

Public pedagogies of normalcy: constructing the girl norm

Jessica Francombe (MPhil/PhD candidate, Department of Education)
J.M.Francombe@bath.ac.uk

Biopedagogies of health, the body and normality are constituted as diverging from longstanding educational traditions and formal knowledge acquisition—becoming embedded in the discourse of (physical) cultural technologies. Scrutinising a media text for the dominance and power rendered within (Johnson et al., 2004) allows for interrogation of these technologies as mechanisms of instruction and guidance; heightening scholarly awareness of the “radical shift in the production of knowledge and the ways it is received and consumed” (Giroux, 2004, p. 67). A broadening of the notions of teaching and learning (Giroux, 2001; 2004)— going beyond the dichotomy of formal/informal education— alludes to the potential for (physical) cultural technologies (Ouellette & Hay, 2008a/b), such as video games, to inhabit new modes of knowing, new modes of surveying the self and new ways of sculpting the corpus.

This paper is located within the bright eyed twinkling, white teeth sparkling, pom-pom waving, midriff bearing, mini-skirt wearing, big breasted digital fortress of cheerleading. “WE CHEER”— a computer game for the Nintendo Wii— is a virtual amalgamation of (hyper)femininity and whether experienced as innovation, play or entertainment (Altheide, 1996) this discursive technology needs to be critiqued as being encapsulated within wider iterations of power, direction and education. Thus, I read “WE CHEER” as a theoretical construct capable of expressing neoliberal tenets of self-surveillance, individualisation and the monitoring of the body towards those ends deemed normal by heteronormative rhetoric (O’Riordan, 2007). “WE CHEER” classifies hyperreal and corporeal displays of female normality as (hetero)sexual, middle class, white, young and a productive neoliberal citizen. This reduction to the ‘body that fits’ allows homogenous images of normality to infiltrate the living/playing rooms, all the while rendering those as ‘other’ outside of these spaces.

Critical work on the pedagogic potential of (physical) cultural technologies matters, because social justice and social inclusion matter. The moving images of female bodies that populate the screens of televisions and monitors up and down the country serve as expansive teaching machines (Giroux, 2004) problematising the innocence and apparently autonomous nature of games and actualising templates of physical normalcy (O’Riordan, 2007).