How to Be the Best at Everything: The Gendering and Embodiment of Girl/Boy Advice

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Abstract
This paper explores the binary divide packaged under the children’s How be the Best at Everything (2007) girl/boy advice books. Postmodern and materialist feminist thought as a lens into media-infused social and class reproduction provide a theoretical framework in interrogating this gender binary. I argue that that the books, as heteronormative nostalgia, operationalize a theory I term “gender retraction,” a phenomenon in which the vast knowledge that informs our identity spectrum propels us into a cultural time warp, where, with an array of socially inscribed possibilities, the binary clarity of age old girl/boy categories has resurging appeal. The paper exposes gender retraction modeling invented and packaged under boy/girl advice and also analyzes contemporary production modes of sex and class division that stage an uneven distribution of gender capital. Closing arguments propose a gender progression vs. retraction frame to promote open-subject opportunities for children to become.

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