

INVESTIGATIONS FROM THE RIBCAGE:
The (Dis)Embodied Order of Safety, Children, and the Problematics of
Public School Policy Practice

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
At the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Ph.D. in Rural Sociology

By
AMANDA GARRISON
Rex Campbell, Dissertation Supervisor

MAY 2011

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,
have examined the dissertation entitled
INVESTIGATIONS FROM THE RIBCAGE:
The (Dis)Embodied Order of Safety, Children, and the Problematics of
Public School Policy Practice
Presented by Amanda Garrison
A candidate for the degree of
Ph.D.

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Rex Campbell, Ph.D.

Mary Jo Neitz, Ph.D.

Peggy Placier, Ph.D.

Kenneth Benson, Ph.D.

Mary Grigsby, Ph.D.

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.

They come through you, but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies, but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

*-Kahlil Gibran *The Prophet**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would have been impossible for this project to be completed without the guidance, love, patience and understandings of a lot of people.

I would not be in a position to have an opportunity to complete this work without the consistent, committed devotion of my adviser, Rex Campbell. He has provided me with a place to grow intellectually and emotionally, and always ensured a safety in support: fighting for me every step of the way. I can say very surely, that he saved me from certain mediocrity, and a life so potentially different from the one I have lived and will continue to live that I do not think I could ever repay his generosity. We have had fights, disagreements, laughter in abundance and a relationship that I will cherish always from someone so dear and well-intentioned, I could not have asked for what I have received from Rex Campbell. Thank you, Rex.

I met Mary Jo Neitz toward the end of my graduate student coursework. The questions that she asks and the ways in which she

challenges my questions and sociological assumptions has changed the way that I think and see the world. The gifts that she has given me to begin this journey and continue my life as a scholar are immeasurable. While her questions challenged me, she also supported the concerns expressed in my research, and never stopped helping me see other ways of problematizing the operations of an educational institution. Mary Jo introduced feminist thinking to my everyday life, and celebrated the ways in which a new framework changed the definitions of the world. I learned more about the power of critical thought from Mary Jo, and worked with her in other ways to understand how feminist theory and method could be used to explore the difficulties of being a child...an aged, gendered, segmented little person on the margins. Her questions about children as knowers of their own experiences are a foundation for this research projects contribution to approach and ethical concerns. Thank you, Mary Jo. I don't know where my thinking or my research would be without you.

What a remarkable ally I found in Peggy Placier, whose expertise and concern for children within public schools, and without, sparked my passion for telling these stories. Peggy introduced me to methods of *doing* education research, investigations in which the public school could be critiqued for their power structures and curricular policies. I

felt as if I found a home in her classes, where my experiences being a mother with children and the problems that I found in operating within the parameters of public school requirements were welcome parts of the classroom discussion. My criticism was valued – Peggy always listened and raised her fist with me, maintaining an amazing sense of humor at the same time, about the absurdities of interactions, and the triumphs of discoveries. I never felt as if my concerns were just my own when I spoke with Peggy. I know this work would not have been what it has become with you, Peggy Placier. You are an inspiration. Thank you.

Ken Benson and Mary Grigsby provided questions and concerns about this work that needed to be considered and expressed. For all of your work on this dissertation: the patience, time, and dedication it takes to be someone willing to review a long piece of work, provide comments and engage in conversation - I thank you both. Thank you for agreeing in the first place to participate in this risky idea, and thank you for being there until this very end. Thank you.

Without the help of the children and parents that sat with me for hours and talked about hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, lunchrooms and playgrounds, this research never would have come to fruition. The delight of talking with children: listening to their stories about

hallways fights and how they disagree with rules was amazing, thought-provoking, hilarious and tragic. They were all story-tellers, their experiences spiraling into other stories about their friends, Zombie-tag, gym class, and the rushing from class to class to be on time. Thank you to all the children that participated – you know who you are! To the parents: thank you for your support in this work by letting me have time with you and your children. Thank you for opening your homes and letting me sit with you on Saturday afternoons or Friday nights while your children talked and you listened. Thank you for listening with me – and sharing your own stories to help me see how you also experience public school. Thank you for your trust and your implied desire to further my questions in your agreement to participate. Thank you. I am forever grateful.

To my children, Patrick and Cecilia Britt, whose abilities to tell stories about their day, their problems, their celebrations, their playground gossip, hallway reports, and lunchroom observations intrigued me, not only what they related to me, but how. Our conversations instigated questions about children's talk, children's experiences and the potential frustrations with living in an adult world. When I began to conceptualize this work, I talked with them about including their stories as part of the evidence to my investigations.

They were enthusiastic and supportive. They began telling me stories everyday, picking up where they left off the day before, the context provided so long ago. At the same time, however, outside of their participation in my work, they struggled through this process with me, anticipating an end in which the time we had together would change. We sacrificed our time together – Patrick and Cecilia sharing time with an education for nearly eleven years of their lives. There is no way I can thank you enough, Patrick and Cecilia, for the patience you have had with your mother’s curiosities, her dreams, her concerns for you, and thank you for your love and support of me and this education. I think our lives are going to change. Thank you for being with me through this whole thing – and thank you for being my children.

My mother, Amy Freshwater, always delighted in the discoveries I made and shared with her in this process. She urged me on to ask other questions, and was outraged with me. We talked for hours about how to talk about power and bodies, children and agency. We disagreed sometimes, but not often, and her devotion to a critical relationship with me as my mother *and* an academic peer is nothing less than a deciding factor in the successful completion of this research dissertation. I feel fortunate to have a mother so interested in the work that I do. I feel fortunate that my mother is someone that wants

me to succeed more than anything – so that while I grew discouraged, she pressed me to think about what was ahead – what *could* be. I am a lucky person to have someone in my life that is invested, and passionate about my work. Mom, you have no idea how much you have provided for me. You are one of my best friends. As with all else, there are not words to express my gratitude to you for your spirit, your guidance and your love. Thank you.

To my brothers – Andrew, Simon, and Sam – whose support and enthusiasm along this research journey encouraged me to continue talking about and asking questions. They also make me laugh – and while they might not have interviewed me about my research, their willingness to provide a respite from the stresses of writing, the stresses of study, and the stresses of graduate school with jokes and stories and shenanigans was always appreciated.

To my friends – all of them, and many I will forget to mention here, but thank you, friends. Thank you for your love and support of me through this. Thank you for talking with me endlessly about my problems and questions with school, my children, other children and the culture that we live in. Thank you for being interested, and offering suggestions, problematizing my work, and jumping for joy when I finally did it. Steve, Margaret, Jessa, my sweet, beloved

friends – Marilyn, Dakota, Jeff, Jennifer, Jen, and Jenn – the members of the Feminist Research Group that pushed me to think about my assumptions and inspired me into that final push to write it out – to get it out – to finish this degree.

Steve, I cannot thank you enough for the time and support you've given me through this whole process. Hours spent talking about problems with the world, problems with our work, and questions about what to do next? You introduced me to Dorothy Smith, and when I just couldn't get it, you were eager to talk it out. You talked with me in ways that made me see the world differently. Thank you. Thank you for helping see the value of my experiences, and for loving me through my frustrations and despair. Thank you for the small distractions that left my sides hurting from laughter, or the wheels turning from your stories, news reports, and interests in curiosities. It has not been an easy road, for certain, but I know I could not have done this work without your friendship and love, Steve. Thank you.

Margaret, dear Margaret, my editor in chief, the co-driver of the work. Thank goodness for extraordinary snowfall in the Midwest during the winter of 2011. Thank you for your willingness to talk and get mad with me during this research process, and being interested in talking with my children about their experiences with school along with

me. Thank you for spending nearly a week with me, reading every line of this dissertation: questioning my words, the structures of my sentences, the metaphors I was using and the ways in which this writing was research. Thank you for your voice and love. Thank you for the breaks in the snow, taking Ham out in the snow-runs you made in the middle of the night, and for the ability to push for work late into the night, and be ready the next morning for the next chapter. I literally could *not* have done this without you. I am most certain. Thank you for your time, your heart and your arms for hugging.

My amazing friend, Jessa. Thank you for your passions – and the stubbornness with which you approach the world that inspired me to think about how to be active in the world. You talk to everyone, a huge smile on your face – and this openness to others translates to your openness in other ways. You are always excited to talk about what’s possible – the future, “oh, where you will go, Amanda.” You give me hope for more things in the world from people, and remind me always that people are good, systems are problematic, and we can change things if we work together. Thank you, friend, for your hope in humanity that creates a space for change and a desire to always do better. Thank you.

And lastly, to Dr. Peter Stokan. Thank you for your encouragement, and the optimism you kept with you about my completion of this degree. I was so frustrated when you insisted that "done" was "better than good," and so I did it. I finished. It is done, and it *is* good. I wish that you could have been here to see it, to read it, to disagree, to agree and to celebrate this accomplishment. I did it! Thank you for believing in me...and never letting me forget that I was capable, worthy and loved.

To everyone that is not named here that knows that are loved – those that know that without them – without every person in my life that has talked with me, cried with me and worked through these things with me, thank you. Thank you for your dedication. Thank you for believing in me always. Thank you for affirmations that my work is important. Thank you for your love-x-infinity. It is returned tenfold.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | ii |
| ABSTRACT..... | xiii |
| PREFACE: DROPPING IN | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE DINNER TABLE AND BEYOND..... | 12 |
| Introduction to the Introduction:..... | 12 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 22 |
| The Pseudonym, Ethics, and Using Children in Research Designs: Truth Claims?..... | 42 |
| <i>The Doing of Interviews- Talking with Children.....</i> | <i>56</i> |
| Parallel Runnings: The IE and Autoethnography | 88 |
| CHAPTER 2: BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT, NEGLECTFUL PARENTS AND FEARFUL FUTURES | 122 |
| In-School-Suspension Results in Angry Parent: 13-Year Olds Imprisoned | 122 |
| Behavior Management Activated – A Working Textual Analysis | 125 |
| <i>Indicators Out of Control/Characteristics of Troubled Student</i> | <i>155</i> |
| <i>Parental Fall-Out/Corrupted Familial Characteristics</i> | <i>161</i> |
| <i>Behavioral Indicators – Before Placement/After Return:</i> | <i>170</i> |
| Epilogue: Prescriptions for Bodies, and the Threats of the Insubordinate..... | 182 |
| CHAPTER 3 <i>INTERMISSION</i>: PRISONERS AND WARDS OF THE RIBCAGE: SKIN AND BONES..... | 211 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| CHAPTER 4: APPROPRIATING THE “INAPPROPRIATE”: HETEROGENDERING THE PRACTICE OF PROHIBITING TOUCH | 219 |
| School Counselor Raises Hell with Allegations of “Inappropriate Behavior” | 220 |
| <i>EPILOGUE</i> | 258 |
| The Power over Bodies, Children, and Gendered Sexualities | 264 |
| CHAPTER 5: ESCAPING THE RIBCAGE | 277 |
| Bullies Inside and Out..... | 277 |
| Policies, Bodies and Fatal Possibilities | 285 |
| “Conclusion”: This is NOT the End | 295 |
| APPENDIX..... | 299 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 302 |
| VITA..... | 307 |

ABSTRACT

This dissertation endeavors to explore the ways in which policies of safety in the public school order the everyday lives of student-children. Using varying feminist methodologies, I explore the experiences that children have with the safety curricula, and the implications on their daily lives as a result of these policies.

Children are exposed to a variety of rules and regulations as a way to teach them how to be "productive citizens and employees," by this particular school district. I use this intention as a premise to talk about how rules against "public displays of affection," and interests in "behavior management" intersect with the determining factors of gender and violence, respectively. This research also explores the larger implications of police in public schools, control over the bodies of children, and the problematics of popular conceptions of pre-adolescent and teenage bullying.

Using interview data from work with public school children, aged 7 to 14, characters are developed that encompass a variety of experiences to create non-fictional stories about the experiences of two children, Jane and John, and their two mothers, Pat and Susan. These short stories, integrated with sociological analysis of education policy, state welfare policy and institutional discourses creates maps that attempt to make the abstractions of policies actual, confronting problems with the assumptions of family, children, sexuality, gender, violence and youth. The metaphors of the child's body as a prison and a safe place are also discussed in relation to consent and when the child's body becomes their own, both in the discourse and in the everyday lives of children, their parents, and the public school.

PREFACE: DROPPING IN

I want to drop you in to a world that perhaps you remember in hazy disconnections or vivid detail. The real world of the public school, and its practices on those that are closest and effected most by its operations. This is a story about children and their school experiences. This is a story about my children and their every day struggles with the rules and other disciplines of their schools, from kindergarten to their present grades. But before I can share those stories, I think it is important to share my own story about my childhood, my experiences with violence, and the difficulties of public school life with a secret. It in this revealing that my episteme makes itself a tool of the research project, and transforms the investigator (researcher) into her own clue (data).

When I was seven-years old, my mother's second husband began to sexually assault me on a regular basis. It was 1982, they had married in 1981. The abuse continued until I was 10-years old, at which time I told my mother that her husband was "touching me." My mother was working on her Masters degree in child development, and

was reviewing materials to be used in classroom settings to encourage children to talk about their experiences with and around child sexual abuse. On one summer morning, while my brother and I waited for her in the car, I held on of pale yellow pamphlets in my hand and looked at the illustrations over and over before I spoke up. The cover of the pamphlet depicted a child and a police officer. The officer was leaning down to the child, listening while the child spoke some secret.

There were questions I remember asking my mother, through the experiences of this abuse. Maybe I hoped that she would figure it out, and I would not have to break confidentiality. "Can you have sex with your pants on?" I remember her in a dark kitchen; sunlight coming in from another room makes shadows in my memory. My brother and I often were treated to baths with Mr. Bubble, a powdery detergent that created a tub full of bubbles. Sometimes, the detergent irritated my genitals, and sometimes, my stepfather was the culprit, but before she knew of his violations, Mr. Bubble was always to blame. I remember complaining of pain, and my mother inspecting my red, rashy labia, muttering about the bath detergent, and I never got Mr. Bubble in my bathtub again.

I remember being so afraid, not that she would be mad, but about what might happen to her. The assaults, after all, took place in the home where we all lived, slept, ate and played, even if they happened when she was not there. What would happen to us, my mother, my little brother and myself? I was terrified, to some extent, of her husband – my stepfather. I had never told anyone that I was being abused at home, but do not remember feeling as if I could tell anyone about what was happening to me. My teachers were kind to me, but this secret was entirely different than Kristin hogging the swing, or Michael poking me with a pencil. The assurances of a stepfather, that his touching, fondling, attempted rape were all private exchanges between us, and that telling anyone was out of the question, made me mute. He demanded silence, and I complied - until that summer morning.

My mother's action was swift. I began counseling almost immediately – with a warm, sweet young woman that assured me repeatedly that the suffering I endured was “not my fault,” even as I did not feel guilty. For the next several years, I wondered about the guilt that I was *supposed* to be feeling as a result of this violation. I heard horrible stories from other girls my age in group therapy...how their fathers had tied them up, burned them, beaten them, and raped

them over and over again. We were all together. Our stories were different, but similar. All violent. All tragic.

I did not feel responsible, but I could not tell my friends when I was 10, in fourth grade, or 11 in fifth grade, or 12 in sixth grade. I remember boys in the class talking about how gross “sexual abuse” was, as this term implied incest – and incest was strictly forbidden. This was weird, as my mother interchanged “molested” with “incest.” This conversation was part of my home life, and my school life – but in different ways. At school, I could not acknowledge my understanding without exposing my experience, which would have been unimaginably traumatic. The school was not a “safe place.”

I do not remember receiving any public school education about sexual abuse prevention. That does not mean I lacked instruction. This particular school district initiated its Sexual Abuse Prevention program in 1981, congruent with an increase in abuse prevention

programs nationwide.¹ I would have been a student in 1980, as a kindergartener, and in first grade in 1981. I was a student in this school district. A lack of my recollection of these prevention lessons is a statement about the effectiveness of this curricular tool, as something accessible to a child. I have clear memories of the baby chicks we hatch in kindergarten, the field trips between the beginning of my public school career and its end. So where is the memory of the guidance to saying "NO!" that I might remember from a yearly confrontation with these programs? I was enduring this abuse in my home, while being trained in a classroom to understand the differences between "good touches" and "bad touches?" Yet, I do not remember feeling empowered to prevent my own violation. Can children be "empowered" in a culture that fundamentally renders them irrelevant to the law, and silent in their own treatments, wants, and desires?

During gym class in my fifth grade year, my friends and I waited in line to be lead by our teacher back to the classroom. We had just

¹ Sexual Abuse Prevention Night, October 2007. This is an event sponsored by the school district in which parents are invited to preview and ask questions about the sexual abuse prevention materials that public school children will be shown during their counseling sessions in the late fall.

completed the gymnastics unit, in which we used the balance beam, “the vaulted horse,” the parallel bars and a variety of other apparatus to help us with balance and coordination. Some of these gymnastic tools required teacher assistance, and sometimes, they touched us while we vaulted, or in attempt to catch us if we fell from the balance beam. My friends were whispering about how our gym teacher and his student helper had “touched” them in strange ways. I did not experience their “touching” as such, but was compelled by the stories of my friends to feel as if I was finally not alone in the abuse I was suffering at the hands of another adult. I wanted so much to belong to a group of children that experienced this pain and violence – so that I would not feel as if I had to keep this secret any longer.² Amongst the story after story they told in that gym line of our teacher’s indiscretions, I still said nothing. Too afraid of the real consequences. After all, the person violating me was not only touching me – he was

² I realize that this is strange to say this in this way, and do not mean to imply that I wanted other children to experience this terrible abuse, but just that feeling as if there is some terrible secret you must keep is a very lonely place. I would have been overjoyed to have companionship in my suffering, while at the same time, wishing that on no one. This is a statement more to the dangers of this assault on children than to sadistic desire.

assaulting me; and he was not a gym teacher that I saw once and awhile at school, but a parent in my home. Nothing came of the talk happening in line between my friends, and I was once again, isolated with the adult bones in my closet.

There are so many assumptions made in this particular type of program– that a child’s “NO!” makes a difference to *everyone*. Children’s voices are marginalized and translated into adult speak, by adults, for adults. This incongruence results in difficulty “telling someone you trust,” and saying “No! in a loud voice.”³ The education did not make it easier to talk, tell my mother, tell a friend for the first time – or even to speak about that experience today. Sharing these stories is not easy.

How does the public school make itself “safe” for children to talk about their experiences with violence? How do other children feel about the rules that are attached to concepts of “safety,” in the name

³ Baird, K. and M.J. Kile. (1986). *BodyRights!: A DUSO Approach to Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*. Circle Pines (MN): American Guidance Services.

of protecting them? How do children speak about their experiences and be heard, in the clamor to try and protect them?

I continued to experience different sexual exchanges with boys, even after I reported the abuse to my mother. During a weekly visit to the school library in the sixth grade, four or five boys cornered me in a shadowed nook of the Fiction section and ran their hands over my body – grabbing and squeezing and grinding against me. The consequences of telling were too heavy to warrant speaking a word about it. It would be my fault, after all, that they touched me. Even in the sixth grade, I feared some discovery that I was not “normal.” Being silent about the assaults seemed to be the best way to maintain a facade. The same boys assaulted me three more times in that library with no intervention. It was only the last time that our teacher came around the corner and ushered them harshly from the enclave, saying nothing to me.

In other words, I could be assaulted at home by an adult, and popularly conceived as a victim of power, yet still be assaulted by people my own age on "safe" public school grounds? What is the responsibility of the school in this case? What is the stake in protecting children from violence against one another, as part of a

foundation of "safety," when the violence seems a normal demonstration of social expectations that "boys like girls"? How can a benign policy of prevention and safety enforce empowerment if, at the same time, it fails to protect those it intends to save from power - even power embodied in the erections of three 12-year old boys?

I was a public school student before the Post-Columbine, hyper-security era, and while there were school shootings before then, I did not experience school as an environment where police walk the halls, and children are suspected of potential violence at every turn. We were not surveilled on cameras when I was in elementary school, and did not have to worry about a fingernail clipper on our person being identified as a weapon in junior high school. Of course, things change in their own ways, but the state of "safe" in the nation's public schools is certainly not the same as I remember.

When my counseling was finally over, I did not feel as if the abuse I suffered was gone, resolved, something that I lived with but could still function within. As I got older, memories of the assaults came back to me. On nights when my mother wasn't home, playful wrestling matches between her abusive husband, my brother, and myself would abruptly become a two-person game. My mother's husband would inevitably play too rough with my brother, who would

abandon us in tears. Then he had me all to himself, quiet, secret, dark, and infinitely disturbing me. Carol Rambo Ronai (1995) does an exploration of her own abuse at the hands of her father. I cried when I read this, her recollections of confusion when the rape felt good, and the fear mixed with the guilt of enduring it. Her writing, in conjunction with that of other researchers such as Giroux and Foucault, encouraged me to speak this truth, to write it, to share it, and to use what I have learned to spread questions around about how children own their bodies. How can a child's body belong to them when they are considered property of their parents? How could I resist being raped, when the rules for preventing it myself escaped me – and my protests rendered useless in the meantime?

With my own children, all of these years later, slowly proceeding through the same public school system, I am overwhelmed with questions about how the school system incorporates “safety” into the curriculum, and at the same time, how the children themselves experience the rules associated with safety and the disciplining of the body. This research is an indictment in part. The institution of education must be responsible for the requirements it places on the movements and disciplining of children's bodies. The practices in place

to restrict, train and incorporate must be accountable to those acted upon.

I cannot name all the ways in which this research has brought me back around to the place my questions spring forth from – my own experiences in the world, as a child, as a student, as a mother, with sexual assault, with rape, with consent, or not. This is where our journey together begins, reader, as this piece is merely a glimpse at a continuing struggle, that will end for us with the last chapter, but continue on past the words and page numbers. An on-going story to tell – infinite possibilities for the future.

CHAPTER 1: FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE DINNER TABLE AND BEYOND

Introduction to the Introduction:

The investigation of the public school system, and its enforcement of rules for the purpose of safety and general operation, requires a variety of sociological approaches that would provide for an excavation of the ways in which these policies, rules, and practices are experienced by those closest to them, and indeed their intended subjects. This chapter will provide a framework from which to understand the presentation of this research.

Traditionally, research written up for academic audiences is divided into distinct categories and follows a path with the *Introduction* to the research being the initial contact between the researcher and the reader. The *Introduction* serves as a gateway to the understanding of the research project as a whole, and provides the reader with a preview of what is to be discussed.

In this particular research project, the Introduction serves to lay out the discussion and provide a place where questions are asked that

contribute to questions asked later. So, much like a traditional *Introduction*, this Introduction serves as an overall map of the general discussion of research to ensue. I do not conceptualize this research as separate from my everyday experiences, or the experiences of my children and their friends. Therefore, instead of an abstracted *Introduction* in which a project can be written about in a distant or “objective” manner, the Introduction to this research project is rooted in the development of questions over time – not as research event, but as a continuing problematizing of the institution of public education.

The *Literature Review* follows, explaining to the reader how the researcher came to formulate the questions that guide the research in a direction for a particular discipline. It is within the parameters of the *Literature Review* that the research is substantiated for the reader and the researcher, using relevant texts and the previous works of theorists or other contributors to build a foundation for and a legitimator of the research questions.

The theories and methods used for and around this particular research project are "free-range:" *they are everywhere*, not confined by the electric fence of disciplinary writing convention. Throughout the piece, I chose the most significant academic works to illustrate the ways in which sociology, in addition to critical education theory,

philosophy, anthropology, feminist theories, and some English academics are talking about the elements of this particular research project. At the same time, I subscribe very seriously to the idea that theory (the mind) and method (the body) are not separable – and so the doing is part of the theory. In the Introduction, I also explore the ways in which I can use the above-mentioned discourses together to create an intellectual doing,⁴ so that the blending and support that theory and method supply one another is obvious.

Chapter 3, as the intermission, serves to metaphorically map out the spaces and confinements of the body of the child, as well as the restrictions on those young bodies.

At the same time, Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 include specific textual groundings to root the experiences of John, Susan, Jane and Pat, characters that represent a conglomeration of stories, from those that I have spoken with, to the languages of academic disciplines.

⁴ “Intellectual doing” here refers to the work and doing of research, so that I am a research tool – a lens coated with sociological discourses to look at the world through. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

The *Methodology* section usually follows the *Literature Review*, in which the researcher explains to the reader how they gathered the information to address their questions, including descriptions of surveys, interview questions, number of subjects, locations for collection, and other intricacies of the research project. This section is usually separate from the *Literature Review* and serves as the descriptor of the structure of the research questions. Many people consider this section and the *Literature Review* sections as the most important to detail, perhaps in part due to the scientific assumptions of the *reliability* and *validity* of the research approach.

For this research, the *Methodology*, much like the *Literature Review*, is written to fold into the actual lived experiences of the people participating in the research project. In other words, since this research focuses on the stories of a variety of different people, and myself, the research approach is best explained as the initiation, gathering, and writing of those stories along with the academic conversations that are relevant to their telling. This approach, some parts of which are congruent with the tenets of the *Institutional Ethnography*, uses the experiences of the people within and around institutional structures, like a public school, and connects those

experiences with textually mediated relationships that also connect to other people. Dorothy Smith (2005) writes of this approach:

...institutional ethnography...is a *sociology*, not just a methodology. It's not just a way of implementing sociological strategies of inquiry that begin in theory, rather than in people's experience, and examine the world of people under theory's auspices.⁵

There are no chapters in this research discussion that are strictly limited to a *Literature Review* or a *Methodology* section. I have attempted to connect the grounding of sociological, and a variety of other discourses, into an ongoing communication of problems and occurrences: narratives of the everyday, organized into accounts that illustrate or highlight the questions of my dissertation research. The presence of theory, or *Literature* reviewed in my dissertation is not relegated to a specific section, but rather, used throughout in a variety of ways to ground the experiences of people, namely children, in a sociological soil. For example, while talking about the suspension of John, a 13-year old seventh grader, sociological conversations arise

⁵Smith, D.E. (2005) *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press. Pg. 2.

with Michel Foucault (1979)⁶ and Dorothy E. Smith (1987)⁷, as a way to talk about the disciplining of the body, and the ways in which the rules and policies of the public school enter the practices of the home. In this way, the theory is not abstracted, but becomes an integral part of the ways in which power is happening and a sociological lens can be used to explain that power.

At the same time, the use of autoethnography supplements the Preface, the Introduction (Chapter 1), and the conclusion, in that I use the experiences of doing this research to tell stories of its difficulties for me. Questions of power, problems with ethics and other dilemmas that surfaced before, during and in the last writings of sentences resonated outside of words on paper.

The *Findings* section is where the researcher finally divulges the evidence she has gathered, and using theoretical questions and methodologies, provides answers to research questions. It is in the

⁶ Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

⁷ Smith, D.E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Findings section that the researcher is finally allowed to express the observations, realizations and surprises that emerged in the work of the research and the reader is allowed to experience the outcomes. As with the *Literature Review* and *Methodology* sections, the *Findings* section is absent in this conventional way from this study, but the discussion or interpretations of the Findings are woven in to the piece, alongside the data so that the reader understands how the thinking and the doing are connected. In other words, to present this research in a traditional fashion severs the possibilities of a fuller, more illustrative research project. I do not hold the discussions for the end of the project; this is a way of writing that provides a possibility to see how these experiences play out in the actual lived lives of children and their parents.

At last, the *Conclusion* conventionally provides a section for the researcher to theorize an understanding of their findings and the implications of their research project overall. This structural approach to academic research provides a relatively easy map from which the researcher can organize their work for the reader and progress through the research process.

The conclusion of this research piece, titled “Escaping the Ribcage,” is not truly the conclusion or the end of the research. While

the conventional *Conclusion* requires the binding of the work toward an end, in which the interpretations and experiences of the researcher with their work are included, the Conclusion of this research project provides a projection of future research, but does not treat this aspect of the writing or the investigation as completed. This research is not an event, with a distinct beginning, rooted in an *Introduction* and *Literature Review*, and a distinct end, wrapped up in the *Discussion* and the *Conclusion*. Rather, it is my hope that I have written this research in a way that what is experienced is a dropping in, a sudden submersion, an operation that goes on past the proceeding investigation and past the acknowledgment of the academy. It is, as Stacy Holman Jones (2002), describes in her discussion of the “torch song,” that much as the sad ballads of Billie Holiday and Barbara Streisand are “designed to arouse ‘intense emotion in both the singer and the audience,’” autoethnography can be a way in which the writing of the research and the reading of the work can be written to “arouse intense emotion” in the reader, and the author.⁸

⁸ Jones, S.H. (2002). “The Way We Were, Are, and Might.” *Ethnography Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*. Bochner, A.P. and C.

Institutional operations impact the lives of children and their parents, whether studied or not. The stories I have heard and my investigations of policy and practice in public schools shocks me for a variety of reasons, perhaps primarily because children experience the stories that follow, and beyond, everyday and every night. If I write to convey my own shock, should it also not, to some extent, be written to shock?

At the same time the conventional research approach has and continues to work successfully for many facets of social science research; it does not work in the same ways for every question asked about the world. For the purposes of this research project, the writing of a dissertation, I will be divorcing my presentation of my research findings from so absolute a location within academic boundaries.

While the ways in which I write this work will not diverge completely from a variety of academic discourses, I have written this research in a way to communicate a variety of different problematics creatively, deviating from the standard practice of writing academic

sociology. I will, for example, tell the stories of Susan and Pat, two mothers with public school children. Susan and Pat are composite characters to a larger drama, a mix of related experiences from other parents and my own stories. John and Jane are characters whose stories are experiences woven together from those of the children I have spoken with, to create a rich telling of adventures through everyday public school lives.

This research is relevant, but in a somewhat unconventional way. It is relevant for questions about the power over children's bodies through public school policy discourse and practice. It is written, in part, to disorient the reader, as the mess of policy sometimes can disorient. I did not feel as if my research questions "fit," into the frameworks of traditional research models. If I was going to be part of the research, I could not speak abstractly of "*the* research," nor leave myself out of the conversation. I could also not be absent from the writing, when I talked with children who are friends with my children – as the way their responses are rooted in knowing me.

Writing this research outside of the conventions allows me to explore the potentially deeper implications of public school policy and practice in regard to bodies, children and safety. In other words, I cannot separate myself from this work and these questions. These

questions come from a history of confusion and disorientation for me. I have watched children twist and turn with the disciplines of the world on their bodies. Sociology and critical education have provided me with tools that help me speak to these questions about public schools, and the rules that guide children, like my children, and their mother everyday.

This is merely a double take in a speeding world – a backward glance and question, “Did that just happen?” It is my hope with the writing of this work as research, as method, that a picture will be created that compels more questions, more investigations and more concern for the experiences, voices and problems that children have with and in an adult world.

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to trace the beginnings of any research question. There is not one period of time in which a light switched on magically and I began my journey through the world of research, methods for doing research, and understandings of the ways in which theories I read could help me think about the actual. I have always questioned

the power in the disciplining of the public school as an institution and its impact on the people that emerge from within its structure.⁹

At the same time, I needed a way to speak about these questions. Tools were required to help guide me toward a place of talking with other people about the questions that were a part of my everyday life. My experiences in a variety of social worlds allowed me to understand some of the intricacies of a theoretical childhood, being an adult, languages of oppressed peoples,¹⁰ and the academic tongues

⁹ I use “emerge” from to illustrate the ways specifically that children enter the public school and generally graduate 12-14 years later. This is a lot of time. I would like to give credit to the presence of public school discipline in the lives of people. Children do not simply “finish” public school. They accomplish their educations, and therefore, the work allows for some understanding of their “emerging from within,” as people with some ability to read, do math, and sometimes, go on to higher education (this is a privilege – not every person leaving high school can or wants to go to college). They are, in other words, qualified to get a job (high school diploma) that might otherwise be difficult without the qualifier of the diploma. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a job with just a high school diploma, and so it seems important to talk about how children “emerge from within” an institution ready for the world for which the institution has intended them. This can be discussed in conjunction with Chapter 2.

¹⁰ When I use “languages of oppressed peoples,” I mean the ways in which language is used as knowledge and power – so that considering children as people without the knowledge to understand the complexities of language, their inability to define the terms of their own learning and their own understanding is a complication of knowledge as power.

of sociology.¹¹ The research that follows is an exploration of the culmination of my experiences up to this point, and hopefully, at least one gateway to what is beyond. In the following section, I will be describing the congruencies between my research questions and the lived experiences in a variety of characters narrated in the third person. While narratives can sometimes be autobiographical, the distinction of this writing is the connection that I want to make with the ways in which the conglomerated lives of the people in the research story with whom I have spoken about public schools, safety, and the rules of being “good” everyday, are organized and intertwined with the same institutional systems and discourses that work in the lives of other children and the parents. These are the ways in which we are all connected.

¹¹ I consider “childhood” to be, as many other scholars agree, a period of time defined by adults to demarcate the legal from the underage, the definitions of “pedophiles,” and a position determined by age to create the boundaries of power between “children” and “adults.” See the introduction in Kathryn Bond Stockton’s work *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. (2009). Durham: Duke University Press.

If I am communicating self to self with readers via the written text; and if I consider the structure of the self or, if one likes, of mental life, not to be a linear experience but a fragmented, self-adjusting one as Bourdieu (1989) and a legion of other theorists before him have suggested; then why should texts be limited to linear format?¹²

The beginning of this research project focused on a discourse analysis of the sexual abuse prevention curriculum used by a local public school system in order to introduce and talk with children in public schools about their bodies and sexual violence. Its genesis, at least in an academic sense, was spawned by my own experiences with sexual assault at the age of seven, and the questions that concerned me both related to my own experiences and to the experiences of children, including my own within the prevention programs of their public school instruction.

When I attended Sexual Abuse Prevention Night, a parent-teacher event hosted by the school district, in the fall of 2007, I was not sure what might be waiting for me. I had been looking at the

¹² Ronai, C. R. (1995). "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol 23, No. 4. Pg 399.

ways in which public schools teach elementary school children (kindergarten through fifth grade or 5-6-year olds through 11-12-year olds) about their bodies and safety, and received information from my children's backpacks concerning this district event.

Upon entering the school, I saw a series of tables lining the wall, and behind them stood women and men with nametags and clipboards. They were asking parents which two sexual abuse prevention programs they planned to attend, one for kindergarten through second and one for third through fifth. The admittance was restricted to parents, school officials standing behind a table informed me, and they asked me about my own children. Since I was most interested in how the district introduced this information, and how they changed their presentation of the information over time, starting with kindergarten made the most sense.

I was directed to the school's library, which quickly filled with parents, some alone, some with their spouse or someone else. We were given packets with the program schedule and a brief outline of the program intended for "our children." One of the women sitting at my table turned to me, flipping through her packet, and muttered, "God, this is a parent's worst nightmare."

Two school counselors came through the seated crowd and proceeded to present their sexual abuse prevention program designed for kindergarteners. They introduced us to a plush blue dolphin named DUSO and the accompanying *BodyRights!* kit.¹³

DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others), the counselors informed us, was used to talk with kindergarten children in the district about resolving conflicts and learning to be assertive. The dolphin puppet spoke along with an audiotape, if the counselor chose to use it, and recited the text of a flipbook with different scenarios and pictures. This flipbook contained dilemmas that the children would contribute to “solving” in the name of their bodies, their privacy, and their best interests.

The counselors shared with us that these lessons usually came around the time of the holidays, before children were let out of school for the winter break – the justification being that the holidays were usually the time that children had the most contact with distant

¹³ Baird, K. and Marilyn J. Kyle. (1986). *BodyRights!* Circle Pines (MN): American Guidance Services.

relatives, who might pose some of the greatest risks.¹⁴ This statement was incongruent with my own experiences. In my experience, many people's stories of child sexual abuse occur with people they were or are in contact with regularly, not once in a while.

I do not remember this training from my own childhood in public schools. According to the information provided for parents at Sexual Abuse Prevention Night, this program was started in the district in 1984, in response to a local incident. This was not a local phenomenon, however. Around the country, there was a seemingly expanding call for a further protection of children – from sex, from strangers, from a scary world. Sexual abuse, according to the material provided by the school during this event, was a traumatic inevitability, impossible to overcome without help. It was frightening.

I remember the yellow flyer I had found in the car while I waited for my mother in the summer of 1985 when I was ten. The cover of the pamphlet depicted a policeman and a child, and proceeded to encourage “you” to tell someone if you were being “touched.” I was

¹⁴ Sexual Abuse Prevention Night, October, 2007, kindergarten counseling presentation.

experiencing a disconnect between my memories of attending public school and suffering sexual assault at home during my grade school years, and the ways in which the school counselors were talking about the prevention curriculum this October evening in 2007. I began to ask questions about public school in a different way, and wanting to talk with children about their experiences with this curricular tool. How was the school contributing to an environment of “safe?” What did the safety of a body that is objectified look like?

This question is more about when the child’s body belongs to them, is their own – along with their thoughts, their feelings and their experiences. If the prevention curriculum attempts to “empower children” to resist their own abuse, then what about the times when children are not being sexually assaulted at home? What about the school’s responsibility, as proliferators of safety, to be “safe” in a variety of ways in a variety of places?¹⁵

¹⁵ It needs to be clear also that I question policies and practices that teachers and often administrators within a particular school do not have power to change, ignore or refuse to enforce. At the same time, teachers have favorites. Teachers see the child that does not cause trouble, the child that does – and in any given situation, makes a decision about the punishment for breaking the rules. In other words, teachers know the chronic offenders.

It would be interesting to match the way people think to the way sociologists present their subject matter. It would be useful to establish as a norm in sociology, an alternate writing format where drawing on personal experience and emotional life, as well as traditional methods of data gathering, is acceptable.¹⁶

To explore these incongruencies, however, it seemed necessary to approach these questions more fundamentally. It seemed to me that the school must create itself as an environment in which this limited conversation could happen. It must designate itself as a “safe” space for children to play, learn and engage in a limited social world. How, then, did it proceed to create this space for children?

They talk with one another about their students. They lose their patience. I only mention this as a way to further ground the realities of discipline and their interests in maintaining order over troubled children, while at the same time, attempting to establish a safe environment for children that do not make trouble.

¹⁶ Ronai, pg 400.

I am asking questions also from a place of knowing the school as a socializing agent.¹⁷ When I use “socializing agent,” I am referring specifically to the ways in which the school is constructed to teach children about gender, race, class, and discrimination, and what results with the disciplining of their bodies (“self-control” and “accountability”), the controlling and confining of social spaces, and the developments of identities associated with the social worlds of the public school. A continued understanding of this conceptual definition helps to locate my critiques.

By November and December, in kindergarten, children have been attending public school for about three to four months. They are taught that the school is a place where there are rules to teach them how to be “safe,” rules to teach them how to be respectful, rules to teach them how to read, how to write, how to add and subtract. The school is a structured place where children learn how to follow directions, and if they cannot, then they endure the consequences. At

¹⁷ Gore, J.M. (2002). “Pedagogy, Power, and Bodies: On the Un(der)-Acknowledged Effects of Schooling.” *Body Movements: Pedagogy, Politics, and Social Change*. S. Shapiro and S. Shapiro (eds). Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press. Pg.75.

the same time, elements of inequality in terms of the child and the adult are understood.

Consider Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) statement: ...[communication] needs pupils who are ready to recognize the teacher as a teacher, and parents who give a kind of credit, an open cheque [*sic*], to the teacher," as a way to see the authority of the teacher established *before* children enter the public school system.¹⁸ Bourdieu goes on to say:

In order for the teacher's ordinary discourse, uttered and received as self-evident, to function, there has to be a relationship of authority and belief, a relation between an authorized emitter and a receiver ready to receive, and it is not the pedagogic situation that produces this.¹⁹

Children know, by the interactions with their parents and the world around them, including the demarcations of "pre-schooler" from "kindergartener;" the preparations for kindergarten, especially the presumptions of "*preschool*"; the understandings of age, and so on,

¹⁸ Bourdieu, P. (1993). "What Talking Means." *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publications. Pg 66.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, pg. 66.

that a “teacher” is an authority, that the classroom is what the teacher and school defines, and that, as with other adults, they are to do what they are told. To respect and behave. The power of the teacher as an authority has to be understood *before* a child walks into the classroom on the first day of school.²⁰

Herein lies a disjuncture. Many children have experiences with authority outside of their home, whether through Sunday school practices at their churches, baby-sitters in a home, daycare, or pre-school environments, where they are taught to follow rules, listen to the adults, and interact cooperatively with other children, ideally. However, while many children have these experiences, not all of them are participants in these structures. John Student, for example, was taken care of by one of his mother’s, Susan Parent, neighborhood daycare friends during the day for the duration of his pre-kindergarten years. He was socialized with other children that she watched, but

²⁰ This is an understanding with a few children. There are assumptions about education before kindergarten (discussed in Chapter 2) that would allow for an easy integration into public school life.

perhaps not disciplined in the way that children attending programs *without* family friends might be.

Susan would report that John proved to be a “trouble student” for the school – for many of his teachers and for the system at large. It would make sense to me that part of John’s resistance might come from this disassociation of power. John can, of course, acknowledge the power that adults have over children, but his consistent distance from authority has landed him in trouble more than once, and required Susan’s interaction with the school from his very initiation.

In Chapter 2, the conflicts between the home and the school, especially in regard to risk and safety of some kind, are further discussed in the story of John and Susan, as they deal with these issues of assumptions and impositions for the sake of the policies and practices of public school discipline. The exploration of power in Chapter 2, over the body through the presence of police and the historical context of a Zero-Tolerance environment for much of the nation’s public schools, is an important component of discussing school safety and the disconnections between what the rules say and how they are enforced.

My daughter, conversely, was a participant from the age of three in structured preschool programs, designed specifically to prepare

children for their immersion into public school environments. It was not until her fourth grade year that she began to have problems in school and with school administrators. The trouble for my daughter and me was not a question of following the rules of conduct, as much as how the rules for safety and prevention of violence did not seem to fit with the goings-on of the playground, the lunchroom, the hallways. She was not an outstanding disciplinary case for many reasons. She did not defy, question or disagree audibly, or bodily. Her “docility” was, just for fun, a “performance” of any number of expectations she interpreted resting upon and around her. In other words, she fit.

Chapter 4 is an adventure through the normalizing of the child’s body with concerns about sexuality, gender and the policies of Public Displays of Affection as they apply to “safety.” Power over the body as exercised by the school is illustrated by the characters in the story of Jane Child and her mother, Pat, as they attempt to cope with the policies of the school involving “inappropriate behavior,” extending past the brick buildings and classrooms, into the homes of Jane and her friends. At the same time, the sexual child, and certainly the child who is “queer,” faces varying levels of threats, bullies, and violence at and around the school. Questions about “safety” and touching create a

larger question about the school as a safe, nurturing space for public school children.

How is the school a “safe” space for any child dealing with the conflicts that occur in public school spaces? How are bullies defined? The experiences my son and I share provided a way for me to know about a child *being a “bully”* - as my son was labeled; and the experiences my daughter and I have help me know the other side - a child *being bullied*.

Part of the difficulty in relating any genesis is pinpointing *the* beginning of thoughts, ideas, problems. While enrolled in critical discourse analysis classes, I discovered works written by educators that incorporated Michel Foucault’s (1977, 1978) investigations of different structures of knowledge and power.²¹ Michael Gunzenhauser (2006) uses Foucault’s discussion of the docile body to talk about the expectations of public school children during an age of aggressive,

²¹ Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, and Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I*. New York: Vintage Books.

high-stakes, standardized tests.²² He explores the ways in which children's bodies are disciplined by public school curriculum and the standardized tests enforced by *No Child Left Behind* (2001-2002). I found his discussion useful in a series of ways, including a better understanding of the philosophies of Foucault. This control of knowledge with systems of power is a way in which children are trained.

The work of Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 1999, 2000, 2005) was perhaps the most influential in my own questioning and investigations of public school discourses and their impacts on home-life and the different experiences my children have shared with me. Smith proposes a new way of doing sociology – one in which the experiences of the people within social worlds begin the story. The institution of the school can be conceived of as a web within which parents and students must attempt to navigate. The researcher, moving from story to story,

²² Gunzenhauser, M. (2006). "Normalizing the Education Subject: High Risk

charts a map of this web, so as to understand how it organizes the experiences of the people entangled within it.²³

The ways in which I began to see the public school developing into its own web became more and more obvious to me. The forms sent home with my child were communications of his difficulties with fitting in. These textual mediations of schooling and disciplinary discourse thread the home into the institutional webbing of the public school.

Allison I. Griffith and Dorothy E. Smith (2005) talk together about their experiences with the “discourse of mothering” and problems with the school’s assumptions of “family.”²⁴ I was divorced and single, mothering my children every other week in a split custody arrangement. I understood that the school had its own ways of making assumptions about the lives of my children outside the brick walls of public school education. There was only one form, usually, or

²³ Smith, D.E. (2005) *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press.

²⁴ Griffith, A.I. and D.E. Smith. (2005). *Mothering For Schooling*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

one letter with information that my child and I needed for field trips, assemblies, classroom instruction and so on. My children needed two of everything – a blaring indication of their status as "defective" in the world of theoretical families.

In situations of discipline, the principals from the schools my son attended eventually began contacting both his father and me. I was usually the first one called with a sick child, sitting in the nurse's office, and the latter called in the case of discipline. What is in operation here when a mother is the first contact for illness, but is the last to know about problems with discipline at school? How were the interactions between the school and me, as the mother, different than those experienced by families with two parents, or families where the father was parenting singly, especially concerning safety, discipline and the policies of the public school?

Parent-teacher conference times were confirmed with one parent – so that if I received the sign-up sheet at my house, I would need to call my ex-husband to coordinate, and if he received the sign-up, he called me. We did not have the opportunity to have our conferences separately, not that we would have been denied, because the schedule for the parent-teacher conference has very few holes. In other words, my experiences led me to understand that time for these interactions

was tight, and that a separate conference might have to be postponed for a less hectic time.

I saw direct connections between what Smith was referring to as the “Standard North American Family (SNAF)” and the assumptions of the teachers and other administrators intertwined in the interactions with the public school.²⁵ The expectations of a “good parent,” and indeed, a “good mother,” were difficult to unravel from the discourse of mothering perpetuated by the institution of education itself.²⁶ I was troubled by the assumptions made about my parenting, my children, and what might be going on at home.

Within this chapter, I also discuss the design and execution of my research questions that are informed from several directions. I use the autoethnographic writing approaches of Carol Rambo Ronai

²⁵ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pgs 157-171.

²⁶ Ibid. 163. “The school-mother T-discourse lays the primary responsibility for the individual child’s school achievement and even his/her success as an the adult on the family. SNAF enables interpretation in practical settings to ‘translate’ into the mother.”

(1997, 2007) to illustrate the layers of my stories and those of other parents, and the stories of my children and their friends as “non-linear” representations of our realities.²⁷ Autoethnography, in this chapter, is used to illustrate the struggles with talking to children, and the ways in which I realize my own privileges in being an adult, a mother, and someone known to the children I am interviewing.

The ethics of using children, especially my own children, as part of the research created a variety of problems and questions whose exploration is required as context for this research. In the following section, the obstacles and understandings of doing research with children become part of the story of how children talk, how they translate their experiences to a mother-researcher, and how their comprehensions of their everyday worlds and my interpretations of their school days come together.

²⁷ I am referring specifically to Ronai, Carol Rambo. (1997).

The Pseudonym, Ethics, and Using Children in Research Designs: Truth Claims?

As part of the process of completing this research, I was required by the Campus Institutional Review Board to provide a detailed description of how I would make sure that the student-children that I spoke with would be protected from any harm – including any unforeseen consequences - as a result of their talking with me about their everyday school experiences.

I was warned repeatedly from different directions about the difficulties with getting proposals accepted in which children were interviewed – and indeed the process was an intense endeavor. There were three different interview schedules required for varying age groups: elementary school children, middle school children, and junior high school children. I was only interviewing children up to 14-years, so I did not need a schedule of questions for high school people.

The ethics board also required that I have parental consent forms, parental releases of transcript forms and youth assent forms. The youth assent forms were especially important to me – not only for the purposes of this work, but for the overall intention of talking with children: if I was to conduct this research with purpose – where the

questions were designed with the challenge of translation, an understanding of the imbalance in power because of my location as an adult and theirs as children - then their consent, however imaginary, was required. It was interesting to me that the parents had to sign a form that granted their consent for a parental interview, and sign the form to agree to allow their children to be interviewed by me. In all actuality, it was not a surprise, as “freedom cannot be extended to those who by their very nature are dependent, since ‘they are not people, but property.’”²⁸

The ethics of asking children to participate in a research project is always a question to be explored. As previously mentioned, the concern is with the integrity of the research to the extent that the names of the children are protected, and that no questions be asked of them that might result in some negative, long-term consequences. I could not, for example, ask them questions about sex, sexual abuse, violence, or other “secrets” that might upset them to disclose. This is not to say that I could not have petitioned or proposed to the IRB that

²⁸ Apple, M.W. (2006). *Educating the ‘Right’ Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. New York: Routledge. Pg. 12.

I would be asking children questions about their experiences with sexual violence, but that different levels of ease with the research approval process, and the nature of my research questions not requiring those specific inquiries, it seemed not to be necessary to involve myself or my research in extensive investigation by the ethics board, and countless submissions and resubmissions. The ethics, however, of asking children to participate in this research project still beg for questions to be asked about what children are capable of handling in terms of their own experiences and the ways in which they see the world. Why the protection? The world is indeed a giant place, where the theoretical child should be protected from knowing poverty, knowing rape, knowing sex, and experiencing a wide range of terrors and joys that compose the social world. It is also problematic to assume that asking them questions about difficult things in their worlds could potentially undo them, when the media, public school curriculum, marketers and the government so relentlessly and without permission, pursue their consciousnesses.²⁹

²⁹ See Langhout (2005), and Giroux (2000, 2006).

I am assuming the position that it is unethical and perhaps immoral for children to be considered too young, too innocent or too naïve to communicate their difficulties in the world – and that as a result of that assumption, they are effectively and perpetually silenced. Giroux states that “pedagogically and politically, young people need to be given the opportunity to narrate themselves, to speak from the actual places where their experiences are shaped and mediated.”³⁰ Why not? What is the fear that forces the silence? I understand that my position and questions are not those of all researchers. Certainly, there are those that would subject their children and other children to needless discomforts for the sake of their own advancement, so the protection of any person from the insidiousness of questionable research practice is warranted.³¹ I only argue that the protection over

³⁰ Giroux (2002), Pg 67.

³¹ As it is not the right of the researcher to force participants into compliance with their research desires, it is also my position that it is not the right of the adult to enforce dominating power over children. Of course, this is a theoretical/ethical position, and one difficult to practice consistently. We all need some disciplines in place to guide us through. My questions here, however, and the questions posed to me suppose the same child – the standard child who does not have legal consent, and is for all intents and purposes, designated incompetent to make decisions for themselves. This is where I disagree. My assertions are that children should be made fully

children is heightened because it is assumed that they do not know, and therefore, must be spoken *for*. In other words, even as they know their own oppression – as it comes out in their questions of rules – they cannot speak to these experiences because of the assumptions of adult culture over them.³²

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to this research project design was proposing to use my own children as informants for much of the information and many of the directions that I both decided to take and that simply happened, resulting in the telling of their stories. The problems with researchers using their own children in their research projects was multi-faceted, and the IRB made sure that I understood that it would be with extreme bias that I would be allowed to use my children in this project. In a letter I wrote to them,

capable of making their own decisions about who and what they want to talk to and about – with guidance from other supportive people – just like adults. Their status as children in the world is legally symbolic – and not necessarily indicative of ability, just like adults.

³² Spivak, G.C. and R.C. Morris. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press. Spivak asserts that while the oppressed may know their own oppression, if they are oppressed they cannot speak. That's the point. The research stipulations on involving children are in place for a good reason, but not all of the components of that reasoning are ethical in terms of denying consent to a body that lives in the world.

justifying my own children as essential for the completion and success of this project, I cited an article written in the *New York Times*, in which Pam Belluck reports on a number of academic researchers that express rich findings as a result of using their own children in their studies.³³

Belluck writes that the common problems for researchers using their own children are very similar to the questions and problems I had encountered talking with my children. Some of the researchers she interviewed described being somewhat shocked at the information their children provided. A few also commented that they suffered scrutiny or criticism for using their own children as test subjects:

Dr. Toga said some nonscientists have said: ‘Why would a parent subject their kid to the dangers of M.R.I.? You should be ashamed of yourself.’

His response: ‘All I’m doing is taking a picture. Nobody loves my kids more than me. Would I ever do something that would endanger them?’³⁴

³³ Belluck, P. (2009, January 17). “Test Subjects Who Call the Scientist Mom or Dad.” *New York Times*. Section A1 of New York edition.

³⁴ Belluck (2009).

While the questions that I have received have not been as accusatory, the use of my children qualifies my research as "risky," so that questions about power difference and truth were common in the justifications to the IRB.

It was not only this concern that I felt contention with. I understand that my position as an adult could muddle the work, from a distance, but so could any "bias" situated in a pursuit of one kind of knowledge. I understood that part of the concern and question also of using my own children, and other children as informants, to be skepticism about the child's will to truth.³⁵ By this, I simply mean that as a result of a symbolic object – childhood – and its understanding located in a world that defines, children are "storytellers," or at least their stories do not relate to adults "what *really* happened."

My response to this question is enthusiastically that, at least in the ways that I want to approach my research questions and their pursuits, concepts of "the truth," can be complicated. Michel Foucault (1990) talks about the "will to truth," and its objectivity, so that the

³⁵ Foucault, (1990).

chasing of it is fruitless.³⁶ The reliance of a specific “capital-T” truth as *The* establishment of “real,” or “actual,” or “authentic,” limits what is possible in a variety of ways. Dorothy Smith (2004) asserts that “the self is active in the ongoing concerting of activities with others,” so that stories change – accounts of what happened last night might be different this morning, depending on who we’re in relation with.³⁷

My children were part of the research process from the beginning of its formations. I asked them permission repeatedly to tell their stories to a large, public audience, and explained to them that people would be reading about their lives. While I would have most certainly respected any wishes they had to omit details of one sort or another, they did not request that I censor their information. I read them the things I had written about them, and sometimes, they disagreed with my account, at which time, I would change the description to align with their conceptualizations of their own experiences. Their truths were essential for the project – not just my own.

³⁶ Foucault (1990). 1157.

³⁷ Smith, D.E. (2004), pg 109.

Consider that children’s “selves” are active too, and that their stories, like those of adults, speak to a truth – in other words, what “really happened” that they report or share, *really happened* from where they’re standing, and their understandings and interactions inform and shape their “social locations,” just like adults.³⁸ The ontological conclusions, or the ways in which people’s truths are shaped by the “concerted efforts” of other people in social relations, constitutes people’s actual experiences in their social worlds.³⁹

Power takes a seat here in the definitions of children’s truths as divorced from reality, effectively silencing them and rendering them invisible in their own experiences.⁴⁰ I want them to talk – and their truths are glimpses into how they see the world.

Concern about power in other ways, and my location, not only as a researcher, but also as a mother to my children, and being identified, as a mother by my children’s friends, is relevant. I cannot

³⁸ Butler, J. (2001). “Giving an Account of Oneself.” *Diacritics*, Vol. 31, No. 4. Pg. 24.

³⁹ Smith, D.E. (2001). “Texts and Ontology of Organizations and Institutions.” *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*. Vol 7, No. 2. Pg. 160.

⁴⁰ Langhout (2005), and Treacher (2006).

fully comprehend the depth to which my location as a parent and adult played a part in how children other than my own children spoke with me about their experiences. Marianne Paget (1983) states that “questions are a powerful unit of discourse,” which requires that not only the questions asked must be comprehensible to the child, but that even the simple tones and provocations of responses must be carefully considered.⁴¹ I noticed on one occasion, while interviewing an 11-year old sixth grader and her father, my version of a shared story (which was actually told to me by my own child) became the basis for my question – so that I was leading the sixth grader along in my version of what she experienced:

Me: I was gonna say that the playground – um..._____ was concerned enough about the incident with _____ on the playground and I don't know which incident _____ would come home and talk about people being mean on the playground. I talked with um...I had a meeting with teachers about _____ pushing _____ and calling _____ and _____ ‘bitches,’ and profanity and basic disrespect and um...in that meeting with teachers, um, they basically put the burden on _____ to protect herself from playground things and they said, she – you know, ‘did you tell the teacher on the playground?’ and she said,

⁴¹ Paget, M.A. (1983). “Experience and Knowledge.” *Human Studies*. Vol 6. Pg 77.

'I told her several times and nothing happened.' Um, and so I was very curious about how _____ experienced that and how you guys might've, but it sounds like it – maybe the details of that story weren't as...maybe, weren't divulged necessarily to the same extent?

B: Absolutely, I mean, _____ didn't tell me anything about this happening until long after it had already happened, and so...those circumstances...you okay?

Me: Uh, the – the thing with _____ on the playground...last year, I think...wasn't it last year? No, it was the year before with Mrs. _____...when he pushed you?

B: When _____...your friend...was mean to you?

A: <whispers> I can put it in the fridge...

Me: Yeah, when he pushed you, right? You remember that?

A: Oh yeah! That!

Me: Remember that?

A: <whispers> Yeah.⁴²

When I asked her the question, she did not respond immediately, as if she might have forgotten to what I was referring. Her father and I then built her experience for her, stepping over a boundary that I theoretically was trying to avoid. Paget writes: "Knowledge thus accumulates with many turns at talk. It collects

⁴² Interview with 11-year old sixth grader, January 2009.

stories, asides, hesitations, expressions of feeling, and spontaneous associations.⁴³ In other words, in order to hear the stories of children, and search with them, building interpretations together, the power held as an adult, closer to the relations of ruling than the child, must be considered in the questioning. Therefore, it is in the listening that I speak less.

With the conclusion of this exchange, the 11-year old returned to her seat with her drink and did not speak much for the rest of the interview.

The context of my relationship with this particular child is a long one; we have a relationship that extends outside of a research capacity. She was best friends with my daughter for many years, and a frequent visitor to our home – where I was not primarily a researcher, asking her questions about her experiences on the playground, but a mother – and a mom that she liked very much. There were times when I had to discipline her for breaking house rules on her visits, and before she knew what I researched and what I was interested in, she knew me only as Amanda, my daughter’s mom. In

⁴³ Paget, M.A. (1983). Pg 78.

other words, while we would have exchanges where I asked my daughter and this friend to relate stories of their day at school, I was not in a position where I made arrangements to sit and talk specifically with her, without my daughter, in the presence of her father and a tape recorder. What transpired, and is recorded above, is the easy transitioning from a desired approach to talking with children about their experiences to an embodiment of parental power, and talking *at* children about how their recollections of their own experiences are not “right.” (right?) Was I guilty of making marks on her skin – guilty of forcing a layer onto her bones that she did not ask for?

This projection of experience onto this sixth grader was not conducive to other questions I had about children and the expressions of their experiences through translations – discussed in the following section. I understand, and understood the story – but not the ways in which my different positions of power could interrupt the flow of our talk. Langhout talked with children in her research also, and cites Patricia Hill Collins: “The disempowered are in positions that provide alternative views of the setting and thus have an important analysis to

contribute.”⁴⁴ In other words, those that are rarely listened to, and often silenced have interesting and unique views of the world – as a result of their forced marginalizations.

This section of the research shifts its tone from an abstracted understanding of what is theoretically happening to what I experienced in my collecting of stories from children and their parents. I am and was interested in how talking, especially with children, created a different set of understandings about how they experience their school days. Unlike the previous sections of this chapter, I am more present as a participant in the exercise of gathering snippets and tidbits of significance from school age children, and therefore, obvious in its presentation. To do research with children, I believe, requires engagement past simply the interest in the questions asked – to see beyond, as children can and do – to the fantastic and the exciting adventure that a seven-year old, eleven-year old, fourteen-year old

⁴⁴ Langhout, pg 124.

might see in the world. What they notice and remember is amazing. I hope to convey that, in some ways, with the following section.

The larger question and intention of including this section is to introduce the problems with asking children to identify their abuse as abuse, their violations as violations and then requiring that they fit their experiences with those violations into the languages and expressions dictated by adults.

The Doing of Interviews- Talking with Children

*...it helps us to see the actual world
if we can visualize a
fantastic one.*

-Marina Walker (1994)⁴⁵

Approaching this research from a feminist methodological framework allows me to do semi-in-depth interviews with children and

⁴⁵ This is not to say that children's stories are fantasy, but that as the tellings of their truths are socially located in terms of "unrealistic accounts" or otherwise, the relation of their worlds are *actual*.

their parents about the ways in which the children work and understand the rules and policies of their classrooms, and the ways in which parents work, understand and implement those policies in their homes and in their interactions with the public school.

There are, within the undulating boundaries of qualitative work, a variety of methods for conducting interviews, depending on what is being investigated. It seems to me, for the sake of this project that, as Langhout (2005) suggests: "...children may be less practiced in talking about feelings and experiences than adults,"⁴⁶ it makes sense to engage children and their parents in a conversational, flowing interview, in which stories come out of stories come out of stories.⁴⁷ Their skins and bones have stories already, the details waiting to be shared. Therefore, instead of walking into each interview with a strict schedule of questions, with children, it seemed necessary to approach each interview as if I were asking them about their day, to ask them

⁴⁶ Langhout, R. D. (2005). "Acts of Resistance: Student (In)visibility." *Culture & Psychology*. Vol. 11. No. 2. Pgs. 123-158. Pg. 133.

⁴⁷ Paget, M.A. (1983). "Experience and Knowledge." *Human Studies*. Vol 6. Pg 69. "In-depth interviews are contextual rather than abstract in their organization. ...they respond to features of the ongoing interaction, to nuances and mood, and to the content of the evolving conversation. Yet, they create knowledge."

about the new stories that leave marks on their skin. In other words, open-ended questions that were relevant to the stories they were in the process of telling me.

I was not sure what to expect when I began to schedule interviews for this research project. I wanted to make sure that when I talked with children about their experiences, we could be in conversation – that they could tell me their stories. Marianne A. Paget (1983) writes: “Stories are a common conversational form and an indigenous feature of the production of knowledge in in-depth interviews.”⁴⁸ I was interested in their everyday knowledge of public school, and their experiences within the walls of their classrooms, but how to get at those experiences, when children, much like other marginalized groups are “muted,” or quiet in a room full of adults, disadvantaged by what Marjorie L. DeVault refers to as “linguistic incongruence?”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Paget, Pg.67.

⁴⁹ DeVault, M.L. (1999). *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pg. 61.

I had the opportunity to talk with children and their parents with whom my children and I had long-standing relationships. My son's friend and his mother agreed to speak with me. My son and I have known these two people since my son entered third grade. My daughter's friend and parents were well known to me also. This family had two children, one of whom was a first-grader with an amazing memory. My children's younger brother and mother were also interested in participating. I knew these two people from familial relationships. The mother had divorced my ex-husband, and had been a stepmother to my own children. This collection of people, therefore, was rather an intimate one, that I believe worked out very well. We had children that shared a school, and therefore, many of the references parents and children made to their stories of the everyday made sense to me – I was also familiar with the schools and the teachers. As the parents were comfortable with me also, and their children knew who I was, the questions I asked, and the stories that I told in conjunction with their stories, filled in spaces with rich information, and still provided me with stories of which I was unfamiliar.

At the same time, there were disadvantages to this intimacy. As related above, my position as a parent, in the interview with the 11-year old sixth grader, reinforced a power difference that changed the

dynamic of the story about being pushed on the playground. She did not remember this story the way that I was telling it – she did not recognize the details as I was relating them. She exclaimed, “Oh yeah, that!” as if it were something she did not think about or remember. It is not, however, that she did not remember – as much as the problems with that exchange lie in my imposition of *my* version of the story.

When I interviewed the seven-year old first grader and his mother (my ex-husband’s ex-wife), the complications of our intimacy were obvious as well. This was not so much a question of power playing over the memories of a child, as much as the problems with particular relationship *outside* of the research setting. In other words, the mother of this child had also been a step-mother to my children. She is still involved in their lives and sees them frequently. The end of our interview drifted into conversations about how her “worry” for my children, that my son was troubled, and my daughter was demonstrating symptoms of someone who might have “problems with perfection.” Her and I had talked in the past about our children – well, mostly, *my* children, and their problems with order. She had been with my ex-husband from 2002 until 2007 or 2008, so her experiences with my children and me extended outside of this interview space. This was only a problem in that, my interview questions did not relate

to my children – and her responses, in addition to those of her child, reflected an intimacy with my children that came out in our interactions within the interview.

The intimacy with the people that I spoke with was not generally a problem, but an advantage, and while I cannot know what it would have been like to interview these people *not* being the mother/parent of *my* children, I can safely assume that the detail to their experiences would have been completely different. It is important to consider too how the questions that I asked were designed with these people, these close acquaintances, in mind – so that in their knowing me, the detail of the questions was not a surprise, a concern or otherwise, a problem for these parents and their children.

In order to have a conversation with children in which their experiences emerged through the telling of their stories, our understandings had to parallel one another in some ways. Bourdieu (1993) writes that “relations of interaction are not ‘an empire within an

empire,⁵⁰ meaning that, the initializing of understanding the experiences of children through their talk, was understanding the differences in the languages between children and adults, and between these children and myself. I could not, in other words, ask them to plainly describe the “work” that they do with “rules.” I do not control the operational definitions of words like, “work,” and “play,” in this case. I most certainly did not want to extract their experiences through stories and simply label their everyday activities of “working” with public school disciplines to the sociological discourse. Dorothy Smith (2004) warns of conventional sociological approaches: "The displacement from subjects to discourse is characteristic. Although multiple citations from interview material are used and no causal attributions are made, the 'constitutional' move shifts agency from people to discursively constructed entities."⁵¹ The stories are not already written sociological theories, to be attributed to and aid in the categorizations of, children’s experiences. A sociological discourse is

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in Question*. P. Nice (ed.). London: Sage Publishing. Pg. 82.

⁵¹ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg 65.

wrapped up as a way to describe their experiences, but not the generator of their experiences.⁵²

At the same time, sociological research is not free from its assumptions about “truth” from respondents that participate in sociological research. What are the assumptions of age to the “knowing?”

Part of the difficulty in creating the questions rested on their individual understandings of connecting concepts, like “rules,” “trouble,” and even “talk,” stems from not knowing how they experience their days. In other words, it is only through the conversation with them that the knowledge about their experiences will come out. Smith writes that: “the idea of language as a coordinator of people’s subjectivities is essential if it is to be incorporated into explications of

⁵² This argument makes sense in relation to the discipline’s questions of institutional ethnographic approaches being similar or related to “grounded theory.” The difference that I understand, and indeed that separates very distinctly these two approaches is that while grounded theory assumes sociological theories are playing out in the society, culture, “site”- to be uncovered; institutional ethnography acknowledges and begins from a social place. If radical sociology can be identified as a study of the social – institutional ethnography is the investigation of the social, or how our social worlds shape us: how we shape us. So, it is not the discipline that shapes the social, but the social that shapes the discipline.

institutions as organizers of our everyday lives.”⁵³ Interview methods using directed questions and guided responses would not work if the information I sought was buried in their stories and possible only through "translations."

Children must figure out how to use adult language, without adult experience, to speak with adults about the ways in which they see the world, or the ways they experience something like violence. In conversations with my own children, for example, there might be several exchanges in which clarification was essential: “what do you mean by _____?”

“I mean, like, _____,” My son would reply

“Oh, like _____?” Thinking I understood.

“No, like _____,” still misreading – occasionally moving on, or dropping the conversation all together out of frustration. And while feminist researchers that I have read do not necessarily speak directly and especially about children in these ways, their work with women

⁵³ Smith, D.E. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press. Pg 3.

and talk is incredibly relevant to a larger discussion about children as a “muted group.”⁵⁴ Marjorie L. DeVault (1999) writes:

Presumably, as well, the lack of fit between women’s [children’s?] lives and the words available for talking about experience present real difficulties for ordinary women’s [children’s?] self-expression in their everyday lives. If words often do not quite fit, then women [children?] who want to talk of their experiences must ‘translate,’ either saying things that are not quite right, or working at using the language in non-standard ways.⁵⁵

Like the women in DeVault’s studies, children’s experiences are limited by social factors. Children certainly experience horrific moments, but they might not be equipped with the language that “fits” with their experiences.⁵⁶ Their experiences are bound by adult conceptions of “childhood,” especially, as a seat of innocence to be

⁵⁴ DeVault, M.L. (1999). *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pg. 61. She describes that while women have voices, they are shouted over by men and the language of men (gender metaphorically).

⁵⁵ DeVault (1999).

⁵⁶ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg 64.

defended (read: constructed).⁵⁷ Their experiences are not only bound by the impositions of nostalgia, but as the language they are taught to speak is at the very least, an adult language, then the ways in which children interpret their experiences are fundamentally bound to the same problematics.⁵⁸ In other words, in order for children to communicate needs, wants, stories of their days, they must imagine their experiences in translations of which adults understand. This is not to say that they only conceive of their stories as adults would hear them (obviously, this is not the case), but that in order to speak their truths, their stories must have some lacings of recognizable structures of language in order to happen at all. The facets of imagination must include the conventions of relating that imagination, in order for the story to be a truth.

⁵⁷ Giroux, H.A. (2000). "Nyphet Fantasies: Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Innocence." *The Giroux Reader*. C. G. Robbins (ed). Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. Pg 125.

⁵⁸ We can use Bourdieu here once again for simplicity. If the social structures – those external to us, that make their marks through the minerals of the social world, onto the skin, then the "mental structures" that are impacted can also be conceived as the bones being impacted. If we learn to talk by hearing language from others, imposed with its conventions on the person speaking them, and the person that taught *that* person to speak, then the ways in which we even understand are confined to the language we are taught.

“Childhood” is part of what is protected within the ribcage. This is especially true of White, middle-class children, and does not hold true for every child outside of that isolated bubble.⁵⁹ Therefore, it is not simply a challenge to ask questions that get at the experiences of children with adult rules in their public school days, but how to ask in a way that makes the work of “translating” visible? Joey Sprague (2005) emphasizes that “...salient dimensions of social power and privilege have an impact on interactions within the context of research, and thus, influence ‘how people talk to each other and what they say to each other’ (original emphasis).⁶⁰ In other words, our relationships to one another, my researcher/parent position, and the social position of the children I interviewed shapes our interactions, and the telling of stories in those interactions creates knowledge and understandings of their everyday worlds.

⁵⁹ As Giroux (2006) states: “Children who are white, blond, and middle class are not only invested with more humanity, they become emblematic of a social order that banishes from consciousness any recognition of abused children who ‘don’t fit the image of purity defiled.’” Pg. 129.

⁶⁰ Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press. Pg. 124.

Paget insists on the benefit of the “in-depth interview,” an interview in which not only the interview is transcribed, but careful attention is paid to the tone, the accents, the pauses and the ways in which talk and knowledge are produced in conversation.⁶¹ She notes that the building of knowledge happens in talk.⁶² I understand that while I am approaching these interviews, these children, with knowledge of public school policies, rules, and practices - their knowledge is new to me. We have different “frames of reference,” so that what I know, and what the children know, while coming from the same place (in this case, public school), is experienced differently between adult and child.⁶³

⁶¹ Paget, M.A. (1983). “Experience and Knowledge.” Human Studies. Vol 6. Pg 69.

⁶² Paget, Pg 78. “Knowledge thus accumulates with many turns at talk. It collects in stories, asides, hesitations, expressions of feeling, and spontaneous associations.”

⁶³ Smith, D.E. (2004). Pg 65. “The actualities explored in interviews and observation become illustrations of the two frames of reference.”

I had the opportunity to interview several public school children and their parents about their experiences with rules and “safety” in their school days. I was interested in hearing their stories, and would discover in the transcription, ways to see their “work” complying with and resisting these discipline structures, and the work of “translating” their experiences to me.

The methodological practice in place here is not one in which I am interested in “coding” the interviews or looking for ways in which the people that I am speaking with can be generalized to one another through their experiences. Dorothy Smith (1987) contributes that in the institutional ethnographic search, the researcher is “...constrained by our commitment to ensure that the women [children?] we spoke to speak again in what we write without our reinterpretation of what they had to say. We have not coded; we have not sought to identify common themes” (my substitution).⁶⁴ In other words, to display the words of the people living and doing the work as they experience is

⁶⁴ Smith, D.E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. Pg. 190.

central to the ways in which understanding the social being done can happen.⁶⁵

One of the seven-year old, first graders, for example, related some of the hallways rules – for moving between classrooms:

Me: Do you have anybody in your class that has a hard time with that . . . or talking – it is hard not to talk when you're going through the hallway?

A: I just like to put a bubble in my mouth.

Me: You what?

A: Like to put a bubble in my mouth . . .

Me: What does that mean?

A: Like this <puffs up her cheeks> and you just, like, pucker your cheeks up . . .

Me: Um-hm . . . what does that help you do?

⁶⁵ See Smith (1987), pg 182. "Standard sociological analysis uses some methods of coding and interpreting such accounts to order the interview materials in relation to the relevances of the sociological and/or feminist discourses. These enable the interviews to be sorted into topics typical of the study population. In such a process, the standpoint of the women [children?] themselves is suppressed. The standpoint becomes that of the discourse reflecting upon properties of the study population. Characteristics of the study population become the object of the knower's gaze.

A: It helps you, um, if you undo it, that – you might talk, but if you know you won't – you don't – you won't . . .

Me: How'd you learn how to put a bubble in your mouth?

A: Um, the teachers told me.

Me: Okay, what'd they say?

A: They said, um, just, like, they, um, showed us how to do it . . .

Me: And if you open your mouth, the bubble will pop, so you hafta keep the bubble in?

A: Um-hm!⁶⁶

I noticed in her responses to me that she had some difficulty relating to my questions, which could be attributed to a variety of factors, but nonetheless, “It helps you, um, if you undo it, that – you might talk, but if you know you won't – you don't – you won't...” – is she struggling here to explain a visual concept to me – not an abstracted metaphor, but an actual, imagined bubble? The teachers, in other words, did not “explain,” this to her, they “showed” the children how to “put a bubble in their mouths.”

⁶⁶ Personal interview with seven-year old first grader, January 9, 2010.

Is this a way in which to understand that “language can never fit perfectly with individual experience”⁶⁷ - that this language that we teach children might be inadequate for communicating what is “really going on” with them?

Feminist sociologists argue that when “sociology's” rigid tradition, takes over as the disciplinary framework for inquiry, something can be lost. “I think of feminist methods,” Marjorie DeVault writes, “as distinctive approaches to subverting the established procedures of disciplinary practice tied to the agendas of the powerful.”⁶⁸ What does power do to this social science and its approach to the social world? In finding out about children’s everyday lives, the detriment of the approach could be ten-fold, in that power is explicit – the control of the adult might at least have some bearing on the responses. After all, as Bourdieu writes, “the dominant definition of legitimate competence is indeed such that...real competence is illegitimate,” the “real” here being the understanding of the speaker to the truths of their own knowledge and the communications of that

⁶⁷ DeVault, M.L. (1999). Pg. 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Pg. 59.

knowledge in interaction.⁶⁹ A standard approach to interviewing that sociology and other disciplines might prescribe could be a research catastrophe.

Asking children to talk about their experiences by “telling a story” opens up the possibilities for deeper inquiry. Paget describes this as a “search procedure,” or an exchange that allows “knowledge to be produced” between people in conversation. “Story” also has different implications than simply my questions and their answers – it asks them to talk, to process and relate their experiences in a way that makes sense to them. Paget writes:

A story is an account of something that develops and changes. It has a plot: some kind of action, which occurs over time. At a minimum, it has one temporal juncture, which describes what happened and what followed. A second temporal juncture would involve reporting what happened after that.”⁷⁰

Paget is not implying that the telling of the story needs to be linear – start to finish – but instead, a series of additions, subtractions, parenthesis, side-tracks and so on. Interviewing children, or asking

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publications. Pg. 82.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Pg 75-76.

children to tell the stories of their every day school activities, requires an understanding of what it means to “talk” to adults, on the part of children.

In another instance, when I was asking this first grader about “the rules” that she knew, she communicated a list of rules, including:

A: And raise your hand before you speak . . . and listen to other people without talking and don't interrupt anyone and when she says, 'don't cheat,' don't look at anyone and when she says 'go to your seat,' you have to go to your seat . . .

Me: What does 'cheating' mean?

A: Um, you can't um...just like, no...um, you can't, like, look at someone else's paper if, like, you're doing a math test...⁷¹

How would an adult have talked with me about “cheating,” and what it meant to “cheat?” Part of the difficulty with designing the questions for children was figuring out how to ask them questions that would “get at” their experiences. What words would I need to use to

⁷¹ Personal Interview with seven-year old first grader, January 9, 2010.

open up their thinking about “rules,” in order for their stories to erupt from the questions?

It seems to me, from this exchange with this first grader, that “cheating” is not something that she can explain or articulate to me, easily. This is not to say that she does not understand what it means to cheat – but she understands “cheating” within a specific context of her experiences. In other words, “cheating” to her, in the context of the first-grade classroom is “looking at someone else’s paper” during a math test.” This is all she would have to say to her teacher for her teacher to understand that someone next to her was “cheating.” A place to start, but if something is difficult to explain – in terms of a rule, does this mean that the extent of the consequences of breaking that rule are understood?

When I asked another first grader to talk with me about the playground, using experiences that my daughter had shared concerning rules about games on the blacktop, he attempted to tell me about a game called “Zombie-tag” that he and his friends play:

Me: What’s zombie-tag?

G: Um...it’s where there’s one base that zombie can’t go, so that means they can run and the – and if they touch you, the other person’s not a zombie, but the other person

is...and then...and then if you-if a person gets touched from a zombie, then they're a zombie.

Me: Oh, so it's just an army of zombies against one person maybe at the very end, like it's a bunch-a people?

G: No, no, no. No. I'm telling you that it's just one zombie that touched another zombie, and that zombie's back-a human and that's another zombie...

Me: Oh...

Mom: Oh...

Me: So the-the person that gets tagged is it?

G: Yeah, and the game never ends.⁷²

He lists the rules of "Zombie-tag" when I asked about explaining how the game is played. At the same time that he is attempting to explain how the game is played, I am confused by his explanation. It sounds like "tag," to me, but the experience of the game, the interaction with his friends who are also playing the game, including

⁷² Personal interview with seven-year old first grader, January 19, 2010.

the co-creation of rules for Zombie-tag create a structure that is difficult to relate with our differences in experiences.⁷³

I would like to be able to relate the ways in which feminist researchers and scholars speak about and assert the experiences of women as overshadowed voices in a world dominated by men – and use their methods to explore similar social oppressions on the talk and voices of children. It is the explanation of Zombie-tag, not just “tag” or the game of it, but the explanation to me, that is work. He says, “No, no, no. No,” as a way of letting me know that the way I am trying to understand is not quite getting “Zombie-tag.”

How can I talk about this translation as work, then? Part of the consideration lies in the desire to help someone understand. Social interaction requires, to some extent, an understanding of simple things, so that the conversation can flow.⁷⁴ “Zombie-tag,” is not

⁷³ Bigelow, B. J., Geoffrey Tesson and John H. Lewko (1996). *Learning the Rules: The Anatomy of Children's Relationships*. New York: The Guilford Press.

⁷⁴ Perhaps not “simple,” but understandings of gestures, objects, tone of voice and so on, ala G.H. Mead.

simply “tag,” but a detailed game of rules in which the Zombie is “it.” It takes two to three exchanges between him and I for me to begin to understand the game he is describing to me.

In another conversation with a first grader, I asked her to talk about rules that might be posted on walls around the classroom or hallways, guidelines for expectations. She told me that she had a “class pledge or something,” and I asked her to explain:

Me: What is that?

A: Like, there are these stuff of what you’re supposed to be doin real good, and um, you write your name on a crown and, like, you just put the crown up on the bulletin board and then you look at it if you need to . . . and you hafta look at that if you forget something that you’re supposed to do . . . and you just look at it and read it, and, then you’ll know what to do...⁷⁵

When I followed up my question with another question about “knowing what to do,” she responded that sometimes she did not know what she was supposed to be doing, even with the help of the “crown.”

⁷⁵ Personal interview with seven-year old first grader, January 9, 2010.

DeVault (1999) writes: “But the routine procedures of the discipline [sociology] pull us insistently toward conventional understandings that distort women’s [children’s?] experiences”(my insertions).⁷⁶ The conventions of sociology can define its boundaries in ways that limit what is possible. I did not want to turn what children told me in their accounts into a certain kind of sociological speak, convoluting their responses to my questions into what I wanted to see, and then telling their experiences as if they were generated by a sociological discourse. Dorothy Smith (1987) states: “...rather than inserting into our [sociologist’s] analysis of the interviews the relevances of the sociological discourse, we are interpreting them as expressions of their part in the local coordination of an institutional process.”⁷⁷ It is important for this research to allow the children I have spoken with to tell their own stories as a way to demonstrate how they work and understand the rules in their actual lived experiences, within the institutional context of public school.

⁷⁶ DeVault, M.L. (1999). Pg. 59.

⁷⁷ Smith, D.E. (1987). Pg. 190.

There are certainly other phrases and indications throughout these interviews that demonstrate the distinctions between the translations of children in regard to their own stories and what adults hear – and interpret as important parts of a larger story.

The focus on this part of the research methodology is detailed to further intimate the ways in which talking with and understanding the experiences of children as "realities" is infused with the use of their experiences in this research. I am aware that in the chapters before this, and the chapters after, that some specific interview data is absent. However, their experiences are fundamental in giving the research dimensions that my children and I cannot complete alone. Their stories from these interviews, and my conversations outside of these obvious research dimensions also fortify the stories where their individual stories are not explicit. They are behind the scenes; helping me make connections and providing information that helps my understanding of school policy and practice take further shape. Their stories are essential.

Interviewing children and their parents together also enabled me to see how parents perhaps sometimes attempt to add to or shape the ways in which their children are experiencing their every day interactions with school rules. One mother of a seven-year old first

grader continually redirected the stories her child was telling me or the responses her child would offer to my questions, which might also be discussed as “guidance,” teaching the child to follow and respect rules:

Me: Okay, tell me why you hate it. Why do you think that- why do you think that rule is a-is a bad rule?

G: Because-because, I think that they don't serve you, you get no food, and you have to wait and you're so hungry.

Me: Yeah!

Mom: But when you're in school, you listen to rules, right?

G: Yeah.

Mom: And sometimes, I go there, and you guys are so loud, it gives me an instant headache.

G: <laughs>⁷⁸

This child is telling me a story about being denied food in the lunchroom. The lunch rules insist on a certain level of quiet in order to be served. He is telling me that he does not agree with because he and his classmates are excited to eat, and therefore, in his experience, there is a lot of talking, but the rules impose a silence for food to be distributed. When he comments that he and his classmates are “so

⁷⁸ Personal interview with a seven-year old, first grader, January 19, 2010.

hungry,” his mother poses a question about following the rules “when you’re at school, right?” which results in his agreement and a change in his story he continues to tell. Could this be a spark of what some might call “resistance,” when this child’s assertions of being “so hungry” might be a response to counter-intuition? Why would people not feed children, in other words, when children were “so hungry?” I hear him questioning a rule from the lunchroom, but what does his mother hear that warrants this correction?

The proximity of parents to the relations of ruling forces a translation and reinterpretation of the stories of children, both for me as a researcher and for the children in their story telling. The mother of this child, for example, understands the position of the other adults in the lunchroom that established this rule. She reports an “instant headache,” when she visits her child for lunch, because the first-graders are so loud. Her story of noise and pain are not congruent with his story of hunger and excitement. They are not the same experience, but her reminder of the rule – and why it exists, and why it makes sense to adults (this mother and the lunch-staff, teachers and other school administrators) does not jive with her child’s recollection of waiting for food. She must simply imply that it is a rule, and he changes his story for her and me.

In my own experiences as a parent of public school children, talking about their (parent's) experiences requires that the person listening know a whole series of things – or at least, that they have experiences themselves that allow them to understand what is being said in talk.⁷⁹ In other words, the social organization of a school day, whether experienced by the child or the parent here requires an understanding, on my part, of how a school day works.⁸⁰ “We do not expect them to speak of social organization and social relations.” Smith writes, “The methodological assumptions of the approach we are using are that the social organization and relations of the ongoing concerting of our daily activities are continually expressed in the ordinary ways in

⁷⁹ Smith, D.E. (1987). Pg. 188. “The terms, vocabulary, and syntactic forms derive from those forms of life and express their typicality.” See also Eastwood (2006).

⁸⁰ Ibid. “...the social organization of our daily practices govern our choice of syntactic forms and terms when we speak of them.”

which we speak of them, at least when we speak of them concretely.”⁸¹

In the design of the interview questions, therefore, there is contained a history of experiences. I have been a parent of public school children for eight years, at the time of these interviews, and my children have shared with me their own experiences in their journeys through the school system. Dorothy Smith writes:

It is the interviewer’s investment in finding answers, her own concern, that serves to recruit her respondents as partners in the search: the things said are responses to these words of this particular researcher. The researcher is actively involved with respondents, so that together they are constructing fuller answers to questions that cannot always be asked in simple, straightforward ways.⁸²

I have received letters and phone calls, taken trips through classrooms on Back-to-School nights, and had parent-teacher conferences with teachers every year of my children’s participation. The questions for the children of other parents and the parents

⁸¹ Smith (1987).

⁸² Devault, M.L. (1999). Pg. 65.

themselves come from my questions, concerns and problems with public schooling, and the ways in which the institution of elementary and secondary education operate to organize the experiences.

Both of the first graders that I interviewed referred to the Think Chair and Think Sheets as a way that they understood being trouble, and also identified kids by name that had been sent by their teachers, to the Think Chair.⁸³ Neither of them ever saw anyone complete a Think Sheet, but they knew that was part of “getting in trouble.”⁸⁴ Coe and Nastasi (2006) posit that the “problem-solving genres” used by public schools as a way to help children figure out how to speak about their experiences and problems in and with the world, are not designed to consider the possibilities of infinite truths.⁸⁵ Using this as a place for questions, how do the prevention programs, like the sexual

⁸³ See Appendix, Form I for Think Sheet.

⁸⁴ Interview with seven year-old first graders. January 2009.

⁸⁵ Coe, K. and B. Nastasi. (2006). “Stories and Selves: Managing the Self through Problem Solving in School.” *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2. Pg. 180-198. They quote Sarah Michaels: “Much of what goes on in urban, public school settings promotes a *dismantling* of narrative performances and artistry – in favor of alternative forms of meaning-making deemed more scientific, rigorous, reliable, intelligent and important.” Pg. 181.

abuse prevention program, and the Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education program (D.A.R.E.), account for a variability of experiences? How do they account for children that might have parents who use drugs? How do they encourage the solving of problems or the sharing of experiences of sexual abuse when the conversation about child sexual abuse is controlled by standardized curriculum and children are not encouraged to share their experiences with one another in a classroom setting?⁸⁶

In talking with children about their experiences, part of the interest is their involvement in the public school process, and their exclusion from discussions about schooling. The methodological approach for interviewing children stems from an interest in their stories about their days at school, their experiences with rules and working through confrontations with order as organized by their teachers, the principals, other administrators, and what Dorothy Smith

⁸⁶ Ronai, C.R. (1995). "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Vol. 23, No. 4. Pg. 406.

refers to as “extra-local ruling relations,”⁸⁷ an example of which can be traced to prevention curricula. Beginning from where children experience their worlds is integral for understanding the ways in which children work within the confines of a system that is attempting to teach them how to be “citizens,” and how the curriculum, complete with its policies, regulations and practices organizes their experiences with learning.

At the same time, the interviews conducted with other children and their parents also shed light on the ways in which the institution of the public school organizes the understandings, and even the language, of “following rules,” and what the rules mean to the people that are required to follow them in order to be “safe.” It is this aspect of the work that begs for an approach that can connect the experiences of the people that I talked with and the larger discourses that organize in standard ways: the Institutional Ethnography.

⁸⁷ For some explanation, see Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg. 73-95. To be explained further in forthcoming chapters.

Parallel Runnings: The IE and Autoethnography

The institutional ethnography (IE) as an approach to sociology is integral to the development of this research. IE requires the telling of a story – the spinning of a web of connections that allows people to work through an institution’s intricacies. As Dorothy Smith (2005) writes, IE is a way to “...design a sociology that aims at extending people’s ordinary knowledge as practitioners of our everyday worlds into reaches of powers and relations that are beyond them.”⁸⁸ In other words, Institutional Ethnography as an approach to sociology has an interest in a distribution of knowledge that includes those that are otherwise excluded from a discourse. Institutional Ethnography’s aim as an approach is also “to produce for people what might be called ‘maps’ of the ruling relations and specifically the institutional

⁸⁸ Smith, D.E. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press. Pg 49.

complexes in which they participate in whatever fashion.”⁸⁹ These ‘maps’ that Smith describes are designed to benefit those moving around the web of the institution; to aid in understanding and navigating the relations in which they are entangled, everyday.

As an approach to sociology, rather than a sociological approach,⁹⁰ IE allows me to explore from a different location the goings on of a social world that is the public school, and connect it with the ways in which the children that I spoke with see that world, and their parents see that world. This is a beginning to a larger conversation about the impositions of "safety," and the anticipated embodiment of rules and policies – through the guidance or organizations of textual discourse and institutional interactions.

⁸⁹ Smith (2005), pg 51.

⁹⁰ The difference, as articulated by Smith and others concerning Institutional Ethnography juxtaposed with traditional qualitative sociological methods of writing, research and otherwise – perhaps most specifically in response to “grounded theory,” is that IE is not looking to apply sociological principles to the goings on of people’s everyday lives, as much as IE is interested in discovering the ways in which people’s everyday lived experiences are connected through different mechanisms of power, like textual discourses that mediate relationships between real people and organizations of the state or other power structures. It is distinct from other qualitative sociological research methods in this way.

It is difficult to isolate and describe *the* specific theoretical-methodological approach to this research question, only because there are a series of sociological and other disciplinary approaches intertwined in the development, investigation, and writing of this research question. The direction of this research rests heavily on both IE and autoethnography.

There are several components that operate simultaneously to fortify IE from the written descriptions of its theoretical base and the doing of the IE. Unfortunately, there are not a plethora of examples from which researchers can draw in order to best understand and subsequently implement the research process of the IE. In an edited reader, *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* (2006) Dorothy E. Smith, Marjorie L. DeVault, Marie Campbell, Tim Diamond and several other researchers contribute to a larger discussion about the possibilities of how IE can be *done*, but Smith also warns that to confine the practice of IE to “methodological dogma,” renders it potentially a sociological approach, as opposed to an approach to sociology.⁹¹

⁹¹ Smith, D.E. (2006). *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. D.E. Smith (ed). Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. Pg. 2.

Timothy Diamond's work in "Where'd You Get that Fur Coat, Fern?: Participant Observation in Institutional Ethnography", for example, illustrates the ways in which the operations of a nursing home are impacted at a variety of levels, with a variety of different people, by the changing of policy in line with budgeting.⁹² The effects of restrictions on spending from an extra-local level down to the everyday work of the nursing staff and orderlies illustrated by Diamond parallels the concerns Pat and Susan, two mothers in the following chapters, who are impacted by policy changes, laws and restrictions at the level of extra-local public school administration and beyond.

At the same time, I would like to discuss the focus on the "participant observation" aspect of the IE as a way to talk about being a "participant-observer" of sorts, in that my location within this work is one of someone inside. Lauren E. Eastwood (2006) writes that "being

⁹² Diamond, T. (2006). "Where'd you Get that Fur Coat, Fern?: Participant Observation in Institutional Ethnography." *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. Smith, D.E. (ed). Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Pgs 45-64. This chapter discusses participant observation within IE, and while the main focus is discussing the "methodological strategies" of IE, my interest in this chapter is the discussion of the organizations.

savvy” concerning processes and frameworks is “imperative to being an effective participant in the process.”⁹³ In other words, understanding the operations of institutional structures of power, like that of a school system, on an intimate level is necessary to the investigative principles of the IE. If I were not acquainted with the operations of the public school in my everyday experiences of being a mother to public school children, then the relevant details – the meanings and implications of policy and practice - would be different. This is not to say that they would be better or worse, but simply that my knowledge of the textual discourse that mediates my relationship with the school changes what I look for, how I hear things and how I interact with school officials. In this way, IE also allows for the experiences of the researcher to have a place in the development of the investigation. It seems, at the same time, however, that there is some distinction between the conceptions of “experiences” for IE and autoethnography. These differences allow for the use of *both* in this

⁹³ Eastwood, L.E. (2006). “Making the Institution Ethnographically Accessible: UN Document Production and the Transformation of Experience.” *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. D.E. Smith (ed). Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pg. 189.

research. The stories that I wanted to tell needed to be representations in a variety of ways. The IE connected my experiences with the public school to those of other children and their parents through the discourses of policy and curricular practice. There is, of course, more to the picture than simply the relations activated by a textual mediator.

Dorothy Smith (1995, 2004) describes the research that both she and Allison Griffith conducted on families and the work of women with school children. She comments that she and Griffith began to question their own mothering practices after some of the interviews, and the ways in which their feelings of negligence could be connected and accountable to the discourse of mothering.⁹⁴ She writes “[t]alking with other mothers about their work as mothers in relation to their children’s schooling revived concerns about our own mothering which had never fully subsided.”⁹⁵ She reports guilt, and relates in later work reflections on mothering within the confines of an educational discourse. This sharing is important to the story – it locates Griffith

⁹⁴ Smith, 163.

⁹⁵ Griffith and Smith, 32

and Smith as very present in the conversations they have with other mothers. They are engaged, and reflexive. I appreciate the ways in which this work weaves together their experiences with and around their research.

The difference is that a “sociological approach” to this particular project would change the ways in which questions were asked about children and their bodies. The IE posits its questions in the experiences of people, with the understanding and intentional interest in the ways in which the differences of experiences all happen under the same structures of organizations.⁹⁶ At the same time, Smith writes: “It is the aspect of the institutions relevant to the people’s experiences, not the people themselves, that constitute the object of inquiry.”⁹⁷ It is not, in other words, necessarily about investigating the intricacies of the people having the experiences. It is not, in this case, a study about the specific children that I interviewed for this project. While

⁹⁶ “The explication of institutional relations brings to light not only common bases of experience but also bases of experience that are not in common, but are grounded in the same set of social relations.” Smith, D.E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. Pg 176.

⁹⁷ Smith, D.E. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press. Pg 38.

my own children are very much a part of this work, behind the scenes – in fact, necessary for it, it is not about them either. IE allows me to explore the different facets of the varied experiences of a number of children. Framing what is captured in those conversations, stories, reports, and letters home is a way that their experiences are connected to one another through the process of their public school days.

Institutional ethnography, as an approach to sociology, is more about developing research that delves into "those aspects of the institutional process that are relevant to the issues of concern *and* appear in how people talk of what is going on in their lives," and not the investigations of the children as cases or as the objects of inquiry.⁹⁸

Other works have approached issues with children, schools, and children's experiences. They have been helpful in understanding the different ways in which people doing research frame their research

⁹⁸ Ibid (2005), pg 40.

about and around children.⁹⁹ The inspiration from these works was the consideration for children, and the implied structure of design in the research that necessitated, if not forced, the valuing of children's experiences as "real," "actual," and experiences of their own "truths."¹⁰⁰ The difference that IE might provide is that it is not about the specific experiences of the children that is the interest, but the ways in which their stories about their experiences together create a larger understanding of how public school policies and practices organize their everyday lives with rules and punishments.

As a part of this project, and as a part of IE, there is always the evidence of the mediating textual discourse that interrupts or serves in the place of the authority of the institution – what Smith refers to as the "ruling relations:"

⁹⁹ See Langhout (2005), Thorne (1993), Myers and Raymond (2010), Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), for some examples of exemplary work with children, and for the consideration of children as people in the world with valid experiences.

¹⁰⁰ These works are mentioned because my experience with them is integral to how I envision, in part, my interest and approach to children's lives and the stories they tell about what happens to them on a regular basis, whether through the administrators of their schools, their parents, other children in their classes and outside their classes, and so on.

...discourse, and the ruling relations in general, are ontologically fields of socially organized activity. People enter and participate in them, reading/watching/operating/writing/drawing texts; they are at work, and their work is regulated textually; whatever form of agency is accessible to them is accessible textually as courses of action in a text-mediated mode.¹⁰¹

In addition, the ruling relations can be conceptualized, for this project, as the everyday workings of the discourse of public school – including the intertextual intricacies of the law, educational counseling and psychology, education, child development, and medicine – and the ways in which the crossings of those discourses creates a web within which parents, children, teachers, principals, counselors and other school officials are ensnared. When Smith asserts that “they are at work,” she is insisting that IE must acknowledge the ways in which texts are always operating as part of the relations of ruling, to organize the experiences of people within the confines of institutional structures.

The textually mediated discourse of the public school can be discussed in many ways. Smith (1990) refers to textually mediated discourse as a “distinctive feature of contemporary society existing as

¹⁰¹ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Social Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: Pg. 75.

socially organized communicative and interpretive practices.”¹⁰² In relation to the public school, the textually mediated discourse appears as the handbook, the form brought home for me to sign for the purpose of disciplining my son, the formal letter concerning the suicide of a seventh-grader, the reminders of field-trip requirements, letters about the taking of standardized tests, and so on. Smith goes on to say that these communications and practices are “intersecting with and structuring people’s everyday worlds and contributing thereby to the organization of the social relations...” in this case, with the school.¹⁰³ My research questions are, in part, fueled by the correspondence I receive from the school regarding my children, also by the interactions with school officials on behalf of my children, and the ways in which I understand the textual discourse of so many intersecting discourses as a function of the school’s operation. In other words, my experiences with the public school, as a student, but also as a parent and a researcher help me to see how the expectations of parenting, the

¹⁰² Smith, D.E. (1990). *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. New York: Routledge. Pg 163.

¹⁰³ Smith (1990). Pg 163.

conceptual framework of a child, and the control of bodies through a series of policies and practices organize not only my relationship with the school, but those of my children, their friends and their friends' parents.

As Eastwood writes of her research on the UN, "The activities of a wide range of individuals are obscured in these phrases and in the final documents produced."¹⁰⁴ She also describes the reduction of paper waste from the UN as not simply statistically relevant, but asserts that the "The UN' does not use paper."¹⁰⁵ In other words, it is not the organization that creates waste, creates policies, and enforces rules. The individual people working within an institutional organization structure the practices, but the reliance on discourse and the heavy presence of text to communicate its objectives provide a cover for the actual workings of those people within a space, like a public school.

Consider Form I, titled "Think Sheet,"¹⁰⁶ as an example. In this particular school district, the "Think Sheet" is a disciplinary

¹⁰⁴ Eastwood, pg. 183.

¹⁰⁵ Eastwood, 183.

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix, Form I.

intervention implemented in the elementary and middle schools. I will use the Think Sheet to illustrate the ways in which textual mediation is “at work” through the discourse of theoretically disciplining the body of a child. The content of the form, to be completed by the offending child, asks the recipient a series of questions about their behavior, the “cause” of their punishment, in the assignment of the Think Sheet. While parents do not necessarily receive a copy at home, the Think Sheet is used to hold the child accountable for their violation of any number of rules, by compelling them to indicate on the form their failure to comply with the rule, their reason for doing so, and their plan to correct their behavior. Of course, the “Think Sheet,” itself is not the only textual discourse happening. There are many operations hidden behind the “Think Sheet,” that involve the efforts of curricular designers and teachers to incorporate the “Think Sheet/Chair” into a streamlined disciplinary technique. The “Think Sheet/Chair” is district wide, requiring the coordination of administrators and teachers in every school to understand the basic guidelines and implement them into their everyday teaching practices.

A seven-year old first grader that I interviewed informed me that sometimes, his teacher in kindergarten used to threaten him and his classmates with the "Think Chair," which is the place, indicated by this first grader, that students sometimes had to fill out Think Sheets. I

say “threaten” here as a way to demonstrate the ways in which that specific tool of discipline is used, and the larger implication of its meaning nestled in the discourse of disciplining the body, or – as the discourse indicates – behavior management.

The individual schools, the individual teachers, do not create the Think Sheet. This is an example of extra-local ruling relations.¹⁰⁷ The creation of this form, with its limited possibilities for responding to the discipline, is not concerned with the experience of the "trouble child," as much as it is with the definitions of categorical "trouble" of the language of school discipline, and the child's location within those confines. Smith defines “extralocal ruling” as: "characteristic modes of consciousness [that are] objectified and impersonal” whose “relations are governed by organizational logics and exigencies.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, the Think Sheet was created somewhere else – somewhere where the people designing it do not know the children that will complete it, nor the teachers that will use it for discipline. It is this

¹⁰⁷ Smith, D.E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. Pg 3.

¹⁰⁸ Smith (1987). Pg 3.

relationship that constitutes a textually mediated relation of ruling, both local and extralocal, that reinforces and proliferates the power of the discourse. In this case, the power of the discourse that disciplines.

In my experience, other extralocal disciplinary forms were sent home with my son, and I was required to sign them. He was then required to return them to the school the next day. I see this interaction as a way to talk about how the school holds the parents accountable for the behavior of their children through a textually situated contract – where a signature is required as a way to confer and approve of the school’s disciplinary measures. It is in this way that the institutional ethnography can explore the organization of these tools of control and create a map of the institutional web, illustrative of the different strands connecting the home and the discourse of the school.¹⁰⁹

In my experience, the best way to talk about the institutional ethnography as a way to see the world operating sociologically is to apply its expectations to the everyday. By “everyday,” I mean the

¹⁰⁹ Again, “the school” doesn’t do this work, but the people working within and behind the scenes of the school day who organize and proliferate the different ways in which power operates in the discourse of the institution. See Eastwood, (2006).

“various and differentiated matrices of experience,”¹¹⁰ the different locations on the same map, the organization of lives in the everyday world. How, in other words, can an approach to sociology be used to highlight the problematics with power, discourse, and institutions in the actual lived-lives of people?

For the purpose of this research, the institutional ethnography is used to begin a conversation about the ways in which children know how to follow the rules, and subsequently, also know how to break them. In the following example, a seven-year old first grader recited for me, complete with poetic rhythm, the rules that are posted on the wall in his classroom:

‘We promise
to-use-each-other’s-special-talents-to
work-together-to-solve-problems-with-all-classmates.
We will stop
and-think-before-we-act
so-our-words-and-bodies-do-not-hurt-our-friends.
We-will-keep-our-eyes-and-ears
on-the-person-talking-so-we-can-learn-from-them-as-well.’¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Smith (1987), Pg. 88.

¹¹¹ Interview with seven-year old first grader, January 9, 2010.

He reported to me that he and his classmates spoke this pledge everyday, “like the Pledge of Allegiance.”¹¹² His mother praises him for his accuracy – reaffirming the rules and practices of the public school classroom, through the support she attempts to convey for her child. She informs me, in front of her child, that he is very good at school, and really, really “likes order.” So a question for the researcher – for me, here, using the institutional ethnography as the main framework from which I am asking my question – could be, how does the affection for “order,” get organized by the structure of the rules in the classroom. Does this little boy “naturally” like “order”? Does this little boy “really like order” because working toward a specific kind of “order” is rewarded in a plethora of ways, while the dichotomous conception of “dis”order are punished? How does the school – or the first grade classroom, in this example, organize the understanding of “order” as expected and morally good, and “discipline” and “punishment” as “necessary” to maintain that abstract “order” – onto, around, and within the child? Whose definitions of order and safety are valued and

¹¹² Ibid.

operationalized, fundamentally silencing a variety of other definitions of the same?

I still need a way to tell stories, however, and while IE provides a space within which the researcher can explore their own questions, in conjunction with the experiences of other people, the lack is perhaps in the presentations of those research projects. I teeter with this particular question in my research somewhere between Institutional Ethnography and autoethnography. How to get at the experiences of people in relation to public school discourse, and at the same time, include myself as an insider to knowledge as well? It is impossible to separate the stories that I tell from those bound with my children and other people. The IE *is* concerned with the self, the embodiment of the social, but not in the same ways that autoethnography interests itself with reflections of the self. This is not to say that one is better than the other, but for the sake of this research, they must be discussed and used together in order to dimensionalize the relationships between sociology, my children, their friends, other children, their parents, and the practices of the public school. Autoethnography, as discussed by Andrew C. Sparkes (2006), used in a variety of ways could further illustrate the ways in which the self is shaped by the social. Sparkes addresses the claims of some social scientists that the autoethnography is "self-indulgent" by

insisting that this particular method "disputes the normally held divisions of self/other, inner/outer, public/private, individual/society, and immediacy/memory."¹¹³ At the same time that IE requires that the research begin from where "they are," and very surely does use the experiences of the researcher with the questions being asked, there is a possibility for further depth of analysis, a requirement for this work particularly that is picked up by the possibilities of depth in the autoethnography. Sparkes goes on to write that engaging the reader with stories is important to allow the stories to be *felt* rather than just read, and that autoethnography has the intention of performing precisely that function.¹¹⁴ It is my intention with the inclusion of autoethnography, to develop a sensual experience for the person reading this work. It is only through this response, whatever feelings are evoked, that gravity of this research can be felt.¹¹⁵ As with Jones's

¹¹³ Sparkes, A. C. (2002). "Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More? Ethnographically Speaking." *Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*. A. P. Bochner and C. Ellis. Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press. Pg. 216.

¹¹⁴ Sparkes, pg. 219.

¹¹⁵ I cannot, of course, control the ways in which this work is interpreted. I can, however, attempt to create a piece of creative research that provokes

torch song, the autoethnography, is an “[act] of love,” and the experiences of the audience with the sad ballad of the artist are intentionally gripping, so that while the feelings may be “Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It’s only natural – It’ll never change,” they can also be “I’d never have thought it – That’s not the way – That’s extraordinary, hardly believable – It’s got to stop.”¹¹⁶ This is relevant to the ways in which I see this research manifesting itself into more than a reading of the goings-on of a public school day, but the feelings of those experiences as a parent, and a person in the world concerned with the context of “children.” Autoethnography “move[s] from the inside of the author to outward expression while working to take the readers inside themselves and ultimately out again.”¹¹⁷ I experience school days through the stories of my children when they

the audience to ask questions, share stories and understand the connections between me – presumably an abstracted researcher – to the rest of the world, experiencing the confines and problems that others experience. The reader, in other words, or anyone suffering through these entanglements, is not alone.

¹¹⁶ Jones (2002), pg 52-53. Jones is quoting German poet Bertolt Brecht here in reference to the variety of ways of feeling about sad performances of music.

¹¹⁷ Jones, pg. 53.

arrive home every weekday. Sometimes their stories delight me, and sometimes, they are troublesome – and I find myself concerned with the events unfolding outside of the conversations concerning school practices. I only mean here that while IE absolutely provides a solid place from which to start, autoethnography allows for a further connection past the experience of the institution – so that my existence, even when not monitoring or conversing with my children, is plagued by their troubles, confounded by fears of the future and concerns about their well-being amongst strangers. While I do not use the specific stories of *my* children, the stories they share and other children share with me create a picture of fictional and yet completely “real” children. My stories are impacted by all of their stories. It is my intention to communicate a layering of these stories that pulls a response from the reader. I want the reader to experience something outside of abstracted reports of research findings. I use autoethnography to incite – to force the asking of questions, and insist that there is more to know. Its use benefits this work in particular, as the experiences of children as they tell it, can be somewhat terrifying.

Institutional ethnographic research requires a different way of reporting findings, so that the writing of the research has a more boundless possibility than simply following the formulas of sociological ethnographies or other qualitative methods of sociological inquiry.

This is not to say that creative ways of writing do not happen outside of the institutional ethnography – quite the contrary – IE, however, asks different questions that produce different problems that require different ways of communicating what has been explored. At the same time, IE is not, in its inception, a boundless practice. As with any disciplinary reporting of research, it has its conventions that follow a loose framework whose focus is ultimately to “discover the institutional order and its organization in those respects relevant to what has been and is happening to people.”¹¹⁸

IE, however, does not embrace, necessarily representation of the research findings in an artful form. Alec Grant (2010) writes, of autoethnography, it “emerged as relatively more aligned with the artistic rather than the scientific pole of the science-art continuum.”¹¹⁹ Part of this research project demanded that I be present in ways that IE does not take up as its project. While Smith and others acknowledge the different ways in which IE can be used to write of

¹¹⁸ Smith, D.E. (2005). Pg 41.

¹¹⁹ Grant, A. (2010). “Autoethnographic ethics and rewriting the fragmented self.” *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*. Vol. 17, No. 2. Pg. 112.

people's experiences with larger, structural systems of power, the aim of IE is to provide another way to do sociology. Majorie L. DeVault (1999) writes that, as feminist researchers, "we will need to experiment with forms and texts that allow us to fully express the insights arising from transformations in research practices."¹²⁰ In other words, creating sociological research that reflects the artful possibilities of autoethnography and the radical approach to sociology of IE requires that a divorce from conventions occur and new ways of speaking research be allowed to emerge.

I have taken some liberties with the writing of this research under the auspice of helping to create a different way to present institutional ethnographic findings and autoethnographic narratives. I locate myself frequently. Dorothy Smith insists that, as researchers, "We begin from where we are."¹²¹ We must, then, move forward with the questions from our own experiences to engage with others about

¹²⁰ DeVault, pg. 80.

¹²¹ Smith, D.E. (1987). Pg. 177. She goes on to say, "The ethnographic process of inquiry is one of exploring further into those social, political, and economic processes that organize and determine the actual bases of experience of those whose side we have taken."

their experiences. It is in these exchanges that the social bonds of the institutional relationships we are all involved with making themselves more visible. In order to compose a body of research that encompasses the variabilities of my own experiences and questions about the public school, my children, their friends and the experiences of other parents with “safety,” violence, sexual abuse prevention programs, countless interventions, threats, phone calls and Think Sheets, an approach is required that allows for a complexity of inquiries that institutional ethnography, as an approach to sociology, provides.

My vision for this work has some of the depth of the autoethnography, and at the same time, the practical aspects of the IE allow for the intricacies of the relationships between people, discourse and power to be explored and exposed. Autoethnography is risky for this research in that the stories I tell with my own voice and experiences must include other people, the stories they tell and the interactions we have. With the sharing of stories in academic settings, however, questions of ethics arise in how to tell those stories in autoethnographic terms, and which stories to tell. Questions arose of how to communicate my own experiences while still protecting those that participated in my interviews and other means of informing. Can

autoethnography be used responsibly by the researcher in a situation involving institutional relations to structures of ruling? In other words, how can I tell my story of experiences with the public school, while at the same time, locating myself in a web with others? Sparkes writes, quoting Tosha Tsang, that “I have claimed these stories to be my own, yet a story of myself, of my identity, necessarily involves and depends upon the story of the Other too. So these stories belong to them as well....”¹²² The stories that I share as part of my experience are also those of other people that I have and have not been in relation to. We are connected, as IE exposes, to one another in a variety of social ways. Stories are some of the ways in which we are connected, and stories have contexts rooted in the everyday lives of people in the social world. Autoethnography allows for the form to write about myself, include the stories of others, and artfully create an experience that attempts to extend beyond a conventional research report.

Laurel Richardson (1997) explains, “reasons for experimenting with literary style and genre” within disciplinary confines “[raise]

¹²² Sparkes, (2002), pg. 217.

political and ethical questions as well.”¹²³ Her assertions of ethics concern the intimacy between the research questions and the investigator. She writes: “Separating the researcher’s story from the people’s story implies that the researcher’s voice is the authoritative one, a voice that stands *above* the rest (original emphasis).”¹²⁴ IE works in similar ways in that the researcher does not transcend the research, but engages in investigating the relationships and experiences that people have in their social worlds.¹²⁵ The problems I have with the ways in which public schools operate are not my problems alone. I knew, even from conversations with other parents, that my concerns and experiences were unique, but similarly connected to the experiences of other parents with their public school children.

Of autoethnography, Laura M. Jewett (2008) writes, "I analyze data by pulling apart the elements of my experiences and the

¹²³ Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Brunswick (NJ): Rutgers University Press. Pg. 18.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Smith, (2005).

experiences of others, then reuniting them through writing..."¹²⁶ so that while I tell my own stories, there are always others in interaction with me, in conversations with me. The risk in this approach is, in part, a result of the method.

My suggestion here is that, while IE is the predominating framework from which my questions come, I do not feel that this approach alone encompasses the desire of this project. Autoethnography as a supplement allows for the filling-out of these stories as they fit into my experiences with the larger structures of power, and those experiences of people around me.

Carol Rambo Ronai (1995) explores the possibilities of writing with a "layered approach" that allows the writer to express a variety of different experiences with an overlay¹²⁷ – and in another piece entitled, "Sketching as Autoethnographic Practice," Rambo (2007) uses a masterful metaphor to describe the process of writing an "autoethnography:"

¹²⁶ Jewett, L.M. (2008). *A Delicate Dance: Autoethnography, Curriculum, and the Semblance of Intimacy*. New York: Peter Lang. Pg. 8.

¹²⁷ Ronai, C.R. (1995). "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol.23, No. 4.

As I laid down my next lines, *in relation* to the prior lines, a representation of my subject started to emerge. As I drew and erased, the process became one of continuous exploration, adjustment, and correction. But even as I erased, the impressions of the prior lines remained embedded in the surface I worked with, guiding, molding, and shaping the emergent drawing. Many times a line I erased got redrawn, at the end, as an overt part of the drawing.¹²⁸

How perfect to think about the writing of children's stories with the public school being the new lines over the top of my faded ones. The autoethnographic sketch makes sense for my work as a component of the writing, but not the complete piece. I am interested in telling my stories alongside those that my children tell me, and that their friends tell me, and those stories of other children's parents. The layered approach that Rambo speaks of in her earlier piece sets a similar tone for the writing of this dissertation. A layered account is "a postmodern ethnographic reporting technique that embodies a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting in one stroke."¹²⁹ In other words, the experiences of being a mother in a public school system

¹²⁸ Rambo, C. (2007). "Sketching as Autoethnographic Process." *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 30, No. 4. Pg. 534.

¹²⁹ Ronai, pg. 396.

where her children experience different degrees of interaction with the administration, thereby involving her in the discourses of schooling and mothering, and the writing of those experiences, are layered. Without my presence in this piece, it ceases to be a sociologically viable project, as I am entangled in the social along with my children and all other children in public school. The history of my present is as important to the unraveling as those of the children I interviewed to sketch an image of the workings and operations of the everyday lives of children – and the impacts of “safety” curriculum on them – on me. On us.

IE serves a purpose here, as a place to begin a research inquiry, but can be taken further to allow for me to join my stories of the problems and disjunctures encountered by my children, their friends, and the parents of their friends. At the same time, institutional ethnography relies on the textually mediated discourses present in the forms I receive from the school, the school handbooks, the scheduling of parent-teacher conferences and so on, to allow me to demonstrate the ways in which I am entangled with the impositions of parenting as defined by school discourse. I am present, engaged and aware of the intricately woven discourses, but this does not resolve the questions or problems with their operations. In other words, my location as a

researcher researching does not matter when my child is disciplined and I must meet with the principal.

The understanding of this can be highlighted with a distinction from IE. The institutional ethnography requires a balance, and in an institutional investigation, the presence of researcher as a participant with the same texts and knowledge of the discourse, provides the reader with a guide through the web of ruling relations.¹³⁰ It would be impossible, in all practicality for me to abstract myself from this work. I agree with the question asked by Ronai: if, as Bourdieu suggests, “all sociology is a personal reflection of the sociologist creating it,” then “why should we impose forms of writing on ourselves that disguise this fact?”¹³¹ I am *in* the investigation.

¹³⁰ See Smith, D.E. (1993). “High Noon in Textland: A Critique of Clough.” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1. Pg. 183. “The notion of standpoint outside discourse holds a place in discourse for she who has not yet spoken, not yet declared herself, not yet disinterred her buried life.” Smith would offer that IE is an investigation of people’s everyday lives, and not necessarily concerned with the experiences of the investigator’s everyday life, other than how it relates to a generator of feminist inquiry. Eastwood (2006), however, talks about the importance of intimacy with the discourse as a necessity for good investigative work, so that some knowing is required – some experience with the same structures as everyone but the researcher.

¹³¹ Ronai, (1995). Pg 396.

Richardson writes that, within the confining conventions of qualitative research, while “students are trained to observe, listen, question, and participate,” they are also, “trained to conceptualize writing as ‘writing up’ the research, rather than as a method of discovery.”¹³² This imagination of writing extends to the fantasy of the presentation of the dissertation most certainly.¹³³ As previously discussed, the different methods employed in this research project beg for questions about conventions. “Conventions place strong constraints on the artist,”¹³⁴ after all, so the presentation of the following research, conducted over nearly a lifetime, and incorporated with the new experiences of new lives – in complete interest of finding

¹³² Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Brunswick (NJ): Rutgers University Press. Pg 88.

¹³³ We are taught as graduate students to categorize or “bracket” in qualitative form, so that even in the writing of our work, we are instructed to form sections that are part of a larger project, but examined as mutually exclusive written sections (as discussed in Chapter 1). “Grounded theory” for example, requires that the researcher seek out the phenomena described in their disciplinary theories and observe, make note and analyze their own observations, which, for all intents and purposes, can effectively perpetuate the interest of the discipline and the researcher – not necessarily the people participating in the research.

¹³⁴ Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pg. 32.

a way to talk about children and their confrontations with safety in their public school classrooms, playgrounds, hallways, lunchrooms, and outside, in their homes at night - must be written as a layered account, one without a timeline. The disorientation of non-linearity and the potential unsettling of the reader can only happen if the writing makes it so – and what better way to attempt a forcing of experience – a forcing of discomfort at the stories of sexual harassment, bullying, abuse, violence, threats and the underpinning of the school in all of these things. Consider the unease of the child in the stories that are allowed to unfold here.

If I am to “begin from where I am,” and also cling to the idea that “to write it is to become,” as Trinh Minh-ha (1989) asserts, part of a larger understanding of language and writing has to be that to write is also to discover, and to slough off the robes of conventional writing is to shed the fear of writing conventionally.¹³⁵ I must, in other words, take ownership of the discord in the sentences here, and embrace that my experiences and those of which I have reported do not have to be

¹³⁵ Trinh, M.T. (1989). *Women, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pg. 19.

presented easily – do not have to be written recognizably to the discourse of sociology - but can expand themselves, “and as there is no need to rush, just leave it open, so that it may later on find, or not find its closure.”¹³⁶

Following is the result of work on many levels. I want to take you on a journey through public schools, where the policies and practices reflect some questions unasked and unanswered. It is written as a way to convey what is happening, and how institutional ethnography as an approach to sociology can be used to explain the operations that guide understandings of rules, safety, sex, gender, violence, neglect and so on, defined by discourses that float above the ground. It is written as a way to sketch me into the stories, and weave my words around those of children, and their parents. It is written to distract and attract, away and toward the problems of the public school, with special attention to the policies and practices that work to discipline children’s bodies. I have written this research in

¹³⁶ Trinh, pg. 19

ways that, I hope, will resonate with the reader, evoke stories and events of their own memories that recall a time when they too were children, working through their everydays in a world operated by adults – especially, in the public school. I have written this work in a way to convey a problem, which requires more and more questions and further and further investigations. And now: the story of John Student.

CHAPTER 2: BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT, NEGLECTFUL PARENTS AND FEARFUL FUTURES

“Defective families produce defective children.”

--Dorothy E. Smith (2004)¹³⁷

The following is an entry on a blogspot written about Susan and John by A.M. Biguous, also known as Amanda Garrison.

In-School-Suspension Results in Angry Parent: 13-Year Olds Imprisoned

By A.M. Biguous on Monday, May 31, 2010 at 2:27pm

Middle Town Middle School -It was just a regular late day for John Student and his mother Susan Parent, a night-owl shift nurse in the midst of a staff shortage. He walked into the school with a note from his mother that requested that he be excused for his tardiness - after all, neither of their alarms rang at 7 a.m. The administrators, however, would not hear of it. John

¹³⁷ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Social Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg. 163.

had 13 tardies - and this offense was punishable with in-school suspension, or ISS to the students of Midtown Public middle schools.

Susan reports that she was warned when John was a sixth grader, a year before, that excessive tardiness would result in a suspension from classes - and that excessive absences would be referred to the Children's Division of the state Department of Social Services. "I could not believe that the school would punish children and parents by involving the state in its absence and tardy policies. When I was in school, all we needed was a note from our parent...."

The Monday of John's 13th tardy, he was escorted to the room in which the ISS operated and, "locked in" as he described his experience. "We are allowed to play chess and play on the computer for 10 or 15 a-piece." When asked about his homework or classroom assignments, he replied, "the teachers come down after class and give us the work we were supposed to be doing during class time, and we have to get it done before we can play anymore games." Student also reported that there are no windows in this room and that the students are not allowed to leave, except to go to the restroom - even eating lunch in the detention room.

Susan received the news from her 13-year old son that afternoon and said she was outraged: "I couldn't believe they would punish him for my lateness. I called the school and tried to talk with a principal about it, but no one that could help me was in the building. I decided to write a letter." She first surveyed the form that John had brought home with him for her to review, sign and return to the school the next day. The form indicated that "excessive tardiness" was a "major problem" that "required immediate action" by the administration. Tardiness was in the same "major offenses" category as drugs on school grounds, carrying a weapon, fighting, using drugs and cheating. Under the section of the form where administrators could make their own notes was written, "Chronic Tardiness."

John related that when he was confronted by the principal for his lateness, she "raised her voice" at him, and told him that he needed to fix his alarm clock or get himself up in the morning to board the school bus. The school bus that would pick John up, in addition to other children in the area, arrives at his corner at precisely 6:45 a.m. John's mother protests, explaining that she is not willing to rob John of the sleep he needs, "He is a growing person, after all, and needs his sleep as much as anything else."

The local district policy on tardiness is not restricted to the

middle school. In 2003, Primary Junction, an elementary school in the same district as Middle Town in the past punished students for being late more than three times by removing the privilege of one of their recesses. When the schools eliminated one recess around 2005 to make more time for standardized test training, taking the exercise time of K-5 down to one daily, the punishment for excessive tardiness was the removal of lunchtime social privilege - one of the only times of the day in which the regulation of social time is a little less constricted around the five to eleven-year olds. Children had to eat their lunch in a designated area of the administrative office.

While John and Susan wait for a response from the school, Susan is not optimistic: "It's almost as if what goes on at home doesn't really matter. The kid needs to be there on time NO MATTER WHAT. I just think the schools need to be a little more flexible when it comes to differences. I mean, he's getting all As and Bs - how is his lateness effecting his performance? Seems as if they're just trying to get him ready for a job in the office - where he has to be on time in order to get a raise and a good review. What if that's not for him?"

Since the incident Monday, John has double-checked his alarm clock every night and is up early every morning, but still has to work into the night and get up on little sleep. This threat of suspension has changed their mornings - so that John pushes her to get ready faster. "I don't like being pressured from my kids to 'hurry up,'" she says, "the school has screwed my mornings."

John added, "Mom is really grouchy in the morning - but I don't want to miss out on class time, or time with my friends. I don't want to be late, so I have to be pushy. I don't like it."

A.M. Biguous reporting.

Behavior Management Activated – A Working Textual Analysis

The following is a textual analysis of a Behavior Management Form given to Susan in 2009. She shared it with me so after receiving it from the school. I begin with this analysis directly following for a reason. Specifically, this is where the questions began concerning this aspect of the research project: how is ‘Chronic Tardiness’ created as a characteristic of risk, and hence, offset from school safety?

The Behavior Management form is a standardized, triplicated document that provides the school, the record and the parents with an account of a) the location of the offense; b) the offense committed; c) other involved parties; d) theorized “motivations”; e) a place for a written description; f) disciplinary action taken in the classroom; and, g) the action taken by administration to respond to the offense. There follows a space for “administrative comments,” and a space below that

for signatures of administrator and parents.¹³⁸ This form is a supplement to a larger industry of programs and services available for schools, including teachers and administrators designed to help develop practices of “managing” different “behaviors” in the classroom and larger school setting. This is what could be considered another part of the “extra-local” ruling relations discussed by Smith, in that this form is not created by anyone in the school district – or at least, is not solely relatable to issues in this particular community, and could be used at a rural school of 100 kids as well as an urban school of several hundreds or more.¹³⁹

As previously mentioned, the form distinguishes between “Majors” (offenses) which “require immediate administrative involvement,” and “Minors,” which do not indicate that the same immediate response as a necessity. The minor offenses range from “using inappropriate language,” and “missing detention,” to

¹³⁸ “Middle Town Middle School Behavior Management Form.” Received on May 4, 2009. For more visual understanding of the sections of this form, see Form II in the Appendix.

¹³⁹ Smith, D.E. (1990). *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. New York: Routledge.

“unpreparedness” and “excessive tardies.” The offenses listed in the “Minors” category exist because they are offenses, but for the most part, seem to be behaviors or actions that simply relate to young people. “Minor disrespect/defiance/non-compliance” as written on the form as offensive, in other words, is not necessarily treated as such by actual administrators. “Disrespect,” as well as “unpreparedness,” are relative to the person defining them, so that all I am saying is simply because these offenses are provided on this form, does not indicate that referrals for behavior management are made of their behalf. Teachers have discretion, as do administrators, as to when and how, and *if* they use these methods. They are not robots, controlled by the words of the policies, but agents in their own practices of disciplining the bodies of children in their classrooms and hallways.

Most of the “Majors” on the other hand, are evidently dangerous situations that certainly require intervention. “Using/Possessing a Weapon,” for example is certainly a case in which the possessor of that weapon be intercepted and the other children protected from potential violence. Similarly, “Giving False Alarm (dialing 911, pulling fire alarm, etc)” has less directly threatening implication, but the consequences are, in themselves, reason enough for discipline. However, “Violating Dress Code Repeatedly,” “Chronic tardiness,” and “Chronic Disruption of

Learning,” seem to be out of place with the other descriptions of serious violence and physical harm to others, but after all, “disciplinary punishment has the function of reducing gaps. It must therefore be essentially *corrective*.”¹⁴⁰ Correction of what is grounded in the discourse as “behavior” that needs to be “managed.” How does “Violating a Dress Code” repeatedly endanger?

The text of this standardized form is active – these categories and assignments of “offense” are working to define and include socially acceptable and recognizable problems with children.¹⁴¹ In other words, as I looked over the offenses listed in the section entitled “Majors,” the definitions of these offenses are recognizable to me as potentially serious problems (why *would* a child bring a gun to school?¹⁴²), the social relations and understandings of violence are

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. Pg. 179.

¹⁴¹ Smith, D.E. (1990). *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. New York: Routledge. pg. 121. “The active text, by contrast, might be thought of as more like a crystal which bends light as it passes through. The text itself is to be seen as organizing a course of concerted social action. As an operative part of social relation it is activated, of course, by the reader but its structuring effect is its own.”

¹⁴² There is an assumption, I am aware, in the interpretation of “weapon,” as a “gun.” The public school’s definitions of weapons are much more broad, so

activated in my understanding. However, when I get to “chronic tardiness,” the reaction and understanding are not the same, from my experiences. This textual mediation between the school and me is working to define “chronic tardiness” as a serious problem – and working against my socially related understanding of “serious violations of school policy.”

According to Smith,

“the assumption...is that the texts intends methods and schemata of interpretation and that these can be recovered through analysis. If the reader’s interpretative practices conform to those intended by the text, analysis will display how the text makes sense.”¹⁴³

So that if Susan understands that chronic tardiness is a problem, as indicated on the form, her understanding of this disciplinary action relates and supports the punishment. By the inclusion of “Chronic Tardiness,” then, with “Use/Possessing a Weapon” – even in its presentation on the physical form itself, an offense on a list with 15 other offenses, the text *forces* “Chronic Tardiness” to be a

that they include non-specific meanings of weapons – “hazardous objects,” for example.

¹⁴³ Smith, 121.

“Major” offense. And since “the text comes before us without any apparent attachments,” seeming to “stand on its own, to be inert without impetus or power,”¹⁴⁴ the embracing and development of perpetual lateness as threat is not a question. Neither should the punishment be, in this regard.

The actions taken by teachers as indicated by the form for any of the above listed “Majors” or “Minors,” refer to a series of reasonably understandable possibilities. A box can be checked for contacting the parent, sending the offender to the office, making the offender change seats and so on. If however, according to the form, a “Major” is perpetrated, “immediate administrative involvement” is required, and the list of punishments or disciplinary actions corresponds with the punishments. Due to the procedures of “checking in” with the office upon late arrival, there was no need, in John’s case, for a teacher to intervene. Instead, the administrative assistance notified the principal that John was late again, and her responsibility became to address the issue immediately. There are 12 possible administrative actions, most of which are easy to identify and imagine (“lunch detention,” “Saturday

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. pg. 122.

detention,” “parent contact”) while others are not as easily identifiable, like “Community Service,” “OSS,” “GRRRR (ISS),” “Recovery Room.” These strange compartments of applicable punishments are not recognizable to someone outside of the discourse of school discipline. When I asked John, he knew what “OSS” was, but without him straddling the ditch between my understanding (or lack thereof), and the school’s implied directives for some sort of punishment, I would not have been aware of the distinctions. John told me that “Community Service” was exactly what I thought it was – and that he had never seen or heard of the “Recovery Room” at Middle Town Middle School, but thought he heard from another child that Primary Junction’s “Recovery Room,” was a “room in the office with two shiny windows where they could see you, but you could not see them.”¹⁴⁵

For every box that can be checked in offenses, there must also be a box to check for appropriate punishment. Foucault illustrates the accuracies and deliberate planning of disciplinary action or punishment

¹⁴⁵ Personal conversation with a child. May 2010. I have since discovered, with my own investigations, that a “Recovery Room” as indicated on the form as a place assigned for the serving of punishment, is a room where children are sent to basically regain their composure – and that there are usually teachers or other staff responsible for helping them “recover” themselves.

for an offense, noting that exacting measurements are central to the planning of a disciplinary event, and are undertaken to ensure the most “calculated economy of punishments.”¹⁴⁶ These boxes and categories, which can be comprehended as offensive enough to warrant the work of filling out the form, intentionally bind the crime with the punishment. Therefore, the appropriation of punishments that “fit” crimes – in other words, for the sake of efficiency, while the crimes are subject to interpretation by teachers or principals (an offense listed on the form might be overlooked depending on individual circumstances),¹⁴⁷ there is a category just in case – and even a space for “Other,” so that anything *not* listed that applies also has a consequence.¹⁴⁸ The same is true for the punishment or disciplinary action.

It is the coupling or grouping of “Chronic Tardiness,” with what I would consider extreme offenses, and the institution of the

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. Pg.103.

¹⁴⁷ It is necessary to continue to remember that teachers do not always fill out forms, they do not always send people to the office. The punishments for violations of the rules are subject to the discretion of the teacher.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, (1977). Pg 103.

punishment for this crime, In-School-Suspension that sparks the questions about conduct as related to “safety.” Does this form implicating “Chronic Tardiness,” collude with the discourse of safety to create a threat in the making – which must be intercepted in the interest of the child? How does the school’s response to these offenses, through the textual discourse and personal interactions with parents perpetuate a normalizing of behavior? What happens next?

There is a handbook provided for parents in this district, titled the “Student Handbook,” which refers parents to a variety of explanations and guidelines for actions taken by the school in regard to their children.¹⁴⁹ This resource is provided to every household at the beginning of every school year, and handbooks are also accessible

¹⁴⁹ I must note here that this is a “Student Handbook” that is written for *parents*, in a language that is obviously *for* parents, with an intended audience of *parents*. The rules and regulations for the classroom are distributed to parents separately by teachers when children in this district get to middle school – the classroom expectations are the daily guidelines for students, while the “Student Handbook” is the policy reference for guidelines in relation to parents understanding the policies and subsequent practices of the school. In other words, children are not reading the “Student Handbook” by school officials and are not generally familiar with the textual representations of policy without experiencing them – or coming into conflict or contact with a rule that is violated.

through the district's websites, in addition to the "policies and regulations" laid out for all of the schools in this area by the district Board of Education. Letters accompany the paper copies of the handbook home with children at the beginning of the school year instructing or at least suggesting that parents read and ask questions if any arise in relation to the handbook.

In addition, the letters home also include a place for a signature, to verify that the parent has received the handbook from their child and has gone over and understood the rules and regulations of the school and the district. I sign my name every fall to comply with the district policies and regulations – in other words, that I have "read and understood" the guidelines and expectations of my children in relation to the public school.

Nowhere in the handbook, however, is there an explicit definition or explanation of the concern for punctuality – only, according to the handbook for secondary schools, the definition of "tardy":

Tardy: Students are expected to be in class with appropriate materials before the bell sounds. Failure to be on time to class can result in disciplinary action being taken by the teacher and the school. Disciplinary action could range from detention to suspension, depending on the number and frequency. Schoolwork missed because of tardiness cannot be made up.¹⁵⁰

This makes sense. A child being late for school is disruptive to, not only the other children that were there on time, but to the teacher as well, who must try to regain the calm established in the wake of the tardy bell.¹⁵¹ This is not the problem. It is understood that consistently being late for a class is a problem – for more than just the offender. The question then is not about whether or not rules about being late are relevant – along with the consequences of disruption. The question is does John’s “chronic tardiness,” as exemplified on the Behavior Management Form, parallel his offense with theft on school property, bringing or using drugs, guns or fists on campus, and the assault or attempted assault of a teacher or other student? How does

¹⁵⁰ Student Handbook. Local Public School District Secondary Schools. District Policies and Regulations. Pg. 21.

¹⁵¹ For more detail here, see Griffith and Smith’s (2005) chapter section on the work that teachers and administrators do to compensate for late students, and also the allowances and flexibility exercised on the ground with these tardiness issues.

his “chronic tardiness,” become framed as a risk, or “major offense,” and then beyond that frame, what are the larger implications of that risk to him and other people? How, in other words, is his lateness a threat to safety?

The district Board of Education’s list of policies and regulations provides that children benefit the most from being on time to school, being prepared to learn, and continuing to attend. The truancy policy suggests that the following benefits are gained by a student’s regular attendance:

The Board of Education believes that regular attendance by students improves academic performance, lowers the district dropout rate, and reduces classroom disruption caused by special attention which must be given to students who return after missing important instruction.¹⁵²

And further adds, in relation to the policy for attendance that the regular attendance by children was the "single greatest indicator of

¹⁵² “Truancy.” JEDA-Critical. Taken from the Board of Education “policies and regulations” for Students. It should be noted in this case that the district distinguishes between “excessive absences” and “truancy” as the latter refers to an absence perpetrated by the child without the consent of the parent. The former implicates the parent and holds them accountable for absences.

student achievement."¹⁵³ Clearly also, the intentions of the policies are written into the text, and includes, "Holding students and their parents/guardians responsible for attendance is part of the district's larger mission to train students to be *productive* citizens and *employees* (my emphasis)."¹⁵⁴

Without being too dramatic in the associations of this justification for attendance policies, it is always a shock to me when systems of power, like the institution of public education, make their intentions explicit. This explicitness is not surprising because I do not see it happening, or because the intentions themselves are disruptive to my assumptions. Indeed, the intentions of the policies make room for the practice of disciplining bodies within the confines of the best interest served for the child. In other words, what is surprising is that while Foucault, Smith, Apple, Gunzenhauser, and Langhout, naming a few, illustrate the theoretical and actual consequences of these mechanisms of control, I do not expect to *read* them, much less for

¹⁵³"Student Absences and Excuses" JED-Critical. Taken from district Board of Education "policies and regulations" for Students.

¹⁵⁴ "Truancy." Ibid.

their perfect applicability. This attendance policy in particular provides a stage for disciplinary action to take place - a concern for the productivity of the citizen grounds for punishment and with the violation of the rule.¹⁵⁵

Coincidentally, how does this approach to attendance continue to implicate parents, like John's mother, Susan or mothers like Carol Irwin?¹⁵⁶

While the attendance policies are *not* necessarily the tardy policies, they are connected. The Board's policies do not deal in great detail with the issue of arriving late to school. There is an implication in the actions of the school administrators at a different level than that of the Board. The Behavior Management Form roots the policies of tardies to the school for enforcement, while the overall requirements for attendance and, conversely, *lack* of attendance might, therefore, have more connections to funding from the state, as per state policies

¹⁵⁵ Foucault (1977). "The body only becomes a useful force (for power) if it is both a productive body and a subjected body." Pg. 26.

¹⁵⁶ Griffith and Smith, pgs 56-57. Carol Irwin is a woman Griffith and Smith interviewed about her daughter's absence from school as a result of Carol's night job.

related to public school funding and number of students in daily attendance. Tardy children still attend and make money. Absent children cost money.¹⁵⁷

There have been many changes to the various operations of the public schools in this area since I was a student. I stun my children when I tell them that when I was elementary school, we had three official recesses, and also one in the morning (upon arrival) and one in the afternoon (waiting for the bus). When my son began public school in 2001, he had two recesses, as did my daughter when she entered school in 2003.

The elementary school my children attended is zoned by the public schools district so that their father's residence was the determining factor in where they attended school. When we divorced,

¹⁵⁷ Again, this is not meant to be a harsh critique. The problem is not that the school receives money for each child in attendance. Public schools are expensive to run – Noam Chomsky would relate about public institutions of social good running at deficits. The problem is that they are *forced* to enforce policies that sometimes do not work in the everyday, in order to receive that funding. THAT is the larger problem at work here.

the custody agreement was to split week by week. As a result, when my children were with me, the only transportation to school for them had to be provided by me. Like Susan, I frequently had trouble getting up and getting them ready on time, so that they were late a lot. Griffith and Smith's work speaks to difficulties of this task, as so many mothers they interviewed had similar experiences. I just could not always get them there, and I was not going to stress about their tardiness. I could not imagine that these two little people would get in trouble for something beyond their control.

Much to my dismay, they began to jump in the car at the end of the day, lamenting that "they" said that if my children were late just once more, they would lose a recess! "They" were the school administrative staff, perhaps the principal, informing them, not me, that another late day would automatically result in one less recess. In the end of their elementary school experiences, they both missed a number of recesses as a consequence of my inability to get to school on time.

The district elementary school student handbook does not address the tardy as a problem. In fact, the scarce presence of "tardy" as an area of concern in the elementary handbook, is an interesting contrast to the presence of "tardy" in the secondary school handbooks, nestled amongst a series of familiar looking offenses. The

elementary school uses the "tardy" against the "absence," while the middle school handbook sets the "tardy" off, in its own space amongst some thirty other offenses with possible, corresponding punishments.¹⁵⁸ However, it has to be possible that the frequency with which my children were late, and their presence in the school office as a result warranted concern from the administration. The outcome: they start missing recess. The recess policy ambiguously ends with: "Recess privileges may also be denied for disciplinary reasons."¹⁵⁹ At this point, with my children, their tardiness is converted to a "disciplinary reason" for the denial of their social time. In other words, tardiness *becomes* a disciplinary issue, where the elementary school handbook did not construct an issue.

There are already problems around the development and potentialities of behavioral confluences of conflicts at home. At the

¹⁵⁸ Secondary Student Handbook, pg. 21.

¹⁵⁹ Elementary School Student Handbook, pg. 17.

same time that I can understand the concern for their tardiness, the problem lies in the consequences of the disciplinary action.¹⁶⁰

What I discovered as a result of further investigation into the issues with Susan, John and “Chronic Tardiness,” was an interesting twisting and weaving of larger state discourses into the policies of the local public schools. The concern with the “Chronic Tardiness,” as with dress code violations and disruptive classroom behaviors, and any subsequent interactions, while grouped on the form with weapon possession and drug use, were considered measures of *prevention*. In other words, to nip this propensity for tardiness in the bud – to prevent a furthering of problematic “behaviors,” like frequent absences, the Behavior Management Form was a tool to communicate to the child and the parent that this level of lateness was a warning sign for worse things to come.

¹⁶⁰ My children were decreasingly late as I began to understand the implications of missing social time. I do not remember when the schools in this district reduced their recesses by one, leaving children with one squirt of outside time before or after lunch. My daughter would always have more to talk about regarding the excitement of recess politics than any of her school lessons. As an effect of that reduction, our household worked to make a concerted effort to arrive on time to school everyday. It was not easy- it was work (Griffith and Smith), and sometimes it was close. Our mornings were different as a result of school recess policies.

According to the district's policies on Absences and Excuses:

The district will contact the Children's Division (CD) of the Department of Social Services or the local prosecutor in cases where the district has a reasonable suspicion that a student's lack of attendance constitutes *educational neglect* on the part of the parents/guardians or that parents/guardians are in violation of the compulsory attendance law. No such action will be taken unless other strategies and interventions have been implemented and proven ineffective.¹⁶¹

As with any case of suspected abuse or neglect, while the school officials are all mandated reporters, meaning that, according to a school counselor Susan spoke with, *any reasonable suspicion* is grounds for alerting the state social service agency (the Children's Division of the Department of Social Services).¹⁶² Incidentally, this does not mean that school officials always report – there is discretion. However, in cases obvious to school officials, the ultimate intervention is that of the state, once the school has established that “educational neglect” is a contributing factor to excessive or chronic absences.

¹⁶¹ “Student Absences and Excuses.” File-JED-Critical. Taken from district Board of Education “policies and regulations” for Students.

¹⁶² Conversation with Mr. Admin regarding unrelated incident reported in Chapter 4. October 2010.

The qualification of “educational neglect” was unknown to me – and I never considered any child’s tardiness a representation to a larger organization that any parent or mother was “careless” about their child’s education. The district does not supply a specific definition of “educational neglect,” but provides the following caution:

Any school official or employee acting in his or her official capacity who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, or who observes the child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, will immediately make a report to the school principal or designee, *including any report of excessive absences that may indicate educational neglect* (my emphasis).¹⁶³

Ultimately, these guidelines are in place to provide some safety for children – some protection of their education from parents or other adults that would otherwise restrict them from receiving what is legally required of children between the ages of seven and seventeen in this Midwestern state. In the case of Susan’s family, however, the protection that the school district and state would impose as a result of her job, which was the main and only source of support for her

¹⁶³ File JHG – Critical, “Reporting and Investigating Child Abuse/Neglect.” Taken from Policies and Regulations of the District School Board.

children, disregarded her responsibilities to her child *outside*, but not isolated from, his education. Griffith and Smith assert that: “The basic schedules of individual family members that are coordinated in the home are inflexible – the school is compulsory; employment is a necessity.”¹⁶⁴ John’s education is extremely important to Susan – at the same time that Susan talks about her awareness that “parent” is not a “natural” position of nurturing, caring or being otherwise engaged, she was not a negligent parent in terms of John’s education. At least, Susan and *I* didn’t think so. As in so many other cases, however, the discourse surrounding the responsibilities of a parent to the education of a child are not considered for the individual’s experiences. Indeed, “discourse,” as a socially organized generator of information in many forms, has “its own structure and relations which impose themselves on subjects as the medium of their thought.”¹⁶⁵ So that, in Susan’s everyday – and the everyday of John, they were simply running late a lot, but to the discourse of schooling – and even

¹⁶⁴ Griffith and Smith, pg. 49.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Social Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg. 105.

further, the discourse of child abuse and neglect, Susan is a potential suspect.

This particular Midwestern state's Department of Social Services, the larger organization of the Department of Family Services (DFS) and the Children's Division (CD), are the responsible organizations for the welfare of children and families. As part of their policy, "educational neglect" has its own definitions, within which guides are provided to clarify the distinctions between "truancy" and the neglect potential in excessive absences. "Truancy" is formulated as an action by the student or the child. While there might still be some question as to "what's going on at home," (a causal explanation of a disregard for a free education), "excessive absence" is, according to the discourse of the school the district and the state, an indicator of a power difference, enacted upon children by their parents or guardian.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Child Welfare Manual – Section 32: Educational Neglect. (2009, August 28). Taken from http://www.dss.mws.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/section7/ch1_33/sec7ch32.htm.

The state provides an online resource for referencing the definitions of “educational neglect” as understood by participating state organizations, in addition to the responsibilities and potentially justified actions of the state to protect the child. The definition supplied by the state is an important component of this analysis:

Educational neglect is the failure by the person responsible for the care, custody, and control of the child to provide an appropriate education and to promote school attendance as required by [State] Law. Section 167.031 RSSt., requires all children ages 7 up to age 17 to attend school, except that any child who has successfully completed 16 credits toward high school graduation is not required to attend, therefore does not meet the criteria for educational neglect. Children ages 5 and 6 are required to attend school, when they have been enrolled in a public school by their parent or guardian.¹⁶⁷

I feel as if I must continue to reiterate that this questioning and critique does not concern the existence of these policies as important for the protection of people that need protecting. There are certainly children that do not have the privileges that my children have – or the privileges of other children, to be born or in the care of parents or people that ultimately care for them. These organizations have good

¹⁶⁷ Child Welfare Manual – Section 32: Educational Neglect..

intentions – but those intentions do not always translate to actions that make sense in the actual world.

Foucault writes:

...in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to *ward off its powers and dangers*, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (my emphasis).¹⁶⁸

The emphasis here lies on the “powers and dangers” of the discourse of “educational neglect,” meaning that the state controls the definition and the ways in which this term is used and the consequences of which are executed. Parents, in other words, do *not* control the meaning, and truly have little recourse to reassign the stipulations of state intervention.

Reading further in this policy definition, and keeping in mind that this specific page is dedicated to the formation of indicators, characteristics and warning signs for people in positions to report

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, M. (1990). “The Order of Discourse.” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. P. Bizzell and B. Herzberg. (eds.). Boston: Bedford Books. Pg. 1155.

neglect to identify and use in their conclusions. It is not specifying *any other form of abuse or neglect*. As indicated by the Department of Social Services:

The indicators of child abuse/neglect vary. No child or caretaker will exhibit all of the physical or behavioral indicators listed, and some of the indicators are contradictory. The behavior of an abused or neglected child and other family members may be sporadic and unpredictable. Indicators should be used only as a general guide. The presence of multiple indicators or the pervasiveness of any one behavior indicator warrants close scrutiny by the worker.¹⁶⁹

Concurrently, the investigating agent has some discretion in the actual world, as demonstrated in the actions of school administrators,¹⁷⁰ and a variety of other examples of mandated school reporters historically, who receive reports of abuse/neglect from children and other parents, but not reporting, based on unknown circumstances.¹⁷¹ The state emphasizes here that the guidelines and

¹⁶⁹ Child Welfare Manual – Section 32: Educational Neglect.

¹⁷⁰ The actions of school administrators in positions as mandated reporters will be discussed further in Chapter 4

¹⁷¹ In other words, what qualifies a report as reportable? Does the child telling you that their parent hits them – and their parents claim to corporeal punishment as justification for battery – constitute a case for reporting?

qualifiable characteristics outlined are not all or the only thing happening – encouraging some investigation before a claim to “educational neglect” is made. The policy continues with examples of

“Characteristics/Indicators of Educational Neglect:”

- A child being held responsible for the care of other children during the school day while the parent works.
- A parent who is unable to get the child fed and dressed in time to attend school.
- Failure of parent to obtain and/or cooperate with special or remedial instruction for the child when recommended and provided by the school and the child is not succeeding in current class placement.¹⁷²

It should be stated that, in the reading of this policy as a whole, and in addition to the rules and regulations of the school district, and individual schools, that the parents are the focus of question concerning the conduct – i.e. educational disinterest – of their children. The characteristics of “Educational Neglect,” are all related to the power of the parent/guardian to restrict, whether intentionally or

Does the consistent absence or lateness preceding a risky behavior warrant intervention and reporting?

¹⁷² Child Welfare Manual – Section 32: Educational Neglect. (2009, August 28). Taken from http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/section7/ch1_33/sec7ch32.htm.

inadvertently, their child from attending public school. The larger latent implications are coded in the discourse as socio-economically based – not necessarily parenting practice, but circumstances, in actuality, beyond control, for which parents are held accountable. In other words, forcing a child to stay home and take care of other children does not necessarily imply neglect. Depending on the circumstances, lack of resources provided by an employer, including wages appropriate for paying for external childcare; child care available during working hours away from the home; and potentially even making too much for social services (child care assistance), but too little to afford day care services, the circumstances dictate the conditions.¹⁷³

Similarly, “a parent who is unable to get the child fed and dressed in time to attend school,” might be a policy ambiguity that can be used to embrace the disciplining of the child in the event of a late arrival or tardiness. What are the assumptions made about a parent

¹⁷³ See also Griffith and Smith’s work with mothers for more examples of how circumstances beyond the control of families renders them suspect to the practices of the discourses of public school and parenting, i.e. pg. 53 for mothers using and needing older children to help coordinate the responsibilities of parenting for school children.

that cannot get up to get their child to school? In this discourse, as it is connected, a negligent parent *does not* get up and *does not* feed and *does not* get their child to school on time.¹⁷⁴ Not a question, then, truly of “unable” as much as “unwilling” is implied in the correlation with “neglect.” Abuse and neglect, as part of an understanding of the language here, do not necessarily account for the occasional accidental oversleeping, hitting too hard in a disciplinary moment, or other questionable demonstrations of everyday parenting mishaps, as much as they are *intentional*. The policy begs for the inclusion of intention by the parents to consensually keep their children from a public education – one in which holds as its mission a successful assimilation into mainstream culture.¹⁷⁵ This could not be more clear than in the last bullet point for this section, which indicates that if a parent willingly refuses to allow their children to be serviced by supplemental instruction in order for their child to be a successful student, there is precedent for state intervention.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ See Griffith and Smith’s previously mentioned interview with Carol Irwin.

¹⁷⁵ See district mission for attendance policies in this chapter, page 12.

¹⁷⁶ Child Welfare Manual, Ibid.

I would never argue that there are, absolutely, no circumstances that would warrant a question about neglect in terms of strong suggestions made by professional teachers/educators to ensure an appropriate fit. I only mean here that there are certainly instances in which developmentally, for a child to succeed at all, special care is needed. No doubt. To reaffirm: there is not a problem with the question of concern. It is, however, a question about the ways in which the school asserts and “reasserts itself” outside itself in the name of normalizing and “productive employees.” Michael G. Gunzenhauser (2006) writes: “The homogenous is the normal, and the reindividualized subject is the compendium of deviations from the normal,” what he equates with the “obedient subject.”¹⁷⁷ The exclusion from these programs – or the invisibility of the student (subject) to the discourse of remediation is a privilege, and evidence also of the functions and success of normalizing. The parent’s ability and obligation to succumb to the demands of the school for the sake of normalizing, if this is actually happening, does not constitute a case of

¹⁷⁷ Guzenhauser, M.G. (2006). “Normalizing the Educated Subject: A Foucaultian Analysis of High-Stakes Accountability.” *Educational Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3. Pg. 249.

“educational neglect.” Quite the contrary. This is not to say, again that these programs, speech therapy, special counseling or otherwise do not have the best intentions, but if we consider again, what Dorothy Smith claims of the assumptions of the objectivity of texts,¹⁷⁸ it is not the intentions that matter in reality, only in the abstract.

My daughter, for example, participated in speech therapy provided by the school for years. This was something that she enjoyed, and when her father and I would ask her if *she* wanted to continue therapy, she would agree that she wanted it and needed it. When she entered middle school, she decided, along with assessments from her therapist and our input, that she was ready to stop her participation in the program. She has never needed any other service provided, but the scheduling of this therapy during the school day did not complicate the scheduling of her father’s day or my day otherwise. She could still ride the bus to and from school, or be picked up or dropped off “on time.” It was not a question of re-planning time around the suggestions of the public school for her speech

¹⁷⁸ Smith (1990), pg. 122.

development.¹⁷⁹ In other words, this assessment and suggestion were not troubling.

Indicators Out of Control/Characteristics of Troubled Student

John and Susan also have experiences with suggestions from the school, concerning John's behavior and "outside" help when his teacher expressed frustration at exhausting all possible methods of "controlling" him. John was a precocious child. His pre-school socialization included long hours with his mother's friend/day-care provider and other children not related to him, in the friend's home. The ways in which he experienced authority in the social world were, therefore, fundamentally different from children whose pre-school

¹⁷⁹ In most cases, my children's father and I have grown to be relatively cohesive co-parents in separate homes. My ex-husband does not trust public institutions to "do their jobs," or the people employed to operate the schools (i.e. teachers). I do not share his distrust in the same ways, however, but our shared criticisms benefit my children, in that both him and I usually resort to asking our children if they want to participate. Their consent is important to both of us for different reasons, but nonetheless, this has always been a parental agreement: they have a stake in the decisions their parents make. We ask them.

experiences were institutionally located. John was plagued with disciplinary measures when he entered a new school in his first-grade year. His teacher did not care for him – and he was disruptive, challenging and “disobedient.” He did not focus. He could not finish the assignments in class. He did not listen. He bothered other children. It was not reasonable, Susan agreed, to expect that the teacher have to step away from her instruction of other children to address “behavioral issues” with John.

Susan understood her frustration, and could not possibly imagine having to focus on John and a room full of same-age children. He was a difficult child with a good heart and a lot of questions, but according to a practicing academic child developmentalist, his social development was healthy, and “normal,” for any seven-year old child.¹⁸⁰ A difficult child, in other words, someone who disrupts has

¹⁸⁰ Susan’s sister got her Ph.D. in human and family studies at a large university and has since received several accreditations that qualify her to help develop curriculum for public schools, teach in public schools, publish research in relevant, interdisciplinary discourses. This is relevant in that her qualifications, even with her biases, cannot be discounted as simply “a aunt’s love,” but must be considered assessments equal to those of school

not learned when to be quiet, when to sit still and when to listen. What are the implications to the training here? His caretaker had routines with meals alone; the only time children had to sit down at her house was for eating. “Non-traditional” preschool childcare is not John’s experience alone.¹⁸¹ At the same time, many children also have a structured week that replicates the school day as they approach kindergarten, and sometimes long before. These socializing locations are different. John watched television and played with other children, sometimes older, sometimes not. Kindergarten was and is an intermediate step for many children.¹⁸² It was a *beginning* step for John in many ways, and it was obvious, to his teacher, in his behavior.

This is a surface level contextual description, a brief history of his present. In one of those many “presents,” his first grade teacher strongly urged that, in order for John to be successful in his education,

administrators. She is an “expert,” for all intents and purposes in her field. Susan conferred with her sister about this matter with John.

¹⁸¹ This can be explained as any childcare in which pre-school aged children (3-5) are cared for, but not necessarily instructed with institution-like curriculum. Extended-family childcare is another example. This is not to delineate in a pejorative way, but merely to highlight the possibilities for other lived experiences of children.

¹⁸² See Chapter 1 for context.

he needed to learn to control himself. Again, the language communicating that the normalizing he should have already displayed evidence of was *not* happening. It wasn't "taking," so to speak.

To heed the guidance of the school in this regard required that Susan make arrangements to meet with a specialist during business hours (8 a.m. -5 p.m.), and find an appointment that was open in the schedule. John attended school in the center of the city, where there were more people and more traffic. Susan was working several miles south of their home and his school; Susan had to coordinate this appointment: she was further away from his school than the doctor's office was where they would be meeting the doctor. This required that she take off from her job, drive into the city, retrieve John from school early, drive back out to the doctor's office, and wait. It took some finagling. This appointment strongly recommended by the school and the teacher presented an immediacy to the situation that could qualify as a sort of emergency. Susan did not have any personal time at work left to take for a leave of absence, meaning that by leaving early for this appointment, she would not receive pay for the time she was not working. She did have health insurance coverage through her employer, but talks about an "inability to imagine" that John was the first child that had come to this doctor's office on referral from a teacher or other school administrator for behavior problems, and what

of those who are not covered by medical insurance?¹⁸³ Out-of-pocket medical expenses might not be possible for many families, for a variety of reasons. A result of this poverty becomes an inability to "treat," to comply with school recommendations.

The teacher advised, (at this point, Susan says, the teacher knew that she was recently divorced) that Susan take John to see a medical specialist.¹⁸⁴ The specialist she located was a child's psychiatrist, employed as not only a doctor of medical expertise, but with academic medical discourse as well, by the giant university in the city. In addition, he was affiliated with a variety of discourses and sponsoring disciplines. He *had* to be to talk with children, and make recommendations about their mental and physical health.

¹⁸³ Foucault (1990) talks about the establishments of systems of power into cross-running comrades in the construction of the "double-model," or the normal/abnormal-type diagnosis. Smith (1990) also discusses the intertextuality of discourses as an element that weaves together the web that more effectively catches us all tumbling through social space...or pushed.

¹⁸⁴ Divorce is widely circulated in too many discourses and disciplines to count, to contribute to a variety of externalized responses, becoming pathologies in some cases. In other words, "divorce" leads to "single-parents," and the collapse of the family is a determining factor in student success.

Susan cannot recall if she scheduled one or two visits with the doctor before he recommended, very assertively, that she begin John on a Ritalin regime. In order to understand the intricacies of meaning to the prescription of this drug, there is an inclusion of a social context required, whose pieces match with the grooves and protrusions of other contextual bones within the same frameworks.¹⁸⁵ In other words, the “disruptive,” concerns with John’s inability to “sit still,” or “listen to instruction,” or “raise his hand,” were constituted in a discourse that communicated something from the teacher, to Susan – the parent, which she then related to the doctor, when he finally asked her to tell him, “what was going on?” and “why” she happened to be there, meeting with him. Ritalin’s position as a “behavior modifying drug,” as understood by Susan from her personal experience, her occupation as a registered nurse, news stories and the talk of people in her different social worlds, helped to construct an understanding of what it means for a child to *need* that – and, to some extent, what it meant if she refused.

¹⁸⁵ See Smith, D.E. (1990). *Texts, Facts, and Femininity*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

She refused.

Susan did not believe in medicating her child. She and her ex-husband had discussed this parental position before John was born, so that the refusal to medicate seven years later was not an “unwillingness” to comply with the suggestions of the teacher and the school. Susan says, “I also did not believe that forcing children to take medication was ethical – I had difficulty forcing cough syrup on them, Ritalin was out of the question.”¹⁸⁶ A teacher not knowing this about Susan’s parenting, however, might read this refusal as resistance, negligence on her part to “cooperate with special or remedial instruction for the child when recommended.” She did not “voluntarily” medicate her child, even with the warnings of problems to come.

Parental Fall-Out/Corrupted Familial Characteristics

The Child Welfare Manual continues to supply the referent to a list of other characteristics that could potentially contribute to the

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Susan, 2009.

discovery of “educational neglect.” It is, once again, shocking to me to see the obvious in print, virtual or otherwise.

Parental/Familial Characteristics:¹⁸⁷

- **Highly stressful family situations**

John added, "Mom is really grouchy in the morning - but I don't want to miss out on class time, or time with my friends. I don't want to be late, so I have to be pushy. I don't like it."¹⁸⁸

- **Single parent family**

“The Standard North American Family as ideological code (SNAF) is often preserved in the identification of deviant instances, such as ‘female-headed families.’ SNAF-defined non-intact families appear to be female-headed families only.”¹⁸⁹

- **Recent marital problems**

“[SNAF] is a conception of The Family as a legally married couple sharing a household. The adult male is in paid employment; his earnings provide the economic basis of the family-household. The adult female may also earn an income, but her primary responsibility is to the care of husband, household, and children.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Please note that the classifications as presented in the text from the Department of Social Services in **bold** print. The conversations I want to have are in the *italics*.

¹⁸⁸ See Biguous, A.M. (2009) report at the start of this chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, D.E. (2004) *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Social Investigation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pg. 160.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. pg.159. While I could certainly discuss the problems with marriage at length, the inclusion of this definition here is to do isolate the social understanding of what “family” is or exists as (“Beaver Cleaver”) and juxtapose it with “Recent marital problems” as a statement to what is

- **Insufficient financial and other resources for child care**

“The ‘intact’ family means that the child’s mother is available to do the work for the school that is done invisibly in the home.”¹⁹¹

As discussed, if we can approach a variety of these texts from the understanding that, as Smith asserts, “defective families produce defective children,” then we can also identify that these “defective” families have to have some point that they are “defecting” from.¹⁹² Smith refers to this as the Standard North American Family in overlapping proximity with ideological code.¹⁹³

Referring back to the beginning of this discussion, the pretext to the list of characteristics to identify “educational neglect” establishes that “No child or caretaker will exhibit all of the physical or behavioral indicators listed, and some of the indicators are contradictory.” Which

assumed in the silence of that “characteristic.” Families that get their kids to school on time and to school everyday do not, theoretically, have marital problems.

¹⁹¹ Smith (2004), pg.163.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 157-171. Pg. 157: “Ideologies, concepts and theories generate texts and constitute their internal organization; they regulate intertextuality and interpret texts at the sites of reading.”

indicators could be considered to be contradictory when they all center on the pathology of the dysfunctional family? In the larger SNAF discourse, as Smith also relates, “[it] enables interpretation in practical settings to translate ‘family’ into the mother.”¹⁹⁴ A practical setting could be anywhere, loosely defined – as practical *is not* an abstraction. In other words, the implications of “parent” to a discourse rooted in the understanding of The Family as the model from which others deviate, and the association with the definition provided above, shows the mother without the husband as a fractured version of what was once ‘intact.’¹⁹⁵ It is, after all, her responsibility to care for the husband, the household and the children – so that if she cannot somehow do all of this, if she fails in her responsibilities to all of those jobs...then what? This is, of course, not a “practical setting,” a hypothetical family that many would agree is not their experience.

It is not about the practical interpretations, however. The text here, the Child Welfare Manual, is not attempting to charge itself with operationalizing the categories that it frames. In other words, it

¹⁹⁴ Smith (2004), pg.163.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

guarantees its own perceived objectivity to defining “single-parent families” as a “familial characteristic” of “educational neglect,” while disclaiming any real responsibility to the applications of those identifiers in a “practical setting,” where “parent” *really is* “mother.”¹⁹⁶

Susan says she knew about the tardy rule, and was utterly shocked when she was asked to meet with the principal of the Middle Town Middle School, on a hot weekday afternoon. The principal told Susan that their district policy was to inform the state about excessive absences, more than seven every semester. She stated that she knew that kids stay out of trouble when they’re in school, and that their goal was to help John be a successful student. Susan tells me that she wanted to ask the principal if she talked with any other parents like that?¹⁹⁷ Susan *did* have to make an appointment with the principal, and plan her day-off around that meeting. Susan earned a wage for her work and *was* employed outside of the home. Susan had also made it a point to inform every teacher or administrator when she met with them that she was divorced from John’s father. John’s

¹⁹⁶ Smith, D.E. (2004).

¹⁹⁷ Personal conversation with Susan Parent.

explosive disciplinary record, with its secrets and predictions, followed him to the sixth grade, and the principal would have had full access. Susan asks, “So –would she have informed me about the excessive absence policy if I’d been sitting with a husband? Or if I had met with her during the day, in my sweats and over-sized sweatshirt, toting a toddler and mothering every step of the way?”¹⁹⁸ If Susan had been a recognized, coupled member of the PTA, would she have known that, according to the Child Welfare Manual, that

State Statute does not require the division or law enforcement to notify the parent of the child prior to interviewing a child when the parent(s) are the alleged perpetrator(s), however pursuant to section 210.145.5 RSSt., when a parent is not the alleged perpetrator, the division is required to contact the parent prior to interviewing the child.

And further that the visible signs of “educational neglect” are

...those observations made by the worker during the course of the investigation. Visible signs include, but are not limited to: the size, shape, and location of an injury, *behavioral indicators of family members*, and physical condition of the family home (my emphasis).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Susan, 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Child Welfare Manual.

That information given to Susan, in an unsolicited fashion, as if it were simply something that every parent was told by the administration, is constituted in the organization of the discourse as an active text, in that it constantly is reaffirmed and reconstituted in its spoken form, its written form, its physical form and its abstracted form. Other parents that I spoke with in my interviews were asked if they had regular interactions with principals for disciplinary reasons, and while a few of the parents related that they had, when their children were younger, the parents of the older children – those that also attended Middle Town did not recall having a meeting with the principal about attendance policies.²⁰⁰ The school principal did not have an individual meeting with Susan's friend whose child attended Middle Town with John. Susan's friend is married, but her son is from a previous relationship. She is a graduate student, working from funding, possibly grants or student loans. She reports that she had to talk with the principal about excessive absences requiring a doctor's excuse, but their conversation did not happen as a result of a

²⁰⁰ Interviews with parents, January 2009.

scheduled meeting, during the day.²⁰¹ Why did Susan have the opportunity to meet individually with this administrator, and then receive information about state intervention as a result of excessive absence? John's "Chronic Tardiness," followed him from his elementary school to Middle Town, and the meeting with the principal could be seen, in part, as a response to what is assumed is coming for John.

It is interesting to investigate further when a question arises about the "visible signs" of "educational neglect." This does not make sense to the tone of the document or perhaps even the understanding that the stipulations generated by the text in this particular case do not include any other mention of physical violence to prevent children from going to school. This is defined elsewhere in the Manual as "physical abuse," with its own list of distinctions and categorizations. The "Visible Signs" section is the same definition in every chapter of the manual referring to some sort of physical violence, sexual violence or neglect, as are the stipulations that provide state's rights to interview a child without the parents present, specifically "if the parent

²⁰¹ Interview with parents, January 2009.

is the alleged perpetrator.”²⁰² If nothing else, it seems as if the implication that there would be “visible signs” of “educational neglect,” as there would be in the state’s contextualizations of other situations of abuse, situates “educational abuse” in the discourse of the state agency, and therefore, the district Board of Education, the administrators in each individual school and the teachers in each classroom, as congruent with abuse or neglect that leaves “visible” marks. And as each teacher and administrator working in the building is a mandated state reporter, trained with these “behavioral characteristics,” what is the response or interpretation of “educational neglect” look like in the actual practice of the administrative check-in every morning? In other words, seeing my children almost twice a week, twice a month made them recognizable to the people working in the elementary school office, if you remember. The people in the

²⁰² Child Welfare Manual. “Physical Abuse.” Section 7, Chapter 28; “Sexual Maltreatment.” Chapter 29; “Neglect.” Chapter 30. Again, this makes sense, and should be taken very seriously. Children that suffer physical abuse, neglect, sexual violence, verbal abuse, emotional abuse/intellectual abuse, that could be considered “educational neglect” should not have to deal with their parents, especially if they’ve summoned the courage to tell someone. This is not the question. The question lies with the implementation of interpretations of these guidelines, and the distance these policies fundamentally take from culpability to the definitions that they perpetuate.

office knew my name. Many of the people working in the office are mothers who talk about their husbands, and some are required by the state to investigate, report and protect the children in their school and really, everywhere.

With further investigation, the Department of Social Services provides some general behavioral indications of “Parent Behavior/Ambivalence:”²⁰³

Behavioral Indicators – Before Placement/After Return:

- Fails to provide basic needs.
- Non-compliant with medical health, sanitary requirements.
- Minimally meets requirements while child is in placement; after child returns, parents lack investment in child's care.
- Creates frequent situations to be separated from children, i.e., respite, hospitalization, drops off children at sitter or child care and does not return as agreed, abandonment.
- Long, frequent or inappropriate use of respite.

²⁰³ As quoted in Child Welfare Manual, Ambivalence is defined as: Workers often have questions about the willingness of parents to assume their role as appropriate caretakers. The following list, adopted from PRAG List, provides some factors to consider and approaches to working with the ambivalent parent. It is important to identify these concerns early in the treatment planning.” Section 7, Chapter 19.

- Lack of nurturing between parent and child(ren).
- Voluntarily places child in foster care, once or several times.²⁰⁴

The portrait of this parent, the theoretical ambivalent parent, who, according to the discourse sounds like an undesirable human being – is painted in a way that provides very little context for the rest of the story. If we take into account that the indicators for “educational neglect” in relation to “parent/familial characteristics” in association, these “parental behaviors,” could be connected in the discourse to the single-parent family, the hazardous evil twin of SNAF ideals. At the same time, in the other chapters of the Manual dedicated to “negligent” treatment (“Medical Neglect,” “Educational Neglect,” “Neglect”), “single-parent families” were all listed with the “Parent/Familial Characteristics” of neglect, while the sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional “maltreatment,” did not include “single-

²⁰⁴ Child Welfare Manual. “Parental Behavior/Ambivalent.” Section 7, Chapter 19. The State Department of Social Services. It should also be understood that each of these sections has their own lists of “Parental Behavioral Indicators” sections that are applicable in the context of the abuse, but the above listed is the general definition provided by “Parental Behavior/Ambivalent,” a seemingly generalizable category of parental behavior.

parent families” as structural perpetrators to aggressive violence. They did include long lists of behavioral indicators associated with parents, but nowhere in these particular sections, did the state imply that parent, which we can collude with the overwhelming responsibility of “family” on women, to complete a picture that is the deficient, neglectful and potentially abuse single-mother.²⁰⁵

“Mothering discourse in North America...was and is actively fed by research and thinking produced by psychologists and specialists in child development and is popularly disseminated in women’s magazines, television programs, and other popular media.”²⁰⁶ A dissemination that is not only seen and understood at a variety of levels by women and mothers, but by children as well – so that what a mother is supposed to “be” and “do,” guides the expectations of children amongst one another, as to the duties of mothering.²⁰⁷ If we consider for a moment the responsibilities of mothers to the husband,

²⁰⁵ See Child Welfare Manual, specific chapters, for more information. Also, see Smith, D.E. (2004).

²⁰⁶ Smith, (2004). Pg. 162.

²⁰⁷ Smith (2004), 163.

the household and the children, then we can consider that any failure to keep the family together falls on the overburdened shoulders of the woman. If The Family falls apart which, according to the SNAF discourse, could look like “behaviors” that might “create frequent situations to be separated from children,” like getting a job, or more than one to provide for children; going back to school for a better chance at more support for children, and benefits from an employer; or filing for divorce or separation from a husband, are a result of neglect on her part.²⁰⁸

A “long, frequent or inappropriate use of respite,” is also a red flag to a parent that does not care about their children – and might be prone to any of the abuses indicated in the larger discourse of child protection. This is not to say that fathers, husbands or men in the house are free from accountability to the Parent Behavior/Ambivalence characteristics. Certainly there are men that are suspect to the state and the schools for their treatment and participation within or without the school in regard to their children, but herein lies the likelihood:

²⁰⁸ Child Welfare Manual. “Parent Behavior/Ambivalent.” Section 7, Chapter 19.

the assumption of the SNAF discourse as proliferated via ideological code, to infiltrate a variety of other theoretical and applied conversations – not just education, nearly insists that the only person that would have time for respite, time for a break, is the mother - homebound, especially if a common denominator in the text of neglect is the “single-parent (mother) family.” And further, the assertion that there is an “inappropriate use of” any kind of break from parenting has larger implications in the conversation about the expectations of mothers.

The aspect of the SNAF-discourse discussed here not only sticks to Susan, as a single-mother in a school system, but also to John. He is the defective product of a defective household, after all. He did not attend an accredited preschool, and was socialized by non-traditional neighborhood daycare networks before he entered public school. A family within the SNAF-discourse would not need a neighbor to take care of the children, because the mother would be there.²⁰⁹ If Susan had stayed home with her son, instead of taking him to her friend’s

²⁰⁹ Smith (2004), pg. 167.

home daycare, there is an assumption that the work she would do would compliment that of the desire of the public school.²¹⁰

The Behavior Management Form couples the “Chronic Tardy” with an assortment of other explicitly dangerous possibilities for the every-school-day. The interpretations of the form depend on the reader, and the context of the interpretation, not to mention where the form is coming from.²¹¹As I stood in Susan’s kitchen and glanced over the form, John stood next to me and tried to explain that he wasn’t “really in trouble,” it was just In-School-Suspension for a day-and-a-half. When I asked him about the grouping – and the fact that his offense was in direct proximity with a weapons offense, he shrugged. He didn’t know why they were together, but he knew he was in trouble and that he would have to serve suspension for the next few days. He

²¹⁰ Smith (2004). Pg. 163. What does it mean to be “available to do the work for the school that is done invisibly in the home,” and also be subject to scrutiny for “long, frequent or inappropriate use[s] of respite?” Does that mean that mothers don’t get breaks? Mothers, evidently, are expected to seamlessly work for the school, take care of the husband, the home, and never really need for anything themselves.

²¹¹ Smith, D.E. (1990). Texts, Facts and Femininity.

would report to his mother, after his detention, with a grin on his face, that he and his detention-mates had to all travel to the bathroom together, and that they all had to perform duties that his teacher referred to as “community service” around the school building.²¹² He did not seem as upset as Susan and I had been at his incarceration, and when I remarked that it sounded like “prison,” he giggled and said, “yeah, I think it was like prison.”

Susan tells me that she did not look at the form until she had already signed it. It was not until much later that I thought about the confession, especially in relation to the signing of a document that efficiently provides a surface explanation of punishment for a “disciplinary problem.”²¹³ Susan agreed with the scrawling of her name to several things: She agreed that my John had perpetrated a crime. He was tardy, which violated the middle school’s policies concerning “Offenses with Possible Consequences.”²¹⁴ It was not simply that he

²¹² Conversation with John regarding his in-school-suspension experience, May 4, 2009.

²¹³ Foucault, M. (1977).

²¹⁴ Student Handbook for Secondary Schools, Pg.21.

was tardy *once*, however, as much as the emphasis bounced off of the “chronic.” The district Board’s declaration of warranted action by school officials, in the event that “excessive absences” were the result of “educational neglect,” is bound to the textual discourse of the state, especially, as demonstrated in “a parent that is unable to get a child fed and dressed in time to attend school.”²¹⁵ Again, this is not a provision of warning signs for “tardy” children and their parents, as much as the groundwork for alarm regarding “what comes next” (what can be prevented?). John’s serving of In-School-Suspension for tardies can be seen as a mechanism in which the school is not interested in correcting the behavior, as Foucault suggests, we must avoid relying on popular conceptions of any system of control as this and their project of correction and prevention of further offense.²¹⁶ I do not know their interest – as I cannot claim to know intention, but the result of John’s punishment and the threat of further suspension altered the interactions between John and Susan, in the morning before school every day. Susan, was, in other words, *also* disciplined.

²¹⁵ Child Welfare Manual, “Educational Neglect.” Section 7, Chapter 32.

²¹⁶ Foucault (1977).

After all, by all counts in the textual discourse of schooling and mothering, Susan *is* a parent that neglects the education of her child. She *is* a single-mother, and has taken a number of “inappropriate respites” from John, she claims. John was frequently late, and even with these friendly reminders that changed to warnings, Susan’s “parent behavior” did not change. The state indicates that with an impending investigation of “educational neglect,” the parents must be contacted concerning the “excessive absences.” The Behavior Management Form was *Susan’s* warning, and the punishment of John for her continued violation of the school and district’s policies was an extension – an extra kick.²¹⁷

Susan’s historical refusal to adhere to the suggestions and directions of the public school in regard to John is evident in his record. He has experiences with school discipline that stretch back to his days as a five-year old in his kindergarten classroom, and include a near forced-dosing of Ritalin as a behavior modifier, to control the prognosis of impending anti-social violence. His teachers’ approaches

²¹⁷ I understand that the school was also punishing John, but the punishment does not exist in that case for the individual alone.

have all been different – there have been more teachers that appreciated John, Susan says, than found problems with him. His grades were never troubled; his interest in school fluctuated, but did not ever seem to be extinguished. It was John’s “behavior” – his defiance, his inability to sit still, be quiet, and listen to the teacher that continued to trouble him and his textually mediated “academic success.” Could it truly have unfolded as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes for Susan? Was her life, her job, her indigence to the traditional roles and expectations of mothering a “major contributing factor to my child’s failure at school?”²¹⁸

There is case here against Susan, and any mother, and the educational neglect of John, and any child. It is not a question of individual teacher assessment. Indeed, most of John’s teachers have their assumptions, I’m sure, but do not necessarily identify Susan as a threat to the education of her son. The school administrators, however, who have different contact with children and their parents, might have a different set of assumptions from which they govern and

²¹⁸ Hill Collins, Patricia. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. Pg.75.

operate. Abstractly, to the policy, Susan's parenting is abusive. John is a victim of abuse; the prevention of his own assault residing in his ability to plead for his mother to get him to school on time. It is in the practice of the discipline, whether through the ISS assignment, the form home, the design of the form, the implications of the categories or the subsequent discovery of a discourse that exists to protect children from the possibilities of a misuse of power over them. However, John is fixable, not yet bringing drugs to school to sell and use in the bathroom. The threat in this case is Susan – to the school and her child. The motherly golem, without a husband, is a menace to “safety,” “productivity,” “accountability” and opportunity for an education, which she prevents²¹⁹ with the behavioral characteristics determined, in “practical settings,”²²⁰ to destroy the working soul of the normalized child.²²¹

²¹⁹ Hill Collins, 74-75. Patricia Hill Collins is always relevant to the discussion of the treatment of mothers in regard to their sons.

²²⁰ Smith (2004).

²²¹ Foucault (1977).

In the following prologue, I would like to further explore discourse, policy, and the controlled abstraction of parenting and rules. John's story created a glimpse into what can be considered an institutional ethnography. Its reading required a related understanding as it unfolded, into relationships between the development of a discourse of violence, neglect and abuse – and the cracks in the wall through which that discourse slips, in John and Susan's experiences with In-School Suspension. As part of this discussion, an understanding of the application of SNAF ideologies²²² into the story about John and Susan is essential. The Standard North American Family as part of the assumption in the policy and practice of the public school is a threat for parents in Susan's case and a threat to children in the case of John with striking consequences.

²²² "The Standard North American Family is an ideological code in this sense. It is the conception of The Family as a legally married couple sharing a household. The adult male is in paid employment; his earnings provide the economic basis of the family-household. The adult female may also earn an income, but her primary responsibility is to the care of the husband, household, and children. The adult male and female may be parents (in whatever legal sense) of children also resident in the household." -159. Smith, D.E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

These stories require a locating in the historical contexts of public school as a treacherous place for the theoretical child, in addition to the increasing presence and allocation of state-sanctioned violence in an armed police force, and the overall conflation of “safety,” and “security” as part of school policy and practice. Therefore, the discussion that takes place within this chapter focused on locating John Student, his mother Susan, sometimes willing, sometimes not, in the larger, active interchange between state power and justifications in the discourse for preventative, disciplinary measures. In other words, how do the players in this drama-unfurling fall into the catchall of unsafe bodies, unsafe practice and the correction of a “safe” discourse?

Epilogue: Prescriptions for Bodies, and the Threats of the Insubordinate

“There is a recognition that power is involved in the very making of who we are and in constraining the ways in which we might refer to ourselves and ultimately represent ourselves.”

-Judith Butler, 2004.²²³

The following excerpt is from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. However, I have taken his classic description of "the soldier" in the opening of the chapter on "Docile Bodies," and made some applicable modifications, quoted in full:

...the [student] has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and given him 'the air of a [student]'.²²⁴

²²³ Butler, J. (2004), "Bodies and Power Revisited." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. D. Taylor, K. Vintges (eds). Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 183-194. pg.189.

²²⁴ Foucault (1977), pg. 135.

Replacing “soldier” with “student” here does not seem to change much of the meaning, does it? Indeed, Foucault makes several references through this work and others to the interchangeable characteristics that define a body ready to be formulated by systems of control and power, like schools, like prisons – from clay. In many ways, the mark of a successful student has not changed since this description of a soldier was conceived in the late 1700s.

It is what this student is to become – to be made into – that is the question. A docile body is a body that is ready for this training. “A body is docile that might be subjected, used, transformed and improved.”²²⁵ In addition, “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.”²²⁶ This transformation of the body through subjugation into a state of order, fixes a soft layering on the bone that renders the skeleton malleable, the body docile. What is a productive body, when the student is in question? What *is* a “student” – and what is a “productive and subjected student?” How can a body be trained if a body is tardy?

²²⁵ Ibid. 136.

²²⁶ Foucault (1977), pg. 26.

While John and Susan's story continues here with a social locating, it is important to talk about the skin and bones of the disciplined child. The disciplined child. The docile body. Thirsty eyes from between the ribs. What traps them? What are they being protected from, these children whose futures of productivity are in the making? What are the "visible marks" on a docile body, the process by which the violence of assimilation can happen?²²⁷

I would like to explore the presence of police in public schools in the district of this particular Midwestern town, but also the larger employment of paid police or security guards that are armed and patrolling the halls of elementary schools, middle schools, junior high schools and high schools on a much larger scale.

I would like to root the theoretical discussion of John Student's situation not only in the literature pertaining to control and bodies, but also to the structures that underlie a different approach to the shaping of a consciousness. As I previously mentioned and defined, Dorothy Smith (2004) explains the far-reaching consequences of the

²²⁷ Alexander (2005), pg. 277.

development of a Standard North American Family beyond simply “defective families producing defective children.”²²⁸

For the purpose of this research project, I have endeavored to discuss and critique the practices of safety regarding children, alongside the policies of safety generated by the public school, primarily through their curricular tools, and especially their prevention programs. How do we connect “safety” issues to the ideology of the Standard North American Family (SNAF)? What foreseen problems are created as a result of what is happening at home? Troubles for John lie with his lack of interest in following the rules. Period. From a school policy position, this is potentially a problem for safety and conduct.

I speak with my mother often about my work, and we were having a conversation about children and resistance one day recently, and she related to me her thoughts, as a child developmentalist, on framing what children do that is labeled “resistance.” She shared with

²²⁸ Smith, D.E. (2004). Pg 163. I use this concept a lot – and cannot stress how it relates so closely with my own experiences through treatments in interaction – mostly subtle that certain care might be taken in situations where an “intact home” would potentially produce treatments of different results.

me that, she believes, children do not “resist,” as this implies some conscious understanding of “going against.” “They do not identify what they are doing as ‘resisting,’ because what they see as simply part of a ‘natural’ way of being *them* is not a resistance.”²²⁹ In other words, as much as public schools and the world of adults (which is “the world”) conflates the acts of children and the understanding of “resistance,” children simply *are*. The assignment of action in this way, my mother contends, is in part a justification for action against them, a detention in the ribcage. The building of the restrictions on the body and the consciousness of children or childhood do not necessary result in the desired effect of the system enforcing it, but instead, often create the idea it is trying to prevent.²³⁰ This is not to say that children do not resist, but what my mother is suggesting is that children might not always associate their “rebellion” with adult conceptions of “resistance,” but rather simply respond to actions and forces that are counter-intuitive – when their intuitions as people do not matter.

²²⁹ Personal conversation with Dr. Amy Freshwater.

²³⁰ Foucault (1977).

This begs for questions about the presence of violence in public schools, and the ways in which the policies and practices work on someone like John? While there seems to have always been violence of some kind in the public school environment – I remember fights on my elementary school playground as early as third grade, between boys – the escalation of violence, and the coverage of it in the media is different than it was in the early 1980s.²³¹ There is media everywhere – and even in 1999, when members of “the Trench Coat Mafia” sabotaged Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the response to the violence and the footage of surveillance tapes crashed fronts together to create a massive storm – the effects of which are felt some 12-years later in public schools and by children across the country. The events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent calls for world war and surges of excessive, exaggerated violence across the planet helped to further devastate the social structures of the

²³¹ Giroux, (2006).

domestic.²³² It is, in other words, a frightening place to be a young person.

Henry A. Giroux (2009) talks about the assault on the young, especially adolescents, but children overall as threats to order²³³ – so much so that Zero-Tolerance policies, while not always strictly enforced, underlie the relationships between school officials and the children they govern for eight to nine hours a day. Giroux also writes that in terms of politico-economic reproduction, “schools were viewed as a state apparatus that produced and legitimated the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state’s political power.”²³⁴ In 2010 and beyond, what are the state’s desires for “safety” in public schools? The birth of the Homeland Security Department after

²³² Giroux, H.A. (2009). *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

²³³ Giroux, H.A. (2002). “Body Politics and the Pedagogy of Display: Youth Under Siege.” *Body Movements: Pedagogy, Politics and Social Change*. S. Shapiro and S. Shapiro (eds). Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press. Pg 53. Giroux mentions “sexuality” as a seat of power in this particular context, but, and while this point could also be made in relation to Jane’s story (upcoming chapter), the connection I am trying to make here is that the threat of youth – sexualities, and otherwise – is associated with a collapse of morality, e.g. social order – and therefore, the control of it, the prevention of it is justified with force, violence, and state-sanctioned control.

²³⁴ Ibid.

September 11, 2001, the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* in an environment growing increasingly hostile toward “democratic education,” and the events prior with excessive media coverage of the Columbine school shootings, contributes to the problems experienced by children in public schools everywhere.²³⁵

It makes sense to talk about the ways in which children experience the presence of force and the heavy weight of accountability, proficiency and relatively unreasonable expectations on their “performances” within and without their classrooms.²³⁶ The Federal Government, in the last decade, has been intently focused on a refining of policies and laws that effectively further the crippling of the public school, and subsequently, the children in attendance. Initially, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1992), made the public school environment soft and welcoming to *No Child Left Behind* (2001-2), which began, what many educators and other critics believe was a spike in a pine box for what was left of public

²³⁵ Giroux (1990).

²³⁶ Apple (2001).

education.²³⁷ Essentially, the consequences are far reaching for a government mandate that limits so many of the fundamental components of what the ideal education could be in a “democracy,” that it is unprecedented in its design to destroy. Apple explains the critical intricacies that comprise this particular educational “reform,” and highlights that *No Child Left Behind* leaves plenty of children behind.²³⁸ “Key subjects” are defined as the epicenter of learning and teaching for public elementary and secondary institutions of education that receive federal money. Margaret Placier, Michael Walker and Bill Foster (2002) connect that: “When policymakers construct curriculum standards, they are deciding what all students in government-sponsored schools within their jurisdiction should learn,”²³⁹ and go on to discuss the ways in which power emerges from a seemingly objective place to create curricular guidelines – the very seams of the

²³⁷ So much work has been done academically in response to this legislation, so while I will discuss some of the material that illustrates the overall, long term problems with *No Child Left Behind*, I will not discuss specific works in detail.

²³⁸ Apple, 88-89.

²³⁹ Placier, M., M. Walker, and B. Foster. (2002). “Writing the ‘Show-Me’ Standards: Teacher Professionalism and Political Control in U.S. State Curriculum Policy.” *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 3. Pg. 282.

education with which many children are required to participate. Federal guidelines, dictate that the federal government no longer has to be responsible for the education of its people, but in the name of which, Giroux, Apple and Gunzenhauser relate to a popular “political-positioning” approach to governance, renders the state’s responsible for their own failures.²⁴⁰ Apple writes that while the legislation is perceived by many to be a positive accounting for a failing system, the effects on the ground are devastating. With the money given to states in the name of accountability and proficiency, the shift in concern and subsequent budgeting practices render public schools a target for ideological violence.

This is one patch in a quilt that illustrates part of the context for John who knows no other way of public school learning outside of *No Child Left Behind*. In this Midwestern state, as a result of these guidelines, urban schools in two of its major cities have experienced historic closures that carelessly disenfranchised hundreds of inner-city

²⁴⁰ See Apple (2001), Giroux (2006, 2009), Gunzenhauser (2006).

children from receiving what is proliferated as a "right" to education.²⁴¹ These children then, by state requirement, *must* attend some form of schooling, and with the understanding that many of the residents sending their children to these hobbled public schools are not wealthy people, might not be "intact families," potentially or actually might be unemployed. This leaves limited options for these families to comply with state law. Their children, in other words, must be transported to schools far from their neighborhoods and communities. These schools have social compositions of their own that are abstractions from the realities of the children migrating to them. In other words, poor kids are relocated to rich schools. "The Normalizing of the Educated Subject," that Michael Gunzenhauser (2006) describes as "*not* [making] everyone the same,"²⁴² is more about accentuating the differences that continue to marginalize. This example, therefore, of the consequences at a state level to poor and predominantly non-

²⁴¹ In an effort to conceal as much as possible about the actual location of this study for the sake of confidentiality, I can only say that in the years since this legislation's institution, an unprecedented number of public schools in extremely poor metropolitan areas have been forced to close.

²⁴² Gunzenhauser, M.G. (2006). "Normalizing the Educated Subject: A Foucaultian Analysis of High Stakes Accountability." *Educational Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3. Pg. 249.

White inner-city children, is a grounded example of a perpetuation of inequality.

In the face of all of the work that has been done concerning this federal legislation since the beginning, this is a well-established conclusion. Consider also that with this example, the children removed from their neighborhoods and relocated, bused, transported to other schools – whose very functioning implies their compliance with federal guidelines – are *dislocated* as are their experiences in new school environments where their stories are not relatable, necessarily to their peers. Coe and Nastasi (2006) contribute that the streamlining of experiences generated by curriculum in this new stage of standardization, as *the* way to deal with real-life situations and problems is difficult to impossible for most subjected children to implement.²⁴³ In other words, even something like the D.A.R.E. program, and its “decision-making model” are rooted in the experiences of an abstract child – a theoretical person whose experiences are relegated in the discourse to those of simplicity. The

²⁴³ Coe, K. and B.K. Nastasi. (2006). "Stories and Selves: Managing the Self through Problem Solving in School." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2. pgs 180-198.

experiences that 10-year old children have with drugs and alcohol are assumed in the standardized approaches to problem solving, so that the models provided by these prevention programs for how to prevent are not matches for the actualities of children's lives. Compound this problem with their relocation, and the potential for their experiences to be silenced around the realities of their everyday lives, and no one benefits from the possibilities and diversities of the stories of children.

It is not always the case that the closing of a school and the redistribution of the children excluded is the only situation that plays out with similar results. There are poor children in schools whose doors remain open, whose functions continue because their quantitative measures of success are recognizable by the government that defines "success." The point here is that whether children are being bused from poor areas or walking to school from apartment complexes in wealthier areas, their experiences are not the same from one child to the next. If their social location, as "children" already renders them silent in the relation of their experiences as "real," or "valid," and fundamentally different from one another, then these heavy measures, far beyond the control of even their parents and

other members of their communities, are surgeries on their souls, inscriptions on their skin.²⁴⁴

In 2001, the stage is still being set for John. Couple these legislations, which attempt to hold public schools to task in unreasonable ways, with the increasingly popular propagation of threat, fear and paranoia erupting in our culture and directed at children and public institutions, and the tone is set for a slow suffocation.²⁴⁵ The school shooting in Littleton, Colorado at Columbine High School in 1999 demanded questions about school security – and not only that, but the seemingly surprising confrontation with the violence of youth.²⁴⁶ The events at Columbine, in conjunction with the events some years later of September 11, 2001, gave birth to an

²⁴⁴ I use “souls” intentionally here – and in relation to the idea of the “soul,” stemming from Foucault’s (1977) use of the word in conjunction with disciplining the insides and not just the outsides. “...there was the scale of control: it was a question not of treating the body, *en masse*, ‘wholesale’ as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘retail’, individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.” Pg. 136-137.

²⁴⁵ Giroux, (2006, 2009).

²⁴⁶ Giroux, H.A. (2006). “Disposable Youth and the Politics of Domestic Militarization.” *The Giroux Reader*. C. G. Robbins (ed). Boulder (CO): Paradigm Publishers. Pgs 147-177.

epidemic of domestic terror: our own children, neighbors, co-workers, friends could be plotting to murder, rape, destroy, or otherwise undermine the “safety” and “security” that “democracy” so delicately preserves.

Take into consideration, then, that with a brutal school shooting,²⁴⁷ its national consequences to children in public schools everywhere, and the (inter)national emergency in September of 2001, and its global consequences, the nostalgically safe world that once was, is no longer. Amongst its many problems, *No Child Left Behind* contained within its provisions a guarantee that the military could continue to recruit its soldiers from high school populations by forcing compliant schools to provide information and access of students to recruiters.²⁴⁸ That is, if they wanted their federal funding.

As mentioned earlier, *neoliberalism* as a political approach to government *and* economy is an underlying problem when addressing

²⁴⁷ Remember also that there have been school shootings before the shootings at Columbine High School, but the focus on this particular school shooting as the guidance for national school security policies involves understanding how the murder of suburban children in an affluent public high school is the spark for change, and not the ongoing and historic violence experienced in urban schools for decades. We now have to fear rich kids too.

²⁴⁸ Apple, 91.

issues of public school. Public goods, like the public school, are not supposed to run at a profit. They are designed to benefit the people, not operated with the pursuit of profit in mind. Capitalism as *the* answer, enunciated by George W. Bush in the wake of economic collapse in 2008, and elevated by a number of other public officials, does not mix well with public good.²⁴⁹ The public schools in this country, therefore, experience and have experienced a reckoning with markets that they have yet to recover from: the fantasy of empathetic capitalism.²⁵⁰ Giroux writes of the “rationality of markets”:

This is a mode of biopolitics that renders market interests invisible by insisting that its primary goal is to promote the security and welfare of human life: an unregulated market is the best caretaker of people’s needs.²⁵¹

If the market is left alone to help those that help themselves, what of those that are robbed of the tools to do so, by the very same

²⁴⁹ Taken from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91Te5uImqWg&feature=youtube_gdata_player in December 2010.

²⁵⁰ Apple (2001).

²⁵¹ Giroux, H.A. (2009). *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability*. New York: Palgrave-McMillan. Pg 79.

politico-economic stage? What happens to the people left out?

Michael Apple suggests:

Impoverishment, the loss of job security and benefits, racial and gender disparities in the ways 'fast capitalism' trickles down to those on the bottom, and so much more - all of these also require a much stronger state to complement the weak state supposedly favored by neoliberals. This smaller strong state, however, is often a repressive one. *It is involved in rigorously policing the population of those left out by the economy* (my emphasis).²⁵²

Rigorous policing of those left out by the economy? Aggressively controlling, in other words, most of the people in the United States, including children.²⁵³ So, in order to maintain dominant social order in institutional theaters, like the public school, the state has to constrict its people. It must especially hold tight to those that do not fit, and while it attempts to squeeze people into one another (envision the melding of one child's experiences with another, to render both

²⁵² Apple, M.W. (2006). *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Pg. 17.

²⁵³ For an interesting discussion of children as consumers and children consumed in this economic culture, see Giroux, H.A. (2002). "Body Politics and the Pedagogy of Display: Youth Under Siege." *Body Movements: Pedagogy, Politics, and Social Change*. Shapiro Shapiro (eds.). Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press. 45-73.

inevitably silent and non-consensually conjoined), it highlights the justifications for their constriction. Children must be squeezed to fit inside the ribcage. Some harder than others.

Lesko writes that the deeply embedded cultural conception of children, particularly adolescents, circulate around “characteristics” determined by outside. In other words, the worlds, language (discourse) and prescriptions of adults. They are transitioning “into adulthood,” or not quite there yet; they are unaware and therefore caught off-guard so much by hormones that they lose control of themselves; they only care about what their friends think – and only do what their friends do; and their teen-age stops at 19.²⁵⁴ At the same time that these misconceptions about young people should look familiar, the consequences of this theoretical teenage person’s existence effect the real people subjected to these categorizations. Children are considered dangerous, potential threats to an imaginary adult security, and walking mysteries; it is almost as if, as Giroux suggests: age-related amnesia, and the governing of nostalgia and

²⁵⁴ Lesko, N. (2001). *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Pg 2.

control desired over the body of the child is established to protect them from their future selves.²⁵⁵

I would not condone the presence of police officers in any public school. Foucault would yield that the control perceived by a symbol of state violence is a mechanism for power, and a jump-start for the work of the self-disciplining of the soul.²⁵⁶ Police represent violence to some children, whose experiences are not part of the conception of “childhood.” Police, however, are also located in a variety of social contexts for adults – so that their presence is not always perceived as a good one either. At the same time, the popular representations and assumptions about police are founded in the expectations that they “protect and serve.” Their presence on public school campuses is a response to something. A fear? A desire?²⁵⁷ I do not remember ever

²⁵⁵ Giroux (2002, 2006), Stockton (2009), Lesko (1996, 2001), Apple (2001).

²⁵⁶ Foucault, M. (1977).

²⁵⁷ Foucault works here too to talk about the representation of the strong state as embodied by the police officer. I only mean that if a student does not trust police for some reason, the presence of police would be a threat, potentially, or at least, uncomfortable. Would the child then discipline themselves, as we all do in different social situations? So, the officer is not only there to patrol and keep order, but to represent the ultimate power of the state...with a gun, and a taser, and mace, and a baton, and support by the local police department?

seeing a police officer in any of the schools I attended when I was younger. My children, on the other hand, do not have experiences without officers in their schools. There are eight Service Resource Officers employed to rotate between the public schools in this community.²⁵⁸ These officers, in addition to officers all over the country, are part of an increasing zeitgeist, haunting the hallways in the name of “safety” and control.

Giroux (2001) writes:

More and more working-class and middle-class youth and poor youth of color... are fed into an ever-expanding system of disciplinary control that dehumanizes and criminalizes their behavior in multiple sites, *extending from the home and school* to the criminal justice system...²⁵⁹

In a news report dated March 7, 2008, a Florida news channel broadcast the story of an event unfolding at a local elementary school. The news station details that when teachers and the Service Resource

²⁵⁸ Heavin, J. (2008). Cost-share plan stirs discussion of school police: District might seek greater control. City Daily Tribune. Midwest City. CVIII.

²⁵⁹ Giroux, H.A. (2009). “Locked Up: Education and the Youth Crime Complex.” *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability*. New York: Palgrave-McMillan. Pg 72.

Officer approached an 11-year old, fourth grader about a report they received concerning her endangering another child, she resorted to violence. According to the report from the news station:

The school resource officer, Orange County Deputy Donna Hudepohl, tried to take Thaliamar to the principal's office and that's when the child started swinging, hitting the officer in the nose. Hudepohl was transported to Florida East Hospital. She sustained severe bruising to the nasal cavity as a result of the injury.²⁶⁰

What happened directly between the "swinging" and the hospital is the question here. As a result of this altercation, its difficulty and the contact between the swinging child and the nose of the officer, Officer Donna Hudepohl electrocuted the 11-year old. The local news station goes on to provide snippets of interviews conducted with the child's mother, Ms. Garcia; the public relations officer for the police department; and other parents. The child's mother, Ms. Garcia, obviously does not agree with the decisions made to Tase her child, citing that the school is aware that her daughter is "like a five-year old," who struggles with "learning disabilities." Her words are

²⁶⁰"11-Year-Old Girl Tasered At School After Punching Officer In Face." (2008, March 27). Taken from <http://www.wftv.com/news/15722616/detail.html> May 2009.

juxtaposed with those of another mother, filmed playing with her toddler on a playground: "She had it coming. She assaulted an officer. You can't let that go."²⁶¹

The story of Thaliamar Jimenez is one of many from around the United States in which police officers or security officers equipped with an array of weapons are in positions to maintain control over children. Another child in Florida was Tased by an officer when it was discovered that she had brought a knife to school and was threatening to use it.²⁶² Yet another incident occurred when a six-year old in an elementary school principal's office was shocked with a Taser when he threatened to hurt himself and the officers with a piece of broken glass.²⁶³

It is not the question here of whether the actions of the children featured in these stories warranted concern from adults. Certainly. However, a question should be asked about the presence of police at

²⁶¹ "11-year Old Girl Tasered."

²⁶² "Deputy Uses Taser Gun On Teen At School." (2005, August 11). Taken from <http://www.wesh.com/r/4840783/detail.html> May 2009.

²⁶³ "Police used Taser gun to subdue 6-year-old student wielding piece of glass." (2004, November 12). Taken from http://www.infowars.com/articles/ps/tasers_6_yr_old_wielding_glass.htm May 2009.

all – in the classroom, the hallway, the lunchroom or anywhere on school grounds. Are these acts of children against police officers decontextualized to frame the execution of power over the bodies of children? In other words, what circumstances exist for a parent to respond that an 11-year old “had it coming,” and that a child hitting a cop is something that necessitates an electrocution?

In 2009, in this school district, a fight broke out in between classes at a local high school. The responding Service Resource Officer charged into the fight, captured on a student’s cell phone video, pushing a teacher and landing atop one of the brawling young people. The video records the officer throwing another student that later expressed that she “stepped in to break up the fight,” and subsequently was injured by the officer responding. He also allegedly injured the student he first encountered in the fight by throwing her to the ground repeatedly, restraining her with his arm on her neck and pulling her zip-tied arms up behind her back to lift her from the ground.²⁶⁴ The parents of the students involved demanded an

²⁶⁴ Boniesh, Danielle. (2008, October 17). “Fight at Highridge leads to further investigation.” *Town Newspaper*. Taken from

investigation into the incident as a result of injuries reported by their children.

The school policy, according to an administrator interviewed by a local paper, is to “suspend any employee under investigation,” but since the SROs in this district do not answer to the school administrators they work with, but the city police department, no such suspension occurred.²⁶⁵ The police department does *not* suspend employees under investigation. The newspaper reported:

<http://www.localtownian.com/stories/2008/10/17/fight-hickman-leads-further-investigation/> in October 2008.

²⁶⁵ Heavin, J. (2008, October 26) “Local Council member critical of Officer’s Return to Highridge Duty.” *CityTribune*. Taken from <http://archive.citytribune.com/2008/Oct/20081026News007.asp> in October 2008.

Interim Police Chief [Jack Francis] in a news release defended the decision, saying replacing school resource officers isn't easy. "There are eight SROs for the entire police department," [Francis wrote]. "Each is specially trained, already assigned to a school and each has ongoing responsibilities in their own schools. ... I had to consider if the disruption caused by Officer [Brauschmidt's] reassignment outweighed the potential disruption by his return."²⁶⁶

While this event sparked much controversy from part of the community, claiming that Brauschmidt used excessive force in his subduing of the people involved in the physical altercation,²⁶⁷ there were students that petitioned to have this officer returned: "I just think people support him as a police officer and support any police officer's right to take care of a situation like that."²⁶⁸ In other words, the "situation like that," or a relatively serious looking altercation on linoleum floors to some students reminds and reaffirms a respect for the force of the officer to preserve the safety of their hallways. Other students, along with their parents, did not feel as if the force he used

²⁶⁶ Heavin, J. (2008). I have substituted names in order to disguise the specific location of these particular occurrences. Their location, after all, is not central to understanding the problematics of these episodes of state-sanctioned violence.

²⁶⁷ Boneish, D. (2008).

²⁶⁸ Heavin, J. (2008).

was appropriate for high school students.²⁶⁹ The police department conducted what they referred to as a “thorough investigation,” and revealed that the officer acted within his responsibilities to the public school population and was exonerated by the police department. He was allowed to maintain his position in the same school, with the same students that saw, heard and felt that fight. Regardless of the justifications for violence, the use of it or practice of it in policy, how does the presence of this officer in particular and any other number of armed domestic forces walking public school hallways make a school a “safe place?” “Safety” is not the same to everyone, and certainly the students involved in this conflict would not be expected to embrace the law as a protector.

Giroux writes that the dystopian fears of youth is a “tragedy that is made obvious by the many ‘get tough’ policies that render young people criminals...”²⁷⁰ I would like to supply a few more details to this story, before the curtain closes on John. I take the information that follows from an abundance of sources available to the community in

²⁶⁹ Boneish, D. (2008).

²⁷⁰ Giroux (2009), pg. 71-72.

regard to the fight at the local high school. The charges filed by the young women involved in this altercation were determined to be “unfounded” by the chief of police and the review board conducting the investigation.²⁷¹ The claims made by the parents, all of which were Black women, mothers of younger Black women,²⁷² were, in other words, overlooked as “fabricated.”²⁷³ The violence enacted on their children and their subsequent outrage, understandable to me, seems to be dismissed – the marks on the skins of their children visible only to them. Their experiences as non-White parents of non-White children in the context of the city in which they reside leads to larger questions about the positions of power parents inhabit when in contention with the policies of the public school. Parents, school officials, and police officers have very different interests in “safety,” depending on who needs to be protected and what they must be

²⁷¹ Police Chief. (2008). High School Report. 1-25.

²⁷² I am carefully making this connection here. I do not want to explore too deeply the issues of race in this particular research project, as this would most definitely complicate the questions I am asking in a beneficial way, I am not in a place to fully expand on these intersections at this time.

²⁷³ Ibid. pg. 12.

protected from. How do parents ensure that their children are safe, congruent with their *own* ideas of safety? What happens to parents in the discourse of safety? How do their concerns for the their children's welfare translate to policy and practice of the public school as "trouble"?

CHAPTER 3 *INTERMISSION*: PRISONERS AND WARDS OF THE RIBCAGE: SKIN AND BONES

The skin and bones of this project is a metaphor for the knitting together of pieces to create a different layer of bone around the skeleton that already exists, and a contribution to a construction of an integumentary experience of senses and understandings in the skin. Children's bodies are sites for powerful contentions, and are also in the shifting but ossified social world, so that the skeletons of their understandings are converted from different social minerals than those old familiar frames of adults. They are prisoners of childhood – looking out from between the ribs of a cage that both traps them and protects them. The ways in which they are taught to move, sit, and speak, inform their development of self in relation to others.²⁷⁴ At once, they are also constituted as objects – of knowledge, of desire, of

²⁷⁴ See Treacher, A. (2006). "Children's Imaginings and Narratives: Inhabiting Complexities." *Feminist Review*. No. 82. Pgs 96-113.

truth.²⁷⁵ The skeletal frames or the bones fusing together, for the structure that is “*adult*,” have different implications toward a conceptualizing of “safety” than those with new skin, new bones, and new eyes.²⁷⁶ Children’s bodies are new bodies. Their skin is less cluttered with cultural inscriptions, the “visible marks” of lived realities and adult experiences.²⁷⁷ The skin is the surface that the social world sticks to, in the hairs, the pores, and the subtle imperfections. The skin is also the surface that suffers the force of the culture in the everyday, often violent, ultraviolet rays of oppression. It is not here that the experience ends, as the most permeable membrane, the skin absorbs the shock of the world, and feeds the soul with what nutrients it can filter. The bones are then fortified with the social minerals. If, as is known of the skin, this organ takes in all that touches it and all that touches it infiltrates the other systems of the body, then does this

²⁷⁵ Foucault, M. (1990). “The Order of Discourse.” *The Rhetoric Traditions: Readings from Classical Times to the Present.* Bizzel and Herzog. (eds.) Boston: Bedford Books. 1154-1164.

²⁷⁶ Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in Question.* P. Nice (ed). London: Sage Publications.

²⁷⁷ Alexander, M.J. (2005). *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred.* Durham: Duke University Press. Pg. 296-298.

not mean, “violence can also become embodied”?²⁷⁸ Can the skin take in the control that is imposed upon it and coat the bones with a hard surface, enforcing their strength with order and other lessons we learn everyday and everywhere? The new skin of children is the perfect place for a fresh tattooing to happen, in many colors and shapes. The experiences that soak into the soft, smooth surface have different chemical reactions on different bodies, so that pre-school education, for example, coats the bones with the experience of sitting still, listening to the adult and following the same rules everyone else must.²⁷⁹ What of the child, like John’s, whose bones do not have that coating? The “normal body” of the child, with the presumptions of its innocent suppleness, is not every child’s body.

I have titled this intermission “Prisoners and Wards of the Ribcage: Skin and Bones” to constitute a visual metaphor for some of the underlying concerns and hopes I have in regard to my work and

²⁷⁸ Alexander (2005), pg 277.

²⁷⁹ This is not to say that children simply *do* these things, but that in some part of their institutionalized preschool experience, they learned “the rules,” whether they follow them consistently or not – it is the exposure to them that is the point here.

my life with children. They are new people – and while we are all always learning, the newness of the world cannot be taken for granted in the ways in which children relate to “grown-ups,” including those disruptions in communication for reasons beyond any one person’s control.

The anatomical ribcage holds the heart, the lungs, the diaphragm, and deeper, the stomach, the spleen and part of the liver. It protects vital organs, simultaneously keeping these organs within the cage.²⁸⁰ In dominant culture, children are considered vital for a variety of reasons. More specifically, certain groups of children are considered essential for the continued existence of our social worlds. White, middle-class children are considered “the future;” the work of adults to “save” and “protect” them depends on social factors, and is not universal.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Saladin, K.S. (2004). *Anatomy & Physiology: The Unity of Form and Function*. 3rd Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Pg. 44-45.

²⁸¹ Giroux, H.A. (2000). *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

Power over children's bodies, their expressions, and the ways in which they think has existed for as long as "children" have been seen as such.²⁸² It is not a new concept, but certainly not a natural one either.²⁸³ Modernity and a technological age in Western culture, specifically the United States, has impacted social responses to children dramatically, changing the surface of the bones, in ways, perhaps inconceivable when matched with the fantastic articulations of intangible imaginations of "childhood."²⁸⁴

Bones are a conglomeration of minerals, filtering into a body from the social world - hardened, strong, and holding us up, helping us move ourselves forward. The social world is comprised of many minerals that bind together to form the articular surfaces – with their ridges and imperfections that hold our experiences in layers of mineral deposits. "Adult" bones have deposits of experiences from years more

²⁸² Gore, J.M. (2006). "Pedagogy, Power and Bodies: On the Un(der)-Acknowledged Effects on Schooling." *Body Movements: Pedagogy, Politics and Social Change*. S. Shapiro and S. Shapiro. (eds.) Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press. Pgs. 75-96.

²⁸³ Lesko, N. (1996). "Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations." *Youth and Society*. Vol. 28, No. 2. 139-161.

²⁸⁴ Giroux, H.A. (2000).

than those of a five-year old “child.” The bones of a new person do not have the strength to hold anyone up but a little body. New bones, however, quickly coalesce with the stories of the adult world about them: what “children” are, what “children” will be, and what “childhood” must remain. The bones of the child are hardened with their own experiences, and those imposed upon them by the disciplines of the social world. Their skeletons grow quickly, their bones absorbing the nutrients and poisons through their stretching, spongy skin.

Skin and bones are also a way to understand not only their bodies as being built *for* them, but about the structures that have developed in response to modern perceptions of peril that require a thickening of their new skins in order to survive – when the “intuitions” of *their* skin, bones, and souls do not matter.²⁸⁵ Prevention programs fill in holes that are presumed to exist, in part because the rib *cage* encloses meaning and makes its mark on the body.²⁸⁶ The violence

²⁸⁵ Langhout, R.D. (2005). “Acts of Resistance: Student (In)Visibility.” *Culture and Psychology*. Vol. 11, No. 2. 123-158.

²⁸⁶ Coe K. and B. Nastasi. (2006). "Stories and Selves: Managing the Self through Problem Solving in School." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*. Vol. 37, No. 2. pgs 180-198.

and mistreatment that children witness on a daily basis teaches them and inscribes violent understandings on the body²⁸⁷ – so that prevention programs, or the teaching that the child can be in control of avoiding their own assault, merely tells another story. Not a new one. The skin and bones of the child have their own stories to tell. It is merely a question of listening.²⁸⁸

An underlying, and perhaps indiscernible aspect of this research finds the knitting of the bones in the talk of children. The theoretical grounding of Jane Child would not be possible without first being confounded by the relating of experiences by children, not only interviewed, but those also ignored or unreachable in the process of this project. In order to understand part of the problem with the inequality of age and its manifestations in overwhelming discourses, I suggest that a conversation happen in which there is an understanding

²⁸⁷ Alexander, (2005).

²⁸⁸ Paget, M. (1983). "Experience and Knowledge." *Human Studies*, Vol. 6. Pgs 67-90.

that the talk of children is work, translating their experiences to adults, without adult experience. This conversation and use of other related works, could problematize the expectations of prevention curricula, not to mention the overall assumptions of disciplinary action outcomes, as projected from a variety of preventative discourses.

While we stand at the door to the following discussion - and I wonder how it is relevant to Jane, and John and any child or parent caught up in the maelstrom that wrecks havoc on the public school as an institution - the concern for how children see and talk about their experiences in the world is essential. It is fundamental in immeasurable ways. How do and will the experiences of Jane Child with school administration and control impact her developments of meaning about her place, her body, her value, her rights and privileges in our culture, and humanity at large? What can the simple interaction between a researcher-mother and someone else's child teach about experiences with power, difference, and the stories of children in relation?

CHAPTER 4: APPROPRIATING THE "INAPPROPRIATE": HETEROGENDERING²⁸⁹ THE PRACTICE OF PROHIBITING TOUCH

"It is essential that every student...understand that students who violate the policies...should expect severe consequences."

-District Policy Handbook, pg 17.

The following excerpt is taken from a blogspot, written by A.M. Biguous, also known as Amanda Garrison. I use this particular story to illustrate the problems that Jane and her mother, Pat, encounter as a result of violations to school policies.

²⁸⁹ I use this term specifically throughout this chapter as part of a discussion started by Chrys Ingraham (1994) on "heterogenders" as "an asymmetrical stratification of the sexes in relation to the historically varying institutions of patriarchal heterosexuality. Reframing gender as heterogender foregrounds the relation between heterosexuality and gender" (204), "The Heterosexual Imagination: Feminist Sociology and the Theories of Gender." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2. I like this explanation as a way to concretely illustrate the ways in which "sex" and "gender" are conflated specifically within the practices of public school policies about touching, sex, bodies and space. I plan to research this further at a later date.

School Counselor Raises Hell with Allegations of "Inappropriate Behavior"²⁹⁰

By [A.m. Biguous](#) on Thursday, September 23, 2010 at 11:22am

In the continuing investigation of the public school system in this area, the following report is brought to you by those concerned:

September 21, 2010.

"I'm really not familiar with both sexualities," the school counselor laughed. He has been the counselor at this middle school for three years, and reports having seen a "rise" in children, aged 11-13 years, coming to him about their sexualities. "I just try to help them be comfortable with who they are...." Mr. Admin is young and married; the pictures of his wife scatter his desktop.

Pat sits in his office on a Tuesday afternoon, responding to a problem at home, Pat alleges was a direct result of the school's intervention. This public school district has a policy concerning Public Displays of Affection (PDA), and she claims that her daughter, a seventh grader at this particular school, was punished needlessly at the hands of the counselor and school policy. "When the school comes into the home - or when the consequences of discipline at school effect the home life negatively, this is a cause for concern."

²⁹⁰ This chapter uses institutional ethnography as its sociological location, in addition to writing multi-layered accounts as a way to establish the relationship between the discourse of the school and the impositions on children and their parents.

Patricia, a local business owner, and long time member of the community, has confronted this particular school on its policies and punishments before. "It doesn't seem right," Pat explains, "that the school can intrude in so many negative ways that mess with the social worlds that develop outside of the school." She continues, relating an incident that happened concerning a threatening situation outside the school grounds that affected the social lives of her children inside the school. "They took no responsibility for the threat to my child and her friend. They claimed that since the incident happened outside of the school building, they were not accountable to anyone."

An interesting claim, given that this most recent incident with the school involved a school counselor, an allegation, and a weekend phone call. Pat contends that the school has contacted her before regarding her daughter's behavior toward another girl (also her best friend). Her daughter reported that her and her friend were hugging one another at the lunch table, when a boy complained to a supervising teacher that, "if I can't do that with my girlfriend, they shouldn't be able to do that either." A reasonable question, handled immediately by school counselors.

"The counselor basically told me that she 'didn't care if you were a boy that liked girls, a girl that liked boys, a boy that likes boys or a girl that likes girls,' there was no public affection allowed. In other words, you can't touch each other - or you'll get called to the office." It became obvious to Pat that there was much more going on here, and as the following weeks and months unfolded; the next incident would be something neither she nor her daughter expected.

Sunday, September 19, her daughter received a message from her friend: "my mother knew about us..." and who was so furious, she would not let her daughter see Jane again. It was discovered then that the school counselor for the seventh graders at this particular school had telephoned the father of Jane's friend and informed him that allegations had been made against the two girls by a classmate. The accusations of "inappropriate behavior," circulated and swirled up the unexpected: a forced severance of the friendship between the two seventh graders, imposed by the family of Jane's friend.

"My daughter was devastated. I mean, this is her best friend,

you know? I just don't understand how parents can be so hard on their kids." And while Pat doesn't pretend to be lax with her own parenting, "their sexualities are their business. If they're doing stuff that's going to get them in trouble, then they need to be warned - they need to know what not to do...but that was just so harsh to me."

It was then that Pat made an appointment with the school counselor, and why she is sitting in his office on a Tuesday afternoon. "I honestly didn't think that the measure that her parents would take would be so drastic." Mr. Admin assured Pat, "I predicted that they would sit down and talk with her...maybe you too, and you all would work something out."

Pat informed him that this is precisely what did not happen. Mr. Admin also stated that, he did not know any of the parents involved, but assumed that any parent would act in the ways that he predicted.

Pat was then informed about the details of the allegations, and when the counselor mentioned a "slumber party" and "things happening between these two girls," she asked for clarification, "I don't understand how what happens at a slumber party is the school's business?"

His response was a shrug and a nod. He contended that it was his responsibility, as mandated by the school and the state, to make parents aware of any situation of concern, citing also that in the state of Missouri, it is illegal for children, or people under the age of 17, to be engaging in sexual activity. He also stated to Pat that if parents are aware of their children's sexual activity, when they are 17 or younger, the parents are accountable to the state for neglect and endangerment, "and then, I have to call DFS," he says, almost under his breath. DFS or the Division of Family Services will then investigate the claim and decide what action needs to be taken.

As the meeting continued, Pat proceeded to ask a series of questions concerning the responsibility of the school regarding incidents that happen apart from the school day? She was also concerned with the lack of investigation on the part of the counselors concerning the allegations made about her daughter

and her daughter's friend, "Do you usually operate on the gossip of 12-year olds?"

Mr. Admin told her that he had not chosen to talk with one of the girls because he was "not sure how comfortable she would be with talking to him." Instead, he telephoned her family, spoke with her father and shared with her father the allegations of "inappropriate behavior," both inside and outside of the school. When Pat questioned him about the lack of communication with her also, Mr. Admin informed her that he did not know that her daughter was the other girl involved.

Mr. Admin and the school district's other counselors work from the same general guidelines and procedures laid out in the district's policies about PDA and sexuality issues concerning the student/children. "It seems to me," Pat states, as her and I walk from the school building, "that the school is really only interested in making sure that kids who don't fit, somehow, in the end, fit." Is this a mark of a school's success? I wondered to her. "Well, I don't know about that - if your goal is producing replicas of a status quo, then yes. It's all well and good to say you're interested in making school safe for gay and queer children, but how are you doing it? And what are you doing about the kids that don't think it's okay? That's where the problem is...bullying presentations and one hour visits on tolerance aren't gonna cut it." Citing the reliability of the witness, Pat questions how the story of one 12-year old against the stories of the accused becomes the "truth," and incites immediate action from school administrators. Pat said she laughed when Mr. Admin told her that he was not "preferential to any sexuality," retorting that if he were not, her daughter and her daughter's friend would not be a focus of the school's gaze.

When asked about her satisfaction with the meeting, Pat was ambivalent, "it is, unfortunately, what I expected."

While Pat and her daughter continue to work through the consequences of this school action, she has little hope that her meeting with the school counselor will change anything. "He apologized a lot, as if it was a decision that he made himself, without regard for protocol. My question is - isn't this protocol? Isn't this another way to 'fix' a 'problem'?" She remains skeptical about any intention the school has of helping her

daughter and other children with questions about the realities of sexuality, especially when, she says, they don't understand or acknowledge children as sexual in the first place.

"As long as the school district continues to promote a panic around developing sexualities with children, and an idea of what is 'age appropriate' in terms of children and their bodies, there will be no reconciling the squashing of difference, with sexuality or otherwise. It breaks the heart."

A.M. Biguous reporting.

This incident is important in a variety of ways, as it is essential to the understanding of a control over the body of the child for the sake of "safety," via the policies or rules of the public school. Is there, then, so much distance between the "hands-to-yourself" rule of elementary school hallways and the Public Displays of Affection policies of middle school?

During my interview with an 11-year old sixth-grader, when I asked her to talk with me about the rules she knew, she told me:

SG: Uh, another one of the rules is PTA – wait. No, PDA, public display of affection – which is like, we can't really

touch each other unless we're like, high-fiving or giving a like pat on the back or something.

Me: Hmm. What does PDA mean to you? What does public display of affection mean to you – like, you can't touch each other – what does that mean?

SG: I think it means like, you can't hug or anything beyond hugging or something.

Me: Okay, and you're . . . uh, 11-years old?

SG: Yeah.

Me: Okay. When did you . . . did you have PDA rules at _____?

SG: No. We were allowed to hug and stuff.

Me: That's interesting. What about . . . um . . . maybe talk a little about how the rules at this school are different, now that you're in a new school – what do you experience as different from _____?

SG: Well, the rules are a lot stricter, because they're trying to prepare us for high school, so the rules are gonna be a lot stricter. Um . . . and some of the teachers are more strict than others . . . like, yeah.

In other words, when you are in elementary school (ages 5-11), you are allowed to touch other children in “appropriate” ways. You can “hug and stuff.” This sixth grader is also telling me that when she entered middle school, the acceptable exchange between children changed, which she attributes to a preparation for high school. Why the change in policy about bodies, touching or space? According to the handbook distributed by the district to parents, even in the

elementary school reference, “PDA” is listed as “Prohibited Conduct.”²⁹¹ In other words, it *is* against rules of conduct for elementary school children to “touch” one another. This sixth grader *knew* about the PDA policy of her middle school, but related that they were allowed to “hug and stuff,” just a year before. Understanding that each teacher has the discretion to treat these offenses within a variety of possible punishments (or not), are there still assumptions about what touching means, based on age? Positioned atop scientific discourses of behaviors associated with children being “healthy,” or “not,” assumptions of bodies, consent and touching that infiltrate the practices of enforcing these policies are problematic.

The district policies concerning Public Display of Affection, as listed in the student handbooks for elementary, middle school and junior high/high school children indicates that public display of affection is defined as “physical contact, which is *inappropriate* for the school setting including, but not limited to, kissing and groping (my

²⁹¹ District website, online student handbook for elementary school students, retrieved December 2009, pg 19.

emphasis)." ²⁹² The punishments include conference with the principal, in-school suspension, extended outside school suspension and finally, a mark on a permanent record. ²⁹³

Preceding and following the interaction with the school counselor, Jane Child was disciplined by individual teachers on several different occasions in which her contact with her best friend, Jessica, was questioned. Teachers sometimes wait outside of their classrooms in the morning, monitoring the bustling children and corralling them into their homeroom classrooms. Jane informed me that she has been corrected several times for interactions with Jessica that Jane does not find to be breaking the rules. Jane also communicated to her mother that she felt interrogated by her teachers to reveal the secrets that she was asked to keep and the “meanings” of her physical exchanges with her friend, Jessica. And while the disciplining of the space between Jane and Jessica was a consequence with school officials,

²⁹² District website, online student handbook for non-elementary school students, retrieved December 2009

²⁹³ District website, online student handbook for non-elementary school students, retrieved December 2009.

other children also helped to enforce the policy of absolutely no physical contact by consistently surveilling the interactions between Jane and Jessica and reporting them to school administrators.²⁹⁴ The district policy textually regulates the spaces between bodies, by defining actions that prohibit the interactions between them, like “assault,” and “displays of affection.” And while the assumptions of “affection” are questionable if not problematic, there is something to be said for the actualities of the public display. “Affection” is not “assault,” but a wanted, “gentle” exchange between two people. The forcing of “affection” into the same disciplinary spaces of violent disorderly conduct (“assault”) accentuates a need for a conversation of consent. It is human to touch, so that the imposition of policy that enforces distance between two affectionate people, silences their intuitions and “visibly marks” their ‘untouchable’ skin.

The existence of the policies around bodies, like that of assault, demonstrates the ways in which children’s bodies are defined as

²⁹⁴ Jane informed me that the first time she and Jessica were “sent to the office,” it was in response to an alert by another child in their lunchroom who saw Jessica put her head on Jane’s shoulder. In other words, and as will be discussed later, children are also working to keep other children in “check.”

dangerous, vulnerable and in need of protection. The district defines
“assault” as:

Hitting, striking, or attempting to cause injury to another person; placing a person in reasonable apprehension of imminent physical injury; physically injuring or attempting to kill another person.²⁹⁵

Given the definition of a public display of affection, and its close proximity with definitions of “assault” in the district student handbooks, what is being communicated in their relationship? What is the school saying about the bodies of children and a child’s ability to determine their own pleasure? How do the curricular discourses of sex, bodies, and touching as part of the public school policy and practice reinforce the idea of children as property?

The human health curriculum, the primary source in this particular school district, for educating about the body (anatomically and physiologically) and eventually drugs, sexually transmitted infections, and relationships between people, begins in kindergarten, with a very structured approach. According to school administrators, there are Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) identified by committees of

²⁹⁵ District website, online student handbook for elementary and non-elementary school students, retrieved December 2009.

child developmentalists, counselors, doctors and school administrators that correspond with the standardized curriculum instituted by educational reform (*No Child Left Behind*).²⁹⁶ The physical education teachers are also the health teachers, so that they are applying their lessons regarding the body and its functions to their physical education classes. Children learn about bones, muscles, and the brain and continue their educations of the human body through the second grade. When human health is discussed in the third, fourth and fifth grade, it is taught by the teacher in the classroom, and not the gymnasium. In the fifth grade, the curriculum introduces the “endocrine system,” which leads teachers into discussions about hormones and body parts excluded from the conversation previously, most specifically, the genitals. There is no conversation about penises, vaginas, ovaries, testes, or otherwise until public school children are 10-years old, despite their obvious presence on real bodies.²⁹⁷

At the end of their fifth-grade year, however, children in this

²⁹⁶ Interviews for class project, October 2007.

²⁹⁷ Personal conversation with fifth grade teacher for class project, October 2007.

district have completed their preliminary requirements for understanding the processes of “puberty.” It is interesting that prior to this instruction, hugging and physical contact between children is not discouraged in practice by teachers, but that past the instruction, it seems, PDA makes itself applicable as an offense, punishable in a variety of ways. Could it be, as Lesko (1996) suggests, “literature on middle school practices so heavily emphasizes the physiological turmoil of young adolescents that self-esteem issues and hormones appear to consume them,”²⁹⁸ so that past this point, any affection is defined by the school as PDA, and these friendly exchanges, encouragements, or support transform into violations of school policies, practiced by teachers and students a like.

At the same time, however, the sexual abuse prevention instruction constituted by the school counseling curriculum begins the conversation and training of children to prevent their own abuse when they enter the public school environment – i.e. kindergarten. In this

²⁹⁸ Lesko, N. (1996). “Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations.” *Youth and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2. Page 141.

particular curriculum, “private parts” take the place of proper names (penis, vagina, and anus) in order to teach children what “appropriate” and “inappropriate” touching of their bodies includes. The instruction of sexual abuse prevention continues until the middle school grades of sixth and seventh, at which time the focus shifts to problems with harassment, sexual assault, and a further explanation of “body rights.”²⁹⁹

Jessica’s father’s reaction to the news from the counselor was one of outrage. Jessica shared with Jane that her father told her that if he ever saw Jane with Jessica again, he would file an “order of protection” against Jane and her mother.³⁰⁰ What would he be protecting his daughter from? An order of protection is meant to provide safety for someone who perceives themselves to be in danger. How do the interventions of the discourse and institutional definitions of “inappropriate behavior,” like that of these two girls, impose themselves in the social worlds of people outside of them, like Jessica’s

²⁹⁹ Information from Sexual Abuse Prevention Night, October 2007.

³⁰⁰ Personal conversation with Jane Child, November 2010.

father?

It is not as simple as conceptualizing the restrictions and prohibitions on the body – but the very real materializing of control for the sake of safety, age and “appropriate behavior.” In this context, control over bodies inside and outside of the school, becomes a collaborative project of “straightening” a child out.³⁰¹ At the same time, it is also interesting to discuss the ways in which the practices of the school force themselves into the homes and lives of children, and in some ways the practices (read: establishments of rules and punishments) of parents. The project of straightening-out is being done, in this case, by Jessica’s family and the school, on Jessica. Pat, however, is not interested in participating in this project, but experiences the forcing of this collaboration from the school administration.

Griffith and Smith (2005) ask, from their own experiences, how

³⁰¹ See Kathryn Bond Stockton’s (2009) discussions in the introductory materials of *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Duke University Press, concerning the ways in which a societal love affair with heterosexuality and straight children clouds the possibilities of everything BUT straight children.

the public school does operate to define parenting, and more specifically 'mothering' in terms of practice, concern and participation.³⁰² They discuss the imposition of the school into the home, and the ways in which parenting is conceptualized through the homework assignments, parent-teacher conferences, and a variety of other school related activities. As previously discussed, in my experiences, the ways in which I parent or mother my school-aged children must be congruent with the policies in relation to the public school or my children will be reconfigured, reformed, and punished for the actions of their mother. Griffith and Smith write: "The ideals of mothering in the context of schooling, and the mother's responsibility for realizing them, are absolute."³⁰³

In other words, in the case of Pat, her inability to realize and respond effectively to school policies make her a question in what Griffith and Smith refer to as "the discourse of mothering." This is the work and organizing of gendered labor in the home around children,

³⁰² Griffith, A.I. and D.E. Smith. (2005). *Mothering for Schooling*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

³⁰³ Griffith and Smith, pg 33.

especially in regard to schooling, and the language and text of it.³⁰⁴

There are expectations of parents written into the public school policies, so that if some “inappropriate behavior” is happening, perhaps more than once, there are procedures to be followed. In my experiences with the textual interactions involving my children, coming from the school, there have been warnings issued to the child prior to their further disciplining. Michel Foucault (1978) relates, once again, that the desire to control the sexuality, and in turn the bodies of children is a prevention of something frightening: the autonomy, in this case sexual, of children.³⁰⁵

Foucault writes:

Wherever there was a chance they (‘tenuous pleasures’) might appear, devices of surveillance were installed; traps were laid for compelling admissions; inexhaustible and corrective discourses were imposed; parents and teachers were alerted, and left with the suspicion that all children were guilty, and with the fear of being themselves at fault if their suspicions were not sufficiently strong; they were kept in readiness in the face of this recurrent danger; their conduct was prescribed and their pedagogy recodified; an entire medico-sexual regime took hold

³⁰⁴ Ibid, pg 33.

³⁰⁵ Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume 1*. New York: Vintage Books. Pg. 42. “

of the family milieu.³⁰⁶

In other words, Jane and her friend, Jessica must be corrected. Their interactions with one another labeled by the school counselor, classroom teachers and even other parents and students as “inappropriate” is, in part, related to a state-sanctioned guideline determined by child psychology discourse and the discourse of law.³⁰⁷ Lesko writes, in regard to the school, “...unexamined conceptions of the nature of adolescents undeniably contribute to decisions about feasible school curricula and policies.”³⁰⁸ In other words, when the school counselor informed Pat that he was required to intervene in matters involving children's lives, both in school and out of school, he was divulging that he is legally bound to inform parents and the state about potential endangerments, based on assumptions about the

³⁰⁶ Foucault, pg 42.

³⁰⁷ Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009), asks, in regard to children and pedophiles: “For to what extent is the object of the pedophilic attraction – that is to say, the child – a *product* of the law?” (original emphasis) – and as will be discussed, how does this development of the child as a legal object create a contradiction between protection and fear. Pg. 65.

³⁰⁸ Lesko, (1996). Pg 141.

“nature” of 12-year olds. And while 12-year olds are not “technically” in the teen-age, the cultural fetters of what “teenager” means shackle the policies to the abstractions rather than to the actualities.³⁰⁹ He cited law as the basis for his concern, in the question of consent, and the legal age for this state being 17.

In this Midwestern state, someone over the age of 21 having sexual intercourse (defined as “any penetration, however slight, of the female sex organ by the male sex organ, whether or not an emission results.”³¹⁰) with someone under the age of 17 constitutes second-degree statutory rape. According to Section 566.032 of this state’s revised statutes, first-degree statutory rape is committed when “*he* has sexual intercourse with another person who is less than 14-years old.”³¹¹ The perpetration of rape itself is defined by the law as forced sexual intercourse without consent. Any sex happening, with any person under the age of 14 is criminal sex. What are the implications

³⁰⁹ Lesko, N. (2001). *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

³¹⁰ Midwestern Revised Statute, Section 566.010

³¹¹ Midwestern Revised Statutes, Section 566.032, 566.034.

of a fourteenth birthday? People under the age of 14 are not legally permitted to have sex with anyone, including people their own age. They cannot agree or deny the interaction as consensual when their bodies are protected by the state. People between the ages of 14 and 20 cannot be charged with statutory rape for having intercourse within that age group. The law defines their sexual interactions as “child molestations.” Second degree “child molestation” is defined as “sexual contact” with a person under the age of 17. “Sexual contact” is defined as:

...any touching of another person with the genitals, or any touching of the genitals or the anus of another person, or the breast of a female person, or such touching through the clothing, for the purpose of arousing or gratifying sexual desire of any person.³¹²

So that, essentially, the body of the 12-year old person is not owned by that 12-year old person. Rather, the law protects anyone under the age of 14 from the dangers and pleasures of sexual activity. Jane and her friend are not allowed to engage in sexual behavior, by law – but this is not the question. The question is how does the law cited by the counselor to Pat, concerning consent and sexual interaction between children, translate from public displays of affection to non-consensual, illegal sexual interaction? How does “inappropriate behavior” become a violation of the law? The law twists and turns the body through this discourse, creating invisible fences and snares that the unsuspecting do not see until they are trapped within.

A 12-year old seventh-grader cannot consent to sex with another seventh grader, and as so many other boundaries are

³¹² Midwestern Revised Statutes, Section 566.010

constructed around this arbitrary age of consent, the cohesion of the law, child development and public school policy is streamlined. Consider the previously mentioned Grade Level Expectations, the infusion of educational policy and curricula, which indicate, in a very quantifiable way, that the development of children is associated very closely with what they are capable of learning.³¹³ In other words, when a child is developmentally ready, e.g. when they are ten, they are on the precipice of what is developed in the discourse as a drastic biological, physiological body change. They are ready for puberty. They need to be informed about what *will* happen to them.

When I talked with a school administrator about how the school helps construct ideas of “age appropriateness” in conjunction with the development of the curricula – including the safety curriculum or the prevention programs occurring in the public school classrooms - the administrator responded that the Grade Level Expectations, the guidelines for classroom curriculum, are a result of collaboration

³¹³ Taken from the state department of education website in October 2007.

between physicians, child developmentalists-psychologists, education specialists, and teachers.³¹⁴ This is a policy to practice that is a combination of a variety of academic discourses.

The policy, in other words, that contributes to the curriculum for each grade level, in many ways is determined by an idea and understanding of a variety of discourses, including child developmental psychology. “Age appropriate” means that children are able to understand – they are assumed to be developmentally similar enough to comprehend what the teachers have to teach. The discourse of “age appropriate” is, in part, a starting place for a larger cultural (mis)understanding of children – what they are capable of, what they are interested in, and how utterly threatening their secret, honest perceptions of the world can be.

Lesko (2001) masterfully constructs an argument for the “denaturalization” of adolescence – and I see this work connected and extended into “childhood” itself.³¹⁵ Consider Lesko’s statement about

³¹⁴ Interview with school administrator, October 2007.

³¹⁵ Lesko, N. (2001).

the ideas of adolescence prescribed by adults encompassing peer orientation, age, biology, and the concept of transition that “operate within and across numerous fields, including education, law, medicine, psychology, and social work, as well as in popular culture, such as movies, television, and literature.”³¹⁶ Precisely how the “appropriateness” of action or behavior is determined – through the swirling entanglements of discourse, depends on how the person defining it understands the policies of the public school.

The school counselor understands that he is bound by law to report behaviors that might be indicative of a pathological problem, or a problem of mental defect.³¹⁷ He suggests that if 12-year olds are engaged in sexual behavior with one another, that it becomes the school’s (and inevitably, the state’s) problem, in that this “inappropriate behavior” might be a result of “something happening at home.” While the state social service system concerns itself with the

³¹⁶ Lesko (2001). Pg 4.

³¹⁷ The school counselor told Pat that the school would be required respond in the same ways (calling the parents, alerting the state) if they discovered a 12 or 13-year old was consuming alcohol in their home, where they lived, presumably with their parents.

conditions of the home as part of its responsibilities to the law, the counselor also is grounded in the discourse of consent as part of state law. At the same time, his responsibility is also to prevention, so that the wayward child, in this case, Jane, can be cured, reformed, set “straight.” Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) confronts the practice of psychiatry and psychology toward the “straightening” of gay children – more specifically boys, but this is applicable. She writes:

The re-naturalization and enforcement of gender assignment is not the worst news about the new psychiatry of gay acceptance, however. The worst is that it not only fails to offer, but seems conceptually incapable of offering, even the slightest resistance to the wish endemic in the culture surrounding and supporting it: the wish that gay people *not exist*” (original emphasis).

And goes on to say:

...the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large. There is no major institutionalized discourse that offers a firm resistance to that undertaking: in the US, at any rate, most sites of the state, the military, *education*, law, penal institutions, the church, medicine, and mass culture enforce it all but unquestioningly, and with little hesitation at even the recourse to invasive violence (my emphasis).³¹⁸

³¹⁸ Sedgwick, E.S. (1991). “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay.” *Social Text*. No. 29. Pgs 23-24.

What, potentially, could those definitions of violence be in a place where both “safety” and “innocence” are an illusion, depending on the eyes being looked through? I would add the over-interest in the “inappropriate behaviors” of these young people is certainly nested in an ideal of youth, and along with that, an appreciation for a certain kind of affectionate display. Are the same disciplinary measures being taken with other girls that might display affection in public? According to Jane, she sees girls in her school building hug and touch one another affectionately every day. What are the assumptions made about the relationship between Jane and Jessica, and how is their relationship a problem, while the relationships of other affectionate girls are not? Are these punishments intended to work out the kinks in Jane’s potentially dangerous sexual future? When does the child’s body belong to them – to make decisions about whom they share it with – when they share it and how?

Remember that the sexual abuse prevention curriculum instituted in the kindergartens of this school district attempts to teach children about “appropriate” and “inappropriate” touching, and charges them with the responsibility, after instruction, to be able to tell the difference. The supplemental material to *BodyRights!* (1986), a picture book entitled *My Body Belongs to Me*, assures children that they do not have to share their bodies with anyone - and only have to

“share” when they want – in other words, consent.³¹⁹ The combinations of “inappropriate” as imposed by the curricular discourse and practice of discipline are not necessarily congruent with the policies of bodies, as prevention instruction implies. Does a child have a right to decide when and how they “share” their body? Jane was perfectly content to hug her friend, and her friend was willing to accept the embrace, whatever the intention. Is it a matter of how, with whom and where that sharing takes place?

The sexual abuse prevention curriculum changes its face when it enters the hallways of the middle schools – no longer concerned with the external threats to the “safety” of children – but instead, turns its focus inward, to the mid-pubescent sexual awakening – and the destructive forces of what is not spoken: the secrets that children keep. The conversation of “sexual abuse at home” becomes talk of “healthy relationships,” and the avoidance and prevention of sexual assault in relation to peers. Despite the GLE requirement for an understanding that allows for a 14-18 year old person to “describe

³¹⁹ Baird, K. and I. Jansons. (1986). *My Body Belongs to Me*. Circle Pines (MN): American Guidance Services. Pgs 13, 23.

patterns of physical, social, and mental/emotional health that promote healthy, long-term relationships,”³²⁰ it does not seem as if a question of a “healthy relationship” is being asked here, a confirmation gained with inquiry. Jane and Jessica are not asked about their relationship in a way that implies “healthy” as the intention of the guidance. They are behaving inappropriately, breaking rules with their bodies, violating policies – fundamentally rendering them theoretically “abnormal,” and “unhealthy.”

In a later, related interaction, the school counselor inquired of Jane in regard to her sexuality, asking her if she preferred “girls or boys.” His assertions to Pat seemed to imply that her sexuality preference (still dichotomously constricted) “made no difference to him,” while at the same time, obviously concerned his guidance. I am only speaking of this here as a way to illustrate how the manifestations of “safety” reach themselves into interactions in which school officials and their understandings of policy detach from the practice of their

³²⁰ Health Education GLEs, Grades 9-12. “Functions and Interrelationships of Systems.” Social, Emotional and Mental Health. Influence of Family and Peers. Pg 15.

services. The guidance counselor does not have any responsibility to know the details of a 12-year old's sexuality, the preference for "boys or girls" is of no consequence to the policy that attempts to dissuade discrimination based on "race, religion, gender, ethnic origin, or any other personal characteristics."³²¹ If the concerns of the safety discourse were for the health of the child and the protection from sexual dangers, conversations with the counselor might have been different. How was Jane made safer by Mr. Admin's empty questions? His approach to speaking with Jane frames her experiences in a very limited way, so that the discourse of safety and prevention provide only a certain number of appropriate responses. His interviews with her are directed, with expectations of specific answers ("do you like boys, or do you like girls?") abounding.

In this particular case, and as previously stated, it can be assumed that part of the responsibility that the public school embraces is to enforce an environment of "safety" for the children within its walls, while at the same time, creating a sense of preventing harm. In

³²¹ Secondary School District Handbook, pg. 19. I am going to infer that "personal characteristics" could include sexuality, although, as children are not sexual according to the policy, this component is not articulated.

other words, teaching about “safety,” what is “safe,” and what the “rules” of safe look like is part of a disciplining of bodies not only to control the learning environment, in an attempt to prevent. By preventing “conduct or verbal, written or symbolic language, which materially or substantially disrupts classroom work, school activities, or school functions,”³²² public school policy attempts to control the physical child, through its abstracted ideas of “inappropriate behavior” and children’s bodies.

The rules about the Public Displays of Affection violated by Jane and Jessica are obvious, as the policy states there is to be no contact. At the same time, there does seem to be some question as to the risk of “safety” in regard to an exchange between two 12-year girls in the hallways, lunchroom or otherwise. The school counselor reported that their behavior was disruptive enough to cause another 12-year old to be “uncomfortable,” but in the same conference related that he knew this particular child, and that she was someone that did have a tendency to “cause trouble.” In other words, the threat of this interaction between these two people – presumably innocent, and at

³²² Secondary School District Student Handbook, pg 19.

the same time, dangerous, was more of a concern than the very possibility of seventh-grade gossip.³²³

The girl that reported Jane and Jessica to the office is not the only child that notices the attachment between these two people. Jane reports that she and her friend recognize and experience taunting, harassment, stares, whispers and bullying in various ways in various locations throughout the school day, and while the school's policies indicate that no such action shall be tolerated, it continues. This is not to say that the school officials or administrators must be or can be aware of what is happening in every corner or on the lips of every child in their charge, but the policies are enforced themselves in strange ways – even in the face of report.

The experiences with taunting that many children have in public school settings, and indeed that many adults remember from their experiences in school, are often reduced to children simply “being mean,” and dismissed as a rite of passage through childhood and

³²³ Stockton, Pg. 62.

onward. So, that while policies exist that prohibit bullying behavior, it is obviously enough of a shared experience between people that a question must be asked as to the “safety” provided by the schools in regard to the children that attend. Despite the school counselor’s willingness to indulge in the gossip of a 12-year old, and interrupt the lives of families in their homes as a result of the accusations from a 12-year old, he did not reportedly have the same response when dealing with the perpetrators of Jane’s bullying. Pat relates that when she spoke with him about this incident, he simply told her that he had spoken with the girls, and that if Jane had any more trouble, she should “feel free” to visit his office.

What is the guaranteed safety of Jane in this case? Jane and Jessica are marked in a variety of ways as examples of “difference,” their bodies’ sites for punishment from school officials and their peers. How are those charged with protecting children enforcing aspects of bullying and body space policies, when the school counselor’s practices contradict the underlying affirmations of bodyrights(!) to teach children to have “respect for their body and the understanding that their body belongs to them” as a way to “empower children if they are

threatened” with abuse?³²⁴ Mr. Admin, in other words, is the “adult” that Jane “could trust,” and she did report the bullying, but she still experiences the threats of violence from other children. This is not to say that he is the problem – it is the practice of these policies and the inconsistencies of their enforcement that is the question. What is preserved in prevention of violence? What happens when, as *My Body Belongs to Me* instructs, you cannot “get away to a safe place” – when the classroom, the hallway, the bathroom and the back of the bus are not spaces where you can go without fear?

Jane reports that she and Jessica (she refers to the two of them as “girlfriends” in some contexts) suffer through these treatments from their peers on a fairly regular basis. Kristen Myers and Laura Raymond (2010) relate the ways in which elementary school girls that they included in a group study work to keep one another in “gender check.” More specifically, they discuss how groups of similar aged young people reinforce the gender-norms of the larger culture in their smaller groups, by questioning crushes and asserting their “genders”

³²⁴ Baird (1986), Front material.

with one another.³²⁵ What are the potential relationships between what the school enforces in its policies of bullying and its policies against Public Displays of Affection?

Even with Jane reporting her harassment to bus drivers, teachers, and the school counselor, the taunting continues. The (dis)connections made here between the “safety” of the school through its policies, and its practices, while in this case orbiting around gender and sexuality, are confusions. How is the school a “safe” place for children when their experiences render them tearful, fearful and reluctant to go back for more, day-by-day?

Jane regularly experiences threats of violence in regard to her sexuality. Stockton asserts that while many times the harassment of some children by others ("Jane is gay") might seem like flippant catchings of some insult entangled with others, like “butthole,” “jerk,” or “your mamma” jokes, that there might be some substance to their suspicions. Stockton writes, “no one believes more firmly in ‘gay’ children than do other children – most especially children of a

³²⁵ Myers, K. and L. Raymond. (2010). “Elementary School Girls and Heteronormativity: The Girl Project.” *Gender and Society*. Vol. 24, No. 2. Pgs 167-188.

prejudicial sort, who ‘out’ any children they believe are acting strangely or any boy or girl they happen to dislike.” In other words, children work to discipline one another *back* into a normative way of being.³²⁶ It is folly to assume that children are naive about what they know and what they do with what they know, and while they might not have a complete sense of difference, they know when someone is not like them. The school helps with that distinction, as do a variety of other social outlets for the establishments of meanings, including the meaning of “normal,” the meaning of “beautiful,” and the negative connotations of being “different.” Children are engaged in a world hard at work to define their experiences for them. Bullies are no different.

A few days after Jane’s meeting with the school counselor, in regard to her sexuality and relationship with Jessica, Pat received the following email, sent to Jane and carbon-copied to her from the administrator’s office.

Hi Jane,

³²⁶ Stockton, pg. 46.

This is Mr. Admin. I am contacting you by e-mail, because I didn't want to draw attention to you, or for you to be questioned about coming to see me by other students. I would like for you to come talk to me some time, if you are comfortable. If you are not, I completely understand, and I definitely will not force you.

I am leaving it up to you if you would like to come see me and when you would like to do so. I want to make sure that I am here to help you with anything that might be causing you difficulty or if you just need someone to talk to. I promise I won't force you to discuss anything that you don't want to. I want to make sure that you know I'm available for all students and any issue.

Sincerely,

Mr. Admin

The initial reading of this email conveys an open door, one in which Jane is welcome to walk through whenever she feels the need to have “someone to talk to.” Jane also communicated to Pat and I that she feels comfortable talking with this school counselor, especially after “all that’s happened.” Foucault writes that “surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration,”³²⁷ so that in Jane’s experiences with teachers, school counselors and principals, she and Jessica are marked by these locations where “registrations” of a variety of characteristics are noted and filed. Regardless of Jane’s continued troubles with touching and discipline, her visits to the counselor and the principal are documented as operations of the procedures of discipline. Foucault goes on to say that:

The registration of the pathological must be constantly centralized. The relation of each individual to his disease ...

³²⁷ Foucault (1977), pg 196.

passes through the representatives of power, the registrations they make on it, the decisions they take on it.³²⁸

In other words, her problems, as noted in the record, and Jessica's problems, noted also, are filtered through a process that defines situations as problems and seeks to recover what is assumed to be lost: the innocence of a child to the dangerous realities of sex and sexuality, drugs, or violence.

Jane told me that she had never received an email from him before, and that it was "kinda weird" to get an email from him after the events that devastated two households.³²⁹ I think it is strange that Jane was relatively unnoticeable until these problems began at her school, and that a hyperawareness of her as a result of the assumptions made about her are guiding the practice of concern for her "safety." The counselor is reaching out to provide this "safe" space for Jane, but the incongruencies

³²⁸ Ibid. 196-197.

³²⁹ Personal conversation with Jane.

of the policy from which he practices allows for a disjuncture between keeping children “safe” from violence and harm, and the ways in which protection and prevention work themselves out in the loopholes of the laws defining children.

EPILOGUE

The last time Jane got in trouble with school officials for touching her girlfriend in the hallway, she relates that she was not hugging her, but that the hallways were crowded, as it was between classes ending and beginning. She reports that kids moving through the halls and getting into their lockers fills hallways quickly. She told me that she was trying to move her friend out of the way of a teacher, by putting an arm around Jessica and trying to guide her away from being an obstruction. A teacher, who happens to be informed about Jane by Jane’s parents and other sources around the school, saw Jane “touch” Jessica. Jane was sent to the office.

The school counselor told her that Jane was lucky that Jessica had not responded to the "hug," or Jessica’s parents would have had to be contacted.

In a prior meeting with Mr. Admin, Pat was informed that Jessica reported neglect, along with other information that Pat would not share. Aside from obvious breaches in confidentiality that are overlooked here, what of the sharing of home-life situations, happening in Jessica's home? What of the stories that she is telling, to be believed - or not? And what of the threat to Jane, who is fully aware of Jessica's life at home – and knows that a phone call to her father would result in further punishments? Does this assurance that another parent would be contacted place the responsibility of what might happen to Jessica *outside* of the school onto the shoulders of Jane, and away from school administrators?

So the relation to the policy here for the safety of children in the public school, and under the care of school officials seems somewhat tattered. How can the school administrators rely on the story of a 12-year old child that "might have seen" some ambiguous "inappropriate" interaction between Jane and Jessica in the hallway, and *heard* someone else talk about something Jane and Jessica did at a slumber party...but Jessica's counseling session, overlooked? Dismissed for what? And in the same general moments, after countless conversations that Pat recalls with Mr. Admin, in which she would also

relate the consequences of his actions (calling Jessica's parents- and her father's violent reactions), compounded with the information provided about home life from Jessica herself, he would threaten Jane and Jessica with a phone call to Jessica's parents (read: her father)? For what? The sake of policy? The sake of standard practice? How safe is this really?

After Jane was dismissed from the counselor this last time, as she was a repeat offender, she was required to speak to the principal. Pat told me that Jane has never been to the principal's office. She has never been disciplined outside of the classroom - but there she was, and there she was warned that if her behavior continued, the punishment next time would be more severe, and that Jessica would be punished and her parents called.

All on Jane's shoulders. All for the preservation of policy. All for the sacrifice of what could really happen...and might really be happening outside the "safe" realm of the school building, where Jessica has to go every night, eat every night, sleep every night. Where does the responsibility stop, really? Phone calls on a Sunday night motivated by gossip by a 12-year old who is a "known troublemaker," and taken up in the name of "safety," met with threats

from officials, warning that if these "inappropriate" behaviors continued: hell would be raised - and Jessica and Jane would have no one to blame but themselves. They must prevent their own assaults. They must assimilate to the expectations. The consequences are unimaginable, unimagined, and terrifying to them both.

And intertwined throughout all of this is the parent – the problem at home that creates the problem at school. Any distinction from sameness in the former, results in a distinction from sameness in the latter. Pat ended a correspondence with me recently with, "It would seem public schools are not a safe place at all for difference." She could not be more right.

I must remind myself, and the reader, that while I make connections in this investigation, and attempt to stretch the imagination, I am always located in this work as a mother-

researcher.³³⁰ *My experiences are primarily rooted in the information my children relay, the correspondences from school on their behalf, and my own interactions with school officials. The stories of my children and I are inextricably connected – mine would not exist without theirs, and visa versa.*³³¹ *The composite characters conceal the individual truths, but highlight the problems with the policies and practices of the public school.*

Jane's story is not about sexuality theory, gender theory or queer theory, but the appearance of work from relevant scholars is

³³⁰ I refrain from using the term "parent" here for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most significantly, as Dorothy Smith writes in one of my favorite pieces of hers, "The Standard North American Family: SNAF as Ideological Code," parenting, according to the discourse, strangely resembles expectations of the woman/mother, with assumptions compounded in the distancing of men from mothering, or more accurately, the abstraction of masculinity as fathering. I identify myself as a "mother," in some ways to present a disjuncture from the assumptions of the discourse surrounding mothering.

³³¹ While I rely heavily on institutional ethnography as a way to explain what is going on with my children and other children, I am asking questions that relate to their experiences – and applying those questions to my own experiences, in addition to those of other children and their parents. I do not ask the questions strictly based on interviews with other parents – but begin this work with the children – and more specifically *my* children.

necessary to illustrate what has taken place.³³² I am asking the reader to consider the ways in which sociologically related philosophies and theories can be used to talk about what is happening to children in public schools. This is not new. However, what I attempt to contribute is another way to see those controls at work.

At the same time that prevention discourses are central in play, it is also important to remember that the institutional ethnographic approach to this research does not require that I explore the intentions of the curricula. The meaning of discourse as an abstracted, dead thing will not aid in understanding the ways in which the everyday workings of children, are organized by the structures of power, located in the active language of policy, practice, rules, disciplines.³³³ The

³³² Part of Institutional ethnography allows that the research does not have to be inundated with floods of theoretical backing, but that the focus of the research questions stem from the actual, lived experiences of the people concerned.

³³³ Smith, D.E. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham (MD): AltaMira Press. Part of Smith's critique is in part that, while Foucault's analysis is imperative, he does not connect the interpretations of these disciplines by the people experiencing them to the laws, rules and punishments for violations. This connection is not his project, however, so I must make the distinction between the two approaches to discourse analysis.

introduction to Jane, Pat and the experiences of these two people with the policies and practices of the public school around bodies, gendered sexualities and "safety," were an introduction into a mess. Chaos induced by practice. Demolition created by policy and reconstruction for the sake of the future.

The Power over Bodies, Children, and Gendered Sexualities

There is no inherent problem with Jane Child, except that she is a child. She is part of culture that, according to many scholars, is a construction composed of so many different parts; the "whats" and "hows" of her childhood were already determined before she was born. The new skin is always predicted to be a perfect canvas on which the minerals can bind and infiltrate, and the bones nourished by them. It is a mistake, however, to reduce her experiences, her concerns, her protests, to those of a young person – naïve and careless. The problem with Jane is that she is different, and she is obvious.

Adrienne Rich (1993) writes, "The retreat into sameness-assimilation for those who can manage it – is the most passive and debilitating of responses to political repression, economic insecurity,

and a renewed open season on difference.³³⁴ Jane will not assimilate, and continues to be a problem at her school. It is in this refusal to give to the school the authority over her body, her privacy, her thoughts and desires that present problems for the institution. While Rich is speaking here of the impositions of compulsory heterosexuality in regard to lesbian relationships, consider the dangers of children realizing their bodies in attractions, and perhaps their sexualities, or not - asserting their queerness and refusing to be corrected. If popular discourse does not acknowledge consensual relationships between women, and seeks to dissuade them entirely for the sake of civility, what of the public school discourse's absolute refusal of the queerness of children – or their bodies as oddly sexual at all? I see policy and practice within the public school as a forcing of compulsory heterosexuality. Jane experiences prohibition on her privacy regularly, which forces an accountability to adults for the sake of her "safety," and reinforces structures that are assumed to bind or train "correctly". She is asked questions by adults that they could not ask one another,

³³⁴ Rich, A. (1993). "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Abelove, H., M.A. Barale, and D.M. Halperin. (eds). New York: Routledge. Pg 228.

but their demands on children for “the truth,” impose a power that Jane and any other child, are discouraged from questioning themselves.

It is not only to sexuality and gender that this control extends, of course. The response to authority in certain ways – tardies, insubordination, public displays of affection, are all ways in which children push against the slowly moving wall that is the expectation of their social locations, sometimes bewildered by an obligation to comply. As Langhout realizes, “The goal of the heightened attention given to discipline and behavior is to mandate uniformity, which is seen as necessary given who children are stereotypically believed to be.”³³⁵ Who are children “stereotypically” believed to be? Nancy Lesko (2001), claims that at the mere mention of age, especially the years considered those of the “teen-age,” concepts of adolescence emerge that are fortified by popular culture and “the history of the present.”³³⁶

³³⁵ Rich (1993). Pg 141.

³³⁶ Lesko, N. (2001). *Act Your Age!: The Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Pg. 4. Lesko uses “history of the present” here, ala Foucault to talk about how people understand and conceptualize adolescence as part of their histories also. At the same time,

Many scholars have already discussed the normalizing of bodies and the sexualities of children. The sexual abuse prevention curriculum and the violence prevention curriculum do not deviate from this objective of normalcy and compulsory heterosexuality.³³⁷ Normal children are not sexual.³³⁸ Therefore, any touch is a violation, even if it is wanted. Jane's skin is not allowed to touch her friend, Jessica's skin, without a reminder that "no touching is allowed." But is it simply the touching that is the problem, or who is doing the touching? What experiences can a child have when the social surface that is their skin is denied as their own skin? What is the lesson, then, on the bones? The policy for Public Displays of Affection in the district where Jane and Jessica attend, is not specific about what constitutes the public display, does this allow for the interpretation of the policy to play out in the practice, so that the definitions of what constitutes a "display of affection" is not about the experiences of the child, but the

this particular use of the "history of the present" refers to the perpetuation of the adolescent as a cultural construct.

³³⁷ See Rich, 1993; Stockton, 2009; Foucault, 1978; Butler, 2004; Bourdieu, 1993.

³³⁸ Giroux (2000).

interpretations of the adults? Who controls the definitions of violation, and who decides the punishments on the body of the child? What is being inhibited?

The sexual abuse prevention curriculum moves past the mention of body parts – and resides instead in the creation of “private parts.” The material provided by the school district defines “private parts,” as those that are “covered up by...[a] bathing suit or underwear” – and while this material was written in 1986, the idea that children must never share their bodies, with the exception of bath time and doctor’s appointments,³³⁹ is an interesting imposition. The discourse of sexual abuse prevention attempts to teach the differences between “good touching,” (read: appropriate) and “bad touching,” (read: inappropriate), by examples. This is reasonable, as the implied power between adults and children does have a consequence of rendering children silent. Judith Butler (2004) writes: “The body implies morality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the

³³⁹ Baird, K. and I. Jansons. (1986). *My Body Belongs to Me!* Circle Pines: American Guidance Services. Pg. 13.

gaze of others but also to touch and to violence."³⁴⁰ If the skin exposes children to violence, and violence absorbed is embodied, coming out in a reading of the bones, what of the child's experiences with touch? How is touch defined as "violent," and lived as such through these definitions by the powerful? As the story of Jane unfolds, a question about the realities of violence against the skin and bones of the child take shape, and an alarming realization of danger existing within "safe" spaces simmers below the surface.

Children are expected to adhere to and comply easily with the policies and practices of the school in order to discipline the body, and also to prevent their own abuse. The premise on which these requirements, preventions, and restrictions rest is connected to the same power that dictates their definitions. This is not to say that children easily do, but that the expectation is that they learn the rules, continue to learn them, and eventually, do not need to be told to be quiet in the hallway, or reminded that they can say "NO!"³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge. Pg. 21.

³⁴¹ Foucault (1977).

If "mental structures are internalized social structures,"³⁴² so that the lack of privacy, and impositions of "bodyrights(!)" and the sexual abuse prevention curriculum, define the private body of the child as restricted only outside of the bathtub or the doctor's office and as covered by clothing, then what of the body of the child? What of the "mental structure" that is the "internalized social structure," of a public body? What of the stories scratched into surface of the bones? How does the contradiction work then, when no one is allowed to touch a child's body in policy or practice, yet it is an explicit understanding that a child's inner workings and conceptions of their bodies as circumstantially compromised guides the interactions with adults and power?

Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimensions; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine.³⁴³

³⁴² Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in Question*. R. Nice. (trans). London: Sage Publications. Pg. 61.

³⁴³ Bourdieu (1993). Pg 21.

The problems with Jane Child, therefore, somewhat revolve around her unwillingness to discipline her own body in a variety of ways. Her most obvious problem, as her parent, Pat, relates to me, is that Jane does not conceive of her bodily behavior as problematic. She simply *is*. Her intuitions do not matter.

The depths to which the school system concerns itself with a child's sexual development is astounding to me. What difference to “safety” does a sexual body make? Isn't the operative assumption here that children are far too young to be sexual, or would it be more appropriate to ask if their age - and bodies, on the cusp of risk-laden adolescence - by some biologically determined default make them sexual and sexualized?

It makes sense to me that the limits on what children can do – in regard to consent and definitions of their own realities to explain situations, or to locate themselves - pose infinite problems related to violence in the public school, and fractures of policy from practice.

The school district where Jane and John attend, in addition to my children and all of their friends, neglects to discuss the definition of “private parts,” the ambiguous representations of genitals, until children are in the fifth grade. The sexual abuse prevention curriculum, however, introduces the hypothetical impositions of sexual

violence on children. So, what happens when there are holes in the language? What happens when the exchange breaks down and the gaps in conversation widen? The prevention of violence is placed heavily on the child – as the discourse is constructed to “empower” through knowledge: following three rules – “1) Say “NO!” in a loud voice; 2) Move away to a safe place; and 3) Tell a grown-up who can help.”³⁴⁴ The conclusion of this resource celebrates the fictional child being “safe” because the child “knew what to do.”³⁴⁵ This pretend child, in other words, protected itself from violence by following the rules of safety.

Butler contributes: “In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others even as the body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own,’ that over which we must claim the rights of autonomy.”³⁴⁶ This is not to say that the child’s body, with all of the restrictions loaded upon it, belongs to everyone else, but that the “child” – both as an actual, legal “population” and a fictitious representation of nostalgia - is not in a

³⁴⁴ Baird, K. and I. Jansons, front matter.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. pg 31.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. Pg 20.

position to deny or approve "appropriate" or "inappropriate touching."³⁴⁷ The right to consent to any sort of interaction is not theirs – so neither “YES!” nor “NO!” are relevant. At the same time, the literature provided to instruct them about sexual violence and violence in general, that involves them, detaches from the practices that should otherwise render them “safe.” I only mean here that the policy of “safe,” in terms of sexual abuse prevention and violence prevention, does not match the practice of what it could look like to “empower” a child.³⁴⁸

Jane’s everyday experiences within the classrooms, auditoriums, hallways, bathrooms and lunchroom do not necessarily paint the picture of a welcoming space. She is harassed regularly by other

³⁴⁷ See Stockton, Kathryn Bond, as previously cited and Giroux, H.A. (2000). *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture’s War on Children*. New York: Palgrave.

³⁴⁸ When my friend was helping read through this work, she asked me after reading this sentence what I would suggest for the “better ways” to empower children. I do not have suggestions – only concerns that we do not listen enough for the solutions that perhaps they could provide. This is not a prescriptive piece – and therefore, I am not interested in offering ways to make this better for anyone. I am simply interested in asking questions and telling stories that might help other people think about ways in which this could be different for children. This is a sociology for people – not a sociology for prescription.

children - on the bus, in the locker room - perhaps in some effort to “check her,” or to ensure that she knows exactly what girls should be doing.³⁴⁹ Jane should not, in other words be using her body to hug, hold hands or kiss Jessica, or any other girl. Barrie Thorne (1993) conducted her research for *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* on school playgrounds – documenting the ways in which children interact with one another to reinforce “gender norms.” The ways in which the school teaches, through the actions of discipline, publicly reinforces for the other children what they should and should not be doing. The interactions between Jane Child and her counselor, as discussed later, are a clear example: Jane relates that she was pulled from class on several occasions to go and speak with the school counselor concerning her problems with Jessica and Public Displays of Affection. The violation of this policy, her mother Pat, explains, is the only thing that makes her noticeably odd to adults. Jane also tells me that she was “embarrassed” every time – as her classmates turn to look at her

³⁴⁹ Myers, K. and L. Raymond. (2010). “Elementary School Girls and Heteronormativity: The Girl Project.” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2. 168-189.

when she leaves the room –knowing in their own ways *why* Jane is “in trouble.”³⁵⁰

The “safe” place that the school ideally hopes for itself to be, created and perpetuated by the policies for “safe schools,” seems to overlook the ways in which the practices create discrepancies. The obvious threats to sameness that Jane and her friend pose, translate to a danger for “safety,” a challenge to “comfort,” and a strange twisting of the already nonconsensual disciplining into the security of normalcy, in the eyes of the school administrators. However, the ways that the school handles the breaking of the rules - the singling out, the being made an example, the summons to the office - translate to danger for Jane.

I must remind the reader, and myself, that this story of Jane is the story of any child. If we take Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theoretical assertions to heart, the straightening out of young people is a process, whose consequences are not yet felt as a 13-year old in a system of disempowerment.³⁵¹ Foucault says, “The Normal is established as the

³⁵⁰ Personal Conversation with Jane, September 2010.

³⁵¹ Stockton (2009).

principal of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education...³⁵² Jane, her friends, and all those before and after, work with and against these incoherent structures, whose promise is to eventually render them status quo. In this way, the policy is a deconstruction – a demolition of the soul of the child – a writing-over on the skin from intuition, so that the practice of enforcing policy creates a chaos that jars the very bones of the children’s skeletons a frightened culture attempts to create. The story of Jane and Jessica’s scary bodies and the response of the public school policy and practice still unfolds...

³⁵² Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books. Pg. 184.

CHAPTER 5: ESCAPING THE RIBCAGE

Bullies Inside and Out

The district policies provide the following definition of “bullying,” which are also, evidently, the state educational policies for public school behaviors:

Bullying -- For purposes of this policy, bullying is defined as intimidation or harassment of a student or multiple students perpetuated by individuals or groups. Bullying includes, but is not limited to: physical actions, including violence, gestures, theft, or damaging property; oral or written taunts, including name-calling, put-downs, extortion, or threats; or threats of retaliation for reporting such acts. Bullying may also include cyberbullying or cyberthreats. Cyberbullying is sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices. Cyberthreats are online materials that threaten or raise concerns about violence against others, suicide or self-harm.³⁵³

³⁵³ File JFCF-Critical, “Hazing and Bullying” taken from school district policy website.

When Jane was in the fifth grade, she and another friend were unfortunately subjected to other forms of bullying – referred to by policy and popular culture as “cyber-bullying.” Stanley, Jane’s friend, Marla’s father, posted video of a school concert onto the internet and tagged the school district to provide an easier way for family to find the film footage. Much to his dismay, someone named “Brandon67988” left a series of comments about the video and Marla, Jane, and another friend, Anthony. The interesting part of this series of events unfolding was that neither my daughter nor Anthony was featured in the video. It was only Marla, singing her heart out. The comments included: “Anthony Peters sucks balls” and

haha you only have one preview this is so fucking gay this is Jane and we are done dating you fagget [*sic*] but your sex felt great I still have dreams everynight im [*sic*] dating someone else his name is Brandon.³⁵⁴

Not only does this interaction qualify as a situation in which bullying is happening, but it also meets the definitions of “sexual

³⁵⁴ Comments taken from Youtube.com in January 2009.

harassment” as by the district in the elementary student handbook:

Use of unwelcome verbal, written or symbolic language based on gender or of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a student’s educational environment or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment. Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to, sexual jokes or comments; request for sexual favors; touching or fondling of the genital areas, breasts, or undergarments, regardless of whether or not the touching occurred through or under clothing; and other unwelcome sexual advances.³⁵⁵

Stan reported to the school and informed Pat that these things were being said about her child. When she confronted the principal, the principal assured Pat that an investigation would commence and they would inform all of the parents involved of the outcome. The principal assured her that the school that housed her child was a “safe” place, with doors that could not be opened from the outside, and cameras monitoring the grounds at all times. People were not allowed to walk into the building or any of the classrooms without checking at the office. In other words, the assumption of the school administrator was that the perpetrator of this sexual harassment was an adult,

³⁵⁵ District Elementary School Student Handbook, pg. 21.

lingering in the bushes with a trench coat, waiting to assault Jane and her friends. Never mind the intimate details of the comments left by Brandon, and the obvious knowing of the social world of this particular school by the perpetrator of these verbal, virtual assaults.

What the school presented, after conferring with the Service Resource Officer³⁵⁶ was a disentanglement of their responsibility to the children that they, by policy, are required to protect. The administrators informed all of the parents that they had investigated, that “Brandon67988” was not a student at their school, and that other boys that had been involved were being sternly disciplined (read: spoken with about their involvement). The parents of all included were being notified and were committed to making sure this did not happen again.

The principal went on to conference with Pat, and suggested that it would have been impossible for a student to leave those comments from a school computer, as firewalls to Youtube.com are in place. This instance, the administrator confirmed after her investigation alongside

³⁵⁶ Service Resource Officers or SROs are paid city police officers that monitor the “safety” of the public schools in this area. More on SROs in proceeding chapters.

local police, was not a case of “cyber-bullying” because it did not happen more than once.³⁵⁷ The principal also asserted that since this had to have happened off school grounds, the school district’s responsibility, to the potential damages and threats to these three people, was nullified. According to the definitions of bullying in the district policy listed above, there is no mention that in order for “bullying” or “cyberbullying” to be considered such, they must occur more than once. The administrator and police officer, however, insisted that there would be no further investigation, since this was an isolated incident.

When Pat asked Jane, after her conference with the principal, if she knew of a “Brandon,” she related that she was consistently harassed by a child named “Brandon” in her class for the way she looked, the games she and her friends played on the playground and anytime she spoke up in class. This young person – despite the claims from school administrators that this “Brandon” attended a different school in the district - in other words, bullied her. “Brandon” was also contributing to “creat[ing] an intimidating, hostile, [and] offensive

³⁵⁷ Conversation with school administrator, January 2009.

educational environment” for Jane *prior* to the alleged instances on the internet.

In other words, the violent actions that would be considered by many to float in the same waters as textbook bullying or sexual harassment were not the school’s problem – even with the fundamental knowledge that were the school not a mediator of these relationships, this would not have happened.

The school’s policies for employees in regard to bullying reads as follows:

In addition, district staff, coaches, sponsors and volunteers shall not permit, condone or tolerate any form of hazing or bullying or plan, direct, encourage, assist, engage or participate in any activity that involves hazing or bullying. District staff will report incidents of hazing and bullying to the building principal. The principal shall promptly investigate all complaints of hazing and bullying and shall administer appropriate discipline to all individuals who violate this policy. District staff who violate this policy may be disciplined or terminated.³⁵⁸

Consider the involvement, or lack thereof, of the school administrators, both the counselors and the principal, in these occurrences regarding Jane and her friends. How is the complicity to

³⁵⁸ File JFCF-Critical, “Hazing and Bullying” taken from school district policy website.

distance the school from its responsibility, as written in the policy, a contradiction to the practice of protection? It is not just about the harassment and tormenting of children by other children. It is also about the desire of the school to monitor and control information, even more vehemently than possible— compounded with the culpability of the school administrators and the easy leaning back on “boys will be boys,” “children are just mean to one another,” and the assertions that these behaviors of threats, bullying and terror are *to be expected*, combine to form a uniquely problematic educational question. It is not reasonable to assume that children are going to be nice to one another all the time - that they all get along. They are, after all, people with personalities, coming from a variety of different places with different experiences. What’s important is the question that lies with the public school’s responsibility to the children they claim to protect and serve. If a child feels threatened, and follows the directions in place to “protect themselves” (by telling a teacher or administrator), what is the responsibility of the school to respond to their cry for help? The principal in this situation responded quickly, but seemed to miss that the problem was not outside the school, but inside the school, and indeed, within my daughter’s classroom.

Are the consequences of these violations to policy simply illusions of a certain kind of control? In other words, do the rules of

“safety” work against some, those on the outside, like my daughter, and in the favor of others, whose participation, whether obvious or not, is rewarded with the comforts of “fitting in,” the blessed fortress of conformity? As many have argued, “safety” is not the same for everyone,³⁵⁹ and as will be discussed below, the treacherous footings of this journey supply the adventurer with little to no protection from a deathly social drop to the very bottom.

Policies, Bodies and Fatal Possibilities

In October 2010, in the span of three weeks there were five suicides involving young people, a 13-year old perhaps the youngest – identified as “gay teens,” by a variety of popular media outlets. The news media reported “public outrage;”³⁶⁰ conversations spread across

³⁵⁹ Giroux, (2006, 2009).

³⁶⁰ “Tyler Clementi’s Suicide Sparks Outrage at Rutgers.” Taken from <https://pod51000.outlook.com:443/owa/redir.aspx?C=4e33046bf54c4bcf83b>

a social discourse of tolerance, despair and the dangers of adolescence; “It Gets Better” campaigns proliferated; and high level politicians, including the President of the United States commented on the tragedy of teen suicide especially connected to sexuality and the threat of difference. But then, like so many other stories, so many other shocking jolts into the realities of a difficult world, those stories turned to whispers of a history already long forgotten by main stream concerns. In my investigation, news outlets that ally themselves with the problems and concerns of a “gay community” were and are still talking about the deaths of these young people, threatened, harassed and terrified by the consequences of the parapets of gender, sexuality and the sanctity of childhood.³⁶¹

It is not only the “gay teen” that suffers the dark troubles of threats of violence, subtle – unseen harassments: the secrets of the social worlds of children. In March 2010, the suicide of Phoebe Prince

95f4b2b3aa94e&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2f2010%2f09%2f30%2ftyler-clementis-suicide-s_n_745137.html, on January 27, 2011.

³⁶¹ “Obama in video ‘shocked, saddened’ by gay youth suicides.” Taken from <https://pod51000.outlook.com:443/owa/redir.aspx?C=4e33046bf54c4bcf83b95f4b2b3aa94e&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.365gay.com%2fopinion%2fobama-in-video-shocked-saddened-by-gay-youth-suicides%2fcomment-page-2%2f>, on January 27, 2011.

created a cyclonic storm cell for a split second, reminding the audience about the power of peer pressure, and the difficulties that new technologies create in the already choppy water of growing up.³⁶² The problem with Phoebe was not that she was a “gay teen,” as her preference, according to news media sources, was for boys. But the story of Prince is like so many that are untold, unraveling in the hallways of public schools everyday: she had sex with the boyfriends of other girls. She had sex with lots of boys, according to the above-cited website, theoretically violating the impossible conceptions of children as asexual embodiments of innocence while at once being secret sex-fiends, fucking like possessed infants in the back seats of cars. The reputation of promiscuity that assigned to Phoebe provoked bullying behaviors from other girls – using Facebook and cell phone text messaging to create an omnipresence of degradation. According to the news media, the school had “no idea” that Prince was being so fiercely pursued by the brutal hostility of her peers. At the same

³⁶² Bazelon, E. (2010, March 30). “Suicide in South Hadley: Six teenagers have been charged with bullying Phoebe Prince. What about the adults who knew it was going on?” Taken from <http://www.slate.com/id/2249307> on March 30, 2010.

time, after certain incidents on school property, Bazelon reports:

Scheibel said Monday that the harassment in the library "appears to have been conducted in the presence of a faculty member and several students but went unreported to school administrators until after Phoebe's death." And, more damningly, "The investigation has revealed that certain faculty, staff and administrators of the high school also were alerted to the harassment of Phoebe Prince before her death."³⁶³

Bazelon also contributes that in her conversations with other students in the wake of this incident, they saw nothing out of the ordinary with the level of harassment Phoebe Prince endured. It was "normal girl drama."³⁶⁴ This particular student also remarked that the level of threat to Prince by these other girls and some boys was not something that would have compelled anyone else to kill themselves. In other words, Prince was not "normal," and in this classmate's experience, her suicide was a relative consequence to her promiscuity.³⁶⁵

Subsequently, the young people charged as perpetrators of the events that contributed to her suicide are in the process of being

³⁶³ Bazelon, (2010 March 30).

³⁶⁴ Bazelon, (2010).

³⁶⁵ Bazelon, (2010).

charged with various adult crimes, and potentially facing several years (up to 10 years) in prison. If this is indeed a rite of passage into adulthood, and something that all children are expected to endure (and do), why the surge of such harsh punishment on those simply performing the script of adolescence? How did the school play a part in the death of this young person?

My daughter reported on several occasions to several school officials that she was being harassed on the playground, in the hallways and in her classrooms, the response was that she was responsible for telling an adult when someone was threatening her, calling her names, or being physically confrontational. She never approached a teacher again when she endured teasing, harassment or otherwise. Jane also told no one about the bullying that she endured – but was summoned at *her* violation to the seat of authority, and begged for diligence in *her* adherence to the rules. Where were the questions about her harassment? The boys in the lunchroom that questioned her and Jessica’s gendered privilege of contact – and the understanding that children know each other’s secrets –and children *do* threaten, frighten and feel scared – and in the mix of all of that, the also attempt to check, re-check. This constant barrage of checking and re-checking has the potential to contribute inadvertently, to the spiritual deaths of their queer classmates.

My son recently had an In-School-Suspension, earned by continuously antagonizing his art teacher. He told me that he did not have to do what he was told to do in the classroom, and did what he wanted. I reminded him that, much like being a guest in someone's home, he must behave as if he were *visiting* this classroom, the classroom of the art teacher, and was not entitled in any way to treat him with disrespect. I supported the teacher's decision, and while my son did not agree, he served his detention.

His interactions with discipline have changed, slowly. He has not gotten in the same kinds of trouble as in previous years, and has been steadily improving. Our home life is good – save for the times that he promises that his homework is done, and a note comes from the teacher a day later. He still gets Cs on his report cards, and justifies his “average” grades with his lack of interest.

We are not late to school anymore. I make sure that I go to bed at an hour that allows me to get up in the morning to get them to school, with enough sleep to stay up after they are gone to proceed with my own productivity. They have stopped eating breakfast at home, and decide instead on the sugary treats their schools serve in their breakfast programs. They also want to be at school early enough to see their friends. They wake themselves up.

Pat and I have not spoken in some time about Jane and Jessica. I worry for these two young people, and their struggles with parents, judgment and the school system. How can a school administrator look the other way when a young person asks for help, and focus so intently, simultaneously, in a certain kind of safety? The contradictions are fascinating. I am interested in working further on this part of the project. Interviewing more children about their experiences with their bodies, in relation to affection, “appropriate touching” and “inappropriate touching,” could shed light on another dimension of Jane’s experiences with, not only the disciplining of her body, but the constrictions on her sexuality. Asking teachers questions about their experiences with PDA or lessons on touching would benefit the conversation as well. Their perspectives on the meaning of the policy, and the stories that they might tell regarding Public Display of Affection policies and their relationship to safety and conduct would also be interesting components of further research.

Questions about educational neglect have also bubbled to the surface as a result of this dissertation research. I wondered how many parents knew about these laws – and how many did not? My knowledge of the policies was a statement to more than just a research interest: my kids are directly impacted by guidelines.

Following the trail of that term, with its implications deeply rooted in a context of violence, exposed some unexpected aspects of a “neutral” policy. I did not expect that a state policy would explicitly direct its employees to gauge the possibility of neglect on “single-parent families,” so that I could be a target, or any parent whose employment of life outside of their children’s could be questioned.

It is difficult to know where to stop with this work – as new instances of police-in-school-problems surfaced, and even more, the use of Tasers on children. Several events that took place in the last year have taken Tasers from a weapon for specific cases of discipline, to demonstrations of power unprovoked.³⁶⁶ I continue to be amazed and bothered by the use of force against children in public schools, by police especially.

A child seems to float along in the world, like Stockton’s metaphor of the “ghostly” child, parallel to the law that defines the

³⁶⁶ UPDATE: Deputy Who Tasered 30 Colorado Students Charged with Child Abuse.” Taken from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/09/update-deputy-who-tasered_n_531354.html January 2011. The officer was attempting to demonstrate what it might “feel like” to be tased, and claims to have obtained their permission to use an electrocution device on a group of high school students at a job fair. Several of the students were hospitalized for burns. The officer resigned.

body as belonging to someone else. The privilege of consent dictates to whom their bodies belong, while the programs and guidelines of adult practice, especially in school curricula, attempts to empower them with control they do not have. How can the child's body be, on one hand, their own – only to be shared when they choose – and on another, not their own at all? Any hug, touch, gesture interpreted as threatening or too close, a violation of policy – results in discipline – a not-so-subtle reminder of the danger of children's bodies. What to do then, in a culture that proliferates the hazards of growing up, when indeed, as Stockton suggests "...'growing-up' might be a short-sided rendering of human growth, one that oddly would imply an end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved."³⁶⁷ There is no way to "grow-up," when the law prohibits. It seems a desperate situation for any person under the age of 17, and an equally disturbing affliction on those that make it through.

I do not have any suggestions for making this world, educational or otherwise, a better place for children. I do not think this is a safe

³⁶⁷ Stockton (2009), 11.

world, and I do not think that police in schools, heightened surveillance of touching and interaction, policies that enforce certain ways of being, the normalizing of standardized education or any of the other problems discussed in this work are “cures,” for the perceived ills of our society. The stories my children tell me of their adventures and the adventures of their friends indicate that while the outcome, on the surface, a correcting that is and has been “working,” the larger problems with our social worlds would contradict these assumptions. The school is not the only place these corrections happen, but as a major functioning part of this society, charged implicitly and explicitly with the responsibility of socializing children, what can the schools do differently – how can public schools change the world?

What would the world of the public school look like if the practices of its administrators and officials saw children differently? What if children’s voices were themselves valued, along with their experiences and understandings of the world they are growing in? What would be different, then?

Institutional ethnography as an approach to social investigations will provide further mapping of the relations between children and schools. I would like to interview more children with more specific questions about their bodies, restrictions on them and their

understandings of policy around the corporeal. Teachers and other public school administrators will also help complete the picture of how these policies work to discipline and the desired outcomes of the disciplines enacted upon children's bodies. I am worried that my interactions as a mother in this district have burned some research bridges, so I have considered the interesting possibilities of other school districts in the area, and their policies for PDA, tardies, insubordination and so on. Taking the Institutional Ethnography as the main approach, the element of the autoethnography compels the research with the element of *me*, so that my place in this web is constant. I appreciate being able to tell a story from my different social locations, including the entanglements that other parents experience, in addition to my ability to creatively weave myself into the stories of children and their parents.

"Conclusion": This is NOT the End

My children are getting older. Every year, they move up a grade, and their problems and resolutions add to their knowledge of rules, institutions and residing with both. My curiosities extend past

their presents, into what we might be looking at down the road – the labels that will follow them, and the ways in which the disciplines they have already encountered continue to shape their understandings of their school experiences. At the same time that this excites me, I feel perplexed by the very real eventuality that their time in public school will end – very soon, and that the questions I continue to ask will require a constant “checking-in.” How will the policies of the body change? If, as Mr. Admin shared, he is seeing more and more young people in his office with concerns about their sexualities (one or the other, according to him), then how will the policies enforced on the bodies of middle-schoolers change to acknowledge these “emerging truths” of adolescence? Will they? What is the developing relationship between the discourse of safety and the “coming-out” of 13-year olds to school counselors? How will parents be implicated in the sexualities of their children? What are potential dangers, after all – to the family – if difference is encouraged, and critical questions are part of a parental pedagogy?

My son told me one night that he did not have a lot of hope for his future. His experiences dictate that he will “not amount to much,” especially since he knows he comes from a poor family – that his education is different from those he associates with on a daily basis. The marks on his skin are various colors as result of his lived

experiences; he knows he is different. Those social minerals that crossed over the membrane of the integumentary to make their divots and grooves on his bones are obvious, as his child body transforms slowly into the skeleton of a person that has been in the world. His body is inscribed, moved, and greatly informed by the practices of public school policy. I see my son squeezing, bit-by-bit, through the ribcage that has kept him for so long.

I told him that I have hope for him – and that he can do whatever he sets his mind to do, knowing that, to some extent, this requires work that I do not divulge for him. There are things that they must discover on their own, but the disappointment of adulthood might be coming fast enough without my protection and the confinement of the cage of ribs. It will be impossible for children to make the world a better place for other people if they are not taught how to respect humanity by example – embrace difference as a nourishment of their own skins, bones and souls, and work against violence as a “rite of passage.” I do work as their mother to help them consider their own inscriptions, to choose their own tattoos – and understand that their bodies do not have to be the bodies of the children before them. The school is also working to mark them in other ways – and not always negative ways. The public school can be a place for this change, but the practices imposed must be aligned with

the policies written to teach, protect, and direct children toward a better world. In other words, respect for the skin and bones of the child must be explicitly part of public school policy, and implicitly practiced by those that desire to publicly serve children. Parents can be beacons for a better world, and I hope, with this research as a beginning, I might also be part of something bigger and better than just my own ideas and practices. What can a safer world look like for children?

I am open to the possibilities.

APPENDIX

Form I – Think Sheet

Time Left Room:
 Time Arrived:

THINKSHEET

Name: _____ Team: _____ Date: 5-8

Sending Teacher: _____

Expectations:

- ✓ Enter the room QUIETLY and sit at the assigned seat. Ignore the students in the buddy classroom.
- ✓ Remain in the seat at all times.
- ✓ Raise your hands to ask questions and wait for teacher to call on you.
- ✓ Complete this think sheet and any assigned class work
- ✓ Wait for the teacher to check on you and dismiss you.

If you are unable to follow these expectations, you will be asked only once to go to the office.

1. What happened? I was talking

**Use the back if needed.*

2. How did you feel? (check all that apply)

Uncomfortable (embarrassed)
 overwhelmed
 irritated
 annoyed
 disgusted
 ANGRY/OUTRAGED

none ←
→
MORE INTENSE

3. What did you do when you felt that way? went to buddy room

4. Has this happened before? YES / NO (circle one)

5. Which skill(s) were you struggling with? Place a check mark by any and all of the following goals.

I can be safe and stay on task even though I'm angry or overwhelmed by my feelings.
 I can be okay even though others around me are not okay.
 I can be on task and follow directions even though I don't want to.

6. Which Wildcat GRRRR did you not follow? (Check all that apply)

Give Respect
 Responsible for Your Actions
 Ready to Learn
 Reach for the Stars

7. The next time this situation arises:

What will you say/do instead? I won't talk

What will your body look like? (examples: stay in seat, keep hands/feet to self).
listening to teacher

Which adult can help you? none

8. Do you owe anyone an apology? YES / NO (Circle one) Who? _____

What is your apology going to sound and look like? (tone of voice, eye contact, what you did)
I'm sorry for disrupting your class

9. When you return to your classroom, how will you act differently? I won't talk

Form II – Behavior Management Form

| MIDDLE SCHOOL BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT FORM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| [Redacted] Phone: [Redacted] | | [Redacted] Fax: [Redacted] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Student Name: [Redacted] | | Referring Staff: [Redacted] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date: [Redacted] Time: [Redacted] | | Team: [Redacted] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| LOCATION: <input type="checkbox"/> Bus <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom # _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Media Center <input type="checkbox"/> Gym <input type="checkbox"/> Bus Loading Zone <input type="checkbox"/> Commons <input type="checkbox"/> Office <input type="checkbox"/> Locker Room <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria <input type="checkbox"/> Hallway <input type="checkbox"/> Restroom <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MAJORS (offenses requiring immediate administrative involvement) <input type="checkbox"/> Using Abusive, inappropriate Language/gestures/writing directly to a peer or teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespect toward a teacher or peer/refusal to comply with adult directive and PBS steps <input type="checkbox"/> Giving False Alarm (dialing 911, pulling fire alarm, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Truancy <input type="checkbox"/> Harassing/Tossing/Taunting/Bullying <input type="checkbox"/> Fighting/Physical Aggression (where injury may occur) <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of Drugs <input type="checkbox"/> Use/Possession of Tobacco <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism <input type="checkbox"/> Using/Possessing Weapon <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic Disruption of Learning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chronic Tardiness # _____ | | MINORS <input type="checkbox"/> Using inappropriate language not directed at a peer or adult <input type="checkbox"/> Violating dress code (1 st or 2 nd offense) <input type="checkbox"/> Minor Disrespect/Defiance/Non-compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Missing Detention <input type="checkbox"/> Minor disruptive behavior: talking, making noise, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Property misuse or damage <input type="checkbox"/> Technology misuse or damage <input type="checkbox"/> Physical contact/horseplay/clay-fighting <input type="checkbox"/> Unpreparedness <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive Tardiness # _____ (3 or more) <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ *PBS continuum should be used to address these issues prior to writing a referral. * A TAD may be given. <i>Positive Behavioral Support</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Others Involved: <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Peers <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Substitute <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Possible Motivation: <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain Peer Attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain adult attention <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain items/activities <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid Peers/conflict w/peer(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid Adult <input type="checkbox"/> Ask to perform task/Avoid task or activity <input type="checkbox"/> Provoked by peers <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brief Description of Incident: <i>Chronic Tardy</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Teacher/Team Actions: Check all that apply <input type="checkbox"/> Prompt/Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Safe Seat 1 2 3 (circle one) times <input type="checkbox"/> Buddy Room 1 2 3 (circle one) times <input type="checkbox"/> Re-teaching of expectations (group or individual) <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to Guidance/HSC/Out Reach Counselor <input type="checkbox"/> Conference with student <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Seating <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Assigned Det. Date: _____ Rm. _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Contact (circle one) phone/ letter / email Date: _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION Taken By: <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; border: none;">Ms. Greene</td> <td style="width: 25%; border: none;">Ms. Grant</td> <td style="width: 25%; border: none;">Dr. Martin</td> <td style="width: 25%; border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Time in Office / GRRRR</td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Conference with Student</td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Detention A.M.P.M Date(s): _____ Rm # _____</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Bus Action/Suspension Duration: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Community Service Date: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Loss of Privileges</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Lunch Detention Date: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GRRRR (ISS) <i>15</i> Hrs/Days Date: <i>5/4/5</i></td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Parent Contact Date: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Detention Date: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Phone / Mail / Conference / E-mail</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Recovery Room (no more than 1 hour) Date: _____</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> OSS _____ Hrs/Days Date(s): _____</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> </table> | | | | Ms. Greene | Ms. Grant | Dr. Martin | | <input type="checkbox"/> Time in Office / GRRRR | <input type="checkbox"/> Conference with Student | <input type="checkbox"/> Detention A.M.P.M Date(s): _____ Rm # _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Bus Action/Suspension Duration: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of Privileges | | <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch Detention Date: _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GRRRR (ISS) <i>15</i> Hrs/Days Date: <i>5/4/5</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Contact Date: _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Detention Date: _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / Mail / Conference / E-mail | | <input type="checkbox"/> Recovery Room (no more than 1 hour) Date: _____ | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> OSS _____ Hrs/Days Date(s): _____ | | | |
| Ms. Greene | Ms. Grant | Dr. Martin | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time in Office / GRRRR | <input type="checkbox"/> Conference with Student | <input type="checkbox"/> Detention A.M.P.M Date(s): _____ Rm # _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bus Action/Suspension Duration: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Service Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of Privileges | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch Detention Date: _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GRRRR (ISS) <i>15</i> Hrs/Days Date: <i>5/4/5</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Contact Date: _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Detention Date: _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / Mail / Conference / E-mail | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recovery Room (no more than 1 hour) Date: _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OSS _____ Hrs/Days Date(s): _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Administrative Comments: _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Parents: A copy of this referral is being sent home for your review. Please sign it and return it to the school if you have not spoken to a school representative about this issue. Should you have any questions please contact us at the number above.</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| By: [Redacted] Parent Signature: [Redacted] | | Date: [Redacted] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Copy – Student/Parent/Guardian | | <input type="checkbox"/> Pink Copy – Teacher | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Copy - File | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, M. J. (2005). *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham (SC): Duke University Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2001). *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Baird, K. (1986). *My Body Belongs to Me*. Circle Pines (MN): American Guidance Services.
- Baird, K. and M.J. Kile. (1986). *BodyRights!: A DUSO Approach to Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*. Circle Pines (MN): American Guidance Services.
- Bazon, E. (2010, March 30). "Suicide in South Hadley: Six teenagers have been charged with bullying Phoebe Prince. What about the adults who knew it was going on?" Taken from <http://www.slate.com/id/2249307> on March 30, 2010.
- Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Belluck, P. (2009). "Test Subjects Who Call the Scientist Mom or Dad." *New York Times*. New York.
- Bigelow, B. J., G. Tesson and J. H. Lewko (1996). *Learning the Rules: The Anatomy of Children's Relationships*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publications.
- Butler, J. (2004). "Bodies and Power Revisited." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*. D. Taylor, K. Vintges. Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 183-194.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

- Coe, C. and B. K. Nastasi. (2006). "Stories and Selves: Managing the Self through Problem Solving in School." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2: 180-198.
- DeVault, M. L. (1999). *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Diamond, T. (2006). "'Where'd you Get that Fur Coat, Fern?': Participant Observation in Institutional Ethnography." *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. Smith, D.E. (ed). Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Eastwood, L.E. (2006). "Making the Institution Ethnographically Accessible: UN Document Production and the Transformation of Experience." *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. D.E. Smith (ed). Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Giroux, H. (2002). "Body Politics and the Pedagogy of Display: Youth Under Siege." *Body Movements: Pedagogy, Politics and Social Change*. S. Shapiro and S. Shapiro. Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press, Inc.: 45-73.
- Giroux, H. (2009). *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giroux, H. A. (2000). *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2006). "Disposable Youth and the Politics of Domestic Militarization." *The Giroux Reader*. C. G. Robbins. Boulder (CO): Paradigm Publishers. pgs 147-177.
- Griffith, A. I. (1995). "Mothering, Schooling and Child's Development." *Knowledge, Experience and Ruling Relations*. M. Campbell and A. Manicom. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 108-121.

- Griffith, A. I. and D. E. Smith. (2005). *Mothering for Schooling*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Gunzenhauser, M. G. (2006). "Normalizing the Educated Subject: A Foucaultian Analysis of High-Stakes Accountability." *Educational Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3: 241-259.
- Heavin, J. (2008). "Schools' policy on fights tough on self-defense." *Local Daily Tribune*. Local City. **CVIII**: 1.
- Ingraham, Chrys. (1994) "The Heterosexual Imagination: Feminist Sociology and the Theories of Gender." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2.
- Jewett, L.M. (2008). *A Delicate Dance: Autoethnography, Curriculum, and the Semblance of Intimacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Jones, S.H. (2002). "The Way We Were, Are, and Might." *Ethnography Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*. Bochner, A.P. and C. Ellis. (eds). Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press.
- Langhout, R. D. (2005). "Acts of Resistance: Student (In)Visibility." *Culture & Psychology*. Vol. 11, No. 2: 123-158.
- Lesko, N. (1996). "Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations." *Youth & Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2: 139-161.
- Lesko, N. (2001). *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Myers, K. and L. Raymond. (2010). "Elementary School Girls and Heteronormativity: The Girl Project." *Gender & Society*, Vol. 24, No. 2: 168-189.
- Paget, M. (1983). "Experience and Knowledge." *Human Studies*, Vol. 6.: 67-90.
- Rambo, C. (2007). "Sketching as Autoethnographic Practice." *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 30, No. 4: 531-542.

- Rich, A. (1993). "Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. H. Abelove, et al. (eds). New York: Routledge.
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Brunswick (NJ): Rutgers University Press.
- Ronai, C. R. (1995). "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 23, No. 4: 395-426.
- Saladin, K.S. (2004). *Anatomy & Physiology: The Unity of Form and Function*. 3rd Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1991). "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay." *Social Text*, Vol. 29: 18-27.
- Smith, D. E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, D. E. (1990). *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, D. E. (2004). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, D. E. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Smith, D. E., (Ed). (2006). *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002). "Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More? Ethnographically Speaking." *Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*. A. P. Bochner and C. Ellis. Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. Walnut Creek (CA): AltaMira Press.

- Stockton, K. B. (2009). *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham (SC): Duke University Press.
- Thorne, B. (1993). "Gender Play: Creating a Sense of 'Opposite Sides'." *Inner Lives and Social Worlds: Readings in Social Psychology*. J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium. New York: Oxford University Press: 386-404.
- Treacher, A. (2006). "Children's Imaginings and Narratives: Inhabiting Complexity." *Feminist Review*, Vol. 82: 96-113.
- Trinh, T. M.-h. (1989). *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Van Ausdale, D. and J. R. Feagin. (2001). *The First R: How Kids Learn Race and Racism*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

VITA

I live in Columbia, Missouri with my two children, Patrick, 15 and Cecilia, 13. I have lived in Columbia for a very long time, and am looking forward to the opportunity that this research will afford me to move out of Columbia and begin a life of new experiences.

I work as an instructor at Moberly Area Community College's Columbia campus, where I teach a variety of Sociology classes there. I plan to continue working as a professor in an effort to help prepare those students with interests in a university education for the expectations of a college classroom. I enjoy teaching Social Problems and Sociology of the Family, especially, and value my time in the classroom as my primary occupation.

My current research interests include the ways in which children learn to speak to adults through translating their experiences as children with adult constituted language to adults. I am also interested in the development of the child's body as sexual and not, and the consequences of heterogendered policies on children's

identities. My future research will include continued study of children's relationships with policy and practice and the ways in which they relate their experiences to adults. I would also like to explore further the realities of order and safety on different children in different school districts, and the interpretations of children in regard to police in their schools, their drug-prevention training, and the curricular implementations of sexual abuse prevention.