Scientific
Research
Publishing

Art Blended Research and Children's Gender Identity Making

Camilla Hällgren

Department of Applied Educational Science, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden
Email: Camilla.Hallgren@umu.se

Abstract

The intention with this article is to explore how visuals and written text may combine to further understandings about complex matters such as gendered aspects of the human condition. To do so, I bring together my professional practices as researcher and artist by theorizing, conceptualizing and visualizing aspects of children's gender identity making. As such, this article is conceptual rather than empirical and covers issues about learning, existentialism, social constructivism, children, identity, and gender. It also exemplifies what I call Art Blended Research, an approach that draws on the insight of that there is more to see than meets the eye. In conclusion, the strength of this approach does not lie in the ability to explain what is. Instead, the strength of Art Blended Research is found in possible explorations and inspirations of what might be.

1. Introduction

In this article, it is explored how visuals and written text may combine to further understandings about complex matters such as gendered aspects of the human condition. To do so, I will bring together my professional practices as researcher and artist by theorising and visualizing aspects of children's gender identity making.

My many years of norm-critical research at the intersection of social justice, gender, antiracism, identity, contemporary media and education forms an important foundation for the impending exploration. Much of the research has been multi-modal in its design and has combined several variations of intellectual expressions with the common aim to deepen understandings about how girls become girls and boys become boys in contemporary societies (e.g. Hällgren, 2015, 2013a, 2013b; Hällgren et al., 2015), but also about anti-racism and education (e.g.

Hällgren, 2006; Hällgren, 2005). Present article is written from a norm critical viewpoint and combine existentialism, social constructivism and learning with artistic expressions. It is conceptual rather than empirical. My previous work is here extended by the theoretical and practical advancements of Art Blended Research, but also by exploring both femininity and masculinity as related dimensions of the same research object: children's gender identity making. The over-arching question that is current is: how can art and research combine further insights about children's gender identity making?

2. Blending Art and Research

There is a wide range of research topics that call for visual components, which can be the reason for that researchers in the social sciences have begun to pay serious attention to the possibilities of images to enhance understandings of the human condition (Arendt, 1958; Weber, 2008). However, as discussed in Hällgren (2015), the blending of art and research is indeed paradigmatically different from other more traditional ways of conducting studies and generate knowledge (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Not surprisingly, issues of a possible relationship between art and knowledge have a long history with wide varieties of answers, laden with philosophical dilemmas. If fact, the art and knowledge issue are dating back to Plato and Aristotle (*i.e.* Livingston 2013; Thomasson, 2005; Gaut, 2003). One main reason for the lacking support of art as a valid source of knowledge, Eisner (2008) explains, is that art have been seen as unable to express and contribute to formal or explicit knowledge. Indeed, the kind of knowledge that is claimed as general and also commonly found in e.g. dictionaries, textbooks, and manuals or presented in numbers, charts, or diagrams, is not easily articulated with artistic expressions. Art is more about explorations than explanations. Nevertheless, I believe that the blending of art and research has extraordinary potentials. Drawing on my own experiences, but also on the thoughts of researchers and philosophers such as Eisner (2008), Gadamer (2013/1977), Knowles & Cole (2008), Weber (2008) and Sousanis (2015), I find reasons for taking the possibilities of blending of art and research seriously. And so, I have decided formulate an approach I call to call Art Blended Research.

If we aim to explore matters beyond mathematical reasoning, observable phenomena and unbiased measuring, and instead seek to learn about basic complexities of the human condition, (Arendt, 1958) such as multi layered processes of identity making and gendered dimensions of that making, I suggest that we need to explore and communicate knowledge in several ways. Complex, existential matters require multiple modes of explorations. The blending of art and research can be assumed as one example of a multimodal form of exploration and communication. The core idea of multimodality, as explained by e.g. van Leeuwen (2011), Jewitt (2009) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) is that communication at its core is multimodal and may include several different communicative resources and, furthermore, that we have the ability to gain knowledge through different senses. As exemplified on the next page with the two descriptions of the Necker Cube, words and images function in different modes in communicative processes.

The Necker Cube in words   **The Necker Cube as image**

The Necker Cube is a drawing by Louis Albert Necker, first published in 1832. It illustrates an ambiguous cube, with twelve lines. The drawing has no cues for depth and functions as an optical illusion. By focusing on different parts of the cube its faces can shift between either appear to be in front, or in the back.
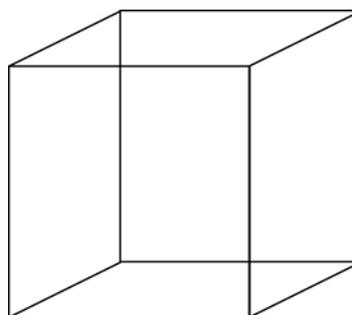
It is suggested by Gadamer (2013/1977) that the art experience mediates a particular kind of knowledge that is separated from traditional academic science and is much closer to insightful, intuitive dialogue than to faultless, linear conclusions and straight answers. Therefore meanings of art become fluid and unpredictable rather than fixed and pre-set. Art can also make us see the world from more than one point of view. As Weber (2008) explains, art can generate multiple interpretations and "call attention to the everyday by making it strange or casting it to a new light" (Weber, 2008: p. 50).

Points of view   www.littleswedenart.com

Another reason for blending art and research into explorations about identity and children's gender making is that images have the potential to instantly make the world appear from other perspectives. We may see things such as concepts, objects and experiences differently. Art can be used to illustrate or comment on wider generalities and simultaneously present multiple viewpoints and as such, it can be part of a norm-critical dialogue. Philosophers such as Gadamer (2013/1977) also explain art as having the potential to disrupt and challenge common social expectations. It can work as a means to reveal social stereotypes, and present alternative views of the world. Similarly, as Diffey (1995) suggest, art have potentials to confirm our experiences and, conversely, art challenge us and show us new possibilities of experience: A dialogue with art might strengthen skills to see the world in other ways, and help noticing what is not there; make the strange familiar, and suggest other ways to look upon the world (Gadamer, 2013/1977).

3. Making Identity

From an existential perspective, part of human existence is the inevitable experience of being in the world with others (Heidegger, 1927, 2008). We can be lonely, but we are never alone. Being in the world with other people, is also frequently conceptualized as the duality between the Self and the Other (e.g. Hällgren, 2013a, 2013b). It is suggested that this duality is found in all societies and that the "category of the Other is as original as consciousness itself" and also essential to individual self-awareness and enabling us to position, differentiate and understand ourselves in relation to Others (Heidegger, 1927, 2008; Sartre, 1943, 2005; de Beauvoir, 1949, 2011: p. 6). Further, Taylor (1994) explains that a "…person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being" is the core of what identity is (Taylor 1994: p. 75). Children's engagement in identity making could thus be understood as initiated in the very first moment of self-awareness-the awareness of being an individual separate from Other individuals-experienced from the inevitable being in the world with Others and in the interplay between the self and Others.

4. Experiencing the Gaze

When children are being in the world with Others, they look at Others, are looked upon, and they are looking at themselves. To articulate a Self there has to be an Other. Or, as explained with the words of Sartre: "As I appear to the Other, so I am" (Sartre, 1943/2005: p. 237). To experience the interplay between the self and the Other there also has to be a gaze. Children' early awareness of the gaze happens when they are about 6 - 18 moths, and

Ok glass   www.littleswedenart.com

identify themselves with their own images and realize that they can be seen by other persons, as individuals with own external appearances. This awareness is also known as the mirror stage (Lacan, 1949/2010). Again, drawing existential ideas from Sartre (1943/2005), the experience of the gaze may occur directly between individuals but the gaze may also come indirectly, from imagination, as a part of the consciousness; as the sense of being looked at; as the thought of being observed by an imagined audience. Children's understanding of themselves can then be understood to be shaped directly in the duality of the Self and Other, with Others who are physically present in the specific moment. But, children's understanding of themselves can also be imagined; informed by their own thoughts of being looked at and the awareness of possibly being objectified in the gaze of someone else. That is an internal experience of the gaze from imagined Others and it can be sensed in thoughts such as: How do I look in the mirror and what would others think of me if they saw me now? How do other people think I look? Do I appear as a girl or a boy? Who do other people think I am? What would my parents think of me if they saw me?

5. Watching the Self through the Gaze of Others

So, the relationship between Self and Other, mediated by the gaze, and defining someone as the Other, is essential to creating self-awareness and ideas of identity. Generally, these acts of objectification and differentiating oneself from the "Other" apply to human existence as rather uncomplicated experiences (as also discussed in Hällgren, 2013a, 2013b). However, the process of Othering could be loaded with all kinds of values. Depending on the quality of the values involved, the basic duality between Self and Other, could also be problematic (Griffiths, 1999). Is the present and imagined gaze charged with recognition, absence of recognition or misrecognition? How is the child positioned in relation to Others in the world? How is the child valued? If the process of Othering is mediated with a gaze that is charged with oppressive discourses such as racism, sexism or stereotyping ideas about children, it can form a basis for experiences of discrimination. And, further, as discussed in Hällgren (2013a), values mediated by the gaze, may inform larger discriminatory structures in society, experienced in cultural and social contexts through text, institutional practices, laws and media. Consequently, on the level of the individual child's, the "...sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of Others" could become an

internal experience of measuring yourself in relation to a world that looks on you with a stereotyping or a non-stereotyping gaze (Du Bois, 1903: p. 3).

A girl is a girl is a girl   www.littleswedenart.com

6. Power of the Gaze

When we look at Others each other in the world, concurrently in a social situation or in our imaginations, there are also corresponding activities of control initiated in our minds. Again, following the existentialist philosophy of Sartre (1943/2005), the act of looking and the interplay between Self and the Other, holds a struggle for dominance between two consciousness's: Who will be the looked-at, the object, and subsequently defined as the "Other"? And who will be the privileged subject; the one with the right to define someone as the "Other"? Sartre (1943/2005) explains that the one who finds himself being looked at, has lost the struggle and becomes positioned as the object. Power aspects of the gaze was also elaborated by Foucault (1977/1995) and conceptualized as the panoptical gaze and explained as a central component in power relations, disciplinary social mechanisms and individually interiorized self-regulations.

The idea of the gaze as significant for the experience of being in the world with Others was diversified with feminist aspects in the philosophy of de Beauvoir (1949/1989). It is explained that the gaze communicates more than domination and objectification (de Beauvoir, 1949/1989). Depending on the quality of the relation, in which the interplay between the Subject and the Object takes place, and the gaze is experienced, the gaze can be intersubjective, rather than objectifying, and carry e.g. friendship, agreement and love. De Beauvoir also points to the fact that men and women experience the gaze differently. Compared to the male experience of the gaze, the female experience, is not merely about interacting with the gaze, but also interacting with a superior, male gaze (de Beauvoir, 1949/1989). Correspondingly, Mulvey (1975) combined the asymmetry between the male and female experience of the gaze into a theory called "The Male Gaze". It illuminates gendered power aspects of the gaze, for instance, that in visual arts, such as film, women are depicted from a masculine point of view. As a consequence, audiences of visual arts, no matter what gender they are, watch media productions through a male gaze, from a masculine subject position.

7. Relevance of Gender

As explored so far, being in the world with Others, lead children into a duality between the Self and Others where they interact with a gaze from an audience that is present or imagined in social situations. The experience of the gaze involves power and may transmit recognition, absence of recognition or misrecognition, which in turn informs children's individual understandings of who they are and shapes their identities. By adding theories of intersectionality to the notion of the gaze, children's experiences of the gaze can be further diversified by several identity dimensions: Gender, race, nationality, age, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, bodily and mental ability, may be understood as combined in the experience of the gaze and informing children's sense of individual identities. Furthermore, these identity dimensions will wire children to fields of social power that may put children at multiple intersections of individual and structural advantages and disadvantages (Crenshaw, 1991; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Hällgren, 2006).

Joining existentialism with social constructivism, gender emerges as one of the toughest among the many and intersectional identity dimensions that the gaze may be charged with. The process of "gender attribution" (Kessler & McKenna, 1978: p. 2) or "sex categorization" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: p. 127) is theorized as an inescapable part of everyday social interactions. Gender identities are constantly redefined and negotiated in everyday practices between individual's interactions, or existentially expressed, while inevitably being in the world with Others. Deutch (2007) explains that gender "…is a master status that overrides any other role or status" and individual perceptions about Others are always entwined with norms about gender (Deutsch, 2007: p. 116). Bem (1993) theorized the pervasiveness of the gender dimension as the lenses of gender, and explained that first of all, individuals understand the world and interact with Other by acting through these lenses. Ridgeway (2009) also points to the ever-presence of gender and explains that gender function as a primary cultural frame for coordinating behaviors and social relations to such an extent that; "…we frame and are framed by gender literally before we know it" (Ridgeway, 2009: p. 148).
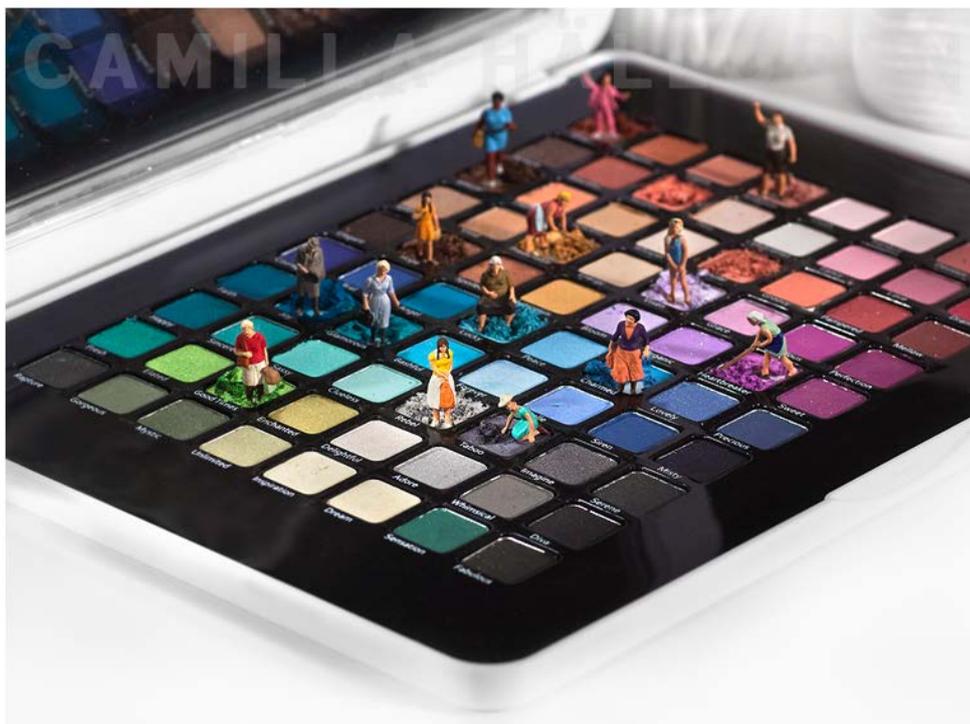
Be what you want   www.littleswedenart.com

The omnipresence of gender is applicable to both adults' and children's being in the world with Others. Indeed, Connell (2005) states that the expectations of being a boy or a girl are one of the most commanding social forces that children ever will meet. To highlight the ideological and discursive forces involved in children's gender making, Rahilly (2015) draws on Foucault (1977/1995) and theorizes the gender binary as a "truth re-

gime": the "…presumption that a child's assigned sex will predict and circumscribe their gendered sensibilities and identities ("boy" or "girl") still holds force in our culture" (Rahilly, 2015: p. 341).

Continuing to stich social constructivism with existentialism, children's gender identity making can be understood as launched even before their bodily existence is physically present in the world. While the child is still an unborn, unknown individual to the world, the cycle of gender norms starts circling around the child, shown e.g. in questions about the sex of the expected child, in pregnancy or adoptions. The norms are also present in ideas about being able to predict a child's sex, by looking at the mother's body-shape, what kind of food cravings she has or if she is sick in the mornings or not. As soon as the biological sex is identified, by genitalia or chromosomal typing, the force of the gender binary becomes "alive and kicking" and activates a set of social presumptions about gendered identities, relative to the assigned sex of the child (Rahilly, 2015: p. 356).

Children themselves become aware of the social relevance of gender typically, before the age of two (Kane, 2006). Their understanding of who they are, their identity making, then get linked to dimensions of femininity and masculinity and their associated social relevance. Trying to be seen as normal and avoid gender assessments, children will do their best to perform as a boy or girl (Davies, 2003; Connell, 2005; Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014; Schilt, 2010). Along the way, there are little or no alternatives for gender binary children who find that their gender expressions do not match their birth sex (Rahilly, 2015; Kane, 2006, 2012). And, taken the above together, when children are meeting the expectations on girls to be girls and boys to be boys they are also dealing with inevitably, mandatory, social tasks.

Each One Teach One   www.littleswedenart.com

8. Making Gender Identities

Meeting the expectations of making of a gender identity that is feminine or a masculine will lead children into different individual experiences of existing in the world with Others. One reason to their different experiences may be found in the pre-set, hierarchal and social order of femininity and masculinity. It is an order that manifests social power. Connell (1987) conceptualized it as the gender order and explains it as a "historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity" (Connell, 1987: p. 98). The logic of the gender order separates masculinity and femininity and puts their qualities in a hierarchal relation to each other, where masculinity has a dominant position over femininity and restrict

women's and men's spaces of action (Connell, 1987; Hirdman, 1988). These are socially constructed ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman form larger societal, social structures. The logic of the gender order are primarily associated with relations between men and women, husbands and wives, but considering the power of social constructions (Searle, 2011, Hacking, 1999), they could be claimed as valid for understanding children's gender-rationalities as well.

One other reasons of children's gendered differences in the experience of being in the world with Others, may be found in the interplay between the Self and the Other, and its associated struggle between being a subject or object in the gaze of others (de Beauvoir, 1949, 2011). As discussed in Hällgren (2013a) de Beauvoir explains that in the making of a feminine identity, there is no actual struggle of being a subject in the interplay between the self and others. Because of the asymmetric power relation between the two sexes, the scene is already set when the feminine self is played towards society and other people. By a socially constructed default, women are pre-defined as the object, and a subordinated correlate to a masculine subject.

Appearance is everything   www.littleswedenart.com

From an existentialistic perspective, this can be assumed for both boys and girls in general when they make identities. However, because of the socially constructed subordination of feminine qualities, girls in general are essentialized, separated and low ranked in relation to the higher male norm. In that way, the making of a masculine identity, offers a social short cut to privileged positions of being the subject, the one that defines the Other. Thus, the making the feminine identity, includes, as a default-option, to enter the position of "the Other" (de Beauvoir, 1949, 2011:7).

This suggests that one key characteristic of the female existence, and what girls are facing in their identity making, is not only becoming a person with subjectivity and agency but, at the same time, having to interact in situations where society, socially and culturally, recognizes women as objects, as the Other, as mere body, as a correlate (Rubin, 1975; Hirdman, 1988; Young, 2005; de Beauvoir, 1949, 2011). Learning to be a girl is not only about learning to be seen as objects but also to objectify oneself and value oneself from appearance rather than from competences and abilities.

The experience of being both subjects and objects informs a "double consciousness" of being both an insider and an outsider in relation to society, to the self but also to one's body (du Bois, 1903: p. 3; de Beauvoir, 1949,

2011; Young, 2005). As such, the feminine existence becomes not only a subordinate condition but also a more contradictory condition compared to the masculine existence. The objectifications, as well as the contradiction of being both subject and object, could be understood as part in the feminine identity package and mixed into girls' identity making (Hällgren, 2013a, 2013b).

Children who engage in making masculine identities will have differing experiences of the basic duality between the Self and the Other and the associated, existential, struggle between being a subject or an object. When boys are being in the world with Others, and look at themselves through the eyes of society, make their identities, they will, similarly to girls, be confronted with the binary of femininity and masculinity. However, boys are not expected to make an identity as a low-ranked correlate to girls. Boys gender identity making is not by default charged with an existential and socially constructed subordination. They do not have to deal with the contradiction of both being a subject and an object or being both an insider and an outsider in relation to society, to themselves and their bodies. In contrast to the making of a feminine identity, the masculine identity package does not come with the "...ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention" (Young, 2005: p. 44). Again, the reason may be that general social orders in society assigns masculinity as the most powerful identity feature and as higher ranked than feminine.

Be a man   www.littleswedenart.com

When boys meet the gender order they engage with the same social phenomena as girls do, but from other gendered perspectives and with different, individual experiences as a result. The masculine condition has its own complexities. One of them is explained by Connell (1995, 2005), from whom we can learn that masculinities are valued in relation to each other, in relation to both men and women, and additionally, strictly ordered in relation to a hetero normative standard and what is seen as feminine. Another name for this is hegemonic masculinity and its core function is to legitimate hegemonic masculinities, which are formed in relation to femininity and other subordinate masculinities (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005).

It was clearly dangerous, but for real men quitting is never an option.   www.littleswedenart.com

From socially shaped norms about gender boys will understand what counts as masculine and what is seen as a high or low status masculinity; what is seen as acceptable boyhood-or not. Boys will meet crucial, social obstacles that limit their options to emotionality, operationalized in phrases such as "Big boys don't cry". Other norms will separate them from girls and degrades activities and materials marked as feminine (Kane, 2006). Boys will get involved in other, less protecting contexts than girls do. Further, boys are expected to show toughness and to deny pain, weaknesses and illness. They are expected to be successful, adventurous and competitive towards other boys. The masculinity stereotype is about aggressiveness, physical violence and being emotionally restraint. From media images, boys are informed that the ideal male body is large, strong, and muscular. Boys also learn that masculine prestige is about taking risks, driving fast, risk your life, be cool, live fast and die young: Do not be soft, and whatever you do: Do not be a girl! Be a man! Save the world! These stereotyping ideals about being a proper boy are no children's game. Making a boy identity in relation to a hegemonic masculinity and according to stereotyped ideals could come with a high price, not only for boys, but for society. As explained by Connell (2005) the consequences of these ideals is clearly dangerous, they could even be deadly.

Like peas in a pod   www.littleswedenart.com

9. Gender Identity Making as a Learning-by-Doing Activity

Drawing on theories from West & Zimmerman (1987) again, gender is not a static identity dimension; instead, gender is dynamic, something that is done. It can be conceptualized as a performance of difference that function as verb, rather than a noun. Children are not born boys or girls' it is something they learn to be. Or as explained by the existential philosophy of de Beauvoir, in her famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman", (de Beauvoir, 1949, 2011: p. 289).

So, if gender is an activity, and additionally, an activity that is expected to be done properly, in a socially accepted way, it may be assumed that the making of gender is something that will need components such as information acquisition, praxis, reflection, watching and action. And, moreover, the making of gender identities is about embracing something important for existing in the world. Taking this together and drawing on theories of Dewey & McLellan (1889) and Knowles (1950) children's gender making could be understood as more than just a doing. Combining information acquisition, praxis, reflexion, watching and acting, children's making of gender identities could be theorized as informal learning procedures that involves gender into learning-by-doing activities with socially accepted gender skills and a coherent gender identity as expected learning outcomes.

Exploring children's gender making as an informal learning-by-doing activity, children will learn socially constructed rules about gender while being in the world with Others. As with learning the meaning of traffic signs, the value of money or how to behave in school and play with their peers-or similar to learning a new game. Games such as board games, card games or online games have their own sets of conventional rules. To play the game effectively players need a shared knowledge about the game. There are rules about what to do or not to do, about how to win or how to loose. For example, the game of Ludo could be played in any way, but if the game shall make any sense to the players, there are commonly agreed rules about what the red, blue, yellow and green areas on the board means. It is also agreed about what the dice are for, how each player shall use their tokens and when it is allowed to push other players or not. Similarly, when children make their gender, they have to engage with the rules and find ways of playing the gender game right. Children will learn which sphere, space and position that belong to them as boys or girls. They will learn about the dichotomy and the differences. They will learn about their gendered worth, responsibilities, qualities and capacities. And they will learn where they belong in the gender order Connell (1987) or what happens if they violate any of the paragraphs in what Hirdman (1988) calls the gender contract. To play or not to play gender right, to act, walk and talk as a boy or a girl, to make gender correct, becomes a matter of being included or not in social relations.

To play, or not to play.   www.littleswedenart.com

10. Learning Spaces

It is suggested that gender is something that is accomplished in relations, interactively created and re-created in everyday scenarios and sustained by collective agreements (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990: p. 179). Continuing to explore children's gender making as an informal learning-by-doing activity, it is a learning that

may be understood as happening while being in the world with Others, as an inevitable consequence of human existence. The being in the world with Others, and its associated interplay between the Self and the Other, forms an space where children learn about gender. This space may be conceptualized as an existential learning space for children's gender identity making, as space that is mobile and develops continuously, with a shape that adapts to each instance of being in the world with Others.

The existential learning space for gender identity can be further thought of as filled with learning resources such as relations, language, material resources, bodily experiences, social structures and power, all coordinated and transmitted by the gaze. In the suggested existential learning space, the gaze function as a learning device for children's understandings of themselves and in their identity making. Bringing together existentialist theories about the gaze from e.g. du Bois (1903), Sartre (1943/2005), de Beauvoir (1949/2011) and Lacan (1949/2000) the gaze can be further conceptualised as having five basic functionalities. That is: 1) To see others; 2) To see one self; 3) To be seen; 4) The awareness about being seen; 5) The awareness about to be seen and valued. The first three basic functions of the gaze can be grouped into what is imagined, and the last two as part of what is present. Furthermore, as in actual classrooms, children will be under assessment, a gender assessment. How well they are making their gender identity will be continuously evaluated and judged according to what West & Zimmerman (1987) theorises as normative, gender standards.

11. Gender Identity Teachers

Children's identity making can be understood as compulsory learning-by-doing activity that takes place in an existential learning space. It is a learning space filled with resources such as language, material resources, bodily experiences, social structures and power. Further, the function of the gaze can be theorized as a learning device through which children will identify, gain, modify or reinforce behaviours, skill, norms, images, and ideas and transform their learnings into a lived and practiced knowledge about gender.

The theoretical picture of identity making as a learning activity, happening in an existential learning space, also implies that there is a teacher somewhere. Tentatively, parents, peers, and society as a whole could be conceptualized to function as informal gender identity educators. Children meet their fathers, their brothers, their mothers and their sisters. They move beyond the family spheres into the rest of society. When children meet the socially constructed standards about gender, Connell (2005) explains that they appear to children as ready-made and unquestionable facts from the adult world. What adults tell children and the ways, in which we practice our lives, will matter to them. As explained by Kane (2012), everyday gendered moments between adults and children will have an impact here and now, but also on future of gender equity. Most likely, what children learn about identity and gender in existential learning spaces, children will bring with them as adults and recycle in their being in the world with Others.

Child is the father of man   www.littleswedenart.com

12. Art Blended Research

In this article, my intention is to explore how visuals and written text may combine to further understandings about complex matters such as gendered aspects of the human condition (Arendt, 1958). To do so, my professional practices as researcher and artist are brought together by theorising, conceptualizing and visualizing aspects of children's gender identity making. As such, this article has not only covered issues about existentialism, social constructivism, children, identity, and gender, it has also been an example of what I call Art Blended Research.

How can art and research combine our minds and expand the ways we think about a particular phenomenon, such as children's gender identity making, and a part of learning processes? Visual expressions together with aesthetic learning and research processes have gradually blended with my research practice over the years. My passion for exploring the potential of blending art and research emanates from my experiences as artist and researcher in dialogue with students and audiences, online and in art exhibitions. This has contributed to important insights about aesthetic learning processes and alternative ways for doing research. It has made me believe that we learn from more than words and also, that we know more than we are capable to verbally express. Also, that learning can be mediated from all kinds of sources.

Using verbal mode of communication only may be like exploring our world in a coloring-by-number-manner. We will learn about colors, shapes, and numbers and use a legend, but not so much about what is possible outside the lines. In an epistemologically sense, I believe that art is particularly capable to facilitate non-linear, divergent modes of thought and activate emotions and imagination as knowledge creators. In a similar way, Eisner (2008) explained that: "Knowledge and understandings are not always reducible to language" (Eisner, 2008: p. 5). Further, Polanyi points to the fact that: "*We can know more than we can tell*" (Polanyi, 1983/1966: p. 4; italics in original). Likewise, Sousanis (2015) has recently illuminated that visuals could provide alternative modes of understandings-where words fail.

The world is always watched from a viewpoint. It is seen from some kind of perspective, from underneath or above, as man, woman, child, or from other significant outlooks. How the world is understood and relates to the position from where it is watched (Nietzsche, 1887/1998). As visualized in the picture "Points of view", the world is surrounded with different glasses that symbolize different perspectives and the boundaries of our current frame of mind. For instance, each pair of glasses may be seen as representing different experiences, worldviews, or theoretical understandings of how to do research. The other glasses represent additional possible perspectives on the world we may shift between and use to combine into new understandings. The same picture is also applicable on interactions with images. They are read from diverse and individual, viewpoints and preconceptions, with different conceptual glasses and render different experiences. By using our imagination, we can move between different glasses, beyond our frame of mind and see the world from multiple points of views.

I suggest that Art Blended Research is not so much about including art as data for investigation, approaching art as a subject or using visuals as decorative illustrations. Art Blended Research is more like a mode of inquiry growing from the interplay between the verbal and the visual. Transmissions of content in the interplay is non-linear, flowing in a non-predictable dispense between transmitter and receiver, from multiple viewpoints. Results are not achieved and presented in standardised forms. Final results, meaning and knowledge constructions become partially decentralized from the researcher. In terms of validity, Art Blended Research calls for open minds and trust in the fact that outcomes can be shifting, unpredictable, un-linear and diverse. When exploring a phenomenon through Art Blended Research it is therefore, perhaps, necessary to move beyond traditional conceptions about knowing in right and wrong manners. And accept not being in full control over how the results are interpreted and what kind of knowledge is generated.

12.1. OK Glass?

The core meaning of identity is individuals' understandings of who they are. Children shape understandings about themselves by existing in the world with Others, with us. They engage in the duality between the Self and the Other and this interplay brings them the experience of the Gaze. Meeting the gaze of Others is a powerful dimension of existing in the world with Others and it becomes even more powerful when the gaze is experienced as an internalized learning devise that informs children's understanding of who they are and shape their identity. As I exemplify in the picture "Ok, glass", experiences of the gaze may come directly in actual interactions between the self and others but the gaze may also be part of an internalized experience, as the thought of

being observed by an imagined audience. What is outside becomes part of the inside. The imagined gaze may be experienced while looking at your self in the mirror or through the eyes of contemporary technologies, which is symbolized with the pair of Google Glasses in the picture "OK, glass". There is a twin function of the pictures name. "OK, glass" functions as the basic verbal command for interacting with the wearable technology. It could also function as a symbol for a question directed to an imagined online, social audience functioning as mirror; Ok, Glass? Am I Ok? Do I act as a proper boy or a proper girl? What would mom and dad think if they saw me now? What would my friends think?

12.2. Be What You Want-Like Peas in a Pod?

Girls' and boys' gender makings intersect with many identity dimensions that are linked to fields of social power. The dimensions of children's identity making are many and do not exist in isolation from each other. They are intersectional. To become a girl or boy as a war refugee in Sweden, in a ghetto in South Africa or in the wealthier parts of Hong Kong, can be very different, even if gender is an omnipresent dimension of being in the world with Others. Masculinities and femininities are dynamic, multi-layered norms. At the same time norms about femininity masculinity functions as conforming stereotypes that command children into pre-defined life areas.

Children are born into this world with human rights that entitle them to dignity, worth, freedom and equality but also to the rights to freely make their own ideas of whom they are and may become (United Nations, 1948). This is also what children frequently are told, that they are unique, that they should be themselves and that they can become what they want. Often, children are told that everything is possible:-All you have to do is work hard enough. As I explore in the picture "Be what you want" too many children will discover that following their own ideals is not always possible. No matter how hard they try. The large box of life opportunities presented to them, turns out to be strictly delimited into pre-defined, labelled shades of possibilities. One other side of the delusiveness in children's gender identity making is also explored in the picture "Like Peas in a Pod" where little boys can be seen to climb into a huge, super-man-stereotype in the form of a candy dispenser, which can snap anytime and turn into a trap, a gender trap.

12.3. A Girl, Is a Girl?

The process of differentiating one self from others is layered with many variations of inclusion and exclusion. In this article the gaze has been conceptualized as a learning device. While being in the world with Others, children become inevitably engaged in the duality between the Self and Others and make their identities in interaction with, and learning from, a gaze from present or imagined audiences who may be engaged in recognition, absence of recognition or misrecognition. As with the Matryoshka dolls, shown in the in the picture "A girl, is a girl, is a girl", children's selves get nested in gendered layers of values and meanings instead being able to choose more freely who they want to become. The gaze and its imagined values become internalized in children's thoughts about themselves, can function in a panoptical manner (Foucault, 1977/1995) and, further, interiorize individual self-regulations. Depending of what the gaze is charged with, or thought to be charged with, ideas about and values of gender, and other identity dimensions, become interiorized as good or bad parts of children's self awareness and identity making.

12.4. Appearance Is Everything—Be a Man

Gender is omnipresent in our existence—it is all over the place. Expectations to become a boy or a girl are among the toughest commands that children ever will meet. To children, following the gendered expectations appear as absolutely necessary to be socially included and seen as normal. Norms about gender appears to children as ready-made and unquestionable facts from the adult world (Connell, 2005). Moreover, making a feminine or a masculine identity will lead children into different individual experiences of existing in the world with Others.

Gender commands facing girls, are explored in the picture "Appearance is everything". Here a Sleeping Beauty doll is used to symbolize the stereotypes girls meet in their gender identity making. One of the girls in the picture has climbed all the way up to the hand of the doll. One can imagine how hard it must be to finally get on top of the stereotype. Looking at the wall behind the doll, the girl sitting on the hand of the stereotype does

no longer cast a shadow of her own. She is hidden in layers of ideals to such an extent that her self and reduced into transparency. As such, this picture deals with theories that demonstrate that when girls are socialized to become women, girls learn not only to be seen as objects but also to objectify and value themselves from appearance rather than from competences and abilities.

Adults' part in constructing and reproducing children's identities in general, and aspects of boys' gender identity making in particular, is explored in the picture "Be a man". Here, little boys are climbing on huge, blue stairs made of plastic building blocks. They are trying to reach a giant plastic Spiderman, a stereotype equivalent to girls' Sleeping Beauty doll. While the boys are climbing towards spiderman, adults are there to watch their steps and steer them in the right direction. As such, their adult governed climbing towards the super-hero becomes an expression for gender assessment and adjustments to stereotypes and hegemonic masculinities. Furthermore, boys' gender making often involves ideals of becoming the saviour of the world, something that is pictured in the image of the divers who are on the edge of the coffee cup, on their way to rescue the wasp that is drowning, can be perceived in many ways. Both pictures could be seen as entertaining illustrations of unrealistic situations. It could also be understood as illustrating the powers and the risks that are involved when boys make their identities according to stereotyping ideals.

12.5. To Play or Not to Play—Each One Teach One

As been said, children's gender identity making is dynamic and function as a verb rather than a noun. It involves components such as information acquisition, praxis, reflection, watching and action that combines into an informal learning-by-doing activity, with socially accepted gender skills and a coherent gender identity as expected learning outcomes. While children are making their gender identities they will learn which social position they belong to as a boy or a girl. Through their experience of being in the world with Others, children will learn about their rights and obligations and about expected competences and they will learn about their worth. Similar to learning the value of money, the meaning of traffic signs or the rules of a Ludo game, children engage with social constructions of identities and the rules of the game of gender. This is exemplified in my picture "To Play or not to Play" where children and adults are playing on a Ludo board. Here, there is little or no room for children find that their gender expressions do not match their birth sex.

Children's informal learning-by-doing activity about gender does not only happen in ordinary school classes from 08.00 a.m. to 03.00 p.m. It happens all the time. The learning about gender identities happen both inside and outside in school buildings. The space where children get educated about gender is located in the inevitable being in the world with Others. As exemplified in both my pictures "OK, glass" and in "Each one teach one", it is an existential learning space filled with learning resources such as contemporary technologies, language, bodily experiences, social structures, power and material resources. Here, the gaze function as a central learning device that operates when we see each other or watch our selves directly or through the eyes of an imagined other.

12.6. Child Is the Father of Man

The second last picture in the article has a title that draws on the strophe "…child is the father of man", from a poem by Wordsworth (1807). It deals with the idea of what is learnt in childhood, children will bring with them as they grow up. The picture "Child is the father of man" explores adults as teachers in children's existential learning spaces. It's an illustration of a generational circulation of norms about gender. From us, boys and girls learn how to manage a whole range of social constructions of girlhood and boyhood. In this particular picture a little boy is watching a violent culture performed by adult men. Social constructions, such as stereotype ideas of gender, are very powerful. As the old saying goes; children see and children do. Beliefs that one gender has higher value over another strikes both boys and girls, men and women, but in different ways. Acting according to them and following stereotyping norms, as also illustrated in "Be a man!" or "Appearance is everything", can come with a high prize for children but also for society as a whole.

Indeed, social constructions such as gender stereotypes are powerful, but they also have a weak spot; they are constructed. They only have power and meanings because we acknowledge their power and give them their meanings.

In bringing together what has been explored about combining art and research in this article, it can first of all be held that if the blending of art and research will happen and combine in our minds, and create alternative ways to learning, depends on the interplay between visuals, verbal and individuals. Each individual viewpoint

and experience of the blending decides what can be learnt. Art Blended Research facilitates a learning that is not necessarily identical and general but experiential, emotional and individual. The functionality of Art Blended Research depends on what the questions are in what form answers are accepted. If we need to know something about logical relationships or kinds of knowledge that claim to be asserted through generalization, evidence and represented with words, we might not turn to art. However, exploring research objects such children's gender identity making, not only through words and numbers, but also through art, may contribute to diverse understandings of the human condition. Looking for emotional dimensions, vicarious experiences and experiential knowledge or aiming for disrupting stereotypes, art can be powerful way to go.

The insight of that there is more to see than meets the eye, has been an important reason for exploring Art Blended Research in this article. In conclusion, the strength of this kind of research does not lie in the ability to explain what is. Instead, the strength of Art Blended Research is found in possible explorations and inspirations of what might be.

Protecting the innocent. II   www.littleswedenart.com

References

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bem, S. L. (1993). *Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society, 19,* 829-859. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, Cambridge: Polity Press, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Connell, R W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Connell, R W. (2005). Growing up Masculine: Rethinking the Significance of Adolescence in the Making of Masculinities. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, *14,* 11-28.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43,* 1241-1299. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Davies, B. (2003). *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender* (Rev. ed.). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1949/2011). *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage Books.

de los Reyes, P., & Mulinari, D. (2005). *Intersektionalitet: Kritiska reflektioner över (o)jämlikhetens landskap. [Inter-*

sectionality: Critical Reflections on the Landscape of (In)equality]. Malmö: Liber.

Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing Gender. *Gender & Society, 21,* 106-127. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243206293577

Dewey, J., & McLellean, J. A. (1889). *Applied Psychology. An Introduction to the Principles and Practice of Education.* Chicago, IL: Educational Publishing Company. https://archive.org/details/appliedpsycholog00mclerich

Diffey, T. J. (1995). What Can We Learn from Art? *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 73,* 204-211. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048409512346541

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). The Souls of Black Folk. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. http://web.archive.org/web/20081004090243/ http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DubSoul.html

Eisner, E. (2008). Chap. 1: Art and Knowledge. In J. G. Knowles, & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues* (pp. 3-12). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545.n1

Foucault, M. (1977/1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (2nd Vintage Books ed.). New York: Vintage Books.

Gadamer, H.-G. (2013/1977). *Konst som spel, symbol och fest [Die Aktualitet des Schönen-Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest].* (P. Sällström, Trans.). Ludvika: Dualis.

Gaut, B. (2003). Chap. 25: Art and Knowledge. In J. Levinson (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (pp. 436-450). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Griffiths, G. (1999). Other. In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin (Eds.), *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (pp. 169-173). London: Routledge.

Hacking, I. (1999). *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hällgren, C. (2005). "Working Harder to Be the Same": Everyday Racism among Young Men and Women in Sweden. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8,* 319-342. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613320500174499

Hällgren, C. (2006). *Researching and Developing Swedkid: A Swedish Case Study at the Intersection of the Web, Racism and Education*. PhD Thesis, Umeå: Umeå University.

Hällgren, C. (2013a). Chap. 1: Gendered Other Hidden Girl. In G.-M. Frånberg, C. Hällgren, & E. Dunkels (Eds.), *Invisible Girl* (pp. 17-21). Umeå: Umeå University. https://iml.edusci.umu.se/invisiblegirl

Hällgren, C. (2013b). Chap. 5: The Girlish Condition. In G.-M. Frånberg, C. Hällgren, & E. Dunkels (Eds.), *Invisible Girl* (pp. 55-63). Umeå: Umeå University. https://iml.edusci.umu.se/invisiblegirl

Hällgren, C. (2015). Chap. 3: —Be a Man! Art Blended Research to Explore Boys' Gender Making. In C. Hällgren, E. Dunkels, & G.-M. Frånberg (Eds.), *Invisible Boy: The Making of Contemporary Masculinities* (pp. 17-30). Umeå: Umeå University. http://www.invisibleboy.org

Hällgren, C., Dunkels, E., & Frånberg, G.-M. (Eds.) (2015). *Invisible Boy: The Making of Contemporary Masculinities.* Umeå: Umeå University. http://www.invisibleboy.org

Heidegger, M. (1927/2008). *Being and Time*. (J. Macquarrie, & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York: Harper Perennial/Modern Thought.

Hirdman, Y. (1988). Genussystemet-reflexioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning. [The Gender Order-Reflections about the Social Subordination of Women]. *Kvinnovetenskapligtidskrift, [Journal of Gender Science], 3,* 49-63.

Jewitt, C. (Ed.) (2009). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Kane, E. W. (2006). "No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!": Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity. *Gender & Society, 20,* 149-176. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243205284276

Kane, E. W. (2012). *The Gender Trap: Parents and the Pitfalls of Raising Boys and Girls*. New York: New York University Press.

Kessler, J. S., & McKenna, W. (1978). *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. New York: Wiley.

Knowles, J. G., & Cole, A. L. (2008). *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545

Knowles, M. S. (1950). *Informal Adult Education: A Guide for Administrators, Leaders, and Teachers*. New York: Association Press.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal Discourse*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lacan, J. (1949/2010). The Mirror Stage. In C. Lemert (Ed.), *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global and Classic Readings* (2010) (pp. 343-344). Philadelphia, PA: Westview Press.

Livingston, P. (2013). History of the Ontology of Art. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Sum-

mer 2013 ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/art-ontology-history/

Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen, 16,* 6-18. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6

Nietzsche, F. W., Swensen, A. J., & Clark, M. (1887/1998). *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (Electronic Resource). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Polanyi, M. (1983). *The Tacit Dimension*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.

Rahilly, E. P. (2015). The Gender Binary Meets the Gender-Variant Child: Parents' Negotiations with Childhood Gender Variance. *Gender & Society, 29,* 338-361. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243214563069

Ridgeway, C. L. (2009). Framed Before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations. *Gender & Society, 23,* 145-160.

Rubin, G. (1975). Chap. 8: The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex. In R. R. Reiter (Ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (pp. 157-210). New York: Monthly Review Press.

Sartre, J.-P. (1943/2005). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. London: Routledge.

Searle, J. R. (2011). *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8,* 23-44. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Sousanis, N. (2015). *Unflattening*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, C. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (pp. 75-106). Oxford: Blackwell.

Thomasson, A. L. (2005). The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics. *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism, 63,* 221-230. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-8529.2005.00202.x

United Nations (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* New York: United Nations.

van Leeuwen, T. (2011). Chap. 28: Multimodality and Multimodal Research. In E. Margolis, & L. Pauwels (Eds.), *Visual Research Methods* (pp. 549-569). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446268278.n28

Weber, S. (2008). Chap. 4: Visual Images in Research. In: J. G. Knowles, & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues* (pp. 41-53). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226545.n4

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender and Society, 1,* 125-151. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002

Westbrook, L., & Shilt, K. (2014). Doing Gender, Determining Gender: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System. *Gender and Society, 28,* 32-57. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243213503203

Young, I. M. (2005). *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Studies in Feminist Philosophy. New York: Oxford University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195161920.001.0001