or a woman?" regarding Van Gogh's still life of flowers. The emphatic answer usually was "a woman!" To further questioning the children responded, "women paint flowers." This would suggest that the subject matter artists use may be defined by sex to the child. Further research along these lines is therefore indicated.

In addition the question of what happens after the fifth grade seems to indicate that more research is needed in the junior and senior high schools. Do the ideas of young people become more stereotyped in response to art work or do children expand as free persons as they grow older?

Further research could be done statistically for this study. If the statistics compiled in this study were taken a few steps further

interesting comparisons or significance may appear. It would be possible to use the binomial test to further study whether the children answered the questions other than randomly for each set across grade levels.

The Cochran Test for Related Observations, also known as the Cochran Q Test, has been suggested as a method to test which of the sets was the best test to use for the purposes of this study. It appears that the Cochran Test would be valuable when used in a pre-test situation to aid in selecting the reproduction sets used for this type of study.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

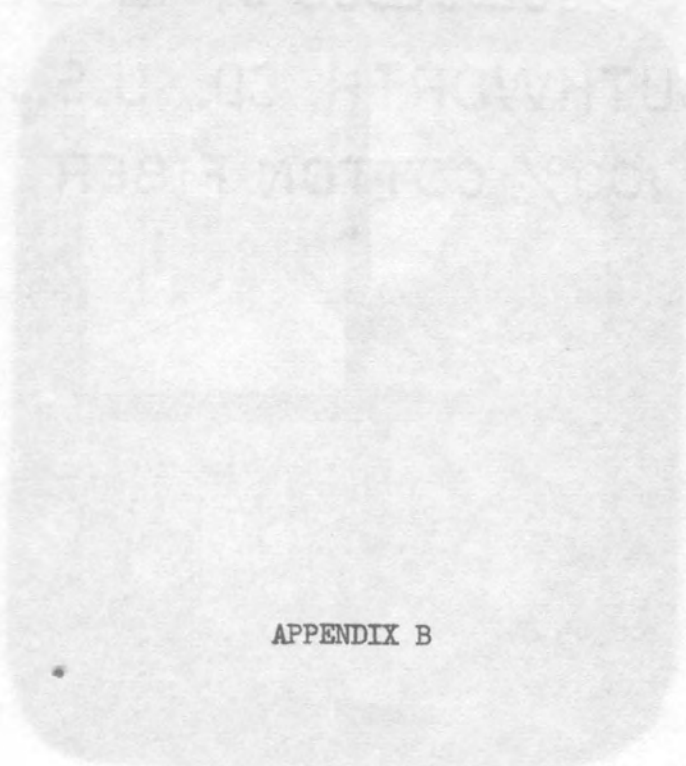






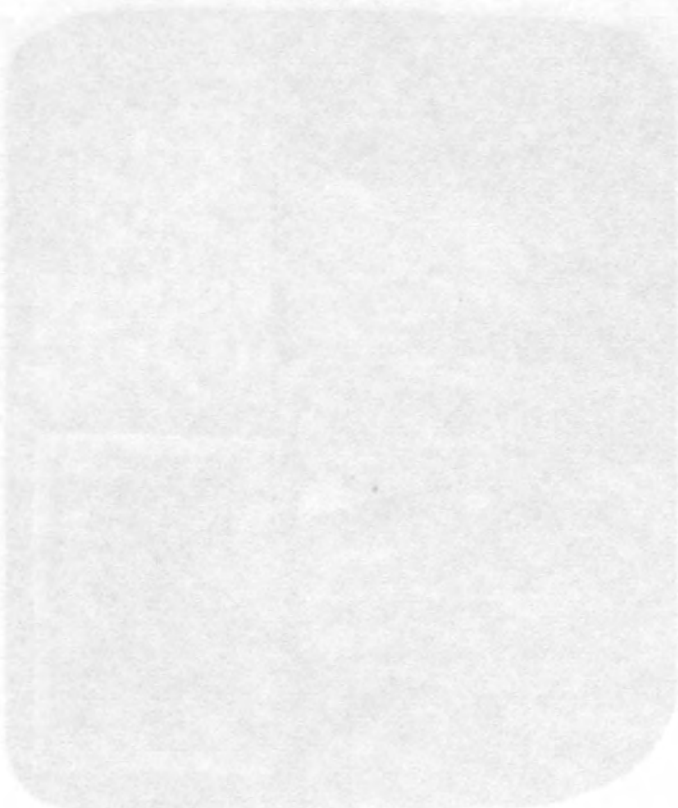
101

1 2  
c 3



APPENDIX B

102  
1 2  
c 3



## Set I

A	B
C	D



## Set II

Set II

A	B
C	D



## Set III

A	B
C	D



## Set IV

A	B
C	D

