

## **Hermeneutics of aesthetics: Influence of Women Teachers' Body Grooming on the Education of Preschoolers**

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### **Abstract**

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*Whereas aesthetics and ethics form the axiological branch of philosophy, the latter's prominence in the discourse of philosophy of education is quite obvious. More attention needs to be given on the role of aesthetics, especially the influence of women teachers' body grooming on the education of preschoolers. This paper hermeneutically interprets the philosophical ideals of women teacher's body grooming on preschoolers. The philosophical sensitisation of young minds for educational purposes is grounded on what they observe in preschool learning environments such as Kindergartens or Montessori centres or nursery schools where majority of teachers are females. Philosophic tenets for education which have long lasting impact on the human mind are greatly influenced by women teachers' body grooming and clothing during the preschool days where the mind is stimulated to think, reason and produce knowledge. The paper contends that more interpretations can be discerned from body grooming of any gender that can lay the foundation of education.*

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**Key words:** Aesthetics, grooming, hermeneutics, mind and preschooler

### **Introduction**

Hermeneutics means the theory of interpretation (Flew, 1979). Whatever is in the form of writing, drawing, painting, verbal or non-verbal information can be subjected to interpretation that goes beyond the thinking of the originator of the work (Seebom, 2004). Aesthetics, which comes from the Greek word *aisthanomai*, meaning perception by the senses refers to the philosophical study of beauty of which body grooming is an invaluable component (Ford, 2009). Body grooming is a disciplined action by an individual to make their body tidy, clean, neat and presentable (Macmillan, 2002). It is an activity of diverse nature and it takes many forms and methods but this paper focuses on body grooming in general without prescriptions and assumes that a preschool teacher is presentable. Grooming may be done with or without cosmetics, substances used on the body to make it more beautiful (Macmillan, 2002). Women as well as men groom their bodies, which may influence any other person and can be interpreted for educational purposes since being well groomed may strike imaginations for deeper thinking, especially in preschoolers who are usually young children from zero to six years and are in kindergartens or Montessori centres or nursery schools where they undergo all forms of early childhood education and care (ECEC) before starting formal schooling (Education Indicators in Focus, 2013).

Janet & Margret (2010) argue that in early childhood, the learners develop their social cognition which is occasioned by the development of their theory of mind. This theory of mind enables them to understand people as mental beings with diverse perspectives about objects. Theory of mind is metaphysical and it is important in creative thought.

### **The problem**

There is dearth of literature that specifically deals with the philosophy of beauty as reflected by teachers' body grooming. Learners may be urged by their teachers to be neat and presentable but the philosophy behind this is not reflected upon. The part played by women in educating the young is very important because it entails mothering and caring (Rice, 1999). Over 95% of preschool teachers worldwide are women, as noted by Bernhagen (2014) and Education Statistics (2011) and it is therefore necessary to hermeneutically study the influence of women teachers' body grooming and clothing on preschoolers. The aim is to interpret in a philosophical way how women's body grooming and clothing influence the philosophic mind of preschoolers.

### **Literature on aesthetics**

History is replete with philosophers engaged in aesthetic discourses. Confucius noted: "Everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it" (Corbett, 2009). As further explained by Corbett, mathematicians including Pythagoras, Euclid describe aesthetics numerically. It is generally accepted that mathematics is beautiful or aesthetic because of numbers such as square numbers, even numbers or odd numbers and figures such as triangles, rectangles, and circles. Borghini (nd) explains that beauty is the image of the infinite and in order for one to appreciate beauty, one must have aesthetic attitude which is carried out by the senses (visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile kinaesthetic). Plato, as noted by Borghini, maintains that senses are not always necessary to appreciate beauty because one can enjoy music that they do not hear but imagine. Santayana (1896) describes aesthetic as a manifestation of God to the senses. He maintains that beauty is truth and the symbol of perfection, which is regarded as the quality of life. As noted Corbett (2009), Albert Einstein states that one who cannot experience beauty is dead. Kant postulated a saying that *beauty is a symbol of morality* (Kant 1964).

Aesthetic education, as noted by Schiller (nd), makes a learner to be harmoniously in agreement with the society and other objects of sense perfection. When contemplating the beautiful, Schiller explains, human beings harmonise with nature since they play with beauty. In training learners to be liberal, aesthetic sensibility is essential, Schiller contends. Danto (2003) explains that beauty is one of the modes through which thoughts are presented to human sensibility. Wolcott (1990) notes that John Dewey, as an education aesthetician, emphasises the role of aesthetics in making learners realise their full potential.

Women have direct role in aesthetics education. For example, in the *Merchant of Venice* William Shakespeare (1564-1616) uses women characters in a case against Shylock. In Africa, Srujana (1996) explains that women decorate the walls and floors of their houses to make them beautiful and ultimately educative. Taiwo (2010) explains that women are the teachers of values in Africa. As noted by Arnold (1981), in the Luhya and Luo communities of Kenya, women impart educative knowledge through composing songs that either glorify or vilify some actions in their communities.

The body and clothing represent the entire personhood and serve as an important aspect of non-verbal communication (Chrum & Parsons, 2011 and Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). How these influence the minds of the perceivers and the way they interpret their perceptions is varied. Since most women are teachers of preschoolers, their influence on the young minds can be described as great. The mind is capable of producing knowledge and education focuses on the development of the mind to produce knowledge (Craig, 1998).

### **Hermeneutics of body grooming in relation to preschooler's philosophic mind**

Two extremes on preschool teacher can be imagined. In one extreme, the teacher comes to class completely naked, without any clothing on her body and on the other extreme; the teacher comes to class with highly decorated clothes. The two extremes may interfere with learning. As explained by Orika (1987), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) maintains that a philosopher is an absurdity and what makes them to be regarded as normal is that they put on clothes. Once someone is completely naked in a situation where they are expected to put on clothes, they are considered insane and they scare everyone around. This nudity is incompatible with the norm and the preschoolers may run out of the classroom thus abandoning all that goes with learning.

The message that they may carry in their minds is that they have encountered a mad woman in the classroom. Comparatively, if a teacher enters a preschool classroom with highly embellished wearing, the learners will get glued to what she puts on and may concentrate less on what is taught.

From the above two extremes, it is appropriate, in a philosophic sense, not to prescribe dress code for preschool teachers. The best that can be argued for is the application of the doctrine of the mean or the Golden Mean, which Confucius and Aristotle support. Golden Mean means moderation in a person's course of life (Flew, 1979, p. 134). As explained by Popkin and Stroll (1993), the moderate here is the Aristotelian mean, denoted mathematically as  $(\mu)$ . Now, given arbitrary numbers 1, 2 and 3, the mean  $(\mu) = (1+2+3)/3=2$ . This is logically and mathematically universally agreeable as further observed by Popkin & Stroll.

But what is the Aristotelian mean for being naked and being extremely decorated? There is bound to arise many cases of subjectivism in this matter. How then do we omit this difficulty? Is it possible to find an ethical minimum for grooming for preschool teachers without necessarily prescribing a dress code?

Though the moderate dressing for each preschool teacher is left open, depending on the environment, and based on the concept of the Golden Mean, we suggest that the following Kantian categorical imperatives, hermeneutically interpreted be regarded as universal maxims in finding the golden mean for grooming:

- i. Let all preschool teachers groom, as though they wished that every child under their influence, and elsewhere; including their own children to dress as they do.
- ii. Let all preschool teachers groom, as though their grooming, will not serve their hedonistic pleasures only but also serve the pleasure of the young ones under their influence.
- iii. Let all preschool teachers groom, so that their grooming encourages harmonious living of all the members of the school (Raphael, 1981).

A preschool teacher is to avoid the two extremes in the sense that her clothing should be moderate. Moderation claims no specificity but extols the use of intellect to choose wisely and by so doing it becomes a philosophic endeavour. The learner is also instilled with this philosophic ability to choose wisely.

Choosing what to wear by a preschool teacher becomes an open possibility. This openness to choose is observed by the preschoolers. It makes preschoolers to be creative in their minds to think of different clothes worn on different days. They may start to attach meanings to different clothes. When this happens, the preschoolers are thinking and reasoning in their minds without necessarily voicing out their opinions. This thinking cannot come out when clothes to be put on by the preschool teachers are prescribed. When clothes to be put on are prescribed, the aesthetic creativity of the observer is stifled and the mind is lulled that things are known and there is no reason for looking for other possibilities. In such a scenario, the philosophic mind of a preschooler may not get stimulated. As noted by Popkin and Stroll (1973), Socrates maintains that knowledge is in the mind and the role of the teacher is to invoke this knowledge so that the learners are made to remember as much as possible what is already patterned in the mind.

Preschoolers use their senses to observe the environment. When a teacher wears perfume, this may strike the olfactory sense of the preschoolers differently. Some preschoolers may find it aesthetically pleasing while others may find it repulsive. Popkin and Stroll (1973) explain that what is good for one person is not necessarily good for another. Whether the perfume is pleasing or repulsive, the most important thing that has been created between the teacher and the preschooler is dialogue, which is an invaluable part of educative process (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 6, 1979). The perfume communicates ideas to the minds of preschoolers who respond through smiling or frowning. The teacher will definitely use her teaching expertise to detect why some preschoolers smile and others frown. When they smile they imbue themselves with aesthetic appreciation and when they frown they communicate to the teacher to change and apply the Golden Mean. Both acceptance of perfume and repulsion to perfume stimulate the mind of preschoolers, albeit differently. When the teacher wears a perfume pleasurable to the olfactory sense, the preschooler as a being seamlessly enmeshes with the classroom environment and enjoys activities performed therein. When an individual is happy and enjoys activities within an environment, as explained by Popkin and Stroll (1973), they become liberal, proud, witty and modest, resulting in incorporating virtues of moderation in their mind. A liberated preschooler has good foundation for creative thought which is an asset to philosophy. For the preschooler who frowns because of the teacher's perfume, the valuable epistemological issue that can be discerned is change.

Although change is disputed in philosophy, with some people maintaining there is no change and others arguing for constant change, it can be posited that epistemologically education is change and change ushers knowledge. The aesthetic value of the perfume that the teacher likes and the preschooler resents when changed by the teacher on the realisation of its bad effects is a precursor to knowledge. The preschooler is enabled, through change of perfume initiated by their teacher, to be pragmatic. Philosophy of pragmatism embraces change according to circumstances although pragmatists are accused of not being principled (Ozmon and Craver, 1995). Education is change and life is full of changes. Methodologies of education are continuously changing as times go by. When a preschool teacher changes perfume, the mind of the preschooler pragmatically changes with the life style of their teacher. The preschooler learns that when things are not pleasing then change must be instituted for the better. Body grooming that uses perfumes or cosmetics can be posited to have philosophic influence on the minds of preschoolers.

Most people tend to confine body grooming to the management of body hair. Body depilation, the practice of removing body hair from neck downwards is a recent practice but it can be traced to ancient Egypt (Boroughs, 2002). To some people, a woman having hairy legs is a trademark of hardcore feminist (Johnson, 2007). Boroughs observes that the main reason why women depilate their bodies is aesthetic. Mallozi (1972) supports the same view by saying that women are usually admired at the whim and pleasure of others, although this may be a controversial issue. The head is a significant part of the body where facial beauty and hair style could be the totality of body grooming that a preschooler may interact with in their mind. The argument herein does not prescribe any specific hair style or depilation norm. It is assumed that every preschool teacher will apply the doctrine of the mean or the Golden Mean to depilate and wear appropriate hair style.

Whatever hair style a preschool teacher adapts will strike the sensibility of a preschooler. The aesthetics of the hair style interacts with the preschooler's mind and stimulate them to think, reason and analyse the whole phenomenon. The analysis, though done covertly, enables the preschooler to identify the relationship that exists between them and the teacher. According Foucauldian feminism (philosophy attributed to Michel Foucault), this relationship exudes power that runs from the teacher to the preschooler (Stone, 2007). The head and the facial beauty contain attributes of power that propels the preschooler to listen and follow instructions from the teacher. The problem with this relationship which Foucault realises, as noted by Stone, is that the learner may be made docile thus diminishing their reasoning capacity. The merit of this power is that it makes the preschooler to imagine in the mind on how to display such power throughout their life or when they take up responsibility as adults. When the preschool teacher displays this power she needs to strike a balance between laying the foundation for critical thinkers or conformists.

The nails of the toes and fingers are usually decorated by women to manifest beauty. Their beauty strikes the aesthetic sensibilities of the preschooler. Some preschooler who appreciates the decoration may establish good relationship with their teacher. In Eastern philosophy, the good relationship between the learner and the teacher is the foundation of knowledge (Ozmon and Craver, 1995). Any act that brings the teacher and the learner closer together as friends is important for education purposes. This closeness entails earned respect on both the teacher and the preschooler. The preschooler is made to develop and grow with love and understanding, which is very important when they undertake leadership challenges as adult.

For preschoolers who do not appreciate nail decorations, they may decide to learn to cope with the situation or act in a suggestive way for the teacher to change. When they cope with the situation they learn that life is tolerating things that you do not want. As reported by Brainy Quote (nd), Aristotle states that the attribute of an educated mind is to entertain something without necessarily accepting it. It is a quality to be instilled in the preschooler to learn tolerance.

Preschool teacher's clothing and body grooming, which is not based on any prescription is an asset that enables the preschoolers to appreciate diversity and different fashions in a multicultural environment. Graham (1997) observes that grooming stimulates thought prompting the asking of "Why?" When body grooming and dressing is congruent with the norms of the learners' personal knowledge then unquestionable attention will be granted to the teacher which enhances effective learning. When it is incongruent with the norms of the learners' personal knowledge, then it opens the window to the learner to seek further knowledge. In seeking for these answers, they covertly improve their propositional knowledge. It can be deduced that the learners begin to be critical thinkers at the preschool level. Consequently, this critical mind also ensures that learning is not only confined within the four walls of a classroom but also continues in every aspect of their life.

The learners accommodation of other peoples points of view and appreciation of diverse cultures enables them to be socially coherent citizens, this begins at the simple stage of appreciating their teachers mode of body grooming and dressing. Graham (1997) explains that body grooming and dressing is an art, and that what elaborates an art is its tendency to arouse an emotion. A teacher who grooms and dresses herself admirably has confidence in herself which in turn stimulates confidence in her audience (Graham 1997). The confidence of both the teacher and the learner enhances dialogue which is undisputed itinerary to effective acquisition of knowledge and understanding between the parties concerned. The symbiotic interaction between the learners and the teacher influences the morals of the preschoolers to a greater extent. Since it is common for people to say that a woman is beautiful, when preschoolers observe their female teachers and find their mode of body grooming and dressing as pleasurable, they judge them to be beautiful (Kant 1964). The learners' ability to make judgments of beauty is translated into moral perspective where they associate beauty with virtues. This caters for the affinity of the preschoolers to adopt desirable morals from their interpretation of the concept of beauty and thus guaranteeing the normative aspect of education (Njoroge and Bennaars, 1986).

### Conclusion

Body grooming and dressing is an art that arouses emotions for educational purposes. A preschool teacher who grooms and dresses herself admirably has confidence in herself which in turn stimulates confidence in her learners. The confidence of both the teacher and the preschooler establishes rapport and enhances covert and overt dialogue which promotes a sense of philosophical inquiry in the preschooler. The symbiotic interaction between the learners and the teacher influences the creativity and morals of the preschoolers thus laying the foundation for philosophic mind.

Preschooler's interpretation of aesthetic environment does not require a prescribed code. The environment is left open for them to fill in the gaps based on the Golden Mean. The preschool teacher is a reasonable and a presentable person who is balanced in her thinking. She is a responsible human being who chooses her actions responsible by infusing her pedagogic techniques with philosophy. Her body grooming is central to this philosophy.

It is recommended that more studies be done on the philosophy of teacher's body grooming which is a component of aesthetics. A teacher's body speaks, probably, more than the words they utter. The mind of the preschooler is posited to be initiated into philosophy through body grooming.

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