

THE FORMATION OF BODY MEMORY UNDER THE PATRIARCHY: Embodiment and Male Validation



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ABSTRACT

Within this essay, I seek to understand how the patriarchy impacts the concept of body memory and creates gendered bodily behaviors. I first explain and define the relationship between one's incorporative memory and affective framing. Given this relationship, I explore what male validation is and how it becomes embodied. I argue that the formation of the incorporative memory and affective framing under the patriarchy creates an embodied experience of male validation. As women begin to understand gender roles, they shift how they move their bodies, and continue to display this gendered movement because men validate it.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Under the philosophical study of embodied cognition, the mind and body are one combined entity, our bodies becoming subjects of knowing and understanding. Following this belief, the idea of a profound and unique bodily sense of memory is now a question that has been posed. Feminist thinkers have begun to use these ideas to explain and understand how gender is displayed and enacted through our bodies. It is notable, however, that feminists have long questioned the relationship of the body and mind, as well as how this relationship has been further shaped by the experience of oppression before those within other disciplines have.

As a feminist philosopher, I seek to understand how the concept of body memory is impacted by the patriarchy and has created gendered bodily behaviors. In this paper, I define body memory from an embodied cognition perspective and affective framing, arguing how the two concepts interact with each other. Furthermore, I use Sandra Bartky's definition of femininity to explore what male validation is and why it is important to many women. Using this framework and the established embodied cognition theories, I argue how male validation becomes an embodied experience for women.

II. UNDERSTANDING INCORPORATIVE MEMORY AND AFFECTIVE FRAMING

Often, memory is regarded as our ability to remember past events and recall information, but memory can be experienced through the body as well. Actions such as riding a bike or writing are examples of the body developing habits and dispositions that are remembered throughout the course of one's life. In "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," Thomas Fuchs expands on these theories and defines implicit memories as a form of knowledge that can only be expressed when a bodily effort is made.¹ Implicit memory exemplifies the body's ability to retain information and achieve it without having to actively retrieve the information. Implicit memory is not simply one's reflexes, but rather a specific kind of bodily habit that is formed through imagined movement and motor execution.²

1 Thomas Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," in *Body Memory, Metaphor, and Movement*, ed. Sabine C. Koch, et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 9-22.

2 Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," 16.

One specific form of this implicit body memory is called incorporative memory. According to Fuchs, one begins to develop an embodied personality structure at a young age. Incorporative memory is the shaping of bodily habits by attitudes and roles that are produced by perceiving the behavior of others. It is formed through imitating and identifying another's behavior and understanding the response it receives from the people around them. Therefore, the body becomes externally perceived and is now a body-for-others because it conveys social roles, and one becomes deliberate with their self-expression. This suggests that how we present ourselves is dependent on our interactions with others: noticing how they display their own bodies and behaviors, as well as noticing how others interact with us. One learns how to navigate the world through observation and mirroring others.³ Engaging in incorporations is an example of body memory because it is not a behavior that we are trying to remember how to do or what it is, it is simply a habit that we are conditioned to take part in. These internalized patterns are often shared with others, and these socially set dispositions can demean one to their general social presence.

According to Fuchs, this can also cause discomfort within oneself because being aware of others' judgments can impact spontaneous bodily movements. A person may constrict their body to comply with social roles, creating feelings such as embarrassment, shame, or pride. This can also impact one's disposition in the long term, shaping one's personality with traits like shyness, sensitivity, or vanity.⁴ These traits serve to limit natural bodily impulses because a person becomes fixated on the idea of how their body is viewed by and interacts with others, which, according to Fuchs, can lead to neurotic behavior.⁵

This idea is especially important for understanding embodiment from a feminist perspective. Women's movements can become constricted because they are aware that, as women, they are expected to behave a certain way. The incorporative memory is essential to defining how it looks to move as a woman. As we view others and mimic how other women engage in gender roles from their bodily movements, a woman's incorporative memory begins to form in a way that imitates the behavior of the women that they observe.

While one's body memory, and specifically incorporative memory, is important in understanding why many women pre-reflexively act in ways that afford them male validation, Michelle Maise's writing on affective framing creates a greater understanding of how one's emotional state will impact their actions. According to Maise, one's needs, desires, and interests directly influence the perception of their surroundings, and this



processing of one's environment is called affective framing.³ In Maise's view, all information processing involves affective framing because through this process we decide what information is important and what can be ignored.⁴ Affective framing also impacts the decisions a person makes because they are more prone to act in a way that is aligned with their emotional state.⁵ According to Maise, it is impossible to eliminate one's affective framing from their decision making and judgment because our emotions are always present. Additionally, memories are not just simply remembering something that happened, but they are impacted by one's affective framing at the time because their emotional state, needs, and desires played a role in which information they process and hold on to. Memories from people in the same situation can be different because their affect at the moment alters what specific details they hold onto.

Affective framing is particularly important for women because oppression creates different desires and needs that will impact one's affect. Those who benefit from privilege will have different needs and desires from those who do not, and therefore the way that they perceive and move within the world will drastically differ. A lack of systemic power creates a dynamic where those who are oppressed must act in ways that make them appeal to the dominating systems of oppression in order to gain closer proximity to the controlling narrative of the oppressors.

Understanding the framework and concepts as outlined by Fuchs and Maise could be further supplemented by considering more well known concepts within psychology, such as classical and operant conditioning. I acknowledge the complicated and approach notion of embodied cognition and the similarities classical and operant conditioning share with the concept of incorporative memory and affective framing. Although, embodied cognition is more focused on the effect of one's environment on their actions and bodily movements, so I do stress the differences between the psychological and embodied cognitive theories. Further, the relationship to the body that embodies cognition analysis is useful for feminist frameworks, which focus on gender as an embodied experience, making it more relevant to my argument.

I argue that the concepts of incorporative memory and affective framing are related because as we move through the world, affective framing impacts how we engage with our incorporative memory. Incorporative memory is demonstrated through recreating movement, and according to Maise's account, almost all actions are associated with one's affective state. This indicates that how we engage

with incorporations depends on our affective framing in the current moment. We move our bodies a certain way because of how we are feeling. Additionally, a large role of the incorporative memory is understanding our relation to others, and this is related to one's affective framing because understanding how others perceive you will impact your affect. The incorporative memory is directly related to affect because it involves moving in a way that aligns with your desire to be perceived a certain way. For example, if I am going to a job interview, and I am confident in my abilities for the job, I will pre-reflexively try to embody my confidence to the interviewer. On the contrary, if I am feeling shy, my body will pre-reflexively convey my shyness.

Further, I argue that our affective framing impacts bodily movement, which evolves into incorporations because our bodies are more likely to grab onto movements with greater affective importance. Moments that elicit a strong affective reaction have a greater chance of being remembered within the body because the emotional reaction is much more significant. If we are continually exposed to an experience that elicits the same affective reaction and also view other's reactions to a similar experience, it will develop as an incorporation because the incorporative memory is formed through the imitation of other's behaviors and understanding the social significance of said behaviors. One example of this is learning how to be sympathetic to others when they are upset. We view how people enact sympathy such as hugging or rubbing someone's back and this becomes a pre-reflexive response when we see someone crying or sad.

III. IDENTIFYING MALE VALIDATION

Before I can begin to elaborate on how male validation can become an embodied experience for women, I must first explain what male validation is and why it is important. In this context, male validation is the approval that a man gives to a woman. For the purpose of this essay, male validation will be defined from an embodied perspective. This means that a man can communicate interest or disinterest, affection or disaffection through body movements. Male validation is not necessarily verbal. This validation is often actively sought out by women, and in many cases, it makes women feel good about themselves due to the power that men hold under the patriarchy. Validation is often only received when women can present themselves in a way that appeases the male gaze. According to Sandra Bartky in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," there are three different specific

3 Michelle Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83.

4 Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, 85.

5 Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, 85.



practices that define femininity.⁶ The first is the size and configuration of the body which involves standards promoting diets, exercise, and plastic surgery. The second is bodily comportment, which includes policing the way in which women take up space, move, and generally compose themselves. The last practice is the use of the body as a decorative surface, meaning a woman adorns herself with makeup and chooses the right clothes to look like the ideal woman. These practices create a society in which women implicitly view themselves and their bodies as inferior and deficient because men control the narrative of what women should look like to be deemed attractive.⁷ This structure places the power of how many women will choose to enact themselves in the hands of men because many women's senses of power regarding control over their looks comes from appeasing men under these conditions. It is important for me to note that this definition and experience of male validation is from a heterosexual viewpoint. Therefore, while women can have a say in gender roles and enactment, considering that this is from the perspective of heterosexuality, the validation from a man will be more meaningful.

Following Foucault, Bartky describes this self-awareness of perception from men as the concept of self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience that is displayed under the patriarchy because a woman is conscious of the fact that she is under surveillance in a way that a man is not.⁸ The woman surveys herself, viewing herself from the perspective of the male gaze and policing herself as an act of compliance. This self-surveillance manifests in conforming to the standards of the patriarchy because a woman is aware of how she is perceived through the eyes of a man.⁹ Women scrutinize themselves to ensure that they have a body that moves and looks acceptable enough to please others. Male validation relies on women's inability to view themselves outside of the standards that men set because women have less power to control the standards that deem them attractive. Regarding the power that men are given in the patriarchy, they have a significant influence on the narrative surrounding women's bodies and, in some ways, control the reality and truth of normative femininity. As men define the value of a woman's beauty, for a woman, receiving validation from a man can often define her own worth because it is a sign that she is accurately depicting herself in a way that attracts men. When a man gives a woman validation of her behavior or appearance, it often secures

her within her womanhood. While there are some instances where women may act in order to seek other female approval, I still believe that patriarchal validation is deeply engrained into women. Due to its significance, I will solely be focusing on the impact of male validation.

IV. MALE VALIDATION AS AN EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

As explained by Bartky, the concept of femininity is tied to the body, and therefore I believe that the concept of male validation as an embodied experience needs to be examined further. I argue that male validation becomes embodied through incorporative memory as we learn to embody social norms and roles. Furthermore, the incorporative memory that is used when seeking male validation also involves affective framing because of the relationship between the two concepts.

As children, girls are not born with the intention to seek validation from their male counterparts. The behavior of seeking male validation is due to gender roles and norms that are conditioned from a young age. Girls view behavior from the people around them or from media they are exposed to, and this informs their beliefs of what a woman should look like, act like, and overall, what a woman should be. In "Throwing Like a Girl," Iris Marion Young analyzes the difference in movement between men and women. Young notes that the movement of women's bodies are much more hesitant and constricted in comparison to the men, and that this feminine bodily comportment is expected of women and causes them to believe that they are capable of less, even if there is no physical explanation for a woman's limited movement. It is primarily a bodily comportment that is generated because women are taught to take up less space and move with more discipline.¹⁰ This display of one's body is more likely less comfortable for women in comparison to moving freely and without fear of judgment.

Women unconsciously engage in this behavior because it is rooted in them through incorporative memory. Additionally, when women do carry their bodies in this manner, it is not a habit that women are knowingly and consciously engaging in because it has become a conditioned part of their incorporative memory. While this behavior may be more physically uncomfortable, women are moving in a way that they are conditioned to engage in with the purpose of complying with the male gaze and attaining male validation. A woman may ignore her natural bodily disposition

6 Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29-33.

7 Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 33.

8 Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 42.

9 Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 42.

10 Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality," *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 143, 10.1007/bf02331805.



and form an incorporative memory that acts in accordance with social norms to maintain the facade of femininity as displayed by bodily movements. In this sense, male validation becomes embodied because women's incorporative memory becomes controlled and constricted by social standards that are set by men. While seeking male validation is societally beneficial for women because men have more power, it is still an oppressive habit that women have been conditioned to engage in. It does nothing to break down the unjust power structure that gender establishes and continues to promote behavior that complies to normative femininity. Additionally, affective framing is a pre-reflective response, meaning that one can engage in it without having to think about or notice how their emotions are affecting their actions.

Furthermore, the self-surveillance as described by Bartky can also be used to show male validation as an embodied experience. When women are conforming their bodily movements, they are aware of the perception that their body receives and subconsciously monitor their own movement to move in accordance with patriarchal norms, through the incorporative memory. A woman's incorporative memory is intertwined with her self-surveillance because she is conditioned to behave in a way that is under the guidance of male approval. While self-surveillance seems an active and conscious act, as we become conditioned to embody gender norms, it is internalized as an unconscious act. Women form gendered movements from a young age that are part of the incorporative memory. As they engage in this behavior, they receive male validation. Because a woman understands the importance of male validation, there is positive affective framing that will always be linked to said behavior. Therefore, male validation becomes an embodied process.

Male validation is also sought out by women because it invokes a positive affective response for women through the relationship that affective framing and the incorporative memory creates. As women begin to understand how their bodies are perceived and the response they can get from men, the underlying power structure that is embedded within the performativity and construct of gender creates a positive affective framing with male validation. As a woman begins to embody a behavior that is considered feminine, and then receives validation from a man, that bodily movement now is attached to an incorporative memory with positive affective framing in which male validation becomes a component. When a woman recreates a certain movement, male validation will always be a part of the affective framing that is associated with the body memory because the woman has received validation from the behavior. Women will continue to enact this behavior that receives a positive response from men because of the feeling that is associated

with it and because there is a cultural norm that tells them to behave this way. Said feeling is only given so much weight because of the power men and their validation hold within society. Further, young girls begin to understand the importance of male validation by perceiving the reactions of other women after they view someone else receiving male validation. This shapes the affective and the incorporative memory because, by observation, women learn the importance of appeasing the male gaze, and looking acceptable enough to please others.

V. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have examined the importance of incorporative memory and one's use of affective framing when forming the incorporative memory. Using this framework, I have found that this relationship is key to understanding how women's participation with male validation as a form of sense-making becomes embodied and is internally experienced. Furthermore, the affective framing that women have associated with male validation can cause a woman to unconsciously form oppressive habits. Male validation goes beyond complying with beauty standards or following trends. It is conditioned to be sought out from a young age, as girls are taught to comport their bodies through the incorporative process, to appeal to men and deny their natural bodily instincts. Women continue to comply with these gendered movements because it is so deeply engrained within their bodily memory. Additionally, because the male gaze has a significant hold on the pressure women feel to engage with these movements, the affective framing that is conflated with these movements is positive despite the behaviors being oppressive. For feminist philosophers, understanding how the patriarchy becomes embodied within women is key to progressing past the idea of the patriarchy as purely ideological and instead enacting new ideas on how women can resist oppression. Further discussion of experiencing the patriarchy as embodied and how the patriarchy becomes an essential part of body memory for many women is needed to understand how certain behaviors can be unlearned and how women can reclaim control over their bodies. Using embodied cognition to transform feminist theories into actual embodied experiences that women face is useful in conveying the deep-rooted impacts of gender.





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