Reproduction or change?: How children learn gender through interactions with adults in France

Katherine Rose Parsons, Institute for Field Education (IFE), Carleton College

**The Institute for Field Education (IFE)**
- 4-week preparatory period
- 12-week internship & field research thesis, entirely in French

**Strasbourg, France**
- AMSED (Association for Immigrants, Solidarity, and Exchanges for Development)
- Working with children after school

**Methods & Ethical Considerations**
- Guided by Strasbourg University sociology professor
- Observation in public spaces
- Informal interviews
- Verbal consent
- Confidential identities

**My Research: The Big Picture**

**Questions**
- What is the Strasbourgeois notion of gender?
- How do Strasbourgeois learn these ways of interacting?
- How do adult Strasbourgeois teach gender to children, perhaps even without intent?

**Findings**
- Gender-based hierarchy and gendered roles
- Children were learning Strasbourgeois notion of gender
- Adults had different expectations for boys and girls, but did not communicate a gender hierarchy
- Older children appeared to teach younger children both gender-differentiated roles and gender hierarchy

**Sub-Sections of Investigation**

- **Interactions between adults**
  - Goal: establish Strasbourgeois notion of gender
  - Place: throughout Strasbourg public spaces
  - Findings: gender-based hierarchy and gendered roles

- **Interactions between adults and children**
  - Goal: explore gender socialization
  - Place: community organizations
  - Findings: adults had different expectations for boys and girls, but did not communicate a gender hierarchy

- **Interactions between children**
  - Goal: see how much children incorporated Strasbourgeois notion of gender into their actions
  - Place: community organizations
  - Findings: children were learning Strasbourgeois notion of gender, but not from adults; older children appeared to teach younger children both gender-differentiated roles and gender hierarchy

**The Enrichment of Being Abroad with IFE**
- Dramatic increase in French proficiency
- Formation of meaningful relationships with native French speakers
- Ability to be perceived by Strasbourgeois as a resident
- Opportunity to engage with French culture (music, food, literature, etc.)
- Deep attachment to the city and its people

**Further Research**
- Repeated research with more observations and interviews
- Other influences on gender socialization (parents, advertisements, television, books, teachers, etc.)
- Investigation into possibility of life-long gender socialization
- Focus on non-binary genders