Brain and Hand: Social Ranking, Sexism and the Role of “Embellishment Crafts” In Education and the National Economy

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ABSTRACT

Purpose / Design: To call attention to the importance of ‘women’s embellishment crafts in the national culture and economy. To shed light on their diminished importance in higher education.

Methodology / approach used: Design Methodology, Participant observation, reference to extensive literature, teaching, field and archival research, and professional practice over 5 decades.

Finding(s): Feminization of many manual intelligences and products is correlated with their de-emphasis is the education system. Feminization also may lead to self-exclusion by males with creative potential.

Practical Implication: Educators can pay greater attention to the economic contribution of manual skills and the social ranking of feminized intellectual outputs.

Originality / value: The design and execution of embellishing handwork done primarily by women during their ‘free time’ has, historically, been ignored or given very low status in schooling, design education and the design profession. School based education, in general, tends to overvalue types of intelligence that are associated with males at the expense of kinds of intelligence usually, and falsely, associated with females. Market forces have made some women’s crafts more economically important and have triggered stylistic hybridization. In Kenya’s ‘fused’ culture of the 21st century, crafters can access and contribute to a plethora of websites that illustrate and demonstrate the intricacies of a global commitment to embellishment crafts. In spite of this, gender division, social ranking and refusal to recognize the intellectual validity of handwork, especially by women, prevents their full development at tertiary level and in general recognition.

Keywords: handwork, manual intelligence, haptic learning, sexism, national economy, women’s work