



Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School (Studies of Great Texts in Science)

Barrie Thorne

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Thorne, a professor of sociology at the University of Southern California, offers her insightful observations of elementary school students in class and at play. Though, as she admits, her status as an adult and an observer may have affected what happened around her, Thorne presents a fascinating account of how children divide themselves--and how others divide them--along gender lines. Breaking students into teams for contests and the eternal game of "cooties" (a contamination attributed more often to girls than boys) reveal much about the microcosm that these students inhabit, and an extensive look at the tomboy, both in literature and in life, compares her ambiguity (sometimes an insult, sometimes a compliment) to the negative attitudes often elicited by gender-crossing in the other direction. Thorne argues convincingly against the theories of scholars like Deborah Tannen and Carol Gilligan that boys and girls have different "cultures," and she attempts to discourage "gender antagonism." A final section offers concrete steps for teachers to take in forming the attitudes--about gender and other topics--of coming generations.

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