

“Dirty Little Girls”

Paper #3 by Wendy Chaidez (Day Class) 4

Adult stereotypes about children influence our judgment and affects us in the way with interact with them. There are also different expectations and beliefs when interacting with girls. Typical girl behaviors are said to be: helpful, neat and clean, easily frightened, quiet, enjoys gossiping, and well mannered. As I was shopping with my niece, I realized that she was acting the opposite of what the typical girl is supposed to act like. At the age of five she seemed independent, competitive, and messy. She didn't fit in the stereotype of what a girl is suppose to be like.

Curious to see what the traits of girls are like today, I decided to observe my niece and her friends in school. As soon as I arrived to the classroom, the teacher and students greeted me. Sidney was not shy to let everyone know that I was her aunt and demanded that everyone be nice to me. She also let them know my age and what I worked in. Soon after my arrival, the children were given a fifteen minute break. Sidney and her friends were the first to get on the monkey bars. Sidney was challenged by one of her friends to reach to the top and without fear she quickly did so. She wasn't scared of the challenge or the height. The boys were upset because they also wanted to play there but didn't care to confront them. Sidney and her friends were loud and did not seem intimidated by the boys which kept going around the monkey bars. After the break was over, I noticed that Sidney's shirt had turned a different color; her shirt was no longer white. She was filthy and had no shame.

When they all were seated and finally quiet, the teacher asked the student to take out their math book. The teacher went over two lessons and proceeded to ask for volunteers to go to the board to solve a couple of problems. Sidney quickly raised her hand and was picked by the teacher. Miss Anderson whispered in my ear that it was common for Sidney volunteer. She scribbled the answer on the board and quickly asked Miss Anderson if it was right. Unfortunately she wasn't but that didn't stop her from asking the teacher why. She wanted to know where she had failed. She was satisfied once she understood what she had done wrong.

Sidney was a completely different person in school and my sister's home. Constantly being told to be quiet at home, she was not given the liberty she had in school. Miss Anderson allowed children to be themselves. She didn't have any expectations about behavior with boys or girls. At home Sidney was very careful not to get dirty because people would think she's a dirty little girl. Miss Anderson didn't punish her, allowing Sidney to explore without fright.

I too was a student in Miss Anderson's class. I learned that stereotypes only impede us from seeing the potential in the women of our future. Since my observation, I now encourage my sister to allow Sidney more freedom. I also have changed the way in which I interact with her. I encourage her to ask questions when not certain. Sidney doesn't fit the stereotype of what we are told girls are like. I am now more careful with what I say to them. Girls today do not fit the stereotype we have of them. It is a great thing that they don't fit the stereotype because they are strong, competitive, motivated, and not easily frightened. These girls are our future and they are strong, smart, and outgoing.