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## What Is Gender Doing in the Female Body? Tracing the Relationship Between Identity and Culture Formation Through an Assessment of Gender in the Female Body

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### Abstract

Within popular discourses in cultural studies, the body is posited as a site of inquiry that is studied in a relationship between an identity and a culture – discussing often how an individual identifies themselves through the body, and how culture takes shape through these bodies itself. The body acts as a symbol for these identities and cultures, where these symbols operate through social roles and relations of the society in which they get formed and understood. These social roles and relations also then implicate on this relationship through various social paradigms in the society, such as gender, caste, creed, race and ethnicity. These social paradigms then can be seen operating through the body as a symbol. Critics like Mary Douglas (1970) have pointed how there exists two ideas of bodies; one where “the body symbolizes everything” and one where “everything symbolizes the body.” Taking these ideas as departure points, the paper aims to focus on bodies as symbols in one such social paradigm, gender, issuing an inquiry into gendered bodies in respect to identity and culture formations. Upon tracing these gendered bodies, it evaluates how body also becomes a symbolic ground for gendered differences to be meted out in a hierarchy, paralleling power plays and contestations. These hierarchical differences can also be then witnessed in subjugations in the society, which often comes at a toll for the traditionally assumed-to-be ‘inferior’ and ‘weak’ bodies. At the brink of this toll, an insertion of the ‘female body’ becomes this paper’s prime aim, which extends its physiological corporeality to be gendered in the symbolic, constructing women identities in and against cultural norms of hierarchy. The paper then seeks to study gender and gendered bodies in relationship to identity and culture formations, where the prime focus becomes the female body in which these hierarchical differences can be substantiated, written against, and sought for liberation. For this, it will look at anthropological accounts of various everyday experiences of the female body, constructing woman identities, translating cultural norms, and understanding these differences itself.

**Keywords:** Gender, Female Body, Gendered Body, Identity formation, Culture formation, Hierarchical differences, Everyday Lived Body, Anthropological accounts, Body as a Symbol.