

Chapter 5

Construction and Transgression of Gender Categories in Representations of Divine Figures: A Cross-Cultural Study of Children's Drawings



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Abstract This research addresses how gods may be gender-typed in children's drawings. It offers cross-cultural comparisons on four distinct samples of drawings from Japan, Switzerland, Buryatia and Saint Petersburg (Russia). We discuss the challenges that arise when rating gender categories in children's drawings, especially when drawing on a cross-cultural sample. Then we propose two approaches for the empirical analysis of the data: (1) providing a general description of the utilization of gender categories; (2) considering the data from a qualitative perspective, comparing children's strategies and cultural references. In the main, while there seems to be cultural differences (as observed between samples), three main sources of normative pressure might exist: androcentrism, same-gender preference, and masculine hegemony. We discuss the observed phenomena in terms of socio-normative influence, cultural and religious references made available, gender traits, and gender transgression.

Keywords Gender development · Individual differences · Masculinities · Same-gender preference · Religion · God concepts · Children · Drawings · Cross-cultural

The work presented in this chapter represents, in its entirety, the reproduction, in English, of a text published in French: Construction et transgression des catégories de genre dans les représentations de figures divines: comparaison interculturelle de dessins d'enfants et adolescents (Dessart et al., 2020).

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Does the divine evoke masculine or feminine properties, or does it surpass such a dichotomous view of gender? Previous studies on drawings of “god”¹ conducted in the United-States and in Europe found that children most often attribute a masculine gender to god (Hanisch, 1996; Kay & Ray, 2004; Ladd et al., 1998). In the present study, four waves of data collection took place: one each in Japan and Switzerland, two in Russia. The gathered data drew our attention to the fact that this issue of attributed gender is not as simple as had been previously assumed. Outside a cultural background heavily imbued with Christianity, feminine representations do occur much more often. In the end, attributing masculine properties to god may well reflect the influence of religious socialization within cultural environments where gendering god is hardly ambiguous. For example, the Christian god is often depicted as the “Heavenly Father,” as conveyed by the Lord’s Prayer or by the Apostle’s Creed. It, therefore, may be difficult to conceive of god as feminine in that context. But a thorough analysis of how children make use of gender typing when drawing god—including children from areas principally characterized by Christianity—has revealed a series of characteristics that transgress binary models of gender attribution.

When confronted with having to draw god, children are subject to different forms of normative pressure. Indeed, some children do choose to diminish (or de-emphasize) typically feminine or masculine traits while others mix them together. The present study illustrates this particular issue by classifying children’s drawings of god according to a set of gender categories, then analyzing the approaches used by the children in their various socio-cultural contexts to establish—or retain the ambiguity of—the gender of the divine.

Data Collection in Several Socio-Cultural and Religious Environments

Children (girls and boys aged 6–17 years) from Japan, Buryatia (Oriental Siberia, Russia), Saint Petersburg (Russia) and French-speaking Switzerland were asked to draw god freely, according to their imagination.²

The materials provided to the participants were as follows: a blank sheet of paper, a gray pencil, a ten-color set of wax pastels, and colored pencils (the latter

¹Given the intercultural and inter-faith qualities of the present study, we decided that the word *god* would be used throughout this chapter. Why, in this volume, the term *god* begins sometimes with an uppercase letter G, sometimes with a lowercase letter g, and why it appears sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural, is explained in the introductory chapter of this book (Chap. 1, this volume).

²We gathered data from a larger interdisciplinary research project based mainly in the human and social sciences at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland), but also involved research teams from other countries. The data sample are accessible on an online database via the following link: <http://ddd.unil.ch>

were only provided to participants in Russia). Researchers collected data in small groups and assigned children to individual places in the room so that they would not attempt to copy from each other. Each child was also invited to provide a written description of their own drawing and to fill out a questionnaire addressing religious socialization (e.g., religious affiliation and religious practices).

Hurdles Faced by the Participants, Hurdles Faced by the Researchers

Drawing god is a complex task. How does one draw: god, God, or gods, and so on? In order to compose their drawings, children have to make decisions at two important levels: (a) the topic (i.e., god) and (b) the medium (i.e., the drawing). The ensuing task—the interpretation of the children’s drawings by the researchers—is a very difficult task as well, as it is based on gender-connoted visual elements.

Attributing gender to drawn figures depends on the interpretation given to a series of markers (or criteria) that one can identify in a drawing: Which features are relevant for determining the gender of a figure? We found it helpful to review scientific literature on children’s drawings of the human form (Arteche et al., 2010; Brechet et al., 2008; Chen & Kantner, 1996; Cox, 1993; Perron & Perron-Borelli, 1996; Royer, 2011). Concerning feminine figures, the most consistent markers seem to be:

- Hair (long, braided, parted, curly or with a knot),
- Clothes (skirt, dress, heels, top),
- Facial features and makeup (eyes being much detailed with lashes, eyebrows and pupils, red or heart-shaped lips),
- Body shape (rounded, chest),
- Accessories (jewels, handbag, feminine hat).

Regarding masculine figures, the most consistent markers were:

- Hair (short or absent),
- Masculine clothes (shorts, trousers, jacket),
- Beard or mustache,
- Body shape (muscular, heavy shoulders),
- Accessories (hat, tie, pipe, cigarette).

Using such markers and combining them together may, however lead to equivocal interpretations of gender because these markers strongly reflect a Western—and binary—view of gender.

Children, in dealing with issues of topic and medium (i.e., What is my concept of god? How do I draw that?) may encounter obstacles that relate to the applicability of the above markers. A first possible obstacle pertains to traditional religious practices and god representations as conveyed in religious art. From the child’s perspective, some representations may be perceived to transgress gender categories. Both Christian and Buddhist traditions provide examples of art that breaches these gender

markers. In the Christian context, male priests and other ordained masculine individuals are often pictured wearing dresses or robes; Jesus Christ and male saints are usually shown with long hair and dresses or robes. In the Buddhist context, one finds males represented with red lips or jewels. Children socialized within a socio-cultural environment that is strongly characterized by such religious traditions receive specific knowledge about visual codes and can use the knowledge in a manner that fits their esthetic intentions. Such is the case of a Russian girl who produced a rather feminine-looking figure, whereas her accompanying text conveys intentions more clearly: “God is in Paradise. I wanted to draw Paradise, where Jesus Christ is seated in his throne” (ru09_sp_f_px_11_xx_nas, Fig. 5.1).

A second issue that the child may have to deal with pertains to feminine or masculine stereotypical elements according to his/her current cultural environment. That environment may or may not be consistent with traditional religious features (ch16_vd_f_rrd_07_08_mar)³.

Two additional difficulties may be found in relation to how researchers themselves handle the decoding of gender markers. Researchers need to be able to recognize gender codes within a specific religious tradition, and they need to be able to account for how gender stereotypes work in a given socio-cultural environment. For example, long hair may point to masculinity—as well as femininity—among Japanese children who are very familiar with *manga*⁴ (jp04_fa_f_pkx_14_03_ikx, Fig. 5.2). However, a similar approach to masculinity within a background distinguished by prevalent Christianity would be expressed differently and would require some obvious reference to traditional iconography, without which the participant’s intention might simply go unnoticed.

A child’s intentions of constructing gender in their representation might be difficult to interpret solely from their drawing. In that regard, referring to a written description attached to a drawing can prove to be very useful. Illustrating this point with the Japanese example mentioned above (jp04_fa_f_pkx_14_03_ikx), the written description provided by the participant substantiates the researcher’s initial opinion that the figure was intended as masculine. However, there are instances where the drawing and the description are in obvious contradiction. These situations pose huge problems for the researchers. Heller (1986) cited one such divergence in the case of Lorraine: She verbally emphasized god’s androgyny; however, it was not at all apparent in her drawing. The figure she had drawn was clearly masculine. A similar situation occurs in the sample from the present study: a drawing from Buryatia distinctly depicts a feminine figure although the written text indicates masculinity through the use of the pronoun “he” (ru08_bo_f_pb_11_03_tou).

Although most drawings of god show an anthropomorphic figure, they do not necessarily display ordinary human beings. They often mix human features with

³Links to quoted images that are not reproduced in this chapter can be found in the index at the end of the book.

⁴*Manga* refers to type of Japanese graphic novel.



Fig. 5.1 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/U69jrc=ht2CfGVy1SVIDZwG.20180702T193943572Z>

other sentient entities (e.g., animal or vegetal), or with non-sentient entities (e.g., light, cloud). This is an additional hurdle that researchers confront when assessing gender typing.

Fig. 5.2 http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/G_qpvY=aRvirrmXrQneOOgY.20200318T151208653012Z



Forms of Normative Pressure and Transgressive Gender Typing

Three central forms of normative pressure can be assumed with respect to gender typing divine figures in children's drawings. Each source suggests a distinct form of gender transgression. First, a prevalent gender category associated with divine figures within a specific religious tradition may exist. It is reasonable to think in this case that children who face an overrepresentation of masculine figures are likely to draw a masculine god, by a mere exposure effect. It may be further reinforced by a specific gender ideology that is encouraged by religious institutions (Whitehead, 2012).

Second, research on gender development suggests that some in-group favoritism operates based on one's gender (i.e., female or male). This may result in a propensity to prefer activities, behaviors or objects that are typically associated with one's gender, and it appears that boys are particularly prone to such an inclination (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Similar observations have been made in children's drawings of human figures (Arteche et al., 2010).

Third, gender norms that prevail in a given social environment might also influence a child's tendency to attribute a particular gender category to a divine figure. Patterns of hegemonic masculinity are likely to reify masculine power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This may involve internalization processes, on the part of both female and male individuals (Uhlmann & Uhlmann, 2005).

So, children are confronted with at least three forms of normative pressure when attempting to draw god. As a result, transgressions of gender norms may appear to various degrees, depending on the prevalent gendered expression being constrained by each of these three sources of influence. Thus, a figure may stand in contradiction to gender markers or expectations with respect to one such source. The conflation of these forms of pressure may also result in another type of transgression: Figures may not abide by binary genders, but may present ambiguity by appearing androgynous or undifferentiated.

In the main, the transgressive quality of a gendered god depends on a series of factors that are either specific to the participant—such as their own gender—or characteristic of the surrounding socio-cultural environment. Such factors may act synergistically or antagonistically. The child's mastery of gender codes, both at a cognitive and at a graphic level, add degrees of interpretive complexity to the task of the researcher.

Gender Categories and Children's Socio-Demographics

Data Sample

In order to conduct an analysis of gender categories in children's drawings of god we used a sample of $N = 1000$ participants. We engaged participants from four different socio-cultural environments: Buryatia ($N = 354$), Saint Petersburg ($N = 174$), Japan ($N = 143$) and French-speaking Switzerland ($N = 329$). Participants' ages ranged from 6 to 17 years and the age distribution across all four groups was roughly equal.

In the Japanese group, half of the children attended a Buddhist school and the other half attended a secular school. All children from the Buryat group attended a public (secular) school; however, this group includes two ethnic sub-groups: children from a Slavic Russian background, characterized by Christian Orthodox practices; and children from a Buryat Russian background, characterized by Buddhist practices. Children in the group from Saint Petersburg represented two distinct schooling contexts: secular schooling and Orthodox schooling (in a church setting). Finally, the Swiss group of participants includes children from religious school (Catholic or Protestant) and secular school contexts.

Gender Categories and Object of Study

For the purpose of the present study, it is important to consider a few key-notions previously suggested by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009): gender, sex category, and accountability. According to these authors, gender, as a socio-cultural construct,

is performed in order to put forth one's accountability for a particular sex category (usually woman or man). Nonetheless, the concordance with such a category may not necessarily be perceived in direct connection with a high degree of feminine or masculine expression. As demonstrated by Garfinkel (1967), a woman may be seen as non-feminine without being a poor candidate for the woman category. Bearing this in mind should help clarify the present approach. First, we assessed the nature of the gender (gender identity) of the figures in the drawings—not the *degree* of expression according to a particular gender dimension. Second, references are made to *gender* categories (see Riegel & Kaupp, 2005) and not to *sex* categories mainly because the nature of the drawings does not permit researchers to assume the existence of actual biological features on the drawn god figures.

We assigned every drawing from the sample to one of the following five categories: masculine, feminine, androgynous, undifferentiated, and irrelevant, respectively. The first two categories represent unambiguous figures. Androgynous figures exhibit both feminine and masculine traits. Undifferentiated figures display such a weak expression of gender traits that it is impossible to assign them to any of the previous categories. We placed are non-anthropomorphic figures in the *irrelevant* category; they do not qualify for further analysis according to gender.

Gender analysis in the present study relied on both the drawing and its accompanying written description. Three different raters (a woman and two men) from the same research team in the psychology of religion assessed the data. A Kappa coefficient was computed by pairs of raters, leading to the following results: .69, .65, and .59. Interrater reliability was relatively low, given that it is usually deemed acceptable from .67 upwards (Hallgren, 2012). This observation reflects the degree of ambiguity inherent in the data. Disagreements between raters were resolved further through discussion, except in the case of seven drawings. These seven cases were removed from the analysis and do not appear in the report below. The final sample size, therefore, was $N = 993$.

Distribution of Gender Categories

We observed the following from the total sample (all four groups of participants).
Raters classified

- 73.0% of the figures as masculine
- 11% of the figures as undifferentiated
- 9.5% of the figures as irrelevant
- 5% of the figures as feminine
- 0.8% of the figures as androgynous

Cross-Cultural and Inter-Faith Comparison on Feminine Figures

Because of the large predominance of masculine figures overall, the presence of feminine figures, when considered in tandem with the place of data collection, can be informative because it may reflect the specific position of feminine figures in the various cultural and faith settings. Observations in this vein may also indicate the normative pressures that contribute to adopting a binary view of gender⁵:

- 18.2% in Japan
- 8% in Buryatia
- 1.4% in Saint Petersburg
- 0.9% in Switzerland

Gender of the Divine Figure vs. Gender of Participant

Certain categories of figures were drawn mostly by female participants. This is the case of feminine figures (90% from that category) and androgynous figures (62.5% from that category). Only slight differences occurred between female and male participants regarding the use of the other gender categories. The following percentages represent the use of feminine divine figures by female and male participants, respectively, for each cultural group:

Female participants

- French-speaking Switzerland: 1.2%
- Saint Petersburg: 2.6%
- Buryatia: 15.4%
- Japan: 38.3%

Male participants

- French-speaking Switzerland: 0.6%
- Saint Petersburg: 0.0%
- Buryatia: 0.9%
- Japan: 3.6%

Developmental Aspects

In order to explore the possible effect of age on the gender typing of divine figures, we grouped the drawings by the participant's age. Two groups were formed: participants 6–10 years old and participants 11–17 years old. We made two principal observations. With increased age there is (a) a decrease in the undifferentiated gender category (from 14.5% down to 8.5%), and (b) an increase of irrelevant figures (rising from 5% up to 12.8%).

⁵ Percentages are indicative of feminine figures within each group.

Summary

Results confirm the three hypothesized forms of normative pressure through the identification of related levels of gender transgression. Gender typing of the divine as it is communicated within a religious tradition appears to influence children in their choice of gender categories used to depict god. That is, children from a socio-cultural background strongly characterized by Buddhism do use feminine figures to a greater extent than children from a mostly Christian background do. In contrast, in the Christian tradition masculine figures through the Father and Christ are emphasized. Although Catholicism and Christian Orthodoxy do accentuate the figure of the Virgin Mary, they do not grant her the status of a goddess. In that respect, feminist theology has harshly criticized the preponderance of masculinity attributed to the divine in the Christian tradition (Johnson, 1984; Lindsey, 2015). It is quite the opposite for the Mahayana Buddhist cosmology, present in Japan and Buryatia, which includes several goddesses (Shaw, 2015). This opens a whole range of possibilities for children from such a background to draw away from masculine figures of the divine. Such potential is particularly evident in the Japanese context, where the word *kami* is used to name a divine being (Dalby, 2015), which is a gender-neutral term and is neither singular nor plural). Moreover, there are feminine Shinto deities (Miller, 2010), which adds to the representability of the feminine. The Japanese group of children, therefore, is less likely than the other groups to be subject to such forms of normative pressure in favor of masculine figures. Concerning Buryat children, the influence of Buddhist representations is coupled with influence of Christianity (Vanchikova, 2006). This might explain the smaller percentage of feminine figures from this group compared to the Japanese group. More generally, the use of gendered articles in the language of the participants has a plausible impact of the gender typing of god. It is worthwhile to note that, except for the Japanese group, the task referred to a masculine word in the language spoken by the children, even though the wording of the instructions avoided any use of gender articles.

Depending on whether the participant is female or male, the assumed underlying in-group favoritism should be observable. We expect to see a higher proportion of feminine divine figures in the drawings of female participants. We found that accounting for the participant's cultural background did suggest some interactions with their own gender, in a manner that would either favor or inhibit its expression on the divine figure.

The last level of normative pressure, masculine hegemony, seems to be present across all groups from the sample, although it remains difficult to pin it down and separate it from the forms of normative pressure coming from religious traditions because they lean in the same androcentric direction.

From a developmental perspective, it may be that the undifferentiated gender category, as young participants use it, leads essentially to non-anthropomorphic figures (gender-irrelevant figures) in the oldest participants.

Besides gaining insights into children's utilization of specific gender categories in relation to god, we also explored ways in which these categories are expressed. This issue will be covered in the next section.

Strategies Used by Children to Express Gender in Drawings of God

We structured the analysis of gender typing strategies utilized by children so that each gender category (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous and undifferentiated) has been addressed across all four socio-cultural groups. The purpose here was not to conduct an exhaustive analysis, but rather to get a sense of the possible strategies used to express gender. Additionally, this analysis aids in identifying the extent to which these strategies were unique to a particular socio-cultural group or employed by more than one of the groups represented in the study.

Masculine Divine Figures

French-speaking Switzerland The divine figure may exhibit biological features that are typically associated with the masculine category, such as a beard, but at the same time, the figure may be wearing a dress, an item of clothing frequently identified as feminine (ch10_ne_m_pfo_12_07_raf). The masculine category may also be accentuated through text (e.g., the words "a man") provided by the participant (ch10_ne_m_pfo_12_07_raf). Influence from the Christian tradition is often evident. Clear traditional references, such as Christ on the cross, indicate the masculine gender of the figure. This can be very useful, particularly alongside ambiguously gendered features (ch09_vd_m_pbu_11_11_jul). The divine figure may also be represented as an ordinary human being whose clothes stipulate identification as a masculine figure (ch10_ne_f_psr_08_05_ama).

Saint Petersburg Saint Petersburg Some figures are depicted as celestial patriarchs, and these happen to be very masculine, they have beards and a tough appearance (ru10_sp_m_rs_15_02_ale, Fig. 5.3). Beyond depicting gender per se, it seems that participants sometimes use masculine figures to accentuate power qualities, as in this case, "I meant that god is almighty and stands above us and holds our world" (ru10_sp_m_rs_15_02_ale). We observed representations of Jesus Christ (ru09_sp_f_rn_17_01_kri), as well as god figures whose patriarchal qualities could be perceived only through the participant's written description of the drawing (ru09_sp_m_px_13_03_ern).



Fig. 5.3 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/LBYby6ZZRYO=3KsYD0MhoQ3.20180702T195644194Z>

Buryatia Influences of Buddhist or Christian traditions are apparent in depictions of Buddha (ru12_bo_f_pb_15_03_lud) or Jesus Christ (including compositions featuring the Madonna and Child), respectively (ru12_bo_f_px_12_00_nas). An influence from shamanism also emerged, found, for example, in the form of a human figure with the head of a dog (ru08_bo_m_pb_10_11_tam). Other sources, such as Ancient Greek mythology (e.g., Ares, god of war), serve to inspire the children's efforts (ru08_bo_m_pb_10_09_ars). Additionally, researchers identified borrowings from popular culture in the drawings, such as the depiction of Bruce Almighty, a movie character played by actor Jim Carrey (ru09_bo_m_px_13_11_vas).

Japan As one would expect, Buddha figures prominently in drawings from this group of participants (jp04_to_m_rnx_08_08_stx), but we also noted the presence of characters from popular culture, such as Goldorak, depicted as a patriarch and surrounded by his celestial court consisting of the Mario Brothers (jp03_to_m_

Fig. 5.4 http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/bd2yeyX7T_W8qkVci3iB VAV.2020031 8T140231899891Z



pfx_10_02_tax). References to people from the child's own family (e.g., grandfather) also appear (jp03_ca_f_rix_07_10_amx, Fig. 5.4).

Divine figures may be characterized as masculine on two different levels: through gender features themselves and through references to familiar characters. While the first level simply consists in including stereotypically masculine features on the divine figure, at the second level children reference characters whose sexual category is known, for example: a child's grandfather, Buddha, Jesus Christ, or Bruce Almighty.

The commonly gender-transgressive character of traditional religious representations (e.g., long hair, dresses) may be lessened by the inclusion of more contemporary features that fit masculinity more tightly. This is the case of Jesus Christ in French-speaking Switzerland (ch16_vd_f_rcb_14_11_oxa) or Buddha in Buryatia (ru12_bo_f_pb_15_03_lud).

Feminine Divine Figures

French-speaking Switzerland Figures may exhibit features that are usually considered feminine, such as feminine curves, braids, pink cheeks and lips (ch16_fr_f_rcn_12_09_gae). These drawings also reference religious traditions that are not typical of this group's cultural background, such as the Hindu goddess Lakshmi (ch09_vd_f_pbu_12_00_oli, Fig. 5.5).

Saint Petersburg References are made to feminine figures from the Christian tradition, such as the Virgin Mary, whose identification was supported by the text accompanying the drawing (ru09_sp_f_px_08_01_sta). Some drawings reference other human based entities, such as fairies (ru09_sp_f_px_07_10_nas).

Buryatia These drawings depict feminine body features, such as prominent breasts (ru12_bo_f_pb_12_06_adi). Some gendered personality traits can also be found in written texts, as in the case of a drawing that depicts a woman warrior (ru09_bo_f_px_11_03_nel). The text that accompanies the drawing states: "My god is a woman. She is authoritative, untamable and glowing in her beauty. She has a long and beautiful stick which can do magic..." Another representation exhibits the Virgin and Child from the Christian tradition, but in an unusual twist, the participant indicates that it is the mother, Mary—rather than the child—who is the divine figure (ru09_bo_f_px_10_10_vik). It also happens that the feminine qualities of the divine figure happen to be only clearly apparent in the written text (ru09_bo_m_px_10_06_bou).

Japan Many figures are gendered as feminine by very stereotypical features (especially the hair and clothes) and sometimes they look like princesses (jp03_to_f_pfx_13_06_sax, Fig. 5.6). Some figures resemble traditional Christian figures, such as Mary,⁶ (jp04_to_m_rtx_10_10_kyx). In some exceptional instances, feminine features (e.g., long feminine hair) are used to symbolize qualities that go beyond gender, for example: the act of protecting the world can be graphically embedded in the figure's hair (jp04_ca_f_rix_14_03_kkx).

We see two main strategies here. Some figures display stereotypical feminine traits (and concurrently bear masculine features, but at a sufficiently low level for those figures not to be androgynous). Other figures do clearly refer to traditional feminine deities. It is worthwhile to note that at the graphic level, the expression of feminine traits seems to be more straightforward in the Buryat and Japanese groups.

⁶It is worthwhile to note that this might also be construed as an instance of borrowing from within the Japanese popular culture. In fact, there are stories about the Virgin Mary (known as "Maria-sama ga Miteru" in Japanese, which translates to "The Virgin Mary is Watching you" in English), in various forms, such as novels, anime, or manga (Hairston 2006).



Fig. 5.5 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/hsU3HEEHT3GE3Y7NOCskjwE.20201008T10291430686Z>

Androgynous Divine Figures

French-speaking Switzerland Gender markers may be found on the outfit (dress, earrings and braids) or on the body (beard and hairy legs) (ch10_ge_f_rbc_15_04_val, Fig. 5.7). The divine figure may also be divided into half a woman and half a man (ch10_ge_m_pco_11_00_flo; ch09_ge_m_pco_10_00_flo). The use of more

Fig. 5.6 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/FktBI22cR7ykWhxJ2II3BQH.20200318T122236790496Z>



than one gender in the divine figures may imply androgyny as well (ch10_ge_f_rbc_12_11_jul).

Saint Petersburg No androgynous figure was identified in this group.

Buryatia Researchers found conflicts between feminine and masculine features, including the body, clothes and hair (ru09_bo_f_px_08_00_tan) or the cheek color (ru09_bo_f_px_13_02_eka), that are not explicitly resolved in the accompanying texts.

Japan The androgynous qualities of the divine figure that bears a somewhat masculine appearance may be grasped by referring to the written text provided by the participant (jp04_fa_m_pqx_11_05_tyx). In this group, we note that androgyny may be distributed across several divine figures within one drawing, some of them feminine, others masculine (jp03_to_f_pfx_07_06_max, Fig. 5.8). Androgyny also appears as a conflation; several known cultural figures may be condensed into one. For example, one drawing (jp04_to_m_rtx_08_09_fyx) displays a single figure that combines the “Seven Lucky Gods”, including Benzaiten, who is a feminine character (Miller, 2010).

With regard to androgynous figures, researchers identified three main strategies employed by the participants. Following one of these strategies, participants mixed

Fig. 5.7 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/6TefojrqQ9SPj22i2ca3qAo.20201009T120536915466Z>



feminine and masculine features on a same figure with relatively high degrees of femininity and masculinity. According to another strategy, participants represented the god figure in a way that divided the divine being into distinct feminine and masculine parts. In the third strategy, participants expressed androgyny of the divine through the distribution of gender traits across multiple figures, each figure standing for either the feminine or the masculine categories. This particular representation could also suggest polytheism⁷.

⁷We are aware that there could be some misunderstanding over theological biases concerning the possible construal of a same divine *substance* (to use the theological term) in multiple representations of the divine. This is not the case. Considering a gender category, such as androgyny, across several god figures is derived from the methods. More precisely, each drawing is assigned to a gender category, be it for one or more god figures. In the main, this approach does not group theologially, but instead classifies on the basis of gender instead.



Fig. 5.8 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/8vJ4O4CgSIuweA7sQr4xGQI.20180702T170041568Z>

At an intercultural level, Saint Petersburg was found to be the only group that contained no figures classified as androgynous. Also, while ontological duality as expressed through gender seemed to characterize the group from French-speaking Switzerland the Buryat group referred to it without necessarily involving gender at all (e.g., ru09_bo_m_px_11_06_vit, Fig. 5.9).

Undifferentiated Divine Figures

French-speaking Switzerland Gender traits are, frankly, weakened on figures having a human silhouette (ch08_ge_f_rap_11_00_and). In other drawings, there is instead some personification of a non-human entity (e.g., a light). The participant achieves this personification by drawing the non-human entity with a human face (ch09_vd_f_pbu_12_06_mel, Fig. 5.10). The participant may also draw the representation of god as a faceless figure in a way that makes it impossible for the researchers to identify its gender (ch10_ge_f_ral_13_05_kok).

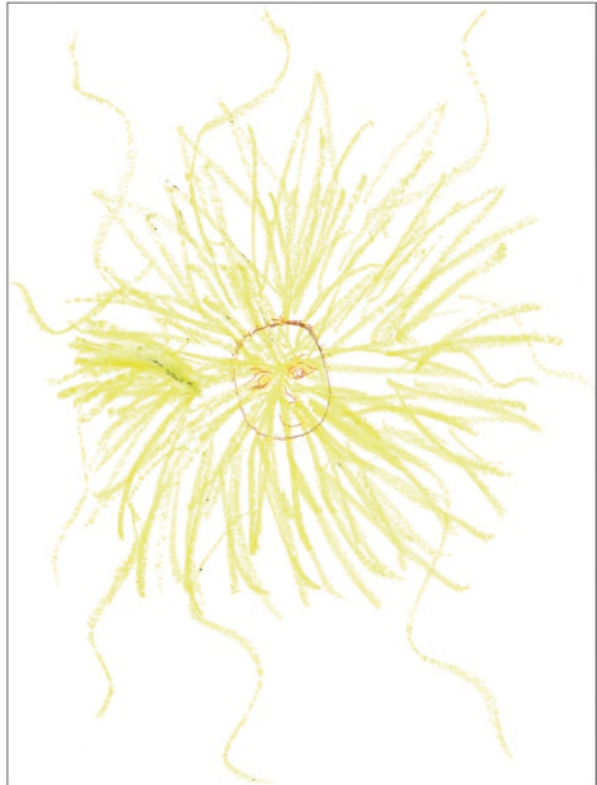
Saint Petersburg Gender traits for this group are also rather weakened, sometimes this feature is reinforced by an accompanying statement that god appears to be “not an ordinary human being” (ru09_sp_f_px_11_04_tan). Here too, the absence of a face may lead to undifferentiated figures, as is the case, for example, of the drawing of a Christian angel. The descriptive text accompanying this drawing underscores the figure’s ineffable properties (ru09_sp_f_px_11_xx_ana).



Fig. 5.9 http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/v4QFu_6kSs27ZrjHEfwn6gV.20180702T192715355Z

Buryatia Similarly, in this group, faceless figures may lead to a lack of gender differentiation (ru09_bo_f_px_11_03_dar), and here again this applies to angels (ru08_bo_f_pb_15_01_nin). Gender attenuation also occurs on otherwise traditional representations of Buddha, sometimes depicted as a statue, “Burkhan” (ru08_bo_f_pb_07_05_ali). A strategy that seems to be typical of this socio-cultural group consists in adding extra human body features (e.g., eyes and ears) to an already

Fig. 5.10 <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/oE5E0QaRsKClmZq6r7v5wA.20201008T104248031409Z>



complete human figure. This expresses multiplicity in the divine; yet, the figure remains gender-neutral (ru08_bo_m_pb_11_09_dan).

Japan As in the other groups, gender traits may be weakened, and different types of characters may be concerned, such as Buddha (jp04_to_m_rtx_08_07_whx), or more ordinary figures (jp03_ca_f_rix_13_02_rix). In this group, the absence of a face is characterized by the inclusion of a mask (jp04_ko_m_ryx_13_01_trx, Fig. 5.11).

We observed two main approaches to drawing undifferentiated figures in the present sample. One approach consists in reducing the salience of gendered features overall, and another approach equates to attenuating features that make a human figure typically human, such as the face. The two groups from Saint Petersburg and French-speaking Switzerland appeared to blur gender expression by applying personification to non-human figures. Regarding the absence of a face, Japanese participants stood out from the others by sometimes including masks in place of faces. Unlike the other gender categories, undifferentiated gender was only rarely reflected upon, or mentioned in, the written texts describing the drawings. Undifferentiated gender has the possible effect of depicting a god that transcends gender: what Thatcher (2011) referred to, in the Christian tradition, as a *supra-sexual* god.

Fig. 5.11 http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/aa_7HOHQZqersFw3Qic4gd.20200325T144323000095Z



Summary

There seem to be common strategies for gender typing that are influenced by religious traditions. In this project, Christian models prevail in the groups from Saint Petersburg and French-speaking Switzerland; Buddhist models predominate in Japan and Buryatia. It is worthwhile to note, that although the Buddhist model is prevalent in drawings from Buryatia, the Buryat group did manifest a complex influence from both religious models. Dandarova (2013) had already observed such a mixture of influences.

Some drawings rely mainly on canonical religious examples, others, however, do vary more from ready-made representations and seem to tie into several forms of gender transgression. A number of drawings showed evidence of borrowing from outside of the participant's socio-cultural background. These borrowings include references to figures drawn both from religious traditions and from popular culture (e.g., anime).

Discussion

Drawings are a particularly appropriate medium through which children may communicate representations of god. Anthropomorphic god representations, predominant in all four samples, ineluctably express gender in forms that are either unambiguously pronounced (i.e., feminine or masculine), mixed (i.e., androgynous), or indistinguishable (i.e., undifferentiated). At the same time, seeking to decode gender in children's drawings of god is an ambitious objective. The difficulties inherent in the task necessitate the use of the multiple raters. The descriptive text provided by the participants helped raters to interpret the drawings and reduce the (at times high) degree of ambiguity, and could therefore stand as ekphrastic information.

The present findings point to a great diversity of god representations in all four socio-cultural groups (i.e., Saint Petersburg, Buryatia, French-speaking Switzerland, and Japan). Similarities, as well as differences, among these groups have been highlighted by analyzing the drawings across four gender categories (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous, and undifferentiated). We also observed three different levels of influence: predominant religious tradition(s) within a socio-cultural environment, the artist's gender, and gender power relationships. The respective influences stemming from all three levels may cause tension or even conflicted feelings in the child. The impact of the first level may be noticed in the utilization of fewer feminine figures in groups that are strongly characterized by Christianity (i.e., Saint Petersburg and French-speaking Switzerland). Religious traditions do seem to bear an effect in that regard; however, it does not mean that feminine figures are constrained to abide by traditional iconography. Instead, this influence is understood as relating to gender in a broader sense, rather than concerning only canonical styles. Regarding the second level, female participants clearly used feminine figures more frequently. The third and last level was most complex to examine because it pertains to broader socio-cultural trends. Nevertheless, general androcentrism in the data may, to some degree, be viewed as the expression of general cross-cultural masculine hegemony in the groups that were studied. Finally, a developmental pattern became apparent; divine representations progressed towards an absence of gender by an increased use of non-anthropomorphic figures among older children (Brandt et al., 2009; Dandarova, 2013; Hanisch, 1996; Ladd et al., 1998).

With respect to the strategies that children employ in their drawings—insofar as their drawing abilities permit, and especially in accentuating the salience of gendered properties—one may think of *perceptual lures*, such as the ones used in ethological research (Detrain & Deneubourg, 2009). Lures may equate to the insertion of common gender markers, the presence of traditional and popular figures, or the inclusion of descriptive texts associated with the drawings. Researchers face two types of data: visual and textual. Combining these elements in the form of a perceptual lure, if well performed, leads to a frank and unequivocal expression of gender (this can include mixed gender).

There are distinctions between explicit and implicit performances of gender. Goffman (1976) has coined the term *gender display* in order to refer to one's affiliation with a particular gender. Gender can be willingly (explicitly) performed in the form of what Goffman has called a *given*. This corresponds to the perceptual lures mentioned above. Gender can also be *given off*, through elements that are deliberately put forth by the social actor. There are many parallels in the data between these concepts and the findings of present study, specifically because gender was not always made explicit by the children, and even seemed to be out of the child's conscious reach at times.

Observations from the present sample have underlined the transgressive nature of certain divine figures with regard to gender; however, possible tensions ensuing from transgression were found to be attenuated in the case of more modern representations and occasional borrowings from popular culture. Gender was also sometimes expressed through divine representations taken from religious traditions outside the participant's own background. We found this especially in the case of feminine figures, which often appeared to conform to ready-made depictions available in the wider cultural context. Analysis of the data also discovered that known feminine characters (e.g., the Virgin Mary) are, by some, credited with a divine nature.

References to religious figures were less obvious in drawings of androgynous or undifferentiated figures that did not fit a binary (either masculine or feminine) view of gender. Nevertheless, angel-like Christian figures were often drawn as androgynous or undifferentiated figures, such as those found in the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, exhibiting either mixed (feminine-masculine) or attenuated gendered features.

Beyond communicating gender for itself, gender typing may underscore other types of qualities. For example, researchers found that participants conveyed a sense of mystery through the use of a beard (which is usually associated with the masculine category) or through faceless figures (often gender-undifferentiated). Similarly, almighty power may well be associated with sturdy masculine figures or with feminine warriors. As for androgynous or undifferentiated figures, they are sometimes used to convey some multidimensional nature of god. Such effects are not unique to gender, and there might be overlaps between the functions endorsed by a variety of symbols.

In conclusion, when drawing god in an anthropomorphic form, children generally cannot ignore gender typing, and therefore their drawings may transgress gender-typing norms. This can result in some surprising compositions. Children from various different socio-cultural backgrounds do copy, reconstruct, and create throughout the process of producing their drawings of gendered gods. Future research should examine social scenes and explore how their drawings might illustrate power plays based on gender. In that regard, it might also be interesting to focus on drawings in which the divine is spread over several figures of the same gender only. This can result in very feminine (jp03_fa_f_pfx_10_02_eri, Fig. 5.12) or very masculine drawings (jp03_to_m_pfx_10_02_tax) that may call to mind sisterhood and brotherhood organizations that aim to heighten empowerment and social support in the face of gender discrimination (Radina, 2017).



Fig. 5.12 http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/1/0105/D_XCS0bqSzyCy0sv0QInxQd.20200318T121534281293Z

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