(THE) STUDENT BODY/IES: CULTURAL PARANOIA AND EMBODIMENT IN THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

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The Student Body/ies: Cultural Paranoia and Embodiment in the American High School

Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes contemporary high school rhetorics and institutional discourse, with specific focus on attendance, discipline, and dress code policies. The analysis is employed through an embodiment reading of high school handbooks and high school buildings. A theoretical lens comprised of the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, and Sara Ahmed is utilized throughout the dissertation, and the primary methods of analysis are Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and primary metaphor analysis. The dissertation suggests that a more thoughtful and informed approach to the development of educational discourse may have the power to radically change (for the better) the way we educate high school students. The core problem addressed is the existence of a rhetorical mismatch between author and audience; current educational discourse/rhetoric fails to connect with its target audience (high school students) on many counts and perhaps in some ways actively alienates them. The appropriate intervention must examine and interrogate that discourse/rhetoric and ultimately suggest alternative modes, tone, and content that might be more effective and productive in engaging the desired audience.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In a recent *Psychology Today* article, Boston College professor Peter Gray identifies what he believes to be the primary reason American high school students don’t like school: “School is prison.” He reiterates: “Let me say that a few more times. School is prison. School is prison. School is prison. School is prison. School is prison.” This might seem excessive to anyone who has never taught high school. I have taught high school, though, and Gray’s characterization is accurate; even the “good” students say this, and they say it clearly and repeatedly. However, another thing I learned from teaching high school is that it’s never wise to accept the words of teenagers at face value.

Still, the repetition and ubiquity of this belief among high school students continued to trouble me even after I left the high school classroom and began teaching at the college level; eventually I began to examine the students’ claims within an academic framework. What I discovered, from reading both theoretical scholarship and mainstream news publications, and eventually applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) and metaphorical analysis methods to institutional documents written and distributed by school districts themselves, primarily high school handbooks, is that the students may have a point.

If they do have a point, then what, if anything, should we do about it? We cannot do anything until we understand how the “school-is-prison” metaphor developed and is perpetuated. In this dissertation, I claim that an analysis of the institutional discourse circulating in contemporary American high schools provides a first step in understanding.
Most current scholarship that addresses the state of our public schools comes from the disciplines of educational studies and social sciences. This makes sense; however, I believe there is a significant gap in the research that may be most productively bridged by English studies. Discussions of psychology and statistics and desired outcomes are valuable and certainly have a place in educational scholarship. But at its most foundational level, education is (or should be) about human connection. One of the most important ways humans connect is through language, through words. This dissertation is about the words. I argue that we do not pay enough attention to the way we use language within the institution of the American high school, and that there are negative consequences associated with that deficit. Additionally, I suggest that a more thoughtful and informed approach to the development of educational discourse may have the power to radically change (for the better) the way we educate high school students. The core problem I address, therefore, is what I perceive to be a rhetorical mismatch between writer and audience; I believe that current educational discourse/rhetoric fails to connect with its target audience (high school students) on most counts; moreover, I believe it sometimes actively alienates them. The appropriate intervention, then, must examine and interrogate that discourse/rhetoric and ultimately be able to suggest alternative modes, tone, and content that might be more effective and productive in engaging the desired audience. I use various interpretive tools (which I will discuss later in this chapter and develop over the course of the project) to perform such an analysis and to begin to offer suggestions for further consideration.

In addition to examining the language and rhetorical effects of written texts, I also extend my analysis to spaces (actual high school buildings). As Michel Foucault, Carole
Blair, Amy Propen, and others have discussed, physical sites are constructed by and help to construct the overall Discourse of the communities they serve. We must consider “these artifacts as rhetorical . . . to the extent that they have the capacity for consequence, have the ability to persuade, and may influence our interpretations and understandings of specific contexts in ways that impact both the mind and the body” (Propen xvi). To extend the comparison, we must recognize that both discourse and spaces enclose, protect, limit, and define lived human experience. The original goal of my project was to examine how the “school as prison” concept is rhetorically and discursively constructed and/or supported. Along the way, I discovered other metaphors and rhetorical patterns that extended and complicated the “school is prison” claim. In a later section of this chapter I will address the specific decisions I made in defining and limiting an appropriate and manageable research corpus.

Before doing so, however, I needed to determine potential locations of connection; if “school is a prison” has become a popular metaphor, there must be actual or implied connections between those two institutions. Regardless of whether the metaphor is valid, there is a collective perceptual linking that begs interrogation. I began by thinking about the primary purposes for each institution. It seems safe to say that the primary purpose of a school is to educate student minds and the primary purpose of a prison is to contain criminal bodies. Both are oversimplifications, of course: we certainly end up managing students’ bodies in the process of educating their minds—perhaps for the purpose of educating their minds—and we know that the incarceration of bodies implies mental and psychological incarceration as well. It was identifying these
intersections and cross-purposes that originally led me to mind/body or embodiment scholarship.

I believe we need to begin by asking some questions about the place and identity of a student body within “the student body.” What does it mean to be an individual body that is, by definition, part of a larger thing we still call a “body”? And how does membership in it make embodied existence unique from all other sectors of human life?

My initial curiosity manifested in four research questions that I used to guide my reading and analysis. First, what can an embodiment reading of institutional artifacts reveal about how we currently conceive of and respond to student bodies? I will discuss in the following section of this chapter how I decided which artifacts to include in my reading. Second, is the school-is-prison metaphor logically valid (for example, is it supportable in general, beyond and outside of the context of frustrated teenagers?) and, if so, how is it discursively and rhetorically constructed and perpetuated? And are there other metaphors that emerge from the discourse? Third, I ask whether the embodied beliefs and practices common in contemporary high schools are supporting or thwarting the expressed academic mission of public high schools. For example, school mission statements (which are generally published online) often articulate goals related to preparing students to develop a lifelong love of learning, to reach their highest potential, and to fully participate in democratic life. I am interested in how the embodied policies and practices that govern the daily life of American high schoolers square with the lofty goals stated in their schools’ mission statements. And finally, I ask what the implications of the answers to the first three questions are for further study or change initiatives.
One of the first analytical challenges I confronted was to define exactly what we mean when we talk about the “high school student body”; this phrase is rhetorically and discursively complicated. On one hand, it constructs a large number of people—usually in the hundreds or thousands—as one solid entity; on the other, the singular word “body” implies an individual life experience that is mediated and delimited by clear physical boundaries, even as the forces that act upon its surface and interior extend and transcend the physical and incorporate other bodies (of individuals, of institutions, of knowledge, of belief). This project interrogates that double meaning. I argue that, in 2014, American society’s entire concept of (the) student body/ies is problematic, contradictory, and paradoxical: We are a culture that values and rewards individualistic behavior yet we simultaneously move toward increasing standardization of all aspects of education and homogenization of the collective student body. At the heart of the paradox reside our educational system’s twin goals of educating and expanding student minds while controlling and limiting their bodies. Historically and presently, we have tried to accomplish these goals in accordance with Cartesian dualism: subjugate and subordinate the body in order that the mind may assume control. More recent scholarship, though, suggests that such a hierarchy is neither productive nor possible. We are our bodies as much as we are our minds.

As the notion of the mind/body dichotomy disintegrates, contemporary theorists have begun reading the body as text in order to understand the origins and implications of cultural inscriptions upon it; by doing so we must wrestle with the ways in which mind and body are always already intertwined and acting upon each other. So we have the “student body,” which is comprised of multiple actual bodies, which can also be read as
texts. But then we also have written, word-based texts that govern those bodies, the primary text being the student handbook. To add another layer, we have other entities (like physical facilities) that can also be read as texts that govern the bodies—that-can-be-read-as-texts, all of which are controlled and constrained by other, farther-reaching, texts, such as local building requirements and specifications, state and federal laws, and cultural norms and expectations.

If we lack a collective understanding of how all this works together, or why it even matters, I believe it can be attributed to the fact that we’ve failed to identify the intersection of body and text, in all of those terms’ variations and connotations. Specifically, we need to examine how that intersection relates to (the) student body/ies. Educational scholars seek to understand and improve pedagogy and learning within the parameters of the current system; social scientists try to determine the social and psychological effects of existing educational structures upon student psyche and behavior; architectural theorists and practitioners attempt to balance the increasingly-felt need for safety and security with functional requirements, aesthetic value, and realistic budgets. All of these efforts have profound, albeit often tacit, effects upon the actual bodies of students in our schools, and all are profoundly affected by bodily characteristics and impulses. The field of discourse studies offers a location from which to begin gathering these various strands together; it provides the tools to help us develop a more coherent concept of (the) student body/ies as a fully fleshed out and ideologically consistent organism that simultaneously accounts for its individual constituents.

In order to perform a meaningful and productive embodiment reading, we need working definitions of the terms surrounding embodiment theories. A. Abby
Knoblauch’s article “Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy” is a good place to begin this discussion, because she brings clarity and distinction to various usages of and purposes for adopting an embodied approach to either writing or analysis. She identifies three primary applications of the word “embodiment” within the corpus of composition/rhetoric scholarship: embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric (51). Because the term is slippery and because Knoblauch offers useful and concise definitions, I include them below in their entirety:

**Embodied language:** the use of terms, metaphors, and analogies that reference, intentionally or not, the body itself

**Embodied knowledge:** that sense of knowing something *through* the body [that] is often sparked by what we might call a “gut reaction”

**Embodied rhetoric:** a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself. (52)

An example of “embodied language” could be something as simple as me claiming that my students are “getting on my nerves” or that my friend is still “nursing her wounds” from her last relationship. More academically, we tend to use embodied language in describing our interactions with scholarly work: “we ‘wrestle’ with texts and ideas, we ‘embrace’ arguments, we try to ‘wrap our minds around’ complex concepts” (Knoblauch 52). As we will see in the following chapter, high school handbooks are replete with embodied language—sometimes intentionally, in the case of explicit directions regarding what is acceptable to wear, pierce, etc.—and sometimes unintentionally, in the case of attendance and discipline codes that are concerned with controlling and limiting bodies in various ways and for various purposes. In many of
these cases, the discourse reveals embedded metaphors and euphemisms that are highly embodied. I will use the term “embodied language” when I am referring to texts that contain body-related words but that are not necessarily intended to persuade or to direct or change behavior. It is also necessary to note here that all language is arguably rhetorical; moreover, intention is not a requirement of rhetoric, nor does its existence guarantee that the rhetoric will “work” in the ways we desire. Embodied language and rhetoric make meaning regardless of intention—the discourse works without us—and most high school handbooks are written without accounting for the inscriptive power of discourse or the phenomenological implications of the embodied practices they dictate.

We use embodied terms because they mean something to us: wounds hurt; wrestling implies a struggle; embracing signifies commitment. They mean something to us because we have bodily felt these things throughout our lives; they are examples of “embodied knowledge.” Knoblauch explains that this knowledge “often begins with a bodily response—or what we might call ‘gut reactions’” (54); she also notes that embodied knowledge tends to be undervalued: “As a trigger for meaning making that is rooted so completely in the body, embodied response is rarely legitimated in the academy” (54). I will use the term “embodied knowledge” when I am referring to feelings or awarenesses applicable to what we understand as “gut reactions.” For example, we often feel weak in the knees when we witness someone in the moment that they are being injured. This is our embodied knowledge kicking in; we understand what it is like to feel pain and weakness—we have knowledge of that—and thus we have a bodily response that is generated through empathic channels. Another example might be if we hear someone characterize her day as “a long uphill battle”: without needing her to
break down the metaphor we instinctively understand it because we know, through embodied knowledge, that climbing up a long hill is exhausting.

The term “embodied rhetoric” can be used both actively (through purposeful writing of discourse itself) and responsively (through analysis) in an effort to understand and anticipate the sorts of embodied responses the discourse is likely to elicit. In this project, I will apply rhetorical analysis methods to the sections of high school handbooks that incorporate the most embodied language; by doing so I hope to begin a new conversation about educational discourse that proceeds from the textual level (in Chapter 4, I will extend the analysis to include certain aspects of actual school buildings and spaces, which can also be read as texts). I will use the term “embodied rhetoric” when I am referring to texts that use embodied language and are intentionally crafted to elicit certain rhetorical effects. I also use “embodied rhetoric” to refer to rhetoric that is transmitted materially or visually, rather than through language; for example, school buildings are a physical example of embodied rhetoric. Knoblauch’s terms can be utilized as part of my analytical triangle described previously, in that they are useful tools for articulating the lived, inscribed, and felt aspects of human experience. I also use these terms to organize the chapters of the dissertation; I will address this usage in the last section of this chapter.

An embodiment reading such as the one conducted in this project purposefully seeks to dispel the belief that we can separate mind from body. It disputes the idea that human beings can truly approach anything with “a dis-embodied view from nowhere” (Bordo 4). In actuality, “there is no such disembodied place of nowhere. We are all situated beings, bodies situated in culture and language” (Knoblauch 58). Jay Dolmage,
in an article published in *Rhetoric Review*, argues that the roots of disembodiment can be found throughout literary and rhetorical history. He argues that we have “accepted an historical narrative in which rhetoric . . . denounces the body, overlooks its phenomenological and persuasive importance, and lifts discourse from its corporeal hinges” when what we should be recognizing is the idea that “rhetoric has a body—has bodies” (Dolmage 1). The purpose of this project is to do just that—to recognize and analyze the ways in which the body and bodies are created through, acted upon, and used to perpetuate and transmit rhetorical effects.

**Description of Corpus**

My initial challenge was to constrain the number of texts/artifacts to a corpus that is manageable but representative. To that end, this study is limited to a consideration of documents or structures that can be considered “institutional,” in that they are agreed upon, standardized, and “published” by the institution itself. In terms of written texts, the corpus includes attendance policies, dress codes, and discipline codes; the material most relevant to bodies is contained in these three categories and is almost always articulated in a high school’s student handbook. I will address the fact that handbooks in their current form are an important and fairly recent innovation in high school discourse that have become a tool for representing and embodying community values and fears within and upon students themselves. Because such a large portion of these handbooks tends to address issues directly or indirectly related to the presentation and action of students’ bodies, the handbooks themselves have become hermeneutic guides for “reading the
body/ies,” especially bodies that deviate from preferable norms established by the handbooks and by the culture in which they’ve developed.

In addition to a qualitative sample of high school handbooks, the corpus includes the school buildings themselves, particularly Willow High School’s building, because it is new (2012) and therefore built in accordance with all current requirements in terms of security procedures, which directly act upon student bodies. Interestingly, we read both bodies and buildings as “texts,” but the building can be doubly analyzed or read as both a text and a body in itself; it is essentially the “body” of the student body—it shelters, contains, and directs its inhabitants, mostly implicitly, in such a way that the collective student body is somewhat at the mercy of its whims and characteristics in the same way the individual is at the mercy of individual bodily features, urges, and impulses. Our lived experience is constantly mediated by the conditions of our body. For example, the individual who is extraordinarily tall, or who is blind, or who is exceptionally beautiful, necessarily lives a life that is affected—for better or worse—by those characteristics. The condition of the building/body of the school has no less impact upon the collective lived experience of (the) student body/ies it contains. Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which national events and concerns (school shootings, mall shootings, September 11th etc.) have in many ways become embodied in the American high school building and therefore the American high school student.

The other challenge associated with defining the corpus involved determining what type of high school made the most sense to study and how many of those high schools would appropriately serve as a meaningful and manageable case study. Amy Koerber and Lonie McMichael, in a discussion of various methods of qualitative
sampling, note that, “In any discipline informed by more than one research tradition, tensions will perhaps inevitably exist between the generalizable, replicable results that can be achieved from well-designed, large-scale quantitative studies and the more individualistic, in-depth results that come from well-designed qualitative studies” (469). Because much of my project relies upon textual analysis, I needed to limit the corpus to a number of pages suitable for close reading. Another characteristic of my corpus that must be recognized is that I’ve selected what Koerber and McMichael term a “convenience sample”: the three schools I’ve selected are geographically close to where I live. There are both potential drawbacks and potential benefits to convenience sampling: although the convenience sample can be perceived as a study limitation, it can still turn up rich data. Paradoxically, the same close relationship between researcher and research site that makes a sample convenient often grants the researcher a level of access to and familiarity with the sample that guarantees a richness of data that could not be attained if the sample were less familiar, and therefore less convenient, to the researcher.

(Koerber and McMichael 463)

I do believe this is the case for my project. Because I live close to the schools in my corpus, I have been able to not only visit the facilities, but to ask to speak with administrators and Board of Education members as a community member as well as a researcher. This helped to establish a common ground, and I believe I was able to obtain a broader and deeper set of qualitative data because of it. Because I had already established a level of trust and rapport with the professionals whom I interviewed, they were more confident in providing honest answers to my questions, even if their responses
sometimes departed from the typical rhetoric generated by school board members and administrators.

Demographically, the schools I selected represent the type of schooling situation in which the majority of American high school students are educated. According to 2011 data published by the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 60% of all American high school students attend high schools with student populations of 1000-2999, and more students attend suburban than urban schools. The three high schools in my case study meet this criteria. Maple High School has a student population of 2183, Willow High School has a population of 1629, and Cherry High School has a population of 2164.¹

Another reason I have chosen to focus on the suburban high school is that there is currently productive and impassioned debate about what to do with “tough” or “failing” schools—mainly in inner-city and isolated rural districts. This is undeniably necessary and is beginning to yield positive changes to these systems. I believe, however, that we tend to assume that “everything is fine in suburbia”; if there is nothing blatantly “wrong” or visibly destructive, then we must be doing a good job with these schools. My experiences with teaching and working with students attending these high schools, however, suggests that everything is not fine in suburbia. My focus on suburbia emerges from an attempt to capture what’s “in the middle”—the location I fear we tend to neglect simply because it can be characterized by a lack of remarkability. Suburban high schools are not taxed with many of the issues that inner city schools are, and they do not generally suffer the extreme lack of resources experienced by isolated rural districts. And

¹ All school names have been changed. Enrollments are for the 2012-2013 school year. Data from U.S. News and World Report.
yet the problems within these schools are, in my opinion, still severe; and they are perhaps even more insidious because they are often quietly severe. By centering my analysis and discussion around three mid-to-large suburban high schools in Ohio, I have been able to examine “the middle”—the location (metaphorical, geographical, and demographic in this case)—where the majority of our students are educated.

**Theory and Methods**

Contemporary American culture expends a great deal of time talking/thinking about/fearing adolescent bodies. I have spent considerable time in today’s high schools (I previously taught high school and currently work with high school students who are taking college classes), and I’ve been surprised by how much of their total educational experience is in one way or another connected to their bodies—and the connections are almost always negative. I am separated from today’s high schoolers by approximately one generation, yet the changes to the high school environment suggest a greater temporal difference. We spend much, much more time and energy writing and enforcing highly specific dress codes; attendance policies and procedures have gotten intricate and complicated; school buildings are now equipped with surveillance cameras and automatic lock down mechanisms. All of these practices have a direct impact upon student bodies—they dictate everything from what style of strap is appropriate on a girl’s blouse to who is allowed to enter certain wings of the building at certain times and whether a chaperone is required. Before beginning my research, I found the relationships between student bodies and contemporary practices such as these problematic, but I hadn’t yet tried to articulate the forces that undergird them.
Two points of interest emerge from the demographic research relevant to this project. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that the largest transition from urban to suburban schools occurred. For the first time in American history, families left the cities “expressly to enroll their children in suburban schools” (Daugherty 9). There are various theories to explain this, but the most likely (and most widely accepted) is the “white flight” phenomenon—white families moving their children away from inner cities that were becoming increasingly racially diverse in order to seek a more homogenous educational environment for their children. Another reason that scholars have identified is not as easy to define, although once pointed out it is relatively easy to observe: this is the idea that school children’s parents’ “life stories were framed in part by the newly constructed suburban schools their children attended” (Daugherty 11). The better the school their children attended, the better it made their parents appear.

We must consider the emotions that may inspire these two conditions. In the case of white flight, although it is complicated and cannot be too easily reduced—we have to talk about fear—fear of the unknown, the misunderstood, the Other. In the case of parental-image-as-reflection-of-children’s-schools, we seem to be looking at a class and/or economic issue that has little to do with actual learning and much to do with appearances. In fact, middle-class Americans increasingly began to “shop around” for the best schools in postwar suburbia, thereby transforming public education into a commodity to be bought and sold through the private real estate market. I argue that “shopping for schools” became more widespread as accumulating educational credentials for one’s children became a more
reliable route toward socioeconomic mobility in the human capital labor
market of the mid-twentieth century. (Daugherty 255-256)

So it was during this time that education began to take on responsibilities that had little to
do with imparting academic knowledge to the children who happened to live in a
particular geographic area. It became purposeful for other reasons: because it could offer
safety and security, because the “right” school could reflect positively on parents for
social reasons, because it seemed a likely route to economic prosperity. So suburban
schools offered a way to quell parental fear; if parents felt threatened by an increasingly
diverse urban population or by the busyness and speed of the city, then sheltering their
children at a location safely removed from all of that where everyone looked alike made
them feel safe. Moreover, achieving this made them “good” parents—parents who cared
enough about their children to physically relocate the family and all of its trappings.
Additionally, there was a socioeconomic component; in order to move out of the city, the
family had to have the financial resources to do so. Therefore, the children were
automatically ensconced in a community that was financially secure, which tends to
promote subsequent generations of financial stability and security.

Interestingly, these three strands of underlying inspiration for suburban
development and growth—fear, image concerns, and commodification—emerged again
and again, in other manifestations, throughout my analysis. For example, the language
employed in dress codes seems to suggest a certain fear of the Other, as focused as it is
upon regulating and norming student appearances. Image concerns are apparent in
statements that suggest school/community reputation is at least partially dependent upon
students’ physical appearance. And commodification emerges in several instances—
from suggestions that a pleasing appearance translates to future economic success to more disturbing examples in which the bodies of female students in particular seem to be constructed as objects of both value and liability.

My analysis is developed through a mixed methods, qualitative research approach. According to *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, such an approach incorporates various aspects: it “locates the material in the world”; it involves an “interpretive, naturalistic approach” to the object(s) of study; and it involves a variety of data, which can range from personal experience to textual artifacts to cultural observations (Denzin and Lincoln 3). Additionally, this approach employs multiple interpretative methods, with the intention that different methods shed light on different aspects of the project and offer different (and enriching) perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln 4). The particular methods I use—critical discourse analysis and primary metaphor analysis—come from writing and discourse studies; combining them in a mixed methods, qualitative approach harnesses their compounded usefulness within the realm of educational studies, which have increasingly turned to qualitative methods in the past decade.

Denzin and Lincoln, in their introduction to the *Sage Handbook*, suggest possible reasons for this shift (from strictly quantitative methods): “Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (10). As a both a discourse scholar and a classroom teacher, I find this approach and these goals particularly appropriate. While it may be useful for me to
look at word counts and rhetorical trends that emerge from textual artifacts (interpretive activities common to CDA and metaphor analysis), I also can’t escape the fact that I am personally entrenched in and entangled with the educational process and the various agents it involves. I spend and have spent a great deal of time in real classrooms with real students, and thus I must recognize my own biases, blind spots, and agendas. Adopting qualitative and mixed methods approaches allows me to not only account for and include my personal teaching experiences, but to juxtapose them against more definable research data.

At the outset of this project, I had some ideas regarding how the “school is prison” metaphor had come into being. I definitely had to adjust my theory according to trends that emerged and that I will detail throughout the dissertation, but not necessarily in ways I would have predicted. Ultimately, I conclude that, while the metaphor is somewhat valid, the reasons for its development and persistence are not exactly what I assumed. Prior to research and analysis, I believed that we (educators, parents, administrators, etc.) were continually making and enforcing potentially problematic and even destructive decisions about how to contain and manage student bodies as a result of our own paranoia—that we were literally mapping our own conflicts, insecurities, and fears onto the bodies of high school students. I do still believe (and the data supports) that this mapping occurs; my assumptive error was that it is sustained by purposeful decisions on the part of various agents. What I discovered instead is that many of the metaphors and other rhetorical patterns that comprise school life (of which “school is a prison” is one) have developed somewhat unintentionally—or at least the degree to which
they’ve become embedded has developed unintentionally. I discuss the reasons for and results of this development in the concluding chapter.

Throughout all of the following chapters, I utilize a three-part analytical framework that focuses on bodies that act and experience, bodies that are inscribed and acted upon, and bodies that feel. I explain this thoroughly in Chapter 2, but I offer a brief example here for illustration: Imagine what is involved with riding a roller coaster. The decision to get in the riding car is volitional; I have decided I want to get on this roller coaster, and I have acted—taken action—to do so. When I sit down, I am buckled in by an attendant; these are the rules and if I want to ride this roller coaster I must abide by them. I am also warned of the dangers of riding this roller coaster by a nearby sign that includes additional rules and disclaimers. I am now both acting and being acted upon—by the attendant and the sign, at this point—and the “acted upon” aspect leaves inscriptions upon my body—inscriptions of fear, or second-thoughts, or excitement. My feelings run beneath all of this and mediate between acting and being acted upon; I felt that I wanted to ride this roller coaster, and now I am feeling what it is like to experience the various aspects of riding it. These three components are cyclical and not linear. The feelings that result from becoming inscribed are themselves facilitating future inscriptions and actions. The initial action was driven by feeling, but also results in new feelings and new inscriptions. This framework is based primarily upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, and Sara Ahmed, and supported by additional scholars and theorists. The beginning of the following chapter develops this framework in detail and provides justification for its use in this project.
Project’s Contribution

I hope that this project’s contribution is both academic and pragmatic. Academically, I want it to contribute to the corpus of discourse studies scholarship and embodiment studies scholarship and to articulate a more specific focus toward adolescents that can be applied in developing future high school rhetorics. My project seeks to build upon existing theory and research and to identify the particular ways in which lived experience is embodied for teenagers within the context of our educational system. Additionally, I want to contribute to the larger body of research that examines institutional discourse through critical analysis. Scholarship addressing the rhetoric of public education is extensive; however, there is a dearth of sentence/word-level discourse analysis of actual documents. By applying James Gee’s method of CDA to high school handbooks—the most comprehensive textual artifacts available that represent the institutional discourses and therefore embodied practices and policies common in high schools—I want to help fill this gap.

Pragmatically, I hope this research contributes to the larger movement to substantially change public high schools for the better. In my years spent working with students of this age group, I have been repeatedly and intensely frustrated by what seem to be misguided attempts to control irrelevant matters (such as a student’s hair color or nose ring) that in turn preclude more honest and nuanced examinations of what we’re actually doing (or not doing) in our school buildings. I believe discussions of academic and intellectual inquiry are too frequently eclipsed by those related to rules, policies, procedures, and homogenization, all of which attempt to order and control bodies, rather than to expand the minds and capabilities of our students. I fear we’ve become mired in
an increasingly carceral, punitive, and constraining mode of administrating schools that
offers no true educational advantage and may in fact embed seriously insidious messages.
A close reading of text and a theory-based analysis of material space can serve to reveal
and interrogate these messages. I hope that by doing so I can offer one path through
which we can begin to cultivate—intentionally this time—an educational Discourse that
lives up to our higher ideals and hopes for our students.

In concluding this introductory chapter, it is necessary to note that, while I believe
many of the aspects I discuss in this project are generalizable to some degree, there are
limits to the conclusions that may be drawn based upon the data provided by three high
schools. Another consideration is the regional nature of the corpus; schools in California
or Texas are different than schools in Ohio, and rural or inner-city schools in Ohio differ
from the suburban Ohio high schools I address. And even within each individual school,
we must recognize that an examination of artifacts such as handbooks and school
buildings does not account for all or even the majority of cultural influences that shape
high school life and experience.

Another complicating factor of this project is my own personal involvement in it. The high school in which I taught at the beginning of my career was a “last chance”
institution in some ways. We served many students who had either been expelled from or
just not experienced success in more traditional schools. Because of the discipline
challenges inherent to this population, the school may have actually been more prison-
like than most high schools; certainly this may have initially colored my perception of the
prison metaphor’s ubiquity or salience. If anything, though, I was actually surprised by
the degree to which it (and other metaphors I will discuss) seemed to appear across academic and socio-economic planes.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2, “Reading and Writing Student Bodies: A Theoretical Framework,” provides an overview and literature review of embodiment studies and situates my project within it. It investigates “embodied knowledge,” to borrow Knoblauch’s term. I develop and employ an analytical lens based upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the lived body, Michel Foucault’s articulation of the inscribed body, and Sara Ahmed’s scholarship on affect and emotion. The chapter also brings the feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz and educational embodiment theorist Marjorie O’Loughlin into conversation with Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed. This chapter articulates the ways in which an embodiment reading of high school institutional discourse can be useful in examining and questioning contemporary rhetorics of American suburban high schools.

Chapter 3, “The Student Handbook as Repository of Institutional Discourse,” utilizes methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and metaphor analysis to interrogate and critique portions of text in typical high school handbooks. This chapter focuses specifically on the “embodied language” institutionally employed in textual artifacts. It also includes a discussion/literature review of both analytical methods and a justification for their use in this project. I analyze the handbooks both holistically and particularly; the early part of the chapter includes an overview of the types of language use identified in the handbooks overall, and the latter part includes a sentence/word level close reading of relevant handbook sections that is guided by specific discourse analysis questions.
Chapter 3 also analyzes the “school is a prison” metaphor on a textual level and identifies other primary metaphors that emerge from analysis. Finally, it suggests the embodied and rhetorical implications of these metaphors. My methods in this chapter are based upon the work of discourse analysts Norman Fairclough, Barbara Johnstone, and Robert Gee and the cognitive linguistics scholars George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, authors of *Metaphors We Live By*.

Chapter 4, “The School Building as Body/Text,” analyzes the physical spaces and architectural rhetoric of contemporary suburban high schools, again with a focus on how those aspects of secondary education support/complicate embodied practices. It engages Knoblauch’s concept of “embodied rhetoric,” in that it investigates the material rhetorical effects of physical school buildings. It discusses the design standard known as CPTED, which stands for “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design,” and addresses the ways in which new school buildings are designed for safety and security as much as they are for education. This has rhetorical implications in terms of embodiment theory; after all, the primary purpose of a school building is to house student bodies. Chapter 4 essentially manifests space as discourse, and we can read the lines, openings, and barriers of bricks and mortar in the same way we can read lines of text. Because CPTED is predicated upon principles of bodily control via passive visual surveillance, I draw parallels between suburban high schools and Bentham’s Panopticon. Foucauldian theory undergirds much of this chapter. The work of contemporary material rhetoric scholars Carole Blair, Mary Lay Schuster, and Amy Propen serves to situate my study within the field of rhetoric studies broadly construed.
Chapter 5, “The ‘Zero Tolerance’ Paradox: Audience, Embodiment, and Acceptance,” discusses real-world instantiations of zero tolerance policies. I include Suzanne Rice’s Deweyan analysis of such policies, which explicates the problems inherent in attempting to develop a tolerant citizenry within institutions governed by zero tolerance policies. In this chapter I include voices from the mainstream media to connect issues such as institutionalized gender discrimination and elementary school head lice policies to high school dress codes. I also connect and discuss the primary metaphors developed in Chapter 3 to actual incidences reported in the media. This chapter also includes the results of interviews I conducted during the research phase of the project with high school principals and a school board member, all of whom offered compelling and surprising commentary. Finally, the chapter (and this dissertation) concludes by returning the discussion to some foundational rhetorical principles related to audience, message, and the power of discourse, and includes a discussion of alternative primary metaphors we might adopt in creating an entirely new discourse.
CHAPTER 2: Reading and Writing Student Bodies: A Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The first chapter of this dissertation offered an argument for bringing voices from English studies into the conversation regarding what to do about our schools. The branches of our discipline that seem most suited to this conversation involve the study of discourse and rhetoric. Because there are multiple definitions for both terms, I include here an articulation of how I will use them throughout this project. When I refer to “discourse,” I rely upon Andrea Mayr’s definition of institutional discourse as “a culturally and socially organized way of speaking” (Mayr 7). The criteria required for bearing the designation of “institution” include being “an established organization or foundation, especially one dedicated to education, public service or culture” (Mayr 7). Additionally, we use the word institution to refer to “the building or buildings housing such an organization” (4). Because my study involves two primary artifacts, school handbooks and school buildings, I believe this framework is the most germane conception of “discourse.” Mayr notes that this conception implies a double meaning: discourse involves a “text” (or an artifact—in this project, I also read bodies and buildings as texts) and a communicative process, the means by which the text operates (Mayr 7). I use rhetoric in the more classical sense of being related to persuasion and effect. We can observe discourse and the processes of discourse; rhetoric refers to both the underlying motivation for discursive texts/processes and the (intended or unintended) effects of those things.
Because the object of my study—“the student body”—clearly involves individual bodies, the minds within them, and the buildings that enclose them, it is necessary to identify the intersection of “discourse/rhetoric” and “mind/body” in a way that provides a location that is academically productive. Embodiment theorists within discourse/rhetoric fields bring these components together. Below I discuss my specific application of their work.

This chapter aims to construct a theoretical framework through which to deploy the remainder of my study. Specifically, I develop an analytical lens based upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the lived body—a body that is our means of perception and experience, Michel Foucault’s conception of the inscribed body—a body marked by cultural discourses and practices, and Sara Ahmed’s work on the affective body—a body governed by feelings. The theoretical intersection of these three concepts—the lived body, the inscribed body, and the affective body—will serve as a heuristic by which we can analyze current discursive norms as they relate to the embodied texts and spaces of American suburban high schools.

The next section of this chapter includes a literature review of relevant scholarship by Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed. Merleau-Ponty and Foucault were both French philosophers; Merleau-Ponty’s major work of relevance to my project (Phenomenology of Perception) was published in 1945, and Foucault published extensively throughout the 1960s and 1970s, primarily addressing the relationships between power and knowledge within systems and institutions. Sara Ahmed is a contemporary scholar of feminist and queer theory whose major publications appeared in the early 2000s. Before I discuss their individual work, though, I want to address why I
believe their union forms an appropriate and productive theoretical triangle from which to conduct my analysis. This requires justification, especially concerning the seemingly oppositional perspectives from which Merleau-Ponty and Foucault conceive of bodies. I will address Ahmed’s contribution and orientation later in this section. Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the “lived” body seems to both grant bodies agency—the capacity to act upon situations and others—and to accentuate the individual nature of existence; conversely, Foucault addresses the ways in which bodies are collectively acted upon by often invisible power dynamics and how they eventually become inscribed—marked and altered permanently by the systems and discourses to which they are subject. It seems reasonable to try to resolve that tension before embarking upon an analysis.

Nick Crossley, who has written extensively on both theorists, articulates why that resolution is unnecessary and, in fact, inappropriate. Crossley claims that “there is a common ground between these two writers which allows their work—and particularly their work on embodiment, power and subjectivity—to be brought into a mutually informing and enriching dialogue” (99). I try to engage this dialogue throughout this chapter; indeed, I believe it’s necessary to engage it in order to render two incomplete philosophies into one unified working methodology. “Foucault’s work allows us to fill a hiatus in Merleau-Ponty’s” and vice versa (Crossley 109). This dialogue is especially germane to the group of bodies whose rhetorical existence I analyze. High school students live in a strange metaphorical region of being, in which they are beginning to gather, focus, and enact power in very real ways, while in other ways they remain very much subjects of a system whose dynamics they are not yet sophisticated enough to fully
navigate. They are the ultimate example of bodies that both actively *live* and that are in the process of *becoming inscribed*.

Even if we wanted to choose one orientation or the other—the lived body or the inscribed body—“the distinction between [them] cannot be maintained” (Crossley 99). Moreover, Crossley contends that the two philosophers would probably not sanction the distinction: “A thorough reading of the work of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty reveals that, for both, the body is both active and acted upon: a locus of action and a target of power” (104). Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to account for the complexity and simultaneity of this tension; I argue that adolescents in particular are both loci of action and targets of power, and that the two positions are not mutually exclusive or contradictory. In fact, the juxtaposition of action and passivity embodied simultaneously is perhaps especially applicable to adolescents as a group. They are located at the end of childhood and the cusp of adulthood, but don’t truly belong to either group. They are beginning to grasp and gain power in many ways, but are still very much at the mercy of the system (and of certain laws, due to their status as minors).

Young adults’ power often manifests as resistance rather than overt action, because in many ways they lack either the agency or the ability to exert power in more direct ways. Crossley claims that it is “the active role of the subject, in her own subjection, and the skills and competence that are presupposed on her behalf, which provides the space for effective resistance” (107). In other words, there is an agency that can be found even in subjection, but it tends to play out as resistance or non-compliance rather than as action. We can define “effective resistance” in this case as anything that “works”—any action (or lack of action) that makes a tangible or implicit impact upon
“the system” in a way that complicates or compromises its norms without doing harm to the student or resulting in the student’s dismissal. This dynamic can be witnessed myriad ways in contemporary high schools. We see it in students violating the dress code just enough to subvert and disrupt without taking it so far that punitive consequences can be justified. More quietly, we sense apathy or disinvestment when the curriculum fails to engage or when the teacher (usually unintentionally) alienates her students.

Apathy and alienation, often on the part of individual students rather than evidenced in the collective body, brings us into the realm of emotion. Sara Ahmed’s work, while it does not resolve the tension between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, closes a gap between them and makes both more concrete. Ahmed fills in the distance between the initial lived experience and the eventual inscription. Ahmed’s scholarship recruits the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault and employs them both to explicitly discuss the ways in which experience is actively felt/lived by bodies during the moments that they are also more passively taking on inscriptions. She then projects forward the felt/lived implications of those inscriptions, demonstrating the looping, circulating nature of existence in which action and inscription are always simultaneously occurring and complicating one another. Additionally, as a woman and a contemporary scholar, Ahmed brings a feminist correction to a discussion initiated by male philosophers writing in a different era. I don’t believe the analytical lens can be sufficiently balanced or complete without the inclusion of a contemporary female perspective. Ahmed’s scholarly orientation proves especially fruitful in my analysis of student dress codes, which are clearly gendered and arguably discriminatory.
Using these three theorists, I attempt to articulate some of the ways in which student bodies are rhetorically constructed through and by the discourses within which they are educated. We automatically associate education with the development of the mind, but we can’t talk about the mind outside of the body (at least not authentically), and therefore we can’t talk authentically about education without engaging notions of the body. Bodies physically instantiate the debate regarding whether rhetoric and discourse reflect or create reality. They do both, and both are evident in student bodies. The physical body is a tangible site of lived and inscribed experience, yet it is also comprised of all the things we can’t see or touch—emotions, history, and potential; it is acted upon and acts upon other entities, therefore both reflecting and creating reality. In this dissertation, I argue that the institutional discourse to which high school students are subject directly impacts student bodies (which necessarily includes student minds), and I analyze the ways in which it does so. In order to conduct this analysis, it was necessary to isolate the artifacts within current institutional discourse that most directly apply to physical bodies.

In the corpus of high school handbooks I compiled, three sections in particular lend themselves to this study: attendance codes, dress codes, and discipline/security codes. It is in these texts that discourse is the most embodied, that it deals directly with student bodies. Additionally, I will “read” certain aspects of contemporary physical school buildings as part of the larger Discourse that touches and governs (the) student body/ies. Work done in embodiment theories provides the framework for this reading and serves as a way to talk about the link between bodies and discourse. The following sections articulate a theoretical foundation, justify its usefulness for this project, and
apply a working method of using embodiment scholarship to rhetorically analyze discursive norms of contemporary suburban high schools.

**Literature Review**

Nearly all embodiment scholarship references the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A central tenet of his philosophy is that we don’t just have bodies; we are our bodies. He rejects Cartesian mind/body dualism in favor of a “body that is the primordial habit, the one that conditions all others and by which they can be understood” (93). He writes, “I am in my body, or rather I am my body” (151). This claim illustrates a phenomenological understanding of lived experience. Pragmatically applied, phenomenology is an “attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian, or sociologist might offer of that experience” (Merleau-Ponty lxx). In other words, we don’t need to delve into a person’s environment, biology, or past in order to analyze or evaluate a given experience; the experience is what it is in the moment, and its felt effects do not have to be mediated by anything else.

Embodiment theories discard or at least deprioritize detached intellectual rationality and champion the primacy of first-person experience lived in the moment. For example, Merleau-Ponty offers the horizon line to demonstrate: “this horizon whose distance from me would collapse were I not there to sustain it with my gaze” (lxxii). In this case, the horizon line—so clearly seen by us and apprehended as an identifiable entity—is something that in actuality does not even exist; its presence is fully born of our
perception. Because we act based upon our perceptions, our conscious and unconscious responses to phenomena are significant regardless of the phenomenon’s origin or veracity. Later in this chapter, I will return to the consequential nature of first-person experience and the importance of considering possible (unexamined) responses on the part of high school students interacting with particular discursive elements of their educational life.

In order to understand how phenomenology facilitates an understanding of human lived experience that departs from the conventional notion of a mind-controlled body, it is first necessary to grasp what philosophers call the “phenomenological reduction” (Merleau-Ponty lxxxiv). The reduction essentially reduces all of human experience to “what is,” so that subject-object positions are irrelevant, or, alternately, they become each other. For example, if I am standing in the rain, I could say that the rain is the subject, because it is actively coming down on me, and I am the object, because I am receiving or being rained upon by the rain. In a phenomenological sense, those positions don’t matter. The phenomenological effect is that I feel water on my skin at the point of contact. I could just as easily flip it around and say that my skin is actively absorbing or taking in water, in which case I become the subject and the rain becomes the object. Merleau-Ponty calls the reduction “[p]henomenology’s most important accomplishment”—that it succeeds in “[joining] an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism . . . Rationality fits precisely to the experiences in which it is revealed” (lxxxiv). Notice this is the opposite of a scientific or rational viewpoint, in which we try to make experiences fit into what we know to be rational. Rather, we can describe experience as it feels, in real time and without regard for reasons or explanations, and proceed forward from that
point. This orientation, for one example, allows us to talk about how lived experience might affect and mediate future experience, rather than compels us to look backward to exterior forces in an attempt to explain or deconstruct why the experience felt the way that it did in the moment.

Merleau-Ponty’s practice of phenomenology, particularly where it concerns perception, relies on the concept of the gestalt (Merleau-Ponty 11). Within this framework, a gestalt orientation maintains that we experience phenomena holistically, not piecemeal. When we view the mountains for the first time, we feel notions of expansion or majesty or excitement or fear; we do not calculate their height in feet or in our minds consider their geologic makeup or their origin stories. A gestalt view of experience is often described as the whole being more than or different from the sum of its parts. This manifests differently in differing circumstances—visually, as in the mountain example I just described, or emotionally. If we encounter a scene of violence between two people, what we feel—and what we remember—is the sense of conflict and threat. We experience this in the moment, as a whole, and we feel it and are in it; we are not separated at an analytical distance in which we immediately look for underlying causes or speculate about outcomes.

This is important to my project in that it accounts for a concept of human perception and experience that is its own entity with its own unity even as it remains within an endless network of contextual conditions and grounds that support or facilitate it. The American high school is certainly a location where the net effects of multiple cultural strands are instantiated, while also being a place unique unto itself. High Schools are a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and generations.
Yet they are also self-contained micro societies that share certain unifying themes, such as a school mascot or collective sense of spirit or a common enemy (e.g. rival schools or the violent neighborhoods in which they’re located).

The notion of “what is,” versus “what causes it to be,” is also instantiated in the way we simultaneously engage with and are acted upon by language. Merleau-Ponty conceives of language as the path through which “we will have the opportunity to leave behind, once and for all, the classical subject-object dichotomy” (Merleau-Ponty 179). He offers an explanation of how the rhetorical effects of language are often distanced from (or even contrary to) factual reality or from the original intent of the speaker or writer:

speech [or text, for my purposes] does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought. Even more so, it must be acknowledged that the person listening receives the thought from the speech itself. . . . Through speech, then, there is a taking up of the other person’s thought, a reflection in others, a power of thinking according to others, which enriches our own thoughts. (184)

All of this speaks to the complications with which we interact with discourses. There are multiple exterior forces (environmental context, the intentions of others, the implicit motivations that color the intentions of others, etc.); and then there is the individual experience within or as a response to the discourse: “The world is precisely the one which we represent to ourselves, not insofar as we are men or empirical subjects, but insofar as we are all one single light and insofar as we all participate in the One without dividing it” (Merleau-Ponty lxxv). This articulates both the gestalt and the phenomenological reduction; it renders “reality” slippery and calls into question whether there can ever be consistent human experience. You and I could be in exactly the same scene and experience it radically differently. As beings capable of logic and rationality,
we sometimes believe we should be able to go back and analyze the experience by dividing it into parts and considering them separately until we’ve reconciled our differences and hence end up with the same experience. Yet not only do we fail to divide experience into its constituent parts, we in fact cannot divide it:

Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical. (Merleau-Ponty lxxvii)

In this characterization, the phenomenological reduction allows us to isolate experience in its purity and to dwell in it, before we turn back toward the objects with which we interact in the world, thus granting more useful and more accurate meaning to each. It is often the “strange and paradoxical” aspects of our experiences that we tend to miss because they have become so naturalized. This is exactly the reason we need to engage the reduction. In order to effectively analyze discourse, we must be honest about the way we experience it—holistically and immediately, rather than from a rational and intellectualized vantage point. The naturalized aspects of experience can be the most problematic because they remain unquestioned. Later in this chapter I will address the ways in which Foucault’s work supports and extends this notion; throughout my project I seek to expose and interrogate many of the naturalized or tacitly accepted aspects of high school discourse relevant to student bodies.

One thing the discourse in high school handbooks is particularly concerned with is the idea of revealing flesh—not all flesh, but the flesh of body parts other than the face, hands, and arms. In order to fully consider the lived reality of these concerns, we must consider what exactly flesh constitutes from a phenomenological/embodiment
perspective. Merleau-Ponty conceives of it less as a covering for what’s inside and more as an integral aspect of the embodied being that cannot be separated or even distinguished from other surfaces or entities it touches: “The contour of my body is a border that ordinary spatial relations do not cross. This is because the body’s parts relate to each other in a peculiar way: they are not laid out side by side, but rather envelop each other” (100). This conception of a fold supports his notion of the phenomenological reduction and to phenomenology in general in that it resists the impulse to deconstruct any element of perception or experience into separable parts.

To consider the flesh a fold or series of folds offers us a way of conceiving of skin in a way that we normally don’t and which may prove productive. The notion of a fold is different than the notion of a barrier—“fold” connotes a joining or a transition in direction, whereas “barrier” indicates a stopping point, an impenetrable division whose piercing is seen as a violation or deviation from “what should be.” If we consider flesh to be the transitional “space” through which we take in experience as feeling, then the degree to which we either protect or allow access to it has obvious implications upon what ultimately becomes of those feelings in terms of lived experience. This is relevant within the context of high school dress codes, many of which contain specific dictates regarding which locations of flesh may be acceptably revealed, how “much” flesh is permissible, and what may be done to the flesh. The analysis section of this chapter discusses how different conceptions of flesh—specifically Sara Ahmed’s and Elizabeth Grosz’s, both of whom were influenced by Merleau-Ponty—can be useful in analyzing the rhetorical and affective elements of high school dress codes. I argue that these codes, as well as attendance and discipline codes and school buildings themselves, are acting
upon student bodies in ways that we tend not to adequately question. And yet it’s the questioning, the “reflection,” that has the potential to “[reveal what is] strange and paradoxical” in the world (Merleau-Ponty lxxvii).

While Merleau-Ponty nudges us toward reflection, Michel Foucault advocates a much more rigorous approach. He suggests that an appropriate consideration of the naturalized elements of any given Discourse necessitates an extremely close attention to it—a reading of the system itself. What such a reading offers is the opportunity to deconstruct our holistic experience into the discrete elements that comprise it. Once we do that, we are better able to understand the ways in which we are not only subjects of the system but also how we unconsciously begin to perpetuate it. For example, Foucault maintains that one of our mistaken conceptions about power is that it works from the top down—that it is something explicitly imposed upon those below by those above. In actuality, power relations are complex, diffuse, multi-directional, implicit, and continuously evolving (Foucault, History 93). We act and react in accordance to a multiplicity of powers without even being aware of their existence. Engaging in a close reading of the system not only exposes the ways in which we are inscribed by the powers-that-be, but also our own complicity in the circulation of hegemonic power dynamics.

Foucault’s work on power relations is particularly germane to my project because it articulates the intersection of embodiment theories and institutional control and power, especially as those apply to prisons and asylums, two institutions that are often (comically, but with a more-truth-than-humor shade) compared to contemporary high schools. Foucault discusses the effort to render bodies “docile,” tracing that effort’s
inception to the eighteenth century, when effective methods of coercion became needed in the absence of slavery (Foucault, *Discipline* 136-7). “Docile bodies” are not only easy to control but also more useful to hegemonic power structures. In fact, “subtle coercion” often proves even more effective than physical force in controlling bodies because it becomes self-perpetuating:

To begin with, there was the scale of the control: it was a question not of treating the body, en mass, ‘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 . . . there is the modality: it implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines.’ (Foucault, *Discipline* 137).

This passage contains crucial implications regarding the discursive options that govern school behavioral codes today, most of which do seek to exert a level of discipline over the educational process, itself an endeavor rooted in discipline (the usages of the word “discipline” are complex, and, in this example, contradictory, because it can mean either “to teach” or “to punish”).

Foucault claims that this increasing regulation and control of bodies actually changes them, has actually crafted a “new object” out of “the natural body” (*Discipline* 155). The new object is a “body susceptible to specified operations, which have their order, their stages, their internal conditions, their constituent elements. In becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge . . . [it is] a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits” (*Discipline* 155).
Foucault’s notion of a changed, manipulated, inscribed body both complements and resides in tension with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological body. Because we are “whole” beings—beings whose minds are integral to and inextricable from our bodies, rather than possessing dominion over them—our responses to phenomena, to experience, are complex and unpredictable. This is the same reason we are susceptible to exterior forces, that we can become marked or inscribed; if we perceive a phenomenon without interrogating its elements, it is possible for us to be marked by experience without our conscious knowledge. Merleau-Ponty is interested in the gestalt nature of perception; Foucault is interested in the inscriptions that occur as a result of it. Later in this chapter I will address the ways in which such inscriptions may result from the “sorting” methods we now use to manage and control students whose appearances deviate from accepted norms. Foucault’s discussion of methods used to identify and isolate lepers and plague victims is applicable to this analysis. In both cases—either the sorting of students or the isolation of lepers and plague victims—there is an effort to contain and control the contagious bodies, the bodies that are already marked as “different” in some way and whom we fear may infect other bodies with whom they come into contact.

Following a description of a typical 17th century plague drill and quarantine, Foucault explains how “each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (Discipline 197). He emphasizes the fear and confusion that motivate the drill and quarantine, the fear of “the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of the evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions” (Discipline 197). Anachronistically, this taps into many of our
contemporary fears regarding what may happen when dangerous teenaged bodies are
“mixed together.” There is an impulse to identify and separate the “sick” ones, the ones
who may infect the others, and we often do. Foucault articulates “the plague as a form,
both real and imaginary,” which has both “medical and political” consequences
(Discipline 198). In the analysis section of this chapter I argue that we still employ
plague-drill tactics in American high schools, that our paranoid reaction to the fear of
“contagion” still drives disciplinary and sorting policies that are generally accepted
components of contemporary discourse.

Many of our cultural fears and paranoia regarding high school students are related
to displays of sexuality, an issue to which Michel Foucault’s text The History of Sexuality
still applies. In the text, he addresses the issue of sexual repression and discusses the
ways in which it bears the inscriptions of penal law and yet remains above and outside of
the law. He is particularly interested in the interplay between sex and power and suggests
that the ways in which the two interact resist easy conclusions or categorizations. In an
attempt to liberate ourselves from this repression, we have come to rely upon what can be
perceived as “the speaker’s benefit” (Foucault, History 6). When sex is “condemned to
prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has
the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language
places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power . . .” (Foucault, History 6).
Foucault’s claim is complex: essentially, he claims that talking about sex is a specious
endeavor, in that it actually does the opposite of what it appears to do. The problem with
transmogrifying the experience of sex into the activity of ordered discourse is that it
serves less to liberate sexuality than to tacitly encode it into already-existing power structures and repressions of other sorts.

Accordingly, in an attempt to exert some level of control over teen sexuality, we have aimed to “subjugate it at the level of language” (Foucault, *History* 17). Foucault is addressing speech rather than text in this passage, but our current written dress and discipline codes also aim to do this, a topic I will return to later. Historically, part of the collateral damage of this move toward subjugation was that along with it came a push toward confession, which has its roots in 17th century Christianity. The result was an attempt to moralize sexuality—by passing “everything to do with sex through the endless mill of speech” (Foucault, *History* 21), we subjected it to judgment and normalization; the linguistic limits and requirements placed upon these discourses “might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful” (Foucault, *History* 21). In other words, bringing sex into the realm of discourse rendered it simply another instrument of control to be incorporated and appropriated by already existing power structures.

The imperative to confess seeped into public and political life; sex became an element of population growth and control, labor and economic capacities, and social/legal familial relationships. Within these confines it was both implicated and categorized in a multiplicity of ways: alternative sexualities were pathologized, women’s sex was medicalized, and education and psychoanalysis assumed governing capacities over sexuality and over the cycle of “pleasure and power” (Foucault, *History* 42-45). But these institutions could not authentically administer such aspects of people’s sexuality just because they could name them. If anything, the development of multiple discourses
surrounding sexuality made it more difficult to control: “never have there existed more centers of power; never more attention manifested and verbalized; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more sites where the intensity of pleasures and the persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere” (Foucault, History 49). I will later discuss the ways in which our rigorous efforts to control sexuality in the high school may be backfiring in ways that achieve the opposite of the intention.

Roughly 40 years before Foucault, Merleau-Ponty spoke to the futility of trying to separate sexuality from the rest of human lived experience, claiming that it “cannot be submerged in existence, as if it were merely an epiphenomenon” (162). This characterizes our default mode of dealing with adolescent sexuality—to let it lie beneath the surface and hope that it doesn’t rise up and interrupt the important events of “real” life. Merleau-Ponty argues against this, claiming that “[s]exuality is neither transcended in human life nor represented at its core through unconscious representations. It is continuously present in human life as an atmosphere [and therefore] coextensive with life” (171-2). In terms of embodied existence, and perhaps adolescent embodied existence in particular, sexuality is so integral to the rest of life—“our entire being,” according to Merleau-Ponty (174)—that attempting to relegate it to the category of “distraction” is probably distracting in itself. And even if separation were a good idea, it’s most likely impossible anyway: “[W]e never know if the forces that carry us belong to us or belong to our body—or rather, such that they are never entirely our body’s or entirely ours” (Merleau-Ponty 174). This notion of totality would suggest that sexuality cannot be broken down, administrated, or even fully or accurately articulated. This
conception of sexuality is consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s overarching philosophy of the gestalt nature of existence.

And yet we have tried to administrate and articulate sexuality within the context of the American high school. Foucault describes four “specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex” that have arisen from the attempt to contain and control sexuality (History 103), one of which is the “pedagogization of children’s sex” (History 104). He discusses the fact that children’s sexuality is seen as both “‘natural’ and ‘contrary to nature’” and that it “[poses] physical and moral, individual and collective dangers” (History 104). Because of the simultaneously undeniable and taboo nature of children’s sexuality, our institutional responses to it have been both vigorous and paranoid. The following chapter of this dissertation will explicate this claim using the language of high school dress codes and discuss the language’s rhetorical implications.

Sarah Ahmed explores our responses to these perceived “collective dangers” in a discussion of abjection and “the performativity of disgust” (92). She suggests a heuristic for exploring the question of how we’ve come to view certain body parts or regions as safe or acceptable and others as dangerous or off-limits. She attributes her assertions to the notion that “disgust is crucial to power relations” and that the “relation between disgust and power is evident when we consider the spatiality of disgust reactions, and their role in the hierarchizing of spaces as well as bodies” (88). She argues that because we associate the lower regions of the body with both sexuality and the expulsion of waste, we deem them “disgusting” and therefore “lower” metaphorically and conceptually as well as spatially (89). The classifications in turn take on meanings related to judging qualities such as acceptability and worth:
Lowness becomes associated with other regions of the body as it becomes associated with other bodies and other spaces. The spatial distinction of ‘above’ from ‘below’ functions metaphorically to separate one body from another, as well as to differentiate between higher and lower bodies, or more or less advanced bodies. As a result, disgust at ‘that which is below’ functions to maintain the power relations between above and below, through which ‘aboveness’ and ‘belowness’ become properties of particular bodies, objects, and spaces. (Ahmed 89)

In the analysis section of this chapter I will address how the lived effects of both power relations and hierarchizing in the context of Ahmed’s division can be witnessed in the way we use bodily presentation to decide which students may stay in the school building, which require alterations to stay, and which must be removed or displaced to alternate locations because of their presumed potential to deteriorate or disrupt the school environment.

Ahmed also addresses the impulse to separate and flee from the threatening body in her discussion of the embodiment of disgust. She notes that it is “dependent upon contact: it involves a relationship of touch and proximity between the surfaces of bodies and objects,” but “it is not that the object, apart from the body, has the quality of ‘being offensive’, but the proximity of the object to the body is felt as offensive. The object must have got close enough to make us feel disgusted” (Ahmed 85). “Close enough” is a fuzzy measure, but it seems to suggest that proximity—the actual physical distance we maintain from something/one—is the deciding factor in whether we will hold it away from ourselves as an Other or accept and acknowledge its existence and validity, therefore incorporating or becoming one with it. This dynamic explicates one manifestation of Merleau-Ponty’s collapsing of subject/object positions, which I will address more concretely in the analysis portion of this chapter. That discussion will examine how both Ahmed’s and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the collapse manifest in
terms of how we decide which “objects” may be acceptably applied or joined to student bodies.

Ahmed extends her discussion of abjection and disgust to one of bodily “borders” that incorporates both Merleau-Ponty’s conception of flesh and folds and Foucault’s metaphorical use of the plague. She explains how an offensive object becomes “a substitute for the border itself” (86). We retreat from or avoid contact with objects we find disgusting; moreover, we on some level fear contagion: “While disgust involves such a metonymic slide, it does not move freely: it sticks to that which is near it; it clings. . . . disgust can move between objects through the recognition of likeness. Disgust binds objects together in the very moment that objects become attributed with bad feeling” (88). For example, a student who suddenly takes on a “goth” appearance by dressing in all black clothes and wearing heavy eyeliner will, for some people around her, be immediately imbued with negative connotations—of darkness, or depression, or disgust. To remain attached to or even in the vicinity of such negativity effectively “brands” whatever and whoever is near it as dark, depressing, or disgusting. There is a mistaken assumption that to remain nearby may facilitate a scenario in which surrounding bodies are absorbed into the offending body or one in which the offending body reflects upon the “normal body” in some harmful way. For some, this possibility proves too threatening, and people move away to protect their borders.

Methods

A theoretical focus culled from the work of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed encourages considerations of the body that do not typically arise in conventional
conversations regarding how we should address and interact with high school students. I claim that by conceiving of “the student body” as a collection of individual bodies that are uniquely perceptive, susceptible to inscription, and affectively engaged, we can more productively engage the redeeming characteristics of adolescents. If we can do so, we may begin to approach education from a position of higher ideals rather than imposing schooling upon students as a series of reactionary responses to infractions of rules that ultimately don’t really matter.

Foucault, primarily interested in the collective, inscribed body, and Merleau-Ponty, primarily interested in the individual, “lived” body, when considered in tandem provide us a lens capable of panning out to view the whole and focusing in to isolate the singular. I claim that this is the lens we must utilize when selecting and designing the discursive structures that govern high school life; furthermore, I argue that our failure to do so up to this point has facilitated an institutional Discourse that is counter-productive to many typically expressed goals of education. I will address this on a textual level in the following chapter, part of which examines typical language used in school mission statements. But for now, the important point is that we’ve thus far lacked a guiding philosophy in developing much of the discourse through which we communicate with high school students.

Foucault critiques efforts toward homogenization and toward producing “docile bodies” on the grounds that those motives are inherently coercive and that they perpetuate the circulation of hegemonic power structures whose dynamic may not benefit the greater good. Despite this critique—and Foucault’s voice has certainly not been the only vehicle—contemporary initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and multiple “zero
tolerance” policies are wholly based upon efforts toward homogenization and the production of docile bodies. By attending to Foucault’s warnings, considering Merleau-Ponty’s work on the primacy of unique, individual perception, and navigating between them by introducing the work of Sara Ahmed, Elizabeth Grosz, and others I will include in the following section, I believe we can generate productive questions about what high school discourse is actually doing on a rhetorical level—we can examine the lived effects of the discourse. I maintain that the rhetorical level is important because, for one, everything is rhetorical; and two, adolescents are particularly sensitive to rhetoric, in that they have not yet calcified or become rigid in their beliefs—they are both more receptive and more susceptible to the rhetorical forces that surround them.

Analysis

The analysis portion of this chapter begins an embodied reading of high school rhetorics. It commences by applying my analytical lens to certain overarching realities of high school life, continues in Chapter 3 with a more focused word/sentence-level analysis of the discourse contained in high school handbooks, and extends to an analysis of physical school buildings in Chapter 4. This dissertation seeks to utilize the theoretical framework of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed (and supported by others) to deploy a productive reading of the Discourse that currently governs high school life. From this reading, I try to distill rhetorical patterns and pose questions that nudge us to reconsider many of the discursive structures we currently accept without interrogation. By beginning with the body, I attempt to return us to the foundation of human experience
and to encourage a mode of perception and operation that accounts for a more holistic consideration of “the student body,” and all of the complexity that it entails.

The remainder of this chapter will attempt to introduce an application of my rhetorical lens that does not denounce the body, but rather accounts for its “phenomenological and persuasive importance.” A logical way to begin this discussion is by interrogating the popular notion that we can apply “mind over matter” to most anything, that our bodies can be governed by our minds, that our bodies should be governed by our minds, that the mind/body divide is achievable and desirable.

This manifests in many of the rules and practices articulated in high school handbooks as an attempt to control the body in order to facilitate the development of the mind. We conceive of adolescents as being somewhat at the mercy of their bodies; if we can find ways to shut down or quiet or cloak bodily distractions, then we will be in a better position to work with students’ minds, which is the point of education, after all. Taken superficially this seems like a fairly solid idea. From an embodiment or phenomenological perspective, however, it appears rather short-sighted and foolish.

Contemporary scholars in feminist, LGBTQ, and disability studies have used embodied rhetoric to question the goal of subordinating the body in order to engage the mind and also as part of an effort to subvert or disrupt dominant power structures (Knoblauch 50). They have shown how our initial experience of an event or an utterance comes to us through our senses (tapping into our embodied knowledge) and our emotions more so than through logic or rationality. By the time we do engage in logic or rational thought, the experience has already passed and is now mediated not only through sense, emotion, and logic, but through memory as well. And even once rationality becomes
primary, the initial sensory or emotional impact remains—a ghost perhaps, but one potentially more powerful than reality; the experience’s effect upon our psyche has already crystallized to some degree in a way that is not likely to be undone. Therefore, if our initial experience of something is characterized by sharp anger or extreme fear, we may not be able to fully shed that feeling even if upon retrospect we decide that we misperceived or overreacted at first.

This concept is relevant to my project because, for example, a high school student experiences the embodied language of her school’s dress code differently than her parents or teachers may anticipate. She develops mindsets and displays reactions based upon her sensory and perceptual interaction with it. For example, her school administrators may perceive a ruling about how long her skirt must be as a protective measure (for her). If the sight of her legs distracts boys and they pester or harass her during class, then both her education and the boys’ education is being disrupted because of the boys’ reaction to her legs. But she experiences this ruling differently; she encounters it as a limit—perhaps an unfair one—rather than a protective effort. The adults in charge may be trying to lay a foundation of safety and security, but inadvertently elicit a phenomenological response on the part of the girl that leads to resistance and resentment. We should consider, though, that resistance and resentment, viewed another way, may be quite valid manifestations of her very real embodied knowledge. Certainly by adolescence the girl has also experienced counter narratives that suggest only she is in charge of her body, that she should be proud of her body, that she shouldn’t feel the need to hide her body. What we initially see as resistance and resentment could also be defended as a healthy display of personal boundaries and empowerment. To return to Ahmed, we could argue that by
dismissing (or overtly disapproving of) her “gut reaction” to being told what to wear, we are perpetuating a counter-productive rhetoric in which embodied knowledge is “undervalued” (54), deemed not only unworthy of consideration but perhaps disruptive and threatening.

A scientific or psychological viewpoint might suggest that if after being upset by the dress code the girl is made to understand the reasons for the limitations placed upon her then her perception will alter once she is given the new information. Phenomenology, though, demonstrates why this transition can never be completely made: “If we hold ourselves to phenomena, then the unity of the thing in perception is not constructed through association, but rather, being the condition of association, this unity precedes the cross-checkings that verify and determine it, this unity precedes itself” (Merleau-Ponty 17). Unlike logical, intellectual reasoning that may work backward to explain things, phenomenological responses, which happen in the moment and without analysis, begin working forward to alter and color our perceptions of an action or object forever afterward as it appears or occurs to us initially, and that experience in some way defines our enduring experience of it. The “unity of the thing in perception” will always be more powerful than any post-experience analysis of its individual parts. The girl’s responses surrounding the skirt-length injunction are not arrived at by associating the experience to other things in her life; conversely, she forms various associations in the moment as a result of the injunction that will project forward in her life and become mapped onto future experiences.

Let us ask how her phenomenological response in the moment of first confronting the dress code manifests toward the object of the confrontation. The “object” in this case
could be the adults whom she perceives to be attempting to control her, the skirt which has ceased being simply fabric and thread, the boys whose presumed inability to control themselves is now dictating her own bodily choices, or her legs themselves, which are now a seemingly problematic if not dangerous part of her body. The quandary these questions imply is that we can no longer tell whether the girl herself is subject or object. Is she an object to be protected by others? Is she a subject acting upon the boys? She is both, and so are the boys. Her “lived” (as opposed to intellectual) experience of her school’s dress code as well as the oscillation of subject/object identities are both clear instantiations of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the phenomenological reduction and of the gestalt nature of human experience: it is possible to break it down, but it’s not relevant, because we experience things holistically, rather than in ordered or hierarchized pieces. Certainly, this alters the girl’s embodied knowledge surrounding issues such as male/female dynamics, personal expression, and the liability that is her body.

The collapse of the subject/object dichotomy forces us to confront the fact that our consciousness surrounding an experience is as strongly based upon feeling as thinking—it is as subjective/feeling as it is objective/thinking. And since thinking is influenced by feeling and vice versa, we can see that the dichotomy was never really valid in the first place. The implication of this (as it concerns this project) is that the way students initially perceive embodied language and practices to which they are subject is permanently encoded in their psyches in an eminently holistic way—it becomes part of their embodied knowledge. It is not “I first rationally understand this discourse and now I will conduct myself reasonably within it,” but rather a fusion of emotional, intellectual and embodied responses that reject linearity in favor of a complicated taking-up-
residence within the whole being. If this is so, then we would be wise to consider the ways in which high school students phenomenologically interact with the texts and discourses that govern their lives, rather than to write off certain reactions as typical teenage whining or rebellion.

Time, budget, and personnel constraints being what they are in public education, it is understandable that no one seems to be engaged in the process of considering or predicting adolescent phenomenological responses, but I argue that we should. Practicing phenomenological analyses of experiences (and interrogating the embodied language that forms the grounds of those experiences) allows us to question and consider whether there might be alternate ways to construct that ground (or whether we need to construct it at all; recall Foucault’s discussion of the pitfalls of passing “everything . . . through the endless mill of speech”; he warns that doing so is often a misguided and counter-productive attempt to control (Foucault, *History* 21)).

The task of analysis is to break down the “objects” (in this case high school handbooks) surrounding or facilitating the experiences that create immediate and enduring affective responses, attitudes, and modes of being within the relevant environment. Foucault recommends a close-read of the discursive patterns and power relations within an institution:

Describing them will require great attention to detail: beneath every set of figures, we must seek not a meaning, but a precaution; we must situate them not only in the inextricability of a functioning, but in the coherence of a tactic. They are the acts of cunning, not so much of the greater reason that works even in its sleep and gives meaning to the insignificant, as of the attentive ‘malevolence’ that turns everything to account. Discipline is a political anatomy of detail. (*Discipline* 139)
This precisely characterizes the sort of rhetorical analysis I will attempt to impose upon the embodied language in relevant sections of my corpus of school handbooks. These texts are without doubt an explicit example of the notion of discipline being a “political anatomy of detail.” The amount of detail dedicated to articulating the basic transactions of attendance policies alone is astonishing. Most of these details are concerned with ensuring that student bodies are within the halls of the high school during designated times, an effort Foucault characterizes as the first step in creating “docile bodies.” He explains that “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space. To achieve this end, it employs several techniques. [For example], [d]iscipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” (Discipline 141). I will discuss current-day conditions and manifestation of this containment in the following chapter. Although Foucault does discuss secondary schools specifically, he could not have known in 1975 how frighteningly relevant this particular discussion would be to high school culture in 2013.

I perform this analysis of the student handbooks in the next chapter by employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods. By doing so, I am able to extend my analysis to include larger social and contextual elements germane to individual lived experience. We may not be able to alter these outside conditions. We can, however, pay close attention to how embodied language and discursive practices interact within them and consider the possible manifestations of those interactions. Ultimately, we may glean information that can guide us toward writing more thoughtful and productive institutional texts whose target audience is high school students.
Much of the discourse surrounding high school life, as we will see in the next chapter, seeks essentially to move bodies out of the way, because they are considered “distracting” or “hazardous” (two words that frequently appear in handbooks) in some way. Setting aside for a moment the arbitrariness with which these qualities are defined, we’re still left with the purely logistical problem of needing to simultaneously ignore or displace bodies even as we’re dependent upon them to perceive, think, and interact. Because of the impossibility of reconciling the two, we’ve tacitly compromised; because we can’t actually get rid of bodies, especially those we find distracting or hazardous, we’ve engaged in an effort to render the bodies we’re stuck with non-distracting and non-hazardous—qualities that are equally arbitrarily defined. Both descriptions have been flattened out to mean something like homogeneous, subdued, and desexualized. Embodiment theories and phenomenology give us a framework and a vocabulary with which to recognize and interrogate these manifestations.

To illustrate: let us imagine a small gold hoop earring in the ear of a girl named Hannah. That image is unlikely to garner any sort of affective response in our culture. But move the same earring to the cartilage between Hannah’s nostrils and at least a certain percentage of the population is now experiencing some level of discomfort or even disgust, and not really about the gold hoop itself. The gold hoop remains nothing more than a small circle of metal. The girl, however, has now become something different. “As a result, while disgust over takes the body, it also takes over the object that apparently gives rise to it” (Ahmed 85). Hannah was a subject wearing an object, but now the object has acted upon her, making her an object of disgust by association with
her gold hoop, and more specifically by association with the location of her gold hoop, even as she retains aspect of subject-hood.

In the plague referred to by Foucault, people understandably moved away from the bodies that carried it; they rejected them. I argue that portions of the discourse we see in school handbooks support a contain-and/or-run-from-the-plague sort of orientation in characterizing student bodies. For example, one handbook I will discuss in the following chapter dictates that students in violation of the dress code must be relocated to an alternate location in the building until their infractions have been rectified—a quarantine. Ahmed describes a similar response to disgust, in which “the proximity of the ‘disgusting object’ may feel like an offence to bodily space, as if the object’s invasion of that space was a necessary consequence of what seems disgusting about the object itself” (86). If we return to the “Hannah with gold hoop” scenario and consider the hoop as the “disgusting object” whose proximity is threatening to others, we can begin to destabilize the grounds upon which any argument for her removal is constructed. If Hannah were made to go to an alternate location in her school building, it would ostensibly be because of the gold hoop, not because of her. But it can’t be the gold hoop, because no one cared when the gold hoop was in her ear. So Hannah must be the disgusting object, except that she is supposed to be the subject who created the problem in the first place.

Perhaps the mother of Hannah’s friend Haley had no concerns about Haley’s friendship with Hannah when Hannah’s gold hoop was in her ear; however, now that it’s between her nostrils Haley’s mom may have concerns. She may be disgusted by Hannah’s nose ring and subsequently with Hannah. She may now perceive Hannah as a contagious body who may just infect her own daughter.
Ahmed argues that once a body “becomes sticky,” it also becomes a “fetish object” that is now subject to the “economies of disgust [that involves] the shaping of bodies” (92). I will argue that, as a culture, we have fetishized adolescent bodies, especially female adolescent bodies (Ahmed also claims that “feelings of disgust stick more to some bodies than others” [92]). In a series of ill-fated attempts to deal with student bodies by hiding and controlling them, by choosing to overpower that which we find threatening or unsettling, we have unwittingly entered their bodies (and by association their total beings, including their minds) into this “economy of disgust” and we’ve allowed it to “shape their bodies.” Moreover, we’ve allowed it to eclipse the very goals of the institutions charged with helping them develop into positive and productive human beings. Ahmed asks, “What else does disgust do? We can return to my reflections on abjection. To abject something is literally to cast something out, or to expel something” (94). In the era of “zero tolerance” dress code policies, we actually do this. As I’ll discuss in the following chapter, removal from the learning environment is a standard response to dress code infractions.

My discussion of Hannah and her ear/nose ring explicates one of the ways in which high school rules directly address and impact the flesh of student bodies. It is interesting to put Ahmed’s discussion of “stickiness” into conversation with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of flesh and Foucault’s use of the plague, which taken all together illustrate how stickiness becomes both a lived experience and an inscription. The plague victim lives through the experience of being inspected and quarantined and has certain reactions to those things in the moment; once the moment has passed, the body bears inscriptions of the experience forever afterward. I argue that the flesh of high school
students has become a surface we have chosen as a working canvas in the project of determining what’s socially preferable, acceptable, appealing, “safe,” “non-distracting,” etc. and that we need to be mindful of what’s beneath it—of what lies in “the fold.” If we take Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of flesh-as-borderland, and if we choose to employ this borderland to cloak or conceal lived affects and effects, then the decisions we make regarding what is and is not permissible regarding flesh do not seem that arbitrary or innocuous.

Elizabeth Grosz offers a theory of embodiment that extends and blends the scholarship of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty; she addresses the immediacy and concreteness of primary experience and also examines inscriptions and inscriptive processes, with specific attention toward adolescent and gendered experiences. For example, Grosz illustrates the consequential reality of adults meddling too intensively with teenaged bodies, especially because that meddling tends to take on gendered or sexualized dimensions in its assumed jurisdiction. In her collection Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism, Grosz articulates the sexed, bodied, experience of adolescents in a discussion of the development of body image:

It is in this period that the subject feels the greatest discord between the body image and the lived body, between its psychical idealized self-image and its bodily changes. Experientially, the philosophical desire to transcend corporeality and its urges may be dated from this period. The adolescent body is commonly experienced as awkward, alienating, an undesired biological imposition. (Grosz 75).

Certainly, the “desire to transcend corporeality” is both common and excessively difficult, if not impossible. “Transcend” is not the same as “ignore,” though. The language in current high school dress codes seems to attempt to construct a scenario in
which bodies—especially gendered bodies—should be ignored or cast aside in the name of prioritizing intellectual pursuit. Most phenomenologists and embodiment theorists maintain that this is both misguided and unrealistic. Transcendence—although it sounds lofty and overly idealistic—is a better goal. To transcend corporeality in this example might mean something closer to “not being held back by” our physical bodies. This seems possible, but it will require a different dynamic than the one under which we currently operate. It will require that we abandon the inclination to yolk sex to shame and bodily differences to deviancy. If we could do this, though—if we could actually manage to set aside our neurotic preoccupations with teenagers’ bodies—if we could stop seeing them as “alienating . . . undesired biological imposition[s],” then we might be able to construct a different kind of educational environment in which students can transcend bodies not because everyone is pretending they don’t have them, but rather because the level of acceptance has increased to the degree that bodies and embodied existence are no longer viewed as threatening.

Also of relevance is Grosz’s discussion of the body as object, which takes up association with external objects and incorporates them into its being—so that body and clothing and jewelry and tattoo art and makeup and hairstyle all become one entity in terms of lived experience. “Anything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image . . . [these objects or forces] mark the body, its gait, posture, position, etc. (temporarily or more or less permanently), by marking the body image” (Grosz 80). This claim has a two-fold implication for high schools under the jurisdiction of dress codes. First, it requires us to reckon with the notion that by altering (or requiring that the student alter) an object upon
his body (a piercing or a tattoo or a certain hair color or an article of clothing), we are also altering the student’s body itself and the student’s body image. Second, we must accept the responsibility of applying forces to students by way of the code itself; the code, too, is something that “comes into contact with the surface of the body” and “marks the body.” This might have both emotional and phenomenological consequences. It returns us to Merleau-Ponty’s conception of grounds or enabling conditions—that which serves as the canvas and palette upon which embodied existence occurs. Grosz writes that “body image is necessary for the distinction between the figure and ground, or between central and peripheral actions. Relative to its environment, the body image separates the subject’s body from a background of forces” (83). American adolescence is a state of being characterized by this struggle—to differentiate oneself from the “ground.” And without getting into arguments about whether the struggle is warranted or even healthy, we must at least recognize it as a factor in the calculus of teenage embodied existence.

Grosz then complicates the “body as object(s)” notion by taking up and paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty’s claim that

although the body is both object (for others) and a lived reality (for the subject), it is never simply object nor simply subject. It is defined by its relations with objects and in turn defines these objects as such—it is ‘sense-bestowing’ and ‘form-giving,’ providing a structure, organization, and ground within which objects are to be situated and against which the body-subject is positioned. (Grosz 87)

This doubling (or splitting?) regarding whether the body, at any given point, as subject, object, or both, inspires interesting questions about how we should conceive of student bodies within the contexts of attendance, dress, and discipline codes. Are our students
agentive subjects within a system or objects of it? Clearly they are both, but which role should be prioritized?

Grosz makes use of another way of conceptualizing bodies that is based upon the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and others. Although she generally conceives of the body as “the site of the intermingling of mind and culture,” she asserts that it is also useful to consider it “as a purely surface phenomenon, a complex, multi-faceted surface folded back on itself, exhibiting a certain torsion but nevertheless a flat plane whose incision or inscription produces the (illusion or effects of) depth and interiority” (116). This is an intriguing thought-concept for my particular purposes because it essentially conceives of the body as a text—“a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional (discursive and nondiscursive) power” (Grosz 116). It is doubly interesting because we are now considering a “text” that is being operated upon or subjected to other texts (the school handbooks). Specifically, Grosz is interested in how inscriptions upon the body form “linkages” and “connections” with “other surfaces and planes” (116). She clarifies that even though these inscriptions are conceived of as “surface effects,” they are “not merely superficial, for they generate, they produce, all the effects of a psychical interior, an underlying depth, individuality, or consciousness” (116). To visualize this concept she offers the image of a Mobius strip, an object whose surface is both interior and exterior with no identifiable point of transition between the two (116).

This idea of surface inscriptions effectively “piercing” through to the psyche with no visible point of entry is relevant to my argument. It is easy enough to suggest that dictating what students may or may not do to the surfaces of their bodies remains only
upon the surface and does not affect operations such as intellectual reasoning or emotional processing, but Grosz’s discussion complicates that assertion. It not only calls into the question the common-sense simplicity that we find so appealing, but loads the notion with consequence because it requires that we interrogate what exactly our dictations might do beneath the surface of student bodies.

And according to Grosz, those possibilities are quite significant:

This analogy between the body and a text remains a close one: the tools of body engraving—social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary—all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways; the writing instruments—pen, stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing, diet, exercise—function to incise the body’s blank page. These writing tools use various inks with different degrees of permanence, and they create textual traces that are capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical chronicle of prior and later traces, some of which have been effaced, others of which have been emphasized, producing the body as a text which is as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript. The messages or texts produced by this body writing construct bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as meaningful and functional “subjects” within social ensembles. (117)

Thinking of the body as a surface, which by definition implies the existence of something beneath it, requires us to find and articulate the delineation. If an article of clothing is applied to the surface of the body, does it (the clothing) then become the surface? Merleau-Ponty claims that “my clothes can become appendages of my body” (93). An appendage, although secondary to the trunk or center from which it extends, is something quite different than a surface or skin; unlike a surface whose job is to cover something else, appendages actively do things, more like tools. They can accomplish action or they can be used against us, to control or manipulate or redirect—yet another illustration of the impossibility of the subject/object dichotomy: “at once an object for others and a subject for me” (Merleau-Ponty 170). These riddle-like questions lead to a more specific
and consequential one: Where does the student’s body end? We have already said that it is inseparable from the student’s mind. But if the claim of Merleau-Ponty (and others) that his clothing actually becomes part of his body is true, then that necessitates other implications relevant to embodiment in education. For example, we must ask ourselves whether the things we say “no” to really stop at the “things” themselves or whether we’re in fact saying “no” to the student’s actual body without realizing it. We must remember that everyone’s embodied knowledge is individualized—what I may consider a superficial bodily accessory may actually be integral to a particular student’s concept of himself.

Foucault, writing in 1975, notes that controlling and coercive practices had already been operating in secondary schools for some time. He discusses the ways in which more subversive, less overt forms of control are more powerful than exerting physical force; once behavior becomes normalized, it assumes a power that circulates below registered levels of experience, where it efficiently and effectively “produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies (Discipline 138). The methods by which such bodies develop go unnoticed because they are generally individually reducible to “minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method” (Discipline, 138).

We have updated the blueprint from time to time, nearly always as a response to something that scares us. Foucault references changes such as the introduction of new weapons or outbreaks of diseases (Discipline 138). In early twenty-first century public
education, we can certainly point to Columbine and subsequent school shootings as the
impetus for high-surveillance, high-security school buildings and zero tolerance policies.
Dress codes have become stricter in response to a society in which bold displays of
sexuality have become the norm. Attendance policies have become more rigid and
detailed as society has become increasingly preoccupied with children’s safety,
regardless of whether children are actually in more danger than they were a generation
ago. Marjorie O’Loughlin connects these changes to the fact that parents of children in
affluent nations have become increasingly attentive to children’s embodiment in recent
decades, claiming that “[p]arents, in particular, but also teachers, are positioned by a
range of health and educational discourses to closely scrutinize the bodies of children and
adolescents” (88); she calls the level of adult scrutiny “remarkable” (89). The more we
attend to something, the more likely we are to want to possess and control it, and this
seems to hold true in the case of attending to children’s bodies.

These changes have elicited responses on the part of school administrators and
boards of education that range from minor to extreme—some that alter the school day
almost imperceptibly and some that render the American high school baffling if not
incomprehensible to those of us who graduated less than a generation ago. Locked down
buildings, armed police officers in schools, classes interrupted so that drug-sniffing
German Shepherds can inspect students, school administrators who roam the halls with
rulers to measure the lengths of girls’ skirts, evacuation drills . . . none of these measures
existed 25 years ago; now they are the norm, even in the safest communities. And the
infrastructure to support this level of surveillance and security—the “small” changes to
the school day—are arguably, because of their insidious nature, even more impactful than
the sweeping changes. Foucault discusses the effect of such systems upon bodies: “These were always meticulous, often minute, techniques, but they had their importance: because they defined a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body, a ‘new micro-physics’ of power; and because, since the seventeenth century, they had constantly reached out to ever broader domains, as if they tended to cover the entire social body” (*Discipline* 139). It is in this way that seemingly well-intentioned initiatives, such as random, mandatory drug-testing or “zero tolerance” dress codes, can become encoded into our cultural expectations to the degree that the next level of surveillance is not as noticeable. Foucault calls them “[s]mall acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious, mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged, or pursued petty forms of coercion” (*Discipline* 139).

I argue that much of the language that comprises contemporary high school discourse fits into this discussion of “apparently innocent” policies that are actually closer to “petty coercion.” The policies are spelled out in language, and the language *appears* to protect children, primarily from their own tendencies to make bodily choices and engage in bodily displays that upset adults for various reasons. But I wonder if we should allow ourselves to be so concerned. Whether adolescent displays of sexuality, for example, are attempts to disrupt the power hierarchy, attempts to gain attention from one another, or simply manifestations of personal preference may be beside the point. Because regardless of intent, the displays *do* disrupt and challenge. The intensity and energy with which we’ve tried to prevent the displays, though, all but guarantee not only their inevitable occurrence but their power to disrupt.
Our efforts to not only control but to actually render nonexistent through denial and ignorance the sexuality of teenagers have been incredibly rigorous. Since the 18th century, children’s sexuality has been viewed as “an epidemic menace that risked compromising not only the future health of adults but the future of the entire society and species” (Foucault, *History* 146). In a series of ill-thought-out [in my opinion] attempts to thwart the supposed apocalypse that is the expression of teenage sexuality, we have resorted to fairly extreme preventative measures (from punishing or at least chastising children for masturbating to publishing ridiculously detailed zero-tolerance student dress codes that prohibit even the most benign expressions of individuality). We have instituted policies for the student body that have become tacitly inscribed upon student bodies.

One of the ways in which we’ve done this is through talking about sex. We’ve brought discourses of sexuality into our schools—an endeavor which on the surface might seem honest and productive but which in actuality becomes an attempt to codify and control beneath a veneer of good intentions. “[O]ne had to speak of it as a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered” (Foucault, *History* 24). Foucault discusses a secondary school in the 18th century “which owed its exceptional character to a supervision and education of sex so well thought out that youth’s universal sin would never need to be practiced there” (*History* 29). In some ways, we still aim for this. Two years ago, a suburban Cleveland high school actually published and issued a “No Grinding Policy” for school dances. It was a contract that
both students and parents had to sign before students could attend a dance. This high school’s administration seemingly believed that by developing an explicit and restrictive discourse concerning this aspect of teenage behavior, they could prevent it altogether. What happened was that both students and parents refused to sign the document—students angry and insulted, parents appalled at the discourse itself—and hence with insufficient attendance to pay the bills, the senior prom was cancelled. The discourse probably did not prevent the behavior, but it did drive it underground, out of the glare of school administrators.

These discourses have paradoxically rendered sexuality both more open and more restrictive. Foucault notes that we have “not consigned sex to a shadow existence, but . . . dedicated [ourselves] to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret” (*History* 35). An obvious example is the enormous amount of time that’s spent *talking* to teenagers about *abstinence* (an initiative that seems to be failing on every dimension). Foucault addresses the futility of this orientation: “The logic of power exerted on sex is the paradoxical logic of a law that might be expressed as an injunction of nonexistence, nonmanifestation, and silence” (*History* 84).

Foucault’s scholarship on power and sexuality, preceded by Merleau-Ponty’s claim that sexuality is inextricable from the rest of existence, has become the grounding for many contemporary embodiment theorists, several of whom harness embodied
language and rhetoric to critique dominant and hegemonic conceptions of sexuality.\(^2\) This has been especially true within feminist scholarship, where contemporary theorists are taking up the unbalanced ways in which female students are often affected by issues like dress codes. We expend considerable time and energy worrying about girls’ appearance even as we urge them to focus only on their minds. We actually use this reasoning to justify dress codes in the first place; by restricting the degree of individual expression students are allowed to exercise in their bodily decisions, we are supposedly freeing them up so that they may concentrate less on their bodies and more on their minds. It’s a mixed message at the very least; it seems both absurd and contradictory for school administrators to publish intricately detailed dress codes, whose development clearly consumes a great deal of time and intellectual resources, while telling the students to just not think about their bodies, to focus on their minds. This message not only fails to account for the fact that students don’t just have bodies, but are bodies; it also sets up a “do as we say and not as we do” scenario that generally doesn’t facilitate cooperation and mutual respect.

Conventional knowledge seems to suggest that the best way to shield adolescents from society’s warped sexual notions is to pretend that they are asexual beings. This reasoning is faulty in at least two ways. First, attempting to combat the “bare-all, less-is-more” message girls receive from media and pop culture by matching its frequency and

\(^2\) Iris Marion Young, for example, in her collection *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays*, discusses embodied experience from a feminist perspective as it pertains to clothing and to “breasted experience” (189). She critiques patriarchal culture for being breast-obsessed, noting that “especially in those adolescent years . . . [a girl] often feels herself judged and evaluated according to the size and contours of her breasts . . . A woman’s chest, much more than a man’s, is *in question* in this society, up for judgment, and whatever the verdict, she has not escaped the condition of being problematic” (189).
intensity with a “cover-yourself-up” message does nothing to problematize let alone confront society’s tendency to resort to the superficial when gauging human worth; it’s like trying to solve the obesity epidemic by encouraging everyone to become anorexic. Secondly, teenagers are not asexual. Whether or not we prefer to conceive of them that way is irrelevant.

Marjorie O’Loughlin, whose text *Embodiment in Education: Exploring Creatural Existence* focuses exclusively on my subject, develops an argument for performing embodied readings of educational practices, supported by the claim that “educational theory, policy and practice in Western consumer societies retains an allegiance to an excessively rationalistic view of mind, or forms of cognitivism, which cast it as a kind of ‘pilot’ steering a sometimes unruly or unpredictable body” (5). Like Foucault and Grosz, O’Loughlin discusses the notion of inscribed bodies, emphasizing the effect this state has upon the “owner” of the body as well as the agency (on the part of the owner) it engenders. She argues that

there remains a sense of the body objectified, as ‘object’ of the gaze and of exchange, having an undeniably public aspect. But now it is also a self-regulated body, no longer just the externally disciplined body of earlier times. This ‘inscriptive’ body—because upon it are inscribed the values, morality and law of the society—has always existed but now its ‘owner’ is more deeply than ever before implicated in the inscriptive process. (O’Loughlin 1)

She paraphrases Judith Butler’s formulation of the dualistic nature of human beings, “in which bodies are simultaneously agent and instrument, that which acts but is equally acted upon by others” (O’Loughlin 3). She notes that this state of being is applicable to human social life generally, but is of particular consequence in the arena of education.
I agree, and I believe it’s an especially complex dynamic when applied to high school students. They’re technically and legally children, and yet in possession of certain adult capabilities. Bodily, in terms of physical strength, control, awareness, and sexuality, most high school students approach if not achieve adult capacities. Yet they’ve not completed the cognitive or moral development phase of life, which does not necessarily overpower but can mediate bodily urges and responses. We must be able to toggle between protecting them and recognizing their manipulative potential. This is that doubling of agency and objectivity, and it’s a particularly dicey division to articulate when housed within adolescent bodies.

O’Loughlin recruits Foucauldian theory to argue that an embodied reading of educational practices can illuminate the ways in which

the process of inscribing social and political powers across the body [carves] such relations into the very configuring of being, and thus [constitutes] its presence. In examining these, what we see is the shift or transformation in the way in which subjectivity is present from one age to the next. The bodies of those being educated are simultaneously shaped and compelled through disciplines; while bodies can be said to discipline themselves in a sense, they always do so within institutional frameworks and in discourses which are outside of themselves and whose imprint they will bear. The body is the inscribed surface of events; it is a text to be decoded and read—a locus of production, the site of contested meaning. (3)

This excerpt identifies two points of import for my project. First, it claims that there is a generational carry-over to consider in addition to our concerns about the current generation of adolescents. When arguing over things like how many hall passes a given student should be granted or what body parts are acceptable to be pierced, we ought also to remind ourselves exactly how short each generation’s adolescence actually is. Upon that recognition we must then also accept that what happens in our institutions doesn’t
stay in our institutions; it remains with (or in, or upon) students after they leave them, and, to return to the first point, will someday emerge anew, in multiple manifestations in their children.

O’Loughlin critiques educational theorists for seeming to be “rather uncomfortable with the brute fact of corporeality” and calls them to task by invoking Dewey’s assertion that embodied existence is central to human experience (16,15). She warns that to conduct educational practices under the assumption that we can ever separate mind from body, let alone privilege “cognition at the expense of the totality of complex processes” that is lived corporeality, we are engaging a “view of ourselves that is not only impoverished but also dangerous. When incorporated uncritically into the educational curriculum it may have disastrous consequences” (12).

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have argued that we have already done exactly what O’Loughlin warns against: We have developed and cultivated a powerful Discourse—of too many pointless rules, too many fruitless procedures, and too many destructive consequences—and “incorporated [it] uncritically into the educational curriculum” (12). Whether or not the result will prove “disastrous” is up for debate, but it’s a debate I believe we should be having more explicitly. This chapter has articulated a framework from which to begin it, and also one that can serve as a heuristic guide for attempting to more critically incorporate alternate discourses in the high school environment.

In many ways, I’m afraid we’ve written and designed ourselves into a corner. We’ve constructed an intricate network of us-against-them, do-this-don’t-do-that
scenarios that not only miss the point but actually create problems we didn’t have prior to the writing; we are caught in a discursive vicious circle. I think we need to figure out a way to escape the network. Rather than doing away with attendance problems, over-engineered policies have prioritized mere presence above meaningful interaction; rather than quieting student bodies in order to not distract their minds, the dress codes themselves have become such a distraction that they often interfere with the educational process; rather than providing for the safety and security of students, certain aspects of contemporary school building design have transformed our high schools into carceral environments whose effects upon bodies and minds we haven’t yet fully confronted.

An embodiment reading of these texts and spaces can help to explicate the ways in which cultural concerns and fears have become (mostly unintentionally) mapped onto student bodies. O’Loughlin references scholarship on consumption that have “declared the body to be the site of intersecting fields of discourse . . . upon which is written various cultural codes and meanings” (1). I argue that adolescent bodies, being very much at the intersection of various discursive fields, are particularly susceptible to this marking. Grosz extends the metaphor, claiming that the body is not only a text, but a “fictionalized” one, one that is “positioned within myths and belief systems that form a culture’s social narratives” (119). The remainder of this project aims to interrogate the ways in which those social and cultural narratives are both embedded in and emerge from the discursive structures that govern much of high school life.
CHAPTER 3: The Student Handbook as Repository of Institutional Discourse

Introduction

In the high schools discussed in this project, each student is given a copy of the student handbook at the beginning of each school year. The handbooks tend to be spiral-bound, 100-150 pages in length, and roughly the size of a day-planner. These documents are important to consider not only because of the breadth of issues they discuss, but because they comprise the largest body of institutional-discourse-in-text-form that students encounter during their high school education; these publications serve as a comprehensive guide for everything from bell schedules to drug testing procedures. I find the persistence of the student-handbook interesting in 2014, especially, because its continued existence defies so many trends. For example, in a world where things keep getting smaller (e.g. desktop computers to laptop computers to smart phones), the handbooks are still growing. In a culture that privileges sound bytes and snippets over long, drawn-out texts, the student handbook is undeniably (painfully, even) a long, drawn-out text. And in an educational and corporate environment that prefers e-documents over paper documents, student handbooks maintain much of their power through their actual physical form.

In the three schools in my study, and in every other high school that I’ve visited or taught in so far, students are expected to have their handbooks with them at all times; they serve as the primary reference manual for all policies, procedures, rules, and contact information. Additionally, the handbooks serve as hall passes. Each handbook contains a limited number of hall passes that students may use for things like going to the restroom, retrieving a forgotten book from a locker, etc. Once the allotted number for the
nine-week period (or the year) is surpassed, the student is out of passes. Unless the student has a documented medical ailment, he may no longer be excused from class to visit the restroom, go to the nurse, etc. Some handbooks incorporate a tear-out system of passes, and others include a chart that has boxes for teachers to initial each time a student needs to leave the classroom. Teachers are also given a copy of the handbook, and parents are asked to “sign off” on the fact that they have reviewed their child’s handbook. All of this places the student handbook in odd rhetorical territory. It serves as a practical document that students need for things like verifying a schedule or using the restroom, a comportment guide of sorts for regulating their overall behavior, and also a legal document, given the sign-off requirements. The fact that students are required to have the handbooks literally on their physical persons—on their bodies—at all times seems to signify a level of import that begs interrogation. So we require students to embody a physical document that governs many aspects of the movement, conduct, and appearance of their bodies. The fact that students tend to resist or actively disagree with many of the bodily mandates set forth in the handbook further complicates the effects of being required to maintain physical contact with them.

The handbooks serve as a repository of an institutional discourse that constructs the adolescent as both “a locus of action and a target of power” (Crossley 104). An embodiment reading of these documents allows us to examine and analyze what school handbooks communicate about students’ identity, value, and degree of agency in the world. The information gleaned from such an analysis in turn enables us to begin asking questions about how embodied life in the American high school squares with (or does not
square with) our goals for students in terms of intellectual and ethical development and citizenship.

The handbooks I analyze in this chapter are similar in length and content. All three have the following major sections, in varying order of appearance: attendance information, discipline information including dress codes, academic information, school counseling information, athletic/extra curricular information, transportation information, emergency and safety information, and contact information.

Much of this chapter uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods to analyze the potential rhetorical implications of the language used in high school handbooks. The other analytical method I employ in this chapter was developed in the field of cognitive linguistics; it identifies “primary metaphors” that emerge from the object of analysis and examines and interrogates their implications. I will address both methods and how they support an embodied reading in the following section of this chapter.

**Methods**

In the “Analysis” section of this chapter, I employ the analytical lens articulated in the previous chapter, comprised of Merleau-Ponty’s lived body, Foucault’s inscribed body, and Ahmed’s feeling body. Additionally, I call upon other theorists doing work in feminist, embodiment, and educational studies. In order to conduct a thorough and valid analysis, I rely upon two primary methods. The first is critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is used to analyze, critique, and eventually draw conclusions and make recommendations regarding bodies of text. I find this approach appropriate for two reasons: one, it facilitates a very close reading and provides a framework in which to
analyze the reading; and two, it approaches language from an implicitly embodied perspective, in that it relies upon physicality to describe its objects of analysis. For example, it looks at “actual stretches of connected text . . . [and] of the structure of paragraphs” (Johnstone 6); CDA accounts for the materiality of text, and notes that the “material sometimes consists of words alone and sometimes includes pictures, gestures, gaze, and other modalities” (Johnstone 9). These passages instantiate Knoblauch’s definition of “embodied language” and also provide a rhetorical space for analyzing things beyond words, which I do in this dissertation. A more complete discussion of CDA methods can be found below. The second method I rely upon in this chapter comes from the discipline of cognitive linguistics and utilizes primary metaphors to describe and critique rhetorical patterns in high school handbooks. An extended discussion of primary metaphors follows the CDA portion of this section, but for now it is important to note that the difference between regular and primary metaphors is that primary metaphors operate below the level of text without our conscious knowledge. They literally become embodied and embedded within us in a way that we neither notice nor interrogate. For example, to say that “John is a pig” is a “regular metaphor.” Any native English speaker understands that by saying this we are implying that John is sloppy, or overweight, or rude. We easily recognize “pig” as metaphorical. A primary metaphor is not so recognizable, but it is as (or arguably more) powerful. For example, most people subscribe to the UP IS GOOD primary metaphor. We tend to feel (not necessarily believe or think, because primary metaphors operate subconsciously) that up is good and down is bad. We would rather rise than fall, and we assume that “higher” is always better than lower, that “looking down on someone” implies contempt, etc. Primary
metaphors generally relate to our embodied knowledge, or what Knoblauch calls “gut reactions” (21). We use and understand them without the need to recruit intellectual explanations for them. We feel that rising up is good and falling down is bad, perhaps because we’ve embodied negative responses to falling—pain or lack of control or humiliation—hence, “down is bad” becomes part of our embodied knowledge that we do not question. I address many primary metaphors as examples later in this section and as actual primary metaphors that emerged from my analysis in the “Analysis” portion of this chapter.

Critical discourse analysis is one approach within the larger field of practice generally termed “discourse analysis” (DA). Its purpose is to cull the underlying or cloaked rhetorical effect from passages of text, and ultimately, to use the knowledge gleaned to effect real-world change for the good. Norman Fairclough identifies three properties of CDA: “it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary” (3). A useful articulation of these properties could be expressed as the assertion that any given text or object of analysis exists not independently but rather in relation to other discourses within a social network, that those discourses act upon and react to one another in complex dialectical relationships, and that the text or object can be approached from varying “points of entry” that originate from various disciplines (Fairclough 4-5). Barbara Johnstone articulates the “controlling theoretical idea” behind CDA as the idea that “texts, embedded in recurring ‘discursive practices’ for their production, circulation, and reception which are themselves embedded in ‘social practice,’ are among the principal ways in which ideology is circulated and reproduced” (53).
Both Fairclough and Johnstone’s theories proceed from the premise that there is a “real” world, that discourse is referential of it, and that “human worlds” are in turn also shaped and constructed discursively (Fairclough 4, Johnstone 11). The primary goal of CDA can be articulated as an effort to “uncover the ways in which discourse and ideology are intertwined” (Johnstone 54). For this project, I attempt to do so within the “human world” of the American high school. I argue that, in terms of “human worlds,” the high school is a site of intense shaping and discursive activity because of the concentrated manner in which it functions; high schools house several hundred people of the same (transitional and sometimes volatile) age under the same roof for a large percentage of their waking hours, and they assume responsibility for not only their intellectual, ethical, and moral development, but their physical safety as well. High schools are insular, and yet also become collecting places for all of the exterior forces they often seek to either deny or guard against.

An important distinction must be made between “descriptive” discourse analysis and “critical” discourse analysis. Any method of DA is inherently descriptive: one must be able to analyze texts and explain their various features before attempting any sort of critical goal (Johnstone 27). Johnstone identifies two premises of purely descriptive analysis; the first is that it is “possible to describe the world,” and the second is that “the proper role of a scholar is to describe the status quo first, and only later, if at all, to apply scholarly findings in the solution of practical problems” (27). She allows that while purely descriptive practice may be possible, such a methodical and focused approach to critical reading tends to inevitably lead to critical thinking and questioning (29). Moreover, this is as it should be: “sensitive discourse analysts should always be casting
critical eyes on their own process of analysis and on the situation they study, whether or not methodological or social critique is the goal” (Johnstone 29). Such an orientation frequently leads to questions regarding issues of power relations and the ways in which they are discursively produced and/or reflected in society (Johnstone 28, Fairclough 8).

The salient factor of “critical” discourse analysis for Fairclough is that “[c]ritique brings a normative element into analysis . . . . It focuses on what is wrong with a society (an institution, an organization, etc.), and how ‘wrongs’ may be ‘righted’ or mitigated, from a particular normative standpoint” (Fairclough 7). CDA is also grounded in human and social values: it aims to help cultivate and facilitate a “‘good society’ of human well-being and flourishing . . . [and to asses] what exists, what might exist and what should exist on the basis of a coherent set of values” (Fairclough 7). James Gee concurs with these views, both on the differences between descriptive and prescriptive discourse analysis, and with the assertion that thorough and responsible discourse analysis needs to employ the critical eye, “not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is . . . political” (Gee 9).

CDA implies practical real-world applications, and therefore intends to affect real change in the real world. However, despite its methodology, which involves discrete tasks performed in a definable and controllable manner, its practice is inextricably situated within an endlessly complex network of social and discursive relations. There is never one “analysis,” regardless of the size of the sample analyzed. The political scientist will uncover patterns and ideologies in which the linguist is uninterested; the rhetorician will identify metaphors that might obfuscate the sociologist’s reading. And as sharp a tool as CDA can be, there are limits to its utility. Fairclough asserts: “We cannot
transform the world in any old way we happen to construe it; the world is such that some transformations are possible and others are not. So CDA is a ‘moderate’ or ‘contingent’ form of social constructivism” (5). Fairclough also notes that any critique of discourse is a production of discourse in itself (8). So although I am critiquing high school institutional discourse in this dissertation, the dissertation is also an artifact of discourse. A question emerges, then, over which discursive artifact is “better”? Fairclough claims that the “only basis for claiming superiority is providing explanations which have greater explanatory power” (8). Fairclough considers the “greater explanatory power” to belong to the reading or analysis that has the “capacity to transform aspects of social life, which brings us back to dialectical relations between discourse and other social elements with respect to the aims of critique to not merely interpret the world but contribute to changing it” (9).

Johnstone refers to Foucault’s conception of discourse, which is important to CDA not only theoretically, but because it helps to explicate the ways in which CDA is concerned with ideology: Foucault considers discourses to be “conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society” (Johnstone 3). The ways in which ideologies become “naturalized” and the resultant consequences of naturalization are primary concerns of discourse analysts.

A discourse can be considered naturalized when it is taken as common sense by the community of participants who use or are subjected to it (Fairclough 34). Any given institution has its own “ideological-discursive formations” (IDFs), which Fairclough
defines as a “‘speech community’ with its own discourse norms but also, embedded within and symbolized by the latter, its own ‘ideological norms’”(30). There is generally one dominant IDF in an institution, and it tends to become naturalized so that non-dominant “institutional subjects” are constructed according to its norms without realizing or becoming aware of it (Fairclough 30). The goal of CDA is to “denaturalize” these ideologies or IDFs, to make “visible the interconnectedness of things” (Fairclough 30, 39). In order to do this, one must uncover and explicate the ways in which “social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures” (Fairclough 30).

Johnstone describes it more holistically, but her position is essentially the same: “discourse is both shaped by and helps to shape the human lifeworld, or the world as we experience it. In other words, discourse both reflects and creates human beings’ ‘worldviews’” (33). In this creation, hegemonies develop and emerge about “the naturalness of the status quo to which people assent without realizing it” (Johnstone 54).

James Paul Gee articulates a method of discourse analysis based upon seven “building tasks” of language and six “tools of inquiry”(17, 28). Each building task has a correlating discourse analysis question—a question that is meant to illuminate the ways in which language operates in the given sample being analyzed. For example, the first building task is “significance,” and the correlating question is, “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?” (17). The first tool of inquiry Gee terms “social languages” (28). This tool enable us to

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3 The “tasks” are Significance, Practices/Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections, and Sign Systems and Knowledge. The “tools” are Situated Meanings, Social Languages, Figured Worlds, Intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations (Gee 17,28).
question what type of social language is being employed in a given sample and what its implications are. For example, a politician uses colloquial or vernacular language to appeal to a rural audience during a campaign stump speech, while an attorney employs legalese to assert his status and competence in a courtroom appearance. The social languages speakers or writers adopt or employ create varying effects related to identity and power. More important than effect, though, is the idea that effect can become reality: present yourself as though you have power and you may come to have power; convey to others that they are subordinate and they may cease to behave as productive agents.

I rely upon Gee’s method for this analysis because I appreciate the organization and meticulousness of his concretely articulated analytical plan. An “ideal” discourse analysis, according to Gee, uses his “tools of inquiry” to ask questions about his “building tasks” (121). Because there are six tools and seven tasks, we must ask six questions about seven tasks, resulting in a 42-question analytical series, from which we then draw “testable” hypotheses. Since this is empirical rather than scientific research, “testable” means that we can observe whether our hypotheses are borne out and confirmed by analyzing further data (Gee 25). For example, if our hypothesis states that the language used to write standardized test questions on a given standardized test contains traces of racial bias that render questions more difficult for children of certain races to answer, and if the more standardized tests we analyze the more we find this to be true, then we can probably legitimately make a claim that racial bias is a widespread concern in standardized testing and needs to be addressed—that the tests need to be

4 Most “real” analyses do not encompass all 42 questions; different analysts are interested in different aspects of text and will focus upon relevant questions accordingly.
rewritten. Although Gee does not lay out the tasks and tools in chart format, I have done so for the sake of clarity and to demonstrate the organizational structure from which the questions are derived. This chart, along with accompanying questions developed from it, can be found in Appendix A.

The central goal Gee’s method is to affect change in the real world. In articulating the difference between DA and CDA, Gee claims that all discourse analysis should be critical—that while discourse analysts must be able to identify and describe the ways in which language works, they “also want to speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They [should] want to apply their work to the world in some fashion” (9). I share this view, and it is why I am interested in analyzing texts such as high school discipline codes. I believe that the ways in which we speak to students begin to construct them as subjects, participants, and agents within the institution, and that all these things have far-reaching consequences for our collective citizenry.

The “tools of inquiry” are to be used as “thinking devices” in answering these analytical questions about each language task. For example, in considering “Relationships (Task 4)” and “Social Languages (Tool 2),” we might ask something like the following: “How does ‘teacher talk’ (the issuing of directives, etc.) affect the relationships between teachers and students?” Our answer could range anywhere from “It encourages discipline and respect” to “It engenders an us-against-them dynamic in which students tend to rebel.” Clearly, we would need to ask more than this one question to arrive at any meaningful sort of conclusion. This is a good demonstration of why it is necessary to consider various aspects of language use before arriving at any conclusions.
If a teacher’s version of “teacher talk” incorporates a discourse of interdependence and productivity our answer may sound like the “encourage discipline and respect” answer; if it devolves into the “this is not a democracy it’s a dictatorship and I am the dictator” discourse, it may lead to rebellion.

Most of Gee’s “tools of inquiry” are self-explanatory, but I do want to dedicate a brief discussion to what he means by “figured worlds” (69-72), because the concept is less familiar but highly important to his method; it is also important to my analysis in the following section. He defines the term as “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal” (71). For example, there is a very traditional figured world for a wedding ceremony: there is a female bride dressed in a white gown who is walked down the aisle by her father and “handed over” to her male groom. This figured world obviously carries a multitude of connotations and implications: the bride as object of beauty and purity, the groom as agent of provision and protection, etc.

However, our figured worlds are in a constant state of flux and evolution. Over time, certain elements of typical figured worlds are violated or new elements are added. Same-sex marriage is now legal in parts of our nation, a change that some see as productive evolution and others see as destructive violation. By attending to the ways in which figured worlds are assumed, accommodated, confronted, or challenged in discourse, we can begin to uncover the ways in which they affect things like identity, relationships, and politics.

Foucault advocates this uncovering—this close reading—as a way of discovering the ways in which we are inscribed by the system and the ways in which we perpetuate it. Often, the figurative language employed in a given text can serve to reveal hidden or
intentionally misrepresented aspects of the system to which it applies. We know that figurative language is so pervasive that it is nearly impossible for speakers and/or writers to avoid. If we slow down our reading or listening enough, we will generally find that most people are capable of isolating and identifying many of the semantic metaphors that we use. For example, the analysis section of this chapter discusses aspects of a “prison” or “criminal justice” figured world that is at least partly established within certain documents that comprise high school discourse. Words like “right of appeal,” “suspension,” “violation,” “loiter,” and “contraband” have punitive connotations; the words themselves, even taken out of context, lend themselves to the figured worlds of prison or criminal justice even if we are not aware of the specific circumstances in which the words are used.

There is a deeper level of metaphorical analysis, though, and one that is arguably more powerful because it generally goes unnoticed—not only by readers and listeners, but by writers and speakers. Gee explains that this type of metaphor is usually “taken for granted” because of its connection to “master models,” which imply “tacit theories . . . used to organize a number of significant domains for a given culture or social group” (91). He uses this short sentence, in which a woman discusses her reluctance to leave a bad marriage, to demonstrate how such metaphors operate: “Why in the world would you want to stop and not get the use out of all the years you’ve already spent together?” (91). This question exemplifies the “time=money” master model. Her use of the word “spent” and the phrase “get the use out of,” as well as her tacit allusions to wanting some sort of “return on investment” reveal the ways in which she (perhaps unknowingly) subscribes to a financial model as the basis for her marriage (91).
The term cognitive linguists use for these master models is “primary metaphors.”

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, authors of the seminal text *Metaphors We Live By*, claim that these metaphors are central to not only the way we understand the concepts in our worlds, but that they also “govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details . . . what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. [They play] a central role in defining our everyday realities” (124). Lakoff and Johnson also note that these metaphors are so pervasive (“most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature”) that in our everyday reality we, for the most part, remain unaware of them.

This combination—the coexistence of something that orders our reality while simultaneously remaining hidden from us—warrants our attention when we study the discourses of institutions. The sheer number of primary metaphors we use without thinking about them on a daily basis suggests how crucial they may be to how we function as human beings. Lakoff and Johnson suggest several, of which I will include just a few:

**THEORIES (AND ARGUMENTS) ARE BUILDINGS:** “Is that the foundation of your theory? The theory needs more support. The argument is shaky” (125).

**IDEAS ARE FOOD:** “What he said left a bad taste in my mouth.” All this paper has in it are raw facts, half-baked ideas, and warmed-over theories” (125).

**IDEAS ARE PLANTS:** “That idea died on the vine. That’s a budding theory. It will take years for that idea to come to full flower” (126).

As opposed to . . .

**IDEAS ARE COMMODITIES:** “It’s important how you package your ideas. He won’t buy that. That idea just won’t sell. There is always a market for good ideas. That’s a worthless idea” (126).

As opposed to . . .
IDEAS ARE CUTTING INSTRUMENTS: “That’s an incisive idea. That cuts right to the heart of the matter. That was a cutting remark. He’s sharp. He has a razor wit” (126).

The last three alone demonstrate the very different ways these metaphors can reflect or construct reality. To conceive of an idea as a plant (that should be protected, nurtured, and cultivated) is vastly different from considering one as a cutting instrument (a weapon or tool capable of inflicting pain and/or death). There are many other potential conceptual structures for “ideas” beyond these three; Lakoff and Johnson articulate seven different highly complex primary metaphor options for thinking about / talking about / experiencing love (126-130). For example, we often refer to conceptions of medicine when talking about love: “This is a sick relationship. They have a strong, healthy marriage. The marriage is dead—it can’t be revived. Their marriage is on the mend. We’re getting back on our feet” (Lakoff and Johnson 126). Another option is to see it as magic: “She cast her spell over me . . . I was entranced by him. I’m charmed by her. She is bewitching” (Lakoff and Johnson127).

This is an obviously different orientation from the financial model the woman in Gee’s text seems to suggest. Depending upon which theory we subscribe to (again, probably subconsciously), we are likely to act and react accordingly. If we perceive love to be a financial state-of-affairs, we will tend to make decisions based upon logic and rationality, and we will tend to believe that we, for the most part, control those decisions. If we see love as magic, we tend to watch and wait passively, to allow ourselves to be swept up in its orbit or abandoned according to its whims. This model is significantly less controllable (albeit significantly more romantic).
This is the reason that the implications of primary metaphors are so consequential for human relationships and environments: “The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (Lakoff and Johnson 128). Any institution has its own culture, and high schools are no exception. And schools are inherently values-based institutions; this function cannot be ignored, especially in high schools, given that the teenaged inhabitants of the institution are at such a crucial stage of their moral and ethical development, both of which are significantly informed by the culture in which they reside. That culture is at least partly revealed (and disseminated, and perpetuated) through discourse; it makes sense to investigate the underlying linguistic and rhetorical concepts (primary metaphors, in this case) that order the perceptions, interactions, and modes of being that inform that culture.

**Analysis**

The following analysis sections of this chapter address the way student bodies are marshaled in my three areas of concentration—attendance, dress, and discipline codes, in this order—using methods from both CDA and primary metaphor analysis. The methods are employed to articulate how embodied knowledge, language, and rhetoric interact with lived, inscribed, and feeling bodies. The first section is an overview of the types of language generally employed in the handbooks.
Holistic Analysis of Handbook

Before performing the close reading that CDA requires, I wanted to get an overall picture of the degree to which certain aspects of these texts were prioritized or emphasized simply due to the quantity of their inclusion. In order to determine this, I turned to precedents from discourse studies scholarship. Specifically, I’ve borrowed the methods of Anita Fetzer and Peter Bull, who discuss two major dimensions of political speech in Britain and within it categorize distinct linguistic modes of rhetorical expression. I then use a corpus linguistics approach to count the words in each category. Fetzer and Bull find that Britain’s political leaders tend to address their audience on two major dimensions: “competence” and “responsiveness.” The “competence” dimension is engaged through claims of “keeps promises,” “decisive” and “principled”; the “responsiveness” dimension is expressed through claims of “caring,” “listens to reason,” and “not arrogant” (Fetzer and Bull 128). Categorizing speech passages into these two dimensions allows the authors to isolate the major rhetorical goals of the political leaders and also to study how the leaders tailor different speeches to different audiences by varying the emphasis and altering the competence/responsiveness ratio to most effectively appeal to audience values and concerns. They find that “for one particular communicative goal, one dimension may be foregrounded and thereby assigned a higher degree of relevance than its counterpart, while for another goal, it may be backgrounded in relation to the other dimension” (Fetzer and Bull 129).

I wanted to apply this methodology to the handbooks in order to help determine what sorts of messages were being prioritized and how this prioritization might affect various audiences (students, parents, teachers). In the handbooks I studied, three clear
rhetorical modes emerged. The first I will call “Informative/Logistical.” It includes information that is, for the most part, logically necessary and rhetorically neutral (although it’s tempting to question whether anything is truly rhetorically neutral). For example, students do need to understand the credit requirements for graduation; they need to know whom to contact for dropping a course from their schedule; they need to know what sorts of extra-curricular activities are available in their school buildings. This example of informative/logistical text is from Maple High School’s handbook: “Starting Fall 2008 students who participate in interscholastic athletics, band or cheerleading for two full seasons can be exempt from the physical education requirement.” The second mode I will call “Guiding/Ethical.” This mode speaks directly to students in a way that expresses interest or concern for their well-being or encourages them to make beneficial and productive decisions. For example, Cherry High School’s handbook states that, “We believe co-curricular activities make school more rewarding. Adherence to certain codes of behavior and academic standards enhances an individual's quality of life.” I differentiated “Guiding/Ethical” passages from the next mode, “Warning/Punitive,” by how they were written; “Guiding/Ethical” implies directives to students that are expressed without negativity or consequence, whereas “Warning/Punitive” passages contain either a “don’t do this” or an “if you do this, then this” element. An example of warning/punitive text from Maple’s handbook is, “Students are not allowed to play radios, tapes, or CD players during lunch. There will be no card playing. Students who violate these cafeteria regulations are subject to disciplinary action.”

I used a corpus linguistics approach to glean information regarding how these three rhetorical modes are employed. Johnstone suggests using this sort of approach as
an extension or addition to analyzing smaller texts qualitatively. The words in a large corpus of text can be coded and counted to determine whether patterns and characteristics that emerge in smaller texts tend to remain consistent across larger bodies of text (Johnstone 22). By color-coding each passage for one of the three modes and then counting the words contained in each passage, I was able to determine the allocation of these modes based upon what percentage of the whole they represented. This is not an exact science—there are cases where the modes either blur or serve double purposes; however, I believe that in most instances the language did fit into one of these three modes. In each handbook that I analyzed, there is a certain amount of negligible text (mostly things like tables of contents, topic headings etc.), so the percentages do not equal exactly one hundred percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informative/Logistical</th>
<th>Guiding/Ethical</th>
<th>Warning/Punitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maple High School</strong></td>
<td>10,425 words 37% of total</td>
<td>704 words 2.5% of total</td>
<td>16,343 words 58% of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Willow High School</strong></td>
<td>9213 words 43% of total</td>
<td>128 words .6% of total</td>
<td>11,784 words 55% of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cherry High School</strong></td>
<td>10,882 words 48% of total</td>
<td>748 words 3.3 % words</td>
<td>10,891 words 48% of total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Word Count Percentages of Rhetorical Modes

The handbooks are similar in length: Maple’s is 28,177 words; Willow’s is 21,425 words; and, Cherry’s is 22,677 words. Additionally, there are clear commonalities in the distribution of the modes. In two cases, Warning/Punitive mode is clearly foregrounded, with Informative/Logistical mode still very significant but decisively less prevalent; in the case of Cherry High School these two modes are roughly equal. In all three high
school handbooks, Guiding/Ethical language is backgrounded to the other two to such a degree that its inclusion in the documents at all is nearly negligible or discountable. This distribution is interesting and potentially meaningful, but it needs to be considered in context with the qualitative analysis, which follows in the section below. I will return to a discussion of the more general functional purposes of high school handbooks in Chapter 5.

**Analysis of Attendance Codes**

This section begins a detailed qualitative analysis of the portions of high school handbooks that contain the most embodied language and that articulate the most embodied practices. I look at attendance, dress, and discipline codes, beginning with attendance. For each code, I describe primary metaphors that emerge from the language employed in the handbooks and/or use Gee’s guiding CDA questions to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the text.

The handbooks in my corpus all have fairly detailed attendance policies and procedures, and all are similar in content and scope. A close analysis suggests several possible conceptual models (primary metaphors). I will focus on four that emerged as salient. The first one I’ll call “SCHOOLS ARE CONTAINERS FOR STUDENTS.” The notion of “container” embodies several obvious characteristics. Containers keep things “in” them. If things get “out” it is because someone has either willingly opened the container and released the things or because the container itself has failed to function. Alternatively, containers are used to *keep* things out. The notion of “containment,” then, implies both enclosure and protection, as well as the securing of borders. Gordon and
Lahelma, in an article that examines recurring metaphors in education, describes a student’s arrival at school as entering “a container where they are expected to take their places in appropriate spaces, their stations. The day consists of movement from station to station. The correct station at one point is an incorrect station at another point.” Their conception of the school day as routinized and almost factory-like—bodies moving from station to station at specified times—reflects Foucault’s description of how “docile bodies” are produced through discipline (Discipline 136-137). Docile bodies are more easily inscribed and more susceptible to taking up the dynamics that support hegemonic power structures. Once bodies become altered in this way—accustomed and amenable to the school routine in this instance—they unconsciously begin to perpetuate the hegemony in a way that is especially effective because it requires no outside force to be exerted upon the bodies. Students learn to enter and exit the container according to rules and norms that are not questioned.

O’Loughlin describes the limiting power of the school-as-container, noting that the “architecture of schools, especially secondary schools, allows students a relatively narrow range of bodily movements” (63); she also points out that the limits impact not only space, but time: “The day itself is divided into prespecified periods, the beginning and conclusion of each being marked by the operation of a buzzer or some other acoustic means acknowledging the change from one period to the next” (63).

These notions of both temporal and spatial containment were evident in the handbooks I analyzed, all of which contain extensive “in and out” language. Students are asked to schedule doctors’ appointments “outside of school hours” (Willow 10); in the event they do need to leave during the day or arrive late, they must “sign in and out of
school” (Willow 10). Willow High School is a “closed campus,” which means that students may not come and go during the day without acceptable documentation from a parent or guardian; there is an exception made for “emancipated” eighteen-year-olds who have “special privileges to sign in and out of school” (Willow 10-14). There are also instances of “holding” or “containing” language that apply to parents regarding student attendance. Maple High School’s handbook explains Senate Bill 181 to parents and students, noting that it will “hold parents accountable” for their child’s attendance (Maple 18). It is clear that aspects of containment, in addition to imposing physical forces upon students, also signify some sort of legal and/or criminal component of the attendance codes. The container itself in the “school is a container” metaphor appears fairly rigid in its ability or willingness to open and close, and there’s no grey area surrounding it. Leaving it without permission “violates State Law,” and once students enter it, “they may not leave again [without] following proper procedures” (Cherry 23). Those who do manage to leave it, must “leave it immediately,” and are never permitted to “loiter” in its vicinity (Maple 18). Leaving violates state law and can be considered criminal conduct, but sticking around can end the same way: “Loitering outside may result in suspension from school or referral to the [Maple] police” (Maple 18). The processes of “signing in and out” are complicated. There are several criteria that must be met in order for a student to be permitted to sign out. Once he does sign out, it is difficult to sign back in: “Even with a note, students will only be permitted to sign out after contact has been made with a parent or guardian. . . . Once a student has signed out, he/she is not permitted to sign back in, unless he/she has a medical or court excuse” (Maple 21). Sometimes attending to the signing in and signing out procedures extends into the school day itself,
at which point the “attendance office personnel will return students to class to ensure accurate attendance taking first period” (Cherry 22). Then, students can return sometime between classes or during a study hall to finish the process of being cleared to sign out later in the day. If they return the same day, they must reverse the process at the attendance office in order to receive permission to sign back in. Students who return to classes that day without signing in can be disciplined (Cherry 22). Clearly, the task of counting and containing students is an intensive business; the fact that it’s spelled out so extensively in the handbooks is indicative of its import to the ordering of a typical high school day.

Another primary metaphor that emerges from the attendance policy texts I will call “SCHOOLING IS A TRANSACTION.” Transaction tends to involve “accounting”—processes of counting, exchanging, allocating, etc. The above section discussed the complexity of entering and leaving the “container”; the requirements surrounding these actions certainly seem to involve a lot of accounting for student bodies. There are provisions in place that address nearly every possible contingency. Most of them involve an “if you have/do/can document this, then you may enter, leave, remain, re-admit, stay-out-of-trouble” dynamic. For example, students are expected to go to all of their classes daily. However, a “teacher pass” can allow one exemption per student per day—a student may, for instance, go to the library or to another classroom instead of following her assigned schedule (Willow 12). If the student uses the teacher pass to exit the class from which he is excused but fails to appear in the designated alternate location, he is considered truant to that class (Willow 12). Students in 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} grade are permitted to miss two school days per year for college visitation, provided the high
school principal grants an “exemption” (which means the absence will not be counted against the student). The student must also complete and return a college visitation form from the attendance office and have it signed by her parent and her counselor in order to receive the exemption. Upon return to school the student must furnish the signature of a representative of the college he visited. Failure to comply with any of these procedures renders the student absent without excuse, or truant (Willow 13).

Students in work-study programs may be issued an “early release pass,” which grants them the privilege of leaving school before the end of the school day. If they try to return to school later in the day, though, they will lose the pass and the privilege of leaving early (Willow 13). Students who don’t normally leave early but need to on one day for a doctor’s appointment can be issued an “exit pass,” which is different from a “teacher’s pass” or an “early release pass” (Willow 14). Clearly, the processes are very specific, and it seems as though it might be easy to make a mistake, to add or subtract something from the wrong column, so to speak.

The punishments for attendance violations are also transactional in nature, with even more direct parallels to accounting. For example, at Cherry High School, 4 tardies=one afterschool detention, 8 tardies=two afterschool detentions, 12 tardies=one two-hour Saturday School, and 16 tardies=one four-hour Saturday School. The most literal application of the transactional nature of school attendance is articulated in the Ohio Revised Code Section 3321.38, which grants the juvenile court the power to require parents to pay up to 500 dollars should their child’s school attendance violate its provisions (Maple 20; See Appendix D). All of these transactions add up to a commodified conception of daily high school experience, one where the price of freedom
is expressed in the currency of documents and transactions that are relatively meaningless and arbitrary outside the walls of the high school. Iris Marion Young correlates this to objectification, stating that “Objects are precisely countable, so that owners can keep accounts of their property. They attain full weight as commodities, objects for exchange on the market, in a circulation of power where precise accounting of equivalents and contracts is the source and locus of power” (191). Her words jut sharply into democratic and philosophical ideals of education, and therefore of schools, as places in which students are not only protected from such commodification but encouraged to transcend it. They cannot very easily transcend commodification while they are simultaneously being tallied, traded, and charged.

As a teacher who once fully embraced this ideal of transcendence, I remember being extremely disturbed as I heard more and more of my students compare their high schools to prisons. It appears to be the most obvious primary metaphor in contemporary compulsory education, at least to high school students: “SCHOOL IS A PRISON.” It’s tempting to discount it exactly for that reason—it comes from the students, who don’t yet have the sophistication or life experience to be writing their own primary metaphors. However, there is an argument to be made for listening to their voices above others. Gordon and Lahelma claim that “we think it is important to recognize the importance of the repeated negative metaphors used by school students. These metaphors express the limited autonomy experienced by them in relation to space and body use in schools.”

For the sake of discussing attendance policies, I want to amend this metaphor slightly to render it more broadly applicable to attendance policies: “SCHOOL IS A BRANCH OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.” This is instantiated extensively,
in sentences such as this one, that articulates what happens if a student at Cherry High School exceeds the allowable number of consecutive absences: “[T]he student will have the right of appeal to an Attendance Committee that will take the individual case under consideration” (21; italics added). In addition to the legalistic language, a general attitude of suspicion tends to inhere regarding school attendance. Cherry High’s handbook has detailed instructions for parents, should they need to call and report their student absent from school. After listing the allowable hours to call and the information that must be reported, the text warns that the calls will be “subject to verification” (Cherry 23).

Even the verb choices seem somewhat overzealous within the context of high school attendance. Willow High School’s handbook uses the word “charge,” as in “the student will be charged” with an absence if she misses more than two hours of the school day due to a doctor’s appointment. It’s important to note that “to charge” also fits into our transactional metaphor discussed previously. Other court-like language appears as well. A student may be released from punitive attendance measures if “reasonable cause” can be shown for prolonged absence (Willow 11). If Willow High School is unable to verify a parent call-off (this school has a similar policy to Cherry’s above regarding parent reporting of student absences), then the student will be “presumed unexcused and dealt with accordingly” (Willow 12). The term “early release” is used to designate the privilege that students can earn if they meet certain criteria (Willow 13).

The fourth primary metaphor that materializes from the attendance policies in the corpus is something like this: “NONCONFORMITY IS A DISEASE.” Attendance guidelines are “prescribed” by the state (Willow 10); students with serious attendance problems fall along a spectrum from “habitual” to “chronic” (Cherry 24); at the
“habitual” stage, the school district may implement an “intervention” to address the problem (Maple 18). All of these terms are used to characterize addictive and unhealthy behaviors and their qualifications and consequences, and they are also associated with criminality. We talk of habitual users and chronic offenders. The very notion of “intervention” implies an unwelcome advance of corrective action brought upon the offending body. Sometimes, the corrective action includes a sentence in the juvenile detention center, a sort of quarantine, perhaps, to extend the metaphor. If the metaphor I discussed before this one constructs students as prisoners, “NONCONFORMITY IS A DISEASE” perhaps constructs them more like mental patients. In both cases, students are taken out of the subject role and cast into an “object-held-against-will.”

Discussion

These notions of containment, transaction, legal administration, and disease raise important questions about how we conceive of students in terms of agency and locus of power. We seem to begin with the premise that some level of force is necessary to both compel students to attend school and then to hold them there. The argument can be made that these measures “work”; they get and keep bodies in school. An embodiment reading, though, suggests that enforcing or encouraging such inscriptions upon student bodies exacts a toll upon their whole beings—body and mind as one—in terms of lived experience and emotional existence. We can (and do) use the power of the criminal justice system to keep kids in school until a certain age. What we seem to keep running into, though, is that marshaling the body doesn’t necessarily lead to engaging the mind. It’s paradoxical, because what we generally claim to desire is the exact opposite: we try
to engage the mind to control the body—to mind-over-matter things. In a
phenomenological sense, neither is possible, because body and mind are one and the
same. So even if we force Johnny’s body into school, we still can’t make him learn what
we want just because he’s sitting there. Which seems to beg the question of whether
forcing students to be in school is even a worthwhile endeavor.

**Analysis of Dress Codes**

The dress code portions of the handbooks lend themselves to a rigorous
employment of CDA because they are discrete sections of the text and because the
language used is explicit and dense, which is precisely the sort of sample that is best
studied through CDA. In order to thoroughly analyze these texts, I applied all 42
analytical questions about each dress code. I wrote the questions specifically for
analyzing a dress code, using Gee’s “tools” and “tasks.” Those questions can be found in
Appendix B. Included in this section are the ones that yield the most interesting and
meaningful insights to the effects of the language analyzed.

To begin the analysis, I asked, “In what ways are words or phrases used in the
dress codes significant because of the context (situated meaning) in which they are
used?” Upon close examination, one notices the frequent use of terminology that is either
carceral, punitive, or otherwise associated with safety and danger. Cherry High School
warns against hairstyles that are “hazardous to the wearer, or to the health and comfort of
other persons in the vicinity.” Various forms of the word “violate” are seen frequently in
all the sample dress codes. Cherry High School states that students who violate
Guideline 7 (which dictates that hair bands must be two inches in width and actually
holding hair back) will be “subject to immediate disciplinary actions.” Violators of the
dress code at this school will be “retained in the office” until the situation is rectified.

These words and phrases contribute to the emergence of certain figured worlds,
which are addressed in another CDA question: “What is the significance of the sort of
figured worlds called into being by the language used in the dress codes?” It may be
significant that we repeatedly use terms associated with punishment and incarceration to
articulate high school dress codes. If we are calling the figured world of “prison” into
being by the way we describe and enforce these codes, we should probably consider the
implications of doing so. We could also investigate a “consumerist/appearance” figured
world, as dress codes are primarily concerned with surface-level presentation created by
material goods.

Because all of these figured worlds imply a network of discourses, it is necessary
to ask whether other texts/discourses are implicitly or explicitly referenced or alluded to
in the dress codes, and what their significance to the sample texts may be. In the case of
a “consumerist/appearance” figured world, for example, there are other texts implicitly
referenced, though not intentionally. We live in a society in which appearance is often
valued over substance, and this is evidenced so ubiquitously that we sometimes fail to
notice it. Consumerist artifacts such as women’s magazines send us a “look good/feel
good/do good” message; we quip that “the clothes make the man.” While one certainly
need not be cognizant of these ideas and sayings to understand a school dress code, it
seems that traces of them reside in assertions such as “Poise and confidence are derived
from an individual looking his/her best. It should also be noted that you would behave as
you dress.”
In addition to implying other texts, figured worlds are associated with particular practices and activities. For example, if we accept that a “prison” figured world is even partially called into being by the dress codes, we must assume that the practices and activities necessitated by it will further cultivate a prison environment, in which one subset of the population (students) is subject to behavioral and bodily control by the other (teachers, administrators). Without engaging in questions of appropriateness or necessity, it seems reasonable to conclude that there are actual effects and consequences of such a dynamic.

In addition to figured worlds, the concept of social language is important in CDA because it serves to express and construct the identity of participants in a given community. For example, the social language in a school community appears to construct the students as subjects (and therefore subjected to or subjugated to [something] by [someone]). In other words, students are constructed as subjects of an institution rather than agents of autonomy. In a “prison” figured world, this use of social language could construct identities of criminality; in a “consumerist” figured world, it could construct identities of superficiality and objectification. Social languages, because they construct identities, also construct relationships of individuals. If the social language constructs one group of individuals as having power over another, it could possibly strain the relationships between individuals in differing groups. Whenever one body (or set of actual “bodies”) is subject to the rule of another body, rebellion tends to inhere as attitude and occur as action.

Social languages exist within larger conversations that surround the issue of relationships relevant to school dress codes. We must ask what those conversations tell
us about these relationships. In recent years, episodes of school violence have driven initiatives to bring the American high school under control to a degree that provides security—mental and emotional as well as physical. When policies and procedures are instituted in an effort to quell violence, it is understandable that fear, distrust, and even paranoia reign. In terms of relationships, there are consequences of fearing the Other, of remaining vigilant for those who “don’t fit in.” Lacking more authentic ways of identifying “problem” students, clothing and appearance have become emblematic of good and evil. For example, the term “trenchcoat mafia” emerged in the wake of the Columbine shootings, a reference to the appearance of the shooters.

The equation of material goods with non-material values is highly and consistently apparent in high school dress codes, and is relevant to my CDA question that asks what sort of perspective on social goods is implied by dress codes in relation to other discourses. There is a multitude of cultural discourses that conflate appearance and worth (or material goods and social goods). Material goods such as certain brands/styles of clothing, salon services, or cosmetic dentistry can create visual, surface-level entities that are perceived as “good” or “responsible” or “well-organized.” We often dangerously assume that wealthy + pretty = smart and successful, while poor + ugly = stupidity and failure. A digital culture of sound bytes and ADD-inducing commercial flashes tends to encourage snap judgments and discourage thoughtful reflection in terms of drawing conclusions based upon one’s appearance.

Another CDA question asks what sort of political discourses emerge from the language employed in the dress codes. Gee describes political discourses as being related to the distribution of social goods and seeks to identify the relationship between that
distribution and the discourse to be analyzed. For example, the language used in the
dress code of Cherry High School suggests that the public opinion of the school district is
somewhat to largely influenced by the appearance of the students in the schools: “Cherry
High School believes that pride in one's self and school is often reflected in the way
students dress . . . . All of us want the Cherry City Schools to be thought of as the best in
the area and the only impression many observers have of us is our personal behavior and
appearance.” If this is in fact true, the potential consequences of students not looking
“right” are enormous. The state in which this particular high school is located still
operates its educational facilities on a property-tax levy system. The schools need
community members to hold a high opinion of them so that they will vote for levies to
operate schools and bond issues to build schools. The success or failure of these levies is
often the catalyst for whether communities prosper or decline, because school quality
significantly impacts property values. It doesn’t seem clear whether students’ appearance
actually is an important indicator, let alone the “only impression” community members
can access to form opinions about their schools; certainly there are other measurable data
available such as test scores, graduation rates, percentage of college-bound students, etc.
Regardless, to suggest that it is this important certainly yokes appearance to distribution
of social goods in some ways that are questionable if not disturbing.

Discussion

I identify three particularly disturbing rhetorical trends that emerge from an
analysis of these dress codes. The first is the obvious and pervasive correlation between
schools and prisons that is made manifest by the language employed to control student
appearance. The second is the material/consumerist nature by which we not only define
but attempt to actually construct student identity. The third is the objectification/sexualization of students, particularly female students. Ironically, this appears to emerge from an attempt to deny or drive underground the sexuality of students. Is it possible that by focusing so much attention and so intensely on students’ expressions of sexuality in an effort to “protect” them that we are actually *objectifying* them through these discourses? And if so, what’s to gain?

This over-concentration on adolescent bodies clearly evidences two of the rhetorical strands that emerged from my analysis: objectification of student bodies and consumerist constructions of them. O’Loughlin asserts that all bodies are presented as objects in consumer culture, where “images are now the currency in which our ideas of what is appropriate to think and feel about others and ourselves are constituted, [and] images of the body saturate everyday awareness” (1). Add the third rhetorical strand to this consideration—student as prisoner—and the total effect is even more disturbing.

I suggest that we probably actually don’t want our students to unwittingly construct themselves as “institutional subjects” whose primary traits are consistent with prisoners, material goods and objects, and sexual deviants. It seems decent to remain cognizant of the fact that high school students are still children in many ways, vulnerable not only to each other and popular culture, but to adult citizens and the environments and institutions we create for them. And right now, they have neither the choice nor the developmental savvy to interrogate the rhetorical structures scaffolding their educational experiences or to escape those structures as they see fit.

If we return to our analytical lens comprised of Foucault’s inscribed body, Merleau-Ponty’s lived body, and Ahmed’s felt body, how do we fit the identities that
emerge from the dress code analysis into a coherent ontological embodiment? I am not sure that we can. I don’t think we want to be able to square “prisoner,” “commodity,” and “sexual threat” with any notion of an adolescent high school student. Yet an embodiment reading reveals that many aspects of contemporary institutional discourse do construct them that way. What we’ve not done is follow that construction to its logical consequences; namely, that we have real, human students who live in these inscribed bodies and who develop all sorts of feelings about them as a result of the messages we transmit. I suggest that such revelations ought to encourage us to reconsider some of our current policies.

The three handbooks in this case study were very similar; the deviations were seen in the level of detail used to explain the codes rather than the actual mandates of the codes. There is definitely metaphorical overlap between attendance policies and dress codes, especially in terms of containment and nonconformity-as-disease. There is also a persistent notion that suggests something along the lines of “We are what you wear.”

All three handbooks evidence an assumed collective belief that the students’ physical appearance is consequentially important not only to the school’s public image, but to the very endeavor of education itself. I return here to the passage from Cherry High School’s code cited earlier, which states that it [the School] “believes that pride in one’s self and school is often reflected in the way students dress. In order for a student to look his/her best, he/she should be knowledgeable about health, grooming, and choice of clothing. Poise and confidence are derived from an individual looking her/her best” (Cherry 25). The implication of these statements is fairly weighty. They suggest that the path to not only personal confidence and achievement but community success as well is
embodied in the physical appearance of high school students. This paragraph goes on to state, “All of us want the [Cherry] City Schools to be thought of as the best in the area and the only impression many observers have of us is our personal behavior and appearance” (Cherry 25). The notion of pride as “reflected” through physical appearance has connotations of both doubling and (possibly false) representation; what we “see” when we consider a student’s body may well be a reflection of internal qualities, but it could also be a mask, and mistakenly assuming them to be one and the same could be short-sighted if not dangerous. And to assert that students’ physical appearance is the only “impression” many people will have of the school is paradoxical: An impression is an imprint made upon a solid surface—one that naturally resists, unless enough force is applied at which point the mark becomes permanent, for better or worse. This directive tells students, “We want you to make a good impression, and we are going to impress upon you the ways in which that is achieved.” In this case, it is the object of the imprint or impression who is supposed to be making the impression. The confusion between subject and object, actor and acted-upon, results in a strange dynamic whose purpose or benefit remains unclear.

It’s a contradictory dynamic as well, because the dress code language seems to be trying to enforce compliance as it simultaneously recognizes that it will require student cooperation to do so. This contradiction can be found in passages of the other two handbooks as well. Maple’s handbook notes that teachers will “assist in enforcing” the dress code (Maple 18), a seemingly problematic phrasing. Assist whom? The students, in choosing appropriate appearances? The administrators, because overseeing it all is overwhelming? It also states (in an oddly passive construction), that, “It is realized that
the effectiveness of the minimum standards of dress can only be achieved through joint cooperation from students, faculty, administration, and parents” (Maple 19). This quandary—of needing students to get on board with a program they generally resist—presents a rhetorical challenge that may not be surmountable. I take this up again in Chapter 5, where I recruit the work of Kenneth Burke to facilitate a discussion regarding audience awareness in high school discourse.

Another manifestation of the “we are what you wear” notion is evidenced in the articulation of the pervasive belief that students’ physical appearances are key to the way schools function. For example, Willow’s dress code states, “Students are expected to keep themselves well-groomed and neatly dressed at all times. Any form of dress or hairstyle, which is considered contrary to good hygiene, or which is destructive or disruptive in appearance and/or detrimental to the routine operation of the school, will not be permitted” (Willow 18). Cherry’s dress code includes this passage: “While the major responsibility for good grooming rests in the home with the student and parents, the school has certain concerns based on consideration of health, safety, and the maintenance of the school atmosphere that promotes study and learning” (Cherry 25). Maple High School administration and staff “believe that students’ standards of dress affect the overall learning environment of the school” (Maple 22).

I’m not convinced that we are really talking about hygiene, grooming, health, or safety. It seems more likely that those words are euphemisms for cultural values and norms that are politically difficult to enforce—values like personal modesty, homogeneity, and traditional exhibitions of gender and orientation. The vast majority of dress code infractions are due to things like skirt length, midriff-baring, and unnatural
hair color, none of which actually have anything to do with hygiene, grooming, health, or safety. It’s also true that all schools have students who are not clean—whose hair is a natural color but unwashed, or whose teeth are yellowed and decayed, or whose bodies are withered from anorexia or bloated with obesity. All of these conditions relate directly to hygiene, grooming, health, and safety, and yet we never pull students out of academic classes or remove them to a secondary location to remedy these issues. So what are we really worried about when we claim to be worried about hygiene, grooming, health, and safety? O’Loughlin points to the “hidden curriculum” of schooling—one that “[conveys] not just the ‘official’ knowledge of the explicit curriculum, but also attitudes and values, and most particularly ways of thinking about the world that [are] in some way a reflection of particular ideological positions” (61). It’s another instantiation of how the bodies of high school students have been an acceptable surface upon which to inscribe adult desires even as it remains a reflection of our greatest fears.

The primary metaphor “NONCONFORMITY IS A DISEASE” that was discussed in terms of attendance policies is also perpetuated in the school dress codes. Maple High School’s first response to dress code infractions is to call the student’s parent(s). If the violation is not immediately “fixable,” as in the case of hair that is dyed an unacceptable color and may take time and/or money to change, the student will be removed from the school and instead attend the “Corrective Learning Center” (CLC) “until hair color is changed” (22). It’s not clear if other infractions can result in reassignment to the CLC; only hair color is addressed. The ways in which unnatural hair colors threaten students or compromise the educational process are not articulated. It should be noted that the code does not state that students cannot color their hair; it just
states that there are acceptable and unacceptable colors for hair to be. The acceptable colors are “brown, black, blonde, or natural red” (Maple 22). This passage of the dress code reads almost like a provision for some sort of re-hab—the provision of an alternate location for schooling during the time it takes the student to “get normal” again. Cherry High School does not appear to have a contingency plan involving a separate location for dress-code violators, but it does assert that if students are not able to immediately “remedy the situation” they will not be allowed to attend class (Cherry 25). It seems that dress code violations are construed in almost the same way as an illness that would preclude academic engagement and interaction with other students, such as chicken pox or mono. Ahmed’s discussion of disgust, abjection, and stickiness (Ahmed 82-89) in the previous chapter applies here. There seems to be a fear of allowing the students who look different or “wrong” to remain in the company of the other students, a fear of contagion.

And removing a student from the learning environment for looking a particular way ought also raise concerns regarding the implicit lessons we are teaching students about what we value in our fellow human beings. O’Loughlin addresses this in an important discussion about “what is involved in feeling empathy with others” (131). She claims that “embodiment is essential to a viable account of empathy because bodies are first and foremost spatially located and it is the relation of place and space that is primordially given in the social relationship between self and others” (134). Willow High School’s published mission statement states, “We believe that education should be
conducted in a safe environment—mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially.”

Cherry High School’s claims that it prepares students to “[engage] in collaborative partnerships with our families, community and world.” Certainly, then, there is at least an expressed or token effort on the part of these schools toward cultivating tolerance, acceptance, and human kindness. O’Loughlin encourages us to recognize the ways in which embodied knowledge, language, and policies must be accounted for in such an endeavor. She asserts that “we need to remind ourselves of the corporeal realities of our existence, and that ultimately it is human bodies which make claims on the compassion of their embodied fellows” (133). If we instead target aspects of embodiment as disqualifiers for human interaction—if we remove the kid who has the wrong piercing or shame the girl whose body is not sufficiently cloaked according to the dress code’s terms—then we’ve missed an opportunity to model tolerance and acceptance for those who look “different,” for the Other. There is a consequential reality to the notion that “embodiment is incorporated into ideas about how one may achieve social unity or harmonious sociality through affective bonding of a kind and intensity that may effect genuine compassion for others” (O’Loughlin 131). It would be a shame to squander the opportunity to facilitate such unity and sociality—something schools seem to want according to their own mission statements—for the sake of what? Protecting the world from seeing the curvy hips of a girl in yoga pants? Or saving us all from having to internally reconcile the notion of a teenage boy with long, pink hair? Considered within the context of empathy (and especially the flip side of that—the cruelty and destruction

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5 The mission statements of the three schools in my corpus can be found in Appendix C, re-printed in the forms in which they are published by the schools on their websites.
that occurs in the absence of empathy), we may conclude that there are larger dangers from which to protect our children than nose rings and short skirts.

Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the “SCHOOL IS A BRANCH OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM” metaphor manifests similarly in dress codes as it has other places I’ve already addressed. It contains passages such as the one that states students will be “retained in the office” until they rectify their dress code problems and that they are “subject to disciplinary action” (Cherry 25). Anyone who breaks the “no hats” rule will have their hat “confiscated” due to their “failure to comply” (18).

**Analysis of Discipline Procedures**

Identifying primary metaphors, which are generally implicit, is particularly useful in examining discourses that addresses student discipline, because even the portions that don’t explicitly concern things like rules and punishments tend to either inherently discuss or at least allude to disciplinary practices or directives. Much of the language employed in these portions has become so worn and clichéd that we gloss over it without thought. Purposefully culling it for primary metaphors forces us to slow down and analyze the rhetorical effects operating below the level of text. One metaphor that emerges in ways that are both explicit and applied sounds something like this: “(STUDENT) **BODIES ARE PROPERTY** (OF THE SCHOOL).” The legal right of schools to dictate things such as what students are allowed to wear, what color their hair may be, what may or may not be pierced, etc., suggests that, at least as it relates to physical appearance, the school has the right to regulate and control the bodies of students. The metaphor is drawn more explicitly in statements such as the ones
addressing the schools’ right to search and seizure: “Administrators may search a student or his/her property . . . with or without the student’s consent, whenever they reasonably suspect that a search will lead to the discovery of evidence of a violation of law or school rules” (Maple 38). Willow High School’s handbook states that “[p]rincipals or designees are permitted to search the person and personal property . . . of a student when there is reason to believe that evidence will be obtained indicating the student’s violation of either the law or school rules” (Willow 25). Note that the provision does not require suspicion that the search may yield information or evidence that prevents violence or harm to others, just that it might uncover a rule violation. To be fair, judicious administrators do not resort to forcibly searching students’ bodies for anything other than very dire circumstances in which they truly do believe that conducting such a search will protect others. Still, though, the provision is there.

Maple High School grants building principals the right to request breathalyzer or urinalysis tests to students if the principal has “reasonable individualized suspicion” of substance use (Maple 31). The student may refuse, at which point it will be explained to him or her that “denial leaves the observed evidence of alcohol or drug use unrefuted thus leading to possible disciplinary action. The student will then be given a second opportunity to take the test” (Maple 31). So students sort of retain the right to refuse more invasive/intimate bodily administrations, but only with the understanding that if they do so they may be punished regardless; the policy assumes a “guilty until proven innocent” status in which perfectly innocent students may be subjected to embarrassing tests or punished for being unwilling to yield to them.

Gee recommends asking how the social language employed in discipline portions
of the handbooks construct the identity of participants in the community. This question identifies one of the difficulties of analyzing school handbooks; it’s often difficult to determine to whom exactly these documents are directed. They are sometimes titled “Student Handbook” and sometimes titled “Student-Parent” handbook, but they are always issued to, and are to be held and maintained, by students. The social language employed is primarily legalese, which seems problematic and somewhat inaccessible if it is meant to address teenagers. There are also confusing shifts in syntax that call into question exactly who the audience is. For example, in this passage on bus riding rules, Willow High School’s handbook reads, “While on the bus, students are under the authority of the driver. The driver reports all discipline cases to the transportation supervisor who will consult with an administrator. The above rules of conduct are for your own safety as well as that of your fellow students” (44). Another passage in the same handbook reads, “Respect for real and personal property, pride in one’s work, and achievement within one’s ability shall be expected of all students. Willow High School is your school; therefore, you should have a certain pride of ownership” (18). The net effect of the (mostly) legalistic style, the (mostly) punitive tone, and the shifting assumed audience is that anyone reading these documents has to at times wonder if it’s not actually directed toward someone else. This particular handbook is titled only “Student Handbook,” but very little of the text (less than .6%) is syntactically directed toward the student.

Another productive question asks what sort of figured worlds are called into being by the text and what identities such figured worlds construct. This project was inspired by the pervasive student complaint that “School is like prison,” so we cannot ignore the
figured world of “Prison.” If we then consider how identities are constructed within prison environments, we must recognize that there are identities of authority (those in law enforcement or criminal justice, prison administrators and guards in the actual physical environment) and there are identities that must be controlled (inmates).

We must also recognize the figured world of “wise elders,” for lack of a better term; there are passages in each handbook that sound like good, solid advice being handed down from parent to child, mentor to mentee, or leader to disciple/apprentice. For example, Maple High School’s handbook explains that, “We believe that a democratic system is the way to provide the opportunity for a worthwhile life in society because a democratic system recognizes the worth of the individual and means the extension of a responsibility for sharing in the common life” (6). This section of the handbook continues to state that the school makes an effort “to provide for the varied needs of its students, to transmit cultural heritage of the past, to provide sound training in democratic living, to inculcate desirable attitudes, and to foster habits and skills that will enable the individual to adjust himself/herself in life in [his/her] chosen field of endeavor and in his/her leisure time activities” (7). These passages stand out, because the language is markedly different from the majority of the text, and because it seems to call into being an entirely different sort of figured world, one where the handing down of wisdom and the teaching of productive habits seem to be the foci of interacting with high schoolers. This is another way of conceiving of “discipline,” and one that we don’t often choose in addressing teenagers.

In addition to considering social contexts, CDA methods encourage us to consider texts as they relate to other texts. For example, we can ask how identities and
dis/connections are assumed or established in regard to other texts. The high school handbooks, at least in the sections that address student discipline, tend to be legalistic in style, which seems to assume an audience identity of someone reading legal explanations or disclaimers or someone being read their rights. For example, Cherry High School’s “Complaint Procedure” reads as follows: “If any person believes that the Cherry City School District or any of the District’s staff has inadequately applied the principles and/or regulations of (1) Title II, VI, and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (2) Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 . . . s/he may bring forward a complaint, which shall be referred to as a grievance, to the Director of Student Services” (3). In a passage that addresses cutting classes, Cherry High School’s handbook states that “the student will have the right of appeal to an Attendance Committee that will take the individual case under consideration” (21). These sort of legal terms that refer to criminal identities abound—“right of appeal,” “take the case under consideration,” etc. One of the most interesting manifestations that seem reflective of legal texts and discourses related to criminality is the (seemingly excessive) use of the word “loiter.” It appears repeatedly in all three handbooks; students are warned not to loiter in the halls, not to loiter in the restrooms, not to loiter in the cafeteria (Maple Handbook 21; Cherry Handbook 28, 34; Willow Handbook 44, 45, 49). Maple High School advises its students that those “arriving to or leaving from school grounds must enter the building or leave it immediately. No students are to loiter outside at any time. Loitering outside may result in suspension from school or referral to the Maple City police for violations of the city ordinance regarding loitering” (18). It seems difficult after reading this passage to simultaneously accept the conception of schools as welcoming and inclusive
communities of learning that foster cooperation and common goals. Remember it is also Maple High School that includes the above-quoted passages on democratic ideals and the “sharing of the common life.” And if all the loitering talk seems to construct identities of vagrants or other undesirables, there are passages whose discourse patterns read as thought they specifically apply to criminals. For example, Willow High School’s handbook states that “In accordance with WCS Board Policy 5771, school officials may search a student or a student’s property when there are reasonable grounds to suspect the presence of contraband that violates the school rules. Dogs trained in the detection of illegal drugs and/or weapons may patrol school facilities and premises” (25; italics mine).

There are many passages that seem to construct the school administration as jury and judge and the students as defendants. For example: Maple High School’s definitional section on “Formal Discipline” states the following: “The Superintendent at his/her discretion may require/allow a student to perform community service in conjunction with or in place of an expulsion . . . Removal for less than one (1) school day without the possibility of suspension or expulsion may not be appealed. Suspension, expulsion, and permanent expulsion may be appealed” (36). This passage offers several avenues for analysis. The language correlates directly with the criminal justice system, and the content is troubling as well. There seems to be a contradiction inherent in the “require/allow” conditions of the Superintendent deciding upon the student’s sentence. If a goal of public, democratic education is to instill an intrinsic motivation toward the greater good, then forcing any sort of community service is questionable; if the goal is to act as a “buck stops here” enforcement agency, then letting students off the hook of expulsion by requiring them to clean up trash along the highway seems strangely
transactional: We don’t feel it’s safe for other students if you are in this school. Unless you do “this [fill in the blank].” Another passage states that if “the appeal is heard by the Board of Education, the appeal shall be conducted in executive session unless the student or his/her representative requests otherwise. A verbatim transcript will be made and witnesses sworn in prior to giving testimony. If the appeal decision is to uphold the suspension, the next step in the appeal process is to the Court of Common Pleas” (Maple 37). In any case, the other texts/discourses circulating in society that sound like the ones in school handbooks are concerned with legal issues and criminality.

**Discussion**

The notion of student bodies as property of the school, evidenced in and supported by provisions for search and seizure and random drug testing among others, requires examination and interrogation regarding how such provisions affect embodied existence. At the very least, it is a point of confusion: “the body is at one and the same time ‘my own’ and yet, in the public sphere, somehow ‘not mine,’” [which] raises questions that are of considerable importance to social life generally but in particular in education” (O’Loughlin 3). This is another instance in which I argue that we need to ask ourselves if it’s worth it. Certainly, being physically searched or forced to submit to the breathalyzer leaves various inscriptions upon student bodies. These inscriptions compromise the lived sense of autonomy and bodily respectfulness we in other ways try to cultivate in students; additionally, we cannot predict or control the affective reverberations of such experiences. We justify all this by claiming to do it in the spirit of encouraging students to self-discipline, to monitor themselves because they’ve been
notified of the regulations, but “while bodies can be said to discipline themselves in a sense, they always do so within institutional frameworks and in discourses which are outside of themselves and whose imprint they will bear. The body is the inscribed surface of events; it is a text to be decoded and read” (O’Loughlin 3). I argue that the benefits of policies that leave such inscriptions do not outweigh their potential destructiveness upon individual student psyches or upon the collective understanding of what school is or should be. No one seems to be under the impression that any of these measures have succeeded in eradicating substance abuse; they just seem to be additional manifestations of the ways in which schools have confused themselves with the criminal justice system.

Because we tend to normalize such procedures by writing them into the every day discourse of high school life, we also tend not to stop and question how strange things have gotten. These measures—drug searches, urine tests, admonitions against loitering—all fit into Foucault’s definition of “subtle coercion” (*Discipline* 137), so effectively employed to create “docile bodies” that are literally changed and marked in such a way that they not only fail to notice they’re being manipulated but actually unconsciously take up the ideology of the manipulators.

Finally, the message that student bodies are the property of the school complicates other lessons we impart to students regarding boundary violations. From a young age, we tell children that their bodies belong to them alone, that no one is ever allowed to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, that they always have the right to “say no.” It’s true that students have a legal right to refuse to submit to the measures discussed above, but not without consequences and not without being assumed guilty. To
claim that the right of refusal allows students to maintain boundaries is a specious
because if students do refuse they are generally assumed to be “guilty.” I would argue
that a student being stripped of her right to play volleyball because she refused to be
stripped of her clothes or her dignity is simply a boundary violation of another sort.

**Analysis and Discussion of “The Strange and Paradoxical”**

For the last analysis portion of this chapter, I want to include here a brief analysis
and discussion of another interesting rhetorical aspect that appears repeatedly: within
these handbooks there exist certain passages that are either contradictory, logically
inconsistent, or confusing. The effects range from passive-aggressive to comical. In any
analytical under-taking, it is a worthwhile endeavor to try to account for the divergent or
outlier data that don’t make sense. Merleau-Ponty characterizes “reflection” as
“conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical” (lxxvii).
Below I include some “strange and paradoxical” passages of high school handbooks to
explicate this effect, with brief analysis comments following.

Cherry’s Handbook states, “The Board believes that the best discipline is self-
imposed and that students should learn to assume responsibility for their own behavior
and consequences of their actions” (29). It then goes on to say, “The Board shall require
each student of this District to adhere to the Code of Conduct promulgated by the
administration and to submit to such disciplinary measures as are appropriately assigned
for the infraction of those rules” (29). Neither of these statements seems particularly
unreasonable; they just don’t seem to go together. One gets the feeling that the second
sentence was perhaps written first, and then the first one added to “soften” it. The notion
of “self-imposed” seems to clash with “requiring to adhere to” and “submit.” Subject-object confusion—a lack of clarity surrounding whether high schools students are (or should be) more “locus of action” or “target of power” (Crossley 104)—is consistent throughout the handbooks. As Crossley demonstrates, they cannot be reconciled anyway. Still, though, throughout the handbooks there are passages that express our discomfort with this reality.

In discussing expulsion, Cherry’s handbook notes that it “is not possible to list every reason why a student could be expelled” (31). However, the handbook then attempts to do that anyway, listing everything from excessive loitering to extortion to arson (34-37). Reading these handbooks gave me the sensation of being hammered—of having seemingly obvious points driven into my brain needlessly and repetitively. We should question not only why they are written this way, but what the potential rhetorical effects might be. From a perspective that considers the effects of embodied language and embodied knowledge, these potential effects cannot be positive. I chose the word “hammered” to describe my reaction—to articulate the embodied knowledge association I personally experience based upon the embodied language used in the handbooks. I am only one example, but I don’t believe I’m completely atypical either. Cherry High’s “Code of Conduct,” lists 32 rules by which students must abide. They include things like not engaging in gambling or gang activity, loitering (again), swearing, smoking, physical assault, etc. In the middle of this list, for no discernible reason, there is a rule (#13) that states that students can’t break the other rules. This feels a little like overkill (again, the first word that comes to mind, but possibly revealing in an embodied sense if we stop to consider what we mean when we talk about over-killing something).
On the first real page of the Maple handbook (just past the table of contents), a short paragraph advises students to read the handbook and become familiar with it, because “It was written to help you!” This seems more and more disingenuous as the reader moves through the rest of the handbook, though—it feels passive-aggressive or sarcastic or baiting [maybe because of the exclamation point?]—none of which serve to establish an ethos of respect or seriousness that would seem appropriate for a document that is apparently so consequential. One sentence at the beginning of a handbook claiming its altruistic nature is probably not enough to make high school students feel “helped” by the majority of the handbook, which, as I demonstrated earlier, is more punitive in tone than anything else. There seems to be some discrepancy in general regarding for whom these handbooks are actually written and distributed to serve, a discussion I take up in Chapter 5.

Maple’s handbook also includes a “Visitor’s Policy” that suggests the school is not at all sure how it feels about visitors. It reads as follows: “Any visitor to the building must first report to the office. Generally school policy does not allow visitors’ passes to be issued. Visitors to the building are governed by all the rules and regulations of the school. Laws on trespassing will apply to unauthorized persons in the building and on the grounds of the school. Visitors who arrive at school with one of our students without prior approval will be sent home” (27). So . . . are visitors welcome at this school, or not? I’ve been to this school, and they have several visitors’ parking spots. And apparently they have visitors’ passes, but they don’t generally issue them. Rather than to criticize Maple High School for its confusing and seemingly contradictory visitors’ policy, I believe it’s important to note that their policy is emblematic of where we are in
education right now: Are schools still a community place? Are they locked-down secure facilities? Can they be both? Is it interesting and meaningful to visit a public high school, or is it trespassing? I don’t think we know. One can almost hear a note of apology or exasperation or both in the language of this policy: It seems to be saying, *We’re prepared for you to visit, although we don’t really want you to, but we might let you if you follow these rules, or we might send you home. We believe we should be ready to accommodate you, but we don’t really trust you, because we can’t trust anyone anymore.*

Maple High School’s handbook states that “[s]tudents are expected to behave in accordance with Federal, State, and local laws” (28). Why isn’t that enough? After this statement, it reminds students that they may not commit burglary or aggravated murder “on school property or at a school function” (35-38). The fact that someone decided it was necessary to include these clarifications, let alone the qualifier about “on school property,” seems odd. This handbook, similar to Cherry’s, also includes a statement about that fact that “it is not possible to list every misbehavior that occurs” (35). So why do we keep trying? Why not abandon it altogether and go with the initial “behave in accordance with all laws” statement? It seems like grabbing low-hanging fruit to throw in admonitions against arson and murder, which are, of course, illegal everywhere.

In a section of Maple’s handbook that discusses random drug testing for athletes, there is a detailed description of exactly how the drug testing is conducted, down to the statement that while giving their samples (for which students may be removed from academic classes), there will be a monitor standing in the restroom whose job is to “listen for the normal sounds of urination” (46). We must remember that the most important
audience for this document is a large group of teenagers. Is this really the best way to address them? Should we not perhaps consider common decency and discretion? This sort of language seems not only unnecessary but rather threatening, invasive, and humiliating. These are random drug tests for which any student involved in extracurricular activities can be asked to submit to at any time; the student needn’t have done anything wrong or even appear to have done anything wrong. And if we must random drug test, why do we only care about testing the students who are involved in extracurriculars? Is drug use less damaging for non-athletic students? Or do we just care less? Or is it harder to justify? It all calls into question the rationale for allowing these sort of activities to interrupt the educational day. If we want to protect children from drugs, is “catching” them in some sort of random selection game the best way to go about it?

The final page of Maple High’s student handbook is a “contract” that students and parents must sign should the student wish to attend a dance. There are ten dance rules. The tenth addresses the issue of “grinding” (49). Students are not allowed to “grind” at dances. It is necessary to point out that there are already several rules in the handbook that could prevent grinding. There are rules against inappropriate behavior, sexually oriented activities, public displays of affection, etc. But we now have a special “no grinding” rule. Adults in the school—administrators and teachers in particular, are supposed to be role models for students. They are supposed to be leaders and guides who are seriously engaged in the extremely important task of educating students. Do we really want to diminish that role to some sort of caricature of the brainless middle manager, sitting in a conference room somewhere micro-managing his co-workers’ every
move? This is an embarrassing policy, and an unnecessary one; students behaving inappropriately at dances should certainly be reprimanded, but adopting this tactic to prevent it seems silly and petty, which I believe actually compromises the authority of the adults who brought it up in the first place. Policies like this one are explicit instantiations of Foucault’s critique of an overzealous effort to regulate sexuality, addressed in the previous chapter. O’Loughlin reiterates Foucault’s claims for a contemporary society, stating that “much of the surveillance of the bodies of the young . . . is presented as an issue of ‘care’ which a responsible society must exercise over the younger generation . . . [However], it can also be seen as an anxiety-induced reaction arising from complex social changes” (89). I think she’s probably right. I think that our cultural paranoia about all sorts of things—violence, sexuality, disconnection, loss of control—is often so overwhelming and difficult to articulate, let alone mitigate, that we’ve unconsciously selected the bodies of high school students as our last bastion of defense against a world we find too frightening. It makes sense, because they’re on the cusp—still technically children but with one foot over the threshold into adulthood. It’s understandable that we sometimes go to ridiculous lengths to control their behaviors for the last two minutes that we can, but it’s not necessarily wise or productive, and it may in fact do more harm than good.

In closing my section dedicated to “the strange and paradoxical” of high school handbooks, I must mention that in a section on intimidation, bullying, and harassment, the Cherry High school handbook advises students to “[p]ay special attention to the words chosen” (32). A great lesson, certainly, but perhaps one the writers should have employed a little more rigorously in developing the document that contains it. In Chapter
5, I argue more explicitly for the development of a purposeful and informed method of developing institutional discourse aimed at high school students.

**Conclusion**

It must be noted that in each of the handbooks there are small portions that depart from the overriding metaphors and themes I critique. For example, Maple’s handbook states that the school “[strives] to respect each student as an individual” and that it aims “to foster social consciousness, sensitivity and recognize a place for individuality among students in a democratic environment” (Maple 6). None of these goals square with the “NONCONFORMITY IS A CONTAGIOUS DISEASE” primary metaphor; on the contrary, they seem to prioritize and privilege the idiosyncrasies of the individual. Cherry’s handbook discusses the importance of extra-curricular activities to quality of life within the high school and includes this paragraph about the student council:

Student Council has a highly active role. Its purpose is not to govern the students, but to serve as a meeting place between the student body and the administration where the students can assume as much of the responsibility of organizing their high school activities as they are able to handle. It is the place where problems or questions arising from either the students or the administration can be presented for discussion and consideration. The Student Council's principle purpose is to promote better relationships between the student body, the administration, the faculty, and the community. (Cherry 71)

Clearly, the intention of granting students as much governing power, autonomy, and equality as possible is not in keeping with a “SCHOOL IS A BRANCH OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM” primary metaphor. Nor is Maple’s goal of equipping students with the “habits and skills . . . to compete in a global economy” in keeping with the “SCHOOL IS A CONTAINER primary metaphor.”
I have also criticized current discourse for constructing students as material commodities rather than as holistic human beings, and for attempting to separate mind and body in ways that are destructive. In many cases, the discourse supports my claim. However, there are passages that refute it: Maple’s handbook also states that one of the school’s primary goals is to “foster a well balanced developed individual through an integration of mind, body, and feelings” (7). It is easy enough to show how the vast majority of the discourse not only fails to support this but actually may contribute to its opposite. However, we also cannot completely discount the inclusion of words like these in the school handbooks, as small a percentage as they might be. The words did not come out of nowhere, but rather indicate an intent on the part of some teacher or administrator at some time; my experience teaching and talking to other teachers and administrators suggests that most educators actually do value freedom, individuality, and expansion over rules, conformity, and containment. In Chapter 5, I address the reasons I believe there has developed a mismatch between current discourse and collective intention, and I offer suggestions of how we might begin to address it.

I end this chapter with two major points for further consideration. First, this analysis indicates that institutional discourse in the form of high school handbooks contributes to constructing a reality in which adolescents are conceived of as criminals, commodities, and sex objects and in which school buildings are some weird amalgamation of prisons and various sorts of hospital wards. Second, these are realities that no one even wants. I address this fact in further detail in Chapter 5; the important point to make here is that the handbooks are a clear instantiation of a discourse that has developed by default and not design. They seem to have been collected and patched
together over the years as a series of reactions and disclaimers rather than intentionally crafted as cohesive guiding texts. This is illustrated in trivial ways as well as more meaningful ones. For example, the sample of text I cited earlier to demonstrate “warning/punitive” language tells students that they “are not allowed to play radios, tapes, or CD players during lunch.” Students of the current generation don’t even know what “playing tapes” means. The fact that obvious anachronisms such as this one get passed over suggests that the more nuanced troubling directives—the ones with far more rhetorical weight—are being missed entirely.

None of this would matter much if the handbooks had become an archaic document that just sort of existed in the background but to which no one paid any attention—the institutional discourse equivalent of quirky municipal laws that remain on the books to outlaw things like walking chickens on a leash in public. Clearly, though, that is not the case. If anything, high school handbooks seem to have become even more important. There’s no way to ignore the embodied effects of this claim: students are required to incorporate these texts—to have them on their physical bodies at all times. There are multiple levels of irony and complexity associated with forcing students to bodily transport the documents that detail what they’re not allowed to have on their bodies.

The fact that this is so further justifies the need to approach the discourse circulated through student handbooks from a perspective informed by embodiment theories. If we return to the original analytical framework—Merleau-Ponty’s lived body, Foucault’s inscribed body, and Ahmed’s feeling body—and we think about the ways in which embodied language, knowledge, and rhetoric work through student handbooks, we
reach some disturbing conclusions. As this analysis has demonstrated, there is an abundance of embodied language present in the handbooks; we talk a lot about bodies. Clearly, the handbooks are rhetorical—they engage embodied rhetoric—in that they aim to direct the movement, appearance, and attitudes of student bodies. All of this interacts with the personal and individual embodied knowledge of high school students—their gut reactions to various mandates, their feelings surrounding the ways in which their bodies are ordered, judged, controlled, and punished.

The reactions and feelings that constitute “lived” experience and that are elicited by the embodied rhetoric of the handbooks leave permanent inscriptions upon student bodies (and therefore minds, because we can’t separate them no matter how hard we try) and upon the collective student body. It’s worth pointing out that this does not happen in isolated pockets of society; this is the environment and these are the effects of an institution that *incribes* nearly every American citizen. Certainly, there are consequences to this mass shaping. The consequences transcend the scope of this project, but the suggestion that they inhere deeply and widely supports the argument for questioning and attending more closely to the artifacts that support their creation.
CHAPTER 4: The School Building as Body/Text

Introduction

In 1996, Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma wrote that “both embodiment and spatiality have been neglected in educational research,” and Nick Crossley emphasized the importance of studying not just bodies and spaces but “body-spaces,” which “are constituted through their architectural design, their actual construction, their organization and their equipment, their enforcement agents . . . and their subject population” (107). In 2012, Amy Propen identified the need for “a visual rhetoric that more expressly accounts not only for a rhetorical artifact’s material and spatial components but also for its subsequent impact on the body” (3). This chapter seeks to respond to those calls for further research by employing the same embodiment theories lens used in the previous chapter to analyze the physical features of a typical suburban high school.

We cannot discuss embodiment in education without discussing school buildings. Marjorie O’Loughlin asserts that “‘space’ and ‘place’ are essential concepts to the understanding of human embodiment” (85) and that the “sheer physicality of school and other institutions of learning, the intercorporeal relations of students, teachers and others is demonstrably concrete, material and carnal” (62). The building, after all, functions as a “body” of sorts in itself; it is the physical and metaphorical body of the collective student body. On the macro level, it serves (or is supposed to serve) as the border between “inside the school” and “everything else”—more so in the era of school shootings than ever before. This border is both protective “skin” and vulnerable “flesh,” and we have seen both manifestations in recent years. The largest scale school violence in history has
been perpetrated in the most secure buildings in history. This irony parallels human flesh, especially as described by embodiment theorists. We tend to think of our skin as a shield, but it is also a point of entry, susceptible to inscription and violation. On a smaller scale, the school building serves a myriad of purposes: it directs, divides, contains, and orders. It shelters and protects from outside forces as it simultaneously imposes forces of its own upon its inhabitants.

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the lived body, in which human flesh, our outermost surface, is not a hard line between interior and exterior but rather an integral series of folds between the two, is relevant to our built environments. If we apply the conception to physical school buildings, we must begin to consider them not simply as enclosing the student body but as part of the student body itself. Merleau-Ponty’s application of Gestalt theory offers a visual representation. In a discussion of the integration of figure and ground, he claims that “the perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of some other thing, it always belongs to a ‘field’” (4). He goes on to note that an “isolated perceptual given is inconceivable” (4) and that “bodily space and external space form a practical system” (105). It would seem impossible, then, to disembody the school building—to consider either student or structure independently of one another, at least within a context in which the two are necessarily conjoined. To make the application more concrete, we can compare it to Merleau-Ponty’s central claim of being a body as opposed to having a body.

Extending this principle, we can make the claim that students do not exist inside and separate from the building, but that the two entities (students and buildings) become one integral body. A close reading of the physical/material school building offers an
opportunity to consider “embodied rhetorics” (to recall Knoblauch’s term)—material rhetorical elements that literally enclose and embody high school students. The integration of student-body/ies with the physical environment is also instantiated materially in more personal ways: students wear letter jackets on their backs and class rings on their hands; they wear t-shirts and sweatshirts and team uniforms; they carry backpacks that bear the school’s emblem and initials, signs that also adorn the hallways of the building and the spirit banners in their yards at home.

Foucault’s notion of the inscribed body explicated the ways in which this integration has permanent effects: students don’t ever really “leave” their schools, because they carry with them the inscriptive tracings of their experiences within (or as a part of) their school buildings; in Merleau-Ponty’s words, they “will carry . . . the intentional threads that unite [them] to [their] surroundings” (74). The power dynamics and circulations in which they are both subject and object while inside the building are subtly taken up into their bodies and psyches in tacit and unconscious ways that the students will perpetuate as they matriculate from high school into larger society. School buildings exert embodied forces upon students who in turn will exert those forces throughout other interactions in their lives.

Sara Ahmed’s work helps to explain this process, showing how inscriptive experiences catalyze affective responses that guide perception and behavior and ultimately alter and divide bodies. The next section of this chapter summarizes relevant scholarship and research and situates it within contemporary educational contexts. I then analyze and discuss the ways in which embodied knowledge, language, and rhetoric
interact in these contexts and suggest points of consideration in interrogating these interactions.

**Literature Review**

Merleau-Ponty observes that “with regard to one’s own body what is true of all perceived things [is that] the perception of space and the perception of the thing, or the spatiality of the thing and its being as a thing, are not two distinct problems” (149). Essentially, he argues that subject and space are one and the same—there can be no subject that is not somehow circumscribed in space. This is a parallel manifestation of his position regarding the Cartesian mind/body split: we don’t have a mind that is separate or above or that resides in a realm separate from the body, because our minds are always and inextricably a part of our bodies.

Foucault makes the philosophical statement more concrete by addressing the ways in which “architecture begins at the end of the eighteenth century to become involved in problems of population, health, and the urban question” (Barou, Foucault, and Perrot 148). He goes on to note that “late in the eighteenth century, new problems emerge: it becomes a question of using the disposition of space for economico-politico ends” (Barou, Faoucault, and Perrot 148). He reinforces the need to interrogate the spatial rhetoric, claiming a “whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers” (149; italics his). In response to their call, my work inquires how spatial rhetoric ultimately shapes behaviors, interactions, and relationships within the school community. Many of these relationships are defined by rank—who has power over whom—and the architecture often serves as a physical guidepost of
designation. It determines “the place one occupies in a classroom, the point at which a line and a column intersect, the interval in a series of intervals that one may traverse . . . It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (Foucault, *Discipline* 146).

Foucault then expands this discussion of “complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional, and hierarchical” (*Discipline* 148) to articulate the ways in which “space” itself is both literal and figurative; it is a “real” location, but can also be conceived of as an “ideal,” in that it dictates not only *where we are* but also *how we should be*. This is a physical/architectural instantiation of the Foucauldian concept of power: that it is most effective when it circulates and operates as a seemingly organic element of the overall network—when it works on its own. In the case of public buildings, “without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives ‘power of mind over mind’” (Foucault, *Discipline* 206).

Merleau-Ponty’s description of this same dynamic is more oblique, but not less applicable. He observes that his “life is made up of rhythms that do not have their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but rather have their *condition* in the banal milieu that surrounds me” (86). I will return to a discussion of the difference between reason and condition in the “Analysis” section of this chapter. For now, let us consider Foucault’s discussion of prisons, perhaps the epitome of both “conditions” and “banal milieu” in terms of lived consequences and inscriptive power as experienced through/on bodies, spaces, and architecture.

The “Panopticon,” which Foucault critiques in *Discipline and Punish*, is a type of prison designed in the 18th century by Jeremy Bentham. The concept is that cells are
arranged around the perimeter of the building, with a central tower manned by a single supervisor who has visual access to all prisoners at all times. The goal is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (*Discipline* 201). The building itself becomes an “architectural apparatus . . . for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it” (*Discipline* 201). It also then becomes an independent rhetorical apparatus, in that the structure and its spatial arrangement carries its own rhetorical force and functions as a rhetorical guide for the human inhabitants within it.

Foucault calls out the paradox of its function: the intention is that individual awareness of constant (or potentially constant) surveillance leads to individual control and self-regulation; the actual result is that “[y]ou have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point. The perfected form of surveillance consists in a summation of *malveillance*” (158; italics his). It is important to recognize that Foucault’s critique is couched not in expressions of skepticism, but rather the fear that the Panopticon would actually work. In fact, he calls it a “marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power” (*Discipline* 202). The brilliance of panoptic function is that it recruits the individual in subjugating himself: “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles” (Foucault, *Discipline* 202-3). Foucault examines the psychological and embodied consequences of this goal:

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture . . . that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a
hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. Stones can make people docile and knowable. The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure—thick walls, a heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving—began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies. (*Discipline* 172)

The element of consideration here concerns borders and boundaries, or, as the case may be, their potentially more powerful substitutions (of which “absence” is perhaps the most effective).

Both Merleau-Ponty and Foucault discuss borders within their conception of lived and/or inscriptive spaces. Merleau-Ponty perceives borders as entities that fold into an integral whole; essentially, he claims that perception and experience cannot be cordonned off by borders or anything else, that the phenomenological reduction renders borders not only meaningless but perhaps imaginary—there is no line between mind and body or interior and exterior or subject and space. Foucault, on the other hand, discusses the somewhat paradoxical fact that *removing* borders actually exerts more control by rendering everything visible—one of the primary tactics of panoptic function. We can extend this paradox to make the claim that removing physical borders gives rise to borders of other sorts—borders between normative and deviant behaviors and appearances, borders between individuals who become hierarchized as a result of the spatial layout of a building, borders between where bodies should and should not be in space.

I bring Ahmed into this conversation to offer an explanation of how borders are both initially brought into being and subsequently “[transformed] into objects” (87). She situates her discussion within the context of disgust, specifically how “disgust operates as a contact zone” (87). She claims that borders “need to be threatened in order to be
maintained, or even to appear as borders, and part of the process of ‘maintenance through transgression’ is the appearance of border objects” (87). I will return to this claim in the following section of this chapter, which includes images of borders achieving their border-hood through having been (or appearing to have been) threatened. The rhetorical construction of borders—the process of a non-textual element actually brought into being rhetorically—exemplifies the sort of effect in which contemporary material rhetoric theorists are interested.

My original analytical framework of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed is supplemented in this chapter by scholars who focus on material and spatial rhetorics. The ways in which bodies live, become inscribed, and feel things are inextricable from the sites and structures within which these processes occur. Carole Blair, in “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” asserts that we already “know” this unconsciously: “If we require justification for rethinking rhetoric as material, there is enough in our ordinary idiom” (16). In her study of the rhetorical effect of memorial sites (the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial and the AIDS quilt, for example), she argues that in some cases these non-texts may be more rhetorically powerful than texts; they “remain in our perceptual fields as long as we are nearby. They do not fall into silence like oral speech, nor are they . . . ‘put away’ like the writings that we read and then store in bookshelves out of our way” (17). This seems particularly relevant to the architectural/rhetorical structures of schools; many high school students live more hours of their lives inside their schools than they do anywhere else. Attending to the ways in which “[r]hetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways, and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience” (Blair 48)
seems necessary when considering the rhetorical effects of an environment in which students spend such a large part of their lives.

If material rhetorics have inscriptive power that evokes certain feelings and emotions, then the “lived” experience of inhabitants or visitors of spaces is clearly mediated through materiality. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the immediacy of all embodied experience, the fact that we are affected holistically rather than analytically by what surrounds us; certainly this is particularly true of the actual physical structures with which our bodies interact. Blair’s words clearly convey a Foucauldian perspective on the power of material rhetorics to order and inscribe bodies and to circulate and perpetuate power dynamics specifically because they are simply there, operating below the surface of overt experience, which actually makes them more impactful. It has become conventionally accepted to discuss the quality and environment of the home in shaping the child—these factors are nearly universally considered directly catalytic in terms of how children develop. The work of theorists like Blair and others can help us to ask important questions about how the rhetoric of school buildings contributes to shaping human behavior and responses and to inscribing human bodies as well.

Also relevant is Mary Lay Schuster’s work in material rhetoric (specifically, her examination of an alternative birthing center in which women direct their own decisions about how they wish to labor and deliver). Schuster seeks to answer two central research questions: “[T]o what extent can people assume potency and agency to rewrite the cultural inscriptions that structure the body, and to what extent do the spaces they create and occupy make this change possible?” (3). Two ideals compromised by traditional hospitals (and contemporary, high-security high schools) are privacy and personal
control. Schuster claims that theorizing material rhetoric “means accepting the materialization of the concepts of privacy and its relationship to a sense of control” (4). When these two concepts are threatened on a personal level, we tend to respond in negative and counterproductive ways. Her argument recruits not only Foucault’s concept of inscriptive forces but Ahmed’s notion of the feelings that may result from them—the feelings of invasion or powerlessness or border violation that may occur. In the discussion section of this chapter, I will return to Schuster’s research questions and examine how privacy and control impact personal agency and inscription within the modern high school setting.

Many claims of contemporary material rhetoric theorists echo the foundational scholarship of Kenneth Burke, who characterized language as “a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Burke 43). His assertion opens a path of inquiry regarding exactly what, beyond letters and words, constitutes a symbol that elicits (or suppresses) particular human responses. The symbols used to induce cooperation in contemporary high schools range from directional signs to the “hidden” cameras of which all students are aware (which, of course, facilitates their panoptic functioning). Hidden cameras and other symbols are working silently and systematically to induce cooperation, to render bodies docile, in contemporary high schools.

Despite (or at least in tension with) the degree of panoptic coercion associated with such measures, one can argue that the motives and inspirations for their existence, which is relatively recent in American history, are, for the most part, “good.” Modern design principles were largely developed in the name of safety. Nearly all new public
high schools are designed according to CPTED standards, which is an acronym for “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.” In the state of Ohio, where the schools in this study are located, CPTED is mandated. The design and construction of public schools is at least partially funded by the state, and the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) requires that CPTED standards are designed into the building from its inception (“Building in Safety”). The approach was introduced in 1971 as a method to reduce crime, violence, and fear in the built environment in general; since the Columbine shooting it has become the guiding standard for most public high school architecture.

The method works according to three major design goals: natural surveillance, natural access control, and territoriality (Schneider 221). Natural surveillance ensures that inhabitants of school buildings can achieve a wide scope of visual access without effort (without having to physically move to other locations, etc.). It is often achieved through corridors with long sightlines, transparent “walls,” open floor plans, and stairwells without visual barriers. This principle has a double goal: to provide visual access and control over spaces and to communicate to students and visitors that “others can see [you]” (“Youth Violence”). It assumes a subject and an object, and the two roles may shift and flip. Natural access control refers to the capacity to limit who is permitted to enter or inhabit a space or location and the means through which they may gain access (Schneider 221). Territoriality refers to “the capacity to establish authority over an environment, clarifying who is in charge, who belongs, and who is trespassing” (Schneider 221). Alternatively (and more positively), it can also be evidenced through “expressions of pride of ownership, and the creation of a welcoming environment . . .
[incorporating, for example] motivational signs, displays of student art, and the use of school colors to create warmth and express pride” (“Youth Violence”).

It seems impossible to not read panopticism in these design goals, especially the aspects that facilitate visual access for the purpose of moderating behavior through tacit reminders that everyone is being watched. The OSFC’s description of commonly specified camera and door access systems notes that both are “designed to be unobtrusive as possible but highly effective” (“Building in Safety”). This instantiates Foucault’s discussion of the ability of surveillance to circulate power as “a mechanism that is inherent to [education] and which increases its efficiency” (Discipline 176). We must keep in mind that the goal of “natural surveillance” is not only to provide the ability to watch, but to remind everyone that they are being watched.

Documents published by the OSFC seem, at least in tone, to have been written primarily for parents and other adults in the educational system whose primary concerns include the physical safety of children. The OSFC’s website assures us that “children who feel safe are both psychologically and physiologically more receptive to learning” (“Building in Safety”). This claim is probably indisputable; what is questionable, though, is whether CPTED and other contemporary design methods actually make students feel safe, whether the methods themselves account for embodied knowledge and the ways in which it is affected by the physical and symbolic environment. Scholars both within and beyond the disciplines of education and architecture are beginning to ask similar questions and offer additional perspectives.

In their book Punishing Schools: Fear and Citizenship in American Public Education, William Lyons and Julie Drew include a student quote that is illuminating in
terms of the effects of this rhetoric of security and surveillance: “[T]here’s like so many cameras I’m sure like everyone’s afraid, all these—even though you’re not doing anything—all these cameras” (44). Clearly, this student is articulating a fairly strong affective response to his school’s security system. We may behave differently when we know we’re being watched, but we also feel different. We can’t know exactly what the ultimate embodied effect of this student’s response will be, but we cannot discount that there will be one.

The widespread use of cameras and other security measures in high schools was largely precipitated by the 1999 massacre in Columbine, Colorado. There were school shootings prior to Columbine, of course, but it was the scope and scale of that disaster, in conjunction with the facts that it occurred in a “good” district and in an era narrated by 24-hour cable news, that made Columbine different and more catalytic than previous shootings. In “The Surveillance Economy of Post-Columbine Schools,” Tyson Lewis discusses the ways in which the Columbine school shooting forever altered the American suburban high school: “The overall conflation of safety with surveillance and security with militarism is part and parcel of a largely neoconservative and neoliberal agenda that is bent on retracting civil liberties and expanding disciplinary mechanisms of a police state” (335). The ultimate goal of this state, according to Lewis, is that “[f]iltered through this dominant ideology, ‘safety’ becomes synonymous with producing a docile and compliant consumer/worker subject” (335).

Lewis also addresses the economic effects of post-Columbine schools having become “important clients of a new, fear-driven surveillance economy” whose costs are exorbitant. Juxtapose this against the fact that we’re talking about institutions that often
struggle to purchase current textbooks and repair crumbling buildings, and we’re faced with tough questions about what our priorities are—about what “school” is becoming. Of particular interest to this project is Lewis’ discussion of the transformation of spatial/visual rhetoric as it relates to school architecture. He observes the correlation between CPTED and Bentham’s Panopticon concisely:

In accordance with the worst nightmares of Foucault, the logic of this overwhelming surveillance profusion seems to be predicated on a spurious if not tragically fatal logic. As long as citizens/students are normalized and homogenized via panoptic disciplinarity, safety is guaranteed. Thus safety becomes synonymous with docility, containment, and visibility. If one cannot hide from the gaze of disciplinary power, then safety is secured. (Lewis 342)

In addition to the Foucauldian references, Lewis taps into the economic costs of instituting such intensive security measures—costs that are bodily as well as financial. O’Loughlin’s discussion of consumption and bodies, in which she identifies the body as an inscriptive surface upon which various cultures and values are written, is relevant here (1). If we consider surveillance and security in terms of consumption, and in turn question the ways in which consumption marks bodies, we are forced to come to terms with the fact that schools, and hence students, are consuming an incredible amount of surveillance and security and are therefore significantly marked by it. What does it mean to be marked or inscribed by the things we consume? It’s tempting to reference the old “you are what you eat” cliché, but I’m not sure it’s not appropriate in this case. The things we consume really do mark our bodies—not just food, of course, but the clothes we wear and the makeup we apply and the cosmetic or medical treatments we seek. Surely a constant application of surveillance cameras, security drills, ordered movements, and warning signage has embodied effects upon high school students.
Joseph Piro also analyzes the culture in contemporary high schools, with an emphasis on the architectural features of such schools. In “Foucault and the Architecture of Surveillance: Creating Regimes of Power in Schools, Shrines, and Society,” Piro examines how architectural design contributes to the facilitation of a carceral society. He discusses the “disturbing byproducts” of the surveillance trend in our high schools, noting its negative implications for “teacher rapport with students, privacy, [and the] suppression of academic creativity and spontaneity” (31). O’Loughlin’s earlier-referenced discussion of the inescapable intercorporeal nature of the relationships between teachers and students would suggest that this warrants attention; if we understand that these relationships are both intercorporeal and negatively affected by surveillance measures, then we ought to interrogate the potential outcomes of this dynamic. Lewis discusses issues of power, as others who employ Foucauldian theory to this issue have, but he also focuses specifically on Foucault’s concern with “the implicit discourse communicated by the built environment” (39) and its impact upon human behavior. Perhaps his most significant claim of relevance to this project is that school architecture and design facilitates “[people being shaped], but . . . unaware of the shaping” (41). This seems particularly dangerous when we’re talking about young people—people who are most susceptible to “shaping.” He discusses what he calls a “surveillance curriculum” (42; italics his), in which policies and procedures driven by security become invisibly embedded in education as an institution, in which “the watching becomes built into the structure” (42).

Piro concludes with a very balanced set of questions and considerations, asking how we can safeguard students without committing them to prison-like facilities and
procedures and stating that it would be “simplistic, and probably unfair, to criticize schools because of their focus on control, discipline, and regulation” (44). He recognizes the challenges we face and the realities we must confront when discovering how to “strike a delicate balance between the need to surveil and the mission to instruct” (43).

Lyons and Drew share Lewis’ and Piro’s concerns. In a compelling discussion of post-Columbine school design, in which schools are built so that sections or wings of the building can be separately locked-down to contain potential intruders, Lyons and Drew point out that this “publicly articulated rationale” seems a bit paradoxical since it’s the students inside the school whom everyone most fears (43). It’s also ironic that the only time nearly all schools with this feature are actually locked down is when the police units and drug dogs are brought in to search students. The following section interrogates these and other paradoxes in further detail.

Analysis

Many schools face obvious physical challenges: they are overcrowded, or structurally damaged, or poorly lit, or technologically dated. These problems are clearly detrimental to the educational experience and warrant serious and individual attention. For the purposes of this project, however, I will analyze school buildings we consider optimal—those buildings that incorporate the latest design research and the best construction practices we have to date (including but not limited to the incorporation of CPTED standards). I choose this orientation for the material rhetoric portions of this project simply because I believe it makes more sense to begin from where we are rather than to engage in analyzing the past (in terms of how schools are designed/built);
technology and the world in general has changed so radically since our older school buildings were constructed that many of the reasons for their configuration are too outdated or irrelevant to be valuable to my analysis. Our “optimal” contemporary school buildings are generally visually attractive, spacious, and secure, all of which makes it easy to overlook their underlying rhetorical power.

But school buildings do order bodies in explicit ways—not only by limiting movement and personal space, but by prescribing “that the students unconsciously mimic that structure with their bones and muscles”; they dictate “basic ways of being that over time are etched into the young individual’s muscles and skeleton, the responses these then demand [become] embedded as neural pathways in the brain” (O’Loughlin 62, 68). Merleau-Ponty puts it less scientifically, but basically makes the same point: “my movements anticipate directly their final position, my intention only sketches out a trajectory in order to meet up with a goal that is already given its location, and there is something like a seed of movement that only grows later through its own objective trajectory” (96). Both are, in essence, describing what sounds mostly like Foucault’s concept of bodily inscription; the crucial fact of this dynamic is that it happens beneath the surface of our awareness, thus affecting us without our full knowledge and thereby not rendering itself subject to questioning. It is through this cloaked process that “the landscape in which we dwell” becomes a “social map whose legend we learn,” while remaining unaware that we are learning it (O’Loughlin 134).

This section includes two specific analyses intended to uncover some of the ways in which these social maps are learned; one is of typical spaces and visual/material rhetoric seen in contemporary suburban high schools. The photographs included were
taken of Willow High School, which was built in 2012 according to CPTED and other OSFC standards. It is appropriate to note that no one high school can represent all or even most high schools; however, this building does evidence typical spatial layouts, security systems, and signage systems that are employed to satisfy both state construction requirements and parental concerns regarding students’ safety. This analysis attempts to read the building as a rhetorical text.

The second analysis attempts to read a lock-down drill as a rhetorical text. I chose these two analyses because both have direct bearing upon student bodies. The earlier sections of this chapter have articulated the reasons this is true for the buildings themselves. The lockdown drill (which I will explain in more detail below) is accomplished through the corralling, containing, and “checking” of bodies. It evidences an institutional willingness to directly interact with student bodies on a mass scale that we have not previously seen in educational practices. My generation grew up with tornado and fire drills, which do necessarily involve the movement and corralling of bodies. The generation before me grew up with air raid drills, which involved similar practices. The difference between those types of drills and lockdown drills is that with the former, the implied threat always came from the outside, from something exterior to and not resulting from the students themselves.

Lockdown drills are different, and in some ways deceptively so. They tend to be “marketed” as a protective measure that prepares students to be sheltered from intruders. And they may very well serve to do so. But the real threat—the insidious threat—is the students already inside the building. The deadliest school shootings to date were perpetrated by students who attended the schools they attacked. The lockdown itself is,
in actuality, used more as a means to an end than it is an end in itself. Lockdown drills are marketed to parents as a safety measure, a way of preparing students to be sheltered from harm. I argue that this is an example of embodied rhetoric that is somewhat misleading or exploitive, in that it purports to be about protection when it’s really about surveillance, because what lockdowns are generally used for is rendering students compliant to drug searches. As my analysis will demonstrate, the lockdown is really only the first, facilitating step. It effectively maintains control over student bodies so that they can be investigated for various contraband, all the while perpetuating the specious appearance of being enacted for the safety of the students. This is ironic, of course, because the potentially dangerous bodies are now being investigated in the name of their own well-being. It’s so confusing (and maybe disturbing in a way we’d rather not confront) that perhaps we simply aren’t willing to question the logic.

**Analysis of Building**

The following images illustrate CPTED design principles. The first image is a reproduction of the floor plan of the first floor of Willow High School. The CPTED principles of natural access control and natural surveillance can be seen in this floor plan. The main entrance to the building is located at the vestibule at the top center of the drawing that shows six sets of double doors. Adjacent to that vestibule is the attendance office (Room 1101). During school hours, all entrances to the building are locked except the three sets of exterior doors at the main entrance. Visitors may therefore enter the vestibule, but they cannot get through the next set of doors to the interior hallways.

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6 All photos depict Willow High School, which was completed in 2012.
without either going through the attendance office or being given access from someone inside the building, who must either physically open a door or release a lock remotely so that the door may be opened.

The long central corridor provides both natural surveillance and natural access control. “Natural,” in this usage, means that no one has to go out of his way to see what’s going on within a space. There are rhetorical connotations of “natural” too, though. For example, when did it become “natural” to be so vigilant, to constantly surveil our school buildings for active shooters? The fact that the hallway runs the length of the building facilitates maximum sightlines, and the two sets of doors spaced evenly within the corridor are capable of being shut and locked remotely. In the worst case scenario, a shooter or other intruder running down the corridor could be seen from a considerable distance and prevented from continuing on his path by shutting down the doors. The principle of territoriality is manifested through the restrictions to access. On the floor plan, this can be observed primarily through the configuration of the doors and hallways. It is also evidenced through signage, shown later in this analysis.
The images below show some of the ways in which natural surveillance is accomplished architecturally. Figure 1 shows the long central hallway (one set of partitioning doors can be seen in the far distance). Standing at either end of it, one doesn’t necessarily recognize its purposes of facilitating building security and surveillance, but it does feel strangely long (this one is 1/3 of a mile). The one-point perspective effect creates a feeling of being extremely far away and removed from spaces at the other end of the building. The rhetorical effects of this distance could suggest any number of characteristics from spaciousness and grandeur to disconnectedness and isolation. The grey cinder block walls and the numbered hallways, though, do evoke impressions of the latter.

Figure 1: Main hallway of Willow High School
Photo by J. Young

Figure 2 shows a transparent classroom space, which is used for various purposes during the school day. Glass on both sides prevents blind spots around the corner, and
also facilitates the double-vision effect wherein everyone can look in or out and everyone knows that they are being seen. The numbers identifying the corridor (“2300 Wing”) in this image are posted in all hallways. The numbers are large and easily spotted so that they can be used for calling out location to responders in case of emergency—not just in the case of active shooters, but if a student has, for example, an epileptic seizure (Fierman).

Figure 2: Transparent Classroom
Photo by J. Young

Figure 3 is of the high school cafeteria, and Figure 4 is a typical stairwell. In both cases, open spaces and glass are used to achieve natural surveillance. While both openness and transparency can be desirable design features, they are necessarily achieved at the sacrifice of other potential qualities, such as privacy, intimacy, and the presence of a more comfortable human scale. The previous chapter referenced Marjorie
O’Loughlin’s claim that “embodiment is essential to a viable account of empathy because bodies are first and foremost spatially located and it is the relation of place and space that is primordially given in the social relationship between self and others” (134). Her words are explicitly applicable to physical school buildings, but I fear we sometimes fail to ask questions that consider things like empathy when we design contemporary schools. Constructing spaces in which everyone is constantly aware they are being watched may indeed be effective in some ways, but it is not empathetic nor is it generative of ideals such as trust, tolerance, or interdependence.

Figure 3: Willow High School Cafeteria
Photo by J. Young
The signs in Figures 5 and 6 are posted at all entry points to the high school. These measures are more rhetorical than they are practical; no one believes that an active shooter or other intruder would be deterred by rules about who can use which doors at what times. What the signage does achieve, though, is the principle of territoriality prescribed by CPTED. Signs like these send a message (to everyone—those inside and outside the school) that someone is in charge here and that measures have been taken to control access and behavior within the school building. The rhetorical effect varies by audience, of course. The signs send a message to parents that the school is on top of things—that it’s looking out for their children. To potential violators, it suggests that the school is ready to respond to intrusion. The most complicated message(s) is the one it sends to students, since they are both potential victims and potential perpetrators. This is
troubling regardless of which role they may identify with. On the victim side of this
dichotomy, signs such as these would seem to encourage fear and distrust if not outright
paranoia, none of which serve to support intellectual growth, let alone feelings of
confidence or agency within institutions that, according to their mission statements, seek
to effect exactly these goals. For students who are potential perpetrators, signs such as
the ones below seem mocking if not baiting. I argue that these are not the sort of
challenges we want to issue to troubled or disenfranchised high school students.

Figure 5: Sign Posted at Main Entrance to Willow High School
Photo by J. Young
The image below is of a sign that is posted at multiple locations throughout the school building. Its intended audience is primarily students, although it functions as a legal disclaimer of sorts, as well.
Recall Ahmed’s discussion of border development and her claim that “borders need to be threatened in order to be maintained, or even to appear as borders” (87). The signs in the images above evidence this process. The borders at Willow High have actually never been threatened, but the signs suggest that the possibility at least exists—perhaps even that it is likely—thus simultaneously creating and securing the borders. The sign at the main entrance—“DO NOT OPEN THIS DOOR FOR ANYONE (EVEN IF YOU KNOW THEM)” is a very clear statement of a firm border whose status is never to be compromised. Conversely, the notice to students regarding their lockers (Figure 7) seems to suggest that this particular border is more fluid—opened and closed and locked at the student’s discretion, but subject to crossing by school personnel. The use of only capital letters in all the signs implies a volume of shouting, of urgency and the need for immediate compliance.

Both the rhetoric and the policies directly impact bodies—either through explicit verbal mandates or through subtle physical directives. Taken together, the verbal mandates and tacit physical directives form a Discourse of surveillance and control that orders the movement of bodies throughout the day. Both embodied language (the text of the signs) and embodied rhetoric (the subtext of the signs, in some cases; the visual rhetoric of the building, in others) are acting upon students’ existing embodied knowledge—the gut feelings they already have of themselves on a subconscious level and those they are developing as they continue to become inscribed by the system in which the Discourse operates.

The inscriptions will certainly change students’ bodies (and, by association, their minds) over the course of their time spent in the institution. Super-surveillance, high
security, and zero tolerance programs have all combined in our schools to project a rhetoric that seems contrary to many of the goals of public education—goals such as tolerance and cooperation and trust, for example; Lyons and Drew interrogate this prison-like culture and call out the zero tolerance movement as an “unassailable policy trajectory whose rationale appears independent of outcomes for its continued existence” (46).

Even those involved in the initial design phases of school buildings concede this point. Dr. Ben Fierman, who is a psychologist retained by the “Strategic Planning and Collaboration Development” team of the architecture firm that designed Willow High School, articulates some of the challenges and contradictions inherent in Lyons and Drew’s critique. He notes that there is a “pervasive sense that the community is demanding secure buildings, that we must act” (emphasis his), even though “it’s fundamentally impossible to guarantee students’ safety, which is what all parents want.” When I spoke with him, he was quite frank, musing aloud, “Are violent acts less likely to happen because we have all this security? No. But it does make the effort to perpetrate one more protracted. And the security does two important things: 1. It facilitates a better response to violence within the district. And 2. It facilitates a better response between the district and police/emergency medical resources.”

I am sure Dr. Fierman is correct. But I also wonder if it’s worth it. I asked Dr. Fierman about Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, the site of the deadliest K-12 school shooting in history. “[The response to] Newtown was done perfectly,” he replied. “The only thing that could have mitigated further destruction was if the first responders had known exactly where the shooter was when they entered the building [a possibility schools like Willow High have anticipated with the numbered
corridors].” So Newtown did everything “right”—“perfectly,” in fact. Yet 27 people died that day.

I wonder if we ought to balance the reality that we can’t control everything against our collective desire to do so. This desire is exercised through action upon student bodies (often in the name of protecting student bodies) that I argue does more harm than good. Foucault discusses the great lengths carceral institutions sometimes go to in order to prevent any problems from occurring, to prevent anyone from doing anything wrong. The efforts toward natural surveillance and natural access control in CPTED high schools attempt the same. The design concept of territoriality has obvious connections to power and control. Those who hold authority assume power over other people’s bodies; within a given location, they determine who belongs and who doesn’t, who may move freely and who is required to be chaperoned or perhaps exiled altogether. This may not seem like a big deal, but for high school students, it is a big deal. High school is not just another place; it’s essentially where they live, and this is intensified because of the developmental stage of life during which they live there. Adolescence is a transitional time during which children begin to detach from home and parents as they cleave to and increasingly define themselves in terms of peers. Because the high school during these years of their lives becomes the location of this transition and the site of their most meaningful social interactions, I use the term “live in” rather than “attend” to communicate the significance and consequentiality of the high school environment. Foucault describes the Panopticon as “a laboratory [that] could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals” (Discipline and
If we pause to consider the consequences of this conception, especially as they relate to embodied practices and rhetoric, might we do things differently?

Foucault also asks some questions that seem eerily prescient in a post-Columbine society: “How many overseers will the Panopticon need? How much will the machine then cost to run?” (154-155). I would interpret his word “cost” as extending far beyond the financial. It seems that in light of these questions we ought to ask how far we’re willing to go and what messages that willingness is sending to students in these schools. We ought to recall recent news stories of zero-tolerance policies run amok, of restrooms whose stall doors have been removed by administration, of students strip-searched over issues like Advil possession (Koeninger). Foucault couldn’t have foreseen these specific scenarios, but he clearly saw the ideology that could lead to them.

I argue in this chapter that the design and administration of high security high schools have an embodied effect upon the school’s student inhabitants. More research is required in fields such as psychology and sociology to determine exactly what those effects are. The second component of my argument is that we have instituted too many extreme measures without sufficient evidence that they actually do what we want them to do (ensure students’ safety), even as they silently inscribe student bodies in ways that may be—on the whole—more destructive than the hypothetical destruction from which we seek to protect them. Despite the degree to which CNN or any other major media vehicle is able to convey the message that all high school students are under the near-constant threat of being attacked, school violence is still statistically rare. I argue that we need to weigh this fact against what we’re doing to all students on a daily basis. Isn’t it possible that explicitly giving students messages such as “Do not let anyone in, even if
“you know them” is actually contributing to a culture of violence and disconnection? I believe there is a line between facilitating a reasonable level of disaster preparedness and allowing “disaster assumption” messages and attitudes to inhere in nearly every aspect of school life. By literally building these messages into the material structure of schools, we do not create a safety net so much as actively employ the messages as permanent inscriptional forces, which, paradoxically, may actually compromise everyone’s safety in all sorts of ways.

Analysis of Lockdown Drill

This analysis will attempt to read a typical suburban high school “lock-down” as a text that has become embedded in the normal school experience and has become tacitly instructive. Its rhetorical force sends messages to students, parents, and faculty that are both subtle and overt. It takes somewhere between a few minutes and up to a couple hours out of a random school day, and then students and teachers resume their normal schedules. I argue, though, that the text remains—that it runs beneath the daily script like a quietly ticking metronome, intended to order the environment and keep everyone on track.

In order to perform this analysis, we must first look at the sequential elements of this text. I will use Lyons and Drew’s observation of an actual lockdown drill to evidence these elements (1-4). My personal experiences with lockdown drills at the high schools in which I have taught were nearly identical. They go like this:
1. As soon as the lockdown is announced, teachers secure their classroom doors and no one may leave or enter until the drill is complete. The drills are generally a surprise to teachers as well as students.

2. All exits and entrances to the school building are secured. All interior doors that separate sections of the school are secured (one wing from another, the gymnasium from the hall, etc.) Sometimes either during or just before all these things occur, police officers with “sniffing” dogs (generally German shepherds) enter the building.

3. Students in classrooms are told to leave their backpacks or purses in their classroom and to line up in the hall.

4. The dogs are led into the now-empty classroom by an officer to sniff the students’ possessions. If the dogs “tag” anything, the owner of the tagged item is dealt with according to school policy for whatever offense he’s committed.

5. After sniffing the classroom, the dogs, who each weigh between 100-120 pounds, walk the line of students, sniffing each one. The dogs are not supposed to touch the students, but according to Lyons and Drew’s observations, they frequently do, “anywhere from crotch to abdomen” (3), which is the height to which they stand as compared to high-schoolers. If all goes well, and nothing and no one is “tagged,” the students are simply sent back into their classrooms and teachers begin instructing, giving tests, overseeing group work—whatever they were doing before. The whole thing takes about 10 minutes in these cases.

Before we begin to interpret the rhetorical force of this text, we must consider another one. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, details the events of a “lock-up inspection”
during the plague in the seventeenth century (195-198). Following is a synopsis of the procedure:

1. As soon as the plague appears in a town, the town becomes subject to a “strict spatial partitioning: the closing of the town and its outlying districts, a prohibition to leave the town on pain of death, the killing of all stray animals; the division of the town into distinct quarters, each governed by an intendant” (195).

2. All townspeople must stay in their houses, and no one may enter or leave the town. An official locks residents inside their homes and turns over the key to the intendant until the end of the quarantine. Guards positioned throughout the town ensure that this mandate is followed.

3. After the quarantine has been in effect for 5-6 days, “the process of purifying the houses” begins (197). The residents are told to leave their belongings in their homes and wait outside. While they wait, the officials enter the home, seal off all the openings with wax, and light a “perfume” to purify the air within it. Once it has been assured that the plague no longer lingers in that house, the residents are permitted to re-enter.

The townspeople of the seventeenth century were fighting something of an unknown; they knew the results of the plague, but didn’t fully understand its origin or means of transmission. They responded with discipline. They “met [it] by order” and tried to “sort out every possible confusion” (Foucault, *Discipline* 197).

I think we’re doing the same thing in American high schools. I think we’re trying to fight some plague that we know even less about than the seventeenth century townsfolk knew about their plague. It’s an ill-defined plague, and it might even be the
wrong plague. We’re trying to “meet it by order” and “sort out confusion” by instituting rigid lock-down drills, random drug and weapons searches, standardized curricula, and high-stakes tests to measure it all. And in the process we’re creating an entirely new plague: a plague of fear, mistrust, paranoia, and apathy; a plague whose symptoms include an inability to think critically, an unwillingness to ask questions, and a lack of initiative to step outside the bounds of procedure. Its lingering effects could be anxiety, prejudice, and disengagement.

The side-by-side comparison of lockdown and plague drills further exemplifies crossovers between the penal system and the medical system and how those crossovers are evidenced in contemporary high schools. Schools, prisons, and medical institutions all complicate notions of protection and health, a propensity for punishment and a fear of contagion. An embodied reading of these drills, as deployed through my framework of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Ahmed, helps to bring these various and often competing aspects into a central conversation. What are we really doing when we lock students up and search them for contraband? Are we protecting their bodies from harm? Are we preventing their bodies from inflicting harm? Are we punishing the bodies that do (or even appear as though they might) inflict harm? And how are we even defining “harm”? As I discussed in Chapter 3, many violations of dress, attendance, and discipline codes do not seem inherently harmful. I argue that we employ tactics like lockdown drills with very little regard for what they may do to students. The experiences of being locked up, inspected, sniffed by dogs, and potentially physically searched undoubtedly affect students’ lived realities. These actions leave inscriptions upon students, and they evoke various feelings.
Additionally, a procedure such as a lockdown drill concretely illustrates Knoblauch’s terms of embodied rhetoric, language, and knowledge. Embodied language, in this case, is used as a rhetorical tool (embodied rhetoric) to justify the use of the drill in the first place; if we suggest that these measures of containment and inspection are intended to keep bodies safe, then we are making a rhetorical move using specific language to advance an idea—in this case, that these type of procedures are necessary and beneficial. The inscriptive effect upon the students—their reactions and feelings—certainly alters their individual embodied knowledge. Exactly how is beyond the scope of this project. However, it seems commonsensical to hypothesize that a student who previously felt secure and trusting in both her own body and around the bodies of others may experience some sort of shift after witnessing her classmates lined up along a hallway being searched by German Shepherds or having her purse (something she may perceive as an extension of her body) emptied and searched as she stands dutifully by.

Foucault compares the plague-striken town to the Panopticon, noting that “at a distance of a century and a half” there emerges one striking difference between the two: In the plague town, “power is mobilized” against “an extraordinary evil” [the plague itself] in ways that are as visible and brutal as they are swift and effective (Discipline 205). Conversely, the Panopticon is “the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system” (Foucault, Discipline 205). Contemporary high schools designed according to CPTED standards incorporate both: the natural surveillance aspects of buildings operate constantly and without overt force,
while the principles of natural access control and territoriality as well as explicit procedures such as lock-down drills govern both openly and covertly.

In Chapter 3 of this text, I discussed primary metaphors that emerge from the institutional discourse of suburban high schools, one of which I articulated as “NONCOMFORMITY IS A DISEASE.” This metaphor is perpetuated spatially as well as linguistically, and often manifests in what Foucault calls “the space of exclusion” (*Discipline* 199). He names the leper as the “symbolic inhabitant” of this space, noting that “leper” represents other sorts of undesirables as well. Foucault then articulates the ways in which labels and spaces conspire to discipline bodies so that they fit into rather than disrupt existing power dynamics:

> Treat ‘lepers’ as ‘plague victims’, project the subtle segmentations of discipline onto the confused space of internment, combine it with the methods of analytical distribution proper to power, individualize the excluded, but use procedures of individualization to mark exclusion—this is what was operated regularly by disciplinary power from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital. (*Discipline* 199).

The previous chapter discussed the ways in which some high school dress and/or behavioral codes provide such “spaces of exclusion” within the school building (the CLC, or “Corrective Learning Center,” for instance, at Maple high school) and consequently construct students as leper-like, capable of infecting others. Clearly, lockdown drills serve to identify and remove students who exhibit symptoms of “disease,” those who are diagnosed by sniffing dogs, who “test positive” for things we don’t want to spread to other students. The CLC and other spaces of exclusion provides for students to be effectively labeled and physically displaced for various infractions. This is easily compared to Foucault’s discussion of the ways in which power and
discipline work through the system: “it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power” (Discipline 198). A girl with a low-cut blouse or a boy with torn jeans becomes the “leper [that gives] rise to rituals of exclusion” in these scenarios (Discipline 198). It is easy enough for administrators or teachers to argue that the students aren’t being harmed, but only removed to an alternate location. There may be harm inherent in the removal, though. Foucault uses the term “branding,” and shows how it employs “binary division” to construct bodies as “mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal” (Discipline 199). Bodies that receive the unfavorable branding come to represent disorder and threat and are effectively cast out from peers in the name of protecting their counterparts on the “good” side of the binary divisions. This was the original purpose of plague drills and seems to be the primary justification for lockdown drills today.

It is in this way that architecture, or, more generally “the relationship between signs and bodies” (Ahmed 92) contributes to what Ahmed calls “the performativity of disgust” (92). The previous chapter articulated Ahmed’s concept of “stickiness.” To restate briefly, objects become “sticky” when they offend or disgust us in some ways. We don’t want to get too close to them for fear that whatever is disgusting about them may “stick” to us. So we displace them; we get them away from other bodies. Foucault critiqued the disciplinary effect of the labeling or naming itself; Ahmed extends it a step to further to illustrate how not only speech acts such as labeling but also methods of separation become “performative”—they do things through a process of reiteration; they “[generate] a set of effects, which then adhere as a disgusting object” (Ahmed 93).
To make this more concrete and to put Foucault’s and Ahmed’s claims in conversation, let us consider a student who is removed from her class and sent to the CLC to do her school work until her appearance is made to comply with the dress code. Because something about her appearance has been deemed unacceptable (or “disgusting,” or “sticky”), she is effectively labeled “mad,” “dangerous,” or “abnormal” to use Foucault’s binaries. She now inhabits the “leper” role and becomes subject to “rituals of exclusion” (Discipline 198). One of these rituals, in addition to the labeling or “branding,” is that she will be displaced to an alternate location in the school building, away from her peers—Ahmed’s “performative” dimension of stickiness being made manifest. Because the performativity crystallizes the “stickiness,” the perceived sense of “disgust,” through action accomplished by physical movement in space, the girl’s identity as disgusting, or contagious, or abnormal, or dangerous is materialized in her physical body, which necessarily includes her mind. This example demonstrates the interaction of Knoblauch’s definitions of embodied knowledge, language, and rhetoric with regard to physical spaces. The language of the code itself is embodied, because it uses bodily terms and appropriates student bodies to facilitate the spatial hierarchy established to circulate the power dynamic. It affects the embodied knowledge of both the girl in question and of those around her by eliciting bodily and affective responses to fear, disgust, and rejection. Through the processes of identification, labeling, and separation, the girl in question will certainly experience an alteration in her embodied knowledge and feelings of herself; her peers may experience feelings of fear and disgust as well, because the system in which they reside seems to communicate that hers is a body to be avoided. Embodied rhetoric, which is again characterized as “a purposeful decision to include
embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself” (Knoblauch 52) can be doubly witnessed here. If we read the building as a text, and within that text there are delineations of which bodies must be placed where, then that qualifies as using “social positionalities as forms of meaning making.” Conversely, the girl herself, who may be knowingly bucking the dress code, could be making tacit rhetorical moves regarding how she wants to be perceived within the system of her high school’s discursive and physical structures.

The elements of the Discourse formed by design components such as transparency and partitioning capabilities and disciplinary processes such as lockdown or search and seizure drills have become somewhat naturalized in contemporary high school experience. Recall Merleau-Ponty’s assertion referenced earlier in which he claims that “life is made up of rhythms that do not have their reason in what I have chosen to be, but rather have their condition in the banal milieu that surrounds me” (86). These things have simply become accepted “conditions” of going to high school, similar to the way in which students accept and participate in regulations such as standing in line for lunch or raising their hands to speak in class. Ideally, conditions should develop from reasons, and the reasons should be valid. For example, if there were no line at lunch there would be chaos and possibly violence or at least a lot of unnecessary inconvenience. Raising hands to speak in class helps facilitate a democratic dialogue. The obvious counterargument to my critique is for someone to state, “Well, if we didn’t have super secure schools, there would be more school shootings, and if we didn’t search students for drugs then more students would take drugs.” Except that no one has been able to show direct correlations that support those statements. The most secure schools do
experience school shootings, and students in the most highly surveilled schools do use drugs. Even those who support and perpetuate many of these systems often recognize this. Diane Smith⁷, a 12-year Board of Education member in the district that houses Willow High School, concedes that “the reality is that if a shooter wants in, they’ll get in. . . . Many of the safety/security initiatives are more of a PR move than anything else.” I argue that we ought to fully interrogate the reasons we are doing things before we institute and allow them to take hold as conditions that are accepted without question.

The space between “reason” and “condition” cannot be collapsed; the two terms reside at the poles of human experience rather than at points along a spectrum. “Reason” connotes a critical consideration, whereas “condition” refers to a mindless acceptance of whatever set of equations and processes orders the day. Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of the difference is juxtaposed against Foucault’s observation of how unrecognizable it is—that once people are inside the system they tend to accept its factory routines without questioning them. To appropriate the terms more concisely, the juxtaposition sets up a comparison in which “reason”= “lived body” and “condition”= “inscribed body.” Taking both together allows us “to be brought into [the] mutually informing and enriching dialogue” that emerges from considering Foucault and Merleau-Ponty in tandem, as complementing rather than opposing one another (Crossley 99). As in the previous chapter, I turn to Sara Ahmed to both explicate and mediate the distance between them. Her work addresses the emotional reality of the space between actively living and becoming inscribed, even if the space exists in a parallel dimension, since we live and become inscribed simultaneously. A concrete analogy helps to illustrate the ways in

⁷ Name has been changed to protect privacy
which this process occurs both instantly and over time: When I was a little girl, I got my ears pierced. The original inscription—the first time the needle was shot through my lobe, it hurt. I recognized the pain and it upset me—I had an emotional and affective response. The next time, when I changed the stud a week later, it still hurt, but it hurt less. I was continuing to apply the inscription in the same way that the original inscription was applied to me. Time continued to pass, and every time I changed the earring I became more and more inscribed, but I thought about it less and less. Now I can barely remember when my earlobes didn’t have holes in them. Over days and then months and years, both the intellectual and the emotional response were subtracted as the inscription itself became permanent. It became a “condition” of my body rather than a “reason” for anything—for beauty, for pain, for maturity—it simply “is.”

Discussion

Kenneth Burke, well ahead of his time in terms of addressing visual/material rhetoric, discusses the rhetoric of “imagery,” which is perhaps a vague term, but one that is relevant to this project. He writes, “Taken simply at its face value, imagery invites us to respond in accordance with its nature” (17). This statement implies potentially significant relationships between student environment and student behavior. The discussion becomes more meaningfully specified (for my purposes) when Burke frames it in terms of the adolescent’s reaction to his surroundings. In addressing the issue of young people’s exposure to media images of violence, Burke claims that, beyond simply seeing these images, the adolescent actively participates in it, “emphatically reenacting” it (18). Because this project was partially inspired by students’ frequent claims that
school feels like prison, it makes sense to examine how “emphatically reenacting” that feeling may manifest from an embodied perspective. Consider the newspaper headline and image below of an active shooter drill held recently at Cherry High School.

**Teamwork**  
Photo by PAMELA J. MILLER | Posted: Tuesday, July 23, 2013 12:53 pm

This image, of a security drill at Cherry High School, was the central and largest visual element on the front page of the local paper, approximately one month before school began. This is the image we chose to present to students getting ready to begin or return to high school after their summer break. I believe we should consider Burke’s warnings about adolescents “emphatically reenacting” the images to which they are subjected in light of what we understand about the interactions of embodied knowledge (gut feelings,
which are susceptible to suggestion) and embodied rhetoric (which this image clearly contains, given the deadly weapons and protective gear). The visual impact of images such as this one, along with the visual and emotional impact of being ordered out of their classrooms by armed officers and sniffed by police dogs, is difficult to mesh with any notion of comfort or security. It seems, more than anything else, to shout “You’re not safe here.” Research has shown that extreme security measures like this “actually [make] children feel less safe” (Lewis 338; italics his). This might be especially confusing for students like those whose school Lyons and Drew observed, with its central commons that “looks like the atrium café of a five-star hotel, with huge panes of glass, sunshine streaming in, brand new tables and chairs, and gleaming tile floors” (Lyons and Drew 2). The juxtaposition created when this space, suddenly and unexpectedly filled with what Lyons and Drew describe as a “paramilitary unit” (2) and their dogs, must be a little jarring and confusing. The tacit message now sounds more like “You must not be safe anywhere.”

Recall Foucault’s claim that a building designed for natural surveillance is intended “to act on those it shelters” (Discipline 172). This evidences a compelling contradiction, and one that seems to emerge frequently when we interrogate embodied practices in the American high school. I argue that we need to find the line between “act on” and “shelter” and then try to articulate for ourselves which side of it seems like a better place to locate our students. To do so, we must examine our motives for acting on and/or sheltering them in the first place. What are we hoping to accomplish, and from what or whom exactly are we purporting to protect them? And have we gotten just a little bit pathological about it? Foucault suggests that an “infinitely scrupulous concern
with surveillance is expressed in the architecture by innumerable petty mechanisms, [which] can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of human behavior” (Discipline 173; italics added).

If we return to the plague search metaphor as emblematic of embodied practices such as dress-code inspections, locker searches, surprise urine testing for drug use, and lock-down drills in American high schools, we must ask what happens to the “sick ones,” the ones who are found to have the “plague.” Do they become doubly victimized? Does the apparatus itself, supported if not dictated by the architecture that encloses it, serve to destroy as it controls? Foucault describes the historical plague-striken town as “an exceptional disciplinary model: perfect, but absolutely violent,” and the Panopticon as a “cruel, ingenious cage” (Discipline 207, 205). It’s true that CPTED-inspired school buildings effectively facilitate things like visual control and the ability to contain or keep out individuals; and it’s true that meticulous attendance policies and dress codes provide a level of control over what students do with their bodies. And it also seems to be true that students do spend a great deal of their time in buildings that really are a lot like prisons, which they may in some cases perceive as “cruel, ingenious cages.”

Foucault also asserts that “[w]ith these themes of surveillance, and especially in the schools, it seems that control over sexuality becomes inscribed in architecture” (Barou, Foucault, and Perrot 150). In all of these cases—all the ways in which architecture inscribes bodies—it is important to remember that it does so utterly passively, which is ultimately both more powerful and more difficult to either point to or critique. The fact that the architecture itself accomplishes all these missions—that it
places and instructs and limits its inhabitants—essentially seems to disemboby the accomplishments, but this is a specious statement; it becomes “a power that seems all the less ‘corporal’ in that it is more subtly ‘physical’” (Foucault, Discipline 177).

Schuster, in her analysis of alternative birthing centers, is interested in how or even if it is possible for people to “rewrite the cultural inscriptions that structure the body” and whether the spaces in which they reside can facilitate or thwart the rewriting. It doesn’t seem likely that contemporary high schools offer much in the way of this supporting this possibility. If anything, they seem to reiterate and intensify many of the cultural fears of the “outside” world, reinforcing the inscriptions by providing a physical location that perpetuates them and instantiates their rhetorical power.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed the ways in which school buildings are designed to both shelter and act upon bodies so that we can safely and effectively develop student minds. I suggest that there are problems inherent in the intention itself, because it still assumes a mind/body divide that doesn’t really exist. We try to deal with either bodies or minds, rather than whole human beings. We want to control student bodies in order to engage student minds, and we want to recruit student minds to work toward the goal of overcoming student bodies.

I want to conclude by offering a comparison for consideration. The two scenarios I present are unrelated, unique, and irreproducible, so this angle of analysis is perhaps not academically useful. But I do believe it sparks important questions.
This chapter has addressed the physical facility and the systems that accompany and work with it. I’ve already mentioned (as has the collective news media, over and over again), that Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, was, by all common measures, a “secure” school (“Sandy Hook”). It sought to protect students through bodily measures just like the ones in this chapter, based on the same principles Foucault critiqued more than three decades before the incident. It had visual surveillance and secure systems for entry access and teachers who knew what to do to protect student bodies in case of emergency. The school building was locked as soon as the children were safely inside, at 9:30 every morning, and remained locked until the school day was over. It was properly locked on December 14, 2012, the day Adam Lanza showed up. He used an assault rifle to shoot an entrance to the building, and he also forced his way into classrooms teachers had already “locked down” (“Sandy Hook”). The systems were all present and fully functioning and everyone did exactly what they’d been trained to do, and the results were catastrophic.

Eight months later, another disturbed man with another assault rifle slipped into a Georgia elementary school. In a conversation that was recorded by 911 operators and that quickly went viral, Antoinette Tuff, an office worker at the school, essentially talked Michael Brandon Hill out of using the gun. She told him that it was going to be alright, and that she loved him, and that she was proud of him (Dvorak). When he admitted he was mentally unstable, she told him about her own suicide attempt a year earlier. She even offered to shield him from police fire with her own body if he would walk out peacefully. Roughly 24 minutes later, Hill gave up and lay down. No child or adult was shot, or even harmed (Botelho, Kuo, and Levs). Washington Post reporter Petula
Dvorak, after extensively quoting Tuff’s words to Hill that were recorded on the 911 tape, asks, “Are you listening to her, America?”

After so many cases in which the “systems” failed, human empathy succeeded (Lithwick). In the previous chapter I discussed the notion of empathy within the context of embodiment in education. I include Marjorie’s O’Loughlin’s words on the matter once again here because of their relevance to this discussion: “[E]mbodiment is essential to a viable account of empathy because bodies are first and foremost spatially located and it is the relation of place and space that is primordially given in the social relationship between self and others” (134).

This point is crucial to understanding the difference in capabilities between high tech security systems and human empathy. The “systems” are intended to order and control bodies without much regard for mind or emotion. What Antoinette Tuff did, however, addressed an indivisible human being. Her “method,” which was more instinct and intuition than learned skill, took into account a “lived body”—one that was holistic and which encompassed a unique and irreducible set of experiences; an “inscribed body”—one that had been damaged and marked not only by past experiences but by mental illness in Hill’s case; and she negotiated the affective and emotional dimensions of the incident by responding to Hill in a calm and nurturing and accepting manner. Her empathic response was embodied in that it accounted for all of these factors. And it seems both unnecessary and extremely necessary to repeat here that Tuff offered to shield Hill from gunfire with her body, should he be willing to walk out with her. Her approach was eminently empathetic and embodied, and I argue that the power in that equation comes from the union.
It would be far too simplistic, of course, to suggest that we should simply swap technology for empathy, that we can replace human interaction with brilliantly designed school buildings. For one thing, we can’t count on having an Antoinette Tuff in every school building or encountering gunmen susceptible to gentle reasoning. It’s very possible and probably even likely that Michael Brandon Hill was nowhere near as dangerous as Adam Lanza to begin with. It’s also true, though, that he had the same access and the same capability. And the fact remains that one approach worked and one failed; the one that worked was the one that accounted for the entire embodied human being rather than the one that attempted to control bodies by physical surveillance and force alone.

If there are lessons we can glean from this comparison, I think they are micro-lessons. The two incidents are not enough from which to make policy decisions about how to secure high schools. What they can do, I believe, is serve as illuminating reminders of the opportunities we might be able to engage by approaching certain aspects of education with a more enlightened, embodied perspective than we have thus far. Physical facilities designed for surveillance, security, and control generally succeed in exerting those efforts and forces upon the majority of physical bodies they touch; what they can’t do is account for mental illness or emotional turmoil or human spirit—they can’t touch these things. Ultimately, I argue that when we attempt to separate mind from body or account for one and not the other, whether through architecture or any other method, empathy is compromised. I don’t think we can compromise on empathy and claim to be fully engaged in the process of education. I end this chapter by calling for research that investigates more progressive, holistic, and empathic methods of designing
and constructing school buildings that can help keep students safe in all ways—physical, mental, and emotional.
CHAPTER 5: The “Zero Tolerance” Paradox: Audience, Embodiment, and Acceptance

Introduction

As I begin this chapter in the autumn of 2013, the children of Newtown, Connecticut, are going back to school—a different school this year than last, because their original school is slated to be razed, the only possible redemption for the site of such a nightmare being its obliteration. The children’s new school has even more heightened security systems than the old school and is populated with police officers and armed security guards. The anchorwoman on CNN’s New Day speculated that these extreme measures will give parents a measure of comfort. When she interviewed Mark and Jackie Barden, however, the parents of seven-year-old shooting victim Daniel Barden, they did not comment at all upon the new security measures. They said that they believe what our schools really need is “more kindness” (Brown).

Daniel’s parents don’t necessarily want more locks, cameras or guns; they want more empathy. Their call comes from a place of parental grief and not informed research. But as O’Loughlin and others have demonstrated, empathy is a vital element of developing safe and beneficial social environments, and it is a necessary component of healthy embodied life (134). The connections between empathy and embodiment are complicated, particularly so within the context of this dissertation. The root word “path” relates to “feeling,” as in sympathy, but it can also refer to disease, as in pathogen or pathological. Within my triangular analytical framework, empathy seems closely located to Ahmed’s point, given her discussions of both “feeling” and “sticky” (or contagious, or diseased) bodies. It also applies to Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, though. Empathy is a
“lived” experience as much as anything else. Empathy is what we feel when we go weak in the knees upon seeing someone else get hurt—we unconsciously recruit our own embodied knowledge (of pain, in this case) to be in communion with someone else, and this all happens in a split second without any intention. In Merleau-Ponty’s language, the felt experience of the weak knees is part of the phenomenological reduction; it simply is. Considering empathy in a Foucauldian framework requires us to ask how potential inscriptions are mediated, altered, or prevented through empathy. For example, an effort to coerce a body leaves a different inscription than an effort to comfort a body. In this concluding chapter, I argue that empathy, rather than remaining a positive but abstract word, should be considered explicitly in terms of employing embodied language and rhetoric in the creation and dissemination of school discourse. Before adopting a rule or implementing a security procedure, we ought to ask, “Is this an empathetic move? Does it attend to bodies in ways that are kind and generative of goodness?” I advocate for an intentional use of embodied rhetoric—for the good—rather than much of the language we already have, which is certainly rhetorical in an embodied way, but not always intentional and in many ways potentially harmful.

There is an irony in the fact that Daniel Barden’s parents—two people who never wanted any sort of ethos or credibility to speak to this topic—basically hijacked a CNN discussion of the benefits of high-surveillance, high-security schools by talking about “kindness”; the parents who have lived the exact nightmare zero-tolerance programs are intended to prevent are asking for tolerance. Do kindness, tolerance, and empathy have a place in discussions about keeping our children safe? Is it possible they may be even more crucial to safety than surveillance technologies or discipline and security codes?
In the anthology *The Anthropology of Empathy*, Douglas W. Hollan and C. Jason Throop note a recent resurgence of academic interest in empathy (1). They note that embodied forms of knowledge and communication (such as the ability to accurately read facial expressions) are “far more central to human culture and behavior than we had previously imagined” (1). Developmental psychologists Jason J. Barr and Ann Higgins-D’Alessandro, who report their findings in *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, conducted research specifically on adolescents within high school environments. Their work shows that empathy and prosocial behavior are positively correlated (Barr and Higgins-D’Alessandro 231), and that the “school environment could influence involvement in prosocial activities during adolescence if the school promotes the concepts of connectedness and cooperation” (Barr and Higgins-D’Alessandro 233–4). The connection between empathy and prosocial behavior is such that those who feel empathy are more likely to perform prosocial acts (defined as “any purposive action on behalf of someone else that involves a net cost to the helper”) (Barr and Higgins-D’Alessandro 232). Recall Antoinette Tuff’s offer to shield a would-be school shooter from armed police officers with her own body. This is an isolated and extreme example, but large-scale research has also demonstrated positive correlations between positive school culture, prosocial behavior, and academic motivation in typical day-to-day high school environments (Barr and Higgins-D’Alessandro 234). Once we begin to account for how interconnected all of these aspects are—empathy, culture, and environment—it becomes more difficult to write off calls for empathy as a touchy-feely notion that sounds nice but accomplishes little. To the contrary, purposefully and explicitly working to increase student empathy not only improves school culture and student achievement, but
may serve to actually physically protect student bodies. University of Texas social worker Catherine Faver’s work has shown that “by fostering empathy, humane education programs may prevent or interrupt a pattern of development that results in violence against people” (365). Developing and implementing measures to accomplish this is a task for researchers and professionals outside of my discipline and clearly beyond the scope of this project, but the existing research does support the argument that attending to empathy in a more purposeful way is probably worth the effort.8

“The Student Body” is a body both more cohesive and more disparate than perhaps any other group. It is a nexus of the individuals that comprise it in a very literal sense, and it is also the nexus of cultural forces and social impulses that act upon it in often competing and contradictory ways. There are natural conflicts that exist and arise between students, and there is a more universal conflict between society and adolescents in general. High school is the final intersection between childhood and adulthood. It’s where students take their first stand as independent agents even as they retain many of the attributes of children. Simultaneously, society pushes back and down upon them, making a last-ditch effort to contain them—to keep them safe, or under our control, or to gain a few more precious minutes to mold them into what we think they ought to be. Adolescents evoke a collective sense of instability and uncontrollability that scares us, so we try to push them back into a box where they can be safely contained for as long as possible. I argue that in doing so we actually compromise their safety in ways that transcend the limited definition of it as physical shelter and protection.

8 Faver's work, for example, focuses on programs that aim to increase student empathy by incorporating animals in their classrooms; she claims that “the study of empathy and prosocial behavior indicates that empathy is inversely related to aggression” and that it actually serves as a “protective factor against aggression” (366).
Inscribing cultural fear and paranoia onto high school bodies is as unfair and destructive as it is opportunistic. We’re concerned about violence to the degree that we adopt zero-tolerance weapon policies that dictate expulsion for things like having a pocket knife tossed on the backseat of a pickup truck. We’re concerned about sexuality to the point that we allow what teenaged girls wear to eclipse what they say or how they think. High school is one of the last sites where we can get away with doing these things, and so we do, but most of what we’re guarding against is not inherently destructive, nor is it contained in the bodies upon which we cast it. I believe that we, adult society, use adolescent bodies as a battleground upon which to stake our last claim of how we think the world should be. In doing so, we scar the land we tromp on and alter it in ways whose lasting impressions we don’t consider and can’t anticipate. So when we talk about “safety,” I think we need to consider the smaller points of well-being as much as we do the more dramatic ones. It may be popular or marketable for a school district to employ armed security guards or to enforce a dress code that suggests every student is much like every other student. But it is also possible that these measures promote paranoia and discourage tolerance as much as (or more) than they facilitate orderly and effective schooling. They do not support psychological safety, nor do they communicate to students that it’s safe to be themselves or to let other people be themselves. I argue that safety and tolerance are intricately connected, and that we cannot effectively promote either in buildings that are loaded with images of danger and governed by programs called “zero tolerance.”
**Body/Tolerance**

Suzanne Rice, in an article published in *Educational Studies*, articulates a Deweyan analysis of zero tolerance policies. She points out the tension and conflict between promoting tolerance ideals and implementing zero tolerance policies (557). Rice is particularly critical of the movement toward homogeneity—certainly evidenced in dress codes, but not limited to them—most zero tolerance policies hinge upon the principle that any departure from an exactly prescribed set of circumstances is punishable and correctable by one predetermined consequence.

Rice also asserts that the foundation of tolerance is a willingness to accept that with which we are not immediately comfortable. That’s what tolerance *is* (561). We simply can’t continue to adopt ridiculously rigid sets of rules that dictate *exactly* how we want students to present their bodies and then overreact to any infraction with Tiananmen Square caliber energy and expect that it will somehow teach students to be tolerant. Rice states it more eloquently:

[I]n a world where there are deep chasms of misunderstanding and nonunderstanding, we need tolerance if we are not to destroy one another. When we humans live in relative isolation, or in tightly closed and homogenous communities, we do not need much tolerance because there is so little to tolerate. (562)

In many ways, various school policies have sought to forcefully develop homogenous communities where they don’t naturally exist. The result of this is generally *not* that everyone capitulates and just becomes homogenous; rather, the institutional efforts to enforce homogeneity tacitly reinforce prejudice and even abjection of the bodies that
refuse to homogenize. The attitude associated with tolerance is one of “live and let live” (Rice), a notion admittedly open-ended and maybe even frightening for some. Moreover, tolerating varying and conflicting ideas and perspectives “does not guarantee any particular outcome”; but without tolerance we all but preclude any shot at transformative progress (Rice 565). And the benefits are not merely social; Rice makes a strong case for how tolerance also facilitates a higher level of academic achievement:

   Indeed, the capacity for putting up with—tolerating—new and unfamiliar ideas is generally a condition of learning, even when the object of that learning is not the least bit controversial. Whether a student is trying to learn the structure of sentences, the periodic table, or mathematical formulae, except in rare cases, there is a period of mental discomfort that must be endured before the new material takes hold. (565)

Rice concludes her article with a discussion of the ways in which zero tolerance policies tend to “situate adults in adversarial relations with students, and beyond that, all but require adults to ‘model’ intolerance” (569); this is especially concerning when we know that the best shot students have at developing tolerance is to be nurtured in communities by “adults who embody and demonstrate the characteristic in word and action” (568).

   We use the word “embody” quite often when we’re describing aspects of human existence; this speaks to our embodied knowledge of the fact that we are our bodies, that we are indivisible from our bodies. Our attitudes and impulses are contained within them, and we impose those attitudes and impulses upon other bodies. If we take Rice’s claims about tolerance seriously and consider them within the context of actual human experience, then we have to account for bodies; we have to ask what “tolerance” means
in terms of student bodies, individually and collectively. I believe that it means we must be willing to tolerate all bodies, regardless of how they look or whether they depart from the norm. Zero tolerance programs—whether they refer to dress codes, drug and weapon policies, or security procedures—just don’t work. They haven’t done what they were intended to do (protect students from all possible mistakes in behavior or external dangers), and while failing to do so they have left harmful inscriptions upon the bodies they were supposed to protect.

Recognition of this fact is beginning to emerge, but it’s coming from individual activism and mainstream media rather than institutional governance, especially as the consequences of it pertain to embodied existence. Slate.com recently published an editorial titled “Got Lice? Come On In.” This may not seem directly relevant to this project, but let us consider its implications. In the article, Dan Kois describes the rapidly widening spectrum of institutional response to children who show up at school with head lice. Many schools call parents upon discovery and the parents must come to the school and retrieve their child immediately. Some will allow the child to return after his head has been shampooed to kill the lice. Other schools, though, maintain “no-nit” policies, which means that a child cannot return until “every last tiny louse egg [even after the eggs are dead] has been combed from her hair” (Kois). These schools have a “zero-tolerance-for-head-lice” policy, which is generally enforced by charging a school nurse or other personnel with “checking” the student for lice and nits upon returning to school.

The administration of the public school system in Arlington, Virginia, began to question such policies this year and have, with the support of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of School Nurses, adopted what Kois calls a
“live-and-let-lice policy.” If a child is found to have lice or nits, the parents are notified, but the school does not get involved beyond that. The child is simply sent back to her classroom for the rest of the day. No school personnel conduct mass lice screenings, nor do they even check children who’ve returned to school after being determined to have lice. Rhetorically, this is a far different move on the school’s part than what more traditional “your child has lice” responses achieve. In Arlington, the communication with the student’s parent(s) becomes informative rather than punitive—thus affecting a partnership between school and parents whose aim is to provide for and improve the child’s health and comfort. It is empathetic. Compare this to the rhetorical effect (and thereby potential inscriptive power) of traditional lice policies, in which the response is more akin to the school imposing an out-of-school suspension for bad behavior than it is an acknowledgment that the child needs some assistance in addressing something uncomfortable. It’s the difference between a medical model—one constructed around diagnosis and healing—and a law enforcement model, which is exercised through indictment and isolation. Schools across the country are quickly adopting Arlington’s policy, and a lot of parents are horrified (Kois).

“Sorry, your response is wrong,” Kois responds. He quotes Dr. Barbara Frankowski, professor of pediatrics at the University of Vermont, who says “No-nit policies don’t make any medical or scientific sense” (qtd. in Kois). She points out that lice are generally firmly attached to students’ heads and “pose no risk to other children.” Kois contends that this is a sensible stance: “Lice are not particularly contagious, they hurt basically no one, and they’re not a public health risk. Lice don’t actually matter. It’s high time that squeamish parents and school administrators stop acting like they do.”
It’s difficult to argue with this logic. But we have set a precedent for departing from logic. I would argue that blue hair doesn’t actually matter, nor do tattoos or piercings or holey jeans. This head lice debate, strange and specific as it is, instantiates Sara Ahmed’s concepts of stickiness and abjection on a quite literal level: we literally abject students from school because we fear inherently harmless “things” getting “stuck” to others because of them—whether it’s head lice or a penchant for low-slung jeans. In the case of head lice, public perception is far more alarmist than the actual degree of contagion warrants, but “even if they were highly contagious, the point that both the AAP and the NASN want to make is that it’s far more important to keep kids in school than it is to send them home in the hope of stopping the spread of lice. Because, again, lice don’t hurt anyone” (Kois).

It’s interesting that most schools are not willing to apply this reasoning to issues arguably even less harmful and disruptive than head lice, and it’s further evidence of the arbitrariness with which we apply policies to student bodies. The language typically employed in high school dress codes exemplifies this lack of purpose and clarity. For example, the mandate that students must dress with “reasonable conformity to current fashions” (Cherry Handbook 25) is problematic as a description. What’s “reasonable”? And why “current”? If a student prefers to wear a retro style of clothing from the 1960s or 70s, but the clothing meets other requirements in terms of length and coverage, is it still acceptable? Does “modesty” trump “current” and “conformity”? What exactly is the goal? Another passage suggests that administrators will need to intervene “when student appearance becomes extreme” (Cherry Handbook 25). This too seems foggy—certainly different people have different concepts of what constitutes “extreme.”
And why do we connect various aspects of student appearance to danger, when there appears to be nothing inherently dangerous about the aspect of appearance at issue? How can one student’s hairstyle be “hazardous . . . to the health and comfort of other persons in the vicinity”? (Cherry 25). Hair color that is of an “unnatural hue” or hairbands that do not conform to Cherry High School’s “two inches in width” rule would seem to be matters of individual preference rather than public health and safety; if there is a direct correlation with danger it hasn’t been made clear. Why is a hair band that is, say, only one inch in width or that is not holding back hair threatening or problematic? We can’t tell, but it appears that this is a pretty serious violation, because those who fail to comply “will be subject to immediate disciplinary actions” (Cherry Handbook 25).

The Willow Schools Board of Education member identified as “Diane Smith” in the previous chapter noted (without any prompting from me) the prevalence of the words “distraction” and “disruption” often used to justify strict dress codes. I’m not convinced that’s exactly what we’re worried about. If “distraction” is truly a serious impediment to education, then we really can’t risk the inclusion of physically handicapped or disfigured students. We can’t allow the inclusion of anyone with a Tourette’s diagnosis or an SBD (severely behaviorally disordered) diagnosis or an SED (severely emotionally disturbed) diagnosis. Yet we do. We expect students to look beyond these differences in appearance or behavior and concentrate on their own work. We don’t conceive of the disabled body as “distracting” or “hazardous” to other students or as a “violation” of the norm. The head lice issue falls in the middle; it’s not a cosmetic or image issue, but it’s not exactly a medical one either.
The pediatrician quoted in Kois’s editorial about head lice comments on how the policies to respond to it were originally enacted, and it’s applicable to many other school codes as well: “I don’t want to disparage school boards,” she says, “But they don’t always make policy connected to what’s scientific—sometimes it’s just what’s easiest, or what they think the parents want” (Frankowski, qtd. in Kois). Smith, the Willow school board member, questions the sensibility of much of the dress code her own cohort adopted and defends: “Who is it distracting to? Because it’s not distracting to the students.” She also notes that, although no one talks about it, the dress codes are not applied uniformly. “Good” students, or students whose parents are board members or administrators, tend to get away with a lot in terms of the dress codes that other students don’t. She told me that her own son made a point of wearing jeans with holes in them (an infraction of Willow’s dress code) every day for an entire school year in order to make two points. One, that his learning was not affected by having holes in his jeans; and two, that he wouldn’t be called out on it because his mother was a BOE member. He was right on both counts.

This anecdote exemplifies Ahmed’s claim that we don’t associate disgust or other negative aspects (such as hazard or violation) with all bodies in the same way; these things “stick more to some bodies than others” (92). Is it possible that the administrators at Ms. Smith’s son’s high school did not associate disgust with her son as much as they might have with someone else’s son? Especially if someone else’s son did not have a 4.0 GPA and a mother who was a school board member? Is it possible that no one was worried about this particular student becoming “sticky” or distracting to other students
because he possessed qualities that seemed more important than the holes in his jeans?
And if that’s true for him, why isn’t it true for everyone?

I argued earlier that it’s generally female bodies that become fetishized—that it is almost always girl bodies that bear the inscriptions of fear and disgust. There is a need for further research to determine if this is statistically supportable, but there are plenty of voices suggesting that there are at least problematic elements of how we apply dress codes to gendered bodies unevenly. While researching this project, I interviewed the principal of Maple High School, who shared with me that just that morning he’d received a “dissertation-like” e-mail from a female student who took issue with the school’s “no yoga pants” rule. She had also copied the assistant principal and the superintendent. The student was angry that she had been removed from class and sent to the Corrective Learning Center (CLC) during a mid-term exam review. The student believed that her performance on the exam was compromised by missing the review. She argued that when boys go walking up and down the halls with their pants sagging below their buttocks (which is also an infraction of the dress code), they are simply told to “pull up your pants,” but that when the girls wear yoga pants they are physically removed from class and taken to the CLC until a parent drives to the school and delivers a change of clothing. After a slight pause, the principal remarked, “That was actually a good point on her part.”

Three months later, a group of middle school girls in Evanston, Illinois, quite publicly made the same point. Led by thirteen-year-old Sophie Hasty and supported by 500 signatures on a petition, Hasty and others picketed for the right to wear leggings to school, sporting signs that said things like “Are my pants lowering your test scores?”
They are upset with their middle school’s new no-leggings policy and even more upset with the stated reason for it: that leggings are “too distracting for boys” (Hess). Hasty claims that disallowing the girls from wearing leggings because it’s too distracting for boys gives girls “the impression that we should be guilty for what guys do” (qtd. in Hess). This is problematic for several reasons, which other voices in the cultural mainstream have taken up as well.

**Primary Metaphors in Real Life**

This project was originally inspired by my students’ claims that their high schools were like prisons; the research phases of it led me through a theoretical exploration of the development of primary metaphors such as “SCHOOL IS A PRISON” and others. Two salient primary metaphors I identified in Chapter Three were “SCHOOLS ARE CONTAINERS FOR STUDENTS” and “NONCOMFORMITY IS A DISEASE.” The previous discussion comparing head lice protocols to provisions for removal from classes due to dress code infractions, both of which embody fears of contagion and evidence responses of abjection, illustrates some of the ways in which “NONCOMFORMITY IS A DISEASE” plays out in real life. Throughout this section of this chapter, I include other stories from the cultural mainstream that instantiate the existence and validity of these primary metaphors.

Amanda Marcotte, a slate.com journalist, calls into question the reasons we’re really so concerned about what the girls are wearing. In response to an *Atlantic* article written by a teacher who favors strict dress codes because she wants girls to see that they “are not the measure of their hemlines, but the sum of their strong minds, kind hearts, and
unlimited potential” (qtd. in Marcotte), Marcotte has this to say: “That’s a noble goal I fully support. I recommend that [this teacher] start sending the message that she doesn’t measure girls by their hemlines by not measuring them by their hemlines. Try ignoring their bodies completely and getting directly to the work of cherishing those minds and those hearts instead” (Marcotte). Journalist Soraya Chemaly notes that dress codes tend to “[regulate] boys’ slovenliness, [while policing] girls for how much of their bodies are visible.” Marcotte asserts that “telling women to cover it up is just as surely a form of sexual objectification as telling women to take it off.” Chemaly also questions the degree to which preventing “distraction” is used to justify many dress code mandates:

Who gets to be distracted? And, whose distraction is central? What is a girl supposed to think in the morning when she wakes up and tries to decide what to wear to school? . . . “Will I turn someone on if I wear this?” Now who is doing the sexualizing? . . . [I]t implies strongly that girls have responsibility for boys’ responses and that boys cannot control themselves. Boys should be insulted. People need to get a grip on the fact that girls are not sexual thermostats for their male peers. (Chemaly)

Annie-Rose Strasser and Tara Culp-Ressler, of the Center for American Progress Action Fund (thinkprogress.org) extend Chemaly’s concern one step further, claiming that “rape culture” is “evident in the attitudes that lead school administrators to treat young girls’ bodies as inherently ‘distracting’ to the boys who simply can’t control themselves.”

Chemaly links the alarming number of sexual assaults that go unreported to school dress codes, saying that little girls who have “grown up with ideas about how her clothes can ‘distract’ boys and make them do things” are disinclined to report rape and assault because “not only has she internalized these ideas, but her school might have institutionalized them in dress code policy and enforcement” (Chemaly).
Even for those who don’t accept the “institutional discourse in the form of girls’ dress codes as a catalyst for rape” argument, it seems difficult to really analyze the potential effects of the language employed in such codes and not be at least a little disturbed. If not an overt violation, it is at least creepy to read local news accounts of instances like the one in which a Cincinnati, Ohio, male administrator denied a student entrance to her prom because he noticed the “curvature of [her] breasts showing” (Strasser and Culp-Ressler). Do we really want to task administrators with looking this closely? With using their considerable education and experience to make determinations about whether or not they can see the curvature of their female students’ breasts?

I don’t believe most educators appreciate this part of their professional responsibilities, and I question whether it’s at all beneficial for students. Chemaly points out instances of administrators calling a girl up onto the stage during a school assembly and drawing a line on her leg to demonstrate acceptable skirt length. She acknowledges that this is often done lightly and humorously, to gloss over the awkward moment, and “everyone has a good laugh” (Chemaly). But there’s a darker reality to this scene: “A girl with no power, being told by a bigger person with authority what to do . . . By using her body as a prop, the enforcer uses her body as an object for his or her own purposes. Making it a joke can be insidious” (Chemaly). She illustrates the connections between adolescent girls experiencing street harassment for the first time with overzealous administrators who “start every school day with rigorous visual inspections” and quotes a 13-year-old girl who says the inspections make her feel the same way she did during a “creepy” incident in which two men on the street leered at and directed comments toward her. Chemaly follows this with the recognition that she “[knows] it seems ridiculous to
compare thoughtful, often loving teachers—of both sexes—with random jerks on the street, but that is only true if you willfully deny the centrality of the 13-year-old girls’ point of view in the matter of their own comportment” (Chemaly).

Perhaps too often we have ignored the centrality of students’ point of view in generating much of the institutional discourse with which we hope to order and control our schools, especially in cases where that discourse addresses their bodies. If this is true, then what we must confront is an audience awareness problem. Because I maintain that the challenge inherent in attending to and addressing student bodies is primarily a rhetorical and discursive one, I want to depart from contemporary scholarship and arguments for a moment to examine some of the foundational beliefs held steadily by rhetoricians from the origin of the discipline within which I now make this argument.

Kenneth Burke’s definition of “rhetoric” describes it as being “rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (43). For my purpose, I expand the definition beyond “language” to include visual, spatial, and procedural texts. The passage about “inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” seems particularly fitting for discussing students and faculty interacting in school buildings, especially since so many of the symbols in these environments either overtly or tacitly order bodies. Directional signs and spatial layouts encourage bodies toward certain patterns of movement while they discourage others, and explicit warning and “keep out” type signs like the ones shown in Chapter 4 clearly order bodies to take or avoid specific actions. Responding to and being influenced by these symbols consistently over time naturalizes the movements,
actions, and directives they support and becomes part of the circulating discourse, at
which point the details are generally not questioned.

It is for this reason that allowing small and seemingly inconsequential symbols to
take root without examining their net rhetorical effect can be dangerous. It essentially
facilitates a dynamic in which the discourse usurps the power of its creators and begins
working on its own, often in unintended and unfavorable ways. Burke reminds us that
“[c]lassical rhetoric stresses the element of explicit design in rhetorical enterprise” (35).
This is so basic and so simple that it seems unnecessary to quote; yet I believe we’ve
neglected this element in developing the discourses with which we address high school
students. We’ve failed to accurately consider or assess our audience, and have essentially
ended up with the institutional discourse equivalent of writer-based prose. Burke also
asserts that “the persuasive identifications of Rhetoric, in being so directly designed for
use, involve us in a special problem of consciousness, as exemplified in the Rhetorician’s
particular purpose for a given statement” (36)

He notes that the teen’s “awareness of himself as a developing person requires a
vocabulary” (18). Part of this awareness includes his embodied knowledge—the things
he knows and senses on a gut level. I argue that we must account for this when we
develop the discourse that frames our students’ high school experiences, that we must
engage in “the element of explicit design in rhetorical enterprise” in a way that considers
bodies and the effects the rhetoric may have upon those bodies and upon embodied
knowledge. If the vocabulary we are giving teenagers frequently includes terms of
containment, punishment, homogenization, and incarceration, certainly this in some way
affects their conceptions of themselves and of the institutions that define them in these
ways. If we return to the framework of lived, inscribed, and feeling bodies, we must recognize that such a vocabulary is an inscribing force on its own, even without considering the procedural implications of it, and that the inscribing certainly impacts a student’s feelings and her lived experience. She doesn’t have to be punished for loitering or having a distracting appearance in order to experience the warnings against it in an embodied way; in either case, the message is that “your body is a potential problem.”

More recent research on adolescents suggests that attending to the rhetorical and discursive artifacts to which they are exposed truly matters. Penelope Eckert, who studies the linguistic and rhetorical patterns and characteristics of teenagers, claims that “[a]dolescence [itself] is brought into being in discourse, our institutions, our practices” (3). She argues that commonly held notions of teenage rebellion and resistance are socially and rhetorically constructed (and exclusively so in industrialized nations) rather than a side effect of hormonal shifts or brain development (15). Her research suggests that much of what we perceive as negative behavior can be attributed to clashes inherent to the common communicative interactions between teenagers and the adults who dictate and control their behaviors and activities. Burke describes rhetoric as the one potential remedy for these clashes; it is the only resource that can mediate between parties mired in the discursive friction that frustrates, separates, and precludes cooperation, interdependence, and mutual respect and understanding. If both Eckert and Burke are right, we could possibly shift our high school students’ attitudes and behaviors in and related to school by altering the rhetoric in an informed and purposeful way.

Exactly how to do that is beyond the scope of this project. What has emerged from this project, though, is that so far we haven’t done it this way—we haven’t brought
research and rhetoric into conversation in a way that enables us to develop a truly productive discourse that governs high school life. Instead, we’ve ended up with a discourse of default that exactly no one appears to actually want. I will address how I believe this has occurred in the next section of this chapter. First, though, I will share my findings that led me to conclude how we’ve ended up where we are.

The rhetorical audience for institutional discourse in the high school is the high school student (at least in part. My research suggests that these documents are written at least as much for parents and administrators, if not more so, than they are for students. The fact remains, though, that they are issued directly to students, and students are the ones who must carry the handbooks with them every day). For example, a code of conduct is written and distributed with the intention that students will read and then follow it. Adolescence has always been a stage of life marked by the desire for freedom and independence. Regardless of whether teens deserve or are prepared to handle these things, they do tend to desire them. If the document we’ve written to encourage them to behave the way we want them to constructs them as subjects to be controlled who have no choices and who are presumed to be guilty rather than innocent, then we’ve already lost our audience by angering and offending them and we’ve destroyed our own ethos in the process. Burke writes,

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his . . . . And you give the “signs” of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience’s “opinions.” For the orator, following Aristotle and Cicero, will seek to display the appropriate “signs” of character needed to earn the audience’s good will. True, the rhetorician may have to change an audience’s opinion in one respect; but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience’s opinions in other respects. Some of their opinions are needed to support the fulcrum by which he would move other opinions. (55)
The last two sentences of the above passage are particularly crucial here: We truly do need to change our audience’s (high schoolers in this case) opinions sometimes. But we generally fail to “[yield] to that audience’s opinions in other respects”; we forget that we actually need some of their opinions “to support the fulcrum by which [we] would move other opinions.” When we ignore this fundamental principle of rhetoric, we are unable to fasten our message to our audience and therefore unable to unite in communication: we have a discursive disconnect. We need to address teenagers in ways that engage them productively, but more often than not our institutional texts and discourses are aimed more effectively toward anxious parents and politicians, leaving high school students—our most important audience—caught in the middle. They are literally snared in the rhetorical web, and they tend to resist accordingly.

Much of what they resist is spelled out explicitly in the student handbooks—especially in the sections that employ embodied language—which is why I selected them as the primary discursive artifact for this project. I had assumed, at the project’s outset, that there was some sort of research or scholarship that undergirds the development of these documents. That is not the case, though. In the schools represented in this study—and this appears to be the norm, given the lack of any sort of guiding standard or available documentation of how these things are written—the handbooks have simply grown year by year from an expressed or assumed need. There appears to have never been a specific rhetorical goal or educational philosophy that informed the creation of the handbooks.

Mr. Thomas, the principal at Maple High School, wrote his district’s first high school handbook in the early 1990s. The request for the handbook was made by the
school’s Parent Advisory Committee. Its first iteration was between 5-10 pages [he couldn’t remember exactly], and it contained only very basic rules. The handbooks for the schools in this study range from 44-57 pages in length in the PDF form available on school websites; they are generally more than twice that length in the small, spiral-bound versions issued to students. Mr. Thomas reports that he wrote the handbook “starting from zero”; there was no template or resources available to guide him so he “just used common sense.” The handbooks expanded each year, and, while their original purpose was to be informative, they have now evolved into “more of a legalistic document” (Thomas). For example, students and parents must both sign off on the fact that they’ve read and understood the handbook. That way, if a student gets suspended in accordance with the rules and consequences articulated in the handbook, neither student nor parent can claim not to have been informed. He also noted that the handbook is used by the school “as a technicality if someone gets in trouble”; basically, it’s a document to default to in order to justify or support punitive action on the part of the school.

The principal of Willow High School provided similar information. He wasn’t aware of the origins of his school’s handbook, but said it’s basically a disclaimer document. When I asked him if there was any research or scholarship that informed its development he said, “None. It’s just an articulation of school district policy. The district’s attorneys notify administration when changes to the law occur that need to be reflected in the handbook. It’s definitely a legal document” (White). And while schools use it to protect themselves, parents tend to do the same. Mr. White noted that “parents tend to begin quoting it when things go wrong, to prove that it didn’t say anywhere that their kid couldn’t wear this or that.”
The more I people I spoke with, the more apparent the discursive disconnects appeared, and the more I wondered whether many of the problems and conflicts of high school existence might potentially be mitigated rhetorically. Looking back to scholars like Burke seems anachronistic; after all, none of the challenges we face today could even have been conceived in the era in which we wrote. But the philosophical foundations of rhetoric, audience, and persuasion remain as true today as they always have. Of particular interest and usefulness to me is Burke’s examination of the ways in which rhetoric can be employed to mediate conflict. He writes,

> We need never deny the presence of strife, enmity, faction as a characteristic motive of rhetorical expression. We need not close our eyes to their almost tyrannous ubiquity in human relations; we can be on the alert always to see how such temptations to strife are implicit in the institutions that condition human relationships; yet we can at the same time always look beyond this order, to the principle of identification in general, a terministic choice justified by the fact that the identifications in the order of love are also characteristic of rhetorical expression. (20)

Burke suggests here that conflict and strife are inherent to all institutions that “condition human relationships”—and high schools would certainly seem to exemplify this—but then argues that rhetoric has the power to calm and bridge through the act of identification. In this discussion “rhetoric” signifies a thoughtful consideration and selection of linguistic options intended to encourage favorable human behaviors. In the case of high schools, rhetoric must necessarily expand to include visual and procedural rhetorics as well. Burke’s words explicitly instruct us to look “beyond order” to “identification,” which seems to specifically warn against defaulting to massive policies that are employed through the system at the expense of the individual.

He also writes: “The Rhetoric must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take,
the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War” (23). Burke’s use of embodied language and rhetoric is powerful here, and it seems particularly applicable to high schools (which are actually often compared to barnyards and war zones). The notions of “scrambles” and “wrangles” and “flare-ups,” “pressure and counterpressure,” and of a “War of Nerves” can be read as a vivid collage that characterizes many struggles and clashes within contemporary high schools. Burke suggests, and I argue, that employing explicit rhetorical design would be an appropriate intervention to begin calming nerves and cultivating an environment that prioritizes cooperation and interdependence rather than consequences and control.

One of the concerns I’ve held about education for a long time is that it’s become more about containing, controlling, and homogenizing students than it is about educating them. The “SCHOOL IS A CONTAINER FOR STUDENTS” primary metaphor is clearly evident in the institutional discourse that orders most American high schools and oftentimes in the rebellion against it. In 2008, one hundred Woodrow Wilson Senior High School students in Washington, D.C., walked out of school during the day to protest what they viewed as unreasonable security measures (“Students Walk Out”). One policy with which the students took issue was a newly implemented policy that required all students to eat boxed lunches in their closed classrooms, rather than to have a typical lunch period in a cafeteria. The administration had contended with some fighting during lunch, and rather than address the individuals causing the problem opted to institute a blanket policy in which no students entered the cafeteria for lunch. Senior Lena Solow, 18, addressing her school’s new rule, said “I was angry . . . A big part of what we’re
opposing is not the measure but how they’re doing it” (“Students Walk Out”). She and several other students formed a group they called the Wilson Peace Initiative, which asked school administrators to facilitate teachers and students working together to patrol hallways to prevent fighting (“Students Walk Out”).

Interestingly, research is on the side of the students in this case. Stephanie Martinez addresses this specifically in her article “A System Gone Berserk: How are Zero Tolerance Policies Really Affecting Schools?” Her findings show instituting programs that facilitate cooperation and interdependence between students and faculty is far more effective in reducing violence than implementing zero tolerance policies. So while the Wilson Peace Initiative students are actually working toward cultivating a productive rhetoric of cooperation, we are locking them up in classrooms to eat their lunches. It’s true that at the time this happened, the students did find positive ways to get their voices heard. But we can only shut those voices down so many times before they cease reasoning and begin screaming. And if they’ve developed these skills of peaceful protest and organization toward a better community, wouldn’t we rather they exercise it in more productive ways than walking out of their schools at lunch?

There is now a name for exactly the approach the Wilson Peace Initiative students suggest. “Restorative justice” programs address behavioral problems and challenges on an individual basis by facilitating cooperation between students and staff members. They offer “a more flexible and creative way of dealing with behavioral incidents . . . . [They] emphasize that offenders understand the impact of their actions and make appropriate amends” (Schacter 27). This strikes me as not only fairer to students, but considerably more socially redeeming and generative of the sort of ideals we want students to embody
by the time they enter adult society. The sticking point is that in order to adopt such measures we’re going to have to surrender some control. We especially have to surrender control when the “problems” we’re confronting affect students’ bodies and really no one else. We might have to come to terms with the fact that, while we prefer students not display tattoos or piercings, we cannot legitimately make a case for a consequential negative impact on society caused by either tattoos or piercings. I say we let it go. I used to teach high school, and I deeply resented the time I could not focus on teaching English because I was required to police whether or not Jimmy’s nose ring was appropriately covered with a bandaid. I believe we’d do everyone better to stop wringing our hands over whether these kids have their priorities straight—they are kids after all—and instead focus our attention on straightening out our own and those privileged by our discipline and behavioral policies.

Lyons and Drew’s critique of “zero tolerance” policies is particularly intriguing; their discussion explicates not only these policies’ effects on the school community, but how they are just “one dimension of a more generalized impoverishment of democratic public spheres . . . a zero tolerance culture, which amplifies the fears of privileged publics to justify the more aggressive and less accountable punishment of other publics in ways that ultimately disempower both” (5). Their words describe the fears of those with more power (adults) being mapped onto the bodies of those with less power (adolescents) and the “nobody wins” consequences of such transferals. Even more disturbing, however, is the degree to which inclusion of these policies has served to “criminalize” what decades ago was simply considered misbehavior (Fowler 15). This movement, I believe, is at the heart of the “SCHOOL IS A PRISON”
primary metaphor that sparks so many student complaints. Although our public schools are statistically “very safe,” even in troubled neighborhoods, “school discipline is becoming increasingly punitive, raising serious questions about its impact on students, schools, and the courts” (Fowler 16). That impact is not restricted to behavior or other environmental concerns. In her article “Criminalizing Kids: The Overlooked Reason for Failing Schools,” Heather Ann Thompson offers this hypothesis:

Politicians and policy makers offer various explanations for the dire state of public education in America. . . . All have missed the proverbial elephant in the classroom, which is the extent to which the nation’s public school system has been criminalized over the last forty years. More specifically, they have failed to reckon with the devastating effect that this unprecedented criminalization of educational spaces has had on the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn. If we are truly serious about fixing our nation’s schools . . . we must first recognize the enormous price that public school children have paid for America’s recent embrace of the world’s most massive and punitive penal state—a vast carceral apparatus that has wed our economy, society, and political structures to the practice of punishment in unprecedented ways. We must challenge the view that society’s needs can best be met by criminalizing the most needy and the spaces in which they live, work, and learn. (23)

Furthermore, the criminalization appears to directly impede academic development.

Thompson cites a study conducted by the American Psychological Association that found a negative correlation between the punitive measures dictated by zero tolerance policies and student academic achievement at the school-wide level (Thompson 27). She claims that pervasive underachievement “does not stem from the fact that [students’] teachers want decent pay and job security; it results from being treated day in and day out as the worst of the worst in society and being forced to learn not what analogies they might need to know for the SAT, but what rules of conduct might land them in jail” (Thompson 27).
**Discussion**

I conclude this project with the same questions that inspired it, considerably more insight concerning how we might approach thinking about these questions, but very few “answers” regarding how we should actually respond to them. I began by asking what an embodiment reading of institutional artifacts reveal about how we currently conceive of and respond to student bodies. Chapter Three, for example, identified rhetorical strands that emerge from the dress codes studied; those strands include school-prison correlation, material/consumerism-based value system, and objectification/sexualization of high school students. Second, I asked whether the school-is-prison metaphor is logically valid and whether there other metaphors that emerge from the discourse. Applying primary metaphor analysis methods suggested affirmative answers to both parts of that question, much of which has already been addressed/reiterated in this chapter. Third, I asked whether the embodied beliefs and practices common in contemporary high schools are supporting or thwarting the expressed academic mission of public high schools. This question cannot be definitively answered from the limited analysis provided in this study; however, there does seem to be some rhetorical evidence that clashes exist between what the discourse claims to do and what it actually does. And finally, I asked what the implications of the answers to the first three questions are for further study or change initiatives. I attempt to address this in the following paragraphs.

My sincere hope is that this project can serve as a starting point for research in education and other fields to begin determining effective and beneficial responses. I continue to believe that the challenges are inherently rhetorical and socially constructed, and that an appropriate response to them necessarily involves a closer attention to the
visual and textual discourses we employ in our high schools. I also believe that the path we’ve
taken to where we are right now is considerably more complex than what we’ve yet
confronted, and that the path to a more productive orientation requires a more
thoughtful and purposeful approach than we’ve taken thus far. Barr and D’Alessandro
take up this idea in their scholarship on empathy, stating that “students often experience
an unwritten curriculum distinguished by informality and a lack of conscious planning”
and that “[t]his unwritten curriculum has often been defined as school culture, or the
class of the school, as it reflects the patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that
have formed over the years” (234).

In many ways, it appears that the rhetoric has gotten away from us. That it
developed as a series of reactions to myriad factors and incidents without any guiding or
unified philosophical intent. This is understandable, given the rate at which our world
has changed in recent decades. I’m afraid that, when it comes to educating, guiding, and
disciplining high school kids, we’ve ended up with the discursive equivalent of “letting
the tail wag the dog.” We have all these little rules, these little procedures, that were
instituted one by one as the result of various and often isolated incidents. Their net effect
has created a constricting web of forces by knitting together all these little rules and
policies in a manner that not only strengthens and solidifies their rhetorical effects, but
seems to have incubated an expansion of similar rules and policies that intensify and
complicate the ones that structured the foundation initially. Students remain beneath the
web but constantly trying to escape it, and we adults respond by tugging harder around
the borders and adding reinforcing threads to keep them under it. In the meantime, we’ve
wasted a lot of time, energy, and resources that could have been allocated to other goals
and directed toward different outcomes. It would be nice to find someone to blame for this—to point fingers at power-hungry administrators or paranoid parents or even really bad kids. The problem with doing so is that it’s not only wrong and futile, but inaccurate. I return, briefly, to Foucault’s discussion of the Panopticon to situate this point.

The panoptic concept requires an overseer in the central tower—one individual who sees all—and by the simple fact of seeing exerts power over those he sees. It’s important to note, however, that if there’s evil in this position it comes from the apparatus—the “machine”—itself, not from the individual who occupies this position. The power (or evil, perhaps) is embodied in the rhetorical structure. Foucault questions who, if anyone, really benefits from panopticism, stating “[t]his seems uncertain even regarding those who occupy or visit the central tower. One has the feeling of confronting an infernal model that no one, either the watcher or the watched, can escape” (156). It’s seductively easy to default to the principal- or teacher-as-evil-deity versus the helpless and oppressed student; it’s probably more productive to question how the existing rhetorical structures of the school cast the characters in these falsely simplistic roles.

Before I began speaking with school administrators and school board members about these issues, I assumed (mistakenly) that they were generally in favor of all these programs and policies they enforce. Their answers to some of my questions complicated and problematized that assumption. When I asked Mr. White, the principal of Willow High School, how he felt about his school’s dress code, he said, “It is such a huge pain. It’s ridiculous.” He also conceded that in many cases what is disallowed because it’s “distracting” is not actually distracting in the least to students. Many times, he said, it’s simply “not really worth the fight.” When I asked him for a response to students’ claims
that high school is like prison, he had a rather surprising response. He said that as a society, “we’re so hypersensitive now. People hit the roof if you don’t do something.” He said he believes that “knowing kids really well is the best defense” against disruption and danger and violence. He lamented the fact that so many teachers and parents get knit-picky about things like rules, dress codes, etc., which sets up an “us-against-them-scenario” in which everyone loses. “That kind of thing builds up,” he said. “It communicates to kids that ‘you’re the problem,’ and ‘we don’t want you here.’ What we need to do is take good care of our kids, treat them respectfully and in a caring way.” Interestingly, he said essentially what Newtown shooting victim Daniel Barder’s parents said in the depths of mourning their child—that we need more kindness and tolerance and acceptance.

My interview with school board member Diane Smith revealed a similar assumptive error. The school board is, after all, the body that signs off on high security buildings and systems and that sanctions the exorbitant expense required to erect and incorporate them. Yet Ms. Smith acknowledged that most of the safety and security initiatives are “more of a PR move than anything else. These things make parents feel better, but don’t necessarily increase student safety or lessen their vulnerability to a significant degree.” So Ms. Smith recognizes that these measures don’t really work, yet believes parents want them, and Mr. White recognizes that some of the policies in his school are counterproductive to student well-being but believes parents want them. I’m a parent of a high schooler, and the security measures don’t make me feel any better. If I could choose an environment in which kindness, empathy, tolerance, and awareness of individuality are prioritized over surveillance and control I would do so immediately.
And I couldn’t care less what the hair on the head of the kid next to my kid looks like, nor do I much care how my own kid wears his hair. These things are all so fleeting over the course of a lifetime and so inconsequential in the larger community, yet we often allow concerns about them to overshadow ideals like tolerance and love.

So we have all these groups of people—parents, teachers, administrators, students—mired in the rhetorical construct we’ve simultaneously built around us and become trapped within, because we all seem to believe that the other parties involved either want or need the provisions and restrictions we’ve allowed to take hold. Is there any way to deconstruct it? Can we reclaim and reframe a discourse of default into one that is informed by research and rhetorical intent? In the following section, I engage in a discussion of hypothetical primary metaphors that is intended to serve as a heuristic device for thinking about this question.

**Primary Metaphors in Possible Life**

A guiding question Gee uses in performing discourse analysis asks how something could have been stated or written differently than it is. Lakoff and Johnson suggest a similar thought exercise. Following their discussion of “conventional metaphors”—those discussed above such as “IDEAS ARE FOOD” or “LOVE IS MAGIC”—the authors offer a way of examining how different metaphors might rhetorically effect different ways of perceiving or experiencing things and of being in the world (Lakoff and Johnson 128). They say that by engaging metaphors that are “outside our conventional conceptual system, [ones] that are imaginative and creative,” we could potentially “give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know”
and believe” (Lakoff and Johnson 128). As Lakoff and Johnson point out, “New
metaphors have the power to create a new reality” (131).

To exemplify this practice, they offer the primary metaphor of “LOVE IS A
COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART” (128). This metaphor is meant to be reflective of
an alternate way of experience and enacting love, but not simply for the sake of trying
something different; it is supposed to be logically consistent and coherent with an actual
lived possibility—one that may be more productive than many to which we currently
(either consciously or subconsciously) subscribe (such as “LOVE IS WAR” or “LOVE IS
MADNESS”). In order to flesh out this metaphor, the authors write a list of 25
“entailments,” which make explicit the sort of mindsets and activities consistent with
love being a collaborative work of art (Lakoff and Johnson 129). Here are some
eamples from that list:

Love is active.
Love requires cooperation.
Love requires a discipline.
Love demands sacrifice.
Love involves creativity.
Love requires a shared aesthetic.
Love cannot be achieved by formula.
Love may be transient or permanent. (Lakoff and Johnson 129)

If the metaphor “works”—if it serves as a cohesive model for whatever it represents
(love, in this case), then we will experience “a kind of reverberation down through the
network of entailments that awakens and connects our memories of our past love
experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones” (Lakoff and Johnson 129). In
other words, a coherent alternative primary metaphor has the potential to both reflect
and create reality; it can have a self-fulfilling prophecy effect. Lakoff and Johnson call
this the “feedback effect,” noting the primary metaphor’s ability to become stronger and
more pragmatically unified the more it is employed, thus accumulating a net effect of change in the way people experience and enact love (130).

Perhaps the most consequential aspect of primary metaphors is that they tend to foreground and emphasize certain ideas and mindsets while cloaking or deprioritizing others, and this manipulation of positioning dictates the way we conceive of and behave within particular life experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 128-130). For example, if I subscribe to the “LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART” metaphor and a problem arises in my relationship, I am going to consult my partner and see if we can brainstorm solutions to our problem and work toward reconciliation. On the other hand, if I subscribe to the “LOVE IS WAR” metaphor and a problem arises in my relationship, I am going to shut down communication with my partner so that I’m in a better position to outsmart him and therefore to “win.”

What if we tried the same thing with the primary metaphors controlling the discourse in high school handbooks? One of those primary metaphors was the one that suggests “SCHOOLS ARE CONTAINERS FOR STUDENTS.” I claimed that the concept of “containment” was pervasive in attendance policies and that its rhetorical effects were primarily related to limits and control of student bodies. What if we switched out the concept of containment for the concept of springing forth? We might end up with a guiding metaphor that says something like “SCHOOLS ARE SPRINGBOARDS TO THE FUTURE.” For this metaphor, I envision the type of springboard a gymnast uses to propel herself over the vault—one that transforms raw energy and impact into directional forward motion. The idea of a launch pad would work as well. If we conceive of school in this way, there is suddenly no provision for
maintaining a “closed campus”; that wouldn’t make any sense. The paragraphs devoted to how students sign in and out of classes and the procedures for entering and leaving the building are not logically consistent with this metaphor either. If the school is a springboard, its purpose is entirely different than if it is a container. The language would have to change to incorporate notions of what students must bring to school: energy, momentum, awareness of target, ability to control pace and velocity. And there would need to be language that addresses the inevitable post-impact side of the action: language that emphasizes the relationship between approach and result, language that discusses the variety of directions one can aim for upon leaving the school, language that accounts for failed launches and second chances. And the seemingly excessive amount of text dedicated to warn students against “loitering”: this too becomes nonsensical in the springboard metaphor, because there’s no loitering on a springboard.

I am aware that this may sound . . . “strange.” My argument would be that it’s at least as strange to address all high schoolers as potential criminals. I just think we’ve been doing it so long that we’ve accepted it as normal and stopped “hearing” what we’re actually saying. I believe another criticism might be that it’s overly idealistic to think this sort of discourse can make a real difference in students’ attitudes toward school. As someone who’s worked directly with hundreds of teenagers, though, I can say with confidence that they’re pretty idealistic. Even the “bad” ones. The bad ones may need a discourse shift more than anyone.

And I suppose this could be perceived as manipulation—purposefully developing and employing new primary metaphors. But the thing is that the discourse is already manipulative. The rhetoric is working—it’s doing something—regardless of the level of
purpose we engage in crafting it. Lakoff and Johnson respond to objections that this is all a lot of feel-good, academic nonsense, that you can’t change people’s behavior all that much by altering the discourse that informs it. They allow that it “is reasonable enough to assume that words alone don’t change reality. But changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (132). Changing the metaphors that underlie the discourse with which we write documents such as high school handbooks does have the potential to alter the conceptual system of the institution as a whole, an alteration I argue is warranted and necessary if we want to adequately prepare students to enter society as critical, ethical, and empathetic citizens. This call to alter the discourse is rooted in the idea that the world constantly changes and that the primary metaphors that govern ways of being within it must change too. Lakoff and Johnson assert that it is the responsibility of every culture to “provide a more or less successful way of dealing with its environment, both adapting to it and changing it” (132).

And it’s not that schools haven’t tried to adapt to and change in accordance with a changing world; it’s that we may have adapted and changed in the wrong way. We’ve tried to adapt to some extremely horrible but very isolated episodes of school violence by employing sweeping, across-the-boards changes to discipline and security policies that manifest as overzealous and ill-conceived zero-tolerance policies and which have resulted in six-year-olds being suspended for bringing Lego guns to school. We’ve tried to adapt to an increasingly sexually liberated pop culture by micro-managing every aspect of teen attire and physical expression.

Which brings us to an alternative option regarding what to do about problematic
primary metaphors or rhetorical messages. This option could be particularly applicable and appropriate for our “(STUDENT) BODIES ARE PROPERTY (OF THE SCHOOL)” primary metaphor and the notion of “We are what you wear.” I would argue that where these metaphors are concerned the best way to alter the discourse to strike a more productive tone would be to practically eliminate it. If we want students to focus on developing their minds, then we have to stop focusing on their bodies. Barring any article of clothing that explicitly communicates hate speech or otherwise demeans the self or others, is it really worth it to police students’ fashion choices? I’m not sure that it is. For one thing, it’s too complex of an enterprise. Fashions and trends change rapidly, and trying to keep up with it becomes a silly endeavor. More importantly, dedicating too much time, energy, and textual space to it creates a rhetorical hierarchy that grants physical appearance too much importance. It allows contemporary culture’s obsession with superficiality to become embodied in high school students and renders the adults in charge of them complicit in doing so.

So in these cases, rather than to suggest alternative metaphors for the ways in which we attempt to compose and control students’ bodies, I suggest no metaphors at all and no (or very, very little) textual space be dedicated to a discussion of such issues. There are possible slippery slope arguments to make here: If we allow nose piercings, then won’t some students take it to the next level and pierce their lips? The answer to that is that yes, some students will. But so what? Piercings don’t actually affect cognitive ability. And since most students don’t even want to pierce their faces, it’s illogical to think that if we stop cracking down on it then everyone will do it. If we don’t dictate how short girls’ skirts may be or how low cut their blouses, what's to keep a
student from showing up totally naked? The law—the actual criminal justice system—can do this. There are real laws that address issues such as public nudity; the schools shouldn’t concern themselves with it for the same reason they really don’t need to publish in their handbooks that murder is not allowed at school functions.

Specific rules aside, the most consistent theme that emerges from a close analysis of high school dress codes and other policies relates to the degree to which we continuously attempt to separate mind from body. We approach it from opposite perspectives: we try to marshal bodies in order to access minds, and we try to recruit minds in order to control bodies. An embodied reading helps us to understand why neither endeavor can be fully successful. We must recognize that we are teaching and working with whole students, to “fully acknowledge the human being’s constructive and creative capacities, but not by asserting the dominance of a certain view of ‘mind’ or ‘thought’ over bodily existence” (O’Loughlin 82). If nothing else, a reading such as this one can make us stop to consider rhetorical effects and, ideally, encourage us to go back and literally re-write the discourse in a way that tears down faulty walls rather than just adding further reinforcement.
**APPENDIX A:** CHART AND ANALYSIS QUESTIONS DEVELOPED FROM GEE’S “TASKS” AND “TOOLS”

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Following are the “building tasks” (Ta1-Ta7) and their correlating discourse analysis questions:

1. **Significance:** How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
2. **Practices/Activities:** What practice or practices is this piece of language being used to enact?
3. **Identities:** What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact? What identity or identities is this piece of language attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact his or her own identity?
4. **Relationships:** What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?
5. **Politics (distribution of social goods):** What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?
6. **Connections:** How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant or both?
7. **Sign Systems and Knowledge:** How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?

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9 Taken from James Paul Gee’s *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS DERIVED FROM JAMES GEE’S “TOOLS” AND “TASKS” (Generic: Can Be Used for any Text)

1. In what ways is the language used significant because of the situated meanings (context) in which it appears?
2. What is the significance of the social language employed?
3. What is the significance of the sort of figured worlds called into being by the language employed?
4. Are there other texts/discourses implicitly or explicitly referenced or alluded to, and if so, what is their significance to the text being analyzed?
5. How is the Discourse being analyzed significant to those whom it affects?
6. What is the significance of the larger conversations surrounding the issues addressed in the text?
7. What situated meanings (contexts) are relevant to the practices and activities addressed in the text?
8. How do social languages and practices/activities interact with one another regarding the issues addressed in the text?
9. What sort of figured worlds are called into being and how do they relate to practices/activities addressed in the text?
10. Are there other texts/discourses that interact with the practices/activities addressed in the text?
11. How is the Discourse of the text related to practices and activities?
12. What other larger conversations surround the practices and activities addressed in the text?
13. How does the context (situated meaning) of the language serve to construct identity?
14. How does the social language employed express and construct the identity of participants in the community to whom the text is directed?
15. What sort of figured worlds are called into being by the text and what identities do these figured worlds enact?
16. How are identities already assumed or established in regard to other existing texts/discourses? How are they constructed or challenged by the text?
17. How is the Discourse emerging from the text related to the identities of participants within it?
18. What larger conversations surround the issues addressed in the text, and how are identities enacted in these conversations? What are the implications of these in regard to the text being analyzed?
19. What sort of relationships does the language employed enact within the context (situated meaning) of the text?
20. What does the social language employed express or imply about the relationships of the participants, ideas, values, etc.? How does it define, construct, or challenge relationship status?
21. What figured worlds are called into being by the text and what do they tell us about the relationships of the participants, ideas, values, etc.?
22. How do other existing texts/discourses define and construct the relationships of participants, ideas, values, etc. in the community to which the text is directed?
23. What does the Discourse tell us about the relationships of participants, ideas, values, etc.?
24. What larger conversations surround the issue of relationships relevant to the community the text concerns, and what do they tell us about these relationships?
25. What perspective do the situated meanings in the text express about the distribution of social goods (politics)?
26. What perspective on social goods does the social language employed in the text communicate?
27. What perspective on social goods is communicated by the figured worlds that are called into being in the text?
28. What perspective on social goods is implied by the text in regard to other relevant texts/discourses in circulation?
29. What political discourses (discourses about the distribution of social goods) emerge from the language in the text? How is the discourse of the text related to the distribution of social goods?
30. What are the larger conversations about the distribution of social goods that are relevant to the text?
31. How does the context (situated meanings) of the text serve to express or construct various (dis)connections?
32. What sort of (dis)connections are implied or expressed by the social language employed in the text?
33. What do the figured worlds called into being by the text tell us about (dis)connections and (dis)connectedness of various elements?
34. What sort of connections are evoked, established, or implied by other texts/discourses relevant to the text?
35. What (dis)connections are evoked, established, or implied by the Discourse emerging from the text?
36. What (dis)connections are present or implied in the context of the larger conversations related to issues in the text?
37. How does the context (situated meanings) of the text privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
38. How does the social language employed privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
39. How do the figured worlds called into being privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
40. How do other relevant texts/discourses privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
41. How does the Discourse emerging from the text privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
42. How do the larger conversations surrounding issues addressed in the text privilege or dis privilege specific sign systems?
APPENDIX B: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS 
DERIVED FROM JAMES GEE’S “TOOLS” AND “TASKS” 
(written specifically to analyze dress codes)

1. In what ways are words or phrases used in the dress codes significant because of the context (situated meaning) in which they are used?
2. What is the significance of the social language used in the writing of the dress codes?
3. What is the significance of the sort of figured worlds called into being by the language used in the dress codes?
4. Are there other texts/discourses implicitly or explicitly referenced or alluded to in the dress codes, and if so, what is their significance to the sample texts? Do readers need knowledge of other texts/discourses in order to fully understand the dress codes?
5. How is the discourse of “student dress codes” significant to those whom it affects?
6. What is the significance of the larger conversations surrounding the issue of student dress codes?
7. What situated meanings are relevant to the practices and activities concerned with student dress codes?
8. How do social languages and practices/activities interact with one another regarding the issue of student dress codes?
9. What sort of figured worlds are called into being and how do they relate to practices/activities relevant to student dress codes?
10. Are there other texts/discourses that interact with the practices/activities related to student dress codes?
11. How is the discourse of “student dress codes” related to practices and activities?
12. What other larger conversations surround the practices and activities related to student dress codes?
13. How do the contextual meanings of the language in student dress codes serve to construct identity?
14. How does the social language employed express and construct the identity of participants in the school community?
15. What sort of figured worlds are called into being by student dress codes and what are the identities of the participants in these figured worlds?
16. How are identities already assumed or established in regard to other existing texts/discourses? How are they constructed or changed by the dress code?
17. How is the discourse of “student dress codes” related to the identities of students, faculty, parents, etc.?
18. What larger conversations surround the issue of student dress codes in relation to the identities of participants in the school community/society-at-large?
19. How do the situated meanings found in the language of the dress codes express, define, challenge relationships of the relevant participants, ideas, values, etc.?
20. What does the social language employed express or imply about the relationships of the participants, ideas, values, etc.? How does it define, construct, or challenge relationship status?
21. What figured worlds are called into being by the dress codes and what do they tell us about the relationships of the participants, ideas, values, etc.?
22. How do other existing text/discourses define and construct the relationships of participants, ideas, values, etc. in the school community?
23. What does the discourse of “school dress code” tell us about the relationships of participants, ideas, values, etc.?
24. What larger conversations surround the issue of relationships relevant to school dress codes, and what do they tell us about these relationships?
25. What perspective do the situated meanings in the dress code language express about the distribution of social goods (politics)?
26. What perspective on social goods does the social language employed in high school dress codes communicate?
27. What perspective on social goods is communicated by the figured worlds that are called into being in the dress code language?
28. What perspective on social goods is implied by the dress codes in regard to other relevant texts/discourses in circulation?
29. What political discourses (discourses about the distribution of social goods) emerge from the language in the dress codes? How is the discourse of “school dress code” related to the distribution of social goods?
30. What are the larger conversations surrounding dress codes that are relevant to the distribution of social goods?
31. How do the situated meanings of the language used serve to express or construct various connections between elements related to school dress codes?
32. What sort of connections are implied or expressed by the social language employed in the dress codes?
33. What do the figured worlds called into being by the dress codes tell us about connections and connectedness of various elements?
34. What sort of connections are evoked, established, or implied by other texts/discourses relevant to school dress codes?
35. What connections are evoked, established, or implied by the discourse of “school dress codes”?
36. What connections are present or implied in the context of the larger conversation surrounding school dress codes?
37. How do the situated meanings in the language of school dress code privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
38. How does the social language employed privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
39. How do the figured worlds called into being privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
40. How do other relevant texts/discourses privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
41. How does the discourse of “school dress codes” privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
42. How does the larger conversation surrounding school dress codes privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?
Mission Statement

The mission of the [Willow] City Schools, in cooperation with families, school personnel, and community, is to provide an education in a safe environment that will enable all students to reach their highest potential.

Belief Statements

- We believe that all students have a right to an education that provides an opportunity to reach their highest potential in an ever-changing global community.
- We believe that each student's education should lead to responsible citizenship and a productive, meaningful life.
- We believe that education should be conducted in a safe environment -- mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially.
- We believe families, school personnel, and the community should accept joint responsibility for the educational needs of students.
- We believe that our schools should provide the best possible resources to meet student needs.

[Cherry] City Schools Mission Statement

The [Cherry] City School District prepares students for an ever-changing future by:

Providing a student-centered learning environment to help students reach their maximum potential

Instilling in them an enthusiasm for lifelong learning

Engaging in collaborative partnerships with our families, community and world.
Mission Statement for [Maple] High School

Dedicated to excellence and student achievement

[Maple] High School is committed to equipping students with the tools they need for academic, personal and social achievement.

[Maple] High School enables every student to reach their highest potential by establishing a curriculum that meets or exceeds government standards for education; providing extracurricular programs that develop children's' mental, physical and social skills; and partnering with parents and the community to create an environment geared to the success of all students.
APPENDIX D: Ohio Revised Code Regarding Mandatory Attendance

http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3321.04

3321.38 Prohibiting failure to send child to school.

(A) No parent, guardian, or other person having care of a child of compulsory school age shall violate any provision of section 3321.01, 3321.03, 3321.04, 3321.07, 3321.10, 3321.19, 3321.20, or 3331.14 of the Revised Code. The juvenile court, which has exclusive original jurisdiction over any violation of this section pursuant to section 2151.23 of the Revised Code, may require a person convicted of violating this division to give bond in a sum of not more than five hundred dollars with sureties to the approval of the court, conditioned that the person will cause the child under the person's charge to attend upon instruction as provided by law, and remain as a pupil in the school or class during the term prescribed by law. If the juvenile court adjudicates the child as an unruly or delinquent child for being an habitual or chronic truant pursuant to section 2151.35 of the Revised Code, the court shall warn the parent, guardian, or other person having care of the child that any subsequent adjudication of that nature involving the child may result in a criminal charge against the parent, guardian, or other person having care of the child for a violation of division (C) of section 2919.21 or section 2919.24 of the Revised Code.

(B) This section does not relieve from prosecution and conviction any parent, guardian, or other person upon further violation of any provision in any of the sections specified in division (A) of this section, any provision of section 2919.22 or 2919.24 of the Revised Code, or division (C) of section 2919.21 of the Revised Code. A forfeiture of the bond shall not relieve that parent, guardian, or other person from prosecution and conviction upon further violation of any provision in any of those sections or that division.

(C) Section 4109.13 of the Revised Code applies to this section.

(D) No parent, guardian, or other person having care of a child of compulsory school age shall fail to give bond as required by division (A) of this section in the sum of one hundred dollars with sureties as required by the court.

Effective Date: 01-01-2004
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*Maple\(^{11}\) High School Handbook.* 2012/2013 academic year.


\(^{11}\) School district name changed


“Students Walk Out to Protest Security Policy; Many Are Upset at Lunch Break

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12 Name has been changed


Thomas, Tim\(^{13}\). Personal interview. 18 Dec. 2013.


White, Randy\(^{14}\). Personal interview. 27 Dec. 2013.

*Willow*\(^{15}\) *High School Handbook.* 2012/2013 academic year.


\(^{13}\) Name has been changed

\(^{14}\) Name has been changed

\(^{15}\) School district name changed