

Critical Question: Iris Marion Young's "Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility and Spatiality"

In this essay, Iris Young begins from the observation that women and men move in different ways in order to construct a phenomenological account of what it is like to inhabit the world as a feminine gendered subject. Drawing heavily on Simone de Beauvoir, Young uses an existentialist framework to outline what she takes to be the essential characteristics of a particular, located kind of female embodiment. By and large, Young's characterisation of feminine embodiment is a negative one, emphasising as Beauvoir does the ways in which being gendered as a woman – and thus those qualities which become associated with femininity – are detrimental to realising one's full human potential as a transcendent subject. If becoming a transcendent subject is taken to be a good thing, then like Beauvoir, what Young seems to be prescribing is for women to aspire to a more "masculine" (active, transcendent) manner of being in the world. Is this a politically useful diagnosis? Can there be no insight to be found in feminine bodily existence? (For example, Young mentions that women better understand objects as "embedded with and fixed by their surroundings" (151), a quality which can highlight the interconnected nature of many things in our world, and also that women have a stronger sense of the frailty of the human body).