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The Symbolism of Fear-Themed Drawings of Turkish and Polish Children

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Abstract
This article presents the results of studies on drawings representing fear. The research was carried out among groups of Turkish and Polish children living in the territories of both countries. The project aimed to recognize the types of fear in children aged 6–10 years. Altogether, 465 drawings on the theme of fear were collected. The study compared symbols recognised in drawings made by children of the two nationalities and their interpretation, considering the cultural context. For comparative analysis, the authors formulated the following questions: What symbolism is found in the children's drawings examined? What are the similarities and differences in the symbolism represented in the drawings? How can the recognized symbols be interpreted? The largest number of the identified fear symbols proved to be linked to the category of animals. To interpret the meaning of the symbols, the authors accepted that the perceived similarities result from the evolutionary origins of the fear of animals. On the other hand, the differences observed concerning the symbolism used can stem from cultural factors.

Keywords: fear, 6–10-year-old children, children's fear-themed drawings, symbols of fears, cultural context, snake, spider.

Introduction

Fear is "a normal, basic and expected state of spiritual reaction and universal emotion affect that occurs in a visible (real) or invisible (unreal) dangerous and threatening situation in living things" (Talu, 2019, p. 763). Research proves that over 80% of children between the ages of 4 and 12 have frightening dreams, nearly 76% of them feel fear, and over 67% are worried (Muris & Merckelbach, 2000, pp. 43–53; Muris et al., 2001, pp. 13–28). Although children's fears are common, are transient and their number and intensity decrease significantly with age (Gullone, 2000, pp. 429–451), they are undoubtedly a difficult experience for children.

Theories of fear distinguish two types of etiological factors. Authors typically include factors common to all fears (i.e., ones impacting the inclination to fear) in one group, whereas the other type groups factors specific to particular scares (e.g., individual experience connected with learning) (Taylor, 1998, pp. 205–214). The most frequent path of acquiring fears and the exacerbation of their symptoms is conditioning. It was observed that children displaying a high level of fear reported their experience connected with its conditioning more often than those with low or moderate levels (Muris et al., 1997, pp. 929–937). Additionally, fear of spiders turned out to be relatively strong in children whose mothers were arachnophobic themselves, which means that the formation of arachnophobia is favoured by specific parental reactions while being confronted with the object of fear (de Jong et al., 1997, pp. 559–562). Even though in research on the 10 most common fears, the majority of children ascribed their origins to vicarious and instructional factors, they were frequently linked to direct conditioning experiences (Ollendick & King, 1991, pp. 117–123; Radanović et al., 2021).

Studies on fear have had an over hundred-year-long tradition (Hall, 1897, pp. 147–249). The tool used most often to assess it is the Fear Survey Schedule

for Children – Revised (FSSC-R) (Ollendick, 1983, pp. 685–692). It follows from the research on this phenomenon that fear is connected to the inclination to feel revulsion (Vernon & Hirai, 2012, p. 410). According to the authors, revulsion, and inclination to fear contribute to an increased susceptibility to stress felt in the face of spiders (Vernon & Berenbaum, 2002, pp. 809–830). Other research results suggest that the inclination to disgust is related to non-adaptative reactions, such as fear of blood and spiders (van Overveld et al., 2006, pp. 1241–1252). Considering cultural contexts, researchers established that among Americans of both Asian origin and European roots, the inclination towards revulsion at animals is firmly associated with feeling distressed regarding spiders and snakes. Nevertheless, the research results obtained imply the existence of an "influence of ethnic group membership on relationships between disgust propensity and animal distress" (Vernon & Hirai, 2012, pp. 418–419). Further, the national level of fear felt can be influenced by the degree to which cultures designate gender roles. It follows from studies that levels of different fears (e.g., agoraphobia) are positively correlated with the so-called masculine ('tough') cultures. For instance, the highly feminine ('modest') Swedish society scored the lowest as far as national fear is concerned, in contrast to the highly masculine Japanese society (Arrindell et al., 2003, pp. 795–807). Inter-continental research revealed too that cultures in which traits like 'inhibition', 'compliance' and 'obedience' dominate contribute to an increased level of fear among their members (Ollendick et al., 1996, pp. 213–220).

The research points to differences, the cause of which can be race or ethnic belonging (Burnham & Lomax 2009, pp. 387–393; Burnham et al., 2011, pp. 236–237), since cultural factors exert a considerable impact on the development and contents of reported fears (Elebedour et al., 1997, pp. 491–496). The most frequently conducted research on this phenomenon in the cultural context covers such issues as "most common fears, gender, age differences in fear intensity, and open-ended responses" (Burnham et al., 2011, p. 236). Based on the results of studies on the most common fears, it is possible to observe more similarities than differences between the examined groups. For instance, in a group of Australians and Americans, researchers recorded 7 in 10 identical

fears.[1] Data concerning children's fears in the cultural context point to the existence of a slightly higher number of differences. The authors of the research provide an example of American children fearing "murderers", Australian ones scared of "sharks", Chinese children being afraid of "ghosts", and Nigerian ones fearing "snakes" and "deep water". Despite such differences, 6 out of 10 objects were the same, which – according to the authors – indicates the existence of similarities between cultures (Davidson et al., 1989, pp. 51–58; Gullone & King, 1993; Ollendick et al., 1996; Muris et al., 2002, in Burnham et al., 2011, pp. 236–237). Similarly, only slight differences were observed regarding fears in pupils in grades 2–5 of elementary schools in North and South Americas. Out of the 20 most frequently recorded fears, 16 were the same in both countries. They differed solely due to the number of indications, which translated into their positions in the ranking list.[2] It follows from the research that certain fears of children are of universal nature. Those independent of culture and typical of all children at the early stage of their development include the fears of noise, being left unattended, height, darkness and animals (Higgins, 2004). Others, on the other hand, are more dependent on the context (e.g., cultural) (Taimalu et al., 2007, pp. 51–78).

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[1] They were: "AIDS," "not being able to breathe," "being kidnapped," "someone in my family dying," "myself dying," "being hit by a car or truck," "being threatened with a gun," and "nuclear war" [J.J. Burnham et al. (2011). Differences in the Fears of Elementary School Children in North and South America: A Cross-Cultural Comparison. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 33, p. 236].

[2] The authors included the following in the group of the most frequently appearing fears: "being kidnapped," "myself dying," "someone in my family having an accident," "being threatened with a gun," "not being able to breathe," "taking bad or dangerous drugs," "murderers," "a family member dying," "being hit by a car or truck," "a burglar breaking into our house," "nuclear war," "drive-by shootings," "going to jail," "AIDS," and "terrorist attacks." [J.J. Burnham et al. (2011). Differences in the Fears of Elementary School Children in North and South America: A Cross-Cultural Comparison. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 33, p. 242].

Methodology

The research presented in this article was qualitative. The rationale for the selection of the phenomenological approach was the desire to ascertain and interpret the individual perspective relating to a concrete case (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2013, p. 39). Phenomenology "is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object" (Smith, 2013). The examination of children's drawings, described here, consisted in referring to experience and its intentionality. An intention is a kind of relation, being an attitude towards some content and directed to an object or subject (Brentano, in: Waligóra 2013, p 15). Such an approach enhanced openness concerning the differing significance of the symbolism of drawings, the contexts in which they were drawn and the persons (children) who drew them, presenting their own vision of the world. Phenomenologists are interested in various types of experience, beginning with "perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity" (Smith, 2013). Therefore, the researchers' reaction to the drawings was to view them from different perspectives and search for meanings, which was supposed to lead to a fuller cognition of the studied phenomenon (Anning & Ring, 2004; Cox, 2005, pp. 115–125; Einarsdóttir & Dockett, 2009, pp. 217–232; Coates & Coates, 2011, pp. 86–110; Deguara & Nutbrown, 2018, pp. 4–23). Taking the phenomenological perspective on the study of drawings also involved accepting the fact that each child presents a different attitude towards drawing, possesses a unique style and composition, as well as preferences regarding the choice of form and colors (Malchiodi, 2005).

This study aimed at learning about the fears of children aged 6–10, presented by them in their drawings through symbols, and to compare and interpret the creations, taking into account the cultural context. Research on drawings reflecting situations and/or anxiety can be found in the works of Handler and Reyher (1965), Bauer (1976), Fox and Thomas (1990), Golomb

(2004), Burkitt and Newel (2005), Guvenc (2005), Kindap and Sayil (2005), Inan (2006), Głowacka (2006), Misailidi and Bonoti (2008), Cimen (2009), Woolford et al. (2013), Burns-Nader, Hernandez-Reif and Porter (2013), Nowak (2014), Braun-Gałkowska (2016), Pudełko (2018), Talu (2019), and Konieczna and Talu (2021). The decision on choosing drawings as the tool to ascertain children's fears was taken due to the present authors' conviction, similar to other authors, that drawings are a medium that enables 'touching' children's emotional worlds (Kearney & Hyle, 2004, in: Yalcin & Enginer, 2014, pp. 270–285; Konieczna, 2018, pp. 251–263; Talu, 2019, pp. 763–779). Drawings allow children to reveal their experiences with no prejudice against the theme being explored. Moreover, they provide a kind of symbolic language to children, whose linguistic abilities are not fully developed, or to those who have difficulty expressing their feelings and emotional states verbally (White et al., 2004, pp. 210–218; Guvenc, 2005; Malchiodi, 2005; Alford, 2015, pp. 45–62).

The type, content, meaning and cultural context of the symbolism of fear applied by children were of particular interest to the authors of the study (Mitarski, 2002, pp. 328–332). To find out about the aforesaid categories, the following three questions were formulated:

1. What symbolism is found in the children's drawings examined?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the symbolism represented in the drawings?
3. How can the recognized symbols be interpreted?

The research dealing with the symbolism of fear was carried out in Turkey and Poland in the years 2014–2021.[3] The inspiration to conduct comparative studies was provided by a publication by one of the authors of the present work (Talu, 2019, pp. 763–779). Accordingly, the study of children's drawings

[3] The research carried out in Turkey took place during 2017–2018, whereas that in Poland was conducted in the years 2014-2021. The first comparative analyses were made in 2020 [E.J., Konieczna, & E., Talu (2021). Symbols of Fear in the Studies of Drawings by Polish and Turkish Children. *Kultura i Edukacja*, 2(132), pp. 172–185, doi: 10.15804/kie.2021.02].

in Turkey covered 314 children (153 girls and 161 boys), and in Poland, 151 children (101 girls and 50 boys).[4] The selection of children was typical of qualitative research–it was non-random–based on the principle of availability and voluntary participation (Laverty, 2003, p. 31; Ballinger, 2004, p. 542). In practice, this meant that for their study, the authors looked for school children aged between 6 and 10, willing to create a drawing and talk about it. Here, it was crucial to obtain the parents' consent as well. Since the aim of the study was not a search for statistical dependences, the authors did not endeavour to keep proportions either within individual groups (e.g., regarding the subjects' age or sex) or between the groups being compared. Depending on the place of conducting the examination, it was of either group character (Turkey – elementary schools) or individual one (Poland – family homes). Irrespective of the manner the research was organized, the instructions to execute drawings were identical, which enabled carrying out a comparative analysis. The stance of authors in qualitative research is that it is not possible to recreate precisely the same conditions in which examinations are carried out, and this does not concern the place of their carrying out alone. Each researcher adheres to their individual manner of perceiving what emerges from the collected material and, accordingly, creates their own specific relationship with the participant (Finlay, 2006, p. 321).

Research tools are of key importance for "understanding of the extent to which cultural factors and diverse contexts and countries relate to children's fears" (Burnham et al., 2011, p. 238). Graham C.L. Davey feels that using fear self-report is not appropriate in intercultural studies, due to limitations relating to translations and the lack of fears specific to the given culture. Therefore, the authors propose to use open questions (Davey, 1994, pp. 17–25). In the present studies, children were requested to imagine what they were afraid of and to make a drawing. The created image constituted the basis for the researchers to talk to each child.

[4] In reality, the number of examined children was 325 and 169, respectively. However, to keep the order, the number of children, which was given in the text, concerns the study subjects whose drawings met the respective criteria and were accepted for analysis.

To identify the symbolism of the drawings, the method of analysis of their content and the child's utterances was used. The former is a scientific approach that allows examining verbal and non-verbal (including visual) materials objectively and systematically, as well as ordering them according to defined categories (Hill et al., 1997; Leblebici & Kılıç, 2004; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007). In the current research, it was run in stages. The first one was an evaluation concerning compliance with executing the drawing with the instruction given. At this stage, 11 drawings by Turkish pupils and 18 by Polish children were eliminated.[5] Next, the authors analysed children's utterances collected based on a set of questions concerning the drawing. It is on this basis that the content of the symbols drawn was made with more precision. The deciding word in this matter, however, was that of the child: if it followed from his/her narrative that the drawing featured, for instance, a snake which he or she was afraid of, the researcher did not question the answer, even if–in the opinion of the latter–the symbol did not resemble one.

The social context of the act of drawing impacts not only its process but also the meanings constructed and communicated. A drawing both reflects cultural conditions and makes cultural practice (Cox 1998, pp. 71–79; Cox et al., 1999, pp. 173–181; Cox, 2005, pp. 115–125). This research consisted in comparing the content of fear symbols recognised in the drawings by children of both nationalities as well as their interpretation, considering the contexts in which they were created.

The analysis of symbols began with identifying them and classifying them into one of the six categories indicated by E. Talu (Tables 1 and 2). The categorising was performed based on the classification of children's fears presented in the literature (Ilg et al., 2001, pp. 243–244; Ilg et al., 2020, pp. 156–168).[6] Then,

[5] Totally, 325 drawings were successfully collected from Turkish children and 169 from their Polish counterparts.

[6] To verify the reliability of the research, expert opinion was applied. An expert was asked to compare the categories of symbols with the fear categories the literature describes. Then, the matches of the expert were compared with the researcher's categories. The expert linked the nine drawings to a category different from the researcher's; Talu, E. (2019). Reflections of Fears of Children to Drawings. *European Journal of Educational*

rankings were established, including the country of origin of the examined children. This gave the foundation to compare the similarities and differences relating to the frequency of appearance of fear symbols.

Table 1. Fear symbol categories used in the fear-themed drawings of 6–10-year-old Turkish children

No.	Fear symbol categories	Children's age					
		6 years (n = 55)	7 years (n = 62)	8 years (n = 66)	9 years (n = 64)	10 years (n = 67)	Total (n = 314)
1.	Fear of animals	21	20	18	14	14	87
2.	Dangerous situations and fears related to death/murder	12	13	16	16	17	74
3.	Fear of imaginary creatures and supernatural powers	9	11	12	14	14	60
4.	Fear of darkness and night	9	11	11	10	10	51
5.	Fear of natural disasters	2	5	6	9	11	33
6.	Fear of medicine	2	2	3	1	1	9

Source: Talu, 2019, p. 773.

Table 2. Fear symbol categories used in the fear-themed drawings of 6–10-year-old Polish children

No.	Fear symbol categories	Children's age					
		6 years (n = 15)	7 years (n = 44)	8 years (n = 29)	9 years (n = 28)	10 years (n = 35)	Total (n = 151)
1.	Fear of animals	8	24	23	18	21	94
2.	Fear of imaginary creatures, supernatural powers	3	8	1	1	5	18
3.	Dangerous situations and fear related to death /murder	2	6	1	4	2	15

Research, 8(3), p. 766; Brownlee, K. (2016). The Competent Judge Problem. *Ratio*, 29 (3), pp. 312–326.

Table 2. (continued)

No.	Fear symbol categories	Children's age					
		6 years (n = 15)	7 years (n = 44)	8 years (n = 29)	9 years (n = 28)	10 years (n = 35)	Total (n = 151)
4.	Fear of natural disasters	1	4	1	3	5	14
5.	Darkness and night fears	1	2	3	1	2	9
6.	Fears of medicine	–	–	–	1	–	1

Source: Own elaboration.

Independent of the children's ages, the Polish study subjects most often presented their fears through a symbol of the category "Fears of animals", as did the Turkish children, with the difference that slightly more of the Turkish nine-year-olds and ten-year-olds were scared of a dangerous situation also. The examined Turkish children most frequently drew the Snake (51), the Dog (9) and the Shark (8), whereas, in the case of the Polish ones, these were the Spider (68), the Snake (19) and the Bat (6) (Konieczna & Talu, 2021, p. 177).[7] Regarding the group of Polish children, a clear difference was observed be-

[7] E.J. Konieczna has been conducting studies on Polish children's drawings since 2014. Drawings related to fears comprise one of the 7 categories of drawings included in the research of the procedure aimed to recognise the developmental needs of children at younger school ages. Each year, the database is updated with new cases. Comparing data of the previous years with those obtained in 2021 (during the Covid-19 pandemic) points to a change in the frequency of fear symbols in selected categories. Accordingly, as regards drawings by Polish children, there are more symbols belonging to the category "Dangerous situations and fears related to death/murder" (change from the 4th to the 3rd position) and "Fears of natural disasters" (change from the 5th to the 4th position). The number of identified symbols in the category "Darkness and night fears" has also changed (change from the 3rd to the 5th position). One child also reported its fear of injections ("Fears of medicine"). In the drawings collected in 2021, there were by 45 more untypical symbols identified, which points to the lack of a sense of safety (Konieczna, E.J., & Talu, E. (2021). Symbols of Fear in the Studies of Drawings by Polish and Turkish Children. *Kultura i Edukacja*, 2(132), pp. 172–185, doi: 10.15804/kie.2021.02).

tween the number of symbols used in the first category and the second one in the ranking order. The analysis of the distribution of the number of symbols of other categories proved the existence of successive differences in their sequences. The second category of fear symbols, as regards the frequency of use by the Turkish children, was "Dangerous situations and fears related to death/murder" (ranking third in the group of the Polish subjects), the third was "Fears of imaginary creatures and supernatural powers" (taking the second place among Polish children) and the fourth, "Darkness and night fears" (the fifth place in the other examined group). In both groups, the least frequently used symbols of fear were those connected with medical practices ("Fears of medicine"), e.g., injections.

Interpretation and meaning of the symbolism of the Snake and the Spider: The cultural context

The commonness of fear causes its symbolism to emerge in each culture. The function of fear symbols in art consists in personifying and attempting to tame the unknown, irreplaceable and resulting from the natural human life cycle. They have become delegates of the moral-habitual sphere of life (Mitarski, 2002, pp. 309–341). Fear symbols can be found in the sphere of myth and in fables passed down to successive generations. Such cultural transmission preserves its archetypal character, allowing its multi-contextual reading (Dudek & Pankalla, 2008, p. 351). Philip Wheelwright calls some of them "archetypal", which means that even though they are characterised by solidity exceeding the general context (e.g., cultural), they cannot be considered to be ultimate and exhausting (1991, pp. 268–278). Concerning fear-themed drawings, fear symbols will be their iconic and symbolic representatives (Bauer, 1976, pp. 69–74).

The authors attempted to interpret the symbolism beginning with the explanation of the cause of the children's significant concentration on the symbol of fear connected to animals. Hence, the authors referred to the theory relating to the collective meaning of fear signals, which indicates that apart from individual, untypical signals, there are also those found not only in

the whole history of mankind but also in the history of the animal world (Kępiński, 2002, p. 67–68). The psychology of evolution underlines the fact that man is firmly written into nature and the animal world, and the fear of spiders, certain reptiles and amphibians dates back to the times when they posed a significant threat to man (Buss, 2011, p. 113). Research reveals that the influence of genetic and environmental factors on the formation of anxiety behaviours due to the fear of snakes and spiders is similar, with the latter marginally outnumbering the former (Kuśmierz, 2020, p. 19). Thus, to comprehend the differences connected to the content of the symbols used in the Turkish and Polish children's drawings, respectively, the culture they derive from needs to be considered. Culture makes mental and material heritage pass through inter-generational transmission. It is present in everything that man has created in the mental, artistic and technical senses. It can therefore play a significant role in shaping children's fears.

The second stage of interpreting the drawings consisted in explaining the meanings of the fear symbolism used. The Snake, featured in the drawings of the Turkish children, is not invested with a uniform sense as a symbol in the culture of the Orient. It is perceived as an important motif in different Turkish works of art, symbolizing force, immortality and the creation of the world. In Turkish tales, the Snake often plays the role of a creature deserving full respect and is portrayed as a patient, hospitable, friendly, helpful, merciful, forgiving and wise towards humans (Ölmez, 2010; Karakurt, 2011). The Islamic folk tradition also narrates myths describing a large snake created by God, which "is so mighty that when he opens the mouth, the heavens and the earth are illuminated by lightning. It has so powerful a voice that when he begins praising the God aloud, it drowns out angels' singing. If he did not muffle the voice, all the creatures could be paralyzed" (Piwiński, 1989, p. 92). In turn, in pictures and narratives from the areas of historical Anatolia, one can find unusual creatures called Maran, defined as snake-people. They were led by Şahmeran, who, as legend has it, lived together with his snakes in an underground country in his palace full of jewellery. This mythical half-man, the half-snake creature was described as intelligent, kind, and helpful to people (Seyidoğlu, 1998; Karakurt, 2011; Bayat, 2012; Çoruhlu, 2013). Similarly, the

creature called Erbüke ("Er" – man and "Büke" – dragon, snake) is still present in folk beliefs in this part of the world.

However, the Snake is invested with yet another nature in the culture of the East: besides power, might and protection, it also symbolised illness, evil and punishment to ancient Turks. In Turkish mythology, due to its cold-blooded nature, the Snake prompted fear and respect simultaneously (Sivri & Akbaba, 2018). One of the legends has it that the Snake possesses a head of white pearl, a trunk of gold and eyes of hyacinths. Moreover, it has seventy thousand wings studded with all kinds of gems, and the same number of faces, mouths and tongues, which prompt justified respect from all who come in touch with it (Piwiński, 1989, p. 92; Seyidoğlu, 1998). Its venom is of similar quality–both lethal and curative.[8] The Snake is also associated with the tree of life as the one that emerges from the tree and knows all its secrets (Sözeri, 2000; İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 2013). It is regarded in Islamic tradition as not only a harmful animal but also perceived as a separate class of genii. It is a symbol of Satan who cheated Adam and Eve, leading to their expulsion from Eden (İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 2013; Sivri & Akbaba, 2018).

Such a description of the Snake is also found in the Holy Bible, where it is regarded as the most cunning of all the animals on earth (Book of Genesis 3:4–5). Since it had put to test the loyalty of the first humans towards the Creator, it was "cursed above all livestock and all wild animals! […]" (Book of Genesis 3:14). To Christians, the Snake became the symbol of death, fall of perfection, beginning of suffering, defeat, deceit and temptation. Reviled as "the great dragon, ancient snake, Devil and Satan" (Book of Revelation 20:2), it is associated with the most tragic events in the history of mankind (diseases, death, wars). The Snake featured under the shape of Satan appears also in

[8] The symbol of two snakes, the so-called "Caduceus", represents medical art in Turkey. In European countries, however, another symbol is more popular, i.e., the "Rod of Asclepius" (or the "Staff of Aesculapius"). Some authors perceive a connection between these ancient symbols, although their origins differ (Janeczek, M., Chrószcz, A., Poradowski, D., Wełmiński, P., & Bilewicz, E. (2017). Wąż jeden czy węże dwa? Czyli o lasce Asklepiosa i kaduceuszu Hermesa [One Snake or Two Snakes? That is About Asclepius' Staff and Hermes' Caduceus]. *Życie Weterynaryjne*, 92(2), 129–133).

Polish legends (Wróblewska, 2018, pp. 301–303). However, it is presented in a different light in Polish folk tales. Apart from the role of antagonist (e.g., as a dragon), it appears as a magical figure of multi-faceted roles, like a donor and a figure bestowing objects and skills on others. In the Holy Bible, one can find descriptions underlining the positive attributes of the Snake, like its shrewdness (Matthew 10:16). Wheelwright opines " of all symbolic animals none holds […] so many varied meanings connected with one another as the snake" (1991, p. 292; see: Cirlot, 2012, pp. 440–444), moreover so ambivalent (Gibson, 2010). It is probably why the presence of the snake symbol is still valid in art, creations of mass culture, and fantasy literature. A good example is the Harry Potter series, where the Snake is indirectly associated with black magic, evil and suffering (Nowak, 2018, p. 99). It is also associated with Basilisk–a symbol of exceptional evil that kills with its sight and poisons all living creatures with its breath (Forty, 2003, p. 137).

An equally powerful symbol of fear is the Spider, which is confirmed by drawings of Polish children. Still, the fear of spiders extends more broadly and relates to other Europeans too. This could be due to its close relationship with the disease-avoidance response of disgust. This relation has evolved since the Middle Ages when European societies experienced several devastating epidemics. The Spider became the object replacing fear of diseases whose etiology was unknown, "Such factors suggest that the pervasive fear of spiders that is commonly found in many Western societies may have cultural rather than biological origins, and may be restricted to Europeans and their descendants" (Davey, 1994, p. 17).

Exploring the meaning of the Spider symbol, one can refer to the myth of Arachne–the Lydian weaver. She was turned into a spider by Athena and the arthropod became the symbol of conceit. It is also perceived as a metaphor for exploiting the weaker and the poor (a bloodsucker that drinks the blood of small insects), aggression, destruction, ambush and insidious attack. In Christian culture, it stands for the Devil – a tempter that lures human souls immersed in sin into its web (Impeluso, 2006, p. 281). As regards Polish folk beliefs, the expression of this symbol is also negative, like that of the spiderweb which is most often featured in children's drawings as an inseparable attribute

of the Spider. The web, even though inconspicuous, is in reality characterized by great strength, owing to which it plays many functions, the most popular present in human awareness being that of hunting. The web woven by the Spider helps it in obtaining food in the form of insects which, having fallen into the sticky web, are paralysed by the Spider's venom. Hence, the web is readily associated with imprisonment, the inability to free oneself from somebody stronger and cunning, with bad intentions.

In other parts of the world, the Spider portends affluence. In Anatolia, there was a superstition that it brings wealth and happiness. However, the spiderweb at home was not as welcome as its weaver–it signified a decrease in the fertility of the residents (Şenesen, 2011, p. 219). Contrarily, a positive role of the spiderweb is mentioned in the legend of Prophet Muhammad, who hid in a cave from his enemies during the Hijrah.[9] The Spider was supposed to have covered the entrance to the cave with its web and thus hidden the Prophet from the Meccans. Moreover, in ancient and folk medicine it was accepted that the Spider possesses healing properties and therefore, its crushed abdomen was applied to reduce fever or treat contagious diseases (İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 2013).

However, the impact of the Spider, present both in Turkish and Polish cultures, is not only beneficial; some tales present it as a poisonous animal of many legs and eyes, one that hunts at night, patiently lying in wait for its prey, hanging on to the threads of its web. The Quran uses the Spider as a symbol of unfaithful polytheists who reject the word of God. The unsustainable foundations of their beliefs are likened to the Spider's house, which is "the frailest of houses" (Quran 29.41).

Conclusion

This research proposes obtaining an insight into schoolchildren's fears, described from the intercultural perspective. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first such research to compare the symbolism of fear-themed drawings of

[9] The Hijrah, i.e., migration from Mecca to Medina.

Turkish and Polish children. The study comprised identifying and comparing the symbols of fear presented in drawings. The children of both nationalities most frequently drew symbols of animals in this respect (Tables 1 and 2). The drawings of Turkish children featured mainly the Snake, whereas, in the case of the Polish subjects, it was the Spider. Concerning the latter, the result is compliant with other studies conducted based on open questions among children of the Western culture (Muris et al., 1997, pp. 929–937; Lane & Gullone, 1999, p. 200). On the other hand, the collected data did not confirm the results of the studies conducted with standardised questionnaires, in which the fear of snakes does not present cultural differences (Packer et al., 1987, pp. 150–156). A likely reason for this lack of agreement between the effects is the manner of collecting data. Davey (1994, pp. 17–25), the author mentioned earlier, opines that in the case of intercultural studies, it is more appropriate to apply open questions rather than use the popularly applied fear self-report. As regards the current study, open questions were used in the interview related to the content of the drawing. The command to execute a drawing had a similar function. This helped the child to tell a concrete story as well as to deepen and order his or her own narrative on fear (Deguara, 2019, pp. 157–174). The authors of this article believe that it would be interesting to conduct a study applying both tools. This could explain the differences in the results between the studies. The authors do not exclude other causes connected with the research methodology either, as they might as well lead to the observed differences.

In the present study, the observed differences related to the order of the fear categories were due to the number of symbols connected with them. Leaving aside the category "Fears of animals", this influenced the ranking of each category established separately concerning the content of the symbols. Over 20 different symbols representing animals were identified in the children's drawings (Konieczna & Talu, 2021, p. 117). Thus, it can be supposed that the use of symbols of the same category by children of both nationalities points to the evolutionary origins of this fear (Buss, 2001, p. 113). On the other hand, the differences observed in the content of these symbols can provide

information on their origins. One cannot exclude individual influences of the environment (that is institutions, family home), which was not considered. This could allow explaining other differences between the examined groups (13 points) within the first two categories of fear symbols in Turkish children. On the other hand, the fear of animals in Polish children (Table 2) dominates over the other objects feared (a difference of 76 points).

The cultural canon of man covers many areas. Concerning this research, its impact should be visible in the symbolic dimension of fear-themed drawings too. Therefore, wishing to learn about children's fears, the authors sought explanations of the meanings of the symbolism of the Snake and the Spider. It follows from the above description that the messages carried by the two symbols remain close to each other. They both have ambivalent meanings, to the advantage of the negative ones, though. Their common feature is that they symbolise a source of evil responsible for the fall and death of man. Thus, it seems that the fear of snakes and spiders can be a result of cultural transmission spread over several centuries based on beliefs and tales connected with the beginnings of the history of man. Both symbols may express the fear of death, very common among children of early school age. It follows from the research that discussing death and dying in biological categories is the best way to soothe this type of fear (Slaughter & Griffiths, 2007, pp. 525–535). It is worth enabling children who draw the above-mentioned symbol to understand the phenomenon of death in its natural, biological and not metaphysical context.

The authors, looking for an explanation of the differences observed, decided that it was not right to be limited solely to the cultural identity of the symbolism of fear. According to Louise T. Higgins (2004), "there appears to be a developmental pattern from the early presence of evolutionary fears until the later development of more culturally shared fears – learned either by training, vicariously by watching other people, or by association with unpleasant consequences". In interpreting children's drawings, it is therefore impossible to exclude the direct experience of children acquired in their relations with the object of fear, besides the cultural context. Here, it is worth reverting to the relationship between fear and disgust, mentioned in our Introduction. The

authors of the study decided that it is important to belong to ethnic groups to understand the fear of spiders and snakes, as well as the inclination to feel disgust and the mutual relationships between them (Vernona & Hiraib, 2012, p. 418). It follows from the study that animals are among the seven categories which evoke disgust (Haidt et al., 1997, pp. 107–131). This means that the use of fear symbols in the forms of the Snake and the Spider can be dictated by personal experience and the number of contacts with animals that provoke a sense of disgust and/or fear which is firmly connected with the former. This can explain why Turkish children, more than their Polish counterparts, are afraid of snakes which they have more contact with. For the same reason, Polish children fear spiders more, as there are about 800 species of insect in Poland and their colonies can exceed 600 specimens per square metre (Kostuch, 2019).

Yet another reason why the results in the category of fear of animals differ can be a learned reaction in the way of classical conditioning. In such a situation, the sources of fear are not direct traumas, but those that arose as a consequence of the process of learning (Carson et al., 2010, p. 260). Observing the reactions of persons of importance to children (e.g., parents) to an object (e.g., a spider or a snake), or to a situation that evokes fear (e.g., an act of violence), as well as observing the manner of their description by adults, can cause reactions of fear in children. Despite the lack of the children's own negative experience concerning an object or situation, the child learns the way of reacting to a given stimulus, mimicking the behaviour they have observed in other people.

A cause for the fears expressed by children in the form of symbols in their drawings can also be inappropriate reactions on the part of their parents. This concerns reactions which hamper children in their coping with the anxieties accompanying them or develop in them long-lasting models of improper reaction to feared objects. A harmful action here is punishing the child for possessing and expressing a fear, which may lead to the intensification of the symptoms and even the development of new ones connected with unacceptable behaviour (a fear of crying in the presence of parents). Equally wrong behaviour is parental accommodation. This is a kind of parents' conduct to

prevent or lessen the child's fear connected to a given object or situation (Casline et al., 2018, p. 457). It includes behaviours which, in the parents' assessment, are meant to help do away with the fear but, in reality, solidify it and make it easy for the child to further shun situations connected to it. The authors include in them such parental behaviours as altering the routine at home because of the child's stiffness concerning its fears, abiding by fixed rules connected with stimuli evoking the fear, as well as excessively soothing and comforting the child (Thompson-Hollands et al., 2014, p. 765–773).

According to Higgins (2004, pp. 37–49), research concerning children's fears allows for establishing which of them have evolutionary significance and which have been formed culturally. Based on the studies presented here, one can suppose that animal-related symbols of fear identified in the examined drawings by children of both nationalities do reflect their evolutionary origins. On the other hand, the symbols of the Snake and the Spider are representatives of fears with cultural grounding. The above considerations, however, point to the need for paying more attention, while studying children's fears, to individual differences relating to the experience, knowledge and convictions of the examined children concerning animals evoking fears in them (Vernon & Hirai, 2012, p. 418). It seems, too, that to deepen the knowledge of the cultural context of fear symbols, it is worth concentrating on idiosyncratic fears (Burnham et al., 2011, pp. 236–237). Idiosyncratic (untypical) symbols can hold completely different meanings for different people and reflect fears specific to the place in which examinations are carried out. Hence, the authors consider it worth paying attention also to the symbols which appeared the rarest in the children's drawings.

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