

# Becoming a gendered body essay



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When the body evolves and is capable of reproduction, the crucial difference between a male and female becomes more apparent, thus, clearly separating a girl from a boy. Naturally, the body will experience metamorphosis effortlessly, and this distinction is illusive and indubitable to others. However, becoming socially gendered requires more than anatomic changes. There are other facets to determining a gendered body apart from physical attributes.

In the article, " Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools," researchers examine how and when bodily differences are assembled, and whether or not gender inequality is being taught and eternalized in preschool. In addition, they studied how, through everyday interactions with teachers and each other, girls and boys are taught the differences in gender in relation to their roles in life. How do gendered differences come to feel and appear natural? What role does preschool have in gendering a child?

What process produces adult gendered bodies? Martin (1998) explores how factors such as everyday movements, manner, and how children consume physical space become gendered. She established five routines that conceive gendered bodies: 1. Dressing up, 2. Permitting relaxed behaviors or requiring formal behaviors, 3. Controlling voices, 4. Verbal and physical instructions regarding children's bodies by teachers, and 5. Physical interactions among children. Research Method

The research method used by researchers was participant observation, which can be defined as: "(a) qualitative method of research (that) calls for the Sociologist to join a social group for an extended period and to record his

or her observations of that group systematically. ” (Argosy University, 2012)

The goal of the participant observation method is to acquire accurate knowledge of a particular group of people through experience awareness and steady involvement over a specific period of time.

Three classrooms for a total of five different sets of 15-18 teachers and children were observed. The information gathered was through extensive research and analysis of this diverse group. In total, there were 5 female head teachers, 9 female teacher’s aides, and 112 children (42% girls and 58% boys). (Martin, 1998) There were many similarities and differences between all classrooms, including: schedule, routine, instruction (religious or not), activities, and rules.

## Results

Family and other social ties including church groups or sports teams contribute in the gendering of children’s bodies. Likewise, preschool also breeds manageable, adaptable, and gendered children. Martin (1998) claims that “ hidden curriculums” are present in preschools, thereby being present in many children’s lives. She defines hidden curriculums, as “ covert lessons that schools teach, and they are often a means of social control. ” (Martin, 1998) Martin’s (1998) study examines how the following practices contribute to a gendering of children’s bodies in preschool:

The effects of dressing-up or bodily adornment, the gendered nature of formal and relaxed behaviors, how the different restrictions on girls’ and boys’ voices limit their physicality, how teachers instruct girls’ and boys’ bodies, and the gendering of physical interactions between children and

teachers and among the children themselves. (p. 497) Conceivably, the most definitive way of gendering a child is through their attire and accessories.

Dressing up (clothing that parents choose for their children to wear to school) and playing dress-up (a game where children experiment with different types of costumes or clothes, have it be female or male) are both ways in which children identify with one gender or another. Dressing up to go to school, especially when the outfit was chosen by parents, will most definitely gender a child. Take for example little girls; when they are sent to school in a dress, they are limited in what they can do.

Playing certain sports such as kickball or baseball where you must use your entire body become difficult as the restrictive attire doesn't allow much room for movement. Thus, the bodily action of a girl is delimited, small, and appears somewhat cramped. On the contrary, boys are more likely to wear shorts, tennis shoes, t-shirts, and in general loose-fitting and comfortable clothes without much (if any) accessories or bodily adornments. This illustrates that what children are clothed in has a direct impact on how they will act in terms of bodily movements.

Girls' clothing is more restrictive, therefore, restricting movements; while boys' clothing is more lax and roomy, therefore, allowing for sizeable movements. Does this suggest that if parents dress their little boys in dresses, skirts, or other form-fitting female attire, he will be more feminine in his ways? With the absence of biology and focusing solely on dress, this may very well be so. His bodily movements will be similar to a little girl, and he

will be taught and reminded (from parents and teachers) how to carry himself in a dress.

In addition to dressing up, Martin gives her explanations for other observations that were conducted within the study: Formal and relaxed behaviors. Hand-raising is considered formal behavior while shouting out the answer is recognized as relaxed behavior. In this study, it was observed that boys are encouraged to display relaxed conduct and avoid being reprimanded, whereas girls were often disciplined or corrected when exhibiting such loose behaviors. Controlling voice. Per Martin (1998), " Kids' play that is giggly, loud, or whispery makes it clear that voice is part of their bodily experiences."

This means that controlling children's voices will ultimately guide their actions. For girls, this may mean teaching their bodies to be more subtle and reserved; while for boys, it condones expressiveness. This is a common practice in preschools, and other social institutions as well. Martin (1998) states, "...the denial of women's voices begins at least as early as preschool, and that restricting voice, usually restricts movement as well" which clearly proposes that girls have narrowed options of defending themselves, especially through the use of voice and action.

Bodily Instructions. Teachers often instruct students to do certain things with their bodies, for example: " stop doing that", " don't hit him", " throw that away. " According to the study, 65% of boys, 26% of girls, and 9% of mixed groups received specific bodily instructions. Of the 65% of boys, only about half of them obeyed and of the 26% of girls, 80% abided by the teachers

commands. Research has found that teachers order boys to stop doing something without directing them toward another behavior which opened the boys up to a plethora of options.

Girls, however, have a limited use of action since their behaviors are likely to be dictated by a teacher who pulls options from a refined manifest. Physical interaction between teachers and children, and physical interaction among children. Physical interaction between teachers and children that is comforting, helpful, playful, and gentle is classified as “ positive. ” Negative physical interaction involved interaction that was disciplining, assertive, restraining, or unwanted by the child.

Lastly, neutral interaction is synergetic, and is interaction that has little content. (Martin, 1998, p. 506) Teachers controlled children, physically. According to Serbin (1983), repeated loud oral punishments toward boys heightened their disorderly conduct. More often than girls, boys commonly experienced interactions where their bodies were restrained or disciplined, physically, by an angry adult or person of power. Thus, boys are more inclined to affiliate physical interaction with battle, conflict, and animosity which will cause them to be more hostile than girls.

Also, Throne (1993) suggests that children also aid in the creation of gender differences. Summary Through this research, it has been determined that gendered bodies are not innate, nor are they easily obtained. The data collected suggests that practices and routines in preschools assist the progress of gendered physicality. Gender inequality is derived from bodily differences which amplify the naturalness of sexual and reproductive

differences between men and women. Solution Gendering children's bodies from a young age is a double-edged sword.

Generally speaking, I don't see an issue as preschools will reinforce behavior that I teach in the home. If I send my little girl to preschool, whether in a dainty dress or boy-like overalls, I would expect that she is being reminded of how to conduct herself as a little lady. However, it is necessary to taper certain curriculums and adjust student-teacher interactions to slowly disseminate the underlying message of gender inequality. Treatment of both girls and boys should be more parallel.