

Adele Tulli's *Normal* is an observational work about gendered cultural rituals. It progresses from childhood activities to marriage, documenting the everyday and ceremonial acts through which we become gendered subjects. Boys become boys by playing video-games, driving motorcycles and engaging in war games. Girls become girls by having their ears pierced, working out and, eventually, having babies. The film reveals the constructed nature of what is considered normal.

The array of rituals observed in *Normal* is not surprising, but the style of filming opens up interesting avenues for thought. For one, the unobtrusive camerawork allows gendered rituals to unfold freely. Some events are observed from afar, while others have been shot at a closer range, yet always in a manner that does not interfere with the action itself. This enables the *mise-en-scène* of everyday life to take centre stage. For example, in the opening scene, a little girl is having her ears pierced. She is framed in a close-up, and the tight frame draws our attention to minute variations in her facial expressions. As the camera rolls uninterrupted, we witness the girl's emotions changing from anticipation to fear to relief through the process. The visual setup is complemented with offscreen voices orchestrating the ritual. The commentary by the girl's mother and the man performing the piercing attest to the girl being groomed to become the 'princess' little girls are expected to be. She is a silent actor in a play written and directed by others.

The unobtrusive, yet highly composed style of *Normal* reveals the social patterns with which gendered roles are constructed and performed. The film shows a society in which men train to be alpha males, and women learn to take care of them. This is embedded in a morbid consumerist logic where outfits, sporting gear and entertainment reproduce and enhance the traditional distribution of power. *Normal* questions the normalcy of this setup by letting the rituals unfold in their banality, emphasising their performative nature. The observational style induces an ironic tinge to the title of the film.

*Normal* ends with a gay couple's civil ceremony, gesturing towards alternative ways of living a gendered life. Interestingly

enough, as the film focuses on rituals that fortify the stereotypical binary of man and woman, these alternative patterns of gendered existence are left to the viewer's imagination. Tulli leaves the viewer to question how we can perform differently and live otherwise.

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