

"Getting Out of My Skin": Embodying Identity in Theatre Classes for 12th Grade Female Students

Sara Erlich Rozansky

PhD Candidate: Faculty of Social Sciences
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the gender performances of 12th grade females in high school theatre classes as they construct a character for the stage. Female teenage studies show that student performances in public spaces are disciplined and constructed. My presentation will focus on the formation of the 'female' gender by examining their bodies as a matter under their control. I am asking: What social, gendered, and aesthetic discourses shape the female interactions with the character and her own body? And how do elements of agency and freedom challenge—or fail to manifest in—her aesthetic practices and performances? The significant emphasis placed on stringent peer suppression in the discipline of female bodies indicates the role of the school in shaping the interactions between females and their bodies. This, in turn, impacts shaping 'feminine' performance within pedagogical spaces, and in their strategies to navigate adolescence. While conceptualizing the body as an aesthetic site where subject-object relations unfold between the female and her fictional character from the play, this research explores: (1) How body, gaze, and agency interact in theatrical spaces in pedagogical sites; (2) How acting provides young females students with opportunities to examine feminine identity through embodied performance. And (3) How the controlling social gaze transforms into a tool for dialogue and identity formation in theater classes, revealing how females create complex gender performances through combined physical and vocal expressions in response to external perspectives.

Keywords: theatre class, female performance, adolescence