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Feminism and Queer in Art Education

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Feminism and Queer in Art Education

1st FAQ

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Introduction

This chapter is a combination of forewords for the edited book *FAQ: Feminist and Queer Perspectives on Art Education* and a pedagogical statement written to explore the foundations and aims of our teaching in the Gender and Art Education course. Both of these aims, the *forewords* and *pedagogical statement* sound like something dominant and stagnant, something very strange in the context of feminist, caring, transformative, engaged, and critical pedagogy. However, we could not find a better way to articulate our aims for a project that grew from our pedagogical collaboration within one course into a research and activist project – and continues to evolve and assume yet other forms of collaboration. Through our work with this book, through our teaching and writing, we take an intentional stance and aim to directly and indirectly influence and advance an orientation of radical democracy. As feminist pedagogues, we always try to avoid assuming power and holding onto the various elements of power, and yet paradoxically this is exactly what we have done through this text and our work as editors. Keenly aware of this, and as we can claim no neutrality in writing this chapter and in our work as

editors, we find it pertinent to begin with a few disclaimers to help decode the bias and preferences in our writing:

- This book is written and edited with the understanding that gender is not a binary, biologically based category divided into two polar opposites (with some exceptions to this polarity), but a fluent, flexible, and evolving part of selfhood; performed aspects of one's subjectivity.
- Gender is not a mainstream (normative/dominant) vs. minority (marginal/deviation from norm) issue, but rather an issue of a foundational human right that is an essential part of everyone's personhood. Thus, normative limitations that aim to prevent complex and diversified experiences of embodiments and performances of gender apply to all people and discriminate against everyone.
- Feminism and feminist theory are not about girls'/women's empowerment but a framework through which we aim to unlearn normativity and to collectively relearn a more humane ontology of being that is truly accepting of diversity and founded on social justice.
- Queer is not an "other" but a broader and more wholesome orientation into being a person and people that is applicable to anyone and to all aspects of society.
- Applying queer theory to education, Elizabeth J. Meyers (2007) explains that queer studies are concerned with much more than issues related to non-normative gender and sexual minorities. Queer theory questions taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation. It seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight. (p. 15)

    Thus, perceiving education and pedagogy through queer, we believe that a central aspect of education, espe-

cially teacher education, ought to focus on the empathetic, caring, and critical study of all possibilities for being an ethical educator in relation to others.

- Feminist and queer theories and pedagogies are both practical and theoretical, things that are deeply tied to everyday life and woven into the structures of education and society.

This book grew rather organically from our shared teaching and learning experiences in the Gender and Art Education course, which is offered annually to graduate students on the Aalto University's Art Education program. This is the only course among the undergraduate and graduate courses that specifically addresses issues and themes related to gender and sexuality. Obviously, offering this one course is not a sufficient allocation of time or resources to such complex and demanding topic to even begin to deconstruct, unlearn, and relearn how binary, normative, and counterhegemonic perceptions and conceptions of gender might influence cultures, societies, art, and education. Rather, we perceive this course as a safe space for the initiation of difficult conversations and for exploring the emerging themes through performative art pedagogy. This course is where we annually renew and grow the community of people interested in further studying these themes.

We are keenly aware that one annual course or an edited book is nothing but a faint whisper in a long history of discrimination. Deconstruction, de-normatizing, and reconstruction take time, because attitudes, beliefs, and practices are rooted in histories embedded in language, ontology, epistemology, and pedagogy specific to cultures and societies. It might be unrealistic to re-gender or de-gender art education isolated from its context, as binary divisions of gender and heterosexual norms surround us and are ingrained in us so deeply that it is hard to even imagine what it would be like for us if we did not assume gender through binaries.

Not "by the book" but rather a book by the community

One might wonder why we have decided to compose a book based on only a few years of jointly teaching this course, and it is certainly important to clarify that we claim no expertise in feminist pedagogy/ theory or queer studies. Rather, we are two novice learners whose primary role is to encourage, facilitate, and support the community of our co-learners, our current FAQ collective, and its future formulations. Our aim is to work collectively toward building a more equal and just art education space and society. The FAQ collective and this book grew partially from our desire to become better at what we do as educators and mentors. However, this book belongs equally to those students and visiting arts professionals who attended the course, as it also belongs to the growing group of graduate and doctoral students who have joined this collaborative working group for other reasons.

Although we, Anniina and Tiina, are self-proclaimed novice learners, it is essential to note that the chapters included in this book are written by experts, as these texts are based on years of experiencing confusion and struggles with the normative and discriminatory behaviors and attitudes of others and experiences of learning to negotiate gender identities in partial disguise, and is founded on self-initiated critical studies and continued formulations of like-minded creative communities. Many of the accounts included in this book were initially shared in conversations and through art during the course. Once voiced, these personal accounts made it strikingly evident how large and deep the gap is in critical gender scholarship in Finnish art education. Especially lacking are publications and venues voicing and presenting student experiences and expertise by young scholars. As a collective, we claim that there is an urgent need to critically discuss and study gender issues among art educators and, as a result, renew our global, national, and local policies concerning arts education. Larissa's chapter (pp. 140–152) points out how even the most advanced curriculum thinkers in a country such

as Finland, whose educational system is so highly ranked globally, are unfamiliar with nonbinary language and thinking.

Several of the authors featured in this book, Aapo, Jani, Abdullah, and Jemina, begin by recalling major discrimination and prejudice occurring in Finnish and European cultures, societies, and education through writing that emerges from their personal experiences, and through this, they build new professional understandings. By reading these texts, it is easy to grasp why and how art education is a suitable context for critical and artistic inquiry as well as for jointly working through systemic injustice, for unpacking normative arts education, and for creating an educational climate and practices that are more open for and embracing of all diversity. Hooks (2010) writes: "Sadly, children's passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only" (p. 15). Indeed, we can read in these chapters, similar to what we have heard in so many other narratives, that children, youths, and young adults who do not conform to norms experience incredible verbal, psychological, and physical cruelty and systemic oppression throughout their lives. Fortunately, our students have not only prevailed, but they have become advanced thinkers and have excelled in their artistic and other educational endeavors. Hooks continues, "Engaged pedagogy is a teaching strategy that aims to restore students' will to think, and their will to be fully self-actualized. The central focus of engaged pedagogy is to enable students to think critically" (p. 16).

Although hook's engaged pedagogy has influenced our thinking throughout our careers as pedagogues working in an institutional culture and discipline that encourages critical thinking (Tomperi, 2017), supports diverse perspectives, and is generally accepting of diversity, we had failed to see that an attitude of acceptance is not enough. In the fall of 2015, our students voiced their concerns and expressed in very direct and practical terms how their teacher preparatory education and artistic curricula failed to fully serve their needs and the demands they anticipated for their future pro-

fession. Our students asked us to reactivate and recreate a course that would directly address gender in the context of art education and schooling institutions. They also requested to have more performative elements and performance art included in their overall curriculum. By voicing their concerns, they placed their trust in us to respond to these needs. Although we were uncertain what this would entail, we accepted the challenge not to cater or provide, but to co-learn with them.

We began teaching the Gender course in the spring of 2015, aware of the deeply ingrained normative notions of gender that directly and indirectly steer education, culture, and society. Based on our inquiries comparing theories, policies, practices, and everyday experiences, we gathered that normative and binary notions of gender block a democratic and inclusive education that is accepting of various lives experiences and performances of gender from actualizing at all levels and in all contexts of education. Many educators would prefer to completely dismantle the gendered structures that dominate education and pedagogy (Sanders, Cosier, Rhoades, Wolfgang & Davenport, 2013), but simultaneously feel that this is a long-term project and there is a need to achieve more immediate results in working toward more caring and ethical classrooms. However, it became very clear to us that critically and caringly dismantling gender norms to build new constructions of counter or dominant cultures for education was not enough. We needed to begin with equity and build our learning on the foundation of basic human rights. In all our teaching, learning, research, and discussions, we aim to work against gendered thinking, practices, and conceptualizations. Equal access to meaningful, challenging, engaging, caring, and ethically sustainable education is a foundational human right for all of our students, yet we constantly run into normative thinking and the persistent binary division of gender. This is especially evident in the texts by Larissa (chapter 7), Aapo (chapter 2), and Jani (chapter 3). Obviously, this does not mean that we are not aware of or interested in certain aspects of culture (e.g. manga girl culture, gendered per-

formativities in social media) nor that we would dismiss these as insignificant. Heta (chapter 4) and Jemina (Chapter 6) bring to the discussion social media, contemporary art, and art institutions that are interesting both as gender discriminatory but also as potential platforms for counterhegemonic cultures.

To our slight surprise, this is not a perspective and orientation that is easy to support. One only needs to briefly study the United Nations (UN) information sites and working groups to run into slogans such as "Building peace in the minds of men and women" (unesco.org), and to realize that the language utilized by the globally highest organization guarding and promoting human rights and equal access to education and culture perceives gender through a binary divide. Large-scale data collection and globally comparative tools, such as the "eAtlas of gender inequality in education" (unesco.org) measure gender gaps in education by comparing girls and boys. When searching for more diversified gender terminology, it becomes rapidly evident that there is a lack of educational resources that address gender through non-normative thinking, or critically examines gender binaries and their actual scientific validity when measuring large or small-scale data. What can be found is information about campaigns intended to protect the rights of sexual minorities.

In 2015, the Finnish National Agency for Education (www.oph.fi) published a practical guide for understanding and promoting gender equality in education. Similar to other policy statements addressing gender, this document presents a clear contradiction by making abstract and nonspecific statements about gender diversity throughout the document and about the importance of understanding the value of each student defining their gender identity as an individual. Yet, the rhetoric almost immediately falls back to the binary, comparative language of girls vs. boys. and even makes a direct reference to a children's right to determine what kinds of men or women they wish to become. Such statements offer a constant

reminder of the tight hold of normative thinking that is deeply ingrained in Western cultures and language.

Rather than focusing on inequalities between men vs. women or heteronormative vs. other-gendered identities, we promote person-first language and approaches. We perceive gender as a lifelong discoursive performance that is specific to each person. Gender is not something "given at birth" or rigid and stable, but is built through evolving cultural discourses and personal preferences. Essentially, through our pedagogical and artistic engagements, we study established power structures. However, while we recognize culturally constructed reservations and fear for the "unknown and unknowable" (Wolfgang and Rhoades, 2017, p. 74) aspects of our experiences and identities (or rather identifiers we each wish to engage with), we firmly believe that it should be a foundational right for everyone to explore various possibilities of personhood based on a foundation of ideological flexibility and diversity rather than binary positionalities.

Gender and sexualities in education are foundational social justice issues; they are also about diversity, which is essential for establishing and maintaining sustainable, healthy, and happy people, communities, and societies. In their recent article "Ecocritical contestations with neoliberalism: Teaching to (un)learn 'normalcy',", Lupinacci, Happel-Parkins and Ward (2018) articulate their perspectives on sustainable education and state:

> Recognizing the pervasiveness of neoliberal capitalism and its restrictive conceptions of personhood, this article argues that teacher education supportive of inclusion requires rethinking understandings of hierarchy, dependency, and difference. Furthermore, in this article we focus on how dominant assumptions about independence, and success in school, impact our understanding and support of the day-to-day kinds of interpretations and actions that make neoliberalism possible (Lupinacci,

2014; Ward, 2014a, 2014b). It is our position in this article that the cruel conditions of schooling that accompany neoliberal capitalism ought to compel scholar-activist educators to think of potential futures—futures that support diverse, inclusive, and sustainable communities (Martusewicz et al., 2015; Lupinacci and Happel, 2015; Lupinacci and Happel-Parkins, 2016). (p. 2)

Gender issues are personal and public; they are also holistic and reach into all aspects of society. Gender and gender performativity are intimate issues that touch and affect us all deeply, and still gender is constructed in mutual communication and relationalities, and concern all communities, institutions, and organizations. Gender "happens," is embodied, and is materialized in words, gestures, gazes, habitus, attitudes, and choices, everywhere. In this book, Verna (chapter 8) presents and explores how we all construct and reconstruct gender through bodily work, contact, and encounters through grappling and in relation to everything that we have learnt and accepted as gendered bodied experiences. Verna's novel and exploratory approach gives insights beyond words as they describe how participants of the grappling workshop confronted gender assumptions, biases, and old and new embodied experiences in physical contact with one another. Heta (chapter 4) begins with popular, cultural phenomena, and rather than relying on normative thinking, their research tackles issues of gender countercultures through visual art. Although recognizing that these phenomena are often global, broad, and not confined to a specific location, she approaches gender through local and present angles to feminism, time-bound to layers of contemporary culture. Heta and Larissa continue this exploration of feminism, queer, gender normativity, and counterhegemonic expressions of gender through the stickers they have created to accompany this book. Most of the chapters are accompanied by visual art, which presents another level and mode to each study and, in our opinion, materializes what Wolfgang and

Rhoades (2017) refer to as the unknown and unknowable. Through art, performativity, and artistic expressions of pedagogy, we gain a level of learning, understanding, perceiving, and relating that would not otherwise be relatable to others. Cleo, our graphic designer for this book, has continued with this theme by creating art for the covers and by designing this book specifically to its intent. During the past few years, we have invited five other professionals representing the professional fields of art education and the gaming industry, dance pedagogy, theater pedagogy, choreography, and costume design to co-facilitate students' performative processes and to run workshops within this course. All of these contributions are built on professional and personal ways of being, knowing, and understanding through/ with/in art that enriches and deepens our learning to levels and complexities otherwise inaccessible to us.

Pedagogy as a tool for unsettling the history of silencing and discrimination of queer

Although we do not have answers on how to resolve the history of silencing or how to undo discrimination through art and education on a broader scale, we aim to improve the spaces of learning (Ellsworth, 2005) we create and nurture. We build our research and pedagogical aims on the idea that by fostering spaces founded on *profound notions of acceptance and openness* we can work toward a *culture of care and support*. We frame our co-learning by a *critical study of power structures and institutionalized discrimination*, and we believe that we can achieve immediate changes in our ways of knowing and working cultures by *forming coalitions*, by *altering our beliefs and practices to critical scrutiny*, and by engaging in work that is attentive and *aims at change*.

All the chapters included in this book and written by our students have emerged from deeply personal experiences and from the authors desire to learn more, but also from the *collective sense of urgency* to have our experiences shared, and through sharing con-

tribute to the *diversification of the field.* Jani (chapter 3) poignantly uses the term lip sync in their chapter and we have aimed to show through these texts that creating cultures of tolerance and passive acceptance is not sufficient. Such a stance is still silencing and discriminating, as such educational cultures tolerate normativity and marginalization. As artists and educators, we need to assume a much more activist stance and actively build spaces for the articulation of complex, partially unknowable, difficult, painful, deep, rich, felt, and embodied experiences of diverse perceptions of humanity.

Ontological and epistemic approaches guiding research

We are not alone in trying to bring queer and feminist voices into the field. While there is very little written scholarship to be found in Finnish art education publications, gender-aware education has been in explored and presented through the work of persistent individuals (Check, 2004; Cosier, 2017; Kumashiro, 2001; Greteman, 2017; Roades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, and Sanders, 2013; Wolfgang & Rhoades, 2017). Although we have struggled to find texts that specifically address queer in the context of Finnish art educators, we have recently learnt that several joint efforts between higher education institutions have been made in queer art education scholarship. For example, in 1999–2005, scholars from the Helsinki University of Art and Design (now Aalto University), the Universities of Lapland, Jyväskylä, and Helsinki and the Theatre, Music, and Fine Arts Academies of Fine Arts, basically all university programs offering pedagogical studies in the arts, were actively trying to advance this agenda. Seven symposia have been organized in the Department of Art Education (now Department of Art), but not without resistance. Whilst there has been tremendous support and a general acceptance of diversity, art educators, including scholars and practitioners, have also resisted openly and critically addressing queer in the context of art education. In Spain and Spanish-speaking Latin America, connections between art education and gender

diversity are contemporary topics, as is evidenced in the recent publication of *Educación Artística y Diversidad Sexual* (2015) edited by Ricard Huerta and Amparo Alonso-Sanz Año.

Although the official starting point for our project was in 2015, as is true of most arts-based and personally meaningful research and pedagogical processes, this one also began much earlier than the project's "official" initiation. The inquiry has its roots in long-term critical reflections and years of contemplation on how to facilitate education that is truly relevant, ethical, and accepting of all diversity. The research project discussed here has materialized in the Gender course that has been offered for a long time but had been inactive for several years. In 2015, following the culminating and candid conversation Anniina had with students, Tiina agreed to partner in redeveloping this course, which was consequently reformulated as a co-learning and inquiry platform for the instructor/researchers and students.

As researchers, educators, and the editors of this book, we assert that through engagements with art, performativity, and public/ activist pedagogy, we can jointly renegotiate how and when we might accept, combat, and resist dominant, discriminatory attitudes and behaviors present in our educational spaces and encounters. Our research and pedagogical interests focus on articulating art educa-tion concepts and practices that are sensitive to complex cultural, contextual, and self-disclosed definitions of gender and sexuality. In addition, in collaboration with the FAQ collective and our other students and colleagues, we aim to explore how the frequently redefined, dynamic gender and sexual identities are performed willingly and against one's preferences through research, teaching, learning, and everyday encounters with others.

Exploring these themes of knowing and not-knowing, per-sonal experiences and boundaries, privacy, intimacy with self and others, and what is shared and common become renegotiated and are important themes for our inquiry and the constant re-evaluation of our presence and contributions to educational scholarship. Liora

Bresler (2017) advocates for the not-knowing or re-knowing which have emerged as key elements for our shared inquiry projects and beyond the authors' research as they have emerged as key themes in the Master's thesis research conducted by some of the students involved in the project. Critical evaluations and deconstructions of normative attitudes, institutions, and practices in the pedagogical context are jointly brought to the nexus of learning founded on the dismissal of certainty and emphasis on critical wonder. In a sense, similarities can be found with the "pedagogical tinkering" advocated by Kalin and Barney (2014) and the performative assemblage antics of Lucero and Garoian (2016). As Lucero and Garoian state: "Our being and playing with and through each||other's utterances and actions constituted an exploratory, experimental, and improvisational event a pedagogical riffing and reformulation of our respective foundational understandings of art, teaching, and learning in accordance with the circumstances of what our students were saying and doing in the Course" (2016, n.p.).

The ontology of performative art works makes the studied material more interesting and unique, as anything gained from the piece is subjective and only exists in the moment. No form of documentation captures the learning, inquiry and contemplations, and the emotional and embodied experiencing of the shared art work as it plays out in the moments of performativity. Leavy (2017) discusses the role of empathy in fiction as arts-based research. Within the performative piece, rather than between the writer and readers, as discussed by Leavy, the boundaries and connections between the performer and participants/audience blur in various, often unpredictable ways. These may generate intertwined experiences of active participation and ownership or create further contradictions that may be fertile and fuel further thinking and action, or generate further disinterest, even dislike and rebellion. Despite these challenges, we believe that the elements of performance art bound to holistic experiencing and either intentional surrender or accidental altering of one's beliefs and values mean that performances and

performativity are substantial contributors to arts-based research in arts education.

Contemporary art works and the constantly evolving forms of contemporary artists provide access to coming-to-know and altering ways of knowing and doing (e.g. Rosiek, 2017), but also bring ethics of arts-based research to the forefront in a different and highly demanding manner. In contemplating the role of disruptive queer theory in art education, Cosier (2017) writes about doing, undoing, and redoing gender: "I am moved by an idea that disruptive queer femininities and masculinities may be productive in terms of expanding possibilities for gender identity" (p. 26) and continues, referring to Greene (1995), "As artists and educators, we have a drive to make work and do work that helps others imagine the world as if it could be otherwise" (p. 26).

To summarize how we perceive ourselves as researchers throughout this collective process might be to think of it as a hybrid lying somewhere between socially engaged art (Helguera, 2011), Charles Garoian's (1999) performance art pedagogy as political action, and arts-based research. Throughout our work, we try to avoid and be conscious of binaries and polarities (theory/practice, performance art/performing pedagogy, I/we-you/other) and rather work toward articulating more flexible and fluent understandings and practices for art education.

Pedagogical framework

As was stated at the beginning, we are but mere beginners in studying gender and sexualities and how these may become performed in art education and perhaps lead to the disruption of normative education, but we wholeheartedly support Cosier's (2017) assertion that we may only achieve some of the utopias we work toward that entail more just and equal societies if we dare to reflect on our processes openly and honestly. As researchers and pedagogues, we may have not achieved anything yet, but as our students emerge

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as leaders in thinking and working on these matters and begin to educate us, we feel we may be doing what we set out to study.

Pedagogy for us is collaboration in the learning group that changes and evolves throughout the process. Engaged pedagogy, discussed by bell hooks (1994), promotes the idea that teaching is a common project for students and teachers (Rekola and Vuorikoski, 2006). At first, everything was focused on a course of five credits in art education. After two rounds of working through these themes in the course, there were signs of responsive change. A few Master's theses were initiated that explored gender and queer issues and, at the same time, new doctoral students began their studies with research plans focused on queer theory and art. Learning grew beyond the context of the course into a broader project and took the shape of an art, research, and learning collective.

The pedagogical approach we based the course on included notions of radical democracy, feminist pedagogy, performative pedagogy, and public/critical arts-based pedagogy (e.g. Garoian, 1999; hooks, 1994, 2010; Sandlin, Burdick & Rich, 2016). These, we believe, provide a framework for exploring the potential for nonbinary (Sandlin & Letts, 2016; Kumashiro, 2000, 2001) and gender-aware art education. Community-based, context-sensitive, openly empathetic, and holistic approaches have created an environment that enables emotions, different experiences, and personal backgrounds to become visible and be heard through discussions, group work on pedagogical performances, and learning units that are based on public pedagogy and radical notions of democracy.

The hybrid discourse of art education and art create a special platform for reflective and critical learning. The course and all the activities conducted by the collective are seen as a research laboratory for both students and teachers. By referring to this as a laboratory, we mean that pedagogy, arts-based learning, and arts-based research aim at unified goals, furthering understanding in an accepting and exploratory culture and environment. Key feminist terms of empowerment and voicing (Rekola & Vuorikoski, 2006)

are sometimes utilized and interpreted through art practices, which means that discussions happen through both art and spoken communication. It is the presence of art and artistic modes of being in/with learning that generates room for subjectivity to meet and collide with political and theoretical notions. This combination of subjectivity, politics, theory, and caring for one another is a guiding principle in bell hooks' idea of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994, 2010; Rekola and Vuorikoski, 2006; Rantonen, 2000). Our strength as pedagogues is to facilitate and support this learning through art and performative, critical pedagogy.

Descriptions of the course

The aims and orientation of the course do not promise easygoing learning experiences, as learning is built by the community and each session depends on the commitment and attitudes of each of its members. Critical thinking in combination with an exploration of sensitive topics that are also deeply personal requires socio-emotional capacity in order to follow others' argumentation and maintain a friendly and accepting attitude even when facing disagreement (Tomperi, 2017), potential suppressed memories, or persistent experiences of bullying and discrimination. During this elective course, students of art education combine critical and theoretical thinking, workshops led by art professionals, artistic/performative work, and pedagogical practice (unit plans and educational materials) to explore the potential of rethinking gendered education. The structure combines pre-tasks (research texts, watching chosen films from a group of suggested films, written reflections that include personal accounts), intensive collaborative learning and work periods I and II, an independent and collective working period between the intensive periods, and a reflective postassignment period. Although the structure of the course may seem rather mundane, we, as the instructors, believe that a structure that is fairly firm provides the necessary framing for learning that is otherwise intentionally open

and reflective of the needs and strengths of each group. We have found that while the combination of art and performative pedagogy with theory and developing practical knowledge has tremendous potential for learning, equally present is an urgent sense of responsibility that is highly demanding of the learners as a group and its senior members, the instructors/researchers.

Although we form a learning community essential for creating a safe space for exploration, the students are seen as individuals with personal and shared, flexible learning goals. Contributions by each of the participating members are voluntary and the levels of engagement vary greatly. In general, the culture of this project is organic and open to anyone's personal needs. The participants of the course work through issues and themes that are time-sensitive and chosen as relevant to be processed. Students bring expertise from their personal lives and various interests in the themes relevant to the course. One of the key activities is to define an agreed-upon working terminology so that the group feels there is an operational language that is sensitive to the experiences of all participants. The course centralizes performativity as an organic structure through which individuals or groups of students are encouraged to critically, empathetically, and emotionally explore gendered and sexualized education as an unresolved puzzle. This approach is believed to encourage and lead students to emerge into exploring problematic themes as a form of inquiry. Thus, learning about gendered themes in education is seen as a form of research inseparable from curriculum theory, didactics, and critical, embodied pedagogy.

The traditional role of a teacher as an authority in knowledge carrying the aura of expertise in higher education has already changed. Educators still ought to be experts in their field, but more than delivering knowledge or skills, they design platforms for stimulating learning (Agnihothri & Merline, 2016) and continue to care for these platforms once initiated. In the context of the course, we perceive ourselves as senior co-learners who are responsible for facilitating schedules, resources, and materials. That is where we

clearly use power (Vuorikoski, Törmä & Viskari, 2004). Our choices for orientation, pre-course assigned readings, and optional films as well as designing the preassignment, the short essay, create an approach and an attitude, a direction for the course. Students' written short essays form the base for the whole course but these do not emerge from the assigned materials, nor do they appear from out of the blue: we are not innocent and our choices and contributions are understood to begin the sharing from the initial temporary orientation point of each person. Regardless of the power our students have, all the choices made for the course communicate the power of the educator (Saarinen, 2001) and this is what continues to steer our self-critical inquiry in creating the platforms and facilitating ethical and caring learning.

Our main role as educators or facilitators during the intensive five days we spend with our students is to guarantee the basis for a secure atmosphere to grow. At the beginning of the course, we ask the students to create rules for co-learning. Again, we are pre-active; we are the ones who ask the students to claim equal space. After that point, it is easier to become co-learners and renew these relations, but still we have already said in the course description that there will be three more tasks during the course. The grading for this course is pass–fail, so we have minimized the emphasis on evaluation, but still it is us who give the credits for learning.

As researchers and instructors on the course we are not neutral, but rather embodied, emotional, sensing, and feeling people like our students. Based on our experiences, we have learnt that in dialogical learning processes, there is always a point in the process where the teacher and students cannot share equal positions of power. Sometimes people share traumatic stories for the purpose of their personal growth or to reflect publicly to learn from the echo of others listening and accepting. Sharing means that these experiences and knowledge are given to others to carry, and sometimes this is hard. In the group, our role as educators is to manage the emotional culture and development so that personal and emotional

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sharing does not cross the limits of individuals or overwhelm the group's ability to work together. For us, soft and caring recalling is sometimes needed to maintain the balance between the need to be heard in order to learn and grow, and on the other hand, the need to create limits. This is by far the most challenging task in creating holistic, communal, and collaborative learning experiences. Whilst students may volunteer to listen and carry their peers' emotional stories, this never applies to the experiences of the educators. We do not mean to proclaim that we remain unknown and private in the process of collaborative learning, but that when we share something personal, we can never do this for our own purposes, but as an account that is relevant to the learning, whereas a student can, will, and should (if personally meaningful) be able to share for the purposes of their personal learning and growth. This is how the unequal becomes visible and tangible. Overall, we are relaxed and actively, emotionally present in the learning, but when the group faces difficult issues or the situation becomes highly emotional, our role is to assume gentle but firm power and to focus on facilitation. A democratic and collaborative learning culture is the hardest and often most rewarding experience for educators and students alike, but the challenge is that situations change fast and there is very little reaction time when a question is raised or contradictory, charged views are presented. This is why we ask students to commit beforehand by writing reflections on preassigned materials, as through these we are introduced to their ways of relating and perceiving.

After the course, some of the students have continued to undertake a Master's thesis on a topic they discovered during the course. The teacher-student role transitions into an advisor-thesis writer role. In the thesis process, it is not always easy to find a dialogical advising approach. Roles form in communication and continue to evolve as each of us repeatedly grows into and relearns these roles. Through these relationships, power relations often transform into dialogical relationships if both parties are willing and ready for this transition.

Conclusion and future plans

Our research, our teaching, and our students' thesis and dissertation projects together created a momentum, and the idea of a shared book was born. The closer we got to publishing, the greater our power grew as editors. We started the book project with an idea of a very democratic peer-to-peer process. As the timeline progressed, we made more and more decisions to reach goals and to keep up with the schedule. Yet, the more we assumed more practical, editorial decision-making authority, the more we felt we were learning from the members of our collective. It has been a great challenge for us to formulate the first sentences of this book. In fact, this chapter was written last, on the brink of the final deadline, and the truth is, we could not have written it before our students' chapters for the book were complete and our work as their mentors was temporarily completed, as they were all now teaching us up until the last comma of their papers had been fixed. Perhaps more than any previous project, we have been humbled by the generosity of our students, by the FAQ collective, and by the numerous other people who have contributed to the formulation of this book

The two words that best describe how we feel about this process are:

Thank you

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Aapo Raudaskoski, 2018

Feminism and Queer in Art Education

Aapo Raudaskoski

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Queer Should Be Here   2
– Queering Finnish Art Education

If stubborn sexism is the only thing that
keeps you from being an outcast pervert,
it has already failed in its task:
creating norms credits the outsiders.

Abstract

In this article, I argue that gender issues should be central to art education that aims to advance social justice in education, culture, and societies. Gradually discovering how little gender and queer are discussed in Finnish art education on a professional level, I find it important to explore why this is as well as to point out some of the key challenges in deconstructing gender. In the first part of the chapter, I share illustrative personal experiences of the workings of queer identity politics. Secondly, I look at how queer is avoided and dismissed as a topic, issue, and an essential element in education, even though it is often thought or claimed to be included. The implausible conceptualization of gender leads to a false emancipation, creating new power dichotomies. In the third section, I ask more precise questions about the conceptualization of sex and gender, and draw on Judith Butler's (1999) gender theory

to deconstruct the sex/gender division and the politico-ontological status of gender. Finally, I reflect on the state of crisis that a thorough unlearning and deconstructing might induce, and how this crisis of unknowing is vital in creating a way for anti-oppressive education.

Gender can be critical

My deep underlying motivation to work with gender issues and contribute to the movement has been accumulating throughout my whole life. As a child, I was often asked questions like "Why do you play with girls?" and "Are you a boy or a girl?" The latter troubled me the most: I felt as though it was supposed to make me feel inferior to others because I was not masculine enough in their eyes as an eight-year-old "male-bodied" child. But the truth was, I didn't understand what the question was about at all, and it startled me. Of course, I wasn't masculine, why would I be? Why would you ask these things from me? It seemed that others claimed to have knowledge about my gender that I didn't, and, at the same time, they bullied me with such questions, as if to catch me in the act of not complying, not doing what I was supposed to do with the gender assigned to me by a heteronormative society. The problem was that I did not have the words that I have now to describe my gender identity: *a genderqueer person*. This means that I identify neither as a man nor a woman, and that many parts of my gender and sexual identity are explicitly open to context sensitivity and in the vast majority of cases do not conform to the masculine-feminine or man-woman binaries. They are fluid social realities.

> One might wonder what use "opening up possibilities" finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is "impossible," illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate is likely to pose that question. (Butler 1999, viii)

For the cis-gendered reader, that is, for those whose gender identity matches their assigned sex, it might be hard to understand how the type of dominance of normative gender system that I described above has been repeated immeasurably during my life – everything from gendered dressing rooms, saunas and toilets, to mental health problems resulting from early experiences facing heterosexist attitudes – and how some of the situations have been especially revelatory, further clarifying my epistemic standpoint related to gender issues. In this context, standpoint epistemology means that the core of the heterosexist society can be observed more clearly if one stands, in one way or another, in a marginalized position, "left outside." When one constantly runs into the obstacles of a system not built for people like oneself, those obstacles are very plain to see.

I use the term heterosexism because of its inclusivity and logic compared to "homophobia" which, in my view, reflects the views shared in popular everyday discussion on sexuality as a distinct trait from gender. Heterosexism takes into account the workings of *compulsory heterosexuality* which creates normatively sexed and gendered settings differently in different cultural contexts, and underlines the fact that the most acute discrimination is targeted against those who break gender norms, including feminine men, masculine women, and all non-binary people.

One definitive turning point for my involvement occurred when I participated in the masters' course *Gender and Art Education*, which is the one course to ambitiously tackle the complex issues around gender and sexuality in the whole of the Aalto ARTS Art Education program. For me, it was a much-anticipated platform to look closely and reflect collectively, with a multitude of standpoints, on the complex issue. Visiting lecturers, consisting of artists, art professionals, and scholars, had worked at the junction of art education and gender. One of them had worked with gender-specific pedagogy for "boys" (that is, assumed boys) in another field of education. Since in visual art education, the researchers on the issue are very few and the course emphasizes performativity as a relevant point

of view, we listened to an expert from a sibling pedagogical field. During his lecture, the group discussed the problem of binary gender segregation in education, and I pointed out how this division leaves queer people on the margin or outside altogether: as a gender-non-conforming queer, I wouldn't know whether I belonged to a boys' dance group or a girls' dance group, and why. To my surprise, for some reason, he sneered and said "Come on, now," moving on with his presentation, thus completely ignoring the problematization of gender as a given ontological category that I had just raised. It should be noted that one might consider it a luxury to be able to do this – not all of us have the privilege of not listening, not having to justify one's point of view. This recalls countless similar situations in my life when gender assignation overruled my gender experience without any intelligent effort to justify itself facing the call-out. The attitude is supported by norms that present it as something natural, something that does not need explanation. However, in the context of the course, these norms were not as solid as elsewhere, and the situation became extremely awkward. Where I have learned to effectively and successfully cope with individual rejections like this, it is their multitude that further drives marginalization, reifies the power dynamics of compulsory heterosexuality, and continues its naturalization. Fortunately for me and others in the group, we later reflected on the incident together, and my experience was heard and felt by fellow students and faculty alike.

This has not been the only incident in my studies that has led to me questioning whether it is possible that many art educators have minimal awareness of the actual problems involved in what we call "gender issues." How do art educators, students and teachers, see, perceive, and conceptualize gender, and what do they make of it? The culture of gender discourse in my art education program has seemed vague, to say the least, and the one course mentioned above has been the only real platform to open up serious discussion to allow further questioning. The more one learns about contemporary gender studies, the more one misses the pivotal discourses

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in art education. Granted that as a result of the dialogic ideals of art education, there is an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance in the art education program at Aalto University, which is indeed helpful in creating room for queer. However, I assert that this almost self-evident acceptance is in fact not working toward emancipation, but instead creating evasion around issues that would cause severe political conflict if they were brought into open discussion.

Queer is avoided in art education

Do we, artists and educators, really agree on gender and sexuality? Is gender not, in some ways, an elephant in the room, when we talk about education-related problems such as power relations in schools, bullying, and inequality? Do art educators knowingly or unknowingly take part in discourses that obstruct the goals that we have explicitly set for ourselves (social justice, inclusion, equality), and further generate new ways of marginalization in society? To answer these questions, it is important to look into the premises that underlie different gender notions in Finnish art education. The discourse on the level of publications is, surprisingly, very scarce, with few exceptions in the past ten years in the main periodicals or publications in the field of Finnish art education. Although there have been a handful of Bachelor's and Master's theses that evoke gender in one way or another, they do not always do so in a critical way, and they do not seem to have entailed extensive further discussion in research publications. In the context of research, it remains vital to underline that talking about "boys" or "girls" is a different discourse altogether, as it begs the questions that operate on the level of gender production, gender ontology, and identity politics. Talking about boys and girls does not necessarily make it about gender. Strikingly, the prominent discourse of contemporary feminism and gender deconstruction that has in recent years been seen across the news media (the #MeToo campaign, marriage equality, transgender human rights violations), has not found consolidation

in art education, although several discussions seem to have been opened up over the years. Is it because we think that heterosexism does not touch us or the work we do? Is it because we think we already know how to deal with gender in a way that is sustainable and inclusive and promotes social equality?

Either active or passive silencing behavior to silence queer in Finnish art education prohibits important questions from being asked, dismisses real conversations from taking place, and bans educational and curriculum theory from evolution. But is the silence in fact that surprising? In the context of the United States, Adam J. Greteman (2017) has joined Ed Check (2004) and Dipti Desai (2003) in demanding a queer space in art education. In addition, the Big Gay Church collective has worked to open discussion through their interventions at the National Art Education Association Annual Meetings (Sanders, Cosier, Rhoades, Wolfgang & Davenport, 2013). One and a half decades after Check and Desai's accounts, queer is still avoided in education (Greteman, 2017). He writes that in addressing sexuality in classrooms, engagements fall roughly into three categories: 1) discussing sexuality as a curricular issue, 2) discussing sexuality as a student issue, and 3) discussing it as a teacher issue. He goes on to state that these viewpoints neglect the possibility of addressing sexuality and difference as a way of helping produce queer subjects (Greteman, 2017). Homosexuality, for example in the context of art history, is discussed by some teachers, but gender and sexuality as identity politics are left untouched.

In a situation where the mere subject of sexuality is largely avoided in education as being volatile, we should not be set back by the fact that it is discussed in a way that excludes sexually critical possibilities, such as students *becoming queer*, for fear of political dissent. As shown below, in the Finnish national curricula, the above-mentioned categories can be found either explicitly or implicitly, and as Greteman (2017) finds is often the case, the focus is on raising awareness of sexual and/or gender diversity, thus hoping to contribute to a change in education. As Kumashiro (2000) notes,

this type of focus has several weaknesses which do not enable progressive education in gender and queer, thus not yielding further social justice. The approach assumes that raised awareness leads to transformation, which it does not necessarily do, as it might just reaffirm the rift between norms and margins. While the new Finnish national curricula (Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2014; EDUFI, 2015) allow and encourage teachers to deal with diverse sexual identities, there is no guarantee whatsoever that queer will be included in the way that Greteman proposes, as an open-ended category of sexual meaning and transformation. This means that it is possible to disregard gender politics, countless queer realities and the dynamics of gender production altogether, by just adding a sort of disclaimer when lightly touching on the subject of marginalized identities: "And then there are gays and what have you." This type of evasion undermines the project of social justice as a whole, creating a new power dichotomy, a fake emancipation.

The Finnish national curricula for compulsory basic education (EDUFI, 2014) and the national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (EDUFI, 2015) acknowledge gender and sexuality as an integral part of education. As documents that draw carefully balanced political and pedagogical guidelines for education, both curricula work on an abstract level. However, in the national curricula for compulsory basic education (EDUFI, 2014), advocating "gender equality" (p. 18) and learning about gender diversity are mentioned explicitly in the part that clarifies the larger societal purpose of the document, and in the core curriculum for upper secondary schools, the goals are mentioned more superficially: "understanding the diversity of gender and sexuality creates room for teaching that is aware of gender and equality issues" (EDUFI, 2015, p. 12). Studying these documents, I am led to ponder if this an invitation to break the silence around the politics of gender production. And further: Will raising awareness produce change?

The abstract terming of the text is undoubtedly intentional, allowing different teachers to work in ways that are supported by

the material context of their work. However, as progressive as the new curricula are in dealing with multidisciplinary learning and many other contemporary societal challenges, they do not draw a clear picture of "gender." It is worth noting that in the Finnish language, there is no sex/gender distinction on a lexical level, but the distinction is made semantically by referring to "biological sex" (*biologinen sukupuoli*) on one hand and "social gender" (*sosiaalinen sukupuoli*) on the other. Because of the lack of substance, "gender" is still easily understood as the socially constructed counterpart of the "sex," popularly as two mutually exclusive categories: men and women. Therefore, "gender equality" also refers to equal rights for men and women, excluding once again those outside the binary gender system. For instance, the curricula for compulsory basic education is explicitly founded on the Finnish constitution and the so-called Equality Act (EDUFI, 2014, p. 14) which was originally a specific law to enforce equality between men and women, and is still literally named "the law on equality between men and women," but also contains some updated notions of gender as a socially constructed identity (Equality Act, 1986). The Equality Act, like the national curricula, indirectly but strongly indicates a binary norm of heterosexually justified and normative gender, and other gender or sexual possibilities are added onto this structure as a sort of feminist disclaimer. As mentioned above, gender production and queer possibilities cannot be properly reached through this approach (Kumashiro, 2000; Wolfgang & Rhoades, 2017).

The important work of second-wave feminists or gender-specific feminists has been to examine, expose, and change the power structures of this male-female and men-women dichotomy in general. Since the wave model is a limited description of feminist movements and theory and often includes canonized Western texts, underrating the widespread feminist beliefs that have been documented at different times, in different parts of the world (Mikkola, 2017; Freeman, 1996), I supplement the term "second-wave feminism" with "gender-specific feminism," as it is generally understood

to apply to subjects that are called "women" in distinction from "men." In the gender-specificity of the second wave, the dichotomies themselves prevailed. They were, however, contested as early as in the early 1990s by Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity (Butler, 1999 [original 1990]; Mikkola, 2017), giving rise to more critical perspectives on gender, such as queer theory, in contemporary feminism. Since then, gender-specific issues have become more complicated, as the distinction between biological "sex" and social "gender" is itself discursive (Butler, 1999). In light of this complexity, it is only logical that if gender-based inequality is to be examined and fought, the dynamics of gender production and performativity must necessarily be examined in the process. For this reason, I continue to further explore these arguments in the next section of this article through queer theory, which provides an extensive framework for this contemplation.

There are revelatory examples of how simple gender specificity creates epistemological problems. Also, there have been publications and writings, for example, on topics such as "why art classes do not interest boys?" (Vira, 2007; Vira & Pohjakallio, 2011). From the point of view of queerfeminist philosophy of science, this type of research question is inadequate for producing any knowledge concerning what the problem at hand has to do with gender, since it already contains the premise that there is a group of subjects called "boys" who have clear attributes, such as a certain type of social security number or physical traits distinct from groups who are not "boys," and who are not interested in art classes. It is important to understand that while the phenomenon of not being interested may certainly exist, what is not justified is the application of the term that implies a normative grouping of "boys" into that category. There are, for example, students that we call "boys" but who are indeed very much interested in art classes. Conversely, there are students that we do not call "boys" but who also are not interested in art classes.

What can be seen here is the power of discourse producing differentiated gender positions that effectively hide their genealogy in focusing on the wrong question. This is often done in the name of statistical simplification, to produce "practical" knowledge, which is, of course, a grave mistake in such qualitative issues that are extremely sensitive to social context and that also have a complex cultural and political history. Why is the discourse *already* subscribed to the notion that being "a boy" plays a central part in disinterest toward art education? Why are the following questions not asked: *who* is not interested in art classes? What in fact do they have in common? Is gender production involved, and how? The important question that is far too often left unanswered is whether there even exists an attribute that justifies the above-mentioned focus on a sample that we, for some reason, call "boys." Questions of this sort could prevent us getting stuck in the loop of hegemonic gender production that often stirs the media in all the wrong ways and reinforces sexist accounts. In Finland, for instance, this discourse has given rise to the "worry talk" that inadvertently places boys as a monolithic group in danger of becoming socially excluded because of their poor performance in school situations. I often find myself wondering: Why do we need to know, what "boys" think of art classes? Is there an underlying supposition that "boys" have certain qualities that perhaps need to be touched or enriched by art education? Why is it more important to know why "boys" are not (allegedly) interested in art classes than to know how lack of interest in art education intersects with gender?

In the following, I argue that an intersectionally informed theory of gender production should – at least for now – be evoked where gender issues in art education are discussed. This means that the identity politics of gender and sexuality as well as class, ethnicity, ability, etc. are to be considered in conjunction. Different marginal positions may share important similarities in how they are produced, and my personal standpoint on gender sets several restrictions on using my experiences in other cultural contexts,

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where gender might be constructed very differently. However, in the scope of my standpoint, the core observation is that if gender is to be understood as a manifold field of identity processes, as contemporary gender studies and the national curricula in many cases imply, it is simply not plausible to step back into heteronormative dynamics without justifying the exclusive simplification. As Butler (1999) argues, this type of feminist thought is self-defeating, as it re-creates oppressive structures in the name of emancipation. However, this is what often happens. Supposedly informed and educated discussion about gender often becomes flattened talk about "boys and girls" or gender-specific issues, such as criticizing stereotypical gender roles and discussing their impact on heterosexual cis-gendered students' lives. Agreeing to Greteman's (2017) views on how queer should be included in teaching – not merely as a victimized, potentially at-risk group of queer students whose human rights have been stomped over by heteronormative society, often to the extent of them being forced to live most of their lives in "war zones" (Check, 2004), but also as a diverse sexual and gender culture of its own right, truly equal to normative heterosexual positions – I propose that queer could work as a context for more inclusive and sensitive teaching.

Queer in question and possible ways toward anti-oppressive education

How is gender then to be discussed, deconstructed and queered? Is there a possibility of settling on a sustainable gender ontology or gender politics?

Decades after *gender simplicity* was irrevocably contested, it seems quite clear that research questions that try to produce knowledge about issues related to gender need to take a stand on what gender is, and how it is produced in a specific cultural context. Knowledge about the social and power dynamics of a certain gender cannot be researched simply through a gender-specific framework that lies on implausible premises and generalizations.

The relationship of ontology and politics desperately needs to be examined. I argued above that in order to produce relevant knowledge on gender, the focus should be shifted from a framework that takes an uncritical gender binary as a theoretical starting point to a framework that goes beyond, and looks into the actual situated contexts where gender is produced, repeated, and performed. What is taken for granted in gender specificity needs to be thoroughly deconstructed in order to find the right questions.

For this, I find the series of compelling arguments Butler presents in *Gender Trouble* (1997, originally 1990) very informative. Although written almost 30 years ago, the philosophical shift has not quite been popularized on the level it would merit, even though the theory is widely appreciated in academic contexts. Butler's arguments are very analytical and often abstract, and as such they are part of a powerful deconstruction of gender that works its way through some substantial Western structuralist theories, such as Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship, and their underlying heteronormative assumptions in gender production. In my view, Butler offers valuable and strikingly logical alternatives to gender discourses that are shaped by heteronormativity – from the production of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and melancholist sexual positions to the institution of marriage and phallogocentric meaning economies. The analytical approach makes use of a rationalist language in order to point out the weaknesses of the above-mentioned theories, and I find this method works well in deconstructing their claims of universality. However, Butler's theory is demanding for the reader, as it involves dense unlearning and questioning and is sometimes difficult to comprehend and apply on the level of the language. It has been criticized for overly obscure language and unclear propositions; although, as Butler has later explained, this type of language is partly intentional in the reworking of the heteronormative complex of gendered language. However, her actual main arguments have become canonical in contemporary gender studies.

The first of the arguments that seems very relevant when considering the problem of falling back into a heteronormative gender system even after some apparent criticism is the denouncing of the sex/gender dichotomy. As discussed above, the national curricula, and the larger discourses of gender equality it cites, state in a way that gender multiplicity is acknowledged but simultaneously use vocabulary that excludes genuine diversity and creates a rift between normalized subjects and others. In my view, this problem could be seen as an extension of the sex/gender division that Butler discusses (1999, see specifically pp. 8–12). Since sex is still popularly understood biodeterministically as an unambiguous biological reality and as such immutable, the notion of gender has emerged and evolved into its political counterpart. But if there exist discursive processes that produce "sex," it is no longer immutable, and turns out to be nothing but unambiguous: "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler, 1999, pp. 9–10). These discursive practices actually exist, as Butler reveals, and they are discussed throughout the book by analyzing a variety of theory on subjectivization, such as that of Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva, to critiques such as those of Foucault, Irigaray, and Wittig.

To unpack Butler's argument a bit further, Mikkola (2017) writes that Butler's (1999) arguments against sex/gender division can be seen as twofold: On the one hand, a gender notion that implicitly defines the group of, for example, women, cannot take into account the full multiplicity of the subjects that are bunched by this simplification – relying on a shared identity category of "women" makes the category itself exclusive. On the other hand, Butler claims that this kind of account of gender is not descriptive but normative. For feminists to define the subject of feminism as "women," the problem is, they implicitly come to define what

a woman is, thus creating new, exclusionary gender norms that leave out many parts of the actual, existing embodied multiplicity of subjects that face oppression.

On a more general level, it is traditionally thought that "sex" leads to a "gender." We do this by assigning sex to newborn or unborn children, and then, knowingly and unknowingly, raising them to apply certain gender norms that align in one way or another with the historical continuum of that sex. While it seems clear today that sex does not necessarily lead to any specific gender at all, because as a social construct, gender is contingent, it is important to understand that Butler (1999) drives the deconstruction even further. The normativity of gender should be seen as the cause and not the effect, as it usually is. We tend to see bodies through gender-normative lenses by picking certain parts of body to form an entity of "sex" (just as we picked individual subjects to form the group of "women" in the earlier paragraph). This selection is not void of discourse even though we tend to think so: "Some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body" (Butler, 1999, p. 95). That is to say, the body, that was supposed to be biological, unambiguous and immutable, is indeed inadvertently constructed to match gender norms that are by no means biological. The traditionally assumed causality that a prediscursive sexed body somehow adopts a gender identity is reversed, and it is revealed that sex is discursive: sex actually *is* gender. Just as selecting individuals to form the domain of "women" leaves the actual, existing multiplicity out, narrowing bodies and anatomies to form the domain of "sex" simplifies what should not be simplified, only in the name of conserving heterosexuality as a normative basis of sex. The real multiplicity of sexual anatomy or biology is dismissed. Realizing this, in my view, effectively undoes the justification for binary sex and calls for a substantial deconstruction in any gender-sensitive context, and hopefully beyond.

In addition to the dissolution of the sex/gender dichotomy, another central notion is the performative nature of gender. Butler writes that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1999, p. 45). This crystallizes what gender is: Not a reality in itself but rather a masquerade, a comedy, a performance that is repeated over and over again, directed by the power structures that gender assignation and norms wield. It is a conglomeration of the political and the ontological, whose very terms and interconnectedness Butler (1999) explores. A particularly revealing context for the performance is drag, where gender expressions are parodically accentuated: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (Butler, 1999, p. 187). In other words, there is no "reality" of gender, a natural dimension, but gender is a reality that is fake. In consequence, all gender expressions are as genuine as they are fake. This idea has immense consequences for the more conservative ways of conceptualizing gender: in admitting the contingency of gender, all gender expressions become "fluid" in the sense that gender does not *ontologically* simply remain from one context to another but rather is constructed specifically in every discrete cultural context. This does not mean, of course, that someone cannot remain in their preferred gender identity, but it recognizes the theoretical possibilities behind the consolidation of all gender identities. However, as long as the gender norms are in place, the existence of these possibilities is denied.

How, then, to deal with gender in everyday situations, knowing that there often remains a lot to be deconstructed? *Gender Trouble* was written the year I was born, and in a seemingly odd way, I have lived my life as if I were aware that this type of theory existed, looking at gender as a performative social aspect and performing very "inconsistent" gender roles myself, fluidly. For a person whose reality is filled with gender non-normativity, unlearning the het-

erosexist norms and language comes almost as a deliverance. But where Butler's theory works as a necessary deconstruction toward veritable gender equality, it is perhaps more difficult to construct than to deconstruct, to *say something* about gender. This must be why gender deconstruction is often described as inducing crisis in those who have not had as many possibilities to reflect on gender production as non-binary subjects – why deconstruct if you are left with nothing at all? However, this crisis is not something to avoid or to be afraid of, as it is a necessary step for revealing what is already there and thus liberating oneself and potentially many others while understanding the genealogies behind gender production. Kumashiro (2000) writes that "learning about oppression and unlearning one's worldview can be upsetting and paralyzing" (p. 44). Unlearning may cause a shock and lead to stubborn clinging to what was familiar before, in order to avoid crisis. This happens to all of us when facing internalized oppression or being called out on our privileges, and it often becomes obvious while questioning gender norms – especially when deconstructing gender in the way Butler suggests. Helping resolve the crisis, both in oneself and in others, is a pedagogical challenge that educators should undertake boldly instead of avoiding the deconstruction. Otherwise the individual resistance, shame, political correctness, and dissonance pose a significant threat to the advancement of social justice on a more broad, cultural level.

It is understandable, however, how demanding the process of solving the crisis actually is. Butler's (1999) arguments are hard to digest because they contrast with everyday perception, and while deconstructing gender politics, they actually touch our sense of gender ontology. While modern Western thought often suggests settling questions with definitive answers, deconstruction alone does not resolve the problem of failing emancipation. If the rug is pulled from under one's feet by pointing out that gender is performative and thoroughly discursive, it is difficult not to get up straight away but to let the confusion actually have an impact on oneself. However,

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learning to live with open possibilities and uncertainty is what queer insists on – and this is central. If gender is thought of as a performative action, something that one does and not something that one is, it is, in consequence, contingent and full of endless possibilities for everyone, and not just for certain marginalized minorities. In search of what I call a "sustainable gender ontology," we need to focus on inscribing empty room for queerness, enhance unlearning even more, and start embracing the emerging queer possibilities. Wolfgang and Rhoades (2017) use the portmanteau "Fagnostics" to describe a pedagogy that embraces all possible non-normative sexual and gender identities, appropriating the term fag and combining it with the philosophical approach of "accepting the *unknown* and *unknowable* as valuable parts of our experience, our understanding and our growth" (p. 74). I see this unknowability as working as a counterweight to the tendency toward philosophical realism and rationalism prominent in Western modern thought. A sustainable gender would then be one that has thoroughly incorporated and accepted the presence of the unknown. This unknown is central to the concept of queer, as Muñoz (2009) writes: "Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (p. 1).

Kumashiro (2000) points out that in order to endure the open-endedness of identity and step away from the normative foci of self, we should deconstruct the Self/Other binary (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 45). As this is not an easy thing to do, he tentatively mentions Buddhism as one possible inspiration or insight: "[J]ust as feminist and queer theorists made use of certain aspects of psychoanalysis (while troubling its weaknesses, such as its sexism and heterosexism), so too can researchers make use of certain aspects of Buddhism (and trouble its weaknesses, such as its sexism or the prescriptiveness of the 'eightfold path'" (p. 47). I find this very interesting, as I have had some powerful experiences with zen Buddhism and zazen (sitting meditation) and the way it approaches the Self/Other distinction that supports the idea of it being an illu-

sionary dichotomy. As Kumashiro (2000) writes, "the different ways Buddhism conceptualizes oppression, the self, desire and change remain relatively unexplored by educational researchers" (p. 47). I have explored zen Buddhism on a practical level not to rationalize but to learn ways from which to face the uncertainty that deconstruction entails. I am by no means an expert on zen Buddhism, but suffice to say, my interest in zen is not purely theoretical but mostly practical, and my interest in the logic of zen and its paradoxes is fairly new. In a famous account of zen for the Western mind, Philip Kapleau (2000, originally 1965) writes that the theoretical approach to zen is commonly known to be academically intriguing but not helpful at all in the actual practice of zen – or even "downright hazardous" (p. 96). This is one of the problems that lie at the heart of dealing with deconstructed states of mind in a fruitful way: The rational conceptualization of those states may seem inevitable but perhaps it actually is not; rather it takes the place of open, holistic experience, that could be epistemically more helpful. I find it interesting how the seemingly irrational logic of zen resists traditional rationalist education. What seems like a paradox or a situation that simply cannot be may contain important revelations of the problems of the conceptualization process itself. Even for someone who does not lead the demanding lifestyle required for the rigorous practice of zen, it may still be an inspiration to dwell on the paradoxes we encounter in gender deconstruction, and develop the patience and courage to encounter the unknown possibilities of these paradoxes. Finding a way to dissolve the resistance they arouse in us may prove to be crucial in building an attitude of openness and uncertainty. Applying zen in anti-normative education is a method that is still to be explored, as Kumashiro (2000) notes, but it seems to have interesting intersections with the concept of queer.

Conclusions

I argue that gendering phenomena in a traditional way consents to unacceptable harm not only to those who do not conform to the rules of compulsory heterosexuality but also to those who try to conform. The rituals of this cultural heterosexuality and the gender system it produces – that is, the binary of men and women – take up resources and spawn discourses that affect all areas of life. Therefore, it is not a simple question of the victimization of assumed "outsiders" or division into segregate marginalized groups. If gender is a rule-based normative dimension of identity, as Butler (1999) suggests, and as the experiences I described earlier in the text suggest, it has logical consequances on identity politics in general, and it deeply affects everyone as individuals and communities and societies as whole.

In this article, I based my thought majorly on Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999, originally published 1990) to deconstruct gender in a way that creates room for queer possibilities in the concept of gender itself, and for those embodied subjects that are necessarily left out of most of the normative accounts of gender that have been published in Finnish art education. Even if the arguments of deconstruction are hard to grasp and mostly consider Eurocentric gender structures, they successfully critique the traditional ways of constructing dichotomies such as men/women, sex/gender and Self/Other. In my view, this type of questioning and opening up possibilities is necessary for all education that claims to be founded on creating equality and social justice. This is done in theory many times, but in practice, it often stumbles upon our own identity crisis and resistance that only help us to sustain and promote the privileged epistemological and political position of the Self. As an important step toward a more anti-oppressive society, we need to explore ways to develop our individual and cultural abilities to embrace the unknowability, the queer, in all identity politics.

As an art educator who identifies as a genderqueer person but who has experienced what it is to remain unintelligible and

misconstructed in the eyes of normative society, I propose that it is urgent to thoroughly problematize gender – otherwise any efforts to advance social justice may simply be in vain, as we constantly take part in the type of heterosexist gender production that not only completely abandons a significant proportion of the population but also fails to serve all people. Gender is simply a social dimension that every educator, if not everyone who is part of our society, should have a not only reflective but an activist stance on. Failing to discuss and process gender and sexuality at the roots of their cultural production does not enable an anti-oppressive change in society. Writing this text is an act of making my reflexive process partially available to others, as I connect my epistemological standpoint to feminist and queer theory and pedagogy. From here on, through subsequent texts I move toward articulating the various possibilities of theorizing, concretizing, and embodying more sustainable gender politics in art education.

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Shadow Superheroes   3

Introduction

In this text, I explore queer culture and my own experiences before and after becoming a part of it, and draw attention to the fluidity of gender expressions in the LGBT community and its individuals, and the struggles of living in the margins of the dominant culture, while maintaining one's own kind of existence – usually in secret. Living in the margins could provide invaluable perspectives about the status quo, and this is something I think is really not fully utilized as a pedagogical opportunity to learn, grow, and change the normative society. From very early on in their lives, queer individuals are double agents, with one foot in the heteronormative culture and the other foot somewhere in the shadows. A position where you are a kind of outside spectator of heteronormative society can reveal unique points of view. I propose that this marginalized position can provide invaluable perspectives about the status quo, exposing a fertile opportunity to learn, grow, and change normative cultures and society.

Being a gay man, lesbian, or transgendered person does not automatically mean that you will not adopt attitudes of the

predominant culture. Many gay men, for example, suffer from internalized homophobia – or heterosexism – which expresses itself as low self-esteem, depression, and self-hatred, and there are many of us gay men who have very strict views on how a man should behave and look. In my opinion, the heteronormative culture, and the masculinity it produces, is the main root of the oppression and possible self-hate of LGBT people.

In the first half of this text, I define the term queer and focus on the fact that many gay men identify with strong women and idolize them, even before becoming part of a larger community of queers. The latter half of the text explores some of the positive and progressive ways in which gender is manifested in queer community, and examines challenges caused by heteronormative culture. Another function of this text is to illuminate some popular aspects of gay culture that are known, recognized, and widely reappropriated by mainstream culture, but sometimes without a deeper understanding and without a historical or social context. The thread that runs through and connects the various themes central to this text is gender expression in queer community and its potential for versatility and diversity.

Queer context

Gender is one of the strongest concepts in most societies. One of the first questions to a parent of a newborn baby is: *is it a boy or a girl?* Most of us dress, talk, and gesture as men or women, and we interpret the actions of others through gender. In heteronormativity, gender is classified into two opposite and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine. These two genders are naturalized, and it is often assumed, sometimes demanded, that sex and gender, along with, sexuality align, i.e. a woman appears feminine, has certain character traits and certain types of genitals, and is attracted to men. What is considered normal for one gender might be considered abnormal for the other: this kind of classification is called the

gender binary. However, according to theorist Judith Butler (1999), there is no biological basis or any other factor that manifests itself as gendered behavior. It is actually the other way around: identity is constructed by the repetition of those expressions which are thought to be the consequence of a gender identity. This identity is not so much a self-proclaimed identity, but a consequence of rigid gender norms. In other words, gender is performative, a construction for which there is no original. However, this repetition is not automatic: there is always the possibility of subversive acts. As an example, Butler defines drag and cross-dressing as subversive acts that parody gender. In cross-dressing, a man dressing up as a woman, or a woman dressing up as a man, are constructs, where the first gender is thought to be real and the latter imitation or mimicry, but according to Butler all gender identities are imitation.

Visuality is an important aspect of our culture, and as art educators, one of our responsibilities is to look critically at our (visual) culture and, in the context of gender and LGBT people, to deconstruct normative representations of gender and sexuality. Studying visual culture often equates to studying representations (Rossi, 2007). Representation involves a sign or a group of signs that expresses or represents something else, through which we understand and perceive the world. Representations dictate how we are seen and how we see others (Lahti, 2002), and those who make and shape cultural representations possess cultural power. According to Stuart Hall (2002), representations are open to many interpretations, although paradoxically their function is to give one primary meaning. Representations that deviate from the normative meanings can be found in all cultural material, if you seek them out.

"Queer" is a term that was appropriated by the gay rights movement in the late 1960s which was previously used only pejoratively against sexual and gender minorities. Nowadays, queer can be used to describe LGBT people, or in a broader sense, anyone or anything that rejects traditional gender identities, including gay, lesbian, and transgendered identities. In academic contexts,

such as queer studies or literary studies, queer is used to describe horizons, interpretations, and art works that refer outside of all known identities.

Queer theory is a field of critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies, and has been most prominently influenced by the work of Judith Butler (1999), Jack Halberstam (1998) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), among others. Queer theory challenges the idea that gender is part of the essential self, and examines sexual acts and identities as social constructions, both by looking at culture from a queer perspective and by theorization on queer itself.

In the context of queer theory, different identities are not seen as binaries, but instead, both straight and nonstraight sexualities are based on complex networks of norms (Hekanaho, 2010; Karkulehto, 2011); in addition to gender and sexuality, queer theory considers dimensions of age, class, and ethnicity (Rossi, 2008). Queer theory dismantles static concepts and identities, challenges heteronormativity and its naturalness, and builds up new identities that are constructed with the same language and within the same discourses as those identities it attempts to resist. However, it is proposed that it is worthwhile forming new queer identities, as new representations and identities cause cracks in the hegemony, which can only be protested within the existing structures. Queer identities cannot by definition be stable and clearly defined, and they need not be. In this sense, queer is more about deconstructing identities than an identity in itself. (Wolfgang & Rhoades, 2017; Karkulehto, 2011).

It is important to understand that queer identities or interpretations are not arbitrary or imaginary. Queer can be found if you know where and how to look; it is and has always been in all cultural productions. Queer resides in the cracks in heteronormativity, which are inevitably formed, as idealized genders and sexualities can never be reproduced perfectly, but are always imperfect imitations. Defining queer is not easy and does not have to be; queer as a term

eludes stable categories and definitions. The power and meaning of queer is in the antinormative, and it is, above all, a critique of all socially constructed identities (and all identities *are* socially constructed) (Benshoff, 2002; Rosenberg, 2004; Karkulehto, 2011). Because of its fluid nature and resistance to set boundaries, queer is often defined as "a zone of possibilities" (Edelman, 1994). In this text, I use the term queer to refer to LGBT people's identities that incorporate a dimension of the indescribable, and in the broader sense, as a concept or an action: queer can be used as a noun, adjective and a verb (Karkulehto, 2011).

She's Madonna ... and Tom, too

In 1991, I was 15 and had my first glimpses of gay culture via television. In that year, two heavily gay documentaries were released, and also shown on Finnish television. *In Bed with Madonna* follows Madonna, her backup singers, and mostly gay dancers on the Blonde Ambition Tour; *Daddy and the Muscle Academy* is a documentary about the life and career of *Tom of Finland*.

Watching *In Bed with Madonna* had a strong impact on me. Even though for some reason I did not make the connection that those – mostly effeminate – guys touring with her were different kinds of boys, just like me, I was certainly captivated and enchanted by their special mannerisms and temperaments. I already knew I liked other boys, and I had heard the term "homosexual," but I didn't realize I was one. To be more specific: I did not think I was gay, nor did I think I was *not* gay, instead I was not thinking about it at all. I just knew I was *different*. The most fascinating person in that documentary – even more than those peculiar dancer guys – was the leading lady herself. Like many little gay boys all over the world before and after me, I fell in love – and most importantly – identified with this bold and strong woman, who seemed to say "fuck you" to the rules of mainstream gender and sexual expression. In my world, she was the first person to break gender roles, at least in the main-

stream. She was also one of the first people I physically identified with. As a teenager, I never compared myself to other boys – I felt too different from them – but Madonna, with her strong physique, seemed to transcend gender, even though she had curly, blonde hair and big breasts. I felt that as a performer, she was kind of in drag, a woman performing as another type of woman.

During my teenage years, I did have a "straight" phase. I was infatuated with girls in my class and had romantic fantasies where I rescued them from distress. But sometimes it was I who was lost in the woods and they who rescued me. Occasionally, there was also a kiss. When masturbating, I – of course – only thought about other boys and things I had seen in the school gym locker rooms. So, it wasn't *really* a straight phase, was it?

If Madonna and her queer dancers were something I identified with, that did not really happen with Tom of Finland men, but I was definitely turned on by them. All those big bulges in their underwear or leather pants, and those titillating, erotic situations and configurations in his drawings. Sometimes it is hard for a gay boy to know if you are interested in a man because you want them or want *to be* like them.

Gay Icons and fluidity of gender identifications

When I was a teenager, I loved movies and mostly identified with female movie characters.

I could relate to characters like Ellen Ripley from the *Alien* movies, Catherine Tramell from the erotic thriller *Basic Instinct*, and Ada McGrath, main character of *The Piano*. Although these characters are very different than each other, they all have common traits – they are outsiders, and most importantly, they refuse to give in to gender norms – so, in many ways, they are queer characters. Ellen Ripley is one of the first female action heroes, managing to be both soft and emotional while working a flame thrower as well as any man – and, of course, being the last to survive. Her mascu-

linity had a quality that made me relate to it. Compared to Ripley, Catherine Tramell is a very different representation of a cinematic female character. She is a highly intelligent and extremely beautiful femme fatale, a bisexual psychopath very much in charge of her own destiny and sexuality – qualities, a young gay boy can only dream of cultivating. Ada McGrath is peculiar and stubborn. She has lost her ability to speak and communicates through playing her piano; her isolation and inability to translate her being to the outside world had a strange familiarity.

Even though I consider myself a gay *man*, I have always identified more with women than men, as have many other gay boys and men. I can only assume part of it is because femininity is a more mobile construct; even though women are oppressed and controlled in many ways, they are also allowed to show emotions and express themselves in many ways men are not, masculinity being more rigid. Here, I am obviously talking about heteronormative concepts of femininity and masculinity, which are tightly glued to being either a woman or a man – a connection, that, of course, does not have to exist. It is necessary to acknowledge that masculinity does not belong only to heterosexual men and that it is not solely produced by them. In addition, women and non-normative individuals generate different masculinities (Rossi, 2003).

While idolizing and identifying with someone is a personal experience, some generalizations can be made. In heteronormative identification, gender can be seen as one of the major factors, i.e. men identify with men, women identify with women. In other words, heteronormativity relies on the idea of two *opposing* genders, which should, as social roles, overlap as little as possible. In queer identifications, the dimensions of gender are something different, and partially unexplainable, taking the definition-defying nature of queer into account. In addition to gender, sexuality is also often considered to be a central factor in identification, both as agents and objects of gazes, emotions, and desires (Rossi, 2003). Some identities and representations can enable identification, even if they

are far from our own ideals or our perception of ourselves or our own body, as in the case of gay men identifying with female movie characters or performers. Kaja Silverman (1996), an American art historian and critical theorist, describes these kinds of identities and representations as "good enough." Finding representations that are good enough requires you to have an eye trained to perceive representations outside the dichotomy of ideal and failed gender (Silverman, 1996; Rossi, 2003).

Instead of masculine (male) athletes, many young gay boys idolize famous women. For a long time, homosexual men have adored strong women, and different generations have raised as gay icons the likes of Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, Cher, Madonna, and many others. How do so many of us end up idolizing women, even the very same ones, before we are exposed to gay culture? Female gay icons are usually witty and beautiful, and always talented. They reflect vulnerability, hidden behind the strong exterior. Under all that glamour and glitz might be pain and sorrow, sometimes tragedy intertwined with humor. Gay icons do not usually yield to traditional women's roles, but instead live on their own terms, and because of this, they are treated as outsiders.

I suggest that as gay men grow up in a heteronormative culture, we learn that in order to love a man and have him love you back, you are required to adopt a certain role. This position is that of a woman, as there are scarcely any representations of love between two men. So we observe our female friends and family, see movies of straight love, one after another, and figure out: that must be my role. Historically, women and gay men share the same kind of socially oppressed position, and this is one more factor that ties us together (Kaartinen, 2004; Karkulehto, 2004). Many gay icons are also survivors and provide a positive and relatable role model for queer individuals, who often struggle in a society that is hostile toward them.

In the context of media representations, many of these adored women, whether famous singers and actors, or fictional

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characters, are *fantastic*. The term fantastic refers to something that is the opposite of realistic, in other words, unreal, and is used in academic contexts, such as psychoanalytical theory, cultural studies, and queer theory, sometimes closely tied up with queer. Harry Benshoff (2002) has suggested that some genres of cinema are, in themselves, queer, like drag and cross-dressing in Butler's example of subversive acts, that reveal the performative nature of gender. Horror movies, sci-fi, film noir, and musicals, among others, build unreal worlds, where queer forces can roam free. They are imitating reality by creating an alternative world, and thus represent reality subversively (Benshoff, 2002; Butler, 1999). It makes perfect sense then, that the queer audience can find something relatable and familiar in these fantastic characters and worlds. Biddy Martin (1994) believes that the charm of queer lies in the way it suggests existence without limitations. According to him, this causes a fear of normality at the core of queer, which can sometimes make us forget that we are regular people with everyday problems (Martin, 1994). The connection between women and gay men has been known for a long time and also used as a tool to represent gay characters at times when presenting homosexuality was unpopular. Authors and playwrights have given female characters traits through which a gay audience could recognize these characters as gay (men). In literature and theater, homosexuality has been referred to through the themes of shame, guilt, depression, imprisonment, and suffering (Kekki, 2010).

Shame, shame, shame

In 1995, at the age of 19, I moved to Helsinki to study. In contrast to a few years before, I knew I was a homosexual, and had even had my first boyfriend in my hometown. Although on the surface level, I did not seem to have any issues with being gay, I had some prejudices toward gay culture. I remember one of my new friends in Helsinki asking if we should go to DTM, the biggest gay club in

Helsinki at that point. I told him I did not want to go to that kind of place. I had some vague mental images of men with beards and leather jackets dancing tango, like some caricature scene from The Blue Oyster gay bar in *Police Academy*. After a couple of weeks and some persuasion from my friend, we went to the gay bar and it changed everything for me. People showed interest, and for the first time, I felt I was among my kind, accepted. Nothing had been wrong with me; I had just been in the wrong environment.

This was not of course the end of *all* my queer-related shame. The following, year gay rights were being increasingly discussed in the Finnish media and political scene. One time, when I was visiting my parents, we watched a panel discussion about gay rights on television, called "Homoilta" (gay evening). The guests consisted of Finnish politicians, celebrities, religion advocates, and of course gays and lesbians. While I was in full support of any kind of gay equality, I felt ashamed of some of the more effeminate gay men, and I remember telling my mother, "not all gay men are like that." I do not think I would have had that kind of attitude if I had been watching that program alone, but because I knew of the attitudes of the heteronormative society, I projected that fear and shame toward my mother, and of course anyone else I imagined watching the program. I wanted "normal" gay people to represent us in public, and I was afraid we would not be accepted if we were effeminate and acted "queer." Looking back, it is almost impossible to relate to that feeling and to understand why *that* could possibly be a problem, although I know it still is a problem to many people. Luckily, it did not take many years until I had managed to work on my attitudes and learned to appreciate the uniqueness of gay culture and gay men and women, as well as people in between and outside of those definitions. Learning about the history of queer culture and its different forms, having positive role models and having a gay community backing me up, played vital roles in my full acceptance of myself. Here, I have to confess my love for Madonna as well: what she did back in the 90s, with her music and imagery, and

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how fearlessly and openly she discussed sexuality and gay rights is amazing, especially looking at it retrospectively. There really never was and never will be anyone like her.

Fighting for queer rights

In order to be accepted and get the same legal rights as everyone else, the gay community has been forced to emphasize their "normalcy" and to hide their unique queer lifestyle and progressive attitudes toward gender and sex. Now, in 2018, when in Finland and some other countries the fight for rights has been somewhat accomplished, LGBT people are also being mainstreamed, for good and bad. At this point, at least, I think it is mandatory to start to emphasize our uniqueness and differences, with pride. True equality is to be accepted as you are, instead of being a poor imitation of the heteronormative culture.

In the history of LGBT rights, demonstrations, and visibility, the most courageous and active individuals have not always been the most normative ones. Instead, it has often been the most flamboyant queens and queers that have resisted the norm and made queer culture visible: those who could not or would not pass as heterosexual. This is a particularly important note to anyone who might think effeminate men, or other people who do not conform to normative gender roles, "ruin" the reputation of gay men or queer culture. One of the most important events in LGBT history is the *Stonewall riots* in 1969, where transgendered people, gay men, and lesbians violently demonstrated against a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a gay club located in Greenwich Village in New York City.

In the 1960s, the solicitation of homosexual relations was illegal in New York City and there was a criminal statute allowing police to arrest people wearing fewer than three gender-appropriate articles of clothing. Police raided gay bars regularly, customers' identifications were checked, female officers took customers dressed as women to the bathroom to verify their sex, and men dressed

as women were arrested. In the early hours of June 28, 1969 the violent handling of the employees and patrons of the Stonewall Inn sparked a riot which lasted for six days, as customers of the bar and residents of the surrounding gay neighborhood rose up against the police and transgender women of color were among the first people to fight back. The Stonewall riots are regarded by many as the first major protests for equal rights for homosexuals. The event served as a catalyst for LGBT political activism all over the world, as it was the first to get major media coverage (Bailey, 2013; Eisenbach, 2006; Livingston, 1991).

Lip Sync for your life

After the riots, the *ballroom culture* gradually became one of New York's most vibrant subcultures, reaching its golden age at the turn of the 1980s and 90s. At these balls, mostly black and Latino LGBTQ men and women competed for underground fame. The contestants dressed up according to very specific genres, such as business executive, best dressed, and butch queen, competing in dancing, strutting, or spoken word. They walked the runway while the judges scored them based on their outfits, attitude, and general fierceness (voguing, the dance made famous by Madonna's hit song "Vogue" (1990), originates from ballroom culture). In many of these categories, "realness," the ability to blend in or "pass" as heterosexual male or female, is foundational. While in the mainstream, the word realness is often used to describe being yourself authentically, in the ballroom context it actually meant quite the opposite: your ability to pretend to be someone else; in other words, to pass. These performances provided a possibility to practice heteronormative gender roles in a society that was hostile toward LGBTQ people, making passing a necessary survival skill. One interesting detail in the ballroom contests was the category of executive realness, where the contestants tried to pass as businessmen, a role otherwise inaccessible to a poor, black, gay man. Passing was not only about

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gender, but also about social class and race. Many of the LGBTQ people were turned away by their own families, so they formed new families in the clubs, where the older ones took care of the younger ones. *Houses* functioned as safe spaces, with a system of unique values and social structures, which many young LGBT people joined, if they could not live openly or safely with their (biological) families (Bailey, 2013; Livingston, 1991).

Drag emerged from ballroom culture and is an interesting and distinctive feature of LGBT community. Currently, drag performances are an accepted form of entertainment even in the mainstream, within those who see gender as binary and something immutable. Drag refers to the practices of one gender dressing in the clothes typically worn by another gender, and imitating their mannerisms. In general, drag queens are "men" dressing as "women," and drag kings do the opposite. Both queens and kings usually develop their own character, with a drag name and specific personality and style. Men dressing up as women does not necessarily reveal the constructed nature of gender, because drag both resists and conforms to gender and sexuality norms (Butler, 2011; Bailey, 2013). For instance, in 2014, drag persona Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest, sporting an evening gown and a beard. This genderbending look caused a lot of praise, but also strong negative feedback and resistance, outside and inside the queer community; from this we can draw the conclusion that one shouldn't do mainstream drag, if the illusion of two, opposing genders is not maintained.

The ballroom scene in itself is a distinctive example of the richness of gender expressions in queer culture. Historically, several categories of gender exist in the houses and the ballroom scene, for example *femme queens*, *butch queens*, *women* and *butches*. With the intention of clarifying these terms to the reader, femme queens are *trans women*, butch queens refer to *gay men*, and butches are *trans men* (Bailey, 2013). It is very important to acknowledge, that these gender categories do not match up exactly with the mainstream

categorizations, as the terms of ballroom culture were born inside the queer community, where gender and sexuality are not as tightly pigeonholed as in straight culture (Bailey, 2013). While much of the terminology of queer culture is emancipatory and gives queer individuals a sense of self and identity, some of the categorizations can be problematic. Another, perhaps more widely known, example of categories within the LGBT community, are *tops* and *bottoms*, terms which are commonly used by gay men in many countries, including Finland. These terms refer to one's sexual preference in anal sex, describing the giver and receiver. A person who is willing to perform either role is called *versatile*. While the function of these terms relates mostly to the practicalities of sex, some gendered, and at times harmful, presumptions exist. Bottom men are sometimes thought to be more feminine and submissive, while top men are masculine and aggressive, very much like their heteronormative counterparts. In many ways, the preconceptions related to these roles lead to similar issues to those straight women and men face in their social intercourse around romance and sex, the most blatant and common examples being femme-shaming, slut-shaming, and sexual safety. In the past decade, or two, more variations in gay identities have emerged, such as the *power bottom*, who maintains control in penetration, as opposed to being passive, despite the receptive role.

Whether bottom men are effeminate or not should not be a problem, but femme-shaming is predictable, as masculinity is fetishized in gay culture and something that gay culture obsesses over, often manifesting in self-loathing ways. In the context of ballroom drag, passing meant the ability to be regarded as the gender you were trying to convey, but more commonly, passing is used to describe the act of queer people passing as heterosexual (or as heteronormatively constructed gender); in other words, being *straight acting*. As sexism and misogyny thrive among straight men, the same type of anti-effeminacy often goes unnoticed among gay men themselves. Internet and dating apps make these discriminatory attitudes visible to anyone: "no femmes, no fats, no asians" is one

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of the more common expressions used to describe so-called sexual tastes or preferences in dating profiles.

Traditional, heterosexual gender roles are often erroneously enforced on nonheterosexual individuals and relationships by heteronormative society and sometimes by ourselves, as sexism, misogyny, and transphobia exist within the LGBT community as well. Many gay men suffer from *internalized homophobia*, as a result of growing up and living in a heterosexist, homophobic, and misogynistic reality. In this light, it is inevitable that all of us acquire at least a small amount of harmful attitudes – some of us less, and some of us more. *Homonormativity* is the equivalent of heteronormativity, where privileging a set of hierarchies, social norms, and expectations cause the oppressed to oppress one another. Hostility toward LGBT people is not just a thing of distant queer history, but still today affects many queer people's lives. Simply living in the heteronormative society of any welfare state is enough to cause mental issues for LGBT youths and adults. While trying to deal with all the challenges of being a teenager, young gays, lesbians, and transgendered people also have to deal with harassment, threats, and violence directed at them. In America, they are nearly twice as likely to be called names, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted at school compared to their non-LGBT peers (Mustanski, 2016), and according to a survey by the Finnish *Opettaja* (Teacher) magazine, a professional journal specifically for teachers, Finnish school is not a safe place for sexual minorities, either. A fifth of the teachers who took part in the survey had witnessed ridiculing or harassment of gay and lesbian students (Lehtonen, 2010). The LGBT community has its own history and culture and in order to prevent history repeating itself, younger generations of LGBT people should not forget where they come from. The hegemonic and normative culture has the responsibility to know about marginalized subcultures and to educate themselves and others for the well-being and survival of the individuals belonging to those subcultures, instead of the existing

tendency to hide and deny queer lives in society, including schools (Wolfgang & Rhoades, 2017).

In many ways, the queer lifestyle is one of great creativity and mobility, and of survival. Instead of seeing queer lifestyles as something less, one can see them as something that needs to be cherished and learned from – to be thankful there is so much color and vibrancy in human culture. In her book *In a Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam (2005) writes about queer subcultures and temporalities. She suggests that queer subcultures can redefine youthhood and adulthood as they resist traditional patterns of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity. Queer produces alternative temporalities as it enables people to imagine their existence outside the predominant milestones of life, which Halberstam defines as birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. Living outside of the institution does not mean one cannot live a full life, just a different one. Queers defy the structures of heteronormativity: men who dare to love other men, women who dare to love other women, while not conforming to gender norms; this is the reason why we are oppressed and mistreated. Our nonconformity threatens the system which sustains the hegemony of male heterosexuality and misogyny. Here we can trace the main source of homophobia: *it is not sexuality itself that is a threat to heteronormativity, but the refusal to live and exist according to the normative code* (Halberstam, 2005). Whether passing as straight people in public or dancing in the streets in drag, queers have always expressed themselves and existed in very fluid ways. We always have one foot in the real world and other one in the shadows, like superheroes with secret identities.

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Heta Huttunen

4   # Visual feminism in 2010s Finland

In late 2017, I came to realize what a momentous and revolutionary year it had been. People had become active in discussing equality issues; not only within my social bubble and closest circles, but beyond it, in the real world as well as on social media. Besides Finland, the phenomenon was also visible in the United States. Donald Trump, accused of racism and sexual harassment, took office as the President of the United States in January 2017, after which women and other people advocating equality from all around the globe united their forces and protested against the patriarchy and racism in an event called the *Women's March* (Wikipedia, 2018a).

Finland's gender-neutral Marriage Act came into force on March 1, 2017. The website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health notes how the Finnish gender equality debate has diversified.

> The debate has diversified. Dismantling gender stereo-
> types and analysing femininity and masculinity have
> become prominent topics. The models and roles of
> women and men have branched out. We have come
> from binary genders to gender variance. [...] Among

other things, the new law makes it possible for same sex partners to adopt children. The gender equality debate now extends to early childhood education and the school arena. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.)

Indeed, in 2017, the book *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014) was distributed to all ninth-graders for the first time (Helsingin Sanomat, 2016).

Perhaps the most influential feminist phenomenon for furthering equality took place on social media in October 2017, when millions of people shared the hashtag "*#MeToo*" to signify that they had at some point been victims of sexual harassment or violence. I, too, shared that hashtag on my Facebook wall. The #MeToo campaign illuminated the social structures in our society, and it highlighted how women, in particular, were victims of sexual harassment or violence. In Finland, the campaign sparked a public debate particularly within the fields of art and culture, in which women working as students or in other lower positions have been systematically harassed and oppressed by men working as their superiors (Yle, 2018).

The visual manifestation of feminism, trends and girl power

My everyday experience is that in recent years during the 2010s, debates like this have little by little led to young people, in particular, finding feminism in their everyday life and questioning the structures prevailing in their everyday reality. In addition to feminist marches and hashtags, feminism seems to be spreading on the web and on social media in *visual form.* In the photo-sharing application Instagram, I have come across a phenomenon that can easily be associated with the feminist discourse. Around 2015, many women began posting selfies (usually self-portraits taken on smartphones) picturing armpit hair, which has previously been considered taboo.

Now, armpit hair was proudly displayed as a fashionable beauty ideal, and it could even be colored or decorated with glitter. I perceive this trend as a part of a broader *Body Positive* idea, which encourages people to embrace a forgiving attitude toward their own body, with the objective of furthering health and well-being. The *Body Positive Movement* challenges racism, the cis-hetero-patriarchy, the image of a particular body type portrayed by the media, the fashion industry and the weight loss business (Wikipedia, 2018b).

The fashion industry has also picked up on these appearance-focused trends associated with feminism. At the time of writing, in February 2018, the website of the Swedish clothing retail company H&M is offering a t-shirt printed with the text "*feminist*" for € 9.99 (ca. 12USD). I have also seen other low-price fast-fashion retail companies offering clothing and accessories with feminist slogans. The irony in this phenomenon is, of course, that in the countries where these items advocating feminism are manufactured, working environments are sweatshops in which unmarried girls and women work for minimal compensation (Julkunen, 2010). It is just that the feminist ideology printed on a product sells and is *trendy*.

This superficial and hypocritical feminism offered by various product manufacturers to consumers brings the concept of *girl power* to my mind. Jessica K. Taft (2004) has discussed the concept in her article, in which she illustrates the problematic relationship between *girl power* and feminism and questions whether the two even have anything in common. Taft (2004) even associates girl power with anti-feminism: she writes about the British 1990s pop band Spice Girls that heralded the message of *girl power* in the book *Girl Power!*, declaring that feminism had become a "dirty word." According to Taft (2004), the *girl power* concept established at that time was indeed apolitical and a less threatening alternative to real feminism; it offered girls a softer, sexier and less active alternative to feminism. The postfeminist idea of *girl power* encouraged girls to settle for the achieved level of equality, for example (Taft, 2004). The concept has also been criticized because of its commercialism, as

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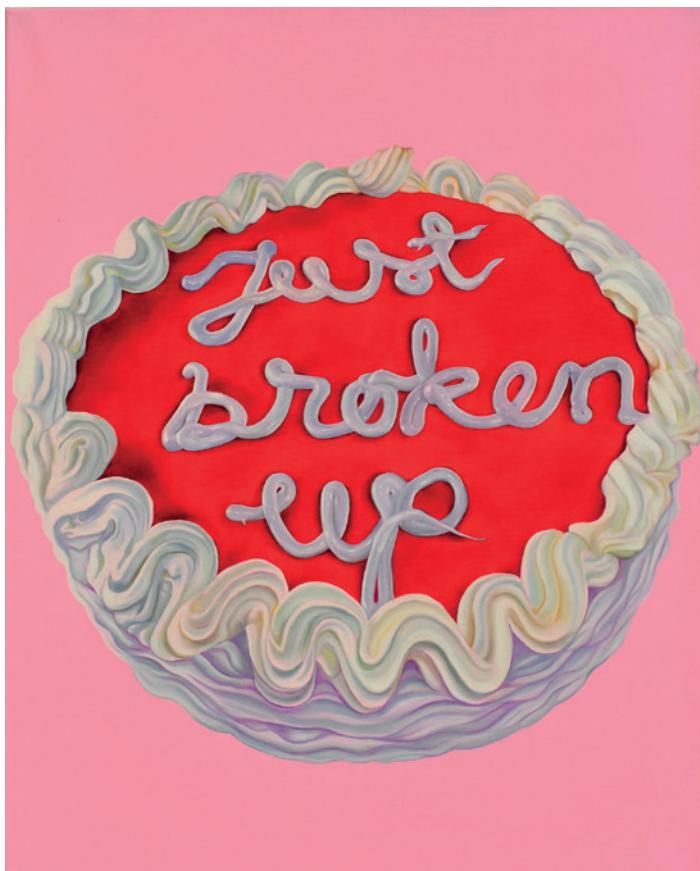
Henriikka Harinen, *Just Broken Up* (2016)

the idea is sold to girls primarily through merchandise (Taft, 2004). I myself have seen the term *girl power* being used, for example, on Instagram as a hashtag, or in stores on certain products, such as caps now in 2018. In Google's image search, the search term "girl power" displays cute pictures, empowering and inspirational quotes with pastel-colored backgrounds and images of various shirts with a feminist *girl power* message. This kind of *girl power* esthetics is inspired by beauty ideals, the fashion world, popular culture, pink and other pastel colors, and everything cute. In 2018, the concept is strongly associated with feminism on, for example, social media. It is interesting how *girl power* has influenced 2010s visual feminism.

As an arts education professional and observer of visual phenomena, in this study, I am intrigued by these kinds of various manifestations of *visual feminism*. The objective of my research is to canvass how the feminist equality issues of the 2010s are visually visible in our society and how they are manifested in visual culture products; in this case, in the visual arts. My aim is to find, identify and define the characteristics of 2010s visual feminism in Finnish contemporary art.

Research strategy, material and method of analysis

In terms of strategy, my study represents qualitative research, and my research material consists of completed documents; artwork that I have curated for this study. As my method of analysis, I use a close reading of images. In the reporting stage and section, my study adopts a form of a dialogic visual essay, as I myself create a visual image by responding to my research question; I visually respond to what feminism is like in 2010s Finland.

As my method of analysis, I apply close reading of images, with which I study the works of three selected young Finnish artists: representational oil paintings by Henriikka Harinen (b. 1993), illustrations by Ida Ruuth (b. 1989) and textile sculptures by Juulia Terho (b. 1991). Even before I had formulated my research topic,

Henriikka Harinen
→ *Hardened* (2017)
↓ *The Last Picture of Us* (2016)
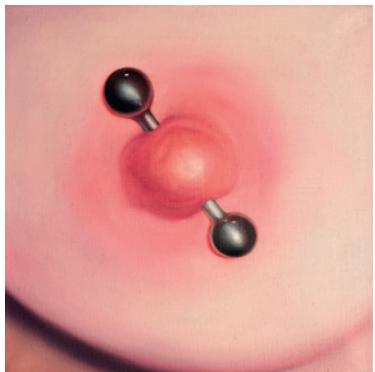
I had come across the works of all three artists on social media; on the photo sharing service Instagram, to be exact. The selected artists' work stood out from the photo stream because in their visual expression I saw subtle or clear feminist messages as well as feminist choices in, for instance, their subjects, use of color, texts used in the works, hashtags ("#") and materials. In applying close reading, my approach is thus to look at, i.e., *read* the works in a feminist context.

I have selected these artists due to their similar experiential world and possibly shared generational experience. All three artists are women born in Finland in the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. I myself am a woman born in 1993, and I live in Helsinki, Finland. I deemed it important that I share roughly the same premises as the artists I am studying, since it enables interpreting the images as well as a possible experience of identification. I find it would be problematic for me to study the works of, for example, a Mexican or Syrian artist in a feminist framework, since our worlds of experience differ in so many ways due to our places of residence. Generational experience, for its part, may be a way to identify a certain shared visual language. All of the selected artists are in the early stages of their careers, which I see as a more fruitful starting point for examining their works compared to more established artists who might already have been studied.

What, then, makes a visual image feminist? In her article on performative art and the construction of female identity, Helena Sederholm (2002) defines some characteristics of feminist art. According to her, the roots of feminist art lie in attempts at making things visible (Sederholm, 2002). For example, the works of Henriikka Harinen highlight body parts deemed intimate or inappropriate in our culture, such as a pierced, naked nipple (possibly a woman's) in the painting *Hardened* (2017) or a penis severed with a knife in the piece *The Last Picture of Us* (2016). In a painting entitled *Just Broken Up* (2016), through a realistic cake, Harinen focuses attention on heartbreak and on being alone, i.e., on sin-

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eat me
when i bleed

Ida Ruuth, *Bosssgirl69* (2017)

Ida Ruuth, *Bosssgirl69* (2017)

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Ida Ruuth, *Bosssgirl69* (2017)

glehood, which is a small thing on a global scale, but as a personal phenomenon, a significantly major issue.

According to Sederholm (2002), the theory of feminist contemporary art stresses the importance of alternative ways of making art, such as parody and mimicry: "The artists thus do not even try to go beyond the recreated gestures in order to create new strategies, but instead tactically exploit the constructed identities by citing and thereby concatenating them" (p. 82). In her simple and sketch-like illustrations, Ida Ruuth uses plenty of underlining text, often in English. For example, one of the female characters in her illustrations is wearing a top in a trendy fashion over a t-shirt, and the top features a prominent text, namely, the word "*feminist*," just like the previously mentioned H&M shirt. In addition, Ruuth uses clarifying hashtags for her drawings, such as *#feminist*, *#bossgirl* or *#menkka* (colloquial Finnish for menstruation). Ruuth's characters may strike clichéd sexy poses, but they have deliberately been drawn with saggy breasts, stomach rolls and body hair, which creates a contrast and poses the question of what is beautiful and sexy.

In Juulia Terho's works, which fall between abstract and representational art, my attention is caught by the artist's material choices: The combinations are evocative and create stories. The mixed-technique textile sculptures consist of "poor" materials typical of feminist art, like trash and scraps (*art povera*) (Sederholm, 2002). Terho uses feminine materials, such as textiles, jewelry beads, childish stickers and colorful threads, which she combines in a racy and surprising way with other materials, such as wood and plastic, breaking expectations and creating contrast.

In the works of Harinen, Terho and Ruuth, my attention is drawn to their choices of color. The works of Harinen and Terho are colorful, whereas most of Ruuth's works are black and white. Harinen and Terho deliberately use a lot of different shades of pink, in particular. In Harinen's paintings, pink is present, for instance, in various carnal parts of the human body, such as the naked nipple and penis, or then pink is featured as a scintillating background

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Juulia Terho

for the painted cake. Terho, for her part, is more moderate yet also deliberate in her use of different shades of pink in the details of her sculptures. In Western culture, different shades of pink are often perceived as very feminine, and as a close-reader of images, I read the use of pink as a conscious, for instance feminist, choice of the selected artists. In her article, Veronika Koller (2008) writes about postfeminist pink. She uses the term to refers to a phenomenon in which women who have achieved social and economic equality deliberately use pink as a way of highlighting their own femininity, while also being aware of the stereotypes associated with the color (Koller, 2008).

Feminism, visual feminism and reporting

The observations previously outlined in this text constitute the first part of the image close reading process of my research. As the research progresses, I will look deeper into these observations and other elements of the works. My objective is to study the curated works in a versatile way, in relation to feminism, contemporary society and feminist culture, such as art.

At the moment, a hot topic in Finnish and international debates on feminism is intersectionality, i.e., the simultaneous existence of various differences (Julkunen, 2010). In addition to gender, intersectional feminism, or so-called fourth-wave feminism, also takes note of skin color, religion, social class, disability and sexual orientation, among other matters. However, in this study, I do not emphasize any specific feminist approach as I examine visual feminism in 2010s Finland. In my close reading of images, I strive to take the history of feminism and its different waves, approaches and topical issues into account in a versatile manner. My hypothesis

←   Juulia Terho

is that the visual feminism I am studying does not unambiguously represent a specific form of feminism, but has been influenced by several different feminist phenomena and ideas. Nowadays, feminist research theories are indeed often studied in relation to and as intertwined with each other, rather than being seen as mutually exclusive (von Bondorff & Seppä, 2002).

My initial premise is that I can use the selected works and the application of image close reading to identify and define some characteristics of 2010s Finnish visual feminism. If and when these characteristics are identified and defined in my research, in the final, report section of the study, I myself will create an image that will serve as a visual representation of what visual feminism is like in 2010s Finland. My study will thereby transform into a visual essay, which Pirjo Seddiki (2010) describes as follows:

> The dialogic approach [of a visual essay] deals with a topical phenomenon, with which visible forms are in a dialogue. The visual material either challenges or complies with the phenomenon. The essay may present a political or social comment and thereby reveal a significant contemporary phenomenon. In addition, the author themselves may enter into a dialogue with their own experiential world, memories and conceptions and the visual material. In a dialogic essay, temporally remote phenomena can also be brought into dialogue with each other. (Seddiki, 2001, p. 43., original text written in Finnish)

The visuality of research results is also discussed by Minna Haveri (2012). According to Haveri, when studying visual and artistic phenomena, it is natural that the results can also take the shape of the study subject and methods (Haveri, 2012). Given that my research is based on examining, identifying and defining a visual phenomenon, reporting the study results in visual form feels like an appropriate and dialogic option.

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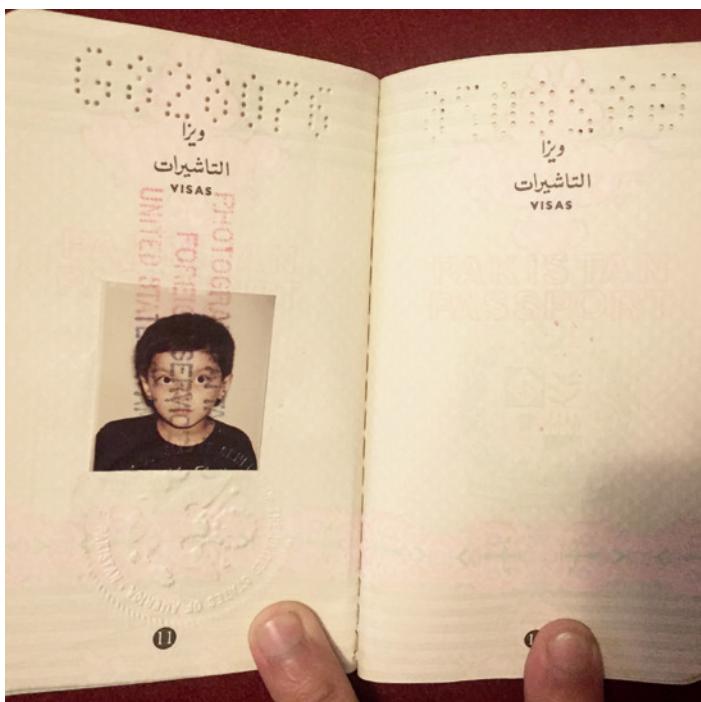
My First Passport, Photograph for a US Visa, 1990

Feminism and Queer in Art Education

Abdullah Qureshi

Queer Migrations:

5

The Case of an LGBT Café /
Queers Without Borders

> One dreams of safer pastures, unearths roots and wan-
> ders. One journeys across seven seas, risks the irk of
> his people, but leaves nonetheless. For he knows that
> he must leave, out of necessity or fear. Fear of knowing
> that though he shares the color of his skin, culture and
> nationalistic identity with them, he does not share their
> beliefs any more, for which he is held accountable. There
> is great price to pay for nonconformity. He prays to his
> gods for assimilation, within this context or another. He
> prays to his gods, as he prays to the image of himself.
> – Mohammad Ahsan Masood Anwari (Anwari, 2014)

Introduction

Having recently moved to Helsinki, as an artist and researcher, what
I grapple with most is my own position as a queer Muslim body of
color in relation to "whiteness" as it is understood in Finland. Even
within the short time I have spent in the region, through conversa-
tions, courses and lectures at universities, as well as exhibitions at

Various Passport Photographs for Visas over the Years

museums and galleries, it has become apparent that there is limited criticality toward what it means to be white in Finland and, in fact, what being Finnish itself means, even as demographics change due to an increase in migration over the last few years, or even decades.

In his seminal work, *Black skin white masks*, Frantz Fanon (1967) states:

> There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.
>
> There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. (p. 12)

In the book, Fanon takes a psychopathological approach to address the mental and physical impact postcolonialism has on a black body – and, by extension, a body of color. Fanon argues that White, which represents the culture of the colonizer, is seen as superior to the Black person, who is the colonized. He illustrates this through various points and case studies, and amongst them language is seen as an important entry point to a culture, whereby, according to Fanon, the black man who possesses mastery over the French language in fact starts believing that he is closer to being white. It is the realization though, that despite this command over speech, he is still not white that starts to cause an existential crisis. Applying this theoretical framework to the Nordic context, and in particular Finland, opens up an interesting set of questions. In a recent presentation, Mira Kallio-Tavin (2018) refers to whiteness in Nordic countries as an "invisible norm." An elaboration of the historical and theoretical background of this condition reveals that "Nordic countries never went through a clear period of critique of colonialism and its presence in everyday environments and encounters, as did the colonial centers in the aftermath of the dismantling of the empires" (Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, in press, n.p.). According to Steve

Garner, "New postcolonial states are often faced with the triple problems of conjuring a narrative of the past that leads inexorably to the creation of the nation state; fetishizing elements of natural culture and heritage that distinguish the nation from others; and socializing people into feeling they belong to the new nation" (Garner, 2014). He further addresses, "in this context, it is less important that Sweden and Denmark held colonies, while Iceland and Greenland, Norway and Finland were colonies, and more important that they were all white nations or proto-nations in a world where that has authorized de facto superior positioning in global social and economic hierarchies" (Garner, 2014).

Further research within the domain, and experiential knowledge of people of color, reveals that within "Finland, the general climate seems to be one that refuses to problematize the power of whiteness to produce both white and nonwhite subjectivities" (Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, in press). Building upon this, within this chapter, I examine the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders initiative, a volunteer-led monthly event that connects people from multiple backgrounds, in particular "local" white Finns and LGBTIQ asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants who are predominately from the Middle East and Africa. In doing so, my objective is to document the journeys, experiences and challenges faced by LGBTIQ refugees, as well as examine how queer gathering and resistance in the format of the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders can be used to complicate and disrupt the normative and complex ideas of racial identity within the context of Finland.

In this study, I rely on an observational approach and first-hand interviews of three organizers of the Café and two self-identified gay refugee men who have been attending the organized events from the beginning. I also draw upon my pre-existing knowledge and experience of the LGBT community in Pakistan in order to form comparisons with other Muslim countries, highlighting the various forms of discrimination that exist for LGBT individuals in these contexts. In my theoretical framework, I use a range of

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sources that include prominent texts from queer and critical theory and current sociological research alongside journalistic reports.

Background

The United Nations defines "an asylum-seeker as someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed" (United Nations, n. d.) and "refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution" (United Nations, n. d.). In modern times, the Holocaust and the Second World War are two prominent events that subsequently led Jewish and other persecuted minorities to move to new homelands, as well as the formation and partition of new countries leading to mass-scale migrations. In the contemporary world, conflict is a far too common reality. We see this across the Middle East, from Iraq to Syria, Yemen, Israel, Palestine, and the Rohingyas in Myanmar, just to mention a few. A natural consequence of this has been mass-scale migration, where at the start of 2015, we saw unprecedented numbers of people arriving into Europe via Turkey or Albania, mostly from Syria, followed by Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Albania, and Pakistan in that order (BBC, 2016). Within this larger group of people, LGBT individuals, who are often escaping "targeted violence, discrimination, and abuse" (Zappulla, 2018), like other vulnerable groups such as women, are particularly at risk. According to the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA), being gay is still a crime in 72 states, with death penalty in eight of them (ILGA, 2017). Taking a deeper look at each of these countries, one quickly realizes that despite many shared factors such as religion, and sometimes language, each of the contexts remains unique due to their particular historical and cultural specificity. It is also worth noting that the sociopolitical context in each of these countries varies dramatically. Over the next few paragraphs, I discuss Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq to illustrate this point.

Pakistan: From a legal point of view, same-sex activity was criminalized in India under Section 377 three years into colonial

rule in 1860 (Ahmed, 2017). This clause made "voluntary carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal" (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860) punishable by life imprisonment. Once Pakistan was created in 1947, as a separate homeland for the Muslims of India, the new Penal Code conveniently inherited this clause, but to date, there is no evidence of this law ever being enacted. Having said this, social attitudes remain difficult for LGBT individuals, and even legally speaking, the *Sohbat* incident presents a case where, although Section 377 itself has not been enacted, the representation and expression of homosexuality is challenged through other clauses.

In 2012, the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore was accused of "spreading caricatures and promoting anti-Islamic thoughts" (The News, International, 2012). This stemmed from the publishing of an article in *Sohbat*, a newly initiated academic journal by the institute. The article in question discussed the history of homoerotic subject matter in Pakistani contemporary art, along with several pages of illustrations. The artworks that particularly caused outrage were those that featured representations of a *moulvi* (a Muslim cleric in Urdu) with a naked child or that included the juxtaposition of homoerotic desire with Quranic verses, leading to the writer, the artists represented, the editor of the journal and the principal of the NCA being charged under Section 295-A (outraging religious feelings) and 295-B (defiling the Holy Quran) of the Pakistani Penal Code.

The transgender community, in contrast to gays, lesbians and bisexuals, throughout South Asian history have a very different kind of presence, where in the past they particularly enjoyed high-ranking positions in Mughal courts as guards of the Harem (female quarters). However, they lost this status during colonial rule, and were only able to regain legal status as citizens of Pakistan in 2010, allowing them to identify themselves as the "third gender." From having this legal status to its actual implementation has been an uphill battle. However, within this domain, a recent positive

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development is where the Senate has unanimously approved a bill that gives transpersons the right to identify "as they perceive themselves" (Shahid, 2018, n.p.).

Iran: In neighboring Iran, on the surface it seems that the government also recognizes transidentity, however, the approach to it is very different. Homosexuality is punishable by death. A closer reading of the situation reveals that the government "doesn't recognize being trans as a category per se, rather they see trans individuals as people with psychosexual problems, and so provide them with a medical solution" (Bagri, 2017). This has certainly led to reports of gay people being forced to "convert" (Hamedani, 2014), although when discussing this with a group of people from Iran, there was skepticism about such claims, where they believed that this was "propaganda." It is important to point out that such reactions of mistrust stem from a longer political history between Iran and the West documented as early as "the reign of Shah Abbas in the seventeenth century," and reaching its peak in 1979 when "USA and Britain took steps to manipulate Iranian politics" (Worthington, 2015). Another example came when international organizations declared the International Day of Action against Homophobic Persecution in Iran on July 19, 2006 – "marking the one-year anniversary of the public hanging in the city of Mashad of two male Iranian youths" (Paur, 2007). People asked, "why now, and why Iran," to which Faisal Alam states: three Nigerian "homosexual" men who were sentenced to be stoned to death earlier that summer elicited no such global indignation (Paur, 2007), hinting at more political motivations behind the declaration, rather than a genuine concern for LGBT rights in Iran.

One of the participants I interviewed for this chapter is of Iranian origin; however, he was clear that he did not wish to focus on the past, wanting only to discuss the present. My sense was that his personal history carried significant trauma, and so I did not probe any further. From within Iran, then, I was able to gather further insight through a closed Facebook group (name withheld

due to safety and security concerns), where local Iranians, diasporic Iranians and those interested in visiting the country were discussing homosexuality. I was able to gather that as there are clearly serious repercussions (either in the form of lashes or execution) for same-sex activity, it must always be performed in hiding. However, despite such aggressively anti-homosexuality laws, you can still opt out of military service after proving through a medical check that you are gay or trans. I was able to confirm that this requires a psychological assessment, but it is unclear whether it also requires a physical inspection. Despite this, like most places in the world, gay people are active on Internet-based dating apps and websites, and as such a secret underground world (at least in Tehran) thrives – regardless of this, it is important to be cautious of who one reveals their identity to, especially within the public domain.

Iraq: In Iraq, the situation for LGBT individuals is particularly dire, and has been for a number of years. Various accounts from within the country reveal that culturally speaking, being gay or trans is seen as a "dishonor" for those around you, and often times leads to your own family or friends acting in honor by either handing you over to those who will "deal" with the issue, or committing the murder themselves. A United Nations report (Iraqueer; MADRE; IWHR Clinic; OutRight Action International, 2015) further highlights the extreme violations of LGBT rights that have occurred in the country, and the ineffectiveness of the government's response. This has led a number of people leaving their homes and countries in order to seek refuge elsewhere. Within the next section I follow the story of one such individual.

Journey

This interview was conducted on February 12 2018 in Helsinki. To retain as much of the interviewee's actual voice as possible, I have included a large section of the transcription and made very few edits

in the process. The interviewed person's name is withheld due to safety and security concerns.

My name is MP ... I'm coming from Iraq. From Baghdad. My age is 22. I left Iraq when I was almost 18. I left my country because of my sexuality. You know, in our country, they are so religious. Actually, my family was so ... Muslim, and they never like these kinds of things.

I moved from Baghdad to Turkey by flight. After Turkey, where I stayed for one or two months, I tried a lot to go from Turkey to Greece. When I was going by the boat, the first time, the boat was sinking down because there was a lot of people. The limit was 15, and we were almost 35. After that they helped us come back to the same land. We slept there for one night. Next day we tried again. When the boat was in the middle of the sea, the Turkish authorities came and cut our journey. We were saying (toward the direction of Greece): we wanna come to you! We were almost in the middle, between the Greek and Turkish border. They just cut us before we had entered Greek territory. Had we gotten on the other side, they wouldn't have been able to stop us.

They asked me where I am from? All people from Iraq need to say they are from Syria, because if we are from Iraq, they return us. Me, I throw away my Iraqi passport. I change my name, I change my country. I create a new fake name. Yeah. And I was with them 13 days. We only got food two times a day. It was so bad. We were like 35 people in one room. After that we gave them money, and I tried to find a new person to take me across. I also tried to find the person who I had given cash to earlier. Because his trip failed, he needed to go back. He was a nice person. He called me and gave me my money back. And then I needed to try again, and find another person who could help me.

I found new friends, who help me find another one. And we go also. We try. The first time, the motor doesn't work for the boat. We come back. We tried three times in one week. After that, we were in the middle of the sea, and the motor doesn't work. It broke. So the driver threw it away. And our boat also started to sink, and I was having this life jacket. After this, one of our friends was a doctor, she sent a message. We were now in the Greek border, so we could call people to help us from Greece.

She called them, and they told her to stay quiet, and calm, and that they will come. Just save yourself, and don't move. Try to keep the boat stable. After about 15 minutes they come, and we finally get into Greece land.

Even though such accounts of refugees entering Europe have become far too common over the last few years, still when reading such an account, it appears more like fiction than reality. In MP's case, he continued to travel through different countries in Europe, encountering fraud, near-death experiences, people who genuinely wanted to help, as well as those who simply took advantage. While most people were interested in going to Germany, or other Western and Central European countries, MP was set on coming to Finland. On being asked why, he (MP, personal communication, March 12, 2018) said:

I don't know, because, now I know what I see in Austria, all the way I came, in Germany, there are a lot of refugees there. I just skip them. I don't want to see them. I just want to go some place, so far that there are not a lot of people there, there is freedom, they respect gays.

In narrating his experiences, MP mentioned "friends" a lot. These are companions that he sought along the way. Between the Austrian and German border, for example, he re-encountered a friend he lost in Turkey. Upon reconnecting, MP convinced the friend to come with him to Finland. However, upon hearing this, the friend's mother secretly asked MP to leave her son behind, saying, "I need him to stay with me in Germany; If he goes, I will be alone." And although it was difficult for MP, he left his friend behind, and continued to form new companionships with other refugees until he reached his final destination in Finland.

What is evident within MP's story, which is one among hundreds and thousands, is the sheer resilience and drive of the human spirit to exist, and be accepted, in this world as one is, wherever that may be. Prior to the interview, MP explained to me the situation under which he had been forced to leave. An older man from within his neighborhood had outed MP to his father. The father, upon confirming this by going through MPs phone, locked

him in the house, forbidding any other family member to speak to him, or for him to continue going to school. The father planned to bring this up further with his own father, who headed the family as the patriarch, and decide whether they should kill him or hand him over to the authorities. It was in desperation to escape this fate that MP's mother helped him run away to Turkey. It is unimaginable to consider the full extent of the traumatic implications of such an experience upon a young adult, let alone factoring in the perilous journey he had to make over the next two years toward safety and freedom.

LGBT Café / Queers without borders

As refugees or asylum-seekers enter Finland, their passports (if they have them) are taken away, and instead they are provided with a temporary permit while their applications are being processed. Many spend months and years in the system, being interviewed several times by different people while they wait for a decision. Sometimes this decision is favorable, and at other times the result is deportation. For those who stay, one of the biggest challenges to emerge during recent years has been discrimination, racism and hate crimes that are the result of a growing anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiment across the region. In response to this, in wider Europe, a range of organizations and cultural initiatives such as Maruf (http://www.maruf.eu) in the Netherlands, as well as the AKS International Minorities Festival (http://www.aksfestival.com) in Denmark, the Transition International Queer Minorities Film Festival (http://www.transitionfilmfestival.at) in Austria and the International Queer & Migrant Festival (https://www.iamsterdam. com/en/see-and-do/whats-on/festivals/overview-film-festivals/inter-national-queer-and-migrant-film-festival) in the Netherlands, have been looking at LGBTIQ and Muslim identity, either exclusively or within the larger framework of interfaith and/or minority politics. A common factor that brings each of these organizations together

LGBT-café

LESBIAN   GAY   BISEXUAL   TRANS

LGBT–café is a monthly queer café evening in Helsinki. We get together on **the last Thursday of every month at 6pm-9pm.**

Lgbt-café is an open and informal event organized by volunteers. We celebrate the diversity of identities and want to make a safe and joyful evening especially for people who are **gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer** – and their friends.

QUEERS WITHOUT BORDERS!

Our aim is to create s a space, where people from different backgrounds and with different identities can all feel **safe and respected**. We do our best to overcome boundaries such as language. We do not tolerate racism, sexism, transphobia or any other form of hate and discrimination.

The cafe is open for anyone who wants to have **friendship instead of borders**. We offer coffee, tea and snacks free of charge – and of course a friendly atmosphere and great company. Welcome!

Time: 6pm – 9pm

25.1 / 22.2 / 29.3 / 26.4 / 31.5

Place: Verandan
Yrjönkatu 31, Helsinki

Contact: lgbt_cafe@riseup.net
facebook.com/lgbtcafe.helsinki

is the fact that they respond to, critique, and challenge larger right-wing dominating, authoritarian discriminatory attitudes through cultural programming by addressing the question of the "other." In this regard, the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders in Helsinki is significantly different in its framework as well as its objective. For one, it receives no funding from public or private sources, and is only run through the personal and private interest of the organizers and participants. Two, it is solely a meeting place, and as such, through its existence does not aspire to shift the center. But perhaps, by taking this rather "innocent," or seemingly apolitical and neutral position, that is precisely what it does, or at least has the potential to do.

The LGBT Café / Queers without Borders was set up in January 2016 by eight individuals (including Niklas Koskinen and Hassen Hnini) with the aim of creating a networking opportunity for LGBT refugees, where in a safe setting, they could not only meet others like themselves, but also local Finns. Talking about how it all began, Niklas (N. Koskinen, personal communication, March 11, 2018) discussed how three years ago, during the fall of 2015, when refugees were migrating to Finland in unprecedented numbers, there was a need for food and shelter. Niklas would observe people queueing at police stations, which is also when he started noticing more profound issues and foundational attitudes relating to queer asylum-seekers. He remarked, "there isn't anything for them, and something should be done" (N. Koskinen, personal communication, March 11, 2018). In the beginning, he told me, it was only ten to fifteen people of Finnish and Russian background. Most of them were activists who had been advocating for Free Movement (http://www.vapaaliikkuvuus.net) or were organizing different LGBT activities. And so, simply with the intention to help the LGBT refugees and provide immediate assistance, those present started reaching out to different spaces, such as galleries, for support, as well as making queries to some eco-friendly supermarkets to get donations of free food.

Once the location was secured, a small contemporary art gallery (approximately 30 square meters) in Kallio, the next stage was to reach out to recent refugees. This was primarily done through posters and flyers at various locations, including bars, cafés, LGBT organizations (and further dissemination through their LGBT / Queer networks), and refugee reception centers in Vantaa and Espoo, in order to target local people as well as those who were just arriving. Reflecting on the experience, Niklas stated, "we didn't meet any resistance," and explained how the response was generally positive on such an initiative being organized. According to him, the main challenge was that they were not an organization, and so it was not clear to others "who we are." It was at this time that Niklas also met Hassen, who first came as a participant, eventually becoming one of the founding and organizing members.

Hassen (H. Hnini, personal communication, November 18, 2017) expressed how it was important for them to keep the LGBT Café independent of funding and governing organizations, so that it could truly be an "agenda-less" and "free" meeting space for the group. Hassen further explained to me the context and complexity of the situation as it relates to the religious, geographical and cultural backgrounds of the asylum-seekers and refugees. In terms of refugees there is a considerable African community in Finland. Within the African and Middle Eastern communities, the majority are Muslim. We also see Iranians and Turks, although attending the events in lesser numbers. The journey for most of them has been a long one, where each person reached Finland with a different story, some coming via boats, and others staying for up to a month in forests, walking for 20–30 days at a stretch. What is common for all these people is that their journey has not been easy or nontraumatic. Most of the people who end up in Finland have not really considered Finland, and have been placed here due to various European agreements.

Party on the street

Over two years, LGBT Café has moved to four different locations, and has had to have its format re-assessed. It was in September 2016, when people started to notice a pattern in LGBT refugees being rejected at gay clubs, in particular Hercules and DTM, two of the most prominent gay clubs in Helsinki. The main incident that led to this becoming overt was when members of the HeSeta ry (http://www.heseta.fi) group were invited to a private event hosted by a Swedish LGBT organization at DTM. Even though they were invited and included on the guest list, they were not let in. Hassen, who was there with the group, called Niklas along with other activist friends. Within a short span of time a crowd of people consisting of the rejected refugees and other activists had gathered outside DTM. This led the Swedish organization to also walk out, bringing the "party to the street, making it one of the best spontaneous protests in Helsinki," said Niklas.

To understand what happened here in terms of rejections, we can look at a recent paper by Rohit K. Dasgupta and Debanuj Dasgupta (2018), where they "argue that the formation of the queer Muslim racialized subjectivity is a spatialized process one that situates queer Muslims on the peripheries of gay (white) spaces of central London" (p. 31). Through the examination of three cases, the film *A Touch of Pink* (Rashid, 2004), the story of gay working-class immigrants living in East London, and the photographic work of British Bangladeshi artist Raisa Kabir, the authors unpack deep-rooted ideas in Western society that fundamentally see Islam as barbaric, and in contrast to Europe, as a culture that is yet to achieve modernity (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 2018). It is this perception of the religion that inherently sees Muslims as homophobic, and hence not belonging to gay / queer culture.

In Helsinki, the outcry and protest subsequently led DTM to amend its policy, and more recently, Hercules has somewhat relaxed its entrance policy, too. In light of all this, and recognizing

a strong need within the community to meet and dance together, the LGBT Café evolved to dedicating half the evening to meeting and connecting, followed by the rest of the evening becoming a free-flowing dance party.

In its current location, the LGBT Café takes place at a venue loaned to the community by a Swedish organization in kind. For a variety of reasons, including safety and discretion, the general rules include zero tolerance toward discrimination as well as no photos and videos are to be taken. Given the nature of the event being an informal non-work related gathering, my notes below were later collated from memory.

September 29, 2017

LGBT Café / Queers without Borders

As usual, I am early to the event. After pacing a couple of times up and down the street, I decide to go in. At the door I encounter a couple of welcoming members of staff. One of them recognizes me. It's Nadja! We've been planning to meet for weeks, and I'm glad that we have finally run into each other. I'm quickly given a run-down of the general rules, and otherwise, am told to simply enjoy myself.

It's a diverse group of people. Immediately I spot some Iranians, Iraqis and Turks. It's a bit of a challenge to communicate because a lot of them don't really speak much English, and either speak their native languages or are learning Finnish. I end up speaking to a Somali woman. After a while, an Iranian guy asks me my status. I'm a little surprised, but tell him that I am a student. I recognize my privilege and retreat.

It's 7:30 pm and people are angst-y to play the music. D., one of the most vibrant personalities in the room, takes the role of the DJ. Out roll popular Arabic tunes, and the room erupts into shrills of LiLiLiLis (Ululation).

People form a large circle, and different individuals take turns to come to the center and perform. Shik Shak Shik plays. B., one of

the super muscly men, takes out a huge Amy Winehouse wig, dons a belly-dancing belt, and takes the floor. I join the dancing.

October 27, 2017

LGBT Café / Queers without Borders

On this occasion, the evening involves a more formal session where a lawyer is talking about asylum-seeker and refugee rights. Initially it seems to me that this is going to be very useful for the community (signifying the regular group of LGBT refugees attending the LGBT Café), however, soon I realize that for most of them, it's not new information. People seem uninterested.

A fiery discussion kicks off in the Q&A. In particular, the Iraqi group of people talk about their experiences in Iraq, the persecution they faced, and why they had no choice but to leave. They talk about how they used to be mocked and picked at for who they were, but when people started realizing that their applications (for asylum) were being successful due to their sexual and gender identities, those very people who laughed at them started faking their applications in order to claim asylum in Europe.

Some of them now live in Helsinki as normal heterosexuals despite their "LGBT" status on paper. "They continue to mock us. What should we do about them?" said D. The community responded, "THEY SHOULD BE SENT BACK."

The lawyer argued that of course there was not one reason why someone was granted an asylum, and the Finns address how you cannot really prove if someone is gay or not: the community remains unconvinced. Dancing begins.

December 28, 2017

LGBT Café / Queers without Borders at Museum of Impossible Forms

The Museum of Impossible Forms (MIF) is an independent arts space set up in a community center in the Kontula neighborhood of Helsinki. It was formed, and is managed, by a collective of arts practitioners, who in many ways see the space as an "anti-museum." The majority of their programming has involved critical dialogue around the arts in the format of conferences, lectures, talks and workshops. Given the organization's location in Kontula, which is primarily an immigrant and refugee residential area, MIF is critiqued for its positioning around larger conversations on gentrification. In the room diagonally opposite MIF is a prayer room that is marked as a mosque.

I arrive early, and most of the organizers are busy setting up the speakers. I ask about the choice of location, and there are concerns that it may be too far for some people, and that space is difficult to find. It's true, the space is far and difficult to find.

Hassen arrives. I discuss the choice of venue with him too, and he exclaims, "YES, and I tell you it's the first, and last time, Have you seen there is a mosque right in front? One of the trans women walked in. Imagine." We laugh.

Later, dancing begins, and we all have a great time.

"Queer" isn't easy to translate: A critical look in

Explaining the distinction between Queers without Borders and the LGBT Café, Niklas (N. Koskinen, personal communication, March 11, 2018) explained how the former is the collective that organizes the latter. As such, the only activity that the collective organizes is the Café. However, its role also involves lobbying for change of racist or discriminatory policies that specifically affect LGBT refugees.

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Addressing the concern of how to talk about queerness within a broad target group, Niklas exclaimed: "Queer isn't easy to translate. And so, for this reason, we named the initiative as such so that the café could be as open and accessible as possible for people who speak different languages and are coming from different cultures."

It is also worth nothing here that Queers without Borders is different from Queers Against Borders, with the latter a group that came together at Helsinki Pride 2017 to organize a bloc, taking a radical stance to address and challenge some of the things they felt were not being addressed by Pride. To this end, their statement called for a world without borders, the stopping of deportations, the trans law not being enough, and police not being welcome, amongst other things (TAKKU, 2017).

Tracing the emergence of the word "queer" in public consciousness around 1990, David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Esteban Munoz (2005) write: "it was a term that challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse" (p. 1). Prior to this, addressing the larger history, in her 1993 essay "Critically Queer," Judith Butler writes: "The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation" (p. 18). It is, then, the insertion of "Muslim" within the queer equation that starts to further disrupt these margins, whereby, being Muslim is perceived as incompatible with queerness, as discussed earlier. It is a fact that many LGBT and queer Muslim struggle to reconcile their faith with their sexualities or gender identities. Often times this difficulty is the result of socially and culturally conservative views toward homosexuality, or rigid interpretations of the Quran, which are now also being challenged by a range of scholars, such as Scott Alan Kugle (2009), as well as imams who openly identify as gay or queer. Hence, to deduce that all Muslim spaces are fundamentally closed to conversations of sexual and gender identity needs to be

challenged. As Dasgupta and Dasgupta (2018) write in relation to South Asian / brown communities, "whilst it is true brown spaces like many other spaces could be homophobic, the idea that all South Asian spaces are by default homophobic operates as a technology of racism, via which Muslim bodies are displaced and perpetually caught between ethnic enclaves and gaybourhoods" (p. 35).

In this sense, Kasra Ettefagh (personal communication, March 12, 2018), who is another active member of the Café, is not in favor of the Café being a reactionary disco space. Kasra is originally from Iran; however, commenting on his background and experience of Finnish society, he stated: "From a legal and psychological perspective, this is where my new life is." He continued to explain that whilst the society is incredibly open-minded, it is difficult to integrate with the Finns, "where it may take you two – three years before you would ever be invited in to their homes." For this reason, the Café as a gathering space served an important purpose, where it was the "first contact" and people could talk, get to know each other as well as form friendships. The addition of dancing (while consuming alcohol), according to him, has actually resulted in smaller cliques or gangs dominating the space, which ultimately leads to less opportunity for new people to connect or find out about each other. Discussing the clique culture further, Kasra explained that to outsiders, many refugees seem to come from similar backgrounds, as so many come from Muslim countries, but still, culturally speaking, they are very different. And, as a result of having suffered from exclusion by their families and communities in their home countries for so long, on some conscious or unconscious level, they start to perpetuate exclusionary tactics, too, for instance, by propagating the idea that if one is not part of their gang, then one is not even gay, as it was seen when the lawyer was there to explain the procedure of asylum-seeking. Similarly, as someone who does not conform to mainstream gay culture, on one occasion, Kasra felt the need to bring along a white friend (with blonde hair) as a way of showing to some of the other participants that if this is perceived as the "ideal,"

then he can "have" it, and he does not need to be part of any gang or clique. He admits this was reactionary, however, he was adamant on making the point.

Reflecting on the challenges of working with such a diverse group of people, and the internal hierarchies that are starting to emerge, Nadja Leham (personal communication, March 21, 2018), another organizer, felt unsure what the word "activism" itself means, and how it automatically translates as a "position of power." As a dancer, recovering from an injury, coming to the café and meeting other people who enjoyed music in a noncommercial and accessible setting, the LGBT Café became an important place to heal. Thinking critically about her own position as a white Finnish person, she feels her role, like many others in the space, is to create a place for LGBT people and their friends. However, some people automatically see the "Finnish" people as organizers, and that as refugees or asylum-seekers they have to take things as they are, without complaining. I asked her about cliques in particular, and how language is another factor where quite a few of the people speak Arabic. A consequence of this is that people who do not speak Arabic end up feeling excluded. For instance, this becomes evident especially at the DJ Station where the same people end up playing their music, and most of the time, it is Iraqi, or through more deeply embedded racial prejudices, whereby an Arab may see an Iranian or Pakistani as lower, or vice versa. For Nadja this opens up the more difficult question of whether as organizers there is a need for them to monitor this. Or, if a free space has been created, should people be able to join in as they please?

Conclusion

When making the move to Finland last August, there was little I knew about the country. Upon coming here, and witnessing racism and discrimination toward non-white people, I was surprised, although not entirely shocked, given the growing racist attitudes

across Europe as a whole. Looking at this further, in this chapter, I present that most of the theory on whiteness is understood from the perspective of colonialism, as we see and learn from the work of Fanon, whereby countries that re-evaluated their nationalistic narratives postcolonialism went through a process of self-reflection. In countries like Finland, as well as other Nordic countries, which did not go through such a critical phase, we see that whiteness has continued to be a norm, and as result, conversations on race have remained minimal to none. This is changing now.

It is the recent arrival of migrants and refugees that has started to cause ruptures in an otherwise color-blind society. Specifically looking at LGBT refugees and focusing on the challenges encountered by LGBT individuals in Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, I followed the journey of one gay man from his country of origin to Europe. Through his account, it is evident how traumatic such a migration is, considering the physical dangers one encounters along the way, and the psychological implications of continuously losing a sense of community either through rejection or circumstance. After reaching "safety" in Europe, we have little dialogue on their healing and recovery. Exclusion, as we saw at the mentioned gay clubs in Helsinki, is very much guided through deeply embedded racist attitudes, and is counterproductive. For instance, thinking this through Kallio-Tavin's (2018) theory of whiteness being an "invisible norm" in Nordic countries, then it can be inferred from the accounts within this chapter that perhaps the white body does not truly comprehend the pain and trauma felt by a body of color, whereby methods of othering are enacted. And the natural need of a human being to connect and find community with whom they may identify is not recognized.

Here, through the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders and conversations around it, new dialogues are being forcefully had. In response to othering, through the Café, each body of color asserts the complex and layered history it embodies. In this sense, the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders methodologically creates

a unique opportunity to challenge dominant structures that are so far blind to racial politics and hierarchies. It triggers a discussion that is otherwise not taking place, or is not easy to have to begin with, as is the case with being LGBTIQ and Muslim. Furthermore, for those who are still vulnerable and at risk of becoming isolated, the initiative provides a safe place to start developing a sense of community. And so, in that sense, simply by being an open, sharing space, with dancing, it resists.

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Jemina Lindholm

6   nothing/special ZINE:

A Collective Zine as an Approach to Critical Disability Studies and as Feminist Art Pedagogical Practice

Abstract

In this chapter I argue why it is important to keep integrating critical disability studies into art education research and describe how this could be done through a collective zine. I start my chapter by elaborating on my motivation in researching disability and sickness, further arguing its importance in the field of art education and explaining zine-making and a collective zine as my choice of media in this process. I continue by presenting disability studies theories to define disability and to position myself within this field of study. I also discuss briefly the connections between "queer" and "crip" and their possible relations to my research. I continue by describing zines and zine-making as practices employing principles of feminist, queer, and public pedagogies to suggest the potential of a collective zine as a feminist art pedagogical practice. I conclude with summing up the main arguments of this chapter and emphasize open-endedness and the struggle for new ideas as key values in investigating zine-making and collective zines as approaches to critical disability studies and as feminist art pedagogical practice. By combining elements of a literary review and excerpts from personal

experience and reflection, this chapter works as a prologue to my research about *nothing/special ZINE*, an art zine for mad/sick/crip art. I use texts by Johanna Hedva (2015, 2016), Alison Kafer (2013) and Mikko Koivisto (2017a, 2017b) as well as texts from the fields of "zine studies" (Creasap, 2014; deGravelles, 2013) and critical disability studies (Goodley, Lawthom & Runswick Cole, 2014; Shildrick, 2012) as my main companions in this process.

Experience of disability, representation, and stereotypes

My relationship with disability studies has been quite short but a passionate love story, a true quest for information, understanding, and validation. I discovered disability studies at the beginning of my graduate studies in art education at Aalto University through a course assignment with which I decided to take a closer look at the visual culture of social media and its relation to disability.

For quite some time, I had been struggling with my illness, so the topics of disability and sickness were constantly present in my life. Similar to others who have gone through the experience of losing my able body, I initially felt as if I were eluding everything that is regarded as desirable, all that is perceived as good and right, my young and able body – because I lived my life believing I would need one to be fully happy. Although my body was changing due to my illness, and even though I was in pain and tired all the time, what I was really losing was my able-bodied privilege; the possibilities and opportunities that I had taken for granted. I felt unfit and this laid a great ground for internalized ableism and pity in general. Of course, these feelings were not caused my body, but because the changes in my body were made unfit by my surroundings, because the world was not there for me to fit into anymore.

I soon noticed that, traditionally, the representation of a person with a disability or illness is divided into two main stereotypes: the charity case who is the target of able-bodied/able-minded pity, or the overcomer of obstacles who lives their life fully despite their

disability/sickness – the one who exists to inspire us all. Neither of these seemed appropriate or matched with what I was going through, but the title of a lecture by Johanna Hedva, an American/ Korean writer, held at the Women's Center for Creative Work in Los Angeles in 2015 summed up my feelings perfectly: "My body is a prison of pain so I want to leave it like a mystic but I also love it and want it to matter politically" (Women's Center for Creative Work, 2015). The simultaneous hope for relief and cure and the hope for a change are all present in this sentence that implies the complexities and quality of living with a chronic illness.

According to Kafer (2013), assumptions and stereotypes like the ones above enhance the depoliticization of disability, as disability is presented more as nature than culture (Kafer, 2013). The author continues by explaining that disability-based discrimination and prejudice are not regarded as social inequality but rather as an individual's cruelty or insensitivity, and this rhetoric further reduces disability to a question of "compassion and charitable feelings," (p. 10) rather than promoting it as a critical matter of social injustice. Further contemplating issues related to representation, injustice, and prejudice, Kafer refers to "disability awareness" events where able-bodied people are encouraged to "experience disability," for example, by wearing a blindfold. These kinds of campaigns or events are often well-intended but actually harmful, as they reduce the experience of disability into the "alleged failures and hardships of disabled bodies" and present disability as "a knowable fact of the body" (p. 4) separable from the holistic experience of a person. Mikko Koivisto (2017b) grasps the problematic of stereotypes and assumptions of disability and sketches an idea of egress (as opposite to access) as a form of resistant thinking about disability and mental illness. "To egress" (p. 165–168) can be regarded as an attempt to resign from the representation and stereotypes related to a certain embodiment, or as a tool to read and examine, for example, visual culture from this viewpoint and to become aware of resistant behavior and acts in one's surroundings.

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Through advanced disability studies literature, I suddenly had words that described my existence and experience from some other angle than that of being a patient, being a target of pity, or having to be brave despite everything I was going through. Disability studies gave me a new mindset that helped me to become proud of myself and to stop hating my body, which in turn provoked me to think and take action for further integrating disability studies in my research. Instead of researching on my own artistic production dealing with the topics of sickness, I decided to open my focus to multiple takes on disability, to avoid settling on fixed notions of the subject. I started to facilitate the *nothing/special ZINE*, a feminist art magazine for mad/sick/crip art operating as a platform for conversations on art and sickness, to engage in artistic research investigating a collective zine as an approach to critical disability studies and as feminist art pedagogical practice. The material for the zine is gathered via open calls online, and each issue of the zine is built upon a certain theme. The first open call was held in 2018, resulting in a collective zine published in print and online at www.nothingspecialzine.cargocollective.com.
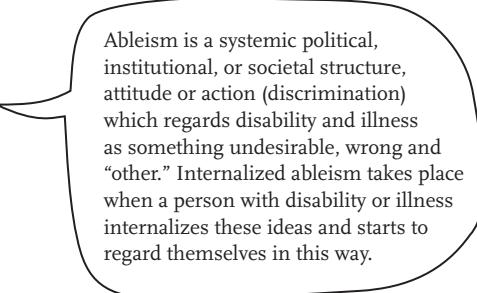
> Ableism is a systemic political, institutional, or societal structure, attitude or action (discrimination) which regards disability and illness as something undesirable, wrong and "other." Internalized ableism takes place when a person with disability or illness internalizes these ideas and starts to regard themselves in this way.

Disability and art education: background to the research

According to John Derby (2016) only a few attempts have been made to outline an actual disability studies curriculum for art education. At the moment, there are no ongoing courses focused on disability studies and art education in the art education degree program at Aalto University. When going through previous disability-related Bachelor's and Master's theses and doctoral dissertations com-

10

years

120

months

522

weeks

3652

days

87600

hours

5258880

minutes

315567360

seconds

Jemina Lindholm *&* Rheumathoid Arthritis

Jemina Lindholm:
One decade down, a lifetime to go!
2017, photographic diptych

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Jemina Lindholm:
Happy Anniversary! (Portrait of an artist 10 years sick)
2017, photographic diptych

pleted for the art education degree program at Aalto University, I noticed that these topics have been integrated by many scholars and students into their research; however, the viewpoints remain strongly linked to special education and the school context, focus on personal experiences (of one's self or a family member), or explore empowering/therapeutic approaches. When searching for Master's theses and doctoral dissertations in art education at Aalto University that integrate actual disability studies with the keyword "disability studies," there are two main matches: first, Mikko Koivisto has studied and analyzed the empowerment rhetoric of Finnish art education using disability studies theories in their Master's thesis, *Disabling empowerment: The powerless subject in the rhetoric of Finnish art education* (2013) and at the moment Koivisto is doing their doctoral dissertation on public pedagogy and disability studies at Aalto University (2017a). Second, Mira Kallio-Tavin (2013) has studied their encounters and artistic collaboration with Thomas, a person with autism, in their doctoral dissertation, *Encountering self, other and the third: Researching the crossroads of art pedagogy, Levinasian ethics and disability studies.*

Considering the scarce amount of research integrating advancing critical disability studies in my degree program (according to my searches), one might be compelled to ponder what this all means in the context of contemporary art education or why and how are disability studies important in the discourse of art education? When talking and writing about disability or illness, it is still often regarded as "the other" or "something special," something that is excluded and outside of normative academic and educational community. Still today, the number of scholars integrating disability studies into their work remains small, even though awareness of the issues has increased within the field of art education (Koivisto & Derby, 2017). As the educational perspective on disability is still partly connected to the medical model of disability (Koivisto & Derby, 2017) and as questions of disability, normalcy, empowerment, and special education are strongly present in art education as well as

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in our school systems in general, I think it is very important to continue integrating critical disability studies into art education research. This will ensure that the basic human right of access to high quality education is actualized; stop the further marginalization of people who do not fit into some artificial norm; and provide new perspectives and open up the discussion on disability and illness in contrast to regarding them as fixed categories.

To grasp the compendious essence of the phenomena of disability and sickness and the importance of integrating disability studies into art education, one might want to consider the fact that we are all only temporarily able-bodied. As Shildrick (2012) puts it: "If we ask why disability should be so unsettling, so productive of anxiety, it is surely because it speaks not to some absolute difference between the experience of disabled and nondisabled forms of embodiment, but rather to a deeply disconcerting insinuation of commonality" (p. 34). Temporarily able-bodied (TAB) is a term used to express the possibility of everyone crossing the boundary between one category and another and, for example, attaining the label of disability (Shildrick, 2012). This might happen, for example, through the process of aging and the loss of capacity resulting from growing older (Shildrick, 2012). This is by no means to say that this is the sole or primary reason disability studies as a field or as a part of art education research is important, but might aid in the realization that there is an able-disabled binary. In fact, the term has been described as a truism and criticized for becoming ubiquitous in the disability discourse. It has also been criticized for its inadequacy in explaining the limits of this binary and in shaking the "epistemic certainty" with which the binary is understood and applied (Shildrick, 2012). As Shildrick (2012) states, it is more important to simultaneously recognize the multitude of irreducible differences and the indefinite boundaries by problematizing the notion of categorical clarity and by unveiling the overlappings within the difference itself that shake the normative assumption that there is a clear distinction between embodiments.

Although my research focused on zines takes place outside the immediate school context, I perceive my work as contributing to the future research of critical disability studies art education, as learning takes place in various forms and spaces.

DIY and art: Background tor zine-making

Having a background in contemporary art, I have been a strong admirer of grassroots level action and member of artist-run initiatives. I had also noticed zines taking up and tackling issues and topics that are often dismissed or processed quite one-dimensionally by the mainstream media. To give one example from the Finnish zine scene, the *QFemZINE* engaged in contemporary discussions on queer and feminism, including one issue about disabilities. Zines are small independent magazines traditionally made with a copy machine and distributed locally in very small batches. A collective zine is a zine with contributions from many people, an anthology of sorts (Creasap, 2014). Zines are strongly linked with what I would call a DIY culture. According to Kimberly Creasap (2014), zine-making is an expression of the DIY ethic. Continuing with a quote by Michelle Kempson, Creasap argues that zine-making is "a specific dimension of feminist expression centering upon grassroots politics and autonomous cultural production" (p. 157). As a platform, zines share commonalities with the independent media of earlier women's movements, such as scrapbooks, pamphlets, and manifestos that enabled "girls" and "women" to write about issues that were not written about anywhere else and can be placed within a historical tradition of feminist writing and publishing (Creasap, 2014). According to deGravelles (2011) some zinesters/teachers approach zine-making as a process of "making space" (p. 98–124); to be more exact, making space for something that is

Do It Yourself (DIY) involves anything (e.g. culture, products, attitude) self-made rather than manufactured or produced completely by a company or via mass production.

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ignored or not given enough attention in and by society, "a radical space" (p. 99).

In addition to their printed form, contemporary zines have also occupied space on the Internet with the emergence of e-zines. The Economist (2017) reported that although big magazines are losing their readers, small zines are springing up. The information in zines takes up different kinds of forms: it can be visual or textual, strive to form hard-core theory or come from very personal experiences. Although zines can be created by anyone and cover any possible topics, *art zines* could be separated as a subgenre of zines, and zines as such can be regarded as art or artistic practice. Zines are not created to please or to be convenient. Still, somehow reading through and submitting to zines as an artist has broadened my understanding and felt important. Someone might regard zines as old-fashioned and outdated, and question their potential for real impact, but I dare to state that making space for things that are important to you, creating things by yourself, and attempting to share your experiences with others never gets old.

"Zine studies" is an intellectual discourse and name for a scholarly movement that studies zines, "zine-ing" and "zinestry" in varying fields of academia (deGravelles, 2014). Zine pedagogy, meaning teaching with zines, can be included in this discourse.

As a spoonie and living my life with at times severe pain-inducing illness and fatigue, I cannot be "active" all the time, and why should one be? While contemplating this in relation to "making things happen" I was bound to ask what it means to be active and what kind of different possibilities there are to be active. We have learned to perceive activity through a very rare lens. Hedva (2015) contests this perception by questioning

A spoonie is a person with chronic illness or disability who identifies with "spoon theory," a disability metaphor created by Christine Miserandino (2003) used to describe the everyday life of a person with a chronic illness or disability.

the notion of the political, which, if perceived as taking a stance for something one believes in, demands "visible activity." In "Sick woman theory" (2015), a collection of writings, artwork, talks, and performances, Hedva describes their thoughts on the possibility of protest as sick people: "I thought of all the other invisible bodies, with their fists up, tucked away and out of sight" (Hedva, 2015, p. 4) and continues:

> I started to think about what modes of protest are afforded to sick people – it seemed to me that many for whom Black Lives Matter is especially in service, might not be able to be present for the marches [...] also because of illness or disability, or because they were caring for someone with an illness or disability. (p. 3)

Hedva further contests the common definition of political and its a-politicizing features:

> If we take Hannah Arendt's definition of the political – which is still one of the most dominant in mainstream discourse – as being any action that is performed in public, we must contend with the implications of what that excludes. If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed *a*-political – simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street. (p. 5)

Hedva (2015) writes that, "Sick Woman Theory is an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible," (p. 35) meaning that sick bodies as such should be regarded as sites of resistance and protest against the inhumane conditions of society.

Contemplating how I could contribute to critical disability studies art education research, I read Hedva's (2016) text "Belonging

in the mess" about art, resistance, and open source. In the text, Hedva discusses the connections between theory and practice and why it is important to act – to become a maker. Hedva describes open source as "a philosophy of how to practice a theory of utopia and a demonstration in how to make a community, as a community" (p. 4). Further, open source or art are not just talking and thinking, they are also "about doing, building, and making: theory and practice" (p. 9). And because of this, according to Hedva, artists should attempt the practice of resistance. Hedva states that resistance can take many forms, but primarily it is about the practice of theory, meaning "the struggle of doing and making" (p.11). They continue that the struggle is inherent to resistance and marks a place for friction, "messy and in between," that is required for people to take action, "to be moved to do anything" (p.12). In their Sick Woman Theory (2015), Hedva promotes vulnerability as a default mode of being and proposes a "politics of care" (p. 68) that suggests care and interdependencies to be the solution for the hostile environment we are living by stating the following:

> The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care. (para. 67)

I find there to be kinship between the resistant, "messy and in between," essence of sick bodies/art/action, the idea of a protest as "politics of care" described by Hedva, and the history of zines in relation to early feminist publishing, making space, and creating communities. For this reason, in addition to writing about and studying disability in the context of art education, I decided to make

a concrete act, a collective zine, in an attempt to combine theory and practice. Further contemplating the possibilities of being active when taking under consideration my illness and disabilities that other people experience, I decided to test the pontentiality of a collective zine as a space or a platform to engage in a discussion on disability and sickness through art; a space to agree and disagree; a space for communication and expression that does not necessarily require physical presence; a space for learning and support; a space where we can be and express activity in multiple forms.

Disability studies and queer studies: Defining disability and a framework for "cripping"

When talking about the Western cultural, political, and linguistic approach to ability/disability and its history, the medical model of disability can still to some extent be regarded as the dominant framework for understanding and defining disability. According to this model, impairment or disability is regarded as a problem or hindrance of the individual and as something undesirable, to be best addressed in medical terms (Kafer, 2013). The social model challenges the medical understanding of disability as located in an individual body that calls for treatment, correction, or cure (Adams, Reiss & Serlin, 2015). This model explains disability through an ableist society, which means that disability is not a deviation from a norm but rather artificially and actually produced by the surrounding society and the environment rather than being a restraint or the responsibility of the individual. The social model of disability is strongly connected to activist endeavors and human rights movements for and by the disability community.

Critical and posthuman disability studies (Goodley, Lawthom & Runswick Cole, 2014; Shildrick, 2012) add to this discussion and raise a critical and disturbing question: Have people with disability or chronic illness ever been human? It suggests that the social theory is in danger of lagging behind the posthuman transforma-

tion: Even though posthumanism tends to reject the legacy of the Enlightenment, activist movements and social endeavors remain important, especially for those groups of society who have never been known as human. Intriguingly, posthuman and critical disability studies suggest that rethinking the human and the relationships with our environments, our world, and the human and nonhuman inhabitants of our planet could be done through disability. Goodley, Lawthorm and Runswick Cole (2014) discuss the theory and concepts of Rosi Braidotti and their relation to critical disability studies and study three disabled posthuman possibilities that might constitute "rethinking through disability" (p. 345). The first concept introduced is "Life beyond self: rethinking enhancement" (pp. 350–353) which takes into consideration disabled bodies using the latest technology as well as the myriad of interrelationships that shake old humanist notions of agency, responsibility, and subjectivity. The second concept, "Life beyond species: rethinking animal" (pp. 353–355) takes a look at the similarities between the tendency to perceive animals and people with disabilities as "others" and something less than human and uncovering the problematics of people treating animals in inhumane ways. Another section, "Life beyond death: rethinking death" (pp. 355–357) suggests that we should rethink how we pair up words like "valued," "quality," "life," and "living" and ponder how we might be able to discuss death, disability and short lives positively, affirmatively, and productively. They state that "being disabled is not a tragedy but a possibility, an affirmation, a "queer" or "crip" space for rethinking what it means to be human, to live a quality life and a life with quality," (p. 356) and conclude that people with disability will continue to fight to be recognized as humans in the humanist sense, but are already "enacting forms of activism, art and relationality" (p. 358) that make us think critically about "a new epoch that we might term the posthuman" as "disability disavows the human" (p. 358) in many ways.

Kafer (2013) suggests a political/relational model of proposing that there are actually many understandings of disability and illness.

The political/relational model takes into consideration that one can be critical toward the medical model and simultaneously wary of a complete rejection of medical interventions. The key aspect of this model is that it "builds on social and minority model frameworks but reads them through feminist and queer critiques of identity" (p. 4). Kafer further criticizes the current primary understanding of disability for emphasizing the medical and individual perspectives. As disability is more a product of social relations, the "problem" of disability, according to Kafer, cannot be solved by medical intervention but through social change and political transformation. This kind of model neither valorizes or opposes medical interventions, but rather takes them for granted; "recognizes instead that medical representations, diagnoses, and treatments of bodily variation are imbued with ideological biases of what constitutes normalcy and deviance" (p. 6). With this, the relational approach departs from the more common social model of disability that commonly relies on the distinction between impairment and disability, as both of these terms are social. Kafer further states: "Simply trying to determine what constitutes impairment makes clear that impairment does not exist apart from social meanings and understandings" (p. 7). This distinction also erases the lived realities of impairment due to solely focusing on the disabling barriers and overlooking the often-disabling effects of our bodies, such as pain and fatigue, and tends to make these irrelevant in disability politics, thus excluding those who wish for medical interventions (Kafer, 2013). Roughly put, as the medical model regards disability as unwanted, the social model can at times regard cure as unwanted, and this can limit the discourses at our disposal. The political/relational model takes a stand against the depoliticization of disability. Kafer notes that, "disability is experienced in and through relationships; it does not occur in isolation" (p. 8) and calls for disability "as a site of questions rather than firm definitions" (p. 11).

Dean (2017) describes the overlappings of queer and disability. According to the author, queer studies and disability studies

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have a similar and connected history. Both fields of scholarship originate from marginalized experiences. The term queer has been stigmatized and to some extent also covers the experience of disability. Over time, queer has been reclaimed as a symbol of pride and resistance. The same transformation has happened with the term crip, a historically pejorative term to describe people with illness or disability (Dean, 2017). Most importantly, queer studies and disability studies share the critique of the effects of normalization on "embodiment, desire, and access" (p. 2). In this context, this refers to opposing the heteronormativity and ableism of society, meaning that these often unspoken and normative assumptions of embodiment provide a framework through which "everything makes sense" (p. 2). Dean (2017) notes that "normal sex—as opposed to its deviant or perverse forms—requires a normal body" (p. 2). This means that queer and crip realities overlap, as the critique of sexual normalization goes hand in hand with a critique of ableist assumptions about embodiment (Dean, 2017). I think it is important to mention the imbrication of these two realities when talking about open-enedness and various understandings of disability, as disability studies has been influenced by queer studies and vice versa.

Carrie Sandahl (2003) has also examined the connections and also the differences between queer and crip in their text "Queering the crip, or cripping the queer?" Queering according to Sandahl spins stereotypic representations "to reveal latent queer subtexts; of appropriating a representation for one's own purposes, forcing it to signify differently; or of deconstructing a representations heterosexism" (p. 37). Cripping, as Sandahl describes it, "spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects" (p. 37). Both queering and cripping use similar strategies of appropriation on normative representations and refuse to minimize their difference and pass as either able-bodied or straight. They can also be used against one another in an attempt to critique and expand what it means to be crip or queer, as in "queering the crip" or "cripping the queer" (p. 37).

Zines employing public, feminist and queer/crip pedagogies

The context in *nothing/special ZINE* is mad/sick/crip, as the description of the zine implies what kind of content will be published and all the issues are looked at through disability. This framework or context of mad/sick/crip art does not require all the art works or all the artists to be mad/crip/sick or the specific disability/identification of the artist to be mentioned, although they can be and this is encouraged. Cripping or "queering the crip" in this case might mean that the context crips the content by default, regardless of the specific subject of an art work or the identity of the artist. In other words the context of the zine, being mad/sick/crip, can spin what is represented in an art work or the other way around, an art work can widen the context by, for example, resisting stereotypes or resigning from conventional representations of disability. This might conclude in expanding what it means to be mad/sick/crip and enabling disability studies theories as well as the overlappings of queer and crip described above to manifest in practice.

Zines as pedagogical tools and constructs have been used and studied in the school context for some time, and the process of teaching with zines (reading and creating them in the classroom) can be called zine pedagogy (deGravelles, 2014). Zines that emerge outside the school context can also be viewed from the pedagogical perspective as they can be regarded as public pedagogy. According to Mikko Koivisto (2017a), public pedagogy refers to various ways we learn through informal and noneducational settings and the premise of public pedagogy is that these informal and noneducational settings (media, entertainment industry and popular culture) shape our understanding of our surroundings at least as much as educational institutions. Deborah L. Smith-Shank and Karen Keifer-Boyd (2011) state that shared narratives become public pedagogy and platforms such as this journal can be regarded as a form of public pedagogy. Zines can employ these principles of public peda-

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gogy as they are part of visual culture and might consist of "shared narratives" (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2011).

Zines can also be viewed from the perspective of feminist pedagogy. There are many definitions of feminist pedagogy and what it actually consists of. Feminist pedagogy can be regarded as an umbrella term for variety of theoretical approaches that aim at developing more equal education and teaching. The premise of such pedagogies is that education does not only produce knowledge but also political and ideological subjectivity. The main principles of feminist pedagogies are empowerment and voicing, which describe pedagogical practices that attempt to distribute power in the peda-gogical setting (Rekola & Vuorikoski, 2006). Rekola and Vuorikoski discuss the feminist pedagogy of bell hooks and note that in their pedagogy, the distribution of power is made possible by creating an equal learning community. Zines and zine-making by definition and in their existence can employ these basic principles of feminist pedagogies, as this makes space for topics, angles, expressions, and voices often disregarded by other media. In collective zine-making and in collective zines, the meaning of community or "sense of belonging" might be pronounced. Creasap (2014) describes the idea of zine-making as feminist pedagogy in the classroom. Creasap further identifies three basic principles of feminist pedagogy that zine-making fulfills: "Participatory learning," "development of critical thinking skills," and "validation of personal experience" (p. 156). Whether zine-making is an individual or a collective project, it is always a collaborative process that consists of talking, providing feedback, and constructing zines together. This kind of collaborative process presents a model of ways for people to accomplish mutual or shared goals as well as individual goals. In addition, zine-making can be a very personal process, which has been an important aspect of feminist pedagogies. Zine-making employs critical thinking as experiences are analyzed through the critical lens of feminist theory (Creasap, 2014). I state that the principles of feminist pedagogies work in a collective zine and outside school context where the edu-

cational setting is not as clearly defined and is more intangible, as the site or the space for learning is a zine and the structure around it and the educational goals are not explicitly mentioned or even shared, in contrast to a classroom setting.

Wolfgang and Rhoades (2017) promote a "fagnostics" pedagogy that considers the possibilities of queering the spaces of art education practice to be more inclusive and culturally sustainable. The authors present an approach that "recognizes and centers the complexity, fluidity and queerness of educational interaction and the subjects involved" (p. 73). Fagnostics regard "education as a site of intervention and struggle, a site for extended resistance of identity binaries" (p. 74) resulting in "broadening emotional and cognitive capacities" (p. 74). I draw from this and suggest the possibility of the *nothing/special ZINE* as a mad/sick/crip space for art resulting in the same outcomes, as I notice many similarities between these endeavors and the topics and phenomena I have discussed earlier in this chapter. These ideas of queering art education might be conveyed to cripping art spaces and feminist learning when it comes to the *nothing/special ZINE* as a collective zine. Wolfgang and Rhodes (2017) focus on sexuality and gender as the key aspects in queering art education: I suggest that the principles of this kind of educational practice in the form of "cripping learning" can be applied to sick/crip realities as well.

When talking about a collective zine as a space and its relation to learning and pedagogy, a quote from an interview text about the Radical Collective Care Practices Project (2015) sums up the qualities of action that happens in the context of art and culture. This action does not happen in an immediate educational context nor is purely educational as such, but employs the practices of the pedagogies described above as well as knowledge production and engaging in discussion common in zines as a format:

We see the arts and culture as a domain where thought and experimentation can still have a place [...] So this is about creating spaces for discussions that are neither strictly academic or aesthetically oriented, and neither purely driven by the urgency of activism. We like the possibility of multi-site and open-ended discussion that platforms and networks can generate, and consider conversations (in discourse and practice) between activism, knowledge production, radical pedagogy and cultural production to be very important ... Structures that would step out of capitalist logics of exploitation and competition and rather build upon forms of collectivity and solidarity – that could take the forms of mutual aid, sustained self-organization, or institutions of the commons. (Rübner-Hansen, 2015, pp.12–13)

A collective zine is a collaborative effort that in the case of the *nothing/special ZINE* consists of multiple takes on the theme of each issue of the zine collected via an open call to form an anthology of sorts, a collection of "shared narratives." The zine can keep on making its interventions and being a space for learning every time it is read by someone. One might use it as a reference or as a teaching material in a classroom, as Creasap (2014) has done. As a pedagogue, making a collective zine means giving up the right answer or conclusion, engaging in creating a more equal learning community, surrendering to the element of surprise and to a myriad of different viewpoints on the same subject. As I am taking the position of a zinester for the first time, the research is a learning process for me as a pedagogue as well. One might also question whether there is even "a pedagogue" in this process, or what/who it actually is. Perhaps being a pedagogue in this context is more writing the words for zine-making and collective zines as sites for feminist learning and feminist art pedagogical practice.

To conclude and continue

The ideas presented here are a prologue to my research and underlie the zine as my choice of medium in this process, as it is a form of art and a form of feminist publishing. I argue that it is important and necessary to continue integrating critical disability studies into art education research and to make concrete acts to enable possibilities for more equal and more safe spaces for open-ended discussions about disability. As a zine can take various forms, it changes and reinvents itself every time an issue is made. Hence, zines as a format can also be regarded as resistant/queer/crip. Thus, I suggest that a collective zine as an art form, and zine-making in general, are well-argued and suitable ways of researching disability and approaching critical disability studies theories in the context of art education. To act is important, as it makes it possible to combine theory and practice, and as the struggle for new ideas and a change is enough. I again quote Hedva (2016) on open-ended processes and the problematics of arriving at a solution:

> This is not to say we will all arrive at a solution any time soon; in fact, I would argue that the very notion of arriving at a solution, as though the process will culminate and, so, stop, is a fantasy, and a dangerous one. The process of making, the struggle itself, seems to me the best we can hope for, and that is enough. (p. 10).

I argue that a collective zine outside the immediate educational context can employ the principles of feminist, public, and queer pedagogies, and thus work as a space for learning. To make a zine is a way to contribute to the previous art education research and work as an art pedagogue by presenting a concrete act of feminist art pedagogical practice and an artistic practice integrating critical disability studies. Contemplating this, my hypothesis is that a collective zine can result in a "crip" space that combines critique and creativity as an example of a form of "activism, art and relationality" introduced by Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick Cole (2014) and as an expression of the "politics of care" introduced by Hedva

(2015). Through working collectively, in constant transformation, and looking at our whole existence through disability, we might be able to discuss the indefinite boundaries between embodiments, to step beyond binaries as well as the burden of representation and stereotypes – "to egress" (Koivisto, 2017b), while still taking into account the multitude of irreducible differences introduced by Shildrick (2012). Thus, zine-making and the *nothing/special ZINE* as a collective zine might work as well as a site of resistance, as a channel for discussion and reimagining our embodiment through art, and as a collective space for feminist learning.

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Larissa Haggrén

7 # Through Uncertainty and Discomfort

– The Struggle of Searching for Anti-oppressive Practices for Art Education

Abstract

The dream of making the world at least a slightly better place is probably familiar to most educators. Just as familiar can be the uncomfortable awareness of the fact that the improvement we dream of is not necessarily the kind of effect our teaching has. As we are working within a society and a schooling system with oppressive norms, it is difficult to prevent these from affecting our teaching, and I find myself confused in the face of this situation. Art education cannot be isolated from the surrounding society, so how could we succeed in carrying out anti-oppressive education within this reality? In the future I wish to explore these issues through more practice-oriented projects, but for now – at the beginning of this journey – I will concentrate on the topic of anti-oppressive art education solely on a theoretical level. In this essay, with the perspectives presented in the texts of Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) and Kevin Kumashiro (2000, 2004), I speculate on actions that could be helpful for making our teaching practices more anti-oppressive.

Art Educator's Responsibility

I believe that aiming to enhance equity within educational institutions and society should be an important part of the work of every educator. No matter how amazing the art lessons we offer, for the marginalized, bullied, oppressed and othered pupils, a huge part of that holds very little meaning compared to the social situations that drain their energy. However, despite my certainty over the importance of working toward equity, I feel there is a conflict between my theoretical knowledge of social justice and my inability to actually incorporate this in my teaching. I have also noticed that a similar inconsistency seems to characterize many art educators, teachers, and entire school institutions. Bearing in mind the power an educator always holds over their pupils, I find the uncertainty over these issues very troubling. The importance of rooting the aim for equity within all education is obvious, so why is it not a norm? With all the knowledge gained during my studies, why is it that I still do not know how to do this right?

The practices of art education that bypass the themes of social injustice are not intentionally oppressive, but they are not immune to the impact of injustice either. Art education happens in interaction by, with and between people, so it can never be disconnected from the society around it, nor from the unequal norms of that society. Ignoring the forms of oppression, no matter how unconscious, is an act of supporting that oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). Excluding the discussion on heterosexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of oppression from our classes does not remove these issues from the lives of the pupils. On the contrary, the less we discuss the forms of oppression and the ways they materialize, the harder it is for us to recognize them and realize the ways in which our own behavior is supporting the reproduction of oppression.

Because of all this, I think it is my responsibility as an educator to find ways to systematically implement anti-oppressive approaches into my teaching. At the moment I am very much

struggling with this process, and thus the focus of this essay is to speculate on possible first steps toward more equal practices in art education. The issues of anti-oppressive education are relevant within all of art education, however, in this text I concentrate mainly on art education within the school context, pondering the anti-oppressive possibilities we art educators could have within the educational content and the social dimensions of art teaching.

Working within the educational content of art education

As a school subject, art is an excellent platform for discussing themes of social justice. Like contemporary art, contemporary art education also offers multiple possibilities for exploring "questions about society and culture, on topics such as human rights and social justice" (Kallio-Tavin, 2015, p. 31). Everything included in the art curriculum is somehow related to the society and/or the lived experiences of the pupils, so it could be argued that implementing anti-oppressive viewpoints in our teaching requires us to change our personal approach to teaching. That is, of course easier said than done, however, it is a relief to understand the amount of liberty we have over the teaching materials used in our lessons. In Finland, teachers in general have the freedom to plan their lessons the way they like (Eurypedia, 2015), although teachers in many subjects are somewhat dependent on the book series they are using and, consequently, somewhat bound to the viewpoints those book series are offering. Compared to that, the situation of art teachers is very flexible: most, if not all of the teaching materials used are typically created by the art teachers themselves. Often it is the art teacher alone who decides the form in which the content of the curriculum is represented in the classroom.

In turn, this power and freedom to choose brings responsibility as creating the teaching materials is also a political act. Creating teaching materials means curating the information we share

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with pupils in the classroom: What do we include and what do we leave out? Whose ideas are we representing? To which artists and ideologies do we give space in our classroom, and to which pupils are we offering representations they can relate to? Gude (2000) proclaims that to understand how our teaching "portrays the world" (p. 81) we should re-evaluate our materials with an anti-oppressive perspective and further, reflect on the reasons and motives behind our decisions. In addition to what is actually mentioned in the national curriculum, there is a strong and very Eurocentric tradition of what is important to learn about art and art history, and it is very easy to get lost in it. Particularly for a young teacher like myself, it might be difficult to have the courage to leave some parts of this mighty canon out in order to make more room for anti-oppressive content. However, as the teaching hours of art are certainly not endless, leaving the "old stuff" untouched and merely adding new topics on top is probably not only an ineffective approach but also impossible within the time constraints.

So, what would an ideal anti-oppressive art class look like? I certainly do not know, but I have understood that neither does anyone else. The nature of oppression is situated, complex, and ever-changing (Kumashiro, 2000), so viewing anti-oppressive topics through a certain perspective and situation does not necessarily translate well to any other context. Considering this, it will never be possible to formulate a 101-package for anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000). That said, I am not trying to offer vague instructions for how anti-oppressive art education *should* be. Instead, I want to point out three notions, introduced in the texts of Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) and Kevin Kumashiro (2000, 2004), which I have found helpful for reflecting and re-thinking my teaching. I am not suggesting these are the only nor the best ways toward finding and defining anti-oppressive approaches to art education, I simply assert that they have been useful for me, and I believe they could be helpful for other art educators struggling with similar questions.

The first notion is actually really simple: *What matters is the way we present our materials* (Kumashiro, 2000), *not the materials themselves.* For example, demonstrating the proportions of the human body only through an example picture with the characteristics of an able-bodied white male is not automatically a disastrous mistake, as long as we do not present it as the only acceptable and "normal" version of the human body. To avoid this misconception, it might be necessary to point out how the idea of the human body should not be limited to this particular example (that the shape, proportions, and color of people vary) as well as the reasons behind choosing this precise picture (perhaps the proportions in it are illustrated particularly well, perhaps it was difficult to find an example other than an able-bodied white male or female because of the fact that the traditions of Western art are racist and ableist). For me, it has been a real relief to realize how an anti-oppressive approach to teaching does not depend on flawless materials. Understanding this has liberated me from the unnecessary pressure and endless failure of not being able to create perfectly unproblematic teaching materials.

A similar feeling of relief is also related to the second notion: *My teaching will always be partial, because all "knowings are partial"* (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 310*).* Each picture we show in the classroom, each art work we view together, can never be more than one glance at the topic. We all also view the materials from different positions, and therefore the pupils will probably not view our materials in the same way as we do (Kumashiro, 2004). The pupils' viewpoints are not shaped simply by the subject-specific knowledge gained from art classes, but more importantly by their personal experiences as well as the communities and cultures they belong. Consequently, each pupil views the topic through their personal lens, always slightly different from the perspectives of other pupils and the teacher. And because a teacher's understanding of the topic is also limited by their personal perspective, the information presented in a class will always be partial to begin with (Ellsworth, 1989). This should not be understood as a reason not to invest time and

effort into the materials we are bringing to the classroom, but it is a reminder that a teacher should not consider it a failure if the examples used do not work well for the whole group. This partiality is something that simply cannot be transcended, which is why it is actually harmful to expect everyone to react to the materials in the same way (Kumashiro, 2004). Because presenting any topic completely and unproblematically is impossible, the most important thing to teach is actually the question of what is left unsaid. In addition to improving the diversity of our materials, we must encourage the pupils to look beyond them, into the gaps in-between, and beyond the gaps of our teaching (Kumashiro, 2000). Instead of focusing on simply questioning the representations offered, we should discuss the absent information: What does this picture not speak about, what questions are not addressed in this perspective?

The third notion, for me, has been the most important one: *Anti-oppressive education will always include aspects of uncertainty* (Kumashiro, 2000). Because of the diversity of our viewpoints, a teacher cannot expect to truly know the approaches most suitable for a pupil (Ellsworth, 1989), so we just have to work with something "good enough" as our starting point. The pupils always have some knowledge, learned and experienced, of the issues of oppression we wish to discuss, and a teacher can never have access to that (Ellsworth, 1989). Parts of this knowledge might be harmful and should be disrupted and unlearned, but even when working around the knowledge articulated aloud, a teacher cannot have certainty on how questioning and complicating this knowledge has affected it (Kumashiro, 2000). Anti-oppressive education also includes the need for both teachers and pupils to view their own position within the oppressive structures, privileges, and marginalizations of their identities and the ways their actions affect the forms of oppression (Kumashiro, 2000), but a teacher cannot expect to fully understand the position of a pupil, or vice versa. In fact, it might even be difficult for someone to thoroughly understand their own position, as we all have several identities and it is impossible for us to simultane-

ously speak from them all (Ellsworth, 1989). Understanding this constant presence of uncertainty has been also the hardest notion for me to accept, as it conflicts with the idea of teaching and the idea of a teacher I have been taught. When accepting the presence of uncertainty, one must also accept that there is no way for a teacher to estimate what will happen in the classroom when carrying out the lesson plan, and there is no way for a teacher to truly evaluate what the pupils have learned from the situation.

Working within the social dimensions of art education

No matter how well-planned our lessons are, approaching the issues of equity and oppression only through assignments can never be enough. Acknowledging the rather limited teaching time given to art classes and the amount of the educational content the curriculum requires us to incorporate into that limited time, confronting the complex themes of social injustice by relying only on theoretical knowledge would be a fairly weak approach. Practical limits aside, exploring the subjects merely through rational assignments or occasional theme days would fail to make much difference. Familiarizing the pupils with the topics of oppression and social justice through assignments is an important part of bringing anti-oppressive education into the classroom, but that alone is not enough. Without empathy and intention and, most importantly, action, the gained knowledge alone will not bring change (Kumashiro, 2000).

Because of the normativizing power the school culture holds, it is important to find ways to incorporate anti-oppressive perspectives into all of our teaching practices, regardless of the topic of the lesson – as part of the everyday life of the school. As Kumashiro (2000) points out, the school institution itself is also reproducing the norms of our society, thus in order to facilitate change, the school institution should not only criticize the "structural and ideological forces" but also focus on "its own complicity with oppression" (p. 36). While we talk about seeing pupils as respected individuals, valued

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as they are, everyday life in schools is often filled with moments where all these respected individuals are still pushed toward the same norms of acting and being. We talk about the children's personal growth at the same time as teaching them all to talk the same way, sit the same way, even walk at the same pace: "Please put your phone away, please get back to work, please take your bubblegum to the trash can."

When aiming toward anti-oppressive approaches to art education, it is indeed crucial for us not to forget the social dimensions of the school and the classroom situation, and how these are always somehow linked to the topics we are exploring within our lessons. If we solely talk about the importance of social justice without specifically addressing the inequality of the everyday experiences of the pupils, presenting the topics as distant or abstract, the delivered lesson learned might have quite the opposite effect. After all, anti-oppressive education does not mean solely informing pupils about the social injustice; it is "education that works against various forms of oppression" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 25). Aspects of equity and inequality are constantly present in the school institution (Ellsworth, 1989), whether we are paying attention to them or not. Depending on our approach, discussing the practices of the school culture can work to either justify or question the harmful norms and customs currently existing in the school and in our society. However, as most of us teachers have paradoxically grown up and been educated within the same institution we are now trying to renew (Vuorikoski, 2003) and, as I have pointed out above, a person's perspective and knowledge is always limited and partial, it is impossible for us educators to thoroughly understand the problematic social norms of the schools we are working in. Therefore, the aim to change things cannot be solely teacher-driven, as without the involvement of the pupils and their perspectives, the change will be just a change, not an improvement in equity.

Indeed, the objective is not a change of just any kind, but a change "informed by" the "theories of anti-oppression, a change

that works against oppression" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 44). It is also important to bear in mind that it is not possible to know where the deconstruction of current norms will take us – if we knew, wouldn't we be there already? A teaching situation is a complex social situation, a space where people with different backgrounds, privileges, bodies, identities, and expectations come together (Ellsworth, 1989). With the complexity of the social situations of school life, we cannot at once notice and understand all the things that should be improved or the ways they should be improved.

Oppression is situational (Kumashiro, 2000) and the social situations in the school and classrooms are continuously shifting; consequently, the ways in which oppression materializes are also constantly changing. Because of this situationality, it is not simple to notice the customs and practices supporting and reproducing the existing power structures. To be able to recognize the things we want to improve, we must pay attention to the ever-changing daily situations and to what really happens in the classroom when we are teaching. Who has space and why? What is demonstrated through the language and words used in the situation? Is the amount of control over pupils' bodies (what they wear, how they move, when they speak) justified or exaggerated? It is easy to be so concentrated on *what* should be done during the art lesson that one occasionally forgets to pay attention to *how* it is done, to what is neglected or how these actions affect the individuals present in that social situation.

Still, even with this constant reflection, it is not possible to overcome the partiality of our knowing, and therefore the uncertainty of anti-oppressive approaches is inevitably also present in the social dimensions of our teaching. Still, I believe it is enough for us to start from the inequalities and forms of oppression that are visible to us now, and aim to change them through ways that seem suitable now, with the trust that through this process of continuous change we can, slowly but surely, become aware of the inequalities currently invisible to us. Informed change should be always combined with the understanding that there is no goal to reach, as the

more we are able to change, the more issues will unravel. In short: the world will never be ready.

Bringing change can be also discomforting, or even painful, as it requires unlearning and also questioning our own identities and privileges (Kumashiro, 2000), the things we have learned to take for granted. It should be expected that questioning ourselves and the reality around us will cause a crisis of some kind (Kumashiro, 2000), which is why an important part of anti-oppressive education is acknowledging the need for a safer place. We cannot just throw the pupils into the deep end of the pool of the awareness of social injustice and expect them to swim. Of course, the school or classroom (or any other space for that matter) can never be a safe space (Ellsworth, 1989), as a school is a public space involving involuntary participation, large groups of people with various backgrounds, and the multiple oppressive norms present in the school culture. Understanding this, I believe our only possibility is to work toward building safer spaces, to focus on continually improving the safety of each situation, and to strive to decrease any aspect that diminishes safety in educational situations.

We should also remember that when addressing the topics of oppression in a classroom, we should not force the pupils to participate in the discussions in our terms, but through ways they are comfortable with. Having personal experience of a certain issue does not mean that a pupil should be obligated to actively participate in discussing that issue, as, for example, marginalized pupils will certainly not reveal their experiences "in the spirit of 'sharing'" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 310). In fact, it might be beneficial to re-evaluate the whole idea of always encouraging "active participation" that is probably familiar to all educators working in schools, and focus more on noticing the moments when the kind of participation we have planned for the lesson might be, contrary to our intentions, harmful for a pupil. I am certainly not an expert on this issue, but I believe that to be able to recognize the limits that should not be crossed, should be a major part of an educator's professional

knowledge to, and so should be one's ability to ethically redirect the situations. That said, an important element of creating a safer space is to offer possibilities for pupils to choose the depth of engagement that suits them, and thus fosters participation in discussions concerning social justice and injustice (Ellsworth, 1989). The pupils are required to go to school and to attend our classes, whereas we, their teachers, are required to try our best to make the school a good place for all of them.

Conclusion

Coming back to my initial question of why I am still uncertain about *how to engage students in ethical and just education*, I conclude that this is due to the quest itself being naive, utopian, and an impossible. In fact, the goal having these answers itself is standing in the way of finding and defining more equal teaching practices. The need to know "how to do things right" includes the belief that it is possible for a teacher to know the results of certain actions carried out with the pupils (Ellsworth, 1989). This assumption clings to the idea that somewhere down the line the change is complete, and it is the teacher who knows this goal better than others. A teacher's need to have the right answers is actually a need to have power over the solutions, thus sticking with the old hierarchies where the teacher is the one holding the power in a classroom. The need to know the Right thing also reflects the need to be in control and the fear of losing it. The obsession over control is typical of the whole of Western culture, but for teachers, having control over any given situation seems to be an essential part of the profession: a noisy and restless classroom is a sign that you do not know how to do your job. But to be able to teach with an anti-oppressive approach, it is necessary for us to aim to unlearn this need for control and accept the presence of uncertainty (Kumashiro, 2004).

To be ethical toward ourselves and toward the pupils we teach, we must remember that different positions hold different

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possibilities and limitations for anti-oppressive action. A person with multiple privileges cannot understand the experiences of a marginalized person, and should refrain from speaking as if they could (Ellsworth, 1989). A substitute teacher cannot rely on similar approaches to those of a teacher who meets a group weekly or even daily, so a substitute teacher should work with approaches more suitable for temporality. All positions offer some kind of possibilities for anti-oppressive education, and through continuous critical reflection it is possible to understand the strengths of one's on positions in different situations – as well as the mistakes we make, and should learn from. As the last point of this text, I want to remind myself and all the other art educators struggling with these issues that when aiming toward anti-oppressive approaches for art education, failure is inevitable. We cannot free ourselves from the limitations of our gaze, so we have to find a way to tolerate these limitations and accept the failures in our process. Change takes time, and it might be quite painful to realize the amount of our own mistakes, but we cannot let that discourage us.

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Verna Kuutti

8

Grappling Laboratory:
Disorientation, Discomfort and Queer Art Pedagogy

Introduction

In my chapter I examine the queer concepts of disorientation and discomfort in the context of body practices in art pedagogy. The article is based on my Master's thesis *Grappling Laboratory – Grappling as a Method of Critical Art Pedagogy* in which I proposed that grappling could be a method for destabilizing normative notions of gender. Departing from Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, I claimed that grappling could be a subversive act that gives a possibility to repeat gendered movements and bodily interactions in a way that questions normative categorization. In this chapter, I explore Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenological concept of disorientation and James H. Sanders III's and Tales Gubes Vaz's ideas on discomfort to explain how this subversion works. Taking examples from an art pedagogical grappling workshop and my personal history as a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu practitioner, I describe how grappling exercises can generate new feelings and thoughts about the self and the other relating to the body, its boundaries, gender and sexuality.

Alternative lines

The small, well-lighted hall is covered with stiff, square tatami mattresses. Our group of six participants in their 30s starts a pair exercise on the floor: one lies on their back, the other puts their chest on the partner's chest and controls the upper body with their hands. The goal of this so-called side control exercise is to try to keep the partner down on the floor while they are trying to rise up. Soon the floor is filled with heavy breathing, unrestrained groaning and laughter. Suddenly, I notice that somebody is calling for my attention. Two of the participants, a man and a woman, have paused the exercise and want to ask something. The male partner seems puzzled and says that it is impossible to do the exercise without "touching awkward places." I explain that the participants can stop the practice whenever they feel uncomfortable, because of the pain it might cause or the situation becoming intimidating in any way. I ask the female participant if the exercise feels appropriate to her and she seems to have no problem with it. After the short discussion, the two engage in the exercise with no observable difficulties, trying hard to resist the opposite power of the other.

This short example is from a workshop I organized for my master's thesis *Grappling Laboratory – Grappling as a Method of Critical Art Pedagogy*. It shows how two novice grapplers, one who identifies herself as a woman and one who identifies himself as a man, negotiate and find consent in a situation they find potentially troubling. The way in which bodies interact in grappling resembles in many situations of sexual intercourse – or at least the cultural imagery of sexual intercourse Western culture has produced. Grapplers look like they are hugging each other very tightly, and sometimes one grappler may end up at the rear end of the other who is on all fours. The positions can provide pleasure, but they are also practical when one wants to fight with the other without hitting or kicking. Practicing grappling thus quickly teaches how particular interactions of bodies and different body parts generate different meanings depending

on the context. The eroticism of same-sex grappling is embraced in YouTube videos of mud wrestling women or in S&M wrestling events of gay men, but in a sport context, even the possibility of homosexual pleasure can be violently silenced (Suresha, 2009). As Chow, Laine and Warden (2016) state, "while grappling relies to some extent on stereotypical portrayals of hegemonic masculinity, its performance practice provides numerous possibilities for the exploration of queerness" (p. 5). As a martial arts practitioner and a queer feminist art educator, I wanted to explore these possibilities in an art pedagogical setting. Personally, the embodied experiences acquired in training and competing in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) have been for me a living laboratory for researching the relations between bodies, gender, and sexuality. BJJ and other grappling sports are still dominantly masculine martial arts, and as a person identifying myself as a woman I have always been in the minority in the mixed-sex training groups. At first inhabiting a dominantly masculine space was strange. As feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed (2006) describes: "The moments when the body appears 'out of place' are moments of political and personal trouble" (p. 135). Being a visible deviation from the norm in the BJJ academy was not the only troubling experience when I started the practice eight years ago. In the beginning, my body was in shock at how hard the training was, how intensely and aggressively my sparring partners wanted to dominate me, and how close the body contact was with sweaty, groaning human beings. Practicing grappling forced me to think about the relationship between my gender and my body: how were differences of strength or flexibility linked to gender differences? I realized my body had had only rare experiences of the kinds of bodily interactions present in grappling, and that bodies categorized as male could have on average more of those experiences. At the same time it was in no sense impossible for my female-categorized body to learn to grapple, to dominate with my body, and to enjoy immensely the rough physicality of the exercise. During years of BJJ practice, what was strange became familiar, being "out of place"

became "being in the place," and discomfort became comfort. Still, the experience of disorientation never completely disappeared. I now have a common embodied language with which I can communicate with bodies of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, ages, and abilities, but the way of being in contact with the other remains always partly strange. This alteration of strange and familiar is one of the reasons why I find grappling has great potential for queer pedagogy.

For me, practicing grappling and being part of the martial arts community has embodied perfectly what Judith Butler (1990) means by *gender performativity* – that gender is not something that one *is* but rather something that one *does*. Ahmed (2006) uses the spatial metaphor of "a path well trodden" to explain how performativity functions. A path starts to form when we follow the line made by the footprints of earlier walkers, and we tend to follow a path that is already there. As paths, norms and conventions are lines that are both "created by being followed and followed by being created" (p. 16). Because of their performative character, norms can change over time – if people stop taking the path, it disappears. It is also always possible to deviate from the path, even though finding your way can be more difficult:

> Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 20)

For Ahmed, it was becoming lesbian and starting to live a lesbian life in a world constructed around heterosexual couples that made her aware of how life gets directed by the often invisible, normative lines. In my case, it was entering the masculine culture of grappling as a woman that got me deeply interested in how gender is performed normatively and how deviant performances are possible.

Treading my path in this environment has been sometimes hard and troubling, often strange, many times fun and inspiring, but definitively highly instructive when it comes to the embodiment of gender. I was curious to know if I could construct a similar learning situation for others too. I planned and organized a workshop called "Grappling Laboratory" where I invited people to experience how grappling *feels*. The idea was not to teach grappling techniques but to focus on play, creative movement, and new kinds of bodily sensations – to bring an art pedagogical mindset to the tatami, so to speak. I recruited participants from my own circle of acquaintances (friends, colleagues, family members) and finally four persons identifying as women (Elli, Jonna, Anu, Moona) and one person identifying as a man (Timo) participated in the workshop with me. The grappling exercises were followed by a debriefing discussion which I recorded and from where the quotations of this article are taken. I did not specifically tell the participants that they should observe their experiences through the lens of gender, but we ended up talking about it a great deal. The participants reflected on how new ways of moving, using the body, and being in contact with others related to gender and sexuality. For some, the intense contact and use of force of grappling was a liberating and empowering experience, for others it crossed personal boundaries in troubling ways. In this chapter I use the concepts of *disorientation* and *discomfort* to analyze how embodied practices such as grappling could be used in queer art pedagogy.

Making the strange familiar

I began this chapter with an example of how two participants in the Grappling Laboratory negotiated a situation they felt could be embarrassing, uncomfortable or threatening for the opposing other. The example serves to illustrate two things: First, the situation shows how our everyday movements and bodily interactions follow normative patterns that are gendered. The male participant noticed

that the grappling exercise would break social conventions, and even though it was not explicitly worded by the participants, the possible transgression actually made visible an internalized norm of how two people of seemingly different genders are supposed to touch each other. According to Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, we must understand how these norms operate to understand what gender actually is. Gender is constructed by repeating gestures and linguistic choices that are intelligible only through a normative lens, and this lens is regulated by what Butler calls a "heteronormative matrix" (p. 151). If we apply Butler's theory to my example from the workshop, we could argue that naturalized heterosexuality generates a sexual interpretation applied to close body contact between a man and a woman, and by repeating gestures that stem from this assumption (e.g. avoiding close contact) we maintain gender norms. The polite male grappler avoids touching the breasts of his female partner not because he is a man, but the performative action of avoiding is actually what constructs the categories of man and woman.

Secondly, my example illustrates that the performative character of gender opens a possibility for alternative performative acts, and thus potential change in gender norms. In the Grappling Laboratory setting, most of the participants could overcome the fear of breaking norms and engage in an intense form of bodily interaction and contact no matter what the assumed gender of their partner. Afterwards, the participants described that the touch and even the body felt different compared to "normal:"

Jonna: *When I grappled with Timo, I initially thought that this is not a normal situation in a way, but then you kind of throw it away. Like it crosses your mind, but I didn't really feel it affecting the grappling experience strongly.*

Moona: *I don't know where it came from, because I was thinking about it before … like, how are we going to touch here. But on the other hand, because the idea of the game was so clear, or at least I was feeling that we just wrench here, so I didn't get that, like where should I grab.*

Anu: *I went some way into a certain mode, just like you* [Jonna] *talked, that now we are going to grapple, that the touch and its quality are something really specific, so I started to think of it* [breaking normative ways of touching] *only when you* [Timo] *voiced it, and I was like, oh yeah, I didn't think about it at all.*

The exploration and reflection of alternative performative acts in relation to gender is a fertile strategy for an art pedagogy that takes a critical, queer feminist standpoint. We must note, however, that subversion is not simply a question of breaking social conventions. We might experience a woman grappler, or a man and a woman grappling together, as transgressing gender norms, but to be able to interpret an act as transgressive, we must first be able to identify a limit between something normative and something non-normative. In the worst case, transgressive acts can help to fortify existing norms. For example, presenting female martial artists as something extraordinary does not necessarily question binary gender categories as much as it highlights being male and maleness as a norm in martial arts (Jenks, 2003). For Butler (1998), subversion lies in the possibility that alternative ways of repeating gender performances reveal the actual performative nature of gender. In Butler's thought, the human subject is deeply intertwined with gender norms, so challenging naturalized notions of gender categories can mean "a crisis of knowledge, a situation of not-knowing." Experiencing the instability of gender can be confusing, even scary, but Butler sees the epistemic crisis as necessary for change to really happen.

The situation of not-knowing is an embodied experience that is well-described in the work of dancer, choreographer, and scholar Ann Cooper Albright. Albright (2013) uses the concept of *disorientation* to refer to the moments of confusion in her dance practice, when one is, for example, off-balance and loses control over one's own movements. For Albright, disorientation is a powerful tool, because the politics of location and the cultural organization of space become visible and tangible only when the everyday order is shaken up. "We rarely think where we are until we have been

lost," Albright summarizes (p. 270). The queering potential of disorientation has been initially developed by Sarah Ahmed, who uses the concept of orientation to put queer studies in dialogue with phenomenology. Ahmed's goal is to offer a new way of thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race, which makes *Queer phenomenology* a foundational text for a queer art pedagogy that focuses on embodiment. When in classical phenomenology the idea is to turn toward phenomena and analyze how they appear to the individual consciousness, Ahmed argues that "turning toward" is already a structured gesture. When we are facing something, what do we leave behind? When we focus on something, what is left in the background? One definition Ahmed gives for orientation is that it is "about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space" (p. 11). In that sense, the political power of orientation resides in the way some spaces extend certain bodies and do not leave room for others. For queer phenomenology, it is thus crucial to look at moments when the extension of bodies fail, when direction is lost and people have to re-orient themselves. These moments of disorientation challenge the everyday order, categories, and meanings of things. Ahmed gives several descriptions of when and how disorientation is experienced, but for the Grappling Laboratory case what Ahmed writes about proximity and touch is especially interesting. When one is very close to something or someone and/or touches it, the subject-object distance which characterizes depth perception disappears, and the background and foreground collapse into each other, creating disorientation.

> Things become queer precisely given how bodies are touched by objects or by "something" that happens, where what is 'over there' is also 'in here' or even what I am "in." (p. 163)

In a grappling exercise, it is very hard to observe your partner "over there," because you are both entangled in a rapidly changing bodily

interaction. Directions vary all the time and what you are doing affects your partner's movements and vice versa. Following Ahmed's description, the other as a separate object becomes something that you are "in." Or perhaps more precisely, the common movement becomes what you both are at each specific moment. Orientation for a grappler is determined by the goal of dominating the other with their body, and because the goal of the other is precisely the same, a grappling exercise becomes a trial of re-orienting yourself through a continued loss of direction and balance. The ground is moving all the time, and you and your partner are what constitute the ground.

Exploring awkwardness

In the Grappling Laboratory workshop, the everyday experience of being orientated and knowing how to find the way was challenged in several ways. We changed dimensions by being close to the ground, moved in non-conventional ways (rolling, crawling, on four feet) and were in close contact with other participants, balance balls and the tatami. None of the five participants had experience in martial arts, although some had occasional memories of playful wrestling with their partners, siblings, or friends. To make the experience of disorientation little less scary, I designed the workshop so that the amount of body contact and physical intensity was augmented little by little. The workshop started with warm-up games and movements, and developed from more structured partner exercises to free grappling "sparrings." In the debriefing discussion, one of the participants, Jonna, described the experience of disorientation as something positive, even though she felt that control was lost – the act of grappling and the bodies involved in it "just went on" partially unpredictably:

Jonna: *I felt that my body and the body of the other transformed into sort of grappling instruments, like, now I'm going to grab here and now a little from there. And the situation is changing all the time, like*

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both are just romping. So maybe that kind of unpredictability is delightful, like where that act of grappling or those bodies just go.

Jonna's description of the exercise is very interesting and relevant for the topic of this article, because in her words the two grapplers become something non-gendered, they experience a metamorphosis into "grappling instruments." Different body parts that could generate a sexual meaning when touched become handy projections that can be used while performing the task of grappling. Facing another human being in very close body contact without a (hetero)sexual orientation can teach how the relations between bodies, genders and sexualities are to some point arbitrary.

All the participants of the Grappling Laboratory said they had attained some kind of altered mode of being during the grappling exercises, where embodiment was experienced differently from everyday life. This mode or state was described, for example as "primitive," "honest" and "being in the body" (in opposition to being in the head). Timo and Anu both concluded that the rapidly changing situations in grappling coerced them to be present in the moment. Moona stated explicitly that she enjoyed grappling because it gave a possibility to move and interact in ways that broke normative assumptions about feminine embodiment:

Moona: [...] *I have always felt that I'm in some way clumsy, that, for example since my teenage years I've been like: "I can't dance" or "I can't tiptoe like some dancer girls [...]". I noticed I personally got huge satisfaction when I had an opponent with whom I noticed that I don't need to tone it down. Like now I'm smashing or hurting or something and I could wrench like for real HNGHHN, so it was in a sense really purifying, because you get to do it so rarely and it's so honest in some way.*

As Moona describes, the intensity of the exercise seemed to matter quite a lot. When the grapplers got carried away by the fight, they did not get confused by the non-normative ways of touching a stranger. As Timo describes it:

Maybe at the end I forgot almost everything [about the awkward-ness of the touch] *when you* [Jonna] *challenged me into a match. At that point, I got into a Zen-like state, like now we are just wrenching here.*

The issue of touching divided the participants – Jonna, Moona and Anu said they could get over the awkwardness, but Timo and Elli admitted they were thinking about it throughout the workshop. Experiencing and embracing disorientation, writes Ann Cooper Albright (2013), does not mean feeling totally comfortable about it:

> Part of the productive tension in this line between panic and total ease is the edge created by a "beginner's mind" – the willingness to feel awkward and lost without undue panic. (p. 372)

This quote leads me to explore *discomfort*, which is discussed by Ahmed (2004). Ahmed explains that feeling comfortable means feeling at ease with one's environment. In a comfortable situation, one is not really aware of the body but "sinks in" to the world. Conversely, it is pain and discomfort that return one's attention to the surfaces of the body as a body. (p. 148.) When a person is acting according to the norms, they experience comfort, because the surroundings allow them to "fit in." On the contrary, breaking the norms can produce feelings of discomfort in those who do not fit in or those who perceive the non-normative act. Ahmed sees discomfort as a productive feeling, because it points out the normative social structures and applies pressure to rework them. In the context of art education, discomfort is discussed by Sanders and Vaz (2014) who describe their own pedagogical strategies as "dis-easing spaces of art education and embracing indeterminacy" (p. 334) and suggest that art educators should teach their students "comfort with difference" (p. 337). The ideas of Sanders and Vaz emerge from their own experience of being gay art educators in universities and bringing up queer issues in their curriculum. Discussing gender and sexuality in the classroom has not always

been an easy task, because some of the students, and also some of the scholars, have felt that these are private matters that do not belong in the academic context. Sanders and Vaz argue that succumbing to the fear of discomfort and omitting sexuality from the classroom can contribute to the normalizing silence that presents uniform heterosexuality as the only reality in art history or visual culture. Queer art pedagogy thus always balances between maintaining safe spaces and discussing and researching subjects that are deeply personal (Sanders and Vaz, 2014).

By asking people to grapple in an art pedagogical workshop I was aware that I was asking the participants to step outside of their comfort zone. The closeness of the body contact, the use of force, the possibility of hurting oneself, and the unpredictability of the action are far from the traditional setting of art pedagogy and quite an extreme way of "dis-easing spaces of art education" (Sanders and Vaz, 2014, p. 334). This is why it is so pertinent to create a safe space where discomfort can be approached while still respecting individual liberties. Throughout the planning of the Grappling Laboratory, I thought of several aspects that could contribute to the emotional and physical safety of the workshop participants:

- By maintaining a fun atmosphere, the workshop could be experienced as play, not violence.
- By doing the exercises myself, there would not be an audience but only participants who co-created/co-experienced the performance.
- Having a thorough warm-up and gradually increasing the amount of the body contact and application of physical force would gradually prepare the participants for the intensity of the grappling.
- By expressing clearly to the participants that they could stop the exercises at any point if they felt too uncomfortable, I wished to restate that they had the power to determine their boundaries.

- By facilitating a debriefing session after the workshop, I wanted to make sure that possible troubling moments would be acknowledged and reflected upon.

Also, because most of the participants were invited from my own circle of friends and all the participants knew at least one other participant also contributed to the safe and supportive culture of the workshop. Still, all of the participants expressed that they were a little nervous about grappling and in particular about grappling in a mixed-sex group. I consciously avoided talking about touching in relation to gender before the workshop, because I wanted to encourage the participants to negotiate and solve potential situations perceived as awkward themselves. For some, this seemed like a good choice – Anu stated that the example of the teacher normalized the intimacy between two grapplers:

Anu: *I think it's pretty essential that when you do it first like that, that this* [side control position, chest on chest] *is okay, and you show how it's done, so it's easy to jump in when you see it.*

Timo, on the other hand, would have wished for a more detailed discussion before the workshop:

Well I got a feeling that now when we have mixed-sex grappling it could have been a thing that I would kind of wanted that we go through at the beginning, that everyone was sort of thinking about it, the amount of touching in general. I felt that it was for everyone something that caused tension.

Timo came to the workshop with his girlfriend Elli, who at first participated cheerfully, but during the last exercise wanted to stop completely. At that point, the task was to pin the partner, and Timo and Elli were grappling together. Elli felt the situation so agonizing that she started crying. The question of discomfort and safety culminated in Elli's experience and it became an important topic in the debriefing session. Elli explained her discomfort in several ways: She could not get over the awkwardness of the touch, her breasts ached when she did the exercises, she was afraid of hurting herself

or the other person and she felt that her personal boundaries were being crossed without her consent. Elli felt also that grappling with her boyfriend brought something into public that was supposed to be personal and intimate. The discomfort brought Elli to consider her gender in a surprising manner:

I feel a little bit like a loser, because no one else, or I mean that it's quite strange, like when we were discussing breasts, so I got like a feeling that I'm a bad woman, you know. That these kinds of things come to your mind, it's not a nice feeling, you know, that I started to think of being a woman, which is very weird because I usually don't think about my gender so much, but here I felt that I experienced my womanhood in a very different way. Not like "don't touch me here or there," but somehow I noticed, that damn, I think it's good to say it aloud, that somehow, I feel I'm a bad woman when my tits hurt – and how stupid is that.

Elli's comment brought up essential information about the differences of experiences. Perhaps because of my more androgynous body type, I had never thought about how grappling techniques do not really take into account the more feminine body types and so enforce the norm of a non-feminine grappling body. Periods and aching breasts are part of life for so many athletes, but these experiences are rarely taken into account in the contexts where I have practiced different sports. On the contrary, the act of complaining about aching breasts makes an athlete feel, like Elli articulates it, like a "loser" or a "bad woman."

At the conclusion of the session, despite the discomfort she had experienced, Elli felt that the workshop and the debriefing discussion were a positive and mind-opening experience. The physical practice showed her a personal boundary which she did not wish or need to cross. To give up trying and to not finish the sequence of exercises felt "liberating, euphoric and extremely good." She also recognized that the shock effect of grappling had something to do with disorientation from everyday cultural organizations of bodies in spaces:

Elli: [...] *Or in general it has to do with being an adult, that you're like "my space" or "my body my business" so in this kind of thing you have to throw yourself in that pain, I mean it was also fun, but maybe if I would do something like this that is more physical, like I notice that all sport I'm doing is like being alone, something like yoga, there's very little contact with people.*

Conclusion

As a bodily practice, grappling is not gender-specific. The same types of movements and techniques are applied no matter what the gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or abilities of the grappler are. At the same time, grappling is integrated into the highly masculine cultures of professional wrestling, mixed martial arts, or professional sports, and a physically able, white, heterosexual cis-male is still the prevalent norm of a grappler. In the Grappling Laboratory, only Timo fitted into this norm, but even he admitted that he has never been able to identify with stereotypical male aggressiveness. So for all the participants of the Grappling Laboratory, the workshop was an environment which they did not always know how to navigate, partly because it was a new bodily practice for them, partly because it broke normative ways of using the body and interacting with other bodies. This disorientation and the feeling of discomfort it generated was productive, because it pointed out the otherwise invisible structures that orient the gendered world. All the participants of the workshop represent a fairly privileged group of people in the sense that in everyday life they mostly experience "fitting in" and do not need to be aware of their differences compared to the social norms (whiteness, heterosexuality, being physically able). The discomfort experienced in the workshop – not really knowing where to touch or anxiety about aching breasts – forced the participants to bring their attention to the body and its capability or incapability to reproduce norms. For Elli, who decided to quit the workshop during the final exercises, the workshop was the first time in a long time that she

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really had to think what it means to be a woman for her. For Moona grappling was a way to express and enjoy an embodiment that broke away from the stereotypical feminine "tiptoeing." Both Anu and Jonna entered a meditative state, where their body was not so gendered anymore but transformed into a "grappling instrument." All the variant experiences and their interpretations pointed toward the relation between bodies and gender. How do bodies do gender? Can a body escape gender? Where is gender located in the body? The role of queer art pedagogy is not to teach correct answers to these questions, but to create situations where indeterminacy can be experienced, explored and reflected upon. As Elli concluded:

If you swim or do yoga, where you are mainly by yourself, so in this you surely do mirror like, I was thinking myself as a woman, what it is being a woman, and the society, so my mind started to build very broad stuff even though it was very meditative because the other person was so present there.

Most of the disorientation and discomfort described by the participants of the research workshop was caused by touching others. The confusion of breaking taboos of physical interaction became bearable because the participants got a new *direction*: to dominate the other with their bodies. Ahmed (2006) reminds us that a direction is not only a way in which someone or something is going, it is also something one gives. A direction includes the "where" but also the "how" and "what." The specific directions I gave during the workshop ("One tries to turn and the other resists," "Try to pin your partner down on the floor," etc.) were directions with which the participants could re-orient themselves in an otherwise confusing situation. For queer art educators, it is especially important to reflect on the nature of the directions given. Directions comfort, but they can also coerce. As Ahmed (2006) writes, "Within the concept of direction is a concept of 'straightness.' To follow a line might be a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point" (p. 16). Balancing the safety of having directions and nurturing the possibility to deviate is a real challenge. In the Grappling Laboratory,

the freer the grappling exercises got, the more there was confusion, and the feeling of confusion was linked to the experience of safety:

Anu: [...] *I don't know how the safety is constructed really, but at that point I was a little bit lost when we started the grappling itself and I was like what should I do now and what can't I do or when the rules were a bit wider so I was for a moment like confused, so then some really clear directions that now we do this and now this and then you show what to do so it helps.*

If we follow Ahmed's, Albright's and Butler's idea that being lost teaches us important things about normative categorizations of gender and sexuality, we must focus on creating art pedagogical spaces and practices that enable risk-taking without the fear of abuse. Dancer, choreographer and martial artist Eroca Nicols (2017) proposes that clear signals of consent should be deployed in grappling exercises as in contact improvisation in general. Nicols has written how "the heteronormativity and unsubtle pick-up scene of many jam environments leave little room for skills development without the compromising of one's values or boundaries. [...] This exclusion prevents many people, particularly many women and femme presenting folks, queer folks, gender fluid folks, people of color and folks of different abilities from engaging in CI [contact improvisation]." Nicols suggests that contact improvisation could benefit from the BJJ tradition that every interaction between two people starts with a fist bump and a high five, and both of the grapplers can tap at any point to end the exercise immediately. When a person taps out, it is a common sign to stop the action and to come physically apart again. To know that there is a clear and mutually respected way to say "yes" and "no" makes it safer to explore the new directions in between them.

All the names of the workshop participants have been changed.

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Bios

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Feminism and Queer in Art Education

First FAQ is a collection of critical, contemporary feminist and queer scholarship emerging from the Department of Art at Aalto University, with contributions from Finnish and international students as well as faculty.

The book advocates for non-normative educational, artistic, and cultural approaches that explore largely silenced issues. The texts emerge from personal experiences, but address systemic discrimination embedded within broad institutional and political structures.

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