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An Unlikely Pair: Impressionism and the Work-Life Interface

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An Unlikely Pair: Impressionism and the Work-Life Interface

Abstract

When I get asked what I am studying in college, I often get puzzled or confused replies due to the fact that the fields are pretty unconventional as a pairing. The remarks, "What in the world are you going to do with that?" or "How interesting," are common responses after sharing. Organization and management studies and art history are an unlikely duo that seem to be vastly different at first glance. After taking many courses within both disciplines to fulfill my double major, I argue that these disciplines are more similar than one may initially assume. Thus, I was inspired to express these connections through a more intentional way, which constituted as a course cluster. More specifically, I am connecting ARTH 206, European Painting: 1700-1900 that I took Fall 2018, with OMS 367, Work, family, and life Balance as a course I am currently taking. Now, one may be perplexed as to how painting and the work-life interface can even remotely be compared, let alone relate to one another. Therefore, this paper's purpose is to show how these two concepts can be applied together in unison, exemplifying the interdisciplinary nature. I aim to epitomize how art history and organization and management studies shares commonalities in application with theories and concepts from each respective field.

More specifically, these ideas will be linked through utilizing the style of Impressionism painting from France connected to the class labor divide and gender coding in society. I chose representative Impressionist works to be associated with the work-life interface themes. I hope to demonstrate how these work-life interface topics can help explain the context of these works. The paintings will not only receive formal analysis, which is a type of descriptive writing practice that is prevalent in the art historical field, but also application to theories, themes, and concepts from the work-life interface. Before delving into the multifaceted analysis of art works, there will be a historical introduction and placement of the period. Art history is full of revolving periods with unique identifying qualities that are reflected in the works, which is why it is important to take the time to build that foundational information that will serve as background and support for the analysis of the art works. Furthermore, this course cluster paper serves to not only combine Impressionist paintings with the work-life interface, but also to bring greater awareness to the overarching connections between art history and organization and management studies.

Keywords

work-life interface, impressionism, gender, social class

Disciplines

Arts Management | History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology | Human Resources Management | Painting

Comments

Written as a course cluster paper in Art History and Management studies.

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An Unlikely Pair: Impressionism and the work-life interface

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Introduction

When I get asked what I am studying in college, I often get puzzled or confused replies due to the fact that the fields are pretty unconventional as a pairing. The remarks, “What in the world are you going to do with that?” or “How interesting,” are common responses after sharing. Organization and management studies and art history are an unlikely duo that seem to be vastly different at first glance. After taking many courses within both disciplines to fulfill my double major, I argue that these disciplines are more similar than one may initially assume. Thus, I was inspired to express these connections through a more intentional way, which constituted as a course cluster. More specifically, I am connecting ARTH 206, European Painting: 1700-1900 that I took Fall 2018, with OMS 367, Work, family, and life Balance as a course I am currently taking. Now, one may be perplexed as to how painting and the work-life interface can even remotely be compared, let alone relate to one another. Therefore, this paper’s purpose is to show how these two concepts can be applied together in unison, exemplifying the interdisciplinary nature. I aim to epitomize how art history and organization and management studies shares commonalities in application with theories and concepts from each respective field.

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periods with unique identifying qualities that are reflected in the works, which is why it is important to take the time to build that foundational information that will serve as background and support for the analysis of the art works. Furthermore, this course cluster paper serves to not only combine Impressionist paintings with the work-life interface, but also to bring greater awareness to the overarching connections between art history and organization and management studies.

Art Historical Backing

The preface to jumping into the thought-provoking analysis will be the necessary background information to ease into aforementioned topics. First and foremost, it is important to place Impressionism into in a place and time period. This paper will be focusing on French Impressionism, mostly in Paris, during the 1880s and 1890s (Harrison, 1993). Impressionism really captures a new version and vision of Paris that becomes representative of the period. Old Paris was full of sensations that shaped the experience of the city, but Haussmannization dramatically shifted that notion into quite the contrast full of brand new sensations (Miller, 2018). Haussmannization created large boulevards, integrated many shops, store fronts, parks, and other leisure spaces that changed the trajectory of Paris as it was previously known (Miller, 2018). In other words, this restructuring process and the upgrades really increased the proximity that forced individuals to be close to one another. All in the meanwhile, major class differences were established due to these new industries, which created a more evident class divide in citizens, which will later be further examined, but evident in *Figure 1* (Miller, 2018). The way people dress, compose themselves, and appear in public as in *Figure 1*, is a major indicator of the class divide, while also mixing the class due to the process of Haussmannization. The new spaces of Paris then created alienation due to the wealth and luxuries that were now being on

display. There were really two sections of Paris: the elites were in the West end where there was an emphasis on luxury and the East side is where the middle class resided (Miller, 2018). This idea of luxury and who had access to it was a key emergence during this time. The newly introduced extravagant things became a complete transaction in society.

Painting is transformed during this era, as well. No longer do artists need to follow all prior academic conventions that defined so much of the art historical discipline before this (Miller, 2018). Hence, there was no need to showcase heroism or liberalism, rather artists were moved back to painting landscapes. Artists are now leaving their studios and going into the world to capture the sensations of the newly transformed society due to Haussmannization. Artists want to portray the daily and leisurely life of new scenes in Parisian life, all from the subjective eye of the artists themselves (Miller, 2018). In fact, artworks of this period are not even clear subject matter, rather they become blurs of a sensational affect like in *Figure 2*. In *Figure 2*, people are walking, looking, and taking in the new sensations of the emerging New Paris, without a very clear idea of what is going on; it is all about the impression of the moments. Thus, Impressionism is renowned for loose brushstrokes, pastel colors, fleeting contingency, plain air painting, capturing the impression of the moment, often nature is the subject, but there are also more complicated underlying meanings. Artist would often return multiple times to the same scenes like ponds, parks, waterfront views, at different times of the day and different seasons just to capture the new sensation of the same place (Miller, 2018). Artists were also now able to develop personal styles, as there was no “right” take on Impressionism, since there was no strict canon as there used to be. Artists often used choppy strokes with loose or increased pressure, in addition to *imposto* style, which is thick paint in dot-like strokes. Clearly, there was a major transformation during Impressionism, as there were a major step away from past periods.

To conclude, this portion of the paper illustrated the background information required before delving into the paired analysis of artworks with the work-life interface.

The Class Labor Divide

The class labor divide that emerges alongside Impressionism can be seen through analyzing *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* (Figure 3) and *Bathers at Asnières* (Figure 4) with different work-life interface concepts and theories. *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* (Figure 3) depicts the newly transformed public park leisure space with families, couples, and individuals enjoying the afternoon dancing away under lush greenery. The space is flooded with many people, some seated at tables eating, drinking, and talking, as others are dancing with a partner to the joyful music humming in the background. Harrison (1993) describes how this scene shows the, “delight and picturesqueness in the modern experience of the visual world.” What is also depicted beyond a scenic afternoon is the clear intermixing and mingling of separate social classes. In the foreground, there are more middle class figures due to their dress. Straw hats, common striped dresses, and casual jackets depict the middle classes’ version of dressed up. The middle class, which is comprised primarily of the laborers, put on their best outfits on their days off to enjoy the beauty of the parks. Whereas the elites are clearly more dressed up with a spatial distance from the middle class. Nonetheless, the socializing and intermixing of the straw hats and top hats reiterates the public space full of multiple classes. These newly emerged classes can be accredited to the Industrialization process of Haussmannization. Haussmannization created many new factories and laboring jobs that mobilized such a shift from a relatively equal class into this new spread of wealth. This new social experience shows the bourgeois is in juxtaposition with the proletariats. Wharton (2008) describes industrialization, “as a process shaping the structure and organization of work, the composition of the labor force, and beliefs about workers and the

workplace - has had a profound influence on conceptions of work, family, and gender.” For that reason France’s industrialization had this shift in what work looked like, which shaped how families existed in society. Family structure, just reflecting on this painting (*Figure 3*) and on others as well, the family composition seems to be quite heteronormative. The mother and child closest to the foreground appear to be talking to a man, possibly her father. Families, regardless of the structure, have differences due to social class from the labor divide. Working class families most likely was not able to afford to have child care in comparison to the elites. Marks (2008) discusses how not only financial capital, but also cultural capital provides access to resources, which then benefits families. This access to resources becomes evident due to the fact that cognitive stimulation for children is directly linked to parents’ income (Marks, 2008). For that reason, elites in society can afford to provide for better opportunities for their children, but the working class is constantly saving and trying to make by. These children then are put at a disadvantage, as they were not raised learning the same skills and education as the elites, which perpetuates this cycle of poverty by generations (Marks, 2008). The higher classes are able to model and teach children proper social norms, skills, and values that will benefit them later on, but the lower classes typically work labor jobs, which are not required to have much skill (Kohn, 1969). Kohn (1969) elaborates on this idea of how higher classes require various skills that are modeled to children, which adds complexity, thinking skills, and flexibility into the values taught. Hence, the more that jobs are complex in nature, more opportunities, and higher home quality (Kohn, 1969). Furthermore, the vast differences and divide between social class were caused in part of industrialization.

Bathers at Asnières (Figure 4) is another illustration of how industrialization changed the work dynamics in society. There are many workers lounging on the bank of a river, relaxing after

a long day of work. There are some figures laying down, taking in the sun, some of the figures are actually in the water rinsing off after factory work. The viewer can assume that these figures relaxing after completed a day of manual labor not only due to their casual dress, but also because of the smokestacks in the distance. The smoke only reiterates the prominence of industrialization while also suggesting that these workers are in fact factory workers. Although there is a dichotomy of laborers and elites in their differing leisure activities. In the distance, there is a faint depiction of elite figures boating. There are a few other sail boats in the distance, as well. The elites boat in their leisure time, but the laborers just take in the solemn peace of doing nothing but lying on the riverbank. Hence, dress, mannerisms, and activities all can point to the class division present in this painting. This ties back to the idea of what wealth can do for people: bring opportunities, access, and advantages. The laborers clearly cannot afford to boat due to the financial constraint, but also time constraint, as they spend their days working for what they make. Harrison (1993) explains how Seurat's paintings often show, "appearance of class in capitalist society." This painting (*Figure 4*) amongst others, manifest the premise of the dual labor market theory. Dual labor market theories establish how there are two main sectors, primary and secondary (Odlé-Dusseau, 2019). The primary sector contains higher paying, more benefits, more resources, and overall access, in which leaves little to none of the secondary sector (Odlé-Dusseau, 2019). The secondary often consists of the working-class where the jobs are typically minimum wage, non-routine, and with no benefits (Odlé-Dusseau, 2019). Odlé-Dusseau (2019) explained how within these sectors, women and minorities are typically more prevalent within the secondary sector. Hence, these sectors are essentially reaffirming the social class divide based on income and job. The men that are laying on the bank are most likely within the secondary sector and the figures on the boat are most likely within the primary sector.

If those figures are not themselves in the primary sector, they may be married to somehow that is and provides for them. Gender is a crucial factor that influences these sectors, which will be further discussed later. On another note, these sectors must have restricted role preference amongst the secondary sector. The secondary sector was limited to specific working-class jobs, which are not roles that have flexible or permeable boundaries, which would mean segmentation for their work and family domains. For that reason, the secondary sector must have also enforced the work-family perspective amongst those workers. Work-family conflict as a perspective contains inter-role conflict between work and family, which are always in conflict (Barnett & Gareis, 2008). Barnett and Gareis (2008) explain how work-family conflict sets strict boundaries due to the fact that each role warrants full attention and energy is finite. This perspective viewed multiple roles as a negative thing, since they would take away from another role. Barnett and Gareis (2008) state, Multiple roles would, “reduce the energy available for performing other roles; increase strain, interfering with the ability to perform other roles; or encourage behaviors that are incompatible with performance of other roles.” For these reasons, the secondary sector has no other option than to keep work and home separately. Laborers simply cannot bring work home, nor would they be permitted to bring home life to work. On the other hand, the higher class elite workers may be able to have more choice over their role preference. They are not so limited to one perspective due to the fact that those jobs are in the primary sector and have more complexity and flexibility. Workers in the primary sector may choose to work from home or integrate roles more intentionally, aligning with the role-enhancement perspective (Barnett & Gareis, 2008). Nonetheless, the class divide not only impacts their sector, but also impacts the ability to have a role preference for balancing work and family.

Gender Coding in Society

Beyond social class, gender coding within society is the next big connection between impressionist painting and the work-life interface. *Young Mother Sewing (Figure 5)* and *The Harbour at Lorient (Figure 6)* are two works that can demonstrate the connections. *Young Mother Sewing* shows an endearing scene of a mother seated as she sews with her daughter resting on her lap. The daughter leans her body on her mother's lap, as she rests her face onto her hand. She stares right at the viewer intentionally, almost as if she is bored. Behind the mother and daughter, there is a table with a vase of flowers sitting. Behind that, there is a window looking out into the outside world. This part of the painting is significant due to the gender coding within society. This era of impressionism went hand and hand with the emergence of domesticity. Due to industrialization, there were clear lines for the upper class with men going to work, as women stayed home (Wharton, 2008). Men held power in the workforce due to the newly created jobs and also the fact that work was now associated with masculinity (Wharton, 2008). Men were the ideal worker, not women. With masculinity defined as working, femininity was also defined. Femininity was clearly defined by the domestic, motherly, and caring tasks. This can be visibly portrayed by looking at *Figure 5*, the mother is inside, sitting, sewing, and meanwhile caregiving. Women's tasks were often related to motherhood, which was indefinitely repressed within the domestic sphere (Miller, 2018). Just as labors in the outside world were rendered to men, labors inside the home were rendered to women (Wharton, 2008). Since working was now coded as a masculine force, in which created the breadwinner, caregiver model that most of, if not all of the elites followed (Boris & Lewis, 2008). Men went to work to be the economic provider, just as women stayed home to be the caregiver (Boris & Lewis, 2008). Boris and Lewis (2008) explain how men were allowed and encouraged to be bankers, lawyers,

manufacturers, etc., when women were limited to the household labor. In fact, women would not only have to care for the children, but also make sure the home was “an oasis” for the man.

Gender had the immense power to define and shape roles during this era, which is highly evident after just analyzing this singular painting. This facet is not even considering ideas like social class though. Lower working-class do not have the luxury to allow the mother to stay at home. For that reason, the gender coding is especially apparent in the higher classes, but cannot be viewed without consideration of social class as well. Social class and gender are two intertwining concepts that have a push and pull, give and take relationship that each need to be contemplated while making these conclusions.

The Harbour Lorient (Figure 6) focuses on how women do appear in society outside of the household. Instead of viewing a woman as a mother like Cassatt often portrays in the interior space, Morisot shows a woman beyond that depiction. Here, Morisot shows a woman sitting on the edge of a wall near the water. The woman is brought to the bottom right edge of the composition. She is dressed in a formal white dress and holds an umbrella, which appears to place her in the upper class. She is somewhat isolated and removed from the town behind her, where people are most likely working. There are boundaries and space between the woman and the happenings behind her. The sail boats are resting in the water amidst the gray and eerie mood of the painting. There is not a lot of detail nor clarity of the strokes, leaving this work up for interpretation. Considering that women are not supposed to be outside alone without the accompaniment of a man, I interpret this somewhat as an escape from the gender norms that are so strictly enforced. She is possibly a wife or mother that is expected to upkeep specific duties within the household. Fletcher (2005) determines the household as the home sphere, being the private, interior sphere. Women are restricted and contained within the home sphere with

specific domestic tasks, being the caregiver. The woman in this painting is clearly defying that rule. Men are often stationed at the work sphere, which is public, and exterior (Fletcher, 2005). Within this sphere, men are expected to be the ideal worker. Fletcher's (2005) sphere model goes hand in hand with Boris and Lewis's (2008) model of the caregiver and breadwinner dichotomy. These spheres reiterate the gender role each person is to abide by when in each role (Fletcher, 2005). Not only should they abide, but there is the precedent that the spheres are at odds as complete opposites. Fletcher (2005) explains how skills, expectations, and norms for each sphere is vastly different. These expectations reflect how gender is linked to portraying masculinity and femininity through actions. These specific attributes further promote this gender distinction, encouraging adverse roles for each gender. For that reason, the occupational sphere and the domestic sphere are clearly contradictory (Fletcher, 2005). This dichotomy can be supported by Acker's (1992) ideas on gender and organizations. Acker (1992) states, "that gender is present in processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life." In other words, the organizational structure of workplaces structure the gender division (Acker, 1992). Gendered institutions show how gender is constructed and enforced in society as a whole, especially the workforce. Although this painting does not necessarily show a woman working, it does show her defiance against the social constructs set in place even about space. It was important to note how women are not only limited to the domestic sphere, but also to see what it looked like for women to be in that exterior sphere, when they really aren't supposed to. Just based on a personal perception of the work, she seems distant, isolated, and lonely. In this manner, it was crucial to highlight how gender existed outside of the socially constructed code.

Conclusion

After reading, writing, analyzing, and finding these intentional connections between two interdisciplinary courses, I may have a better answer to the next time someone asks why I am double majoring in art history and organization and management. It is evident that although these disciplines have differing practices, styles, and purposes, there are some foundational elements that remain the same. The connections I made goes to show the significance of how work-life theories can help explain and exemplify commons themes within the artworks. Many theories, research, and just general historical trends can link the disciplines. I even further argue that art history and organization and management studies rely on some of the same major fundamental concepts. These are not limited to critical theories like feminism, Marxism, modernism, postmodernism, and more. The results of these theories may look vastly different, but some of the core ideas are driving both of these fields. To conclude, this course cluster accomplished the main purpose and goals, which was to showcase how interdisciplinary courses can be applied in an intentional multifaceted analysis.

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Figures



Figure 1: Paris Street: A Rainy Day, Gustave Caillebotte, oil on canvas, 1877



Figure 2: The Grand Boulevards, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, oil on canvas, 1875



Figure 3: Ball at the Moulin de la Galette, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, oil on canvas, 1876



Figure 4: Bathing at Asnières, Georges Seurat, oil on canvas, 1883-84



Figure 5: Young Mother Sewing, Mary Cassatt, oil on canvas, 1900



Figure 6: The Harbor at Lorient, Berthe Morisot, oil on canvas, 1869