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Learning to Play School: The Role of Topic in Gendered Discourse Roles among Preschoolers

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1 Introduction

For several decades, researchers have investigated the relationship between gender and public and private spaces (Brown 1980; Eakins and Eakins 1978; Swann 1989) demonstrating stronger links between women and private spaces and men and public spaces (Adams 1992; Chan 1992; Gardner 1981; Goffman 1977; Tannen 1990; West and Zimmerman 1983). These earlier studies have illustrated various ways in which gender becomes culturally constructed in public and private spaces, showing linkages between cultural ideas about, and expressions of gender. In particular, some studies of gender in public discourse have shown a preference for the male voice (Gal 1991; Lee 1996; Mendoza-Denton 1996; Ochs and Taylor 1995), even on the Internet (Herring et al. 1996; but see Bergvall 2000). Spender (1985) has argued that there is a '30 percent rule' in public discourse, according to which women are perceived as speaking as much as men when they participate 30 percent of the time in public discourse situations, and are viewed as dominating the floor when they exceed this '30 percent rule'.

In a consideration of gendered participation in classroom settings, the idea of the '30 percent rule' (where male voices become favored over female voices in public settings) becomes particularly important. Children do not arrive at school already knowing how to talk appropriately in the classroom. Instead, children must learn how to talk, and to listen, in culturally proscribed ways for the school setting in order to be successful students (see Swann 1989: 185). What has generally been found in the literature is that learning to perform school roles,

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or to 'play school,' so to speak, involves learning gendered ways of interacting (LeMaster et al. 1998; Swann 1989).

Many studies have documented an imbalance in gendered participation in classrooms. Often, boys speak more than girls, boys are much more likely than girls to call out their answers and be given the floor while girls will get reprimanded for the same behavior, and boys are much more likely than girls to be praised by the teacher for the same behaviors (Lee 1996; LeMaster et al. 1998; Mills 1998; Sadker and Sadker 1985; Swann 1989).

The teacher clearly plays a role in how the children learn to play school in gendered ways, either through mediation or at least tacit acceptance of gendered classroom behaviors (Swann 1989). For instance, in a study by Whyte (1986, in Swann 1989), getting equal participation from girl and boy students in science classes could only be achieved by teachers with some effort. In fact, one of the heads of science in the study remarked that while there may have been equal participation among his students, he 'felt as though he were devoting 90 percent of his attention to the girls' (Whyte in Swann 1989: 186). As Sadker points out, differential behavior by the teacher toward students has had a dramatic effect on girls' participation in the classroom.

> Girls become "spectators" to the educational process in co-educational classrooms: They are called on far less; when they do contribute to class discussion, their contributions are less likely to be evaluated or engaged at length; and teachers are more inclined to do things for them rather than show them how to do things for themselves. (Sadker in Tannen 1990: 308)

LeMaster et al. (1998) show that children do not start out acting in gendered ways, but acquire these behaviors through various shaping mechanisms employed by teachers which children seem to adopt. What became clear to us (LeMaster, Hitchcock, Sanchez, and Werner 1998) when conducting research at local preschools with 3- to 5-year-old children was that girls and boys were equally competent 'floor-getters' when they began preschool. But consistent with Sadker's findings, over time these children were socialized into gendered ways of getting and holding the floor. We have reported earlier that remaining silent in public teacher-centered discussions and learning to get attention from the teacher while remaining silent is often constructed in school as more 'feminine' than 'masculine' behavior (LeMaster et al. 1998). To achieve this end-goal, girls receive harsher discipline for breaking their silence than do boys. Additionally, when examining both student-initiated and teacher-initiated silences, we discovered that patriarchal images of rightful speakers in these situations seemed to shape who would or would not speak up, favoring boys over girls.

The findings in this paper differ from and develop our earlier work, which was carried out on a more delimited data set. Upon further, more detailed analyses of interactions in our complete data set, what seems to matter more in terms of gendering the floor-getting behavior is the topic open for student participation, rather than simply the gender of the student trying to participate. Of course, numerous studies have linked discussion topics with gender (Ainsworth-Vaughn 1992; de Francisco 1991; Fishman 1983; Hirshman 1974; Leet-Pellegrini 1980; Swann 1989; Tannen 1990; Thorne et al. 1983). However, our study examines how young preschool children acquire this linkage of topic and gender, and how they are socialized into it. We are documenting how children learn classroom discourse strategies necessary for them to be successful at 'playing school,' and how these strategies involve children's enactment of their own gender in an emergent way.

2 The research site

Data used for this research were collected in the summer of 1997 at a preschool located in the greater Long Beach, California area. A preschool administered by a local school district (as opposed to a private school or a 'Head Start' preschool) was chosen as the research site because the teacher standards and communication structures are similar to those found in higher school grades, better enabling a link between our findings and classroom research with older children. This preschool explicitly seeks to prepare its students for attendance in the district's elementary school, suggesting that behaviors learned here are likely to be those found in studies of higher school grades. The school is located in a primarily upper-middle class European-American neighborhood, from which the school draws many of its students. Although the students represent several ethnic groups, the social class is fairly homogenous. The preschool, while located within a school district, was not free to participating families.

At the time of research, the school accepted students on a full-time or part-time basis. Students either attended the school Monday through Friday, or on a part-time basis, either Monday/Wednesday/Friday, or Tuesday/Thursday. There were five classrooms of students with approximately 24 students in each class, balanced by sex (12 girls and 12 boys) and age (from 3 to 5 years old). Every teacher at this school was female, and the two who participated in this study were under the age of 30, each with several years teaching experience.

We filmed students in one classroom on Tuesdays and Thursdays and in the other classroom on Wednesdays and Fridays.[1] Because of an interest in gendered behaviors in public discourse, we focused on the half-hour of structured teacher-student interactions in the morning (roughly from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. each morning).[2] The two classrooms were videotaped, four times each, in order to

[1] On a couple of occasions, Megan Hitchcock brought a video camera and filmed the classroom along with Barbara LeMaster to provide another perspective. Also Lisa Roberson came to a couple of the filming sessions, sometimes holding a camera, and sometimes taking ethnographic field notes. Both Hitchcock and Roberson were undergraduate CSULB students looking for research experience.

[2] LeMaster had been observing classrooms at this preschool two years prior to the formalized study in the summer of 1997. The Director of the preschool enabled this research to take place by approaching the School Board herself on behalf of the researcher. Because LeMaster initiated the research herself, she was limited to the number of classrooms she could videotape alone, i.e. two

capture changes in students' participation over time. Although LeMaster had originally hoped to film on the very first day of the summer session, then in the middle, and again at the end, due to delays in receiving completed consent forms filming could only occur at the middle and end of the summer session. Nonetheless, she was able to conduct ethnographic observations from the first day.

Only children whose parents granted permission were participants in the research, with 100 percent participation in one class, and less than that in the other.[3] Because this is preschool and attendance is not mandatory, the numbers of girls and boys within particular age groups fluctuated on any given day. In addition to videotaping, various members of our research team observed the children at other times in order to better understand the children's full range of communicative abilities.[4] By observing the children in this wide range of settings, our aim was to ensure that students' abilities to speak in a public setting were reflective of that setting, and not their developmental level or personal style. We observed them in structured teacher-student discourse, on the playground, at mealtime, with caregivers, and with their parents. In this way we could take individual characteristics into consideration and thereby be more confident in our claims of floor-getting behaviors by these very young children.

While this study is based on preliminary research findings of two preschool classrooms in a local school district, we are currently expanding our data set by videotaping teacher-centered discourse in four more West Long Beach preschools, filming eight classes. In the new data set, which we are currently collecting and cataloging, all of the teachers are female, and none of them are European-American. The teachers are Central American, Mexican-American, Samoan, Filipino, Asian and African-American. The majority of the children are Latino with Spanish as their first and home language. The next predominant group of children is African-American, followed by a number of different ethnicities, including Filipino, East Indian, Samoan, and other ethnicities. Most of the classes we are currently filming are conducted bilingually, at least to some extent, in both English and Spanish. The main purpose of this ongoing new study is to expand our data set to further determine whether the claims we are making on a small data set can be confirmed. In addition, we have an interest in exploring the intersections of ethnicity and bilingualism with gender in the classroom.[5]

[3] Although this classroom had less than 100% participation, LeMaster wanted to keep it in the study as she had already been observing the teacher for more than two years.

[4] LeMaster, in addition to conducting ethnographic observations at the schools, had an opportunity to observe many of the children outside of school hours, at parks, in their homes, and in her own home. Additionally, Megan Hitchcock and Lisa Roberson conducted some ethnographic observations of the children in the classroom and on the playground.

[5] The current research is funded by the Spencer Foundation.

3 Methodology

Our initial analyses of the data (see LeMaster et al. 1998) looked at both child initiated participation and teacher involvement in student silencing in structured teacher-student classroom discourse. Our findings were consistent with other literature on calling out behaviors where boys overwhelming called out more often than girls and when girls tried to do the same, they were more often and more severely reprimanded by teachers. We also noticed that girls tended to raise their hands much more often, and for longer periods of time than did the boys, yet got the floor less often and for shorter duration (on average) than did the boys. Teachers contributed to shaping these kinds of behaviors in a number of ways. They would reinforce silencing uniformly for both girls and boys by calling on quiet children who were following the hand-raising rule. However, they more often than not would call on quiet girls who were *not* raising their hands, therefore tacitly reinforcing a passive floor-getting behavior for girls. We also noted in our study that girls were much more likely than boys to receive physical discipline and to be noted as a poor example of behavior in front of the whole group of students. Girls were much more likely than boys to be grabbed by the arm and physically moved from place to place to silence them. Boys were more likely to be indexed from one place to another (i.e., a teacher would point at a boy, then point to the place the boy was to go rather than physically move him), or an aide, rather than the teacher, would be asked to physically remove a boy.

What we wanted to follow up on in this study was hand-raising behavior. As a result of our initial analyses of the data (LeMaster et al. 1998), we suspected the girls might be varying their hand-raising techniques in an effort to increase their floor-getting success in controlled teacher-student interactions. We defined controlled teacher-student interactions to be situations where the teacher was primarily directing the segment by requiring the students to raise their hands to participate. To test this conjecture, we plotted students' hand-raising behavior over time. This plot allowed us to examine the range of ways in which children would raise their hands in order to obtain permission to speak in class. It also allowed us to examine how long each type of hand-raising behavior was employed, and which type(s) may be most successful in obtaining a turn at talk.

The hand plotted time and sequencing data had been charted on graph paper with the student's names across the top, and time (in one-second increments) down the left-hand side.[6] Each time students raised their hand, gained the floor, called out to the teacher, or in some other way sought to gain the floor, their actions were recorded as they occurred. Accordingly, a clear picture began to emerge with respect to how long the children raised their hands and how long they kept the floor. Figure 1 below shows an example of this kind of coding

[6] Tina Werner, an undergraduate CSULB Anthropology student at the time, developed this coding technique.

technique. The figure shows hand-raising patterns for five children. Vertical lines delineate the amount of time each particular child (for example, Child 1) has been raising their hand, relative to the other children on camera at that moment (i.e. Child 2, 3, 4, 5), in terms of one-second increments of real time (according to the time-coding on the videotape). White boxes indicate 'floor time,' or the time that the child gained and maintained the floor with the teacher's permission. Black boxes indicate a call out, or the time that the child gained the floor without the teacher's permission. A gray box indicates a disruptive activity employed by the student (e.g. stomping their feet, flapping their arms) to gain the attention of the teacher, and hopefully, the floor.

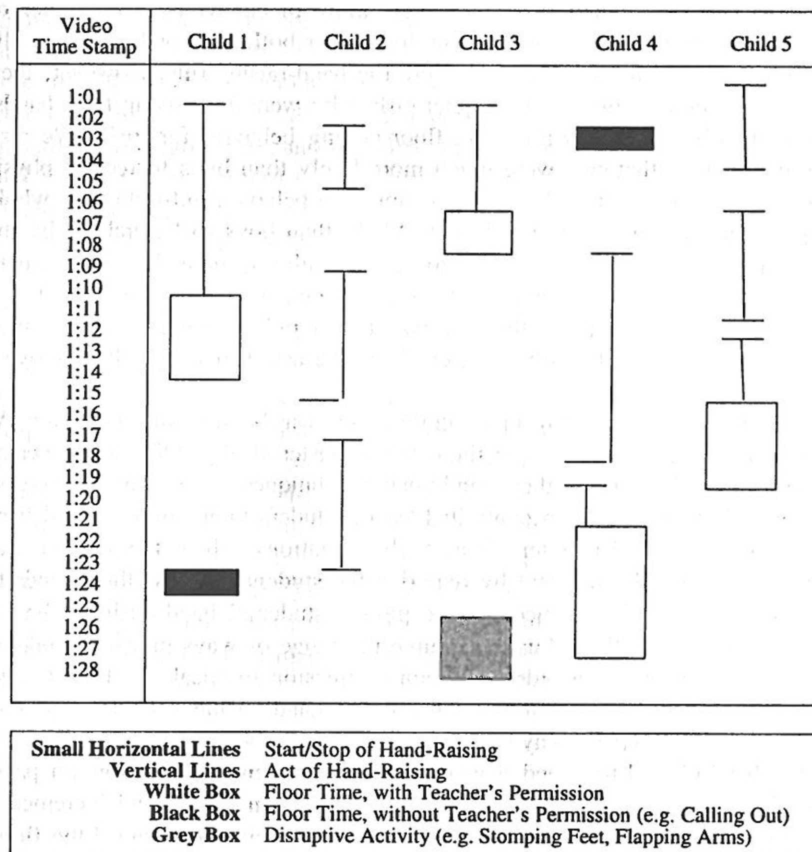

Figure 1. Example of Hand-Raising charting.

On our actual data sheets, all female children were put on one side of the chart, and all male children on the other. By segregating the students by gender and then coding their hand-raising time and floor-time, we hoped to see 'at a glance' how gender may have affected student participation in terms of the student's own

hand-raising efforts. We could determine how long a student tried to obtain the floor through raising their hand, as compared to other students trying to participate at the same time. We could also see (at a glance) who achieved their goal of getting the floor, and how long each child managed to maintain the floor once it was achieved.

A total of eight segments, listed in Table 1 below, were analyzed for student hand-raising variations as a result of their controlled teacher-student interaction framework. Teachers were given a coding name by students participating in this research, the names being reflective of the color of clothing each teacher wore on the very first day of filming; hence, the 'Blue' and the 'Pink' teacher. We use the term 'segments' to refer to identifiable topics, which in this study are 'Calendar,' 'News,' and 'Sharing'. 'Calendar' refers to talk about calendar-related concepts. In this kind of segment, children are learning the names for the days of the week and their relationship to each other (through concepts such as 'today' and 'tomorrow'). They learn about how days of the week relate to actual calendrical representations of them. They also learn about seasons and the weather. In 'News' segments, children are encouraged to tell the teacher their news, which may be about going somewhere, or getting new clothes, or, essentially, anything they can think of. The teacher writes a synopsis of the news of each child on a white dry erase board. 'Sharing' refers to an activity where children bring in some item from home to share with the class. The child typically stands in front of the class holding up the object for their classmates to see, and tells their classmates about the object. They then invite their classmates to ask questions about the item.

Teacher	Date	Segment	Female Students Participating	Female Students Present	Male Students Participating	Male Students Present
Blue	7/29/97	News	7 (100%)	7	5 (100%)	5
Blue	7/31/97	Calendar	4 (67%)	6	1 (20%)	5
Blue	7/31/97	News	6 (100%)	6	5 (100%)	5
Blue	8/26/97	Calendar	4 (67%)	6	1 (20%)	5
Blue	8/26/97	News	6 (100%)	6	5(100%)	5
Blue	8/28/97	News	6 (100%)	6	6 (100%)	6
Pink	8/1/97	Sharing	5 (63%)	8	10 (100%)	10
Pink	8/27/97	Sharing	5 (100%)	5	7 (64%)	11

Table 1. Segments (Total number of segments analyzed = 8).

In some ways it was difficult to compare segments across classrooms, as teacher style varied widely. While the Pink teacher had students talk about the calendar, it was done in a very different way from the Blue teacher. The Pink teacher rotated participation in the calendar section by selecting one student each day to talk about calendar issues (such as the day of the week, the date, the weather, etc.). When other students in the class participated in this topic, they did so as a group, rather than as individuals vying for the floor. Therefore, the segments we

analyzed in the Pink and Blue teachers' classrooms were simply those that required students to vie for individual participation either by calling out or by hand raising. This limited the segments we analyzed in depth to the 'Calendar' (Blue teacher's classroom), 'Sharing' (Pink teacher's classroom), and 'Telling the News' (Blue teacher's classroom) activity segments.

Floor-getting behaviors were not unified for all children; in fact, they were diverse, as illustrated in Table 2 below. Going back to our interest in analyzing the range of hand-raising behaviors and other child-initiated behaviors used to get the floor, we identified 12 different ways that students raised their hands and two other methods for vying for the floor (tugging on the teacher and calling out). The twelve 'hand-raising variations' covered a broad spectrum of hand-raising activity from upright body posture with one hand straight up, to body posture that was anything but a 90-degree angle to the floor, or was some other variant. For example, 'Body Tilted and Hand Straight Out to Side' indicates a bent body (e.g. 45-degrees), along with one hand stretched out to the side of the student's body. Table 2 below indexes the types and expanded descriptions of floor-getting behaviors used by the students in our study.

Hand-Raising Variations	Expanded Description
Hand Up	Upright body posture; hand straight up
Hand Wave	Upright body; hand straight up with wave
Hand on Head	Upright body; forearm resting on head
Two Hands	Upright body; two hands up
Hand Extended to Back	Upright body; hand extended to back of student's body
Hand Straight Out to Side	Upright body; hand extended straight out to side of student's body
Hand Low (Below Head Level)	Upright body; hand up, below head level
One Hand Supports Other	Upright body; one hand raised, with other supporting it (typically at elbow)
Hand Up/Down	Upright body; hand alternately raised and lowered in a very short period of time
Body Tilted; Hand Straight Out to Side	Bent body; hand straight out to side
Body Titled; Hand Extended Back	Bent body; hand extended behind student's back
Body Tilted and Hand Up	Bent body; hand straight up
Other Floor-Getting Behaviors	**Expanded Description**
Tug on Teacher	Student tugs on teacher without raising hand
Call Out	Student calls out to teacher without raising hand

Table 2. Hand Raising Variation Index.

We endeavored to look at detailed variations of hand-raising because our initial analyses (LeMaster et al. 1998: 307) suggested that girls may use more varied types of hand-raising than boys in trying to secure the floor. We hypothesized that because boys get recognized more often and more quickly than girls, having difficulty getting and maintaining the floor may create a need for girls to use a greater variety of strategies to entice the teacher to call on them. However, we did not find what we had predicted. Instead, we generally found both girls and boys employing about the same range of variation of hand-raising techniques in order to get the floor. And while we could find some instances in which either girls or boys used some of the hand-raising strategies differently from each other, we did not find a pattern that could be confirmed by our data. For this reason, in our analyses, we both separated hand-raising behaviors from other floor-getting strategies, and merged them together to see whether any interesting patterns may emerge.

Each second a student's hand was raised was given a value of one (1) and included in the appropriate category. Since girls are said to raise their hands more often than they call out, the hand-raising times were separated from the other floor-getting behaviors before merging them together for an overall analysis. The segments listed in Table 1 were analyzed in this manner and were then summarized not only by total student participation in each activity segment, but also by gender.

4 Findings

This section details the children's efforts in vying for the floor through the use of either hand-raising behaviors or other behaviors (as described above) in each of the three segments analyzed: (a) Calendar, (b) Sharing, and (c) Telling the News. We found it fruitful to conceptualize the children's attempts to get the floor through either hand-raising or some other means as the 'energy they expend' in order to attempt to obtain a turn at talk. The next section discusses the relevance of these findings.

In the Calendar segments, girls tried harder to get the floor; however, each group's energy expended generally matched the floor time they were granted, with a slight favoring of girls. In our data, the girls raised their hands 81 percent of the time and used other floor getting behavior 2 percent of the time for a total of 83 percent energy expended to get the floor. They gained the floor 88 percent of the time. Their floor time therefore roughly matched their efforts. Similarly, the boys' efforts to get the floor, at 17 percent, roughly matched their actual floor time as well, which was 12 percent. (See Table 3 below.)

	Total Hand Raising (A)	Total Floor-Getting Behaviors (B)	Total Effort (A+B)	Total Floor Time
Female Aggregate	72 (81%)	2 (2%)	74 (83%)	38 (88%)
Male Aggregate	15 (17%)	0 (0%)	15 (17%)	5 (12%)

Whole number denotes time spent on each activity in seconds (a value of one (1) was given for each second of activity); percentage is the aggregate percentage.

Table 3. Calendar summary.

The balance between energy expended and floor time was not as even in the Sharing activity segment as in the Calendar data. In the Sharing activities overall, girls tried to get the floor 45 percent of the time, yielding 31 percent of the

floor time. Boys tried to get the floor 55 percent of the time, getting 69 percent of the floor time. In this case, boys were slightly favored, though the differences are still small. (See Table 4 below.)

	Total Hand Raising (A)	Total Floor-Getting Behaviors (B)	Total Effort (A+B)	Total Floor Time
Female Aggregate	246 (44%)	6 (1%)	252 (45%)	34 (31%)
Male Aggregate	303 (54%)	2 (1%)	305 (55%)	76 (69%)

Whole number denotes time spent on each activity in seconds (a value of one (1) was given for each second of activity); percentage is the aggregate percentage.

Table 4. Sharing summary.

Finally, in the Telling the News segment, there was a marked gender difference in the energy expended by students to get the floor, and the floor-time given. In this case, girls tried to get the floor 70 percent of the time, but only managed to get the floor 49 percent of the time. Boys, on the other hand, tried to get the floor 30 percent of the time, but as in the Sharing segment, managed to get the floor more often than they tried, namely 51 percent of the time. (See Table 5 below.)

	Total Hand Raising (A)	Total Floor-Getting Behaviors (B)	Total Effort (A+B)	Total Floor Time
Female Aggregate	1708 (70%)	2 (0%)	1710 (70%)	574 (49%)
Male Aggregate	732 (30%)	2 (0%)	734 (30%)	599 (51%)

Whole number denotes time spent on each activity in seconds (a value of one (1) was given for each second of activity); percentage is the aggregate percentage.

Table 5. Telling the News summary.

5 Discussion

Cultural expectations of rightful speakers according to particular topics emerged in these data. Topics were either gender-neutral (sometimes slightly favoring girls' participation) or clearly favored boys' participation. What may be important about these different activities is the kind of participation required by the students. In the Calendar activity children simply report on facts (as our culture presents them) in terms of reporting the day of the week, the date, or how to interpret the weather. When interpreting the weather, the children look outside, then choose an icon for weather symbolizing 'sunny,' 'cloudy,' or 'rainy' weather. They are constrained in the kinds of answers they can give, and the participation task is therefore highly prescribed. This is different from the other two activities we are reporting on here, which require novel utterances from student participants. Sharing and Telling the News activities require students to offer opinions or information that is of interest to others. When telling the news, for

instance, one must determine what is newsworthy. In both of these types of situations, boys' participation was favored over girls.

While we are positing that the Calendar activity is gender-neutral, as children received approximately the same amount of floor time as energy expended, girls were in fact given a slight preference, and it is therefore possible that this topic is emerging as preferring the female voice. It was the only topic in our data that enabled girls to participate at the level of their effort to gain the floor. However, these variances in distributions are very slight, and it may be more accurate to say that children gained the floor roughly in proportion to the amount of energy they expended to get the floor, rather than to claim that children's gender influenced their floor time. (See Figure 2 below.)

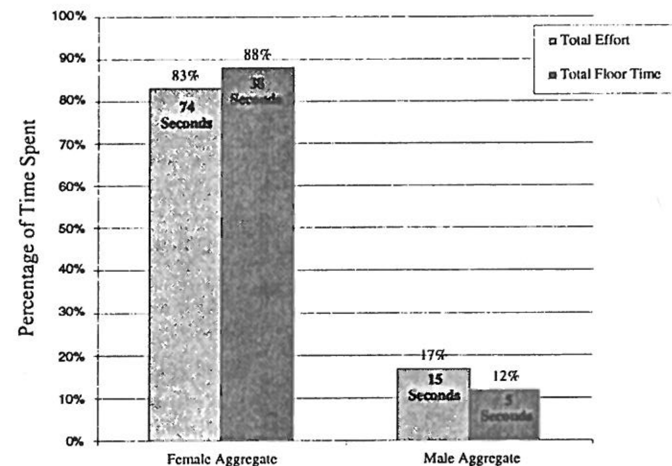

Figure 2. Results for 'Calendar' segment.

After coding these data according to the system in Figure 1, we found that many of the children called out their answers without raising their hands, and were permitted to speak, whether they were girls or boys. In almost all instances, children who tried to get the floor through raising their hands did get the floor. It may be that talking about Calendar issues, such as naming the days of the week, or stating the date, or deciding on the weather, is being constructed as a neutral topic, much as it has been treated in etiquette training for cross-gender communication (Martin 1985; Vanderbilt 1967). Alternatively, this could be a topic emerging as more appropriate for girls, as more girls participated than boys, and boys participated significantly less here than in the other contexts.

In the second activity, Sharing, every child is given a turn to bring in an item from home to share with the class. What we analyzed here were the children's attempts to ask questions about the item. In this case, the children asserted themselves in order to get more information about the item being shared by an-

other student. In our observations, we first attended to the kinds of items being shared, and whether they might be considered of interest more to one gender or the other—a factor that might skew our data. Among the items children brought in were a tiny microphone, a toy shark, a book about a horse, and an alarm clock. We determined that, at least for the data under evaluation, the items could not be easily classified as being of more interest to one gender.

Our results for the Sharing topic emerged as not completely gender-neutral. In this segment, boys had to expend a bit less energy than girls in order to get the floor more often. (See Figure 3.) We argue that these kinds of behaviors eventually lead to tacit norms for gendered floor-getting behavior in classroom situations, and thereby may have a gendering effect on children's participation.

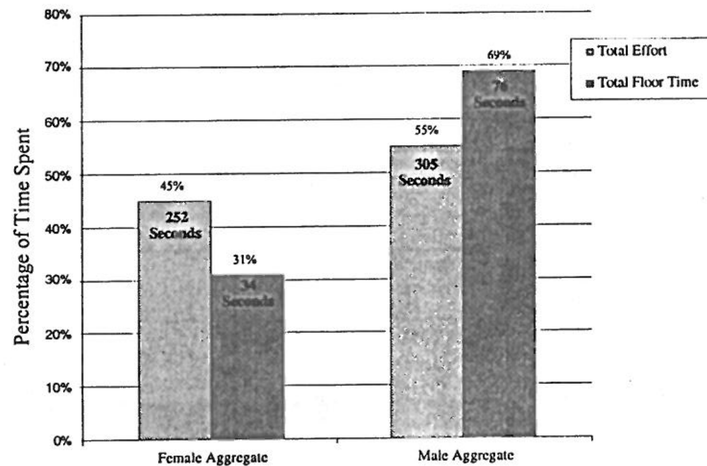

Figure 3. Results for 'Sharing' segment.

Finally, the Telling the News segment was perhaps the most illuminating of all of the activity segments analyzed to date. In this activity, children were expected to vie for the floor in order to give information about themselves that they deemed relevant to share with the class. The Telling the News activity required children to assert themselves, both in terms of floor-getting behaviors, as well as in terms of presenting facts about themselves they deemed important enough to be written on the board and shared with their peers. Of course for preschoolers, this meant telling about a new pair of shoes, or even tying their shoes, or brushing their hair in the morning. But, regardless of the content, the activity required a higher sense of individuality and assertion than either of the previous two activities analyzed here—Calendar or Sharing. As mentioned previously, the Calendar activity simply requires prescribed answers from the students. The Sharing activity, on the other hand, requires that students ask questions of the child sharing an item, or offer opinions about that item to the sharer and the rest of the class. The Telling the News segment requires children to assert that there is something about themselves which is newsworthy enough to be written on a whiteboard by the teacher, and shared with the rest of the class. (See Figure 4 below.)

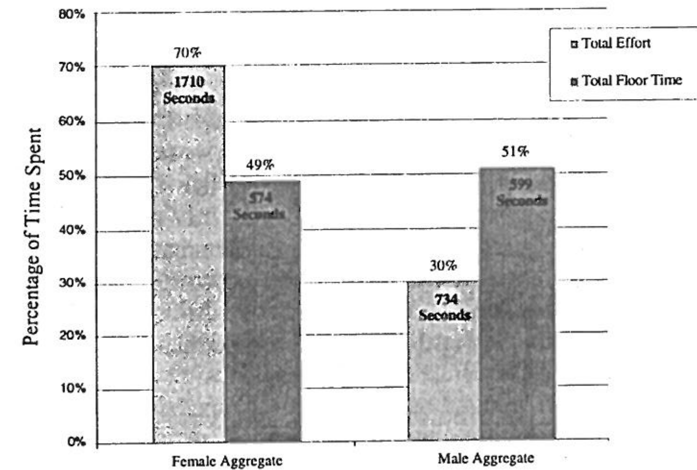

Figure 4. Girls' and boys' effort and floor time in 'Telling the News' segment.

The detailed hand-raising coding of the data for Telling the News, again following the system demonstrated in Figure 1, showed further that girls raise their hands longer in order to get the floor for shorter amounts of time than the boys. Furthermore, all of the girls had to raise their hands in order to participate in this paticular segment, while only one boy had to raise his hand for any duration in order to get the floor. When presented with these asymmetrical distributions, some teachers argued that boys are called on more and allowed to call on more due to their higher energy levels; however, we observed that both girls and boys exhibited disruptive behaviors.

The Telling the News activity is similar to 'reporting' speech, which has been studied by language and gender researchers. What has been noted for adult 'reporting speech' is that it is deemed a more masculine than feminine activity in terms of who seems to engage in it more often, and more comfortably (Tannen 1990). There may be a link between the emerging preference of boys' voices in the Telling the News segments in preschool and adult 'reporting speech' being constructed as a more masculine than feminine behavior. The research presented here indicates how people learn to associate certain styles of speaking with gender. In this case, preschool children are learning that the topic of Telling the News calls for more male participation over the female participation. The children learn this through a disproportionate ratio of floor time to the energy expended to get the floor. While children may not start out assuming that telling one's news is a more masculine speech act than feminine, they become social-

ized into this kind of viewpoint through the favoring of boys' voices over girls in this kind of activity.

The Telling of the News segment happens right before snack time. As children successfully tell their news, they are dismissed to go wash their hands and sit down at a table for their snack. Children who have not yet told their news remain on the carpet until all of the children are dismissed. The series of still photographs in Figure 5 were taken from our videotaped data.[7] These photographs and the accompanying transcript illustrate in greater detail how boys' voices emerge as favored voices during the Telling the News segments.

At the start of the transcript, Gemma tells about her new shoes and gets the floor for a total of 11 seconds. When she is finished, she leaves the rug to go and wash her hands for snack time (Figure 5.1). When Gemma leaves the circle, there are four children left, one girl (Alice) and three boys. Alice begins raising her hand as soon as Gemma is asked "...what's new?". Alice is the only child out of the five remaining children at the time to have her hand raised. Nonetheless, when Gemma leaves the circle, the teacher looks at one of the boys (Adam), and tells him he is going to be next. At this point, Adam notices Alice with her hand up and raises his own hand (while the teacher's back is to them). By raising his hand, Adam is 'playing by the rules' in an attempt to be next to take the floor. He obviously sees Alice with her hand raised as a threat to his ability to be next (as the teacher said he would in line 8) He demonstrates this in his outburst when he screams at Alice in lines 9 and 10 saying, "You, no! I am supposed to be next. Me, not you!" (Figures 5.2 through 5.4). One might expect the teacher to choose the girl to go next, taking into account the fact that she was the 'playing by the rules' by raising her hand first and keeping it up the whole time while remaining quiet. She might also be expected not to reward Adam's outburst, but rather to tell him that children must take turns. Instead, the teacher supports Adam's behavior by calling on him next.

While Adam is giving his news, a girl returns to the floor to try to talk to the teacher. But in order for this child to be successful, she must interrupt Adam's telling of his news. By this time, Adam has had the floor for 23 seconds, which is a relatively long time, and is still going strong. Nonetheless, the girl from outside the circle who tries to interrupt Adam and talk to the teacher is unsuccessful. The teacher simply tells her to 'sit down,' without entertaining what she is saying. Adam continues telling his news for another second before the teacher tells him to go wash his hands for snack time (Figures 5.6 and 5.7).

At this point there are two boys and Alice left in the circle. Alice, once again, is the only child raising her hand. Perhaps just to be sure the teacher sees her, she changes her position in order to sit directly in front of the teacher while continuing to keep one hand raised. Just as Alice settles in, however, one of the boys puts his hand up and is called on by the teacher. This boy keeps the floor for approximately 19 seconds before the teacher dismisses him.

[7] Thank you to Marci Dallazen for creating these still images from our videotaped data.

Now there is only Alice and one boy remaining in the circle. Neither one has shared their news yet. Alice continues to have her hand up. The remaining boy does not raise his hand, yet the teacher calls on him to share his news (line 28). Alice decides to take action and tugs on the teacher's shorts (Figure 5.8). The teacher gently pushes her away saying 'you're next' while picking up a pencil she has dropped on the floor next to Alice. The boy takes 6 seconds to tell his news before being dismissed for his snack. Then the teacher finally invites Alice, who still has her hand raised, to take the floor in line 34. Yet, at that moment the girl who tried to interrupt Adam in line 14 comes back with a friend to try to talk to the teacher again, this time potentially interrupting Alice (G5) who has finally received a turn to talk (Figure 5.9). Rather than telling the girl and her friend to 'sit down' without entertaining what they are saying, as she did when the girl tried to interrupt Adam, the teacher this time lets the girl say what she wants and responds favorably to the interruption with a statement of interest, saying 'you do?' in a melodic voice. The teacher then says that she wants to hear Alice's news and the girls walk away. Alice finally gets the floor, but only has it for one second before the teacher says 'Okay, you can go wash your hands' and walks away from her, leaving Alice standing alone at the white board.[8]

(1) Telling the News

1	T:	Gemma, what's new? *(Gemma has had hand raised from the beginning.) (Alice (G6) raises hand)*
2	G5:	( )
3	**9 sec**	
4	T:	Those are beautiful! *(pointing to Gemma's shoes)*
5	G5:	Yes they are!
6	**2 sec**	
7	T:	I like those! *(G5 gets up and goes to wash hands)*
8	T:	You' re going to be next, hang on. *(looking at B2)*
9	B2:	*(puts hand up after seeing girl raise hand and points to girl and yells)* You no! I am suppose to be next to go!
10		Me, not you!
11	T:	Adam we are taking turns buddy! What is your news?
12	B2:	( )=
13	**23 sec**	
14	T:	Wait, where are you going? *(she says to B2 as a girl comes up to her to interrupt the boy and ask the teacher a question)*
15	T:	*(Looks at girl and says)* Sit down.
16	B:	( )
17	T:	Where again? Oh the airplane museum! Yeah, you like that place, huh? Go wash your hands.

[8] It is important to note that the teacher does not have a pre-existing bias against Alice. Although this was an extremely rich illustrative case, the pattern was typical for the Telling the News segments.

18	G6:	*(Goes and sits in front of teacher with one hand up and one over her mouth)*
19	T:	( ) *(calls on B5 who just put hand up)*
20	B5:	( )=
21	**10 sec**	
22	T:	( )
23		[
24	B5:	=( )
25	**9 sec**	
26	T:	What? So your mommy's going to have a baby too? Yeah!
27	B5:	( )
28	T:	Oh boy! Dexter do you have new news for me? *(Dexter has not had his hand up at all)*
29	B6:	( ) last time ( ) **3 seconds**
30	T:	Yeah, *(G6 tugs on teacher's shorts)*
31	T:	*(saying to G6 while touching her head, dropping her pencil and bending over to pick it up)* You're next.
32	B6:	( )
33	**6 sec**	
34	*(Alice has had her hand up since G5 was called on in line 27, and now* 35 *starts to talk for* **2 seconds** *when she is interrupted by the same girl who tried to interrupt B2 in line 14. The girl brings a girlfriend with her this time.)*	
36	G1, G3:	We have ( )
37	T:	You do? Ok, I want to hear Alice's news. Go ( )
38	*G1 and G3 walk away.*	
39	T:	What's your news, Alice?
40	G5:	( ) = **1 sec**
41	T:	You went to the store?
42	T:	Okay, you can go wash your hands. *(The teacher walks away)*
43	G5:	*(Stands alone looking at the board.)*

Figures 5.1–5.9. The male voice emerges as the preferred voice in 'Telling the News' Activity Segments:

Fig. 5.1. Student leaves floor.

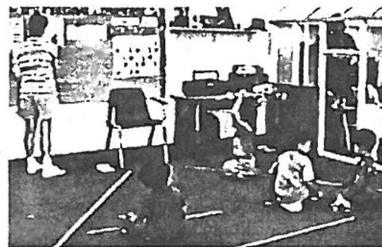

Fig. 5.2. Boy sees girl raise hand.

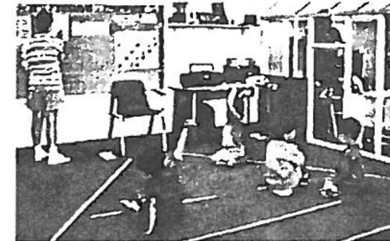

Fig. 5.3. Boy raises hand then yells at girl with hand raised.

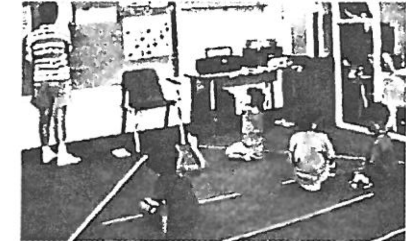

Fig. 5.4. Boy continues to point and yell at girl with hand raised.

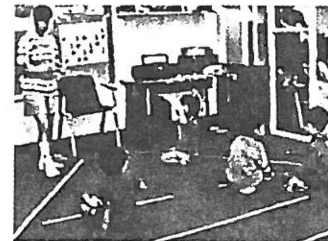

Fig. 5.5. Teacher says, "We're taking turns buddy."

Fig. 5.6. Girl attempts to interrupt while boy is speaking.

Fig. 5.7. Teacher tells girl not to interrupt but to sit down.

Fig. 5.8. Girl tugs on teacher's shorts.

Fig. 5.9. Teacher allows girl to interrupt another speaker.

6 Concluding Remarks

In our data, one of the three topics we examined was constructed as a neutral topic open to both girls and boys, the Calendar topic. In this case, participation in the discussions roughly matched participation attempts by children, whether female or male. The other two topics in our data, Sharing and Telling the News, were constructed as preferring boys' voices. In the Telling the News segments, the boys' attempts at participation were clearly privileged. There were no topics that were clearly constructed as girls' topics in our data.

Research on language socialization shows how gendered behavior is culturally acquired (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). What our earlier preschool research showed was that children with little or no experience at floor-getting behaviors in teacher-controlled situations initially have few, if any, rules about who attempts, or how or when they attempt to speak up (LeMaster et. al 1998). Our continuing research now shows how teachers hold and enforce cultural assumptions about rightful speakers in these situations through the choices they make when yielding the floor to students. Unlike previous research on adult participation in public situations which point to relative success at getting the floor as gendered, our research points to certain topics of public discourse as being constructed as gendered, and others as being constructed as gender-neutral. It moves beyond the dichotomous view of participation (or lack thereof) in public discourse by women and men toward a more complex interaction of culturally gendered topics, genres, discourse space, and individual agency.

In previous work (see LeMaster et al. 1998), we attributed the favoring of boys over girls in classroom discourse to teachers unconsciously acting on patriarchal cultural conventions for 'appropriate' gendered behavior in public discourse, similar to Spender's '30 percent rule.' As Spender (1985) pointed out, when women speak 30 percent of the time and men speak 70 percent of the time, women are perceived as speaking in equal proportions to men. Other classroom research supports this idea, namely, that male voices are preferred over female voices in classroom participation (Lee 1996, Sadker and Sadker 1985). Again, as Whyte (in Swann 1989) showed in a study of science teachers learning to treat their students equitably in the classroom, even when students participated in equal amounts, girls were perceived as contributing as much as 90 percent more than boys.

What accounts for this kind of phenomenon where female participants are perceived as dominating the floor when speaking less than, or equal to male participants? As Cameron (1998), Taylor (1999), and others have pointed out, culture is more than partriarchy. Culture encompasses complex interactive sensibilities about how one can perform their gender in any given space (Lee 1996).

In our preschool data, we believe the children's behavior indicates their emergent understandings of how to perform appropriately, in other words, how to 'play school.' They do not start out acting as gendered beings when trying to get the floor in their preschools. They generally come to school as three- or four-year-olds who have not yet had the experience of learning to get the floor from a teacher in a classroom setting. Our data show them initially trying to get the floor by whatever means possible, interacting more as individuals than as members of the group. But, within a few weeks of preschool training, the children learn how to get the floor from the teacher as participants in a classroom, and they are learning when and how gender is relevant in those participant structures.

As we have shown in this paper, 'topic' emerges as one of the areas in which gender becomes salient for these children as they learn the classroom rules about how to get the floor from the teacher. When talking about a gender neutral topic, such as the Calendar, every child is invited to participate in the discussion. Their attempts to participate are rewarded, regardless of gender. But when Sharing, or even more so when Telling the News, the male voice comes to be preferred through interactive cues the children learn as they acquire the classroom rules for getting the floor from the teacher.

Children certainly have agency as Thorne (1993) points out in her own work. These children no doubt bring their own agency to how they participate in their preschool class. They can choose to conform or not conform to gendered expectations by teachers and peers. But what is particularly notable in our data is that within a relatively short time, children generally conform to gender expectations in the classroom setting. Tracking how they learn the rules of school from their first day in the classroom until they have acquired those rules provides necessary insights into the role of gender in successfully learning to 'play school.'

Several language and gender researchers have been addressing the issue of understanding gender as an emergent identity through analyses of interactions (Cameron 1997; Livia and Hall 1997; Butler 1990) rather than something that is indexical or static. Gender does not exist without social construction. Interactants make gender viable and salient through their performances with each other, as was the case with our preschool children. Studies that focus on 'performance of gender' have been referred to as 'performativity' studies. As Hall points out in her description of performativity (2000):

> To a poststructuralist like Butler, there is no prediscursive identity, as even our understanding of biological sex is discursively produced. This perspective puts more weight on the speech event itself, requiring us to examine how speakers manipulate ideologies of feminine and masculine speech in the ongoing production of gendered selves.

By examining classroom discourse, researchers can gain a sense of how a student's agency interacts with communicative rules for participation in school. The children in our preschool research did not start out with any preconceived notions of gendered ways of getting the floor in school. When they started school, they tried to get the floor in whatever way was comfortable for them, regardless of their gender. But over time, they are shaped into gendered ways of participating in structured teacher-student discourse where the teacher acts as the

gate-keeper to their ability to participate in the classroom setting. In this way, the children are learning how to 'play' school as a gendered actor.

Although the data reported on here show how children adapted themselves to the shaping mechanisms offered to them in preschool, we hypothesize that children from some cultural traditions will not be so easily shaped into these particular gender roles which more generally favor the male over the female voice. For example, we suspect that African-American girls and, perhaps culturally Jewish girls, who come from cultures that value women's voices in public arenas may not accept a silenced role in public classroom participation. We are expecting to learn more about this from our current on-going research in West Long Beach preschools.

Examining gender in preschool classroom communication is important as it can inform us about the role of schools in children's enactment of gender in the classroom more generally. Most research on gender issues in the classroom has been conducted on older school children (older than preschoolers) and on adult behavior. Some teachers have argued that boys and girls are simply different, and because boys have higher energy levels, they not only need to speak up more, but teachers must call on them more to keep them from disrupting class. This, however, led us to our guiding research questions. Are boys and girls this different *before* they learn how to be students in American schools? Or do they learn how to 'play student' in a teacher-directed discourse? Are girls in fact as unruly as boys before they learn school rules about when to be quiet?

In the situation of classroom teacher-oriented discourse where children are expected to vie for the floor, discourse spaces may be constructed in any number of ways. Our goal here has been to understand whether they are being constructed in gendered ways, and if they are, to understand what effect this may have on children's acquisition of gendered identities. We aimed to investigate whether there are times when gender does not matter and others when either the female or male voice is preferred in classroom settings. And if so, we may additionally ask how early these cultural preferences are conveyed, and how well they are accepted by school children. Ultimately, this kind of research may help us to understand how these early experiences with school communication norms affect speech styles in other communication arenas later on. The fact that these preschool children do not start out as gendered floor-getters, but end up that way, suggests that they are being socialized into societal norms through classroom interactions, among other means, with their teachers, learning to 'play school' in gendered ways. Understanding this process may help us make sense out of later claims—often ad hoc explanations—for gendered behaviors in school and for adults.

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