

Becoming a gendered body



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Becoming a Gendered Body The researcher in this study, Karin Martin, is investigating how the hidden school curriculum contributes to the creation of a gendered body in which it is perceived that boys and girls have different 'natural' abilities. This is an important thing to investigate because it has been shown through other studies that women's roles in society are strongly linked to their gender performance in which their body itself has become a source and indication of insecurity and lack of authority as girls are taught to keep their bodies constrained, not take up space and not be too open to the greater world: " theorists suggest that gender differences in minute bodily behaviors like gesture, stance, posture, step and throwing are significant to our understanding of gendered selves and gender inequality" (495). While these ideas are evident in adult bodies, there has not been a great deal of study into how these ideas are originally formed as it is commonly assumed to be natural. Martin suggests it is instead something created at about preschool age, at least partly as a result of the hidden school curriculum in which students are taught to behave in specific ways to facilitate the needs of the classroom, teaching and reinforcing specific gendered behavior in the process. The research method for the study was participant observation as the researcher observed five different preschool classes in two different preschools located in the same city. One was located near the city's university and the other was a Catholic school. The study group consisted of 112 children and 14 teachers in which all of the teachers were female. Of the children, 58 percent were boys and 42 percent were girls with very little diversity of ethnicities and little or no difference in economic class as all of the children were classified as having come from middle class homes. The researcher and her assistant observed activities within the classroom

approximately three times per week for eight months, taking notes and trying to remain as unobtrusive as possible within the classroom setting. Observations were taken during both structured and unstructured activity times. Field notes were then analyzed using Hyper-Research software. Martin determined that gender among young children is created through a variety of factors. One of the most significant factors was dress/body adornment. Surprisingly, she found that most little girls were dressed in pink or pastels almost every day while boys were dressed in primary colors, green, orange and black, but never pink. Girls were also often dressed in dresses which enforce their own form of limitation on movement. The younger they were, the more often they wore dresses. This also had the tendency of compelling both the girls and their teachers to fuss with their appearance more often, attending to clothing and appearance more than being concerned about play or activity. This attention was also reflected in the fact that girls spent much more time than boys playing dress-up within the classroom and developed a much finer sense of the appropriate behaviors given specific forms of dress. Both during structured and unstructured play, the researcher observed that boys were 80 percent more likely to engage in 'backroom' relaxed behaviors when appropriate while girls were 80 percent more likely to observe more formal, 'front room' behaviors even when at play. " Teachers were more likely to reprimand girls for relaxed bodily movements and comportment" (501). The teachers were more willing to put up with boys' disruptive behavior in positive ways as compared to girls. Throughout her observations, Martin concluded that gender is indeed created through a combination of family and school regulation of children's bodies in such a way that behavior expectations for girls were significantly different than behavior expectations

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for boys. I'm not sure there is any good solution to this social problem other than working to make people aware of what they're doing. Parents will always want to dress their babies in blue and pink to designate gender, but if teachers are made aware of how they react differently to the two genders, they may be able to play a role in equalizing them. This has to be an institution-wide effort though, in order to be truly effective. References
Martin, Karin A. (August 1998). " Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools." American Sociological Review. Vol. 63, N. 4: 494-511.