THREE CODES: A COLLAGED ANALYSIS OF DRESS CODES
AND ART CLASS ASSESSMENTS IN A U.S. HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation in
Art Education

and

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by

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Abstract

In this dissertation I examine two common practices within a U.S. high school: dress codes and grading within an art class. Viewing the practices as aesthetic judgments that are regulatory and disciplinary, I layer and collage them in text form and in visual form, to analyze their effects within school. I interviewed young women to gather their memories of dress in high school. I also solicited stories about their use of drawings both inside and outside of art class. These stories create a narrative of how girls present themselves through dress and art production according to their perceptions of what is important within the school structure; but also how they use dress and drawings for their own purposes of pleasure, informal communication, and achieving goals. I interviewed art teachers to gather similar stories; to develop a picture of the ways teachers imagine their performance and appearance are judged by themselves and others, and how this relates to the judgment of their ability as a teacher. Layering the responses shows how teachers and students are enmeshed in practices of shaping each other’s perceived value, partly through what I call school aesthetics. Using feminist methodologies allows questioning and disrupting of the traditional authoritarian position of the expert, and in turn of the teacher as expert. Pushing this disruption, I argue that the practices analyzed here produce divisions among students, and between teachers and students. Using Foucault’s theories as a methodology of “pointing-to” areas I believe are useful to examine, I raise the question of whether these repetitive dividing practices are intrinsic to our systems of education: routines that continually re-form students into hierarchies of knowers and non-knowers, those who belong and those who are outliers, as the knowledge and behavior deemed essential shifts with the perceived need for divisions.
The third code I explore regards the formal code of the dissertation. I consider the aesthetics of knowledge production and I present part of my research in the form of collage, zines, and comics; advocating non-traditional, multi modal forms of research as valid and potentially useful to high school students and teachers.

key words: aesthetics, art education, dress codes, grading, high school, knowledge production, zines.
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THREE CODES
& dress up dolls

Amy Albert Bloom
Chapter 1

Introduction to the Introduction: My Old School

In this dissertation I critique some practices that I witnessed and participated in, as both a student and a teacher, in Community Hills School. That is not the real name of the school; I changed it as I changed every name in this work—to protect the privacy of the participants. It is not my intention to demean or to disparage the school, because I appreciate the valuable good that Community Hills School provides.

Community Hills School is an average school. By that I mean it is like many U.S. schools that, as John Goodlad (1984) pointed out, are appreciated and thought useful by their communities (p.36). Goodlad observed that most U.S. citizens value their local schools while often viewing other schools as inadequate, based on generalized assumptions and on the negative review of public schools declared in the 1983 federally commissioned document, A Nation at Risk. That contrast is intensely present today; as we may paradoxically believe the enduring rhetoric that America’s schools are failing even as we may rate our local schools as satisfactory. It is worth examining who benefits by such rhetoric. Mercedes Schneider (2014) delves into this topic in her blog on current educational politics. While she observed the post-Katrina dismantling of the now nearly obliterated New Orleans public school system in which she taught, Schneider presented alternate views to the labeling of New Orleans public schools as unsalvageable. Schneider’s assessment of the Common Core State Standards explains one form of profiting by such detrimental labeling of public schools:

Moreover, the results of the CCSS assessments are designed to destabilize public schools by “failing” the schools, firing the “ineffective” teachers,
and handing over the “failing” schools to charter, voucher, and online education business operations. And massive amounts of student data are being collected to “inform” the entire corporate reform process, not the least of which involves the development and sale of CCSS curriculum (Schneider, 2014, from the section “My article in the Washington Post on January 23, 2014”, para. 44).

We like our community schools for many reasons, few of which have to do with their aggregated test scores. Schools reflect the challenges and possibilities of the neighborhoods and the larger society that surrounds them. That the communities, students, and staff of many schools consider their schools a worthwhile effort reflects the value of the U.S. public school system; a grand idea that works, in at least some way beneficially, for many students; as an educational, social, and community space. Also, for many students, school is a place to be while their parents work; and for some, a place to be among others because there is no one home, or there is no home at all.

On the other hand, I do not claim that every student gets a good deal or a fair shake from his or her local school, including at my school, and I address that within. I face the fact that there are some schools that are in dire need of improvement, and I don’t ignore the school-to-prison pipeline (Ferguson, 2000); in fact I think it operates on a small scale at the school I describe here. While I do not specifically focus on that phenomenon, I refer to practices, particularly what Michel Foucault (2003) calls “dividing practices”, which I believe are part of that process. But in the face of considerable and continued national criticism of our public schools by financially motivated parties, I still believe that public schools are worth saving. At the least, the
communities served should be the determiners of the value and future of their local school.

Writing a critique of school practices in the present environment that is so hostile to public schools leaves me fraught with misgivings. However, I do not believe the various privatization schemes proposed as the fix for the public school system provide solutions to the issues I examine within this research; in fact I believe such solutions likely exacerbate issues of inequitable treatment of students. It is because I believe U.S. public schools are valuable institutions that I believe them worthy of critique. Community Hills School provided me with the experiences to examine several educational practices that apply to many schools, and in this study I veer from close up, eye witness reportage to a meta/national view of the same practices that are kept in place by tradition and/or by nationally compelled policies. These are traditions and national policies that I believe need to be reviewed, questioned, and in some cases abandoned, and not just at Community Hills School, but at all schools. It is important to continually check if our claims for schools match the realities that are produced for students. That is, if schools are considered centers of opportunity for individual students to succeed, how well do they meet that idealistic goal? And if they do not meet that goal, are there practices that might be changed for the benefit of more students? I purposely do not define success or benefit in this instance as the closing of the so-called “achievement gap” or as improved test scores, but rather by various measures of success, most notably the goals a student develops for herself.

While some former students surely hate Community Hills School (and I know them) others love it, and still long for its halls (and I know them, too.) And many, like
me, fall somewhere in between, appreciating the educational opportunities we had; and looking back on many memories with fondness or regret, and similar in that respect to looking back on a life overall. School means good days and bad days but mostly just days; busy schedules filled with bells, detentions, pencils, computer screens, and grades; and highlighted by friends, favorite classes, sports, holidays, and eventually graduation. This makes up the “real world” of school; no less real than what comes later for graduating students, and no less significant than many other ways we spend our days. I thank Community Hills School for providing me with these experiences. I learned a lot there as a student, and even more as a teacher.

Also, it suddenly occurs to me that because this is a critical look at educational practices, I may not have made it clear that I really loved teaching at Community Hills High School, and at the city high school I taught in before that. I enjoy teenagers far more than I imagined I would before I became a teacher, and working with high school students—whether they liked art or not—was always interesting, busy, and mostly fun. Keeping in contact with young people keeps me optimistic for the future; and the one downside of working on a Ph.D. is that I missed working with all those smart, funny, and creative high school students. I also have the utmost respect for teachers. Indeed, it is my affection and respect, for students and for teachers, and my beliefs about how they should be treated, which motivated me to pursue this research.
Figure 1-1: Pink card reads: “Bottom of skirt. (arrow) Skirt measurement card. Student should be kneeling straight. Floor. (arrow)” Yellow card reads: “The genuine, bona-fide, two-inch skirt card. Made in Taiwan.” From The OnLion blog of The Lovett School in Atlanta, GA. in a post by student Antolina Ramirez (2008).
Introduction: Two Stories

In this research, I ask: What happens when texts about art education practice in a high school are layered with texts of disciplinary regulations, in this case, a school dress code? The question arises from my encounters as a high school art teacher. Two stories of my teaching experience serve as an introduction.

Kasey’s Dress

Kasey, a junior in high school, walks into homeroom, and her eyes are red-rimmed and teary. Kasey earns good grades and is seldom in trouble. She has plenty of friends, and today, Kasey and several of those friends wear matching outfits to school. They wear short, form-fitting, black dresses, and high heels, and their hair and make-up is carefully groomed and styled as though for a special occasion, like a dance. And this is a special occasion: it’s Halloween, and dress-ups of all sorts are a Halloween tradition in this school; one in which students may choose to participate or not. Homeroom is a sociable beginning of the day before classes start, so Kasey has time to tell us that she and her friends were rounded up and sent to the office because someone objected to their outfits. The principal told them to “go to the nurse,” and the nurse was expected to explain to the girls why their outfits caused a disturbance, and why their outfits were considered inappropriate. The school called the girls’ parents, and requested that they bring in different clothes for the girls. Kasey is confused, sad, hurt, and angry. She defends the nurse, who, Kasey says, was obviously trying to be nice to them yet was compelled to discipline them. In this moment, Kasey will decide whether to accept the judgment implied by the label of inappropriate, as she has been appraised today, through
her appearance, by school authorities. The other students in homeroom watch and listen, and it’s hard to tell what they are thinking. As some students share homework questions with each other, or look over at Kasey, who is still talking (and occasionally sniffling) with her closest homeroom friends, I wonder what lessons all of them are learning: Lessons about clothes, lessons about girls, lessons about bodies, and lessons about what the school tells them is good or bad.

Roxanne’s Drawing

For a class in observational drawing, I assigned a still life. I explained composition, proportions, and the use of value to achieve modeling. I brought in odd and unusual objects: toys and curios from a thrift store, in an effort to make the project more choice-based and interesting. I emphasized ways to capture the realism of the objects within the drawing. When Roxanne shows me her drawing, my training in art and my carefully planned rubric leads me to notice everything “wrong” with it. The objects seem out of proportion, the contours of objects are irregular where they should be—to my eyes—smooth, and the use of pencil seems hurried and messy. The shading is scribbly in some parts and it doesn’t seem to follow the logic of any particular light source. My first thought is: This isn’t a good drawing. It’s not sufficiently realistic. It appears unskilled. I imagine the local juried student art show would reject it. Knowing that, I likely would not submit it.

This is what Roxanne’s drawing depicted: She drew the feet and legs of an articulated wooden mannequin in the upper three quarters of the paper. Around the feet, as though forming a little fence, she drew five toy alphabet blocks. The skewed
proportions of these blocks were one of the things that distracted me as I sat grading
students’ work. I read Roxanne’s reflection sheet, in which she explained that her
drawing depicted an apology to her mother for something (unnamed) that Roxanne had
done wrong. Roxanne’s explanation made me examine her drawing more carefully. This
time, I noticed the blocks spelled out “SORRY.” Then I recalled that her brother had
recently mentioned their mother was in prison, for a reason he did not elaborate (nor did I
ask.) I paused. The school required me to assign grades. My rubric was a useful tool for
this purpose. Roxanne’s project did not quite “fit,” according to my rubric. But the
reverse was also true, and I realized that my rubric did not fit Roxanne’s drawing.

**School Aesthetics**

These events were moments of surprise and reflection for me: disruptions in the
common, everyday, routine procedures of school. Regarding Kasey, the disruption of the
disciplinary action was evident to the school “public”: to Kasey and her friends, to me, to
her classmates, and to some parents in the community. The disruption of Roxanne’s
drawing, however, was (in the moment) only in my own mind. Like the teacher who
decided to report Kasey’s outfit, or the principal who decided to discipline Kasey based
on her appearance that day, I had a choice to make: whether to judge Roxanne’s drawing
the way I had learned to judge good drawings and bad drawings, or whether to find a new
way of viewing her drawings, and thus expanding my ideas of what drawings, and ways
of valuing drawings, could be. One observation of this study is that both events are
examples of seemingly banal processes that can harshly impact some students, as the
regulations privilege form and procedure over the potentials of student desire and self-
direction. Further, I argue the effects of such judgments can extend beyond the disciplined or graded student: beyond Kasey and Roxanne, rippling outward and affecting a wider community. For example, how might the students witnessing Kasey’s discipline learn to judge the dress of other girls? How might Roxanne’s art making, and its potential to communicate with others, be enhanced or limited by my judgments? And recognizing the often public nature of assessment in a classroom (even if it is claimed to be private), how might my grading of Roxanne’s artwork permit (if I approve it) or inhibit (if I disapprove it) other students’ experimentation with their own art production?

Additionally, the events also interest me as examples of culturally based aesthetic judgments that are imbedded in school practice, and I believe this focus—the connections between discipline and art grading in high school, with both processes based on aesthetic ideals—is an important topic. Aesthetics refers to a broad range of philosophical ideas about—and practices of qualitative judgment about—beauty, style, and appearance, and the field of aesthetics is studied in many different contexts: within art and visual culture (Berger, 1972; Staniszewski, 1995; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001); its significance in contemporary art (Danto, 2003); as experience (Dewey, 1934); its historical antecedents (Giovannelli, 2012); as spiritually replenishing (hooks, 1995); encountered in daily life (Light & Smith, 2005); its commercial value (Postrel, 2003); within education (Eisner, 2005; Stewart, 1997); in 20th century female fashion (Mulvey & Richards, 1998) and as socially constructed (Lippard, 1990, 1995; Wolff, 1983).1 The everyday routine of clothing judgment is evidence of one type of aesthetic practice in schools. However, the

1 Note that these books overlap in their themes; and each is more complex than the description I assign to it. I merely attempt to show the attention to aesthetics in writing from multiple sources and perspectives.
aesthetic judgment of clothes, and the numerous issues surrounding clothes in school, is
handled, and thus taught, through disciplinary rules, punishments, and benefits granted,
rather than by educational methods such as studying the cultural and historical meanings
of clothes, or by reading, or by discussion. Similarly, there are aesthetic/critical traditions
in art education (a discipline that ostensibly includes the study of aesthetics) that
inculcate certain styles while rejecting others in a manner that denies the subjectivity of
such judgments, and fails to acknowledge their cultural and social genealogies. I search
my own education in western ideals of art\textsuperscript{2} to discover where my ideas of “good art”
originate. For example, the College Board website currently explains some criteria for the
judgment of high school students’ Advanced Placement art portfolios through a western
tradition of design: “We also look for students who are more aware of the principles and
elements of design in their work; these students tend to produce work that is not only
conceptually but also technically superior” (Sleat, 2013, para. 2). Thus, while the study of
aesthetics does not often appear in generalized lists of what school students need to learn
(although it is included in art education), aesthetic values are instilled in school through
means including disciplinary rules (as in a dress code) and in the art class through
curriculum, critique, and grading. Grading is often a numerically based system for
evaluating student work. Standardization, and its increasing importance\textsuperscript{3} among those in
power who control school funding and thus school policies, call for grading practices that
are objective, yet every grading system conceals sorting systems that are vastly

\textsuperscript{2} Western, in this dissertation, refers to cultural beliefs and practices originating in
Europe, including England, and embedded in The United States as well as Canada and
Australia. These four locations share many educational beliefs and practices.

\textsuperscript{3} See the January 2014 issue of \textit{Art Education}, which is devoted to “Standards and
Assessment” and Robert Sweeney’s insightful editorial.
subjective. For example, a critique of Sleat’s (2013) assertion about the advanced placement portfolio evaluations reveals numerous assumptions about student capabilities, about art, about aesthetics, and about quality. This intersection—of discipline, aesthetic judgment, grading, and the molding of students who are “ideal” in dress and in art production—is where my research interests lie. As I analyze what is revealed when texts about art education practice in a high school are layered with texts of the disciplinary regulations of a school dress code, I find a complex collage of effects and outcomes of these practices that I present in a multi-modal format. In this dissertation I use the dress code, and my curiosity about it, to explore:

- the dress code itself and its genealogy
- the position of girls in a public high school and how the dress code defines them
- the position of public school teachers and how they are defined as moral guardians and trainers of future employees, and compelled to discipline and inculcate certain values according to the code
- how my art teaching practices were formed by my own art education and by the visual culture that surrounded me, and how that created a code of aesthetics by which I judged student work
- an art format in a dissertation as an alternative form of communicating research
- and finally, a look at dividing practices and how they are enacted through the school codes.

These pieces shift and fit in many ways, and the work represents my own continually shifting questions, curiosity, and perspectives. I have completed one goal, and that is
to add the voices of some students and some teachers, as well as my own, to the current conversations about education in United States public schools.
Figure 1-2: Hasenpfeffer: Rabbit and Bear, parts one and two.
Figure 1-3: Hasenpfeffer: Rabbit and Bear, part three.
Chapter 2

Methods

Collecting Conversations and Analyzing Them With Caution

The methodology I used was guided by the question: What happens when texts about art education practice in a high school are layered with texts of disciplinary regulations, in this case, a school dress code? I follow a qualitative research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Eisner, 2005; Galman, 2013; Garman & Piantanida, 2006). I mean to tell a story about experiences in a public school that is open to thought, consideration, and interpretation rather than to collect numerical data and present quantitative findings. This is a political choice. Feminist research methods include situating one’s position. Hence, as a researcher, I declare (and admit) my non-objective perspective: I am interested in this research because I have personally witnessed the effects of dress codes and art grading practices in school, and therefore I believe it is important to critically examine them. This denies the idea that I can be completely objective and at the same time it asserts the importance of my experiences, feelings, and beliefs: three categories that are not traditionally considered to constitute valid research. It also rejects the idea that anyone, including quantitatively oriented researchers, can be completely objective. Every researcher has opinions and views the world, including deciding what to research, from a particular viewpoint. While we can respect, appreciate, and benefit from much traditionally done quantitative research, feminist theory continually questions claims of objectivity and neutrality in research in an effort to check for viewpoints that are privileged or questionable, and to highlight those viewpoints that remain unrepresented.
For example, one urgent focus of my research is to add the words of students and teachers, including my own, to the current critiques of public education, as these sources reference lived experiences that are neither solicited nor considered in big decisions currently in play in our national educational policies. The approach I choose is one that values telling a multi-vocal story from the view of the participants; as much as that can be accomplished. To that end, I listen to Reinharz (1992), who states that she tries not to “speak for” her participants (in her case, contributors) but to “present their voices” (p.16). I do my best to present the words of the girls and the teachers that I interviewed, though as I place them in collages and make an effort to contextualize them, I recognize I am at times using their words to present my own ideas. What I continually attend to is questioning (to myself) how they might feel about that presentation, and this of course is a flawed process. I did not actually ask them, let alone ask them at each step of my collaging and writing.

However, using an arts-based research form of collage to present this evidence is also purposeful in that regard. The collaged images do present the words of the participants, placed against other texts that have a presence in the world. They compose data that can be examined and re-examined by each viewer, and perhaps with differing reactions and meanings with each re-examining. This changing nature of collage may remain closer to the “truth” of what each participant said, in that their own ideas changed (in some cases) as soon as they said them and thought about them, and in that the collage reflects the cacophony of multiple, changing voices in the space of school and of the world at large.
Additionally I attend to girlhood studies, in which methodologies include “focusing specifically on age (girls, not women) gender (girls, not boys), and the social value of the texts (often regarded as having little value as in the case of fashion magazines, soap operas, diary writing, and romance reading...)” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008b, p. 17). In this case, it means I consider the girls’ fashion and dressing practices, note passing, doodling, fashion magazine reading, and other pleasurable girl-oriented activities as important. Girlhood studies helps to extend the limited definition of who is traditionally represented in feminist politics.1 Girlhood studies emphasizes probing the portrait of girls as always in need of protection, and questions topics that assume a perspective of moral panic. Researchers may, for example, disrupt the generalized view that playing with Barbies will damage a girl’s psyche (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 1997) or overturn the notion that the internet is an unsafe space for girls (Cassell & Cramer, 2007). This disruption is important when researching girls. As Shauna Pomerantz (2008) found when she planned her proposed topic of studying girls’ style in high school, many peers responded with previously formed opinions, as though they already knew everything about girls, and that girls’ activities were not worth studying:

Either girls were doing something good, or girls were doing something bad…either girls were powerful or they were powerless. But such dichotomies do not make sense given the intricacy of girls’ engagement with cultural forms…I wondered how this impression of girls gained such a hold in our society, and why it is that so many people feel justified in

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1 bell hooks (1984; 1994) for one, writes about the phenomena of middle and upper-middle class, white, heterosexual women dominating the leadership and power positions of second-wave feminism.
disparaging the things that girls do. Certainly, men’s, boys’, and to some extent women’s cultural practices are not given the same disparaging treatment (Pomerantz, 2008, p.34).

Considering each girl’s story also moved me from presenting research that felt too one-sided. For example, while I object to dress code practices that position girls’ bodies within school as dangerous and thus requiring control, talking to girls showed me that for some of my participants the dress codes produced positive outcomes, such as an official reason to avoid clothes they would find uncomfortable, or the chance to gain the approval that may accompany dressing according to the code.

Finally, to design this methodology, I use:

• interviews of students and teachers,
• anecdotes and memories of myself as a student and as a teacher,
• and a gathering of visual culture
• to create a narrative
• and a collage (arts-based research) of the practices I analyze.

Talking to Girls

I wanted to talk directly to girls who were former students, to hear what they had to say about their experiences with the dress code and their experiences with art class projects. I was interested in how their stories compared with my own memories and perceptions of each participant, and my own memories of the school. I interviewed eight girls: Veronica, Hannah, Rosemary, Molly, Taylor, Jana, Alissa, and Olivia. All are former high school students of mine; four of them are one and two years out of high
school, three had just graduated (I interviewed all in the summer), and one had completed her junior year, soon to be a senior in high school. I contacted each girl through Facebook. We met in a local lunch place of each girl’s choice, for pizza or sandwiches, and I recorded our conversations on a cell phone. I prepared questions about dress and drawing. The questions concerning dress were prepared to elicit stories about dressing for school. I was curious if (and how) the girls would describe practices of school dress; for example, planning outfits, purchasing or otherwise acquiring clothes, getting ready on a school morning, and the perception of being visible and judged on dress within school. I asked about uniforms to probe their potential reactions to the idea of further restriction in student dress. While most of the girls graduated and so did not face the possibility of uniforms, I was curious if they would choose them (in hindsight) or possibly judge them as a good idea for current students. I was curious about their drawing practices, too, in particular areas. I hoped that asking about depicting their own or fellow students’ clothes in photos or drawings would prompt further stories or memories about practices of school dress, and also elicit stories that would include descriptions of other’s dress, whether complimentary or critical. I also remembered observing that communicating with each other through notes, and drawing and doodling on the notes, was a common practice of girls in school.² This appeared fruitful as one way to access information about voluntary drawing practices for comparison to drawings required within art class. Finally, I asked about comparing art class work to the art work girls did on their own as a way to gauge

² And as a girl, I remember my own practices of communicating in school through writing notes and through doodling funny characters for friends.
their contentment (or discontent) with art class practices, while trying to avoid the imagined awkwardness of asking them if they liked my class.

In the interviews I asked the following questions, and allowed for emergent conversation around each.

1. Can you describe the clothes you typically wore to school?
2. How did you decide what to wear to school?
3. What did you know about the dress code while in school?
4. Would you have liked to wear a uniform in school?
5. Did you notice or talk about what other girls wore in school, and if so, can you give an example?
6. Did you ever draw or take pictures of what you or other girls wore to school, and if so, can you give an example?
7. Did you use drawings to communicate with others in school, such as doodles on notes, and if so, can you give an example?
8. What were the differences between drawings you did for art class requirements, and those you did for friends?

I transcribed the interviews in two forms. The first transcriptions contained both sides of our conversations; my questions and comments and the girls’ own responses and comments. In the second copy I removed my comments, so that the girls’ words seemed to flow without interruption. The edited copies provided me with their voices alone. This simplification helped me to notice repetitions, or to catch interesting ideas, and so helped me to pull out evocative parts of stories. From these I printed and cut up—with scissors—different quotes to use in collaged form. I used the guidelines of narrative analysis as part
of my method, to re-tell the story that each girl told about her experiences in school
(Galman, 2013). However, I eventually told the story, so to speak, through organizing the
responses according to similar topics, and I let them speak next to each other on the
collaged pages in the zine format.

Zines are small booklets created by hand in small editions, often Xeroxed, and
hand bound with staples or thread (Farrelly, 2001; Piepmeier, 2009). Zines are given
away or sold at very low cost; often one or two dollars, because the goal is not to make a
profit, but to communicate. They may include combinations of text, doodles, collage, and
personal content, and such handmade and irregular communicative art is judged
positively by the zine-trading community as “the messiness of the zine conveys a sense of
vulnerability and, therefore, a sense of openness and availability for human contact that
creates pleasure for the readers” according to Piepmeier (2009, p.67). Speaking about
feminist zines, Piepmeier explains that zine makers “revel in informality and threaten
conventional boundaries. They explicity reject the standards…of mainstream publishing
and the art world” (2009, p.73). The multiple scraps of text imitate the multiple voices
and perspectives the girls shared with me. I also include quotes from the girls and the
teachers in various parts of the dissertation.

Talking to Teachers

Heydon (2010) writes about being the subject of research while she was a teacher.
She considers the disconnection between how the researchers wrote about her and how
she saw herself; revealing the conflict between her own expertise and the researchers’
analysis of her. Like Heydon, I felt a gap between what researchers implied and what I
experienced as a teacher, as I was often on the receiving end of research, particularly during in-services.\(^3\) Such in-services often introduced newly packaged “best practices” that we were to incorporate in our work. Thus, questionable research was continually presented as superior to our insider expertise, and in ways that had a real and direct affect on our ability to control our daily work.

Therefore, as I interviewed fellow art teachers, I wanted my research to be respectful of their teacher-positions and teacher-experiences/expertise. I do not know that I achieved that in any special way, and at this point, I believe my respect for my fellow teachers is largely shown through my choice of topic: that is, questioning some of the aspects of our jobs that we are compelled to do. As with the students, I interviewed teachers to further complicate my own recollections and experiences with comparison to those of other teachers. I modeled the questions on the ones I asked students. I initially imagined asking teachers questions about their students’ dress and drawings, but instead decided to mine their own memories of dress and art making in high school. I felt this would be an interesting and useful memory project, as memory is a component of my own engagement with this research. I was also interested in teachers’ self-perception regarding judgment: How did they imagine they were looked at, regarding their own dress, and regarding their students’ art class production? Were these ways they imagined they were evaluated? I interviewed four art teachers, three females and one male: Karin, Maia, Anna, and Russell, all of whom I knew previously and professionally. I met the teachers in diners and cafés. After being out of public schools for two years, re-

\(^3\) See the section “Re-Education” for more on in-services.
connecting with teachers was valuable for my research. I asked them the following questions.

1. Can you describe the clothes you typically wear to school (as a teacher)?

2. How do you decide what to wear to school (as a teacher)?

3. Do you remember anything in particular about girls’ dress during your high school experiences? About your own dress?

4. Did you wear, or would you have liked to wear a uniform in high school? Would you like to wear one now?

5. Were drawing and/or art making important to you as a high school student? If so, in what way?

6. Do you currently use drawings to communicate with others in school (such as doodles on notes) and if so, can you give an example?

7. What are the differences between drawings and artwork you do when teaching, and those you do outside of teaching?

8. Do you feel that your quality as a teacher is determined by what your students create? And if so, do you think that judgment is a) your own opinion, and/or b) the opinion of others?

I present the teachers’ words in a zine format. This work relies on my own experience as a teacher, an inside informant, with an awareness of teachers’ experiences and positions in school. My experience as a teacher also generated my interest in collecting the teacher materials that inform the zine.
Autoethnography, and Teachers as Insider Researchers

Much of my curiosity about the topics of discipline, grading, art class judgments, and student dress developed from frequently encountering these topics in everyday conversations in and out of school, and these are stored in my memory. I collect dialogues that I have engaged in, overheard, and read, from sources including faculty rooms, principals’ announcements, students’ discussions, social gatherings, professional conferences, internet news sources, blogs, and newspapers. I run across these discussions, particularly those about dress, in such mundane locales as on a bus, in a grocery checkout line, at a hair salon, on bleachers in a gym, and in a pizza shop. A typical example: when parting with an acquaintance recently, unaware of my topic, she remarked about school, “Now if we could just get students to follow the dress code.” Another example: While I shopped for produce in my local grocery, a man I did not know called my attention to a young mother with two little children. She was choosing lettuce; she wore a bandeau top, shorts, and lots of silver chain-like jewelry, and she was heavily tattooed. He asked if I would ever wear “something like that to go to the store” as he invited me to notice and to critique her appearance. I laughed, answering (truthfully) that I would not look as good in it as she did. Most of the comments I hear are critical of girls and alarmist in their reactions, like these. Something always “needs to be done” about the way girls dress. If I agreed with the critique of each commenter (for example, “Yes, if only they would follow the dress code” and “No, I would never wear that to a grocery store”) I might not notice how many times these comments are made. But because I question these normalizing processes, I do notice them. Together, they form a collage of cultural expectations and knowledge, a sort of background noise to learning, teaching, thinking, and living.
As a former high school art teacher, I use memory work (including comparing my memories to my former students’) to draw on years of experience as a teacher, and I assert that this data is valuable. While Hubbard & Power (1999) and Kincheloe (2002) believe that K-12 teachers can be researchers, I argue that many teachers are already researchers, as they notice, question, try out theories, reflect, and try again, experimenting repeatedly as they teach and re/act on the job and in the moment to a multiplicity of individuals, responsibilities, and events. Furthermore, I maintain that my insider position as a high school teacher fills a gap in some research, including that of Brunsma (2006a, 2006b), Bettie (2003), and Pomerantz (2008), in which the researchers were not employees of the secondary schools they investigated. While each of these researchers provides valuable work (and work which inspires my own) they do not have a teacher’s sense of how the job requires a prescribed performance. Recollections of teaching are a large part of my data. As an insider, I ask, how did my position as a teacher compel me to discipline, to grade, to be part of a “team,” and to fulfill job requirements, and what did this produce, both good and bad? Therefore, I include memories and reflections as texts and layers of “the way things work” in school.

Texts & Gathering

Thus, collecting the texts for my research collage includes interviewing, listening, reading, searching images, and remembering. This gathering process is integral to my methodology. Beyond interviewing, and acquiring books and articles to read, the

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4 Notably, Bettie (2003) acknowledges the possibility of unfairly representing teachers (p. x).
gathering itself includes thought and analysis as I juxtapose and view a multitude of images, experiences, and information. I cast a wide net with the word texts. To begin, I refer to research from scholarly writings in art education, cultural studies, feminist theory, and post structural theory. I extend texts to include interviews, anecdotal memories and experiences, and popular discourse. Archival and contemporary sources include official documents (such as a school dress code,) blogs, zines, art education textbooks, fashion magazines, advice literature, children’s literature, advertisements, movies, comics, toys, and comments in social media outlets. Finally, I include visual images from some of these sources as well as from student artwork and my own drawings.

**Collage & Layering**

Because I layer texts to reveal meanings, I use collage to research, analyze, and present parts of my dissertation. In one instance, I visually annotate the actual dress code from the high school I worked in. The collage produces a complex network of evidence, research, and narrative. Arts-based research is a methodology that recognizes studio practice as a unique and valid form of inquiry (Irwin, 2013; Seigesmund, 2013; Sullivan, 2006, 2009). Additionally, collage is recognized as a communicative art medium and a form of inquiry (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008) and further, as a useful form of autoethnography for teachers (Eldridge, 2012; Milne, 2006).

Cartoonist and teacher Lynda Barry (2002; 2010) creates a comic and collage format in her narratives that forms compelling stories, complex yet accessible images, and art education pedagogy. Barry’s (2002; 2010) collage, narrative, and collection
processes resonate with me as productive acts and as a presentation of research; at times pleasurable, and at times uncomfortable as memories are accessed. Hillary Chute (2011) claims Barry’s remembering-spaces juxtaposed with present-tense spaces create a multi-time format that tugs one between now and then. Barry’s layering process is useful to me as I refer to the physical practice of collage: literally cutting apart and recombining portions of text (writing) and images with glue; mashing bits and pieces next to each other in a process that includes choices, recognitions, and connections, yet resists static judgments. While any writing or image holds a multiplicity of meanings depending on the reader/viewer, the layers and juxtapositions in collage help push the multiplicity to an extent that drives observation of new meanings, including paradox, irony, and the unsettling of taken for granted ideas (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). Barry’s comics, too, allow these useful spaces for different resonances and ideas to emerge. As Chute (2006) says of the comic form, “in the hybrid form of comics, two narrative tracks never exactly synthesize or fully explain each other” (p.342) and so a dialogic space is left open, a space in which new possibilities may be imagined. As with Barry’s juxtaposition of times and spaces, collage can indicate a genealogy, a “now and then” of the practices I research.

For example, in collecting vintage educational and popular media, I find texts that provide evidence of the construction of common ideals of gender performance that Judith Butler (1986; 1988) writes about. The 1960 Better Homes & Gardens Baby Book is filled with gender claims about infants, infants that appear, at least when diapered, as gender-
neutral. But he is a husky boy\(^5\) and she is a pretty baby. The text commands in the voice of the all-knowing expert: As he grows, he *will* prefer puppies and building things, and she *will* want to cook and play with dolls (Caudill, 1960). Thus Butler’s theories that gender is a performance and a role we are expected to inhabit from birth rather than a natural, given state, are demonstrated with actual documents. *Health for Life*, a 1961 junior high health textbook, declares that Sally’s four-year depression is all her fault; the result of wishing she were a boy. Sally rejects dances and dressing up in frilly clothes as silly, and she feels uncomfortable performing the role of girlness expected of her. While she achieves honors in academics and in athletics, the authors argue that she needs “to cultivate the feminine qualities that make women attractive…She could never really be happy until she succeeded in becoming interested in the things that girls care about.” (Gallagher, Goldberger, & Hallock, 1961, p.33-34). While these vintage texts show how far we may have progressed in understanding gender as a construction, they also indicate some roots of our cultural beliefs; a genealogy. Immersed as bits in a collage, the evidence of gender construction allows a pleasurable, thoughtful, or disturbing meditation on all they may mean to the viewer; as historical artifact or as resonant of our current situation.

Collage also resonates with “what goes on” in school; the entanglements of shifting, changing, and multiplying experiences and interactions of a single day. Like a collage, even the “average” day at school is filled and busy—with tests, romances, arguments, victories, failures, lessons, pleasures, punishments, and lunch. Through the

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\(^5\) For example, “This husky young man sleepily opens just one eye for his first portrait” (Caudill, 1960, p.58). And this: “What a charmer! With those big, dark eyes and a captivating smile, she’s the darling of the diaper set” (p.119).
juxtaposition of texts and visual images, the meanings sensed in collage can shift and vary, preventing a cemented certainty of conclusions or pat answers to complex topics. Thus collage allows each viewer a different connection, never truly settled, to their own experiences, past and present, and to the topics I research, and so encourages continual questioning and thought.

I also found inspiration in the collaged text of Leafgren’s (2009) *Reuben’s Fall*. In a text-based format—one paragraph of text a followed by a paragraph from text b, and so on—Leafgren layers portions of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish* (1977) with the work of an enduringly popular contemporary teachers’ guide to student discipline, Wong and Wongs’ *The First Days of School* (1998). The result is an unfavorable critique of the Wongs’ text, as the disciplinary measures they recommend for children neatly match Foucault’s historic recounting of coercive routines and harsh punishments in education. Extending this process, Leafgren’s method is useful as a way to compare art education texts with disciplinary codes. Her inclusion of popular cultural references such as song lyrics and movie themes also affirms their position in our common understandings; texts that inform our everyday, shared discourses. I borrow this technique as well.
Chapter 3

The Foucault Toolbox

I use Michel Foucault’s work (1977, 1980, 1982, 2003) as a hybrid of methodology and theory, appreciating the way he offered his ideas as a “toolbox” (O’Farrell, 2005, p.50). His work is accessible to me because of his examples, which are not always found in philosophical theory. In addition to his theories, it is his historical investigations of practices in school and outside of school that resonate with my own searching through texts of the past to compare them with the those of the present. In a process I call “pointing-to,” he draws our attention to historical practices somewhat like a comedian telling a story, in that he allows his audience to make the connection between what he points to—the comedian’s “did you ever notice?” and the paradoxes this observation brings to mind when compared to where we are now, or as the comedian might say, “so what’s up with that?” For example, Foucault finds French educational instructions from an 18th century guide on training the child’s body in learning handwriting. The students should:

hold their bodies erect...slightly inclined, so that, with the elbow placed upon the table, the chin can be rested upon the hand, unless this were to interfere with the view; the left leg must be somewhat more forward under the table than the right. A distance of two fingers must be left between the body and the table; for not only does one write with more alertness, but nothing is more harmful to the health than to acquire the habit of pressing one’s stomach against the table…The right arm must be at a distance from the body of about three fingers and must be about five fingers from the
table, on which it must rest lightly. The teacher will place the pupils in the posture they should remain when writing, and correct it by sign or otherwise. (Foucault, 1995, p.152).

We are left to make the connection to practices of controlling and positioning student’s bodies still in place today. Similar phrases may sound familiar: “We are not going inside until everyone is quiet and this line is straight.” “Eyes front, hands on your desk.” “All shorts, skirts, skorts and slits in the skirts must touch the bottom of the fingertips with arms fully extended.” Or as Hannah says about some art lessons in grade school, “there were just very specific instructions and you had to follow them. Even with exactly how to hold your paintbrush.” Because Foucault describes in detail the words of educators at that time, in an “aha” moment, we may recognize, with surprise or dismay, our commonalities with the past, and with practices we find outdated. While our contemporary educational practices are promoted as advanced, compassionate, and too humane to treat young people in an overly oppressive fashion, Foucault makes it evident that we are not entirely removed from the past but still connected to it in questionable ways; and in these examples, the teacher is positioned, as in the 18th century French writing instruction guide, as the disciplinary official; responsible for shaping each student to a predetermined ideal.

While I will return to Foucault’s theories in other sections, here I will introduce those Foucauldian techniques, as I interpret them, which are most useful for the scope of this paper.

1. If you want to understand something, research its genealogy, as Foucault does when he looks at the history of discipline in schools, prisons, and hospitals (1995). “It is one of my
targets to show people that a lot of things that are a part of their landscape—that people think are universal—are the result of some precise historical changes” (Foucault in O’Farrell, 2005, p.61). I look at the historical origins of social practices so I can investigate where our cultural thought comes from, and so that I can disrupt habitual practices that we neglect to question. One example is the dress code rule that boys remove their hats in school. Social and religious traditions about hats and head coverings for males and females vary widely, and it is worth asking where the dress code hat prohibition comes from, and why it is such an emphasized rule in some schools. (And by the way, I am still not sure where the hat rule comes from.)

2. Be suspicious regarding claims of rationality. “I think that the word *rationalization* is dangerous. What we have to do is analyze specific rationalities rather than always evoking the progress of rationalization in general” (Foucault, 1982, p.210, italics original). Foucault questions our uncritical reverence for the Enlightenment era, when scientific classification was invented. We may typically learn about this in school as a time when Westerners developed more intellectual capabilities and started looking at the world through scientific practices, which we have come to associate with intelligence and advancement. Foucault notes that people did not necessarily get smarter, but they did start collecting and organizing information in particular ways. Collecting and placing information in lists and charts is useful; a neat way to organize things in scientific disciplines. However, he cautions that this was only one of many possible ways of looking at information, and one that we came to believe is the only way. And once the fad of scientifically examining and classifying came into being, we used it everywhere, including in school report cards, medical charts (used by insurance companies as well as
doctors,) and Facebook profiles. Foucault’s suspicion of classifications results in part (as for many philosophers and artists) from seeing the horrors of the Nazi use of rationality, by which millions were murdered in the name of specious scientific classifications, and through efficiently designed, mechanized methods of extermination. He also questions rational classifications from the position of a gay man who learned that according to science, his life and his being were degenerate. So while Foucault has respect for ideas of rationality (after all, we have to start somewhere to get on with the day) he finds it useful to continually question rational ideas. He describes sitting in the space between the certainty of rationality and an openness to new imaginings; a sort of continual reflection and critique:

If intellectuals in general are to have a function, and, even more specifically, if philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers. (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p. 249).

3. Look for ways that rationalization leads to dividing practices and racialization. Dividing practices and racialization are two terms Foucault uses that refer to ways we tend to divide up populations and groups of people based on differences that we believe are natural, but that we actually create. One example is the idea of the “bad girl” and the “good girl”, which are created types that are repeatedly referred to in society and in school (such as in the 1850 novel The Scarlet Letter, and in a similar story, the 2010 movie Easy A; and as implied in a contemporary school dress code.) Foucault says of “what I shall call ‘dividing practices.’ The subject is either divided inside himself or
divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys’” (Foucault, 1982, p.208).

Using a Foucauldian approach, we can ask questions about the binary of “bad girls” and “good girls”: How else can we look at girls? How do these terms operate, and what do they produce, for girls, for the school, and for the entire community? Who benefits by these classifications? Why are girls in school judged by descriptions of sexuality based on their bodies and their dress?

4. And finally, observe how you are observed, and how you observe others, and thus how you become a subject. Subjectification is the ultimate result, for people, of scientific classification (Rabinow, 1984, p.10-11). Through observation that uses dividing practices and racialization, we come to know that we are being watched and classified, and we shape our behavior (subject ourselves) to that knowledge. For example, while we work, we consider how we will be judged as a good employee by those who are watching: perhaps by showing that we work fast, or by teaching the way we are told to, or by disciplining students according to a dress code. We may learn what kind of student we are though the grades we get or through messages of teacher approval or discipline, which the teacher decides through observation and examination. We also watch each other, and classify each other. So, as studies of even very young school children show, we may quickly learn to modify our behavior according to how those watching want us to behave, and we may inculcate our peers to do the same, for example by warning them that, “the teacher can see you” (Leafgren, 2009). The final result of subjectification is that we behave as though someone is always watching; we self-regulate, even when no one is
around. Subjectification is a useful concept for examining why we do some of the things we do, and who we have in mind when we do them.
Figure 3.1: “All shorts, skirts, skorts and slits in the skirts must touch the bottom of the fingertips with arms fully extended.” Print the cover image (left) and the pattern (right.) Cut them out. Glue the cover image to a 4 3/8 by 5 3/4 inch envelope. Fold the pattern in half and place it in the envelope.
Chapter 4

The Dress Code: Protecting Us From Girls’ Dangerous Bodies

At the end of this section is a visually annotated dress code. I look at school dress codes in general, and at Community Hills’ dress code in particular, by annotating the actual language of the code with text from other sources and with visual images in order to disrupt the linear list of rules and categories, and to encourage questioning of the code. Recently, Suanne Stein Day, chair of the school board at the Quebec school that art student Lindsey Stocker attends, remarked about Lindsey’s refusal to change her shorts at school: “You have to follow rules and just because you think a rule is wrong doesn’t make it so” (Solyum, 2014). I would argue that thinking a rule is right does not make it so, either, and that expecting students (or teachers) to accept rules without question should not be the purpose of schooling. In school, citizens should learn about and practice their rights. Additionally, understanding that rules can be wrong, and that if they are wrong it can be unethical to follow them, is another valuable lesson; and one that is useful to guard against tyrannies large and small. This would make sense as part of a study of the Civil Rights Movement, and of similar historical and contemporary political movements.

As my awareness of dress codes increased over time, I grew curious about exploring the institutionalized harassment inherent in the dress code. The dress code is complex in its construction and in its effects. It does not, for example, harm or oppress every student or even every schoolgirl. It can benefit some students, particularly those who are seen as dressing according to the rules of the code, and especially if the student attends to the unstated aesthetics inherent in the code’s design; for example, an upper
middle class aesthetic similar to what is described as “prep” style\(^1\) (Bettie, 2003). It does, however, often serve as a discriminatory device, and in this it affects several groups of students in particular, as well as any random student on any given day. Because this dissertation focuses primarily on girls, I concentrate on those aspects of the code that appear to reference girls’ fashion practices, such as “spaghetti straps.” Dress codes define what girls are in school, and the separate space they occupy within school, according to the wording within the codes and the disciplinary practices that result from the regulations.

The girls I interviewed, whether they cared about fashion or not, were determined by the school rules to be liable to disrupt the school depending on what they might wear on the basis of having female bodies. Whether they are funny, kind, outgoing, smart, athletic, loud, or quiet, through the dress code, the school defines girls as an ever-present threat. Girls’ bodies are viewed as bodies with the capability to distract boys from their studies, or make the girl a subject of extra attention, or make her, because of her very physicality, a dangerous challenge to the school’s controlled functioning. In defining the term *girlhood*, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2011) cites Robinson: “… the term ‘girl’ derives from the Old English word for dress or apparel, *gyrela*” (p.93). Dress codes still define girls according to their dress, as in school, a girl’s dress is a means of measurement, both literally–by skirt length and shoulder-strap width, and figuratively–by association with character traits. Dress codes aimed at girls today are often justified on the basis of

\(^1\) The Hill School is a local preparatory boarding school serving wealthy students (and some scholarship students) and featuring traditional customs–customs that require or are associated with an upper middle class income–as a selling point: clothes, long-established buildings, dining rituals, etc. are carefully described and highlighted on their web page. See The Hill School’s dress code description at http://www.thehill.org/RelId/636956/ISvars/default/Dress_code.htm
shielding studious boys from the temptation of girls, what the district describes as “a learning environment with minimal distractions” (Community Hills SD, 2010) or as I often heard from some administrators and teachers, “How can you expect boys to concentrate when girls are dressed like that?” The protection of schoolboys from sexually dangerously schoolgirls has a long history. Michel Foucault (1980) observes that the dawning 18th century concern with health and the investigation of individuals’ sexualities was in part to protect the upper classes by shielding the upper-class boy from illicit sex:

the schoolboy, the child surrounded by domestic servants, tutors, and governesses, who was in danger of compromising not so much his physical strength as his intellectual capacity, his moral fiber, and the obligation to preserve a healthy line of descent for his family and his social class. (p.121).

While girls are posed as sexual threats, boys’ dress or attractiveness is not seen as a potential distraction to girls; thus (paradoxically) girls’ own sexual desire is ignored (Fine, 1998; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Pomerantz, 2007.) While I concentrate on girls, it is important to mention other categories of students positioned as dangerous—or as non-existent—by the dress code. Feminist theory allows for this; as Olivia notes, “I think a lot of people think it [feminism] means you think females are better than men or that men are left out and I think they have the wrong idea there.” For example, Black and Latino males are often singled out by rules prohibiting styles originating in African American and Latino culture. These are described as “gang” attire, as though certain clothes, certain colors, and accessories are invested with the power to harm, and there is an assumption
that gang-associated styles, such as a bandanna, are evidence of membership in a gang and actual gang presence in the school. Crockett and Wallendorf (1998) write about dress codes; including student identification with styles in school, and ultimately how these may affect the marketing of clothing items. As they examine public discourse about dress codes as well as incidents and issues surrounding dress codes in school, they find a class-based rationale regarding estimates of danger, and who is dangerous, within schools: “Clearly, dress codes are implemented in schools to control conflict. Sociological analyses of conflict within a society often turn to the notion of class as a basis for interpreting the form of conflict” (Crockett & Wallendorf, 1998, p.120).

In other words, it is useful to ask which students are seen as dangerous, and whether the estimate of danger is based on their race, their gender, their socioeconomic status, their abilities; or possibly on the combination of any of these categories. The authors write about the totemic power of unified, symbolic gang attire to promote pride and cohesive membership in a group, and we can recognize that the totemic aspect applies not just to gangs’ attire but to any school group’s attire: for example, the school’s baseball team uniforms have totemic significance, as do male administrators’ suits and neckties. Indeed, “suits,” a common slang term for men in business attire, could easily be a gang tag. Concerning totems, Crockett and Wallendorf (1998) state that in each group, “…members draw their identity from it. As a totem, it is regarded as being worthy of respect and special attention by group members” (p.121).

Crockett and Wallendorf discuss the power of public ritual, through discipline enacted by the school, as a counteractive tactic to the power of totemic identification with symbolic clothing:
A school's banning of a gang's totemic representation serves as a ritual in the sense that it is a countervailing set of actions designed to bring that aspect of life under control. It is intended to convince everyone, through its visibility, that the school has killed the totem and therefore the gang's ability to draw identity from it. Thus, dress codes serve the latent function of acting as a countervailing ritual that publicly destroys the identity of the undesired group. (1998, p. 121).

To extend the idea, a school may label certain items of clothing as gang attire as a way to claim that the items (and the students that wear them) are dangerous, and as a way to inculcate the idea that the preferred and accepted mode of dress is the one the majority stakeholders are most comfortable with. As Fab 5 Freddy writes about Jamel Shabazz’s 1980s photographs of early hip hop street fashion, “…by acting calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough, the African American male shows both the dominant culture and the black male himself that he is strong and proud. He is somebody” (Freddy, in Shabazz, 2001, introduction).

When students, any students, enact this individualistic pose in school through whatever fashion they adopt, the result is a complex power struggle between authorities promoting what they are comfortable with (a familiar appearance, looking “like me,” and a subjugated attitude) and the students’ searches for markers of identity: their own school style, which may or may not align with the dress code. Kasey tried on the costume of an adult, attractively dressed woman, and her appearance was seen as usurping her role as young, innocent, in need of protection, and most of all, as an obedient dependent. Therefore it is useful to ask about any dress code: what groups does the code imply are
undesirable, and why? Or stated another way, it appears that we accept some gangs in school, and reject others, on the basis of subjective and questionable judgments.²

Additionally, the dress code affects all students in that it further defines gender-specific clothes. For example, several years before Kasey was disciplined for Halloween garb that was judged, in a sense, as “too female,” a group of boys were similarly disciplined for wearing skirts on Halloween. In this, the code³ passively limits the dress choice of cross dressing students, and because the codes are ambiguous in certain areas (while specific in others) such students exist in the margins of school practice, as students observe both the discipline meted out to boys who wear skirts on Halloween, and the lack of recognition of cross dressing or transgendered students in any form of supportive or even neutral acknowledgement. Additionally, heterosexuality is passively recognized as the only acceptable orientation for students (as well as teachers) in that while sexuality is monitored through female-specific clothing codes that refer to sexuality, gay and lesbian youth are non-entities, since the dress codes permit nudity in same-sex locker rooms.

Thus the language of the codes serves to create some types of students, such as bad girls, and ignore others, such as gay and lesbian students. Judith Butler refers to this disregarding as symbolic violence; a violence that is not necessarily delivered through punches or bullets (but can be) yet discounts some human lives as non-existent, as she calls it: the question of “bodies that matter” or “grievable lives” as opposed to bodies that

² And sadly, we may consider that recent (and too numerous) school shootings seem to have no connection to any sort of banned clothing items, that is, the assailants often resemble the majority culture of the school.
³ In this case, the rule was unstated in the official code but enacted in the moment by agreement among school authorities.
do not matter, and ungrievable lives. These are the lives, the students, which we do not acknowledge (Butler, 2009).

Additionally, and importantly, my focus on girls and the subsequent use of many vintage images lead to an appearance of white, middle class, heterosexual girls as the norm of this dissertation. While this is the norm inculcated within the school I research, it is not the status of all girls, or of all the girls I interviewed. In other words, many girls are entangled within school aesthetics by more than one marker of evaluation; and by more than gender, or one notion of girl as gender.4

So while I focus on girls, as I attempt to paint a picture of school life I include stories of varied genders and identities, as everyday life entangles us all. Ordered to “dress and groom themselves… In a manner which, in the opinion of staff and administration, does not interfere with classroom instruction and the operation of the school” (Community Hills SD, 2010) who will get in trouble and who will escape trouble is a daily lottery in school. To “interfere with classroom instruction” or to expect “minimal distractions” (Community Hills SD, 2010) presents the idea of education as a regulated, formal practice, in which learning can only happen while wearing certain clothes and behaving in a certain orderly way. Of course this is about control: a standard of quiet and apparent focus that the school has determined is ideal. Simply thinking about all the ways we may learn, especially outside of school where we have a choice, disrupts this notion. Some of us like quiet, stillness, and order; others of us like music, a cell phone at hand, and a location near a window; others of us need to move, tap our fingers, and jiggle a leg, or down M&Ms as a reward for every page we read—and on and on. But

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4 Thanks to May Alkharafi for clarifying discussions on this topic.
the ideal of the quiet, orderly classroom, all seats facing the teacher, is a tradition that works for school authorities who desire the appearance of control and the semblance of learning.

**Sweatshirt Monsters**

The following dialogue is from an early 1960s television show called *Leave it to Beaver*. The episode is titled “Sweatshirt Monsters” (Connelly & Mosher, 1962). It shows that the idea of learning in school as requiring a certain costume as well as completely submissive and orderly behavior is an enduring belief, illustrated here from one area of the U.S. cultural past. Beaver, AKA Theodore Cleaver, the main character of the show, is a young boy who in this episode is in about 7th grade. He and his friends buy a new fashion fad: sweatshirts painted with big monsters on the front, in the style of Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, a popular artist of hot rod painting at the time. They make a pact to wear their sweatshirts to school the next day; a somewhat daring idea. All the boys are stopped in their plans by their parents the next morning, through various reprimands, and with angry reactions verging on violence. Richard’s mother scolds him and pokes him in the chest, Alan’s father grabs Alan’s books and throws them down, then pulls the sweater roughly over the boy’s head, shoves it in his hands and angrily points to the bedroom, pantomiming the demand that his son change his shirt. And as “Whitey” is ready to leave

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5 I use this show, with its male protagonist, twice in this dissertation. *Leave it to Beaver* provides an example of the depiction of school norms in the history of American culture, and while aspects of the show appear stilted by today’s standards, its comic storytelling relies on fairly “realistic” situations and conversations that reflect how schools operate and how children talk, or at least how they did in mid-20th century middle class America. Beaver is a boy, yet his dress code experience here and his IQ test experience detailed in a later chapter are similar, though not identical, to what might be experienced by a girl.
his house, he is pulled backwards inside the front door by his collar; his face expressing surprise. Beaver’s parents, angry but slightly more calm, also make him change his shirt before school.

The sweatshirts hit a nerve with all of the parents, and the idea of wearing them to school is seen as shocking; the parents’ reactions seem proportionate to finding out their child committed a crime. In this instance, the crime was altering their normal school dress; the crime was non-conformity with the majority. It’s important to note that Leave it to Beaver was atypical for family sitcoms at the time in that while it presented an “ideal and average” family that was middle class, white, and suburban-dwelling, the writing was superior and the shows often featured the parents questioning their own authority and disciplinary choices, and treating their two sons with a compassion that was progressive for the time. Beaver, wanting to be loyal to his friends and the pact they made, secretly puts on his sweatshirt in the garage, without his parents’ knowledge. The following happens when Beaver enters his classroom wearing the sweatshirt.

Mr. Collins: Class, come to order.

Beaver enters, and the class laughs.

Mr. Collins: Class? Class, Class! All right, Theodore. You’ve succeeded in disrupting the entire class. Now, may we have your cooperation?

Beaver: Oh, yes sir. (Beaver still stands by his desk.)

Mr. Collins: Well, we’re waiting.

Beaver: Oh. (He sits down.)

Mr. Collins: Theodore, that isn’t what I meant. Will you please stand?

Beaver: Yes sir. (He stands.)
Mr. Collins: (Annoyed) Now, take it off!

Beaver: What? (He looks uncomfortable.)

Mr. Collins: That ridiculous sweater or whatever it is you call it! (He gestures towards Beaver dismissively.) Take it off, so that we can resume our studies.

Beaver: Yes sir. (He reaches for the hem of his shirt and stops.) But– I don’t think you’d want me to do that.

Mr. Collins: Why not?

Beaver: Because, I got nothing under it but me. (The class laughs.)

Mr. Collins: All right, Theodore! Just take yourself down to the principal’s office.

Beaver: Yes sir, but–

Mr. Collins: Without any further discussion.

Beaver: Yes sir.

In the Principal’s office:

Ward Cleaver: Mrs. Rayburn? (They shake hands.)

Mrs. Rayburn: How do you do. Mr. Cleaver, we dislike putting parents to this trouble, but sometimes it becomes necessary. Sit down, please.

Ward Cleaver: Thank you. Well, I uh understand Beaver has broken some sort of rule.

Mrs. Rayburn: Mr. Cleaver, did you approve of the way your son looked when he left for school this morning?

Ward Cleaver: Yes, as I recall, he looked all right to me.

(There is a knock and Beaver enters in his sweatshirt.)

Mrs. Rayburn: Come in, Theodore.

Ward Cleaver: (Looks stricken) Beaver!
Beaver: Hi Dad.

Ward Cleaver: Mrs. Rayburn, I assure you, we had no intention of Beaver coming to school looking like this.

Mrs. Rayburn: Well, I wouldn’t think so.

Ward Cleaver: Beaver, didn’t I tell you to put on a shirt this morning?

Beaver: Yes sir. I put on a shirt.

Ward Cleaver: Well then how did you manage to get to school looking like this?

Beaver: Well I took the shirt off, and I guess this was underneath.

(Ward looks annoyed and incredulous.)

Mrs. Rayburn: Mr. Cleaver, you must be aware of the school’s position. This manner of dress only tends to detract from the reason why we’re here. To get an education. Theodore, I imagine when you went to the classroom in that apparel (she looks him up and down) there was quite a bit of tittering among the other students. (She nods, almost as a signal.)

Beaver: Yeah, the guys tittered pretty good. (He nods, too.)

Mrs. Rayburn: Theodore, what do you think it would be like if everyone in the school wore something like that?

Beaver: I guess it’d be kinda gruesome.

Mrs. Rayburn: I think it would be pretty gruesome, and I don’t think we’d get very much work done.

Ward Cleaver: (Gets up) Yes, well. Mrs. Rayburn, I’m very sorry this happened. But I assure you it won’t happen again.
Mrs. Rayburn: I’m sure it won’t. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Cleaver. (She reaches her hand to shake his.)

Ward Cleaver: Not at all.

Mrs. Rayburn: Theodore, you have plenty of time to go home and change your clothes and be back for your afternoon classes.

Beaver: Yes, Mrs. Rayburn. (They begin to leave.)

Mrs. Rayburn: By the way, just what is that on the front of your shirt?

Beaver: Oh, it’s just a regular Martian with three eyeballs.

Mrs. Rayburn nods and makes a gesture as though saying, “oh,” but making no sound.

Ward, looking annoyed, physically guides Beaver to the door by his shoulders.

The logic in the adults’ arguments is evidence of the effective practices of normalization. Brady and Schirato (2010) explain that normalization becomes so familiar to us that "the everydayness of those mechanisms is so difficult to see ... the force of authority accumulates through its very repetition" (p. 68). Beaver’s sweatshirt is considered offensive and transgressive, but more importantly, as a hindrance to learning. Learning, in this instance, has to do with obedience and quiet listening, but also presenting an approved of, conforming, and normalized appearance. Learning is described as work, and any interruption or suggestion of a different method of work is taboo. For example, Mr. Cooper could have used Beaver’s shirt to discuss Ed “Big Daddy” Roth’s newly popular artwork, Roth’s entrepreneurial skill, or hot rod design and culture. However, this alteration of the educational script would also be a transgression.

The reactions of the adults and their words indicate the inter-community pressures of normalization. Note that Ward is compelled to make Beaver change because he is
embarrassed (as well as angered) by Beaver’s appearance. Ward is also in a sense disciplined by Mrs. Rayburn; after all, he too is summoned to the principal’s office. The episode shares with Community Hills’ dress code the idea of learning in school as a narrowly defined, tightly controlled, conforming procedure; and it demonstrates Foucault’s theory of subjectification in that everyone observes and disciplines each other.

Shauna Pomerantz and Bronwyn Davies (2008) argue that girls are agents in creating their own identities, not oppressed slaves of media messages who blindly or submissively follow institutional orders or marketing gimmicks. This describes the girls I interviewed and taught. Nor are girls completely oppressed by dress codes, as high school student Lindsey Stocker demonstrated when she protested the shorts rule at her school. Too, several of the girls I interviewed mentioned that they sometimes wore spaghetti straps even though the rules forbade them. Davies discusses girls’ clothing choices in the forward to Pomerantz’s book about how high school girls establish their identities through dress. She notes the girls choose styles with the awareness and the intention to position themselves: “They become this and not that. They are located here and not there” (Davies in Pomerantz, 2008, p. xiii, italics original.) Yet it is also worth examining how much freedom girls do have to choose. While it is important to pay attention to the agentic power of girls, and to avoid the limited binary of victims and oppressors, I don’t want to ignore the strength and the ever-present reality of the dress rules; and how they are enacted and reinforced through daily examinations, scoldings, and disciplines such as those in response to Kasey’s dress and Alissa’s friends; those Alissa calls the loud girls; the “crazy” girls.
Lately more news articles like the one featuring Lindsey Stocker’s situation appear about girls challenging the school dress code rules that I talk about within this work. It is promising to see young girls stand up for themselves in the face of such shaming. Perhaps this is due to third wave feminism, with its reclaiming of female sexuality as something intrinsic and not shameful, or just the ubiquity of so much information and so many outlets of all kinds in media that surrounds girls in the U.S., resulting in access to feminist influenced writings and resources. Maybe media reports about girls challenging school dress codes have a snowballing effect when other girls read about them, in that they give girls an alternate script to follow. However, each of these challenges also indicates schools where the harassment is still, after all, in place, and condoned by the institution.

When I taught, I noticed that girls would often complain about being disciplined by the dress code; not by objecting to the code itself, but by claiming unfair treatment; as Veronica said to her assistant principal, “Really? ‘Cause I can see girls’ underwear, and you can’t see mine, ‘cause I wear shorts under my skirts. So if you’re going to tell anybody, tell them, not me!” In these instances, the girls are likely noticing actual unfair treatment in who gets disciplined and who does not. However, it may also mean that they have learned at some level not to question the idea that schools need dress codes for girls. A more powerful argument than “That’s not fair” is “That’s sexual harassment.” But such a strong challenge with strong words is risky for a girl to attempt, considering her

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6 “Talking with 13-Year-Old Leggings Activist Sophie Hasty” (Hess, 2014); “Shouldershaming” girls at Utah high school: why the big cover up?” (Jonsson, 2014); “Quebec teen “shamed” for jeans shorts becomes latest in wave of teens protesting dress code” (Solyum, 2014.)
subjected position in school. Not every girl would be comfortable with asserting herself in that way; particularly considering the storm of discipline, the local (and perhaps media) attention it will generate, and the possibility of further discipline—as for Beaver Cleaver, a girl’s parents and the community may well side with the school. Sexual harassment, however, is an accurate label for the process enacted here. Indeed, reading Lindsey Stocker’s description of two assistant principals ordering all the students in her art class to line up against a wall, and then ordering the students to stretch their arms down at their sides, and then scanning their bodies and their shorts length, is uncomfortably reminiscent of what an editor of an adult magazine might do when scanning the bodies of potential models. If we imagine the same discipline enacted with adult employees of the school district—that is, lining up administrators, teachers, and other staff to check their legs for coverage, perhaps the sexual harassment is easier to see. In other words, no girl (or boy) should be disciplined in that way.
Figure 4.1: The Annotated Dress Code Begins on the Next Page.
In United States schools, dress codes are a common feature of disciplinary texts and handbooks. A list of rules and guidelines, the codes focus on what students are not allowed to wear in school. Changing over time, the codes expand to meet current fashion fads that schools find objectionable.

The language in the codes that concerns female dress spotlights girls' bodies as sites and sights of sexuality that must be observed, covered, and controlled.

Foucault (1980) notes that prohibition (or the constant focus on a prohibition) can cause the multiplication of that which it is ostensibly intended to prohibit; in this case, sexuality: "Take the secondary schools of the 18th century, for example. On the whole, one can have the impression that sex was barely spoken of at these institutions. But one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation" (p.27).

Community Hills High School
Dress Code 2009/2010

Dress codes are often justified with the reasoning that certain types of clothing "interfere with classroom instruction and the operation of the school" (Community Hills High School 2009-2010). This notion discounts the unintentional instruction inherent in the dress code itself, and in its application, and its implied values. A dress code is a passive curriculum.

I look at how dress codes in United States high schools create types of girls through a focus on their sexuality, determining the bad girl and the good girl.
In junior high school a teacher chastised me in the hallway for wearing a short skirt. She thought my short skirt was inappropriate. I thought her interest in my skirt length was inappropriate. When I started teaching, I encountered this same interaction repeated, again and again, between teachers and students: discipline and punishment for dress, met with resentment, defiance, or worse, humiliation. While I had not thought about my experience for years, as I saw more conflict over the dress code, my memory served to remind me to consider the student’s perspective.

The nature of dress codes requires teachers to critique students based on gender, race, and class distinctions. This encourages discrimination and disrupts the trusting relationships that are essential for a positive school environment.

Dress codes are also described in language that is specific, including numerical measurements of exposed skin: *straps less than two inches wide*. A paradox exists between the desire to control girls’ sexuality while at the same time not wanting to discuss the sexuality itself, so it is avoided by labeling it in vague yet disciplinary terms.

The aesthetic directions of appearance are fashion, and fashion is always changing. The aesthetic dictates are dependent on variables including currently fashionable styles, the weather, comfort, age, a particular girl’s figure, and the varied opinions of the society she moves in.

The study of aesthetics in art class creates an opening for the study of dress: not only fashion design, but an investigation of the formal qualities, the meanings, and the cultural customs of dress in and out of school. This would include a critical examination of who benefits, and who is disadvantaged by dress codes in schools.
Proper Dress Procedures

The students of Community Hills High School shall dress and groom themselves:

1. In a manner which, in the opinion of staff and administration, does not interfere with classroom instruction and the operation of the school.

2. In a manner which complies with the health and sanitary standards required or desirable for a community or an educational environment.

3. In a manner which complies with all safety regulations set forth by this school and state governments. When representing Community Hills School District as a participant in athletic, scholarship or club activities, attire should be in accord with the specifications of the coach or sponsor and school dress philosophy.

Uniforms are often proposed as an antidote to the concern about dress in schools, yet uniform policies become another sight for the multiplication of discipline. Brunsma (2006), has consistently found that they do not have any positive demonstrable effect on the typical reasons for their adoption, including desired improvements in “academic achievement, attendance rates, behavioral and disciplinary problems, school climate, and substance use” (p.15). However, he finds that the initiation of uniforms at one of the researched schools had an unexpected effect on discipline infractions. A new disciplinary room was created to handle the increase in disciplinary actions relating to uniform violations.

Shore and Wright (2000) note the rise of corporate business methods dominating the working landscape of professors and teachers (and students) in the guise of a better outcome for all. Noting that Foucault warns of such disguised technologies, Shore and Wright observe, “These regulatory mechanisms act as ‘political technologies’ which seek to bring persons, organizations, and objectives into alignment” (p. 61). Indeed, the khaki slacks and the polo shirt with an embroidered school logo typical of many school uniforms matches the uniform of workers at Best Buy and other businesses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSJHS 9th grade Semi-Formal Fashion Do's and Don'ts!!!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DO</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear spaghetti straps or strapless dresses that aren't too low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear a one piece dress or a two piece dress that covers the stomach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear long dresses or dresses with length just above the knees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During finals week in early June one year, a vice principal at the high school where I taught decided to enforce a rule forbidding spaghetti straps on shirts. He entered the room where I was proctoring and handed out extra-large, second-hand men’s tee shirts to several young women wearing tops with skinny shoulder straps, saying loudly, “Put it on!” How the girls felt after this, how it affected their performance on the two hour final exam they were starting, and who was chosen to be disciplined and who was not (the list of potential infractions in a typical high school is long) are questions worthy of consideration.

A common discussion point surrounding girls’ dress in schools centers on how girls’ dress affects boys. The image is one of hard-working boys doggedly pursuing their studies until a girl in a short skirt tempts them to lose their focus. This commonsensical belief relies on several political stances. It positions girls as sexual temptresses. It privileges heterosexuality as the only sexuality in school. It favors the treatment of boys over girls because it ignores the reverse possibility, that boys might tempt girls away from their studies, an omission that denies girls’ sexual desire even as girls are seen as a sexual threat. It privileges the importance of boys’ studies over girls’.
Because our school district wants to ensure a learning environment with minimal distractions, the following guidelines will be enforced:

Section I: General

1. Spandex or skin tight outfits of any type of material are not permitted unless an accompanying top covers the hips, buttocks and cleavage in an appropriate manner.

2. Excessively baggy clothing that poses a safety hazard is not permitted.

3. Undergarments should not be exposed. Pajamas/night clothes are not permitted.

Covering requirements, probably the most common regulation of dress codes for females, are purported to desexualize the appearance of the female body. Yet as Higonnet (1998) shows in her examination of popular images of children in western art such as Cherry Ripe, ensuring the covering of the body (even the body of a child) does not prevent the perceived sexuality of the body; it may actually invite such association (p.132). Coverage may be just as sexualizing a practice as disrobing; that is, covering one's self to prevent a sexual appearance paradoxically acknowledges and prioritizes the sexual body that is covered.

Carrie, a student who called another student a whore, told me solemnly, “You need to tell her that her skirt is too short.” When I pointed out that Carrie’s skirt was the same length as the girl she was reporting, she stared at me blankly, as though I missed the point. And I had, although Carrie did not fully comprehend our situation, either. In looking back, I realize that skirt length was only a device to help her locate and separate herself from a reviled position in school, an everyday struggle for all female students. McWhorter (1999) states, “We were all being scanned constantly for information regarding our sexuality, we were all constantly scanning ourselves” (p.24).

Foucault (1982) asks a question inspired by Kant: “What’s happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living? (p. 216). To question dress codes requires foregoing the embedded belief that they are somehow necessary, and unearthing how we arrived here: believing them to be required.
Rubinstein (2001) notes that modesty in fashion is thought to have originated (within western history) in Christianity. While early Christian men and women donned similar shapeless robe-like garments that reflected an appearance of somber sexual asceticism, during the Renaissance, ideas of individuality and the flaunting of accumulated wealth inspired fashionable clothes. Men wore tights and codpieces, and women donned cleavage-enhancing dresses, as fashion celebrated the body, clever design, and bright colors.

After the Enlightenment, in the 19th century the ideal of the rational man, unemotional and focused on work, took hold in the shape of the business suit: "the prototype of the contemporary business suit, signifying rationality and self-restraint" (p. 44). Male suits ossified into this ideal form, changing little in over one hundred years.

Female dress remained fashion-oriented, as the spheres of male and female were separated into ideals of work/seriousness for men and home/emotional life for women. Women became decorative displays of their male family members' wealth. 

Rubinstein (2001) also notes the power of "public memory," (p.5) the storehouse of images one gathers in society: the common exposure to depictions of people in art, photographs, and illustrations, which becomes a visual library for our thoughts.
Fear of "gangs"—bandannas, colors, low-slung pants and caps are seen as evidence of potential criminality.

Indeed, the "interfering" elements may refer more to a student deemed dangerous to the school's mission, than a particular garment: a bad girl; a gang member.

In Goth culture, boys dress to disturb and shock, but girls are expected to appear "pretty" (Brill, 2008). "Yes," says Veronica, "At Hot Topic, it's getting hard to find girls' trips (baggy nylon pants) and they have lots of these little dresses and corsets."

Geruluk (2008) argues in support of the right of a girl to wear an hijab to her school. Geruluk decides that this means the hijab is an integral part of the girl’s identity. Yet she critiques the goth girl whose fashion, Geruluk claims, is not "essential" to the young woman’s identity (p.92).
Writing about the Victorian feminine ideal, Gorham (1982) says, “Out of this uneasiness, this unspoken recognition that the ideal must, by its very nature, remain unattainable, arose a series of parallel images, images that were negative in character” (p.37).

Section II: Tops

1. Tops may not be “low cut” or exposing. Off the shoulders, shirts/tops, midriffs, and backs are not permitted to be exposed.

2. The following are unacceptable school attire:
   a. Tank tops/muscle shirts
   b. Spaghetti strap/halter/mesh tops
   c. See-through blouses or shirts
   d. Tube tops/crop tops
   e. Any straps less than two inches wide

3. Any top that is skin tight or allows the midriff, cleavage or undergarments to be exposed is not permitted.

4. Coats, jackets or garments designed for protection from the outside weather are not permitted to be worn in school.

Unfortunately, girls can also achieve a medium of status by conforming to dress codes. By fulfilling her role as a woman to dress code and the behavior of others, girls may gain status. In the 1947 educational film, *Are You Popular?*, the authoritarian narrator states that Ginny “parks in cars with boys at night” and that “Girls who park in cars are not really popular.” Ginny tries to be friendly with a group of students in the cafeteria, but they reject her. One boy at the table actually sneers at her, and we see viewers are invited to have the same harsh judgment of Ginny. There is vocal agreement of the entire table on the disparagement of Ginny’s character. Caroline, however, has the table’s hearty approval, even though she is a new student and they don’t know her well. The positioning of some girls in school as bad girls remains to this day, and it is harsh. For a while I wondered why many of my female students called each other sluts, or were so quick to judge each other on the same standards that could be used to hurt them. In my eleven years of teaching high school, I saw several girls shamed and publicly humiliated for sexual activity, for example, by rumors following a weekend party. In all the shaming, I never once heard the name of any boy involved, just as in the old film *Are You Popular?*, in which none of the boys at the table are disparaged for being in a parked car with Ginny.
I am standing in the hall with two friendly, energetic teachers. Down the hall, Michael, a student, turns a corner and comes towards us, quickly removing his hat when he sees us. My coworkers immediately start an angry conversation with each other. “Did you see that? He took off his hat when he saw us.” “Soooo disrespectful! It never ends.” We perceived the situation completely differently. Knowing Michael, I knew that his appearance was extremely important to him. His hat was part of his “look”, and he was very self-conscious. I saw him taking off his hat as first, avoiding discipline (a sensible move) and second, showing respect to the teachers in his presence (he said hello politely, and he could have left it on and argued defiantly with their certain demand to remove it.) At such times I longed for a more nuanced reflection and conversation about our dress code. Foucault (1977) states, “It is the fact of constantly being seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (p. 187). The dress code, in Michael’s case, allowed teachers to make him a subject of constant observation and discipline.

Black and Hispanic students such as Michael were disciplined more often, and more harshly, for such infractions. A white member of the baseball team could easily get away with wearing a hat, or would receive a milder, even friendly, reprimand. Our required No Child Left Behind statistics reporting on discipline, broken down by race and presented at in-services, proved this. Did anyone in the school even know where this rule and custom about hats originated historically? As an educational institution, were we being intellectually curious and engaging students in such questions, or just enforcing norms whose origins we did not even understand?

Foucault looks at how race is constructed as an idea based on the desired protection of a group of people. As Walshaw (2007) notes, “Discourses do not merely reflect or represent social entities and relations, they actively construct or constitute them” (p.15). In other words, social groups could also separate themselves by hair types instead of skin color, or food preferences rather than gender. Difference is created by our language and attention, rather than discovered as something natural.

At the same time, I could see that teachers felt compelled out of fear to enforce the rules, and so chose not to question them. In the words of Paulo Friere (1993), “Fear of freedom of which its possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts” (p. 20). Yet what did this mean for Michael’s place in our school? He was seen as bad, and was unwelcome, and his hat, for him a treasured status symbol, but for his teachers a symbol of bad character, was the focus of the struggle.
Section III: Pants/Shorts/Skirts/Skorts

1. Pants, shorts, skirts and skorts must be secured and worn no lower than the hip. Low riding/sag style is not permitted.

2. Length of pants should not extend beyond the bottom of the shoe and should not drag on the floor.

3. Tear-away pants (snap pants) and boxer shorts worn as outer wear are not permitted.

4. All shorts, skirts, skorts and slits in the skirts must touch the bottom of the fingertips with arms fully extended.

5. Cut-offs of any type are not permitted.

Yet my first instinct was that she “needed” to be covered; that she was in danger, or dangerous herself. It is a notion I continually rejected as a teacher as I began trying to see things through my students’ eyes: what they thought was “pretty”, teachers saw as “inappropriate.” What they saw as “fashionable”, a teacher labeled “slutty”.

If the students ever said what they really thought of what we wore, we adults would have been stunned, hurt, or just infuriated by their rudeness. But we were not so considerate or polite as they were.

Teacher

I mean I don’t think I’m super fashionable, either, so I think I just want to look nice. I. I don’t aim to be Miss Vogue, or something like that.
So we turn to our clothes to help display the feelings in our bodies and minds.

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When I look back I think maybe now I would have liked to wear a uniform in high school because I wouldn't have to think about my clothes or worry about my clothes.

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Teacher

The only reason I remember that outfit is because my boyfriend liked the outfit so much. It was just a pair of simple slacks and a striped fitted top. And I have something like that I wear now, and I—it's funny, because I still have that memory: every once in awhile I'll be like whoa! That memory comes back.

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Foucault (1977) said of his reason for studying the history of prisons that he was not "...writing a history of the past in terms of the present" but that he was "...writing the history of the present" (p.31).

Peril also cites Lois Pemberton's 1948 sex education book for teenagers, including her assertion that a girl who is sexually experienced before marriage will be considered "shapeworn and shoddy with a low value sign on her", a remarkable objectification of women as goods (p.98).
The ambiguity that allows school officials wiggle room for extending arbitrary discipline in dress codes also invites girls to argue their own definitions of each ambiguous term. A girl could ask for a clear explanation of the exact nature of an outfit's inappropriateness.

Section IV: Offensive Dress

1. Clothing, patches, buttons, pins, jewelry, back packs are not permitted if they:
   a. Have sexually suggestive writing/pictures
   b. Advocate violence
   c. Advertise or promote the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs
   d. Have innuendos or obscene language
   e. Are disrespectful

2. A tattoo must be covered if it:
   a. Has sexually suggestive writing/pictures
   b. Advocate violence
   c. Advertises or promotes the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs
   d. Have innuendos or obscene language
   e. Is disrespectful

For some girls, the dress code can be a safe excuse for not following fashion, or wearing styles they find uncomfortable. Indeed, many students do like the dress codes. Students may receive extra attention and praise from teachers for wearing teacher-approved fashion.

It also depends on if I'm meeting with parents. I'll wear something nicer... or you know, if I have a student observer coming in I'll look nicer. I won't wear just a plain shirt. I'll have more of a blouse on rather than just a regular shirt like a turtleneck, or a plain shirt.

No, I wouldn't want to wear a uniform. I'm an art teacher so I'm in the minority at school, and the math teachers and the English teachers don't have to get dirty like I do. So-oo I have a feeling that whatever uniform would be created, like a shirt and tie, it would be a mess for me. I'd have to spend a lot more money replacing stuff all the time because clothes would be ruined.

In 6th grade when I went to middle school, where I no longer could wear a uniform, I didn't have a lot-I didn't have any school clothes. So my grandmother made my clothes. My grandmother made jumpers for me. She made me a whole set of jumpers and they all had matching headbands. I did like the jumpers! Cause my grandma made them. I wore those for awhile until I figured out that kids weren't wearing jumpers to school.
Brady and Schirato (2010) explain Judith Butler’s theory of the enforcement of norms, “the everydayness of those mechanisms is so difficult to see...the force of authority accumulates through its very repetition” (68).

Section V: Footwear
1. Some sort of shoe must be worn at all times.
2. Any shoe that poses a safety hazard is not permitted.
3. Shoes with laces must be tied.
4. Bedroom slippers are not permitted.

Section VI: Jewelry
1. Spiked jewelry, wallet chains, choker chains or any chains or jewelry that could cause injury or constitute a hazard is not permitted.

Section VII: Headwear
1. Hats, caps, bandannas, sunglasses, visors, sweatbands and other head coverings are not permitted.

Section VIII: Health and Hygiene
1. Any apparel that is judged to be unhealthy or unsanitary is not permitted.
2. Each student is expected to maintain good personal hygiene.
Dress Code, Community Hills Elementary, 2011-2012

Regarding the 1867 painting Making a Train by Seymour Joseph Guy, Anne Higonnet (1998) refers to the assertion that the painting was seen "...as a tribute to childish innocence" (p. 36). However, "The child's body still triggers the viewers' adult sexual knowledge. Is the little girl sexy despite her innocence? Or, more troubling, is she sexy because of her innocence?" (p. 36-7). Further, Higonnet claims such depictions "Infantilize adult female sexuality" (p. 38).

In a primary school building, dressing and grooming should meet standards of safety and health and should not cause disruption to the educational processes. The school aspires to a standard of good grooming which will reflect in a positive way upon the student, his/her home and the school.

Inappropriate dress includes but is not limited to:
- any garment containing words or symbols that are profane, obscene, sexual in nature or make reference to drugs or alcohol
- any garment that, by its nature, disrupts attention from the educational process
- clothing that reveals any part of the student's mid-section, including low rise jeans, pants, or skirts, halter tops and midriff tops
- spaghetti-strap tops are inappropriate
- shorts or skirts must be appropriate length with garment below fingers when standing with arms at side
- flip-flops and sandals that compromise the student's safety during physical education class and recess play – sneakers or low heeled shoes should be worn at all times

It's easy to be clean on the outside. All you need is soap and water and a scrubbing brush. It's harder to be clean on the inside.
Chapter 5  
A Short Genealogy of Girls’ Advice Literature,  
For Girls and Other Interested Parties  

For all of the importance placed on dress codes in schools, I haven’t seen a class on the history and culture of dress customs in any of schools I read about or those I worked in. The practices that school addresses with disciplinary codes, and our ideas about those practices, are valuable educational topics. That is, applying critical thought and questioning to the school itself—the real world that students and teachers inhabit every day—makes sense (Duncum, 2002). One can view the school itself as a social laboratory, ready to be explored and analyzed by students and teachers. Instead, social issues, when studied at all, are usually focused on the world outside of school, as though social concerns including categories of gender, class, race, and ability do not exist in school (Duncum, 2002, p.105). Thus these culturally sensitive subjects are avoided in school curriculums, yet attended to through disciplinary measures that punish according to cultural or socioeconomic differences among students.¹  

¹ That discipline can be harsh, and it can extend outside of the school. As I wrote this section (June 2014), a woman whose children were repeatedly truant from school died in the local Berks County Prison; her death is under investigation but is believed to be due to various health issues. She was ordered to spend the weekend there as a result of failing to pay fines for her children’s repeated truancies. As part of the story, the newspaper published this data on local mothers (and fathers) who are similarly imprisoned: “From 2000 to May 2013, there were 1,626 people incarcerated in Berks County Prison for failing to pay truancy fines. Most of those imprisoned were female; 1,064 women were put in jail for truancy in that 13-year span, compared with 562 men” (Kelly, 2014). As a teacher, I had no idea that this was happening in my county, and as a homeroom teacher, my marking of students as absent had a direct relation to these statistics. It also occurs to me that this may have been the reason that Roxanne’s mother was imprisoned.
Avoiding or forbidding such discussions is a political stance. As Yvonne Gaudelius and Peg Speirs write in their book on contemporary issues in and about the art classroom,

Some educators might argue that social, political, and cultural issues do not belong in a classroom because they carry particular agendas and disrupt the status quo. This position is based on the assumption that traditional course content is neutral, when in fact it is always political.


The authors acknowledge that this is a challenge for teachers, and I refer to this when I discuss teachers’ positions in school later in this dissertation.

For example, Wetschler (2011) notes the continued controversies surrounding critical ethnic studies classes, and arguments over whether schools should offer them or not. An interesting point raised by Wetschler is that some of these classes have been eliminated recently with the justification that more time needs to be spent on “the basics,” and with subjects that are covered in standardized testing. This, too, is a political stance: one that places test development and curriculum decisions in the hands of stakeholders who believe schools exist for limited employee training for corporate benefit. In such instances, courses are determined according to one group’s (in this case, business owners’) political and economic values.

That being said, it is interesting to take a look at where some of our current notions of “modesty”\(^2\) in female dress within schools originated, and that is what this section does. Ideas of modesty in dress are bound with the control of girls’ sexuality in

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\(^2\) It is difficult to find examples of what constitutes male modesty, particularly regarding dress. Modesty is usually an adjective reserved for females.
many of these examples, and in language and reasoning that foreshadows parts of the contemporary dress code annotated in this dissertation. Disciplinary codes in the school handbook, such as the dress code and other sections are written in the language of advice literature. As Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2012) notes, “Advice literature is fascinating to study, since it is written in opposition to actual or projected behavior on the part of youth” (personal communication). Hence the school handbook attends to a perceived lack in students, and addresses them in language that is both encouraging and authoritarian. In this, the school handbook is similar to the language in a facsimile of a *Handbook for Inmates* (1960) from the former Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia:

> Since early release is the desire of almost every inmate, the effort you invest in conforming to rules and regulations of the prison is to your advantage. Your first duty is obedience to orders…The wearing apparel for dining rooms, movies, school, church, and visiting room shall be shirt tucked inside of regulation trousers, shirt sleeves to be down and shirt front buttoned. (*Handbook for Inmates*, 1960, p.8).

I examine the literature to unearth questionable suppositions and to better understand practices of contemporary advice literature, including the dress code, through a genealogy of its past. Advice literature for girls includes books that point girls towards images of idealized young womanhood, and religious tracts that direct girls in approved ways of behavior. Other forms of advice literature are magazines for girls (that include cooking and sewing instruction, and fiction and comics with moral lessons), and fashion magazines (that feature tips for dress, news about fashionable consumer trends, and exemplars of idealized female appearance.) I examine some historical and contemporary
Western advice literature regarding dress and behavior and aimed at girls. I ask how such literature was constructed, and what the writers hoped to achieve. I also note the tensions between the advice literature and the way girls received it. That is, I probe the notion that girls were obedient to these instructions for their appearance and behavior simply because such works were published.

Notably, the advice literature I look at focuses on a girl who is white and middle class. The predominance of this focus indicates the literature’s viewpoint; that this is the ideal girl. The white, middle class view of morality, proper behavior, and appearance is exerted continually, regardless of the audience. As Jillian Hernandez and Anya Wallace (2014) note,

Heteronormative regimes dictate that sexual education for youth be rooted in fear and center on the prevention of situations that are not respected (i.e., parenting children out of wedlock, contracting disease, enjoying promiscuity). This framework unduly targets Black women and girls because it is assumed that they are at high risk for unplanned pregnancy and disease transmission more so than their White counterparts (para. 9, italics original).

3 I use a generalization for middle class. Cogan (1989) claims the label middle class in the U.S. casts a wide net, and that it includes people who think of themselves as middle class, “embracing whole groups as long as they possessed certain values—thrift, industry, sensibility, education, and morality— and thought of themselves as middle class...State of mind and commonly held values defined it” (p.14, italics original). Cogan’s description notes the Protestant ideals favored in this particular determination of middle class; a work ethic, yet determinedly not associated with working class. However, the notion that one simply claims to be middle class and so is (and thus accrues the benefits of belonging) disregards the prejudices, exclusions, and dividing practices of class then and now. See Webb (2006) for examples of girls’ exclusion in the 1890s, and Fraser and Gordon (1994) for a portrait of the ways this delineation of values excludes certain groups today, and specifically young single mothers who are Black.
For example, Black and Latina girls are depicted in a contemporary Christian sex education text in a manner which makes it appear they are more “at risk” than other girls (J. Gallagher & A. Gallagher, 2009). Throughout the advice literature, behavior and appearance of girls are continually connected in the texts; one represents the other; character is defined by dress.

Finally, this short genealogy is not in any way a comprehensive or systematic review of historic writings about girls’ dress. I gathered several texts and popular culture examples that connect to the dress code I analyze in the present, and I present them as phenomena to inspire and inform thought about the way girls are written about, thought about, and treated through dress codes today; and also how girls see themselves.

**The Bestsellers of Dr. Gregory & Reverend Fordyce**

Dr. Gregory’s 1774 text, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, and the Reverend Fordyce’s 1778 *Sermons to Young Women*, were popular works from members of the Scottish Enlightenment movement of the late 1700s. Edmund Burke, often called “The Father of Modern Conservatism”, was also a prominent voice in this group of intellectuals. Daniel O’Neill (2007) notes that Burke and other enlightenment advocates shunned the idea of “deep democracy”, that is, democracy for every layer of society, (pp. 259-260). To this end, they imagined an idea of a perfect society, suitable to the new economic form, and suitable as well to their own needs and desires. Proponents of Enlightenment thinking, they believed that men were rational, and that women perceived the world through emotions and their senses. This idea of “sensibility” was widely endorsed; thought to be a natural and physiological difference between the sexes; it
served as reasoning and justification for different roles. Thus, “…female subordination became naturalized on the basis of their supposedly finer sensibility” (O’Neill, 2007, p. 90). They imagined women’s place in the “little society of the family” (2007, p.94), and constructed an ideal definition of girls and women to fit this plan. In their writing, Gregory and Fordyce instructed females as to their roles in a fatherly, familiar address that masked the inherent conflicts within the ideals they urged. A noticeable tension is in these writers’ pretense of understanding a girl’s experience well enough to direct girls in “how to be a girl,” including guidelines for dress and grooming, as well as cultivating the roles of obedient and devoted daughters.

John Gregory’s book includes chapters on Religion, Conduct and Behavior, Amusements, and Friendship, Love, and Marriage. The vision of woman as the “angel on the hearth,” taking care of home and family, was a popular trope at the time. Gregory (1774) instructs his daughters that a female is naturally more inclined to be observant of religion, and so should be the man’s guide in this; affirming the notion of woman as the gentle, angelic guide of the family. “You must often put on a face of serenity and cheerfulness, when your hearts are torn in anguish” (Gregory, 1774, p.5). Further, girls should not concern themselves with bible passages they do not understand, “but treat them with silent and becoming reverence” (1774, p.6) thus asserting that intellectual curiosity is a male domain.

The advice on dress focuses on ideas of modesty for girls, and coverage, then as today, exemplifies modesty: “A woman shows her charms to most advantage, when she seems most to conceal them. The finest bosom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms” (1774, p.16). However, coverage, in this instance, only increases a
girl’s sexuality—highlighting the sexual difference further (Higonnet, 1998) by concealing what Gregory is trying to see; in a sense he claims that a girl’s chest is sexier when it is covered. Gregory’s statement exemplifies Foucault’s reminder that that which is repressed is actually multiplied, as such rules, like a dress code, require continual observation and examination of the female body (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p. 301).

Gregory continues:

Your superior delicacy, your modesty… preserve you, in a great measure, from any temptation to those vices which we are most subjected…The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions particularly fit you for the practice of those duties where the heart is chiefly concerned. (1774, p.5). You will not easily believe how much we consider your dress as expressive of your characters. Vanity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it. (1774, p.16).

Gregory praises feminine traits while suggesting that he, as a male, is freed from certain duties and expectations that require these traits. His writing inadvertently reveals that the roles for girls are not natural at all, but invented, in that they require detailed rules. Too, this claiming one thing—that certain traits are natural—while indicating a simultaneous lack of faith in that belief by insisting on continual instruction on what is supposed to be natural, demonstrates an anxiety about the double-bind in the philosophy.

Gregory’s and Fordyce’s advice for girls appeared to serve their own positions and philosophical beliefs. Exempting themselves from the daily devotion to religious piety, they claim women are the natural guardians and teachers of religion, and they order girls to act piously and meek; somewhat as a religious proxy. Their instructions align
with the tasks they want to assign to girls and women: taking care of home and family, including whatever tasks are required, and representing the virtuous character of the family through their obedient and subdued behavior. As a young Florence Nightingale lamented in the 19th century: “The family uses people not for what they are…but for what it wants them for—its own uses…If it wants someone to sit in the drawing room, that someone is supplied by the family, though that member may be destined for science, or for education” (Gorham, 1982, p.126). The construction of girls within contemporary dress codes remains similar in inculcating modesty in dress, and in placing girls’ educational needs as secondary to boys’ (about whom it is claimed they are disturbed by girls’ immodest attire.)

Fordyce’s book covers “modesty in dress and deportment, female virtue, friendship and conversation, domestic and elegant accomplishments, intellectual accomplishments, female piety, female devotion and good works, and female meekness” (Fordyce, 1778, introduction). Further, he warns:

Remember how tender a thing a woman’s reputation is, how hard to preserve, and when lost how impossible to recover; how frail many, and how dangerous most of the gifts you have received; what misery and what shame have been often occasioned by abusing them! I tremble for your situation” (pp. 22-23).

Thus Fordyce constructs a role for middle class girls and then warns them of disaster if they do not submit to their role.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1762) specifically counters the writings of these authors, as well as the writings of Edmund Burke and other
members of the Enlightenment. Wollstonecraft gave some credit to the guides for portions of sensible advice. But she had no patience with their dismissal of girls’ intelligence (O’Neill, 2007). Of Fordyce’s work, she would “Instantly dismiss them from my pupil’s if I wished to strengthen her understanding” (Wollstonecraft, 1762, p.194). Wollstonecraft rejected the idea that such speakers were elevating women, and she dismisses their flattery. She refers to Fordyce’s writing as “sentimental rant” (1762, p.195) and wonders why he insists on “melting every human quality into female meekness and artificial grace” (p.192). Wollstonecraft objects to Fordyce’s use of religion in directing women to act as angels, and so be pleasing to men. “Do religion and virtue offer… no brighter reward?” (1762, p.197). Wollstonecraft critiqued the description of a female ideal as an attempt to mask the command of subservience. She proposes the subjugated role instructed by Fordyce is “the portrait of a house slave” and offers that if this woman is not an angel, “She is an ass…this domestic drudge, whose being is absorbed in that of a tyrant’s.” (1762, p.198). Wollstonecraft also believed in natural sensibility, but she believed that it is mixed with rationality in both men and women. She chided the injunctions to act artificially meek and modest, and especially to hide one’s intelligence. Using Gregory’s and Fordyce’s claims about the family as an important unit of an ideal society, Wollstonecraft argued that surely an intellectual woman would make a more suitable companion for an intellectual man. Of Gregory’s rules for behavior she says, “A cultivated understanding, and an affectionate heart, will never want starched rules of decorum” (Wollstonecraft, 1762, p.200). Of acting artificial, she chides, “It is this system of dissimulation, throughout the volume, that I despise. Women are always to seem to be this and that…” (1762, p.202).
Jane Austen satirizes Fordyce’s book in her 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The smug and buffoonish cousin, Mr. Collins, recommends it to the Bennett girls, and when he begins to read it aloud the girls find it boring; comically interrupt him, and change the subject. Another counter-opinion to the ideas of Gregory and Fordyce, though indirectly, is the voice of 10-year old Alethea Stiles (b.1745) of Connecticut. She inquires of a relative in a letter, “Why mayn’t I go to college too, for my father says one Jenny Cameron put on a jacket and breeches and was a good soldier, and why may I not also and live at the college?” (C. Huber & S. Huber, 2011, p.7). Alethea particularly refers to clothes as not just a signifier of gender, but as granting access to certain roles, in this case, becoming a soldier.

**Periodicals & Christian Tracts**

Alisa Webb (2006) argues that girls’ magazines “are agents of socialization” (p. 253) and present a socially approved image for girls, in which they may envision themselves. Periodicals aimed at girls increased in the nineteenth century, and a new image of girls appears in them: what Frances Cogan (1989) terms the “Ideal of Real Womanhood;” girls who are self-reliant, healthy, outdoorsy, adventuresome, and well educated. However, Kristine Moruzi (2012), writing about the English periodical *The Girl’s Own Paper*, argues that the new focus on health and a feminized athleticism for girls was spurred by “Social Darwinist concerns regarding the health of the British Race” and “fears of racial degeneration”(Moruzi, 2012, p.82-83); what Foucault would describe as dividing practices (Foucault, 1982). Still, the delivery of content and entertainment in magazines specifically for girls turns somewhat less didactic than the 1700s advice
literature. Moruzi (2012) argues that the Christian influence was principal in early reading materials for children: “before 1850, children’s books and magazines were predominantly religious” (p.5). However, in the late 1800s, middle class girls probably had a wide variety of reading materials in the home, and likely read not only what was especially for them, but literature and periodicals meant for others in the household (Grenby, 2009; Moruzi, 2012; Shefrin, 2009). Moruzi (2012) argues that “girls’ reading could no longer be controlled as it was in the past” (p.6), an event which most likely increased moral panic about girls’ growing independence. Moruzi points to Linton’s 1865 article in the Saturday Evening Post bemoaning the independent, new-fashioned girl. Linton allows for two types: girls are either “the embodiment of the virtuous womanly ideal of the past or the prostitute of the present” (Moruzi, 2012, p.1).

The Young Lady’s Guide (1870) is a collection of Christian religious tracts for girls.4 “Fashion,” an excerpt from Mrs. Sydney Cox’s tract entitled “Friendly Counsel for Girls,” tells the story of what happens to a disobedient girl who is too fond of pretty clothes and low-cut gowns–she develops a cold and dies. “An extremely fashionable girl! A very worldly girl! A thorough ballroom young lady. That they are terms of reproach…that they imply censure rather than approval no one will deny” (Cox, 1870, p. 139). Cox’s moral test of a girl is this: She asks if the dance-loving girl is content the day after the dance: “Will she be merry…playing with younger brothers and sisters? and happy in the evening, reading to her invalided father and mother?”5 (Cox, 1870, p.141). In the story, Mr. Browne warns his daughter Ella about wearing her fashionable blue

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4 The American Tract Society, publishers of this volume, still publishes tracts today.
5 Family servitude is implied in both examples; a recurring ideal for girls also noted by Gorham (1982).
slippers to an outdoor dance in damp weather. Ella ignores his advice, and dances on the wet grass, soaking her slippers. She develops a cold—“the seeds of consumption.” Later, still under a doctor’s care, Ella again ignores the advice of her father, and the Doctor’s order to wear “a bodice of wash-leather high up to your throat” (p. 151). The high bodice is unfashionable, and Ella, with her mother’s approval, chooses a fashionable gown that is less covering. Her fashion choice leads to a recurrence of illness, and this time it leads to her death. The author says of the impressive white marble monument marking Ella’s grave: “it covers only one of fashion’s slaves…and a life willfully sacrificed to the same exacting goddess” (Cox, 1870, p.154). The story concentrates not as Gregory or Fordyce might, on Ella’s immodesty or on her reputation, but on her disobedience (to her father and to the doctor) and on her joyful pleasure, viewed as selfish, in going out dancing and in following fashion. Thus Mrs. Sidney Cox develops an interesting counter argument to the growing influence of fashion; perhaps Gregory’s and Fordyce’s arguments of modesty and reputation may have had less impact in an age when sewing patterns included in magazines made following fashion more accessible and more desirable to many girls. Cox argues that following fashion is physically dangerous; though she still attributes Ella’s death to a low-cut gown rather than, say, a long skirt that could cause a fall.6 Her focus also censures girls’ pleasure: she instructs that girls should deny their

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6 One of the earliest women’s periodicals in the U.S. was *Godey’s Ladies Book*, published from 1830 to 1898 and edited by Sarah Josepha Hale. Helen Woodward (1960) notes that Hale joined Antoine Godey in 1832 at the magazine, which included Godey’s paper patterns for dressmaking. Along with the first patented sewing machine (1842) girls and women in the United States could sew fashions faster and with more expertise. Woodward notes that friends shared copies of the popular magazine.
own desires in favor of serving family; here in the example of younger siblings and invalid parents.

While girls were reading other stories about adventurous young women who did not necessarily expire due to their activities, and girls were adventuring themselves on new contraptions like the bicycle, Deborah Gorham (1982) argues that Victorian girls at the turn of the century were largely expected to adopt adult female dress in adolescence, including corsets, in part to restrain their bodies in appearance and activities. Thus as they matured, “a girl child must accept constraints on her behavior, whereas a male child, by growing older, gains more freedom” (1982, p.95). This brings to mind the childhood dress-ups for girls illustrated in the annotated dress code within this dissertation; playing dress-up in adult attire such as high heels is viewed as acceptable and cute when girls are very young, yet girls may get in trouble for wearing similar fashions when they are older and attend school.

**Girls’ Diaries**

Jane Hunter (2011) notes that, in their diaries, nineteenth century girls both adopted and rejected some of the conservative restraints placed upon them. In the early 1800s, Anne Jemima Clough wrote, “the worst thing that has grown in me is a sort of wild, boastful feeling, which would lead me to give way to a great deal of wildness if I had the opportunity and did not keep it in” (Gorham, 1982, p.137). Molly Hughes, born in 1867, wrote, “How I wish I was a boy! Mother caught me saying this aloud one day, and promptly told me that this was a wicked thought. She did not go on to give a reason, but merely insisted that it was splendid to be a girl, and with such exuberant enthusiasm
that I was quite convinced” (Gorham, 1982, p.174). And in 1886, 16-year old Charlotte Norris wrote “Duty shall preceed pleasure. Save ten dollars by June1st. Bathe regularly every day” in her list of resolutions (Hunter, 2011, p.252). Like Foucault’s self-regulating subject, these girls discipline themselves to fit societal and familial ideals for their behavior. There were also girls who used their diaries as a chance to express ideas for which they needed an outlet. In the 1880s, Annie Winsor continually questioned the treatment of youth in her writing (Hunter, 2011, p.260) and was daring in her diary confidences: “To me, there is an exquisite thrilling pleasure in real, hand to hand, private ‘fooling’ with a boy I like” (Hunter, 2001, p. 261).

**Comic Books & Magazines**

In the 1940s, comic books appeared for girl readers, and fashion was a pleasurable focus in many of them. Some included paper dolls along with stories about girls’ lives and romances. Readers were encouraged to create their own fashions, which artists redrew as outfits for the comic’s characters in the narrative or separately as fashions for the paper dolls. Here, fashions were not rated as appropriate, modest, or inappropriate, but were simply enjoyed as creative, chic, and perhaps inspirational designs. However, there were depictions of good girls and bad girls within the comics, and Trina Robbins (1999) observes that some of the comics contained advice in letters columns such as this in *Girls’ Life*, a magazine spinoff of the *Patsy Walker* comic series: “Dear Patsy, I am fourteen years old. Some of the girls in my class use lipstick, but my
mother says I am too young. What do you think?” (Robbins, 1999, p.29). With female superheroes, of course, modesty in dress was not an issue (Robbins, 1999; Stuller, 2010; Stuller, 2011).

Magazines for teen girls have been researched widely, as a window into how girls see themselves, and how the media thinks girls should see themselves (Currie, 1999; Driver, 2007; Massoni, 2010; McRobbie, 2000; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008; Palladino, 1996; Walker, 1998). While magazines are driven by advertising and editorial articles that promote the advertisers', editorial voice makes a difference in content. 20th century editors often infused their own beliefs about what was good for girls in the magazines (Walker, 1998). Kelley Massoni (2010) in her thorough look at the history of Seventeen magazine, notes that Editor Helen Valentine’s ideal was to present fashion yet also engage girls in stories about careers and intellectual and political affairs. However, the magazine’s focus changed when many post-World War II girls clamored for a return to ideals of women in the home, and they demanded articles on dressing to please boys; including hairstyle ideas, makeup instruction, and articles on girdles and diet plans. A craving for stories about marriage, cooking, and decorating in a cozy (and safe) home was most likely a response to the death and destruction of the war years.

*Parents’* Magazine represented the new post World War II focus on scientific, expert information, and the fad for scientific-infused instruction for household and family tasks that began with home economists such as Ellen Richards some fifty years before.

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7 Patsy tells the girl to obey her mother (Robbins, 1999, p.29).
8 Though some exist without: Youth publications from *Parents’* family of products featured mostly ads for their own books and magazines; *Ms.* has a history of attempting to resist advertising influence in the editorial content, with various degrees of success.
9 An imagined nostalgia for a time before the war that perhaps did not actually exist.
Parents’ published Polly Pigtails’ Magazine for Girls in the 1950s. The postwar era saw an enormous rise in consumer goods and magazines were enmeshed in the new market, featuring advertising and editorializing about new products (Walker, 1998). Polly Pigtails contained a variety of advice, activities, and stories. Some stories included careers, yet many articles still focused on the importance of being attractive. A biographical illustrated comic about Florence Nightingale appeared next to an advertorial feature on Simplicity sewing patterns titled “Polly Likes to Sew,” and advice articles like the unfortunately titled, “Why so Fatso?”(1953).

Polly Pigtails was actually the revived Calling all Girls, which first highlighted teen celebrities such as Shirley Temple and Elizabeth Taylor with other preteen content in the 1940s. Following Polly Pigtails, the Calling all Girls title was again revived. In the 1960s, these featured a pert blonde preteen in comical and cute scenes with her pet dachshund on the cover. The covers were drawn by Freeman Elliot, who also painted pinups of adult women for calendars and magazine illustrations, and there are surprising similarities in the poses. The illustrations show the tension between the continuing ideals of girlhood: a wholesome, asexual yet sexual image of hearty, healthy girlhood and the contrary injunctions to be attractive to males, yet innocent: sexual but unaware, naïve and vulnerable; young girls as childish pin-ups.

The Second Wave & Girls’ Voices

In the 1970s, Seventeen, Young Miss (the newest identity of Calling all Girls), and Co-ed (available through home economics classes) reflected the second wave Women’s Movement, as all three magazines featured feminist content, some of it substantial. As
advertisers and editors co-opted the language of social movements to sell fashion, shoes, and perfume, the juxtaposition with feminist features created a dialogue about changing expectations and possibilities for girls. Fashion remained prominent in the magazines, and as with the earlier comic books, the fashion was celebrated in terms of pleasure and creative design rather than dictates of modesty. The Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964, and the passage in 1972 of Title IX, which addressed equality of sexes in school activities, created legal grounds for enforcing parity regarding race and gender, and helped to radically shift the culture. Co-ed aimed to explain these legal and cultural changes in its series, “I’m Happening,” which focused each month on a different aspect of women’s movement issues. Written as though by a young woman, the fictional voice is an “every girl,” describing and making sense of changes at the time. “Woman Power! What kind for Me?” presented a positive look at the options for girls. “Things have been happening recently,” the article begins, “It’s a funny thing. A year or so ago, the ideas advocated by Women’s Liberation seemed way out, really radical. Now, the author continues, many ideas such as equal pay are accepted by “almost everyone.” (Co-ed, April 1972). In Seventeen, 15-year old Naomi Oreskes states, “I’m also into the women’s movement…It offends me when people get the image of a bra-burner the minute you say you’re for women’s lib. What should I be for?” (Seventeen, June 1974).

While in the 1960s, Black girls were seldom featured in girls’ fashion magazines; Palladino notes “Black teenagers and college students took the struggle for civil rights beyond the classroom and into the community…organizing sit-ins…” (Palladino, 1996p. 186). Finally, Black models appeared with more frequency in the 1970s, however Asian and Latina models were still rare in Seventeen. Co-ed, sold through schools, was more
reflective of actual school populations. In *Seventeen*, Yolanda King, the daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr., was interviewed\(^{10}\) in an issue that includes 14 fashion pages of what the magazine called “realgirls” that were not professional models (*Seventeen*, January 1972). In this issue, they are “the new activists.” Their leadership in the arts, community affairs, and sports is described. Pamela Jones of the Harlem Dance Theater is one of the “realgirls”, and also the cover girl. Black models appeared more frequently in ads throughout the 70s, and make-up and hair features for Black girls were included in the magazines (*Co-ed*, February 1976). Lucy Paul, a Navajo from the Arizona Indian Reservation, is the cover girl of November’s 1973 *Seventeen*. The American Indian Movement was formed in 1969, and AIM occupied Alcatraz Island in the same year “to demonstrate that Indian communities had survived and to demand recognition of their existence” (Kidwell, 2003, pp.171-2). However, Indian culture was also commoditized and romanticized as a fashion influence, and as a way to sell products like Yucca-Dew shampoo.

The 1970s sexual revolution brought a new frankness to editors’ and advertisers’ treatment of sexual topics for girls, and more acceptance of girls’ sexuality. Love’s Baby Soft cologne illustrated the odd combination of infantilizing girls’ sexuality that Anne Higonnet (1998) questions, in text that reads, “…that irresistible, clean-baby smell, grown up enough to be sexy. Because innocence is sexier than you think.” (*Seventeen*, October 1974). Articles on sexuality, teen pregnancy, and abortion had a less didactic and more informational tone, such as an article on girls’ potential sexual activity entitled “It’s your own decision: The right to say no” (*Seventeen*, June 1974).
Pop music provided additional cultural images of girls in the late 20th century. Girl groups such as the Supremes, the Ronettes, the Flirtations, the Chiffons, and the Marvelettes featured young Black women as style icons, often in matching gowns and hair styles, and breaking color barriers in album sales and in performing on television. All of these cultural images showed girls various options for ways to be. Depictions of roles for girls in magazines, movies, and on television expanded in variety, though the girl and her dress were still idealized and inculcated in service to the perceived needs of society. However, the multiplicity of outlets prevented the dominance of a few authoritarian voices telling girls what to do and how to dress.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, public discussions of changing gender definitions (and changing social issues in general) created some moral panic, inspiring a genre of Christian literature that offers advice on how to keep girls chaste and how to stave off the influence of “secular humanism” at college (Budziszewski, 2004; R.C. Durfield & R. Durfield, 1991; J. Gallagher & A. Gallagher, 2006; Gresh, 1999; Wheaton, 2005). Young Woman (J. Gallagher & A. Gallagher, 2006) counsels girls that it is unfair to boys when girls wear immodest clothes; and that immodest clothes (on a girl) incite temptation.

The multiplicity of depictions of girlhood served as a precursor to the end of the decade, in which girls had more opportunities to develop their own cultural outlets. Susan Driver (2007) in her book Queer Girls and Popular Culture, notes that the girls she interviews enjoy looking at teen girl magazines to mock or reimagine them. One girl would include in her ideal magazine, “fashion, DIY crafts, sewing, politics, sexuality, performance reviews and interviews with influential queer people, DIY divas, fat
fashionistas, girl bands” (p. 164). Further, today girls are creating their own media content, such as hand-done zines (Piepmeier, 2009; Peril, 1995) or messaging to a wide audience via the internet, such as through The Fbomb, a feminist website created by teenager Julie Zellinger. However, girls who are white and middle to upper-middle class still dominate these stories of young creators. Surely other young girls are creating media. Locating (and creating) these “lifestyle features,” by and about girls who are other than white, and not middle class, would be a useful topic for a public school curriculum. Jillian Hernandez and Anya Wallace (2014) write about the hip hop artists Pretty Taking All Fades (P.T.A.F.) a trio of Black female hip hop artists from a public high school in Los Angeles, and they emphasize positive recognition of the girls’ popular song “Boss Ass Bitch,” which features frank sexual language and descriptions of sexual pleasure. Hernandez and Wallace ask, where is the feminist support for the exploration of the erotic in the music of P.T.A.F.? (2014). Indeed, among the girls writing feminist-oriented blogs and even standing up to high school dress codes, we might ask if some of their attention is granted because they still skew towards the normalized, middle class ideal of acceptable appearance and behavior. That is, if Julie Zellinger or Tavi Gevinson (creator of the online magazine Rookie) performed P.T.A.F.’s song “Boss Ass Bitch,” would they be admired in the media as they are for their comparatively mild blogs.

Certainly, the dress code I examine here, as a form of advice literature in the student handbook, has remnants of belief in the “bad girl” as a type, and of belief in the need for modesty in dress that Fordyce and Gregory spoke of. Character development lessons are implied throughout the student handbook and the dress code. The girl who dresses against the code disrupts the school day. A girl deemed sexually inappropriate, at worst labeled a
slut, can serve as a marker of who is approved within school and who is divided, separated, and moved to the margins of educational opportunities (Tannenbaum, 1999).

But like girls’ counter-responses to media through the centuries, girls can and sometimes do subvert and alter the attitudes and rules that determine their position.
Chapter 6

The Ideal Schoolgirl Zine

This zine section is for girls, about girls, and dedicated to girls. It features the words of the girls I interviewed presented in an alternative collaged format. I believe this girl zine and the teacher zine are the most important and useful parts of this research. Both forms include data that is raw but contextualized by what it is next to. That is, I do not analyze each statement or the speakers--I arrange their words so they form a dense multiplicity of voices, resonating with the reality of school, in which each individual shares a common space but differing perspectives. In the Ideal Schoolgirl Zine, the data sits next to other data, like students in a classroom. The voice of each girl is next to that of another girl. Their words are collaged with some vintage materials, and I use vintage fabrics as a background, as a trace of their interest in clothing, and their styling and sewing (in some cases) of their own clothes. The vintage features also reference the genealogies of dress codes, art education practices, crafts, and fashion.

The pages are labeled with embossed labeling tape titles: Dress Code (School), Dress Code (Immediate Proof), What to Wear, What R U Wearing, I See You, Uniforms, Misunderstanding, Art Class, Projects, Fashion, and Doodles. The pages are busy, and so dense with information that they may be overwhelming to the reader. In this they represent a typical day of interactions when teaching in a high school (or attending one) where as a teacher there are innumerable exchanges with perhaps hundreds of students. My daily classes totaled an average of 185 students, depending on my yearly schedule, with more students seen in homeroom, study halls, hall duty, and bus duty, and more
added to that with all the social interactions that happen while students pass classes and
during school-wide events.

Considering the look of this section, I think of my friend Jim, who teaches math,
and how he would be visibly distracted and unsettled by all the visual paraphernalia
plastering every surface and hanging from the ceiling when he would come into my
classroom to talk about something. We laughed about it, because when I proctored a test
or held a study hall in his room, I longed for something interesting to look at. His tidy
room felt sterile to me, and the only art I found to examine were a few neatly tacked math
posters and some vintage desks printed with math formulas and graphs. I could turn that
story into a binary about math versus art, but I won’t because I know my best teaching
friend is both an expert art teacher and a whiz at math. She can quickly plan an entire
school schedule, and that’s a very math-y problem—classes and how often each meets,
time periods, lunch periods, days of the week, numbers of students, numbers of teachers,
teacher breaks—she can visualize the data and arrange it perfectly. My point with this
observation is that we three each perceive the world slightly differently; we have
different skills and interests, different teaching styles, and we are comfortable (or not) in
different classrooms, and that goes for our students, too. Therefore, one size fits all
educational programs or goals (and disciplinary systems) are suspect (and flawed) for that
reason; for teachers as well as for students. With that in mind, I suggest that if you find
this dense data overwhelming, you visit this zine a little at a time.

This zine is experimental, and moves me towards a goal of creating alternative
media, with girls and for girls. As I read the girls’ words a picture emerges of each girl
finding her way through school; a commonplace experience but in a space that can
sometimes be hostile to her needs, desires, and feelings. Veronica, Hannah, Rosemary, Molly, Taylor, Jana, Alissa, and Olivia—They alternate between striving for individuality and recognition, or searching for the security of belonging; finding a place of comfort through friendships, or standing out through achievements; locating promising paths of interest, and discovering where they fit in. Here I will highlight a few observations.

Veronica dresses in a goth/rock style that is considered transgressive by some in school, and one that the dress code spotlights by forbidding chains, for example. Veronica is a good student and well-behaved but she notes some hostilities she has to navigate. She is the one who speaks back to the assistant principal who tries to punish her for her short skirt. Veronica has more in common with Hannah and Molly, who dress more conservatively, than the dress code implies. She has a circle of friends that provide the same warm support, and shared jokes, doodles, and note-passing that Hannah’s and Molly’s friends do; they just feel comfortable in different kinds of clothes.

Alissa, for her part, decides that to survive school she has to separate herself from some former friends; the girls she calls loud. She makes herself quieter and negotiates her style by wearing tights with her short shorts, and consequently she is able to successfully traverse some dress code infractions. In other words, she tries to stay under the disciplinary radar by making herself invisible, as she says, “I would only talk to two people.” She’s learned how to stay out of trouble but she is aware of an injustice in the designation of who gets in trouble and who does not, and she suspects (rightly, I think) that the rules are in place not necessarily because they make sense, but because they provide a system that is useful for dividing students; as she says, “to get the kids they didn’t want.” The page featuring that story is labeled “Misunderstandings” and it is
decorated with bluebirds printed on the fabric in the background. It has three important stories that I placed together. First, Alissa talks about “the girls that were louder;” those that get in trouble through the dress code. The other two stories I label with a second layer of pseudonym, so that they are further anonymized.

Jazmin tells a story about how she suddenly discovered in grade school that doodling was a way of allowing her brain to access what the teacher was saying. Later, when she reads the test, she “just heard him say the answer” because the doodling allowed her to access the information in the first place. Jazmin ended her story: “No one could teach me, but I guess they just didn’t know how.” These are harsh words for current educational policy. Jazmin figured out, at least partly, something that would help her learn; how to help herself. But one of my arguments throughout this dissertation is that we seldom ask students what they would like, or what might work for them. We continually study, research, decide, and then impose a new technique rather than ask how students like to learn, what kind of tests would work for them. That is why I would not propose, based on Jazmin’s experience, that every student needs to doodle, although I could conceivably package a program requiring doodling for all students and offering some kind of proof that it improved student learning or “reading readiness.” But that would be missing the point, as well as being an avaricious and dishonest maneuver. The real lesson is that each student is an expert on themselves, and things might work better if we give up the role of authoritarian experts and start to ask, offer, and help rather than label, group, and assign.

McKenzie’s story follows Jazmin’s; in which she suddenly accessed a painful memory of a small act of violence–her doodles seized and thrown in the trash by her
teacher. This act resonates with the destruction of the totemic object previously discussed concerning the dress code: “It is intended to convince everyone, through its visibility, that the school has killed the totem and therefore the gang’s ability to draw identity from it” (Crocket & Wallendorf, 1998, p.121). The teacher publicly disposes of McKenzie’s work—a part of McKenzie, in the sense that it is hers, and her creation—to demonstrate to McKenzie and to the class that the only important content and behavior is that which is directed by the teacher. The lesson we might learn here, through the juxtaposed stories, is to let McKenzie and Jazmin doodle. It may help them and it may not, but they are probably doing it for a reason. Can we step back, move away from the Leave it to Beaver regimented classroom and recognize that learning can look like doodling, and that doodling can be a kind of learning?

Several times the girls stopped as they talked, as though in hearing their own words they suddenly realized a question. They shifted gears and asked, “what’s up with that?” in a critically questioning way. Rosemary and Olivia both ventured that uniforms might be helpful in school; Rosemary thinking it might help students who are teased for their clothes, and Olivia for eliminating the fuss over girls’ clothes. Rosemary was caught in a quandary: “you know…people would…fit…not fit in, but just be accepted.” Rosemary values dressing like an individual “I wanted to appear different than everybody else,” but she feels concern for students that are mocked. She is caught in a bind: “However, the other thing I think of is people wouldn’t be able to express themselves as much.” As for Olivia, after considering that uniforms might eliminate the vexing disciplinary attention to girls’ dress—“If it’s such a big deal”–She suddenly asks “are
shoulders that big of a deal?” That was an opening for her to share, enthusiastically, how she had been thinking a lot about feminist issues lately. She said:

Um, actually that reminds me of something. Yesterday Devon [her good friend] was wearing this shirt with an anime girl on it? And she was pretty much like not wearing clothes. And I was like, “Devon, I hate your shirt.” I feel like if I was wearing a shirt with a naked man on it, that wouldn’t be okay. If he wore that to school, that’d be fine, but if I wore a shirt with like, a man on it? I really don’t think that would be okay. So…I don’t know. I really feel that, this whole thing with Wendy Davis, I’m sure you’ve heard that. In Texas, like with the anti-abortion laws? I’ve been thinking a lot, for a while, about feminism and stuff, and a lot of people have a bad idea about it. But it’s pretty much a male-dominated society. Did you see–there’s commercials sexualizing women all the time, but then there was one salad dressing commercial? I don’t know if you saw it, for Zesty dressing…And I saw on the internet; people are all, “Oh, I’m boycotting this, this is ridiculous, they can’t do this!” But meanwhile there’s all these women being sexualized. But here’s this man…and it was just really silly. But they do it to women all the time so it’s just turning the tables; what’s wrong with that? I don’t know if they were trying to make a statement but I think they kind of did. [I interrupt, and mention that she might enjoy taking a women’s studies class in college next year.] I think I really want to take a women’s studies class. I’ve always been interested in powerful women; I just think it’s really great to have role models. Like
you say, the role models in school are all teachers. I can’t think of anyone else off the top of my head that is a good role model for girls. But in drum line, it’s pretty much a male section, and I’m a section leader so that makes me feel really awesome. When I see females in drum lines, I’m like, “Good for you, you have to put up with all the boys! You can do it!” And even with the trombones, there’s one girl in the trombone section, and she’s such a leader, too. It’s like clearly, you can handle things, just by being the only female. I try to talk to some friends about feminism. I think a lot of people think it means you think females are better than men or that men are left out and I think they have the wrong idea there; I think a lot of people do. I’m sure I did before I looked into it too, you know you always hear like, “feminazis.”

Olivia makes a good argument for offering a women’s studies class in high school, and Rosemary’s critical thinking shows that students have complex questions about the way the world works. I find myself wondering why girls (and boys) have to wait until college to take classes such as women’s studies, philosophy, and other classes that they may want, or in Olivia’s and Rosemary’s case, need, to study issues that are important to them, or that impact them, as the dress code does on a daily basis.
Figure 6.1: The Ideal Schoolgirl Zine Begins on the Next Page.
I’d see a lot of girls walking throughout the halls in school. You see like bras hanging out, you see stomachs and backs showing. I’m like, I know you’re not supposed to do that!

Freshman/sophomore year my homeroom teacher drilled it into our heads what the dress code was. She was just—she always told us like this is how it needs to be, this is what it is.

Oh my God it’s crazy. I knew it limited a lot! But, I mean everyone knows exactly what it is because the teachers read it in the beginning of the year and everybody gets in trouble if they mess up with it.

And it’s in the handbook and everyone has to carry that everyday. Actually yeah, I read it just to laugh at it. They have really crazy things in there, like “wear shoes” and, I don’t know, “no chains or handcuffs,” what in the world?? Who’s trying to wear handcuffs to school?

I knew there was something about “fingertip length” but I also knew that nobody paid attention to that so I never really did either.

The two that I can think of off the top of my head are the spaghetti strap rule, or the two-finger rule for spaghetti straps, your straps have to be at least two fingers wide. And the fingertip one for shorts, like if your shorts are above your fingertips they’re too short. That’s just always what I’ve heard.

Um… no spaghetti straps! I think that’s strange. The fingertip rule, with the down to your knees or something? No thongs or underwear hanging out… no haaaatssss… ahh, I almost forgot about that! It’s been so long since I’ve been told not… to wear a hat! I remember people getting yelled at all the time, and it doesn’t apply now, ever, at least not at my college. At college, it was never, “Take your hat off.” That’s strange now that I think back to that.

I noticed they always said shorts have to be long enough that when you put your arm down flat, there are no fingers past the length. I really felt like the rules were written well, but they weren’t followed. I feel like people decided, you know, you can get away with that, so many people were doing it.

You hear it all the time. It’s like, told you in the beginning of the year: “Girls, you must have your skirts or shorts fingertip length.” Yeah, right, that’s not gonna happen. It—it was other girls, like teachers wouldn’t say anything. If it wasn’t showing anything inappropriate, then I guess it wasn’t really cared about.

So those are the main things. “No pajama pants” I know was a thing. I think was a rule, or slippers or something. Which is another thing that never happens in college!

I just don’t think it’s appropriate to go to school and to have it all hanging out, you know, I’m there, you’re sitting there, for how many hours a day, might as well be comfortable, and plus it’s cold half the time in the school!
I know that you—okay, shorts and skirts, they were supposed to be below fingertip length, which was kind of hard for me because I have really long arms! I didn’t really follow that code very much because it was unreasonable. I know you weren’t allowed to wear spaghetti straps, and that was fine with me because I was always cold, so I always wore sweaters. And then I feel like the midriff—you weren’t really allowed to show very much, which, I mean, I can understand. I wouldn’t really want to show that around my teachers and such.

... I mean it’s just your shoulders showing, I don’t think that’s anything like... why those? That’s not something that I think would be—like I can see walking around in you know, a bra, but... I don’t know, people all the time in the summer just casually wear spaghetti straps.

They used to go over us, go over at the beginning of the year. I always thought it was funny because you knew when summer was starting because the principal would come on the speaker and just remind everybody about the dress code happening the first warm day of the year, you know, all the spaghetti straps and short shorts would break out because everybody would know that, they could maybe get away with it before they reminded us! I mean I don’t wear them but I, I don’t see them as a negative thing.

... I mean it’s just your shoulders showing, I don’t think that’s anything like... why those? That’s not something that I think would be—like I can see walking around in you know, a bra, but... I don’t know, people all the time in the summer just casually wear spaghetti straps.

After awhile I realized it only stopped people from dressing like lunatics. Like, shorts being too short—that’s actually really appropriate in the real world, you have to have on good length shorts. And then by the time you graduate, you don’t really want to wear really short shorts. I mean I didn’t really want to wear short shorts anyway, so it wasn’t like I was not free.

I’m sure I’d see something and be like well, that’s probably not really appropriate for school. I guess that’s part of the reason why we have the dress code, too. People are like, “Oh, I’m expressing myself.” But you’re here to learn. You’re not here to attract a mate, or whatever!

I honestly think dress codes are bull. Because as long as you’re not flashing people, it shouldn’t matter. I guess we have them to... protect others? So you don’t wear shirts that have curse words on them, or stuff like that, but as long as it doesn’t harm others, it shouldn’t matter. If somebody takes offense to what you’re wearing, then they need to get something checked out in their head!

immediate proof!

you have to wear appropriate length shorts.
I would say that I never really dressed down much; I always tried to look my best. Usually jeans and that kind of thing, and dresses. I was really big on accessories in high school and I think I still am.

Sometimes you just like to dress up, and wear like a cute shirt, but sometimes I feel like there's like too much effort going into that. If you're wearing like a lacy dress, and you're looking for a special bra, or something, it's "Ahh, it's not worth it! Just wear whatever."

I wore more gothic clothing—dark, fishnets, and band tee shirts and skirts and trips and skinny jeans and—trips are like parachute pants with chains on them. I had a pair of combat boots for the longest time, kicks, and stockings. I'd dye my hair, and bleach it blonde in streaks.

The craziest stuff. Whatever I found at the Goodwill or whatever I could make on my sewing machine! I look back on it and it was crazy. Well, because if I wore it in public now I'd look like a hobo or like a crazy person. I thought if you just put a cardigan on something, it makes it acceptable, whatever it is. Just add a cardigan to it!

Like the first day of senior year I was actually wearing a Star Wars shirt and the photographer, he's all like, "Oh, a girl who likes Star Wars," and right before he took the picture he said, "May the force be with you!" and I'm laughing so goofy in my picture.

How I dress depends on my mood, if I'm happy I guess I dress up more; if I'm, like, feeling down, I would dress down; probably more casual—I dress a lot depending on my mood and I feel like a lot of people do that also.

I usually wore more fancy clothing. Lace, and...

I'd normally just wear whatever I'm comfortable with, I never like planned my outfits, cause, let's face it, I'm lazy! I'd pretty much crawl out of bed at the latest point, just throw on whatever.

Around middle school I was always into rock and roll music and such, so after awhile I'm, I actually really like the way they dress, so I kind of tried it out. I feel more comfortable being this way than in being in bright pink and khakis and stuff like that.

Occasionally me and my friend would have a matching shirt, and we'd be, "Heyyy!" Yeah, cause we were like twins. My one friend and I at band camp, one of the theme days was Twin Day. So, we got these two tee shirts and then we did a music staff and notes and it connected, half on one shirt and then it would connect over to the other one. And we actually made them over the phone, we weren't even together—we matched them perfectly!

And in my AP government course, we had to do power point presentations and I just thought cause that was like an advanced course that I should take the time to put some effort into it, not only with what I have on the PowerPoint, but how I was displayed as well, because they're not only looking at the PowerPoint, they're looking at the person talking.

The first three years I always had a system. I always wore a nice blouse, and then jeans, and always wore a nice necklace and some earrings. And then somewhere around my um senior year—just got—just got more, I guess—confident? I started wearing tee shirts, with my hair up. I...not to do my hair, I definitely became more relaxed, but it was more than that. I think before, I'm like a fear, like not wanting to be seen in public, it was really trying. I got more comfortable with my friends.

I wore whatever I thought Audrey Hepburn would wear. I love her with all my heart. Or something that—I had my Audrey Hepburn days that I tried to do that and then I had my days where I would go like thrift store crazy. And long skirts and you know, stuff like that, scarves everywhere.
It was more of a “How comfortable am I in the clothes that I wear?” So, it was never like, “Oh, are these people going to judge me if I wear this?” You know what, if they judge me they’re just jealous because I can be myself.

and other times I would just stare at that person and think, “What are you wearing? Like, Hello!” I definitely noticed girls more than I did guys, but occasionally the guys would be like that.

You know, everybody wore their shorts, and their tee shirt, and their hair in a braid.

And then I just sort of used common sense, because, if I wouldn’t walk outside wearing that, why would I go to school wearing that, you know what I mean? You should care about how you look to some extent, like how you display yourself.

Definitely noticed their clothes, though. But then, I don’t know. You can always find inspiration in little things, even if it’s just like colors or fabrics, so, I always try and think of them in positive ways. And then just, learning experiences—I don’t want to have to learn not to wear that. I’m glad she did!!

In the summertime they’d wear short shorts, and bright pink tee shirts and stuff like that and skinny jeans, cause that’s the new regular pants and I don’t know, I never really paid attention to the way other people dressed because I never really cared, it didn’t affect me.

because you don’t know what’s going on with them at home and they probably have to dress that way for something, you know what I mean? So I never really—I never really wanted to start something cause I never wanted to be that person.

I mean I wouldn’t pick anybody specific to say look at so and so, but, we would talk about how like certain people wear this kind of thing, you can kind of identify the different groups by clothes.
Like one of my best friends, Evie, everyday was jeans and a tee shirt. Which is the opposite of me. So, it never really mattered to me very much. About, like, making friends and how they look.

Yeah, we’d definitely talk amongst ourselves. Honestly, you kind of judge sometimes, you can’t help it, it’s just, “Whaaat were you thinking?”

I figured if they’re looking at me then I’m going to have to, you know, present myself.

I woke up an hour or two before and decided then, and hoped I was a wake enough that day to think of things. I think, maybe it was not about being noticed, but just, you know, being different.

Carmen always looked fantastic. On the negative side? Because I’m a female and I gossip?

How some girls dressed, it wasn’t very appropriate, it was rather trashy and just not a lot of thought put into it.

And I feel like I got a lot of compliments in return throughout high school, a lot of people knew me as being a fashionable girl. But, friend-wise I feel that most of my friends in high school, some of my closest friends, could care less about fashion.

Oh yeah! Sometimes you’d take notice like “I just lo-o-o-ve your style!” You took time out of your day to plan it, it looks very nice put together.

I’ve always looked at other people’s clothing. And, I just really like clothing, so I always like to look at what other people wear, like new trends and that kind of stuff, so it’s always interested me. I was always big on complimenting people. If I liked what they’re wearing then I would compliment them and tell them that I liked what they’re wearing.

Um, and I guess some girls would sometimes wear clothes that weren’t flattering to their body types, very unflattering, and we’d get, I mean not to their face, you know, we’d do the mean thing and talk behind their back. It was never my friends, but you know just like, “Why is she wearing that!” Those are really short, or you know. It was mostly always girls but there were guys, too, who we would talk about. Come on, why is he dressing like he’s from the streets of Philly? He’s not. He’s from here. The more I think about it, we were pretty mean... but yeah, I mean they’re probably talking mean too. It’s high school. Everybody talks.

I hated to tell her

“PLEASANT DREAMS”
Making a bed right is a fine art; takes lots of practice. This girl is learning how.
No. Just cause, um, that would have been so many layers! I guess it depends on the uniform, but I just feel like that would have been so much more of a hassle in a way. I know the main argument is like you have to be unique and stuff, but for me personally it was like that's just so much work. To go out and have to buy a specific uniform, plus I've always been heavy so I'd always be concerned with how it would look, like they're very fitted. I feel like they wouldn't flatter me and I would just be uncomfortable always. So I feel like in my case that would have definitely distracted me from enjoying high school. I feel like a lot of schools that have uniforms don't think about plus-sized students.

Science of...

and you're not allowed to show who you really are, so if we had to wear a uniform I would have personalized it to the point where it wouldn't have been a uniform! They would have gotten mad at me!

I think I would have liked uniforms. The reason for that is because, you know, I see so many people getting picked on, for trying to be a little different, and I think if everybody had the same thing on, you know...they would...fit...not fit in, but just be accepted.

However, the other thing I think of is, people wouldn't be able to express themselves as much so maybe I'm in the middle. I just, I've overheard people say you know, so and so is getting picked on, for whatever reason, like it's their earrings are too big, or their shorts are too short, or long, whatever, but maybe that would eliminate that problem.

No! I just love expressing myself through clothing— that's just like one of my favorite things in life, I guess! And so I would NOT like a uniform.
For certain people. You know? There's um—if you were a really wild girl, and you were wearing really tiny shorts and your butt was out then they would call you out on it. I think they kind of used it as, “How can I punish you? Oh yeah, you're not following the dress code so I can get you on that.” But then some people, like me, I wasn't very crazy or anything, I would wear—I don't know, I would wear my short shorts but I would do it with like, some vintage tights or something like that and I wouldn't get in trouble for it cause I would only talk to two people.

The girls that were louder. Teachers don't like when kids make out in the hallway. You can't yell at somebody for that, so like what can you yell at them for—on their clothes! You know? But—I feel like it was just another way to get the kids that they didn't want. I don't know, you go to high school and then your friends change and stuff? So half of my friends are like the really crazy girls, that wore things that weren't allowed. So I noticed all of the things they did in high school. Then it's, “What did you get in in-school for?” “Oh, for my shorts.” “Like, really?” I feel like that—just they just need all the rules sometimes, it's just so that they can catch it a certain way. I was watching CSI the other day and they wanted to arrest a guy. And the only thing they could find was that he used the store power outlet. So they did like theft of electricity or something. And it's just like that in high school; they just need those rules so they can use them like that.

Well, I'm an auditory learner so I just have to listen but I have to be doing something else, it's like a background thing. And then when I see the question on the test, it just replays in my head—the answer. But I have to be doing something else to catch it, I don't know why. So I'm always doodling. So Carmen; we have a million doodles, it's just notebooks filled.

I thought I was bad at learning in a way. It took me forever to learn how to read, and I'm still not very good at spelling. But I was doing a test; it was in 6th grade. I had Mr. O'Donnell; it was English class and we were learning grammar. And I couldn't, I was so bad at grammar, I just didn't understand it—all these rules! What is this? I just want to speak English! But I was taking a test and he said something about the rules of grammar, and like I was taking the test, and I knew I wasn't paying attention cause I figured I wasn't going to get it but then all of a sudden I read the question and I just heard him say the answer to it and I realized, “Okay this is in here, like I can do this!”

One my whole life. But they don't have title one in 6th grade. So I think that's why I got out. I like to think it's cause...I know it's cause there was no more Title One! But yeah, I did every math camp, math and reading camp, all those camps because no one could teach me, but I guess they just didn't know how.

I remember being in the seventh grade—and the sixth grade, too, and drawing—and the teachers taking my papers away from me.

I remember, I remember in the sixth grade, I was just—it was kind of like—it wasn't scribbling, but just drawing and doodling and filling the paper. And then in the seventh grade I was actually drawing a picture and—it's weird that I can remember those two things specifically—but I guess it kind of like—I don't want to say it hurt me, but I don't know, it made me not like those teachers. Thinking about it now, this would really upset me if it happened now! But she, in sixth grade my teacher, I was drawing and she just like ripped it from my hand and threw it in the trash can in front of me. And I remember, I wasn't upset at the time but I just took it out of the trashcan at the end of class! I never—I never really thought of that too much before but yeah, I'm getting upset.
I know the artwork that I did for my friends; they were more personalized. It was for a specific occasion instead. I knew a lot of art projects I kind of just did, and I’m like, I don’t know how I feel about this. I know a lot of the art projects I did in senior year I was really proud of. Some of them, I just thought, I’m going to do this and it doesn’t really have a meaning behind it. She’d ask, “What does this mean to you?” and I’d be, “It’s an art project! I don’t know!”

Drawings with friends, they’re not as detailed—obviously—maybe a little more personal, related to conversations, things you could talk about. While art—it’s like, a different side of you and deeper, you know what I mean, different kinds of thoughts you have. It’s kind of weird, I don’t really like to keep sketchbooks! I’d really just do big paintings and then have them there. If I come up with a new painting idea I start that and then I’ll finish the other thing later. She always had us keep a sketchbook and when she’d assign stuff I’d do it but I’d prefer just to, you know, get my ideas... I just prefer to put my ideas in one big painting.

Cause even when we were younger, sometimes it was so structured that we had to hold the paper just one way and there were just very specific instructions and you had to follow them. Even with exactly how to hold your paintbrush.

Art class was definitely different mediums. I feel like my sometimes in art, I didn’t do as many expressive things as I did on my own time. I feel like when I was really drawing, that was alone versus like what I was doing in art class. Cause I feel like a lot of my art class was art I wasn’t interested in, clay and stuff; I really just like painting. I was like, okay, let’s just get this 3-d unit over cause I’m done with it. I was one of the few people that hated clay. It dried on my hands. I hated it so much I used to bother Mrs. Lewis every day for lotion. But I feel like on my own I was more willing to draw whatever. I felt more confined in art classes. I liked when we got to choose.

In senior year we did ink and pen portraits of ourselves. I did my hair and it looked awesome, it’s hanging on my ceiling. I look at it and I’m always proud of it and it looks amazing! I love the way I did my hair; it looks really cool.

anyway I wanted to. I could turn the page upside down and have one drawing this way and one drawing that way and—in art class I just felt like it was a little bit—I had to be a little bit more—Maybe that was sort of me pressuring myself? I don’t know.

I remember that piece, she had us take a word and then change the meaning of it. I did a piece about my aunt because she recently passed so it was like fresh in my mind. I always did stuff that was recent to me, or stuff that I experienced or went through. That just seemed to work for me. That’s where I found my inspiration.

I tried a little bit harder in art class, I think, whereas if I was just doodling with my friends I didn’t really care much how good it looked. It was just to get my point across. But I think in art class I just wanted myself to look nicer, in general for people to see it and I just, you know I wanted it to be perfect, or close to perfect.

I felt like even though I was fairly open to expressing what I wanted to in art class, there was more structure that you had to follow.

You know in art class, as you saw, I put a lot of effort into it. I’d come up with my ideas and I’d just get really into it and I’d just—I’m also kind of a perfectionist when it comes to that stuff. whereas with friends I could draw it on a diagonal on the page and it wouldn’t matter and I could just draw it
But there were some projects where, what we did was just shapes or just lines. Everything was that. And then you know, that's nice, but it was like, "Okay, you can use these lines and they have to be here, here, and here." So it made it just like every other class. You know? It wasn't like being creative and art class; it was like doing the formula for this problem. You know, doing what I'm supposed to do. I think having things like that is the killer of everything.

But I liked when we had the chance to do what we wanted with things—I remember we made—like we made a box. But we were able to do whatever we wanted with this box and I had this crazy architecture in mine. You could do the bare minimum or you could go really crazy with it, just like with notes with your friends, you could do something fun.

We played with fonts. Ever since, I don't know if you remember you showed us a video about Helvetica, ever since I saw that I've been so crazy about fonts. And me and Carmen always tried to change our fonts up, so every day we would change our handwriting and see if it was recognizable.

Sometimes art class was the same. Because we could—like the drawings with my friends are fun and they make you laugh or they make you think about something—they get in touch with some memory or something like that. Sometimes that's how art projects were. So it was the same, sometimes.

On my own my drawings were definitely more expressive, maybe not always school appropriate, so that was a big thing. Like with Felix's, they were more private. With paintings, I didn't feel the pressure to get them perfect, it was okay if I really screwed up and then put it aside for a little while. There was no stress with them, so that's always nice.
It is— it really is a presentation! I think that fashion is basically a form of art. That’s how I see it and it’s just— people displaying art on their bodies.

I did like drawing outfits back in high school and I still do now. I mean, I’m getting better at it throughout college ‘cause I’m learning how to do it. But, I like drawing outfits and designing things.

Well, my Teen Vogue was like my handbook for life. So I would take that everywhere. In the mornings, I would look through it, what do I have that’s close to this? And I would draw it out, whatever I had, to see how it looked together.

I would always look at somebody’s outfit, and then maybe I’d look at somebody else’s, and then I’d try to combine them in a drawing, and then use some of my own ideas. Just to see if I can make a different looking outfit, and then—like if I could ever learn to sew, I’d love to make some of these things!

And sometimes you notice something about something that you like. Whether it’s the way the fabric flowed, or the way it looked or something, like the shape of it. And I always tried to jot that down quick.

I love clothes and I like drawing them. I feel like you draw what you know, and so if I’m wearing like a cute outfit I’ll draw that.

A lot of times I would take something I saw, like, on someone else, and then either keep it that way or change it or maybe, just completely make something up that’s new.

I don’t like drawing guys but I really like drawing women’s clothes, so I mean— I’m not like Carmen, she’s really good at that, but it was something I did in my past time.

Great Fashion Looks for Everybody

and then I’d get embarrassed cause all my notes would have women all over and it’d be like oh—someone’s going to find this and be… It’s so strange to explain, they’d probably be like “Why are there no guys?” Well, they’re so boring!
Absolutely I doodle! I always say that I don’t really speak with my mouth as much as when I draw on paper; that’s my way of communication. I would doodle, and you know, even in my paintings and my other drawings, I always like to convey a message, and see what other people thought about that. I’d see if they can get it.

I remember it was everyday in math class, it was actually after I had your class, I remember I could never think of what to draw, or do in your class. But I could in math class, and so I would fill up this entire paper. I would take a piece of paper from my teacher’s desk, and like I have no idea how I passed that class! I didn’t pay attention; I drew the entire year! But I’d fill up the page and I would date it and fold it into a square. I have a cereal box filled with those.

A lot of times me and Carly and Shea would pass notes to each other with like really weird doodles on them, that only we would understand!

I would say in art class a lot, between all of us we would doodle, just casually. Felix, he would doodle things for me and then I’d be like, “Oh! Draw this next!” So then he’d doodle that.

We have these big packets for Chemistry and I draw all over the cover, and I feel like clearly she could see that I was wasting time, I mean I don’t think it’s a waste of time, but, it wasn’t what I should be doing. I should have been working! I’m kind of surprised she didn’t say anything to me.

I just remembered—me and Sam, we wouldn’t see each other a lot so we actually did doodle on stuff and have friends pass it along. I forgot about that. I just remembered that. The goal was just to make it look as ridiculous as possible! Well at the time, she used to be in my lunch period but then she got her schedule moved around and she wasn’t in any of my classes and I was always busy after school; it was just kind of a way to be communicating with her. That was pretty much our main thing.

About, like my favorite things to doodle were dogs, and drums, and cats, and just cutesy stuff.

I used to doodle dancing food. I’m just drawing food! I like to show my doodles. I do like to! I didn’t even get a phone ’til August. Teachers never commented, but one time on a test it was just going really badly— I just started drawing cats on it! I’m like, “I give up on this test!”

I would always laugh, because Carly rambles—at all times—even in her notes she’ll ramble and it’s funny. Personalization. The drawings are kind of like expression, so you could tell if somebody’s being sarcastic or funny or mean or is poking fun.

I know with one of my friends, Michelle, we used to write notes back in high school and we would doodle on them all the time and we would doodle our inside jokes and such so, that was just one of our things. Normally different things, so different faces and animals and like, maybe food, or something like that, it just depended on what we were talking about.

I would get those notebooks and pretend to put notes in them, but—I’d always put them in the back, so that if you’d flip through you wouldn’t see them. I used to really like to draw eyes. That’s really weird. So strange! I used to draw them all over my papers, like a friggin’ psychopath!

Maybe a smiley face or a star here and there in the corner of the page, but it was mostly storytelling, what we went through— “Hey, do you remember that one time with like this, this, and that,” and we would just draw it out.

I actually have I think it was—it was my sophomore year I had an entire notebook. And every day I would like draw on a page. And I’d fill up the page, or however much I got done that day. I would date it and then I’d just turn to the next page, and so that’s for my sophomore year. And then—so like I still have that notebook.

I know people who drew a lot more than me... so like Tommy—oh my god, all the time—notebooks full. A lot of boys, now that I’m thinking about it. They’d always draw like weird things and be like, “Look what I drew!”
Chapter 7

The Art Classroom as Freedom: Realities and Myths

The art classroom is often mythologized as a place of freedom and safety for students: a place where students can be creative and express themselves, where they can rehearse aesthetic and social critique through art making; a place where students might critique such regulatory school practices as the dress code. And depending on the classroom, it may offer those opportunities. Like most art teachers I know, I have heard students declare with sincerity that it was the outlet of art class that got them through high school, or served as the reason they came to school at all, or set them on the path to their future career.¹ For Roxanne, the girl who drew the alphabet blocks, for a time, art class was a way to comprehend and process her feelings about her mother’s imprisonment.² But as I realized when grading Roxanne’s work, art education has its own disciplinary,

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¹ And of course students may say this about many factors in high school–music or science class, or athletics, or a special connection with a teacher, or a guidance counselor, or a school friend. My point is that, in my experience, students often have meaningful and life-changing encounters in high school.

² Justifying the value of attending to this kind of event (my choosing to be attentive to Roxanne’s needs as I perceived them to be in the moment) is a source of frustration for many teachers; not in its occurrence, but in trying to explain its importance to outsiders who direct what teachers and students should do. There’s a valuable organic aspect to our lives, in and out of school, that precludes planning for, measuring, and sometimes understanding. In trying to articulate this, we teachers may fall into the emotional performance of the hero or martyr, (and many of these occurrences are emotional for the teacher as well as the student) that is, the exasperated argument of “Don’t you realize how much I do for my students?” in response to critiques of teachers as, for example, self-centered union members opposed to educational change. But there is a truth to this claim of caring that deserves honoring. While it may be expressed in self-centered terms, and this is something we teachers should continually reflect on, there is value in work that requires care for others; work that is currently discredited in national conversation. I note how the term “Nanny State” (not “Daddy State”) is used in political rhetoric to mock social programs, thus deriding caring, the feminine, and generosity in one put-down.
regulatory systems; and these practices can oppose what we declare about the power and possibilities of art education, and the value to our students of studying and making art.

These regulations are influenced by national curriculums, and by the world of fine art; I mean the idea that traditional and contemporary art of the kind found in art museums and galleries is a sort of ultimate art on which art education should focus. As I found with Roxanne’s art, my own sense of what is good art for the classroom had something to do with the way I grew up and the way I learned–my own genealogy of aesthetic awareness.

The more years I taught, the more the students’ own art–including Duncan’s dogs colored in zany marker patterns, and Roxanne’s energetically produced drawings and paintings, and Ijaba’s thickly tempera and glitter-coated fashion girls wore down my code of modernist elements and principles-based rules, and appeared to me as important and meaningful work in its own right; not developmentally lacking or requiring my expert advice for refinement.

My friend Kenneth, an art teacher of grade school children for over 25 years, has very specific and refined tastes. So it surprised me when he declared, “The longer I teach, the more I think, who am I to judge their work?” I know what he means, and perhaps one of our mistakes as teachers is to place ourselves always in the role of the expert, instructing students whom we are told, and so come to believe, are never fine just as they are but always lacking and in need of help. Their work touched my heart. It made me laugh. It taught me about their lives, and kept me connected with youth cultures. And also, it excited my sense of design. (Not always all at the same time.) Once I opened my aesthetic judgment to appreciation of the wonderful variety of work that was already
there, I was overwhelmed by the abundance, and by the inherent value of their art. But first I had to allow that as a possibility. I had to examine my own education, and the sources of my aesthetic beliefs.
Figure 7.1: My (Beloved) Aesthetic Education.
Figure 7.2: In the Classroom: Whose Aesthetics?
Sam’s Gift Cards

Sam’s head is bent over her work. She was drawing all period, something small and detailed, and now she is cutting the paper into little rectangles. Sam often prefers to socialize with those around her rather than work on the assignment, but when she gets an idea she works intently until she completes it to her satisfaction. I walk to Sam’s side and say good morning. She sifts through the cut rectangles on her desk and hands me one, saying, “Here!” I look at the little piece of paper in my hands. It is a hand-made trading card of sorts, a cartoon portrait of me, and labeled “Mrs. Bloom.” She draws me with a cartoon sunny smile and colors my hair with a no. 2 pencil, which is perfect for its graying color.

Whatever the class art assignment was, it was not this: a collection of cards featuring people in school, including her friends, several teachers, and someone she thinks is hot. Sam intends to give each person their card, but for the moment they form a delightful pack, a visual representation of her social circle within school. They include stats for each individual: a list of alphabetical adjectives, as Sam combines two disciplines, art and her list of English vocabulary words, in her perceptive and irreverent observations. Sam shows me a card depicting Mr. Hunter, her social studies teacher, and I hope he appreciates it. The cards do not fit what is considered good art in the school scene. Some might not even recognize the cards as art. The art considered good in school culture, and the art that is recognized with higher grades and with prizes at art shows, often features carefully rendered drawings, paintings, and sculptures that attempt to capture a photographic likeness, or an imitation of a genre of artistic style, and the works are appreciated for that quality. Plenty of other works may garner admiration, too,
including those that feature extra detail, fantastical subjects, and eye-catching or fashionable designs. But ephemeral works such as messy sketched comics drawn on notebook paper, carefully folded notes with magic marker doodles as marginalia, and Sam’s friendship cards are often overlooked by the school community and within the art classroom, as they do not fit the standards of An Art Project. The fact that Sam’s valuable artistic production does not meet the requirements of my assigned project, or for that matter the National Standards for Art Education, or the A.P. art portfolio requirements, is evidence of this regulatory system, and of the acceptance of art teachers and art accrediting agencies as authoritative judges of students’ art.

Artist Shona Illingworth (2005), in talking about the mythology of community art projects, could be describing a public school art classroom when she says:

Often the implication is that the artist will service the group by instilling “a sense of community” and “increase self confidence” through facilitating “creative expression”, while at the same time maintaining a position of cultural authority. This...defines the group within a limited reference while denying the complexities of the social and economic positions that impact on their lives by offering art practice as some sort of palliative. (p.47).

Illingworth highlights the paradox between what are claimed as the benefits found within community art spaces, against the leader’s “cultural authority.” Also, considering Roxanne’s drawing of alphabet blocks, Illingworth’s statement cautions me against claiming art as a palliative for Roxanne, or for any student. I have a feeling that Roxanne’s work was valuable for her, or at least the process was, and that she was
figuring something out; maybe it was a palliative. It meant something to her that is perhaps beyond my understanding, and that acknowledgement of my own ignorance is reason enough to sit in Foucault’s indeterminate, spiral space—the “revolving door of rationality” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p. 249) allowing for students’ desires, and having the faith in them that they know what they are doing even if I do not. Is Sam free to create art that is meaningful to her, or must she produce art to meet a curriculum that determines her needs for her, that imagines her future within a particular limited realm, that defines Sam for herself, as the dress codes do?

Another source of art class regulation is censorship, enacted within the classroom or by parties outside the classroom. Drug training workshops often called on us to look for symbols of drugs in students’ artwork, and to both forbid such drawings (such as pot leaves and mushrooms) and report them; as with gang attire the trainers insisted it was likely such students were using drugs. Teachers went back to their classes and examined students’ doodles for evidence. Heaven help the student who doodled a Smurf and a little mushroom house after such a workshop. My junior high school English teacher used to tell us, “The word is not the thing,” and I didn’t understand that in ninth grade. But I understand it now, particularly in relation to drawings of guns and pot leaves; and in spaghetti straps and sag pants imagined as embodying whatever character flaw or danger the observing disciplinarian assumes they represent.

Christine Marmé Thompson (2009) writes about the censorship of preschool children’s drawings, particularly the powerful action-packed violence that is so essential to superhero depictions, and to many children’s desires in drawing. At such times the censorship defies our claims that art education allows to students to express themselves;...
we limit their expression to that which meets our authoritarian approval. Thinking about censorship in schools should give us pause. When Jana and Felix can create some drawings (the naughty ones) only outside of school; when critical or ethnic studies classes are eliminated by political censorship, it means that school limits students’ learning, and that students may be able to learn more outside of school than in school—the opposite of what we claim schools do. How then do we define or justify the value of schools?

Paradoxically, the under-appreciation of divergent art in the classroom ignores contemporary practices in art making and designing. Featuring the transgressive styles and rule-flaunting designs that are lately popular in mass culture, the editor of a book of handmade work from graphic designers states, “Maybe it is time for graphics to be judged purely on the universal principle of their relative appeal to the viewer” (*Handmade Graphics: Design+Art*, 2010, introduction). I like the combination of “universal” and “relative” in that quote; it seems to acknowledge the unpredictability of the designs and the reactions to them. Similarly, the graphic design work in the book *All Messed Up: Unpredictable Graphics* (the word unpredictable appears again) celebrates the messy mistake, the purposeful imperfection, and the flawed but embraced art emerging from the perfectionist world of graphic design. The book invites the viewer to consider “what is unsafe, uncertain, unstable and uncomfortable…unpredictable states…as states of mind that enable the creative process to breathe, evolve and, ultimately, progress” (2004, p.15). When we claim that schools are for learning how to act in the real world, or to prepare for jobs, we are ignoring the real world of these graphics professionals and deferring to historic ideas of Fordist training; that is, learning
to do what you are told to do. As contemporary artists make news for inventive
destruction of artistic conventions, and graphic designers entertain new rule-breaking
aesthetic forms, the National Standards for Art Education, the rules for the Scholastic Art
Awards, and the requirements of the Advanced Placement Studio Art classes confirm
tradition and standardization as the focus of art making in schools. Where do Sam’s cards
fit in such a classroom?

**Feminist Zines & Good Taste**

As art teachers, how do we come to know what we know and believe what we believe about art? When I made some of the comics and collages that appear in this work, I was struggling with ideas of what I wanted to do with this dissertation. I wanted to include art that was personal, and art that perhaps breaks some art room codes and art education guidelines as I had learned them; for example, that cute can not be meaningful; that popular symbols like hearts or peace signs should be avoided. I wanted to include the kinds of art that I argue for allowing and appreciating in the public school art classroom. Could I theorize, and therefore officially justify this? Considering how some feminist zines work in combining drawn and found images, stickers, hand lettering, word processing, Xeroxed images, personal reflections, uncensored opinions, and disruptive or radical content sitting in a space with cute, girly paraphernalia allows me to justify my own artistic preferences. Hilary Chute (2011) says of Lynda Barry’s collage work:

> Barry embraces lush collage as did the pattern and decoration movement of the 1970s, in which artists like Miriam Schapiro and Joyce Kozloff mixed fabric and paint and explored the use of commonplace materials,
putting pressure on mainstream concepts of art that devalued ornamentation and handicraft as "women's work" (p. 290-291.)

Allowing the feminine, or what is considered the feminine, first to seep into my teaching, and then to revisit it in an intensive way in graduate school was illuminating, and as with being introduced to the field of girl cultures, it validated something that I had missed, but wasn’t aware of.

I was restrained by knowledge that came from art history lectures and art classes long before I became a teacher. My enormous, 767-page college art history textbook had no female artists, a fact I never noticed until I examined it recently. In movies, popular prints, and on the walls of museums, the art I saw was equally limited in scope. Lucy Lippard (1990) notes that racism (and gender bias) are often hidden in the art world “because personal taste and individual selection (called curating) rule for the most part unchallenged. The people doing the ‘caring’ for art are overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and—in the upper echelons—usually male” (p.7). When a work is not chosen, the curators claim, it is rejected entirely on the basis of quality (which they decide) and so Lippard describes their biased argument thusly: “Quality will prevail, so-called minorities just haven’t got it yet” (P.7). Foucault’s dividing practices are evident here, as groups are separated and excluded according to supposedly objective criteria, through standards of taste, and theories that serve to privilege some, and move others to the margin. In my education, there was no situating of the critics and curators as experts; those who had decided these were the great works. That is, as Lippard notes, the experts (and those who respected their authority) did not recognize or admit to their own biases; biases which

everyone has in some form. These discourses flowed, in Donna Haraway’s (1988) term, as a “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere,” from an omniscient narrator, who delivered a hierarchy as an essential truth; natural, and not questionable or subjective (p.581).

Lucy Lippard (1992) is reflective concerning her own recognition of feminism and feminist art, as she remembers her earlier immersion in the mid 20th century’s predominant modernist art: “I can see that I was drawing back from certain taboos, among them ‘sentiment,’ ‘emotionalism,’ ‘permissive lyricism,’ and ‘literary generalization’ all of which I am now frequently guilty of” (p.32). She admits the strength of inculcated behaviors: “Five years after the birth of my feminist consciousness, I still have to question every assumption, every reaction I have, in order to examine them for signs of preconditioning” (p.32). I know what she means. I call this my default button; the phenomenon that even after learning about feminism and feminist art, and encouraged by my women’s studies classes to include women when discussing history, art, and culture with students, I so often reverted to lessons learned long ago, and reverted to thinking only of the men I originally learned about in school. The Guerilla Girls, a group of activist incognito feminist artists, respond to this common experience by, among other things, creating collaged and cartoon-filled books that feature investigations of art world histories, politics, finances, and museum and gallery structures. In their humorous The Guerilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art, they state that their own educations “reduced centuries of artistic output to a bunch of white male masterpieces and movements, a world of ‘seminal’ and ‘potent’ art where the few women you hear about are white, and even they are rarely mentioned…” (1998, p.7).
The modernist influences I depict in Figure 7.1 surprise me by the similarities in their mid-century modernist design. I could have added many more, and this image makes me realize just how influential these objects have been in the way I see the world. I have affection for these objects and their design; and I believe that is only a problem if my affection becomes a belief that they are superior to other’s aesthetic tastes, especially in my role as a teacher. The college art textbook, *Design Through Discovery* (Bevlin, 1970) was presented to me in that authoritarian way. While there are many good design ideas and examples in the book, Bevlin continually ties design practices to design found in nature, as she makes a case for universality—the idea that good design has a universal understanding. Yet even with my background of modernist designed toys, (or because of it) I struggled with the limitations the book appeared to impose. Is “balance” a universal design principle, or is it an idea that is useful to some designers and artists who speak in terms of a particular shared aesthetic?

Also, these were not my only aesthetic influences; and I realize my aesthetic tastes come from many sources. As a child, I found my connection to my Pennsylvania Dutch heritage troubling, partly because I viewed it through locally sold souvenirs; imagery of hex signs and odd caricatures of Amish people, and these as representing all Pennsylvania Dutch people. Amos, a giant, grotesque (because of his cartoon stylization)

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4 Pennsylvania Dutch refers to the Germans who settled in Pennsylvania in large numbers during the 17th and 18th centuries. Among these settlers were Anabaptists, from which came Mennonites and Amish; two distinct religious groups. Each of those religious strands has various denominations. The Amish tend to be more traditional in their culture: driving horse drawn buggies on local roads, wearing customary clothes, sending their children to one room schoolhouses, and foregoing electricity. In general, however, Pennsylvania Dutch does not refer to any religious group but to a German ethnic heritage originating in Pennsylvania that, like other ethnicities in the U.S., has traditions of a unique dialect, special foods, holiday practices and the like. “Benjamin Franklin, who
image of an Amish man made from fiberglass, was an attraction outside a local diner for many years. Because of my name, Amos was one of the things classmates would call me when we played that playground game of “make fun of each other’s names by trying to rhyme them with something embarrassing.” It was distressing because I was a girl being called a man, and furthermore, I was being compared to a monstrous man, considered laughable because of his unsophisticated fashion (he was barefoot) and his ignorance. For a while there was a pressure-sensitive speaker at his feet, and so he would announce colloquial Pennsylvania Dutch sayings; sayings that are mock-able because they defy proper grammar. It took a long time before I could visit the local museum’s Pennsylvania Dutch collection and appreciate the art that comes from that heritage, from my heritage: everyday objects beautified with painted flowers and strawberries and birds; hand lettered and decorated frakturs commemorating family births, marriages, and deaths, and textiles including samplers, knitted mittens, quilts, fancy embroidered pincushions, and little toys. Eventually, too, I learned to appreciate the colloquialisms, the souvenirs, and even Amos the statue as a kitschy roadside attraction.

Exploring my Pennsylvania Dutch lineage and the aesthetic deriving from it, I created Dutch Book/ New Museum of Art, a box with a collaged surface of images of crafts, and filled with an assemblage of craft materials such as sequins, feathers, and glitter as well as cheap knickknacks and souvenirs (figure 7.3). I juxtapose popular crafts, including Pennsylvania Dutch hex symbols, with illustrations of fine art. Placing plaster cast figurines next to sculpted marble, and geometric patchwork quilts next to modernist

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5 My clever response was, “That doesn’t even rhyme!”
6 Such as, “Throw the cow over the fence some hay.”
paintings is an exercise in finding the similarities between the two designations and questioning the hierarchy of value. Paradoxically, many Pennsylvania Dutch antiques are valuable and collectible, with dower chests, carved wooden birds, old household pottery and pages of hand-lettered lessons from students’ workbooks going for high prices in the art market. This consumption of what was everyday craft, objects originally used at home the way I use a crock pot or pillow cases, indicates the shifting designations of what is valuable in art, and throws hierarchies into question–what is featured in a museum, for example, and how it is displayed. So I include crafts considered kitsch as well. I wonder if these are, or will someday be, considered valuable. I imagine someone collecting Olivia’s decorated chemistry notebook, Taylor’s fashion sketches, and Hannah’s collection of notes to friends.

The box lid features an old column from a craft magazine in which readers sent in letters with photographs that showed off their creations, or letters that requested “pen pals” or an exchange of sewing and craft patterns. A letter from Betty Walter, of Grove City, PA on the box lid states she has “10,000 quilt patterns, 700 stuffed animal patterns, and 100 rag doll patterns” and that she would like to trade with others. I see Betty Walter as a curator and a researcher of sorts. She’s created some kind of library (she must have an organizational system for 10,800 patterns) and certainly she has expertise about this facet of art making: a history of published patterns for DIY projects. While creating this assemblage, new ideas and connections emerge from manipulating the materials. In the midst of seeing, cutting, manipulating, and pasting images and writings from women proudly showing their work to the world, I move from a sense of amusement regarding these dated images, to realizing my respect for the women. As I wonder why their
creative work, their labors, and their interests are dismissed so easily and considered low in the hierarchy of art, I wonder at my own position relative to the traditions and expectations within academia. I recognize my trimming, arranging, and gluing scraps connects with my heritage, with the women in these images, and with the fragments and bits I collect and arrange in my academic research.
Figure 7.3: Dutch Book/New Museum of Art.
Many feminist zines disrupt images of ideal girlhood by altering images from various corporate and cultural sources, as well as retelling stories of their youth to process them and place them in perspective. Lynda Barry’s collaged images and comics share an aesthetic commonality with feminist zines. Hillary Chute talks about the “detritus of girlhood” Barry uses in her work:

Relevant as feminist praxis, One Hundred Demons is a vital feminist work, resignifying the detritus of girlhood as productive collage by aesthetically revisioning it. The recontextualization of cheap, common, or utilitarian paper (which also harkens back to the historical avant-garde) may be understood as a transvaluation of the idea of working on "waste"—a knowing, ironic acknowledgment on Barry's part that her life narrative, itself perhaps considered insignificant, is visualized in an accessible popular medium, comics, that is still largely viewed as "garbage." And significantly, the use of genre and/or everyday materials such as newspapers and paper bags as a foundation for drawing is consonant, materially and theoretically, with DIY (“do-it-yourself”) culture: the DIY ethic, so prominent in punk and youth subcultural practice, and in contemporary grassroots feminism today, is not an abstraction in Barry's work, but constitutes its explicit political context. Barry's feminist demystification—and feminist valuation—of the "writer" and "artist" in the figure of a genre material-obsessed cartoonist is a significant contribution to visual culture, as is her summary dispatching of any notion of a coherent self (p.302 and 303)
Cindy Crabbe’s (2011) *Doris* is emblematic of the varieties of styles and communication within feminist zines. Like the collaged images in Barry’s *100 Demons*, Crabbe revisits memory and girlhood experiences to make sense of them in the present, and to understand their impact on her life. Funny, raw, and information-packed, Crabbe writes about politics, love, gender, recovery, art, and living spaces (including homelessness), with stories and recipes included. Her pages are pasted-up compositions of typewritten text interspersed with hand written content, collage, and little doodle-like drawings; a style evident in many zines. When I met Cindy, selling her own and others’ zines at a women’s studies conference, I purchased another zine that she told me was created by a girl in high school, titled *Limbo* (2012). Printed in white lettering on black paper, the anonymous 3 by 5” zine is folded lengthwise and hand sewn at the edge. Silver pen was used to print the title and add the page numbers. There is also a hand-drawn penguin on the first page. The story is autobiographical, and concerns memories beginning in 7th grade—of the first days of school after moving, of sexual abuse by a relative, a sister’s suicide attempts because of the same abuse, the search for hope, and the desire for a happy ending. The form of the zine subverts both publishing and economic traditions, in line with recent practices of alternative imagining of exchange.7 But *Limbo*’s author also subverts the traditional trope of the ideal girl. She tells her story publicly, and speaks of her fears, her strength, and resilience: “Why had I handled it so differently? Why wasn’t it me in the hospital? I was younger, so shouldn’t I be the more f----d up one?” (p.38) This handmade object tells a story that has been told by other girls;

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7 In Crabbe’s *The Encyclopedia of Doris*, she creates an alternate copyright permission system. Crabbe sells her zines through mail or direct sales, and carries other zinesters’ work as well. Too, other zine outlets (called distros, an abbreviation for distributors) sell Crabbe’s work.
it is the same and yet different. It is her story, and she made this book with her hands, and
I hold it in my hands and think about her. Her story can serve as another kind of advice
for girls, by representing an image of a strong girl; one not defined by her adherence to
codes of modesty, appearance, or duty. It is a story of survival, community, and
communicating, for any girl who happens upon it. The young author exchanges her story
with others. She can do this with her name attached, or remain protected by anonymity
while still participating in a social conversation.

Divergent Art in School Spaces

Sam’s cards and the notes the girls that I interviewed talk about operate in a sense
as part of feminist zine culture. The decorated notes create a conversation, taking place
below the radar of official school talk and the delivery of the standardized curriculum.
When Jana remarks, “A lot of boys, now that I’m thinking about it–They’d always draw
like weird things and be like, ‘Look what I drew!’” I wonder if the girls’ drawing and
writing in privately passed notes is a more accepted form of communication for girls; in
that they may not feel as comfortable claiming a public space (McDowell, 1999). Sam’s
practice with her cards also replicates zine culture in that she gives them away; she
distributes them. They are not meant to keep; because she is so eager to hand them out, to
connect, she does not hand them in for a grade. Her purposes for making the cards are
other than an art assignment; in fact her method embraces art as communication, while
my insistence on grading does not. Sam’s art travels quietly through the school system
with its emergent, informal communication. It delights her friends, and like a silent
telegraph through the halls of the school, they connect, commiserate, complain, and laugh
through such creatively drawn and written messages, passed to each other hand to hand, and avoiding authoritative editing.

Students’ art in school, their own art, exists in many spaces, inside and outside the art room. The girls I interviewed described art projects they liked and those they did not. Olivia told a story about an assignment that she grappled with:

I always feel like for art class, sometimes I really struggle with something I want to do. I don’t think the art class requirements are strict, but–I feel like I’m kind of restricted in a way. I can think of one project that we did, it was supposed to be a perspective project, there were like six choices. And they were pretty broad, but I couldn’t think of anything I wanted to do. So I just kind of did a landscape, with a house and a road but I pretty much didn’t really follow the requirements. I remember when she was grading it, she said, “Oh, it’s a great painting but you didn’t really do what you were supposed to.” I said, “Yeah, I kind of get that. I should have followed it more.” But I couldn’t–I wasn’t inspired by the project. So it was, oh well, just paint. At the time I knew this isn’t what she wants. But I was going to turn something in and I wasn’t going to redo it. I really like how it looks. There is the hint of perspective in there. It’s not like the focus of the picture though. So I just turned it in. But I remember I thought, the perspective part of this is the worst part. If I could take this out then I would–it was the part I didn’t want.
Jana also struggled with the limitations of art class. Her favorite medium is filmmaking, which she would have preferred working on over other required mediums:

I feel like film is always forgotten; it’s also an art. I think that the way I felt when I made films is how Felix feels when he writes or draws. It’s really the whole, from beginning to end. I like how there’s so many steps; it starts with the scripts—no, it starts before that—you’re sitting around and you’re just throwing ideas around and you’re just, you know, bouncing things off each other, and I like how it slowly comes together and then it’s just so fulfilling to watch it, at the end. Like we finished it and here it is and it used to just be us sitting around drawing, sketching things out for what we should do, and now it’s this nine-minute short film and that’s always really exciting. And the process of filming in general, it’s really exhilarating. It’s really stressful, but I’m one of those people who really works well with that…it’s such a rewarding stress, you know everything that can go wrong will go wrong on set and it’s just, you know… as much as I complained about it when I’m on set, I like the challenges that come, I like overcoming them; I like solving them. I think that’s what makes me stay in there with film in school, even though it’s hard and it’s stressful and there’s so many people that are better than me; this is something I really like. It’s such a collaborative art, and that’s really erratic because I always used to consider myself not someone who likes people. I was always such a solitary worker, and I hated group projects, but when you get the right group for a film, it’s so great. It all just really comes together.
But I also like editing, which is more solitary. Then you can surround yourself with just your equipment, and focus on that for about 20 hours!

You don’t have to be with people you don’t like.

Sam’s cards, Olivia’s painting, and Jana’s love for filmmaking call for curriculums that are fluid and allow for student desire. Design of school curriculums seldom consider the interests, energy, ideas, and skills that students already have and that they are eager to put to use. We continually design curriculums from a top down, expert position, neglecting to ask the intended audience members what they might be interested in, and then we are mystified when those curriculums are rejected or avoided by the students. “Anything can be art if I say it is.” My high school students would sometimes make this claim; based on their growing recognition of art being both more varied and complex than what they previously imagined (it’s not just a painting in a museum!) and simpler than what they imagined (it doesn’t have to be a painting that looks like something!) While they sometimes said it as a farcical argument, for example facing grading time with an unfinished project, there is truth in that claim. It is a truth, too, far from the realm of writing art curriculum, and that idea may make us nervous. As experts, even those of us who critique our currently over-tested school culture, or national standard curriculums, are wary of an undefined curriculum. We are tied to these “curricular dress codes” by the fear that too much freedom will be the path to…the path to…the path to what? What artists and designers actually do, perhaps? Which is to think, invent, practice, play, and experiment with ideas and tools and materials.
Art curriculum is everywhere around us. It is in the doodles that the girls I interviewed talk about. It is in their notes, in the stuff they make at home, inspired by their own desires, and perhaps disallowed in school. Laura Chapman broadens the possibilities of definitions of “high quality”, of educational spaces, and perhaps of curriculum ideas when she states:

In the traditional venues for encountering “high quality,” such as museums or galleries, concert halls, theaters, it is easy to forget how experiences in these sanctuaries are enriched or inhibited by impressions from a larger surround of mass-produced cultural fare, mass-circulated imagery, so many aesthetically designed environments. I think it is a mistake to think that “high quality” is only and inevitably at a distance from everyday experiences…If you walk by the cosmetic counter, you have the opportunity to see someone’s “lessons” about the aesthetics of self-presentation for women. There are different lessons in other “departments” whether it is children’s clothing or home goods (in Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009, p.22).

I imagine a curriculum being written by each student, as the anonymous high school senior does in her zine How I Quit School (2010-2012). It is worth asking what we may miss in students’ achievements when we forego a flexible model of curriculum.
Figure 7.4: Learn to Knit.
HATE TO KNIT

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IT'S ALL... SHATTERED DREAMS & RESILIENCE

THE BOOK FOR KNITTIN' QUITTERS.

NO SHAME IN IT...
TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

STUFF TO MAKE
THAT'S NOT KNITTING!

Dedicated to Ian S., the student who said, "Why will these hands not do what I want them to?"

Figure 7.5: Hate to Knit.
Chapter 8

Stories We Tell in School, and Some Myths

There are stories we tell in school, and stories we tell about school. One of the ways that we know what we know is through lessons we learn in school. Schools in The United States have traditions, curriculums, cultures, and practices; some of which they share in common with each other and some in which they may vary. But one thing all school cultures possess is stories with mythical content; commonly held (and cherished) assumptions about what school (and learning) is, and what should happen in school. These include ideas about what opportunities school provides to each student; how students should look and act in school; and school’s purpose, which increasingly focuses on school’s importance to the national economy.

A mission statement tells a story about a school’s goals and beliefs. Mission statements, borrowed from the world of business,\(^1\) have been increasingly promoted (Whatever It Takes is one such book and program purchased by Community Hills) as a form of organizational improvement; ostensibly a way to get everyone in an organization working towards the same goal. Traditionally, the goal of school was assumed to be educating students; however mission statements sometimes promote ambiguous notions such as teamwork and conformity. Here is Community Hills’ mission statement, developed by a group including several administrators, teachers, and paid consultants:

**OUR MISSION:**

*The Community Hills School District: Educating, Inspiring, and Empowering Every Student Every Day.*

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\(^1\) And the corporate world perhaps borrowed them from political manifestos.
This statement is followed on the school website by another:

Our graduates include an Olympic medalist, a Pulitzer-prize-winning author, a global executive for a top athletic apparel brand, a nationally known television news anchor, a brigadier general in the United States Marine Corps, an environmental lifestyle pioneer and best-selling author/columnist/television personality/radio host on green, modern living, and a cardiovascular surgeon on the cutting-edge of medical research.

In the combined statements there is a paradox. The first statement, “The Community Hills School District: Educating, Inspiring, and Empowering Every Student Every Day” asserts a claim about treating every student equally, in that that no student will be left out of education, inspiration, and empowerment. The second statement lists seven prominent graduates of the high school who have achieved some sort of success in various areas. The mission statement combined with the follow-up statement encourages a cognitive dissonance—that is, the necessity, but impossibility, of believing two contradictory ideas at the same time—in all participants in the school. Why does the school make the first claim? And why does it make the second?

The first statement may answer social or legal calls for equity, but also answers to the American\(^2\) ideal that every individual is equal in the eyes of the law, in American democracy, and by extension, in the school. It promises parents that their child will be just as important as anyone else’s child, that their child will be educated, inspired, and

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\(^2\)I use “American” in various instances in this paper to match its common usage in the educational discourse currently prominent in The United States. “American values”; “American superiority” are terms that reference a historical meaning based on dominant cultural beliefs of what The United States’ ideals have been, are, or should be. I use the term when I choose to keep the flavor of that conservative discourse evident, while not necessarily approving of its limited, majoritarian referents. I also note that “America” can refer to any number of nations in the Northern, Central, and Southern Americas.
empowered—every day. That’s a big promise, and most likely neither possible nor provable. Further, at the same time it is an ambiguous promise that makes use of vague terms. What does it mean to be inspired every day? Inspired to do what? If a teacher or a student has a headache, can they (must they) still be inspiring/inspired that day? What does it mean to be empowered every day? Does an empowered student use the bathroom without permission? Does an empowered student choose what they would like to learn? There can be beneficial and detrimental meanings for educating, inspiring, and empowering. Less idealistic-sounding synonyms include trained, motivated, and authorized. Thus the statement acts as an advertisement for the school’s quality in that it “sounds good” but is not specific in meaning. Each reader can decide what the meanings are; a situation that can lead to confusion or disagreements, but also, more optimistically, may provide the means, the gaps, in which to challenge majoritarian directives. For example, a student could create her own definition of empowerment and argue that the mission statement guarantees her right to that empowerment.

The second statement makes a claim that important people, according to particular definitions of success (fame, income, and/or placement in organizational hierarchies) have graduated from the school. It implies that the school had something to do with the graduates’ success. Thus, to parents, the message is that this is a good school, where every child, including your child (because we treat everyone the same) has a chance to be one of these success stories. This message coincides with the professed idealism of the 2001 Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which masks a project of federal and corporate school control with the requirement to hold schools accountable for the success of every child. The paradox in the local school’s mission statement matches that from the
federal level: in a system (economy, nation, school) that not only recognizes but organizes itself by competition and by hierarchy, how can every individual be equal? In fact, citing these seven individuals highlights their specialness in the school’s definition of success: a hierarchy; thus acknowledging the school’s system of judgment. The list does not highlight, for example, a parent, a plumber, a salesperson, or a teacher. Can we all be an Olympic medalist, a Pulitzer-prize-winning author, a global executive, a news anchor, a brigadier general, an environmental lifestyle pioneer, or a surgeon? That is, even if we all learn to be a “Brigadier General”, the nation only needs a small number of them.

So how do we cover over the inconsistencies of our myths? Since everyone cannot be at the top of a hierarchy (and Race to the Top is indeed the title and focus of another federally invented program, in which schools compete with each other for funds) such systems eventually need stories to explain why some children–that is, the majority of us–will not make it to the top.

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3 Even fewer than I imagined: “U.S. Code of law explicitly limits the total number of general officers who may be on active duty. The total of active duty general officers is capped at 230 for the Army, 208 for the Air Force, and 60 for the Marine Corps.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigadier_general_(United_States)
Figure 8.1: High School: We are all different; every one every day.
Re-Education

If the school’s mission statement served only as an inspirational focus, an upbeat reminder of the need to consider every student as important and to remember the importance of the work we do as teachers, I would not spend effort in a critique of it. However, the Mission Statement represents one result of the school’s need to meet federally mandated directives such as NCLB, and recently developed ideals of school culture as corporatized (Shore & Wright, 2000). The job described in the Mission Statement largely falls to the teachers, and it is written as an impossible goal, yet one for which teachers are increasingly held accountable. One can try, but one will never achieve the perfection of educating, inspiring, and empowering every student every day—whether one believes in actual freedom in the empowerment of students, or in a controlled and orderly mass of like-minded individuals.

Teachers and students are partners in educational practice in public schools, though policies and expectations often place them in adversarial relationships. This partnership grows more important as both groups are under constant criticism. Consider that every contemporary critique of a teacher related to actual or supposed insufficient student test scores is also a critique of entire groups of public school students, labeled as unsatisfactory, or in the terms of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, as inadequate. It is necessary to note their reliance on each other—our reliance on each other—as both groups struggle for decent treatment and equality in our public democracy. When teachers from the Teach For America program (TFA) are presumed superior to state-certified and educated public school teachers on the basis of having attended an ivy league school, or through being approved by the ivy-league educated administrators of
the TFA organization, public school teachers and public school students are facing an invented and growing caste system, one which lacks even the pose of a meritocracy (illusion though it may have been); a caste system that must be confronted.\(^4\) As The Secret Blog of Wendy Kopp—the tongue-in-cheek blog satirizing TFA founder Wendy Kopp—says: “I started a movement. If you go to a good college, you’ve heard of it”\(^5\) (About me, 2008).

Teachers are continually faced with such ambiguous orders as meeting the expectations of the mission statement. Particularly of late, programs including NCLB, TFA, as well as those pushing for the privatization of public schools (but with public money) have successfully promoted the idea that public school teachers are lacking in effective skills. Thus, they have commanded teachers in one impossible directive after another, or in the case of TFA, replaced them altogether. This generalized critique of public school teachers has been growing since the 1980s, beginning with the publication of “A Nation at Risk,” a federally produced document that rang false alarms for the supposedly dire situation of United States public schools.

As a freshly minted teacher with a Bachelor of Science in art education, within several weeks on my new job, I attended my first in-service. In-services are days when students have off and teachers are in attendance, and such days might be spent getting work done, planning lessons and projects together, or perhaps visiting a local school to

\(^4\) There is a continual assertion that the students in TFA and any group that is not part of the system of state educated public school teachers are superior, and this estimate is based in sketchy referents such as, for example, coming from an ivy league school. Wendy Kopp, founder of TFA, is a graduate of Princeton. TFA was developed as her college project.

\(^5\) http://fakewendykopp.blogspot.com/
have a common seminar: a day when all art teachers in an area, for example, meet for a planned program of interest and sharing ideas. However, in the growing focus on the critique of public school teachers and the alarm about public school quality, most of these days are now state-directed (in Pennsylvania) and tied to accountability: continual retraining in various programs sold by consultants, (such as spending several days writing a mission statement) or in the state’s latest directives, and in NCLB training and adjustments, and in instruction for each new launch of mandated tests. In-services are one of the reasons I am a reluctant researcher: I have seen first hand how “research–based practices” can exasperate and demoralize teachers and students; while making money for those who support and sell the programs. My point is that although the school hired me, and although I had a college degree, both of which indicated that I was qualified, I was (along with every veteran teacher) viewed as needing immediate and continual retraining. When the tone of such training turns to the kind of ambiguous directive in our mission statement, a teacher’s job becomes frustratingly difficult to perform.

The Importance of Flair

In the 1999 movie Office Space, actress Jennifer Aniston, as waitress Joanna, works at an Applebee’s style restaurant. While she waits on tables, she is serially interrupted and reprimanded by her manager for not showing enough enthusiasm in her wearing of “flair,” a profusion of small pins, buttons, and badges that are emblematic of the wait staff’s performance of casual familiarity. The flair is proposed as something the staff should have fun with; voluntary yet required; to show commitment to the organization by wearing multiple badges in an enthusiastic display of company zest and
spirit. Joanna tries to pin down her boss Stan’s (played by the film’s author, Mike Judge) continual ambiguous critique.

Stan: We need to talk about your flair.

Joanna: Really? I, I have 15 pieces on. I, uh, er…(she nervously points to her flair.)

Stan: Well–okay, 15 is minimum. Okay?

Joanna: Okay.

Stan: Now, it's up to you whether or not you want to just do the bare minimum, or uh, well, like Brian, for example, has 37 pieces of flair on today, okay, and a terrific smile. (Brian is in the background, gesturing enthusiastically as he talks to a table of customers.)

Joanna: Okay, so you, you want me to wear more?

Stan: (He sighs.) Look. Joanna.

Joanna: (She nods, listening intently) Yeah.

Stan: People can get a cheeseburger anywhere, okay? They come to Chotchkie's for the atmosphere and the attitude. That's what the flair's about. It's about fun.

Joanna: Okay. So, more then, yeah?

Stan: (He sighs again.) Look, we want you to express yourself, okay? Now if you feel that the bare minimum is enough, then– (he bobs his head back and forth) okay. But–some people choose to wear more and we encourage that, okay?

She nods, uncertainly.

Stan: (Quietly, while nodding his head yes) You do want to express yourself, don't you?

Joanna: Y-yeah. (She nods.)

Stan: (Quietly but with meaning) Okay, great, great. That's all I ask.
Joanna: Okay. (She looks slightly relieved but uncertain.)

Later in the movie, Stan addresses her again.

Stan: Joanna!

Joanna: Yeah? (She is busy filling a pitcher of water in the dining room.)

Stan: (He stands behind her, claps his hands together and as he talks, he nods firmly.) We need to talk. Do you know what this is about?

(She stiffens, and she sets the pitcher down and turns to face him.)

Joanna: (Sarcastically.) My, uh, flair.

Stan: (Sarcastically.) Yeah. Or, uh, your lack of flair, because, uh, I'm counting and I only see fifteen pieces. Let me ask you a question, Joanna.

Joanna: Umm-hmm.

Stan: (Exasperated) What do you think of a person who only does the bare minimum?

The scene ends with Joanna, increasingly angry, stating that if she is supposed to wear 37 pieces of flair, Stan should just tell her to wear 37 pieces of flair. She authentically “expresses herself” by giving Stan the middle finger gesture and then quitting.

The scenes, like much of the film, are a comedic enactment highlighting the irony of the processes of normalization (enforced assimilation); in this case corporatization, since the passive-aggressive demands are meant to promote myths developed within business cultures (Treiber, 2013). Joanna does not understand (or chooses to disobey) the passive pressure to be enthusiastic in her flair display and thus fails in becoming a conforming member of the company team. Further, by questioning Stan’s ambiguity and trying to force him to specify his command, she risks uncovering the company’s mythology of employee spirit and the falsity of Chotchkie’s “fun” atmosphere as being
voluntary and genuine. Stan continually refuses to be specific, urging her instead to adopt his attitude of belief: if he directs her, she will not be sincere, only following orders. She must want to become like him: whether by masking her own disbelief or by actually becoming like him does not matter, as long as she appears to mold herself to what he wants, and ultimately what the organization demands.

There is also the possibility that Joanna should not work at Chotchkie’s if she doesn’t agree with what is required. Should she, can she, even if she wants to, reshape herself to fit the job? By the movie’s end, the main protagonist, Peter (played by Ron Livingston) leaves his corporate job with Initech because of similar frustrations as Joanna faces, and he finds a job in construction, which is portrayed as free from such convoluted talk, expectations, and forms of examination. While his former Initech corporate coworkers also acknowledge the ironies and frustrations of corporate work, they are relieved to find comparable jobs at new corporations after the demise of Initech. To Peter, physical labor is more appealing (and clear cut in the job description) than his former corporate position. Thus Office Space explores the complexities of many contemporary jobs and the job market, and how individuals’ ability to obtain and hold a job, let alone one with some level of pleasure, may vary.

Teacher Flair

In actual organizational practice, the state of Pennsylvania currently uses a teacher evaluation system created by private consultant Charlotte Danielson. The School District

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6 A claim favored within free market theory and neoliberalism, paired with the claim that jobs are plentiful, easy to come by, and easy to switch.
of Philadelphia webpage shares this description of grant money exchanged for adopting the system:

In December 2011, Pennsylvania was awarded $41,326,299 under the federally-funded Race to the Top grant program. The primary objective of Pennsylvania’s Race to the Top Local Education Agency (LEA) Grant program is for participating local entities to adopt and implement Pennsylvania’s Educator Effectiveness instrument and to use the evaluation process and results to inform local decisions regarding professional development and staff retention in support of student achievement. (Educator Effectiveness: Purpose of Grant, 2014).

Danielson’s book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996), includes pages of gridded charts and rubrics that attempt to describe and evaluate every facet of a teacher’s existence, from how tidy her room to how much (and with how much sincerity) she volunteers in school or community after the work day is done. The rubrics are so extensive that they reach far into students’ positions and possibilities in school: While written as teacher evaluations, these rubrics direct the teacher in her control of the students, including limiting their freedom of expression. Under “Domain 2: The Classroom Environment; Component 2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning; the first “Element” is “Importance of the Content.” Listed as an “Unsatisfactory Level of Performance” is this rubric: “Teacher or students convey a negative attitude toward the content, suggesting that the content is not important or is mandated by others.” Thus, one
is disciplined to pretend that mandated content is not mandated, and/or is more important than it may actually be, or than teachers may believe, or than students may believe.

High school students often recognize (and enthusiastically critique) content that is not important to them; even content that a teacher or their peers may find worthwhile. This does not necessarily preclude them from following the lesson or learning the content. Discussion about such issues is a natural and sensible occurrence in teaching. However, honesty in this case may get a teacher and her students an unsatisfactory rating. The gridded rubrics are repeated in thick packets of forms that teachers must fill out for each evaluation (as I did.) As with Foucault’s examination of the subject, teachers are asked to confirm such beliefs on the forms and in practice with their students; committing themselves to the state’s determination of the mandated content’s importance. O’Farrell states, “One particularly effective technique in the exercise of disciplinary power is the examination (at school, at work, in hospitals and asylums.) Through the examination, individuals are required to reproduce certain types of knowledge and behavior. Their performance can then be measured…” (2005, p. 105).

A Teacher’s Reputation: A Teacher Zine

When the Danielson evaluation system was first introduced to us, one administrator said of the ratings, “Very few of you will be rated as distinguished.” I thought she was kidding, or at least performing poorly on the Danielson teacher rating scale for having “high expectations” for students; that is, for us. (See the redacted “High Expectations” text on page 8 in the zine.) But Danielson does indeed say that. She states under “PROFICIENT”– “Most experienced, capable teachers will regard themselves and
be regarded by others as performing at this level.” When teachers discussed evaluation meetings with each other, we agreed that there seemed to be a percentage for each category decided ahead of time—indeed, Danielson says “most of us” will be proficient, so there must be a figure already in place. Our raters would say things such as, “I can’t give you that,” and their justifications were unconvincing, but seemingly required by the director who said that most of us would not—because it wasn’t allowed—earn the distinguished rating. The four-level ratings scale includes unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. This sort of paradox—Danielson (and our directors) having lower expectations for teachers, yet insisting that teachers have high expectations for their students, and never addressing the irony—is everywhere in the current educational jargon, in evaluation systems, and in dominant political talk about public education. The logic is elusive.

And some ironies are hard to miss. I was surprised that *Whatever it Takes*, (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004) a book and program about school improvement purchased by our district, includes an exemplar that uses the acronym REDSKINS (the featured school’s mascot) for a mission statement. I believe our educational reform policies resemble infomercials: sold out, sales-based, making up anything that sounds good in the moment, and promising results that will never be delivered. But I’m glad Danielson shows her cards, whether intentional or not—it allows a productive gap for disruption, which I present here. The next section features a zine entitled, “Where a Teacher’s Reputation is Won—or Lost!” It is for teachers; dedicated to teachers; and about teachers. The zine focuses on the situation of many public school
teachers today; one of meeting demands from various stakeholders; stakeholders who do not comprehend (or do not care about) teachers’ lived experiences.

Zines are one way for teachers and students to speak about their situations in school, anonymously if they choose. *Truckface #15* is one such zine. Miss B, the English teacher who writes *Truckface*, uses her zine to rail at Bill Gates for his powerfully funded educational initiatives, in a section entitled, “Doesn’t Bill Gates Have Another Profession to F--k With?” The zine begins with, “Odd Year. Cursed Future.” Miss B describes the principal’s depressing speech on the first day of the new school year:

[We had] dropping ACT scores and the ominous scarlet letter of “level 3” probation affixed to our school that we held so dear. The label that placed a pox on both of our houses, teachers and students. A No Child Left Behind punishment of threatening job losses and an unenthusiastic freshman class that believed that this school is bad because the government and standardized tests believed it so. (*Truckface #15*).

*Yo Miss* (2013, 2014) is a zine series by Lisa Wilde, in which she presents her experiences as a teacher who works in “a public charter high school” in New York City. She describes it as “a second chance school…many of our students have dropped out, been kicked out, or flunked out of other high schools.” (*Wilde, 2013a, p.6*). Wilde shares the stories of her students, endeavoring to present, in a sense, their side of the story: the challenges each student faces, and their very different lives and personalities. Through these stories she makes evident that the students in this school are not an undifferentiated mass of miscreants, as they are labeled by the city, but individual souls with desires and
dreams like every student; like every person. *How I Quit School* (2010-12) is a zine produced by a high school student who, unable to continue her performance as the perfect high achieving schoolgirl, drops out in her senior year to create her own educational plan at home. She connects to others in a social movement called Unschooling.

For the most part, the zine “Where a Teacher’s Reputation is Won–or Lost!” speaks for itself, however I offer this information. The only writing I created in this zine is the phrase on the cover; “Her hands are stained with dye, and she apologizes. She’s been working with art club after school.” The rest of the quotes in the book that are tagged with hand drawn large quotation marks are quotes from the teacher participants that I interviewed. These are juxtaposed with text from the following sources: A vintage etiquette guide (Benton, 1956) a teacher evaluation plan (Danielson, 1996), a motivational guide to improving schools (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, (2004) an Encyclopedia Brittanica advertisement from a 1920s teacher magazine (that’s where the title comes from), advertisements from 1950s National Geographic magazines, a chain of command diagram from Community Hills School District, and other assorted ephemera.

The experiential statements of the teachers contrast with the authoritarian voice of the teacher advice literature. The etiquette book shares much in common with the teacher evaluation guide; as an authoritarian address to someone who is lacking and needing guidance in so many areas, all of which have specific forms and rules. The teachers here speak of their situation in the present as well as remembering significant moments from their own days as high school students. Finally, the newest teacher, finding her way in experiencing her first job, brings to mind my own first days as a teacher. She looks to
other teachers as a model for her clothes and behavior, and she remembers with freshness her own joy in high school art classes (her comments are on pages 10 and 15 as numbered in the zine.)

If you’d like to print and share the zine, and I hope you do, a layout for printing is included at the end of the images. This zine can be printed on two sheets of paper (front to back, according to the diagram) and then cut, folded, bound, and distributed to interested parties. To bind the pages, thread a large needle with sturdy thread. Work on a piece of felt or a washcloth that is folded multiple times to create a soft stab-able surface. Poke the needle through the outside of the folded spine of the zine through all the pages. Make a stitch by threading the needle back to the outside spine, about 1/2 inch from the first stitch. Tie the thread ends together and trim them, but not too close to the knot or the knot may come undone. Add a sticker, some color from pencils or markers, glitter, or other decoration to the zine. Just for special. It’s that personal touch that makes the difference.
Figure 8.2: The Teacher Zine Begins on the Next Page.
Where a Teacher’s Reputation is Won—or Lost!

Her hands are stained with dye, and she apologizes. She’s been working with art club after school.

"Well turned out business girl," sneaker are frowned upon. They want you to wear more dressy professional footwear."
Unsatisfactory

Teacher or students convey a negative attitude toward the content, suggesting that the content is not important or is mandated by others.

I wasn’t really interested in math. I wasn’t good at it; it was very difficult, and I didn’t see myself in the future using a lot of math or algebra. So, I didn’t really find that to be relevant. But I was always an artist. And so for me those classes were important. I took painting outside of school because I didn’t have it in high school. I’ve never used algebra since high school.

A teacher in a PLC begins the unit by advising students of an essential outcome, an outcome so important, so significant, that every student must achieve it.

But then I also know that administration is looking and judging.

There’s a judgment with the students and each other. Some kids are really nervous to put themselves out there on a piece of paper because of what others might think.

Your success or failure as a teacher is not decided by a school board sitting in solemn session. An unofficial committee, wielding far greater power, sits in judgment upon you.
**This professional Mission Statement has some amateur features.**

Relationships: Forming community interactions.

Exemplary Performance students.

Diversity: I feel like they're society.

Spirit: I'm afraid to mess up and I encourage them not to mess up and I'm like "just try" I don't care if you know what it looks like, just give it a go.

21st Century

Knowledge: A lot of my kids are coming from homes that might not be able to have paints, or be able to afford a private art class. It is the only time they get to play with paint or the only time they get to go up to the clay room and just, you know, experience it.

Only intelligent choices.

If it doesn't turn out, if it's a flop, it's okay, especially if they come and ask me more questions after school or ask me "Can I make something else?"

Many times in administrative meetings, faculty meetings, I'm always thinking about something else that I want to do. I'm thinking more about my art, so I doodle about things that I want to make for my art.

Are you happy? — If you're not satisfied where you are,

I doodle, in my faculty meetings all the time; I focus so much better when I'm doodling, and my students—other teachers might frown upon this— I let them doodle while I teach.

Sometimes it'll be a descriptive doodle, you know when I have a hard time explaining something I'll ask for a piece of paper and then I'll just draw it.

Have more FUN

I draw on my passes a lot to teachers that I know—to send them a fun little hello, when I'm sending a student that we both share.

Differences from Social Manners First Names vs. Last Names Answer Your Superiors Quiet, Please Promptness Don't Discuss Salaries Don't Go over Anyone's Head Don't Use a Word I'd work on it all Permission Don't Be a Buzz week and then Fridays it would be Friday Keep Your Personal Problems delivered by a student. They looked Calls and Letter Writing, so forward to it. Your and Family Visit Your Office? Smoking, Eating and Gum Chewing in the Office Do A Sponge The Office Party
How good are you
PROFICIENT
The teacher clearly understands the concepts underlying the component and implements it well.

"With the art show I'm constantly comparing myself to other art teachers and their display; what they're creating throughout the year. I think that's a good healthy um, not competition but just realization, like am I, am I doing what I what I've been taught, am I doing what I should be?"

I have to hand in a list to administration for, you know, what awards the kids have won, how many of the schools they competed against.

"But the teachers, because of the gallery, teachers are always commenting on what the students are creating. They just enjoy seeing all the different types of art. So they know that you're doing good work. I think that's kind of a positive from my peers."

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE
UNSATISFACTORY
The teacher does not yet appear to understand the concepts underlying the component. Working fundamental practices associated with the elements will enable the teacher to grow and develop in this area.

FASCINATING ANT FARM
An ant's entire world seen through the clear plastic walls of this unbreakable, escape-proof ANT FARM. Have fun watching the busy array of worker ants digging tunnels, building bridges, moving mountains!

"If the kids aren't able to produce what I'm trying to teach them and they are not able to accomplish the skills they need to learn, or the kids are not able to make something to express whatever they want to express, then I feel like I haven't—that I failed."

"Am I pushing the limits or am I just kind of coasting?"

BASIC
understand the concepts to implement a little more, their project could have been better. So from that standpoint I feel like sometimes I didn't do a good job of discussion, visiting classrooms of other teachers, and help will enable the teacher to become proficient in this area.
"They're so nervous. And they don't want people to think they're good at something or that they're bad at something. Especially my quiet female students. They don't want to be too smart. They don't want to be too good.

For the most part I feel like every kid, as long as they're working hard and they like the project then, it's okay! Then we're doing a good job.

But there's two things that I want them to get basic skills. And I want them to realize that there are..."
"I usually decide on something that's kind of like classy."

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN'S MANNERS

"and not really low cut cause that's not me, and also it's not professional, especially working with kids."

"book."

"Definitely, like a nice neck and just, you know something school appropriate."

"something I would see another teacher wearing, or a professional."

"It's easy enough to say that a woman should act like a lady, but it's a little harder to define just what the expression means."

"Well—son, what did you learn to-day in school?"

"Miss Martin told us. Say, Dad, I found out if you wore other brands you were kind of like— I don't know if you were made fun of, but you made fun of."

"specifically tank tops had to be, straps had to be two inches or wider and I remember this because when it would get warm out, our vice principal would stand at the front door with a ruler."

"definitely got stink-faced from certain girls."

"And if you wore a tank top that had thinner straps, they would make you wear an old dirty tee shirt from the gym."

"People were very concerned about who was wearing what, and what you had."

"But they were color coordinated depending on the program you were in. And so they knew where you belonged in the building."

December, 1926
4. Don’t Take Advantage of Your Baby Sitter. In general, babysitters are not supposed to do housework unconnected with the care of the children unless it is part of their job. (This wouldn’t apply to someone who was taking over your household chores, for instance). The average sitter who comes in for the evening is usually free to read, study, watch television or whatever she wants that’s compatible with her job once the children are asleep. And to expect her to wash a sizzling meal, wash the dishes, or vacuum the living room, or iron a basketful of clothes is not a fair bargain, unless you’ve made special arrangements to that effect beforehand.

START YOUR CHILD ON THIS SENSIBLE PLAN

“...I was geared not to take art because I was highly academic. So I didn’t have a lot of art courses in high school. But the art courses I did, I had a graphic design class that I loved, the teacher was inspirational, and I think that’s probably one of the reasons why I eventually switched over to that. Guidance counselors were telling me to stick with, you know, the foreign language, stick with the math, the sciences, that kind of stuff, cause I was good at that. I kind of felt like I was cheated.

people who like to draw

AND ASSIST HIM—WITHOUT PRESSURE

The People Who Care for Your Children, 369

Baby-Sitters—WITH HIS SCHOOL WORK
The easiest way to get distinguished

Teachers at this level are master teachers and make a contribution to the field, both in and out of their classrooms. Many of these teachers are at a different level, consisting of learners, with students highly motivated and engaged and assuming a responsible role for their success. Administrators think that if a kid wins a contest or they get public recognition, then you're doing a good job. The word passes around and soon you have a reputation that leads to bigger things—to a more desirable position and a better salary. But other times— it depends who is judging and what you're basing it on.

I'm critical of myself, and I'm always reflecting on what I do and what I could do better, so I feel that's judgment I put on myself. Especially because so much here in Pennsylvania has become focused on standardized tests and test scores, and they are looking very critically at visual art and I feel like we aren't getting the kids to produce you know, what we could term quality work, getting the kids out and winning awards and having the kids build portfolios and getting scholarships for effective monographs. For college, that—our programs will be cut.

We're worth a lot more than we thought!

It was nice that you could just forget everything else, you know if you have like papers or tests, and you could really just focus on something you like.

I actually distinctly remember one time being in art class and I was so into one of my projects... I was so into it that I seriously forgot everything around me, and then when the bell rang I jumped out of my seat... because I was so tunnel-vision about this project.

Before long, the folks at home will say, “Miss Martin must be a very good teacher.”
THE RIGHT
THE WAY
Whatever
It Takes?

How Professional Learning Communities
Respond When Kids Don’t Learn

FORK UNION
MILITARY
ACADEMY

For ONE SUBJECT PLAN of study
has increased honor roll DPH in Upper
school, attendance 96%.

Interesting classes:
12 modern subjects, 2 military subjects.

For more info contact:
Dr. J. C. Wicher
Box 308 Fork Union, Va.

HERE'S ALL YOU DO
work better!

16.
Teacher Zine Printing Layout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
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<th>publish your own zine!</th>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
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(back to back as shown)

cut on cut lines. Fold each page. Assemble pages, stitch together. Add a hand-touch.
Student Flair

That the *Frameworks for Teaching* (Danielson, 1996) teacher evaluation rubric includes student performance and goes so far as to include responsibility for student beliefs and expressions in the classroom shows the increasingly entangled position of teachers and students in public schools. While there has always been a social link between the two, in that school, and learning in school, is a place of social interaction, the increased focus on teacher accountability through numerical measurements of both teachers and students places teachers ever more in the role of Stan; inculcating students to do better, and to perform a certain way, for one’s own survival as a teacher. To complete the analogy, as a teacher, I am Joanna the waitress to the school administration’s Stan the restaurant manager (and as administrators are to the state and federal overseers) but I in turn act as Stan to my students’ Joannas.

My focus for this research began with noticing the downside of a dress code: the frequent altercations in enforcing the code that positioned students and teachers as adversaries; as boss and wayward employee or police officer and delinquent rather than teacher and student. I saw girls in tears, and girls spoken about in ways that made their sexuality a character flaw, as a direct result of the code and what it focused on. I also observed (and took part in) the daily tracking and ordering of students by performance, which often related to appearance, as in the appearance of character, attitude, and motivation. In their art, I oftentimes graded students according to an ambiguous and subjective rubric, and gave credit according to the apparent adherence to the requirements of a project; even as I tried to make such rubrics meaningful and useful. I also saw teachers (such as myself) struggle to meet every demand, including these, in an effort to
keep our jobs and at the same time to honor our own idealistic notions of what teaching should be. I believe it is valuable to uncover the ambiguity and flair-demanding quality of so much of our educational practice. It is one thing to judge students (and teachers) based on a subjective aesthetic; it is quite another to make them (us) declare that it is good; or that it is important and undertaken by choice, as described in Standard 2b, Importance of the Content (Danielson, 1996).
Figure 9.1: Girl Teen Fashion Can!!!
Chapter 9

Pleasure in Clothes and Making: A Dubious Art Education Instructional Goal and An Exercise in Arts-Based Research

In this section I join a memory of art making from my high school days with consideration of the dress code and of the girls I interviewed. I think about arts-based research as I create this project, and I think about how connecting with my memories of youth allows me to empathize with girls in the present, and how accessing memories of art I liked to make opens me to the possibility of appreciating the art that students might like to make.

In the attic of my childhood home is a 3-foot tall moving container, with sturdy paperboard sides and a metal base and lid. As a teenager I decorated the surface with a collage of images from Seventeen magazine. The images all feature DIY projects, which the magazine printed frequently in the 1970s. There are advertisements for threads, fabrics, and sewing patterns. There are multiple images of girls wearing clothes sewn from patterns, or tee shirts decorated with batik and paint. My favorite sewing advertisement narrative of the time was that of the girl either modeling, or surrounded by, multiple outfits that she had made. The ads spoke of a richness of possibilities, of being able to make (and so possibly more easily afford, because sewing can be economical) and to invent anything I wanted, desired, needed. I could create myself; my own image. My friends and I were not uninformed; we did not buy everything in the magazines—including the editorial content. We spoke back to the magazines. We bought very few products, actually, being on budgets below those of the apparent intended audience. We mocked any advice we found hokey, discussed which models and clothes we approved of, and
laughed at the unaffordable retail prices. The magazines were sources of pleasure, inspiration, and information.

For example, I first learned of *The Little Red Schoolbook* (Hansen & Jensen, 1971) a controversial and radical tome for teens, in an issue of *Co-ed*, purchased through (of all places) my home economics class. *The Little Red Schoolbook* caused an international fury, and worldwide calls for censorship. The encouragement for students to question their school’s practices, and the frank talk about sex and drugs made it seem like a handbook for anarchy; to the authors (and to me) it was an honest look at schools and information (shocking though it was) that many young people wanted. I found the book in a local store and smuggled it home. My point is that the content of teenage girls’ magazines, then and now, can contain more complex and intellectual content than adults may suspect.

The collaged can served as an article (like the images on its sides) of décor in my room, something useful, pleasing, and idea inspiring, like a 3-D sketchbook. I started collaging as a young girl and the process and product has either been beautiful or meaningful, if not both. It is a way I make sense of and figure out my world, and a way I speak. When Rosemary says “I always say that I don’t really speak with my mouth as much as when I draw on paper; that’s my way of communication,” I understand what she means. This resonant object speaks to me now, as does Lynda Barry’s comic “Lost and Found,” about who I was at the time, and how I spoke at the time. I made art that was important to me. And I made a lot of it outside of school, where I felt free to create things not for a grade but just because I wanted to make them. Sewing mixed with collage, and clay, and crafts, and cartooning, (which didn’t seem to be considered “real drawing” at
that time) in a continual, pleasurable process. I don’t know if my high school art teacher would have approved.

I also remember my feelings about fashion. Was I wearing short skirts, as Olivia says, to “attract a mate”? Partly, yes, I was. But not in the way the dress code implies. I wanted to be attractive to boys, at least to certain boys. But I was not wearing short skirts to be “sexy,” I was wearing what I thought was pretty and fashionable, though sexy and pretty and fashionable overlap in complex ways. I see this in the girls I teach; the gulf between what their fashion is assumed to be—a teenage temptress, a flirt, a sexual tease, a bad girl—is far from where I believe the girls see themselves, that is, their intentions to connect with the culture and fashion of their time. If today’s fashion seems sexier to us (and has it ever not, to adults looking at whatever is in fashion, from 1920s flappers to 1950s sweater girls?) it may not be the sexy appearance that girls are after but the look, the knowing look, the knowing how to look, according to what is hip and fashionable in this given time and place. As adults, we can easily (and apparently, we usually do) miss the meaning, or overlay it with our fears for girls, or our moralistic approach to examinations of their clothes and their youthful bodies. As Pomerantz (2008) says of one of her student informants, “She was not dressed for me. She was dressed for a world that she understood, a world that included the social scenes, groups, and cliques within which she was positioned and had positioned herself” (p.157).

I photographed the can and I recreated a miniature version as a craft that is reproducible, (should you actually want to make it) or re-imaginable. This allowed me to play with the images; to problem solve how to arrange the images and what size container would be proportionate, and in the process to experience and revisit the feel and
process of one aspect of my (and perhaps others’) arts-based research. It gave me the
time, allowed me to remember each image in the collage, and to remember the pleasure I
felt in imagining the media and techniques as possibilities. I made those batiked tee shirts
one year as Christmas gifts for my high school girlfriends; the making and gift-giving
reminiscent of the note passing among the girls I interviewed. This how-to section argues
for the value of allowing for the unquantifiable, unpredictable, educational/art
experience. It is written in the form of a familiar, conversational, slightly hyperbolic craft
instruction guide.

Make Your Own Girl Teen Fashion Can!!!

INSTRUCTIONS: How to make your own girl teen fashion can!!! Let’s start!
This project is just for fun. However, intentionally fun activities do not necessarily
guarantee fun—indeed they may become surprisingly meaningful, serious, or
transformative in ways impossible to determine in advance! Are you someone who likes
to “do your own thing”? Then jump right in and get started! (Or you can practice first,
and copy the design included here, for a 5-inch tall 1970s fashion can.¹) Choose a
surface: For the original jumbo version, I used an old round cardboard moving container
with a metal base and a removable lid. For the mini-version I used an 18-ounce tub of
prunes. (Dump them into another container.) Imagine the alternative possibilities of
surfaces to collage upon: a cardboard box; the door to your room; or even a tote bag! If
censorship might be an issue, choose a traditional hiding place, like the inside of your
school locker, or the inside of a bureau drawer. Find a magazine of your choice (it

¹ Find instructions at end of this section!
doesn’t have to be a teen girl fashion mag) and tear, cut, or rrrrrip out items that catch your interest. You might want to think as you shred ‘em, ”What is it about this image or item that makes me want to: slash enjoy destroy alter hate praise highlight adore analyze possess curse improve or like it?” Or you might not want to think at all, and just let ‘er flow and see what happens! Glue these resonant bits and pieces and important fragments to the surface with whatever sticky stuff works. Notice the perceptions that appear as you juxtapose/mash together all that stuff you ripped out. Watch in amazement as you mix up words, images, and phrases and see the meanings change before your very eyes! What the…where did those ideas come from? From YOU, interacting with the big world around you, filtered through a magazine that caught your eye. OMG! This is so cool; you could do it all day!!! When you’re done, it’s time to grade your work. Don’t worry, there’s a fun way to do that, too! Take this advice for example:

“Instructional goals should be capable of assessment. They must be stated in clear language that permits viable methods of evaluation and the establishment of performance standards” (Danielson, 1996, p.68).

Yes, take it. Take it and print it out and tear it up, and paste it to your collage someplace. Then go ahead and establish your own performance standard and evaluate your fine self! Wow, you worked really hard. I’d give you an A plus! Let’s have a snack, and admire that great thing you just made!
Detailed Instructions for Girl Teen Fashion Can, Just Like the One Shown

Empty the tub of prunes. Place the prunes in alternate container. Clean the inside
of the tub with soapy water; then rinse and dry. Print out the collaged images of can sides
and lid. Place two sheets of white copy paper so that the 8 1/2 inch edges overlap a little
bit. Tape them to hold them in place. Align the collaged images of the sides, right sides
up over the white paper, overlapping them to match the images. Make sure they are
straight so that they will wrap neatly around the tub. Tack the overlap with a small piece
of tape. Using 2-inch wide clear mailing tape, carefully cover the collage with long strips
of clear tape. This takes three widths of tape. Then pick up the whole deal and trim the
edges of the collage. Wrap the collage around the container and check to see if any
trimming is needed. Tape the collage in place, overlapping the edges where they meet.
For the lid, cut a square of “peel and stick” paper adhesive a bit larger than the lid image.
Apply the adhesive to the underside of the lid image. Then coat the lid with more clear
mailing tape. Trim the image around the edges and check for fit on the plastic tub lid.
Finally, peel off the paper backing from the adhesive and apply the lid image to the
plastic lid. Smooth it out. You’re done!
Figure 9.4: Fashion Can Lid, and the Original Girl Teen Fashion Can
Chapter 10

A Lesson in Division

In this dissertation, I point to dividing practices in several areas: How the dress code divides girls into good girls and bad girls, and how it uses fears of difference in a continual struggle to eliminate identities counter to the school’s ideal. Also I look at how teachers are continually labeled as lacking, and divided from “the best and the brightest” teachers in TFA, and from the experts hailing from consulting companies whose latest ideas are valued over teachers’ lived experience. I note how teachers and students are divided by systems that position them as adversaries rather than joining them by shared strengths. I examine aesthetics through this lens of dividing, locating my own understandings of my feminine-oriented and Pennsylvania Dutch aesthetics as being less-than; and how I sensed that modernist design, for example, was preferable to these. I push an arts-based research form with the belief that it is valid and valuable, and that it provides additional modes of engaging with research for both the viewer and the researcher. I use collage to form research that is not finished by the researcher (me) but added to by the reader and/or the one who experiences the research in its present form.

In this section I talk about dividing practices on a national scale, and look at several more examples to flesh out a picture of how they operate. The reasons why they operate are less clear. In Society Must be Defended, Foucault (2003) talks about the enactment of protection and safety practices in society. One example I noted is the view of gangs, including perceived gangs, as a threat that must be weakened and moved to the margins, which in turn causes identification, labeling, and then discipline in schools, and leaves some students in less advantageous positions than others. Looking at what is
produced, good, bad, and neutral is helpful when examining dividing practices. Ultimately it seems that, in different instances, those who benefit most by the division have a stake in initiating the practices and/or subsequently supporting them, though who benefits and how is not always obvious or clear-cut. In the case of those disciplined groups labeled by “gang” or other identification tropes as delinquent, what is produced can include discipline programs, counselors, separate schools and school arrangements, fines paid to the local district justice, books, uniform sales, news stories, and Hollywood feature films.

Ladelle McWhorter (2004) sensed these dividing practices as a student, as she was made to feel self-conscious through the continual disciplinary scanning gaze of the school. McWhorter sensed that as a lesbian, her identity was considered delinquent. Referencing Foucault’s theories of dividing practices, McWhorter explains how school operations label and then divide students:

Consider high school again…Teachers and students try out different strategies. Agendas shift. But an equilibrium usually emerges. A daily routine is established. Repeated events of power bring about a certain shape of things. But more than that, these repeated events of power produce not only institutionalized routines but also the sorts of people who participate in them. High schools are notoriously clique-ish, but they are so partly because they tend to produce certain human types over and over again. One has only to consider the nerd, a real social phenomenon, but one that is absolutely unthinkable outside the arrangements of power that are our modern educational institutions…likewise the juvenile delinquent,
the retarded child, and the "at-risk" child. These are categories of human
being that have been invented in institutionalized arrangements of power,
including school systems and the psychological discourses that support
them. Children are identified at early ages as, for example, "learning
disabled" or "gifted" and treated as such. They come to understand
themselves in relation to such categories. They come to be the people they
are identified as. (2004, p.43).

**Beaver’s IQ Test**

Turning once more to *Leave it to Beaver* as an instance of our cultural genealogy,
“Beaver’s IQ” (1961) reveals how such types as McWhorter describes are invented in a
fictional grade school by a combination of school operations, “the psychological
discourses that support them” (McWhorter, 2004, p.43) and the children’s understanding
of how they are being observed, judged, labeled, and divided. At the start of the show,
Beaver is depicted as a happy-go-lucky eleven year-old boy, playing with a frog and then
a balloon. He finds out he will take an IQ test in school, and as the IQ test looms in his
future, he grows increasingly worried about it because his grades are not great. His fears
are exacerbated because his father has been pushing him to “develop good study habits”
and attend to his future plans. The principal, Mrs. Rayburn, is a substitute teacher for
Beaver’s class.

Mrs. Rayburn: Tomorrow we’re going to have a test. We’re going to have what is called
an intelligence test. Does anyone know what that is? Penny?
Penny: I do. It’s a test to see how smart you are.¹

Mrs. Rayburn: Oh. Mr. Whitney?

Whitey Whitney: Yeah, or how dumb you are.

Penny: Like in a spelling test, you see how smart you are in spelling. But in an intelligence test, you see how smart you are in everything.

Whitey: Or how dumb you are in everything.

Mrs. Rayburn: Well, not exactly. Let’s say that an intelligence test measures your capacity to learn. It shows us what your interests are.

In the hall by their lockers, Penny, Harry, Whitey, and Beaver talk about the test.

Penny: I betcha I get a hundred on the intelligence test.

Harry: Is that the kinda test where they stick needles in ya?

Whitey: Heck, no. They measure the size of your brain.

Beaver: How do they do that?

Whitey: What’s the matter Beaver, didn’t you take one last year?

Beaver: No, I think I was home with “Scarletia.”

Harry: What’s that?

Beaver: It’s a rash.

Whitey: I took a test once where you put funny looking blocks together and you have to make them fit. That’s to see if you can be an engineer.

Beaver: I’ve seen a lot of trains, and I never saw an engineer playing with blocks.

Harry: I don’t like taking a test from the principal. What happens if you flunk it tomorrow?

¹ While in this episode June Cleaver encourages her son Beaver to consider all the new careers girls are engaging in, Penny is unfortunately portrayed as a hostile braggart.
Penny: They send you to dumb school. That’s what they do. They got a whole big building full of dumb kids! And they give you chocolate milk at recess, and don’t let you go to college.

Harry: Gee. I wouldn’t want to go to dumb school and drink chocolate milk.

Beaver: Me neither.

Penny: You’re already in the dumb reading group.

Beaver: I am not, I’m just in the second reading group.

Penny: Well, that’s dumber than the smart reading group.

Beaver: Yeah, but its not as dumb as the dumb reading group.

Penny: Boy, wait ‘til they measure your brain tomorrow. They won’t even be able to find it.

Penny leaves, and Beaver makes a face.

Whitey: You’re not worried about the test, are you Beaver?

Beaver: Of course not. Are you going to pass it, Whitey?

Whitey: Sure I’m gonna pass it! Miss Landers says I’m the smartest boy in the class.

Beaver: Yeah, that’s right.

Harry: Whitey, how’d you get that way?

Whitey: I don’t know. I’ve been smart as long as I can remember.

After the test, the same group gathers in the hall and discusses the test.

Penny: Hey, did you say the triangle could fit in the circle, or the triangle couldn’t fit in the circle?

Harry: Heck no, I said the circle could fit in the triangle
Whitey: Boy Harry, you’ll get killed for that answer!

Penny: It was easy. I did the whole test with just half my brain.

Whitey: I hope it wasn’t the dumb half.

Penny and Harry leave.

Whitey: Boy Beaver, having too many answers left over, I hope I don’t get sent to that dumb school.

Beaver: Yeah, me too. I hope she can read my paper. At the end I kinda ran out of spit [for erasing.]

Later, Beaver’s parents (and Beaver) are pleased because Mrs. Rayburn calls and says that Beaver scored in the top ten percent of the class. While Mrs. Rayburn claimed the test was about finding out their interests, the students understood what the test was meant to do, and what it actually did: classified them, separated them, and placed them in a hierarchy of smart and dumb, furthering the labels they already had according to their assigned reading groups.2 What the children lacked for further understanding (and the adults, too) was practice with critical questioning, that is, they need an understanding (and permission) that they are allowed to question given practices such as intelligence tests or standardized tests, to discuss these issues, and to formulate opinions about them.

Critical questioning is possible for children, and it is useful for looking at school’s dividing practices, as Miriam Cohen demonstrates in her book, First Grade Takes a Test (Cohen, 1980.) Similar to the episode “Beaver’s IQ,” the book shows the

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2 The writers of the show say that they took many of their ideas, scenarios, and much of the dialogue for the series from observing and listening to their own children and their children’s friends (Applebaum, 1984.)
conversations between worried first graders about to take their standardized test, and the “gifted” student Anna Maria, who like Penny and Whitey, perceives (as do her classmates) her superior position in the school’s intelligence hierarchy. The book shows the children thinking up smart and creative answers to the test, but the reader knows that these are not the answers that will be marked as correct, and labeled as intelligent. The test subjugates students by seeking a certain kind of answer: not the “smartest” one, but the one the test designers have decided will be the correct one. What Anna Maria’s class has that Beaver’s class did not is a critically thinking teacher with the expertise to find the value in all of her students because she uses various measures, such as looking for their individual and group abilities. The teacher gets angry when she sees what the test does to the children’s understandings of themselves and each other, and when they start calling each other “dummies,” she interrupts:

“Listen to me!” They had never heard their teacher sound like that. “The test doesn’t tell everything. It doesn’t tell all the things you can do! You can build things! You can read books! You have good ideas! And another thing. The test doesn’t tell you if you are a kind person who helps your friend. Those are important things.” (Cohen, 1980).

They set about exploring what they can do, and they return to learning in their classroom–students and teacher together. However, a teacher must be careful with such valuable disruption of mandated school practices as standardized tests and curriculum. Consider that the teacher in First Grade Takes a Test is engaging in questioning the school’s practices with her students, and so will be rated, in the Pennsylvania teacher evaluation system, with this: “Unsatisfactory Level of Performance: Teacher or students
convey a negative attitude toward the content, suggesting that the content is not important or is mandated by others.”

**Poor Kids**

Sometimes when we appear to pay attention to addressing the inequities of our society, including dividing practices, we still manage to default to more, and harmful, dividing practices. This can happen even when our intentions seem to be good. In much national educational discourse of late, I notice the continual reference to “the poor” as being the locus of the problems of U.S. schools. David Berliner (2012) addresses this; and from the perspective of someone who seeks to help the students he is talking about. Berliner and Diane Ravitch speak as a unified force for anti-testing pushback efforts. For example, Ravitch promotes Berliner’s writing through her blog. They practice a political strategy of changing the school reform conversation to one that disrupts the dominant critique, and investigates false claims of standardized test proponents, educational profiteers, and public school critics. They add needed context and responses to the onslaught of school critique that has been omnipresent in recent U.S. history. To his credit, Berliner suggests a proposed solution of adequately paying jobs for all families as one logical way to change a family’s economic position and thus a child’s poverty (rather than claiming that school will work that miracle) but there doesn’t appear to be any government plan for that at this time; nor is there likely to be.

Yet the continual speech about poor students from both speakers (poor in money and in performance) operates as a dividing practice, in that the problems of U.S. public schools, and in fact of the entire economy, are shifted to the backs of poor children. I also
note that the idea of what constitutes academic success, thus defining the “achievement gap” between rich and poor students, does not change: it is defined one way, through limited forms of testing in limited academic subjects, and poor children (supposedly) continually come up short according to this preferred measure. The message goes something like this: Poor children are the ones getting those low test scores that are dragging down our nation’s international rating and ultimately our economic standing. It’s them, not other children. And we feel sorry for them, because they are poor, and what can we do about it? We need to do something about it. And further, if you don’t agree and recognize that, it’s because you don’t care about the poor children.

Somehow, “poor children” become a homogenized group; all failing, and separated, (divided) and viewed only in terms of lack; furthermore, in a shift of language they move in this essay from being children with problems to being the problem for the United States:

Virtually every scholar of teaching and schooling knows that when the variance in student scores on achievement tests is examined along with the many potential factors that may have contributed to those test scores, school effects account for about 20% of the variation in achievement test scores, and teachers are only a part of that constellation of variables associated with “school.”… In aggregate, such factors as family income; the neighborhood’s sense of collective efficacy, violence rate, and average income; medical and dental care available and used; level of food insecurity; number of moves a family makes over the course of a child’s school years; whether one parent or two parents are raising the child;
provision of high-quality early education in the neighborhood; language spoken at home; and so forth, all substantially affect school achievement…If we broke up American public schools into five categories based on the percent of poor children in a school, as in Table 1, it is quite clear that America’s youth score remarkably high if they are in schools where less than 10% of the children are eligible for free and reduced lunch... If this group of a few million students were a nation, it would have scored the highest in the world on these tests of mathematics and science. Our youth also score quite high if they are in schools where between 10 and 24.9% of the children are poor... Our youth perform well even if they attend schools where poverty rates of youth are between 25 and 49.9%. And these three groups of students total about 26 million students, over half the U.S. elementary and secondary public school population. It is quite clear that America’s public school students achieve at high levels when they attend schools that are middle- or upper-middle-class in composition. The staff and cultures of those schools, as well as the funding for those schools, appears adequate, overall, to give America all the academic talent it can use...In the schools with the poorest students in America, those where over 75% of the student body is eligible for free and reduced lunch, academic performance is not merely low: it is embarrassing. Almost 20% of American children and youth, about 9 million students, attend these schools. The lack of academic skills
acquired by these students will surely determine their future lack of success and pose a problem for our nation” (Berliner, 2012, italics mine.)

By the end of this section, Berliner’s solution—and I’m sure this is not what he intends—seems to be the elimination of poor children. I feel uncomfortable writing that; but I’m not being flippant, and this gets to the heart of my theory about the hazards of the practices I analyze in this dissertation. I think that Berliner is trying to help public schools by reassuring readers that U.S. public schools are successful enough, so we can stop panicking about our schools and our international competition because, as he says, the U.S. has “all the academic talent it can use.” The good schools and the smart kids will provide that. But as for the poor kids, they “pose a problem for our nation.” We might say that those kids fill the “dumb schools” that Penny warns her classmates about. The essay seems to argue for keeping the kids separated; and the statistics can easily be read as: more poor kids make a bad school. This is not a new issue; that of locating, even blaming, America’s problems with poverty on the poor rather than on economic policies. In chapter 5, I cite Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon’s 1994 essay in which they trace the meaning of the word “dependent,” and how it changed with the situation of workers in the western world; and how finally the shift in language transferred blame for America’s poverty onto young, single, Black women who are mothers. These girls and young women became the locus of, and even blamed for, U.S. poverty.

I look at what dividing practices produce that I’ve considered in this dissertation—girls positioned as sexual objects and so subject to the disciplinary (in school) and political (through laws) evaluation of their bodies, aesthetic tastes that add dollar value to
works of art and antiques, the elimination of teachers’ jobs (and their unions) to the benefit of corporate interests, and contentment for Beaver Cleaver’s family through the assurance of a place in college and a career for Beaver—but not for the dumb kids—through a school-administered intelligence test. Maybe we can start talking about poor children in terms other than by what they lack. For example, I wonder who would pass a test of resilience, and who would fail such a test.

Even qualities and problems shared by the middle class and the wealthy: one parent raising a child, language other than English spoken at home, lack of food (it happens,) parents who are abusive, and I’d add parents who are alcoholic–these are all shifted to problems owned by poor people. In my experience as a teacher, I saw these characteristics and conditions spread across the spectrum of income; though perhaps not noticed and critiqued in the same way for rich and poor students by school staff. I also saw poor and “disadvantaged” students who were smart, talented, and motivated, and wealthy students who did not test well. As in First Grade Takes a Test, I believe: These divisions don’t show all the things we can do, and further, something in this form of caring about poor children just doesn’t feel accurate, let alone ethical.

Lynda Barry’s Education

Finally, I look once more at Lynda Barry’s comic, “Lost and Found,” the last story in the book 100 Demons. You can read it here:


However, the online version does not include the collages that introduce each story in the book. In the comic, she describes being subjected to academic dividing practices from the
position of a poor child growing up with very few books. Barry compares and contrasts her childhood and education (as much as her work is semi-autobiographical) with what she imagines about the life for a writer who uses writing terms Barry is not familiar with. In the 18-panel story, each panel features an image with text, headed with a second block of text, which addresses the reader and moves the story along. Barry’s 11-year old self is shown in several panels on a living room floor, contentedly reading the want ads as her grown up self comments in the narrative-filled headings. In the text and images, she explains how she found the limited popular reading materials in her home both enjoyable but also intellectually and imaginatively stimulating, in contrast to those who would critique such materials as deficient. As Chute (2011) describes,

Here, Barry literally reimagines and re-creates her undervalued childhood "art" in the context of literary narrative…The "found" in the title "Lost and Found" is the exuberant mode of imaginative storytelling and self-expression that the genre material of the newspaper and its ilk--specifically the classifieds, the Readers' Digest series "Joe's Lung," and the newspaper homemaking advice column "Hints From Heloise"--provided Lynda as a child. Yet Lynda's love of genre material, as she narrated, marked her as unadvanced. (Chute, 2011, p. 299).

Barry’s lack of plentiful books creates a contrast with the fortunate children in such research as that of Evans’ (2010) “Books in the Home” study. Widely reported in news outlets; the study found that many books in the home, and the related idea of “scholarly culture” in the home, positions children advantageously for future education.
While the study questions its own findings (is it merely evidence of dividing practices among upper class families, or is it indicative of the children learning more when young?) it was reported in media outlets as a reason why children with caring, reading parents and lots of books (that is, not poor) will get more schooling (and subsequent success) than those without. Barry’s own experiences complicate this research in an interesting way: obviously intelligent and talented, an avid reader and a writer, she continually feels like, and is treated like, an outsider in school and when meeting other writers. In one panel, she appears as a high school student, denied entrance to a creative writing class for advanced students by a teacher who answers her request for admission by correcting her language: “Say yes, not yeah.”

In another study comparing the abilities of wealthy and poor children, Stanford researchers measured language acquisition of toddlers and compared it to a count of the words their parents used, finding that “By 18 months of age, toddlers from disadvantaged families are already several months behind more advantaged children in language proficiency” (Carey, 2103). Barry’s comic makes me question such research. This research divides populations according to socioeconomic class and labels one class as inadequate. It solidifies class distinctions in a manner that benefits one class, yet it is justified in terms of helping the other class; the disadvantaged class. If we, as teachers and as researchers, say that “yeah” is less than “yes,” and that the classified ads and Reader’s Digest are not good enough as educational reading material, and that children from low socioeconomic families are always behind, I argue that we are engaging in racialization (though not based solely on race,) within a system that is so covered over with an appealing, justifying narrative of helping that we do not recognize it for what it
is. In a panel featuring Barry’s jargon-laced struggle to write a college theme about Sylvia Plath’s book *The Bell Jar*, college student Barry’s sharpest description of Plath’s dark autobiographical novel is the vernacular line “her classic bummer of the 20th century.” The student Barry uses slang, yet her description is witty and truthful at the same time. Her choice of language would likely be judged as inadequate in an English class. As Chute (2011) writes:

Barry explores her difficult and constitutive relationships with relatives, friends, and community, as well as with trauma, re-creation, and the very notion of creativity, visualizing and materializing memory as counter not only to those who would fix her identity (and believe identity fixable), but also to those who would diminish the political importance of the everyday. (2011, p. 298).

The “political importance of the everyday” that Chute points to could well encompass colloquial slang as valuable language representing a particular cultural perspective. After visiting her former traumas of feeling judged as inadequate, Barry settles some scores and in the process encourages the reader to feel confident in their abilities as well. (Barry teaches art and writing workshops, and includes hints for both in the book.) “Mrs. Snobaroo” is the nickname she gives the English teacher who was the gatekeeper that did not allow Barry entrée to a protected world of advanced students; and she makes the cartoony police (drawn extra-simplified to show their extra-imaginary status) who did not believe her daydream warnings issue a public apology over the police radio: “Calling all cars! That kid was right about the want ads!...We were so stupid!
Repeat! Very stupid!” The people she meets whose education was other than hers, she now demystifies: the writer who knows about terms foreign to Barry’s writing process—“story structure” and “arc” and “plot points”—is described as “super dramatically educated,” which compares her to Barry’s 11-year old self, who gleaned her knowledge from popular culture and enacted it imaginatively in a super-dramatic practice. Finally, after revisiting her love for the Hints from Heloise column, Barry uses the language of the popular column to invite others who feel anxious about their abilities, as she once did: “Gals, ever felt so intimidated by the idea of writing that you’ve never even given it a try? Think writing is only for writers? Sure is common!...Please write!”

The arts-based research format of this dissertation, with its inclusion of comics, collage, zines, and a craft project, argues in favor of visual art as a valid form of research and of presenting research. Like Lynda Barry’s work, it stakes a claim for who is authorized to produce knowledge and to decide how it is shared: in this instance through a collaged dissertation. This is a valuable claim for art educators, as it speaks against the current limited notions of “what counts” in schools: what is scholarly, worthwhile, useful, and funding-worthy.
Chapter 11
Conclusions & Findings

I’ve completed my list of research tasks: I looked at how the dress code defines girls through its coded language, examined a genealogy of dress codes for girls, theorized about the position of public school teachers and how they are expected to discipline according to some questionable codes, recalled how I learned about art in order to realize how I developed my own code of art class aesthetics, used arts based research—particularly collage—to understand and then present my findings, and finally theorized about how Foucault’s (2003) dividing practices form an overarching element of this research. I set out to explore the question: What happens when texts about art education practice in a high school are layered with texts of disciplinary regulations, in this case, a school dress code? In this chapter, a synopsis of my findings mixes with ideas for further research.

Findings: The Dress Code

I found that the dress code affected (and affects) the way the girls see themselves and one another. Olivia and Jana wonder about the public perception of their shoulders, and why their shoulders require coverage. Molly sometimes wears spaghetti straps, but also notices when other girls wear clothes she views as too bare or as breaking the code. At the least, the code is confusing, and causes girls to question their own and their female classmates’ bodies, and their embodied presence, in school. It is as if girls need to earn the right to be in school through the correct appearance of their bodies. As Hannah says of dressing for her important class project presentation, “I figured if they’re looking at
me, then I’m going to have to, you know, present myself.” I do not believe the dress code as it stands can be justified without resorting to discriminatory assumptions about girls; and particularly ones that have been present in our cultural milieu since the 1700s. The dress code gives permission, even requires, administrators and teachers to scan girls’ bodies for evidence of their sexuality. This practice places teachers in the unethical position of being required to harass their students.

However, the girls negotiate responses to the dress code in some interesting ways. Hannah recognizes, with her class presentation, that clothes may signal meanings and effects, and she chooses to dress according to the respected form of female “professional dress” as it applies to high school girls. This is a way for her to achieve success; in this case to get a good grade. Hannah understands and accepts the codes’ aesthetic as a cultural practice with which she feels familiar and comfortable, and she accrues benefits in school because of this. Veronica, for her part, rejects the administrator’s discipline of her skirt length by arguing about the code’s arbitrary application. Because she points to an unjustifiable practice that would have been uncomfortable for the (male) administrator to argue with, she wins a small victory: to avoid punishment and further shaming. Veronica chooses to dress according to her desires and comfort and does not accept the code as applying to her own dress. Taylor, Rosemary, Alissa, and Veronica look forward to dressing for school, finding satisfaction in their fashion choices despite (or within) the codes. Indeed, all of the girls describe times when they locate some form of enjoyment in dressing for school. This in itself is a disruption of the code, as the girls find pleasure and express individuality in their school dress, in spite of the suppression of individuality pushed by the code.
The teachers, for their part, each adopt a sort of uniform of “appropriateness,” defined individually by their own teacher-aesthetic, but also subdued in appearance. Indeed, wearing a bright color, as described by Anna, becomes a highlight of fashion and individuality. When Karin wears the outfit that reminds her of one she wore as a teenager, and one that was her boyfriend’s favorite, she says “Whoa!” as though memories of her romantic youth are conflicting with her teacher-self. As teachers, I recommend researching our genealogies regarding issues of dress, aesthetics, and discipline, and how these histories come to inform our feelings and actions as teachers in the present. We can then use these remembrances to find common ground with our students.

**Findings: The Dress Code & Drawings**

The dress code served as a valuable lens through which to examine art education grading practices in schools. Because the dress code is an obviously constructed and subjective disciplinary system, while simultaneously claiming to be essential and fair, it provides a path to comparing and questioning other taken for granted school practices, including grading. The dividing and discriminatory effects of the dress code parallel grading, tracking, labeling, and disciplining in school. At the same time, it was surprising to recognize how much of my art education practice was founded on similar disciplinary and subjective principles. Once noted, these suppositions can be taken apart and questioned, and I argue this is a valuable process for art educators, both practically and ethically.
Some ideas of how to respond to or change those practices come from the girls. Indeed, in their responses, I find several interesting areas for art education exploration. First, doodling appears more productive than I expected, and worthy of further study. Doodles appear repeatedly as quick, communicative drawings; shared with others or created for each girl’s amusement or purpose. Though considered as ephemeral or a throwaway art form, the girls use doodling in many useful ways. They doodle to communicate with each other under the school radar, that is, to claim a “girl-space” that fits expectations of quiet girl behavior, as opposed to boys’ aggressive or louder doodling practices as described by Jana. They use doodling to draw forbidden topics, including poking fun at their teachers or other students, and drawing “inappropriate” images (as Jana describes) with friends. The girls doodle to record fashions and styles they want to remember or re-design, to access concentration in their classes, and as expressive responses to frustrations or boredom. They doodle to stay in touch (through notes) when classes and schedules keep them apart. Doodling provides an example of a productive art practice that exists outside of the school structures of planning, rubrics, grading, and aesthetic judgments. As such, doodling may help us consider art practices overlooked or forbidden in the art classroom, and how we might embrace them within art education.

I also consider the girls’ art making desires in the secondary school art classroom. The responses to the questions about self-initiated versus school-required art practices revealed that girls like to have choice in their art making: in media, in process, and in focus. Choice is important to them and makes a difference in motivation (Olivia’s perspective painting), in feeling successful (Jana’s filmmaking), in pursuing their own artistic methods (Rosemary’s preference for diving into painting rather than pre-planning
through sketches) and in connecting, and feeling connected, in school (all of the girls’
fashion drawings and doodled notes.) This speaks against the current environment of pre-
planned curriculum and standardized goals for all students. In fact, according to these
girls’ responses, such relentless, standardized planning appears less necessary—and less
effective—than we imagine.

Additionally, I note the interest all the girls have in drawing and otherwise
depicting fashion, creating fashion, wearing fashion, and studying fashion. I was
surprised that every girl described practicing and enjoying fashion drawing, whether as
part of doodling or as imagining a career focus. That does not mean that every girl wants
to pursue art making with a fashion focus (and many boys would likely be interested as
well.) And I’ve just implied that I favor opening up curriculum rather than developing
new directives. But if we look at offering elective curricular choices, and I suggest that
we do, fashion study appears to be one that girls desire.

**Findings: Teacher Positions**

**Taste**

Locating my own aesthetic origins allowed me to question my likes and dislikes
as a teacher of art, and to open those notions up to examination rather than rely on
unconscious habit. It also allowed me to question those areas of my aesthetic preferences
that were belittled, or that marked me (if only in my own mind) as ignorant about issues
of taste. We can examine how our (or others’) ideas of taste affect our art education
curriculums, on levels from the personal to the nationally and professionally sanctioned.
And we can also examine ways that taste drives grading in art education practice, and
thus if taste becomes a dividing practice that discriminates against some students. I argue that taste, embedded yet not acknowledged in art education practices, does work as a discriminatory device in ways that contrast with our claims for the value of art education to all students.

Zines

The teacher zine was created with the intention to share it among teachers and other interested parties. I hope that the comics, zines, and craft projects in this dissertation are copied and shared, and that they form conversations and a talking-back to some of the educational processes I critique. Failing that (or in addition), I hope that within this dissertation I manage to encourage collage, zine making, comic-making, and the practice of critically questioning discussions as potential responses to oppressive procedures, as well as acts of self-sustaining fulfillment. I imagine these within and outside of school spaces, and practiced by teachers as well as students. I hope, too, that I’ve made a case for a partnership between students and teachers. Feeling threatened with losing their jobs, it is understandably tempting for many teachers to blame students and their families for any troubles within schools, as exemplified in the essay by Berliner (2012); and so lose the most valuable partnership available for the success and endurance of America’s public schools. All in all, I encourage these artistic practices as personally and politically valuable.

Teacher Independence

Additionally, I argue that it is time for teacher education programs to offer political education in the form of encouraging teacher independence. Rather than training
teachers for fitting into a system of public education that currently disregards teachers’ abilities and expertise (indeed, Danielson’s guide to “professional practice” does the opposite,) I believe art educators need to find new ways to define themselves as professionals equal to the consultants that school districts hire— in other words, equal to Danielson. The teacher zine is a way to start that conversation and exploration.

**Findings: Arts-Based Research**

Using arts-based research in the form of collage to examine and present my findings solved a dilemma of wondering how to fairly present the girls (and the teachers) I interviewed. Arranging their responses in quotes juxtaposed with related responses from others allows readers to make their own connections and to hear the girls without the interference I imagined might happen had I described each girl and then tried to analyze each thing she said. I do make some assumptions, but I limit them—to do more felt like I was analyzing the participants as a psychologist, and I am not a psychologist. Remembering the unjust labeling I felt as a public school teacher at the hands of research-based consultants, I sought a way to avoid such labeling, and this method worked for me.

The collaged form of this dissertation resists domination by one ideological viewpoint and allows for shifting, unfinished meanings to be perceived (or not) by each reader or viewer (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). Shifting meanings thus provide a continual state of reflection. This makes sense in the consideration of school issues, which are complicated by many viewpoints and competing interests. Collage holds disparate images, texts, and ideas in proximity, yet their incongruity resists fixed
conclusions. For example, the last page of the annotated dress code section features the
dress code at the Community Hills Elementary School and contains elements of a girl
scout handbook, two paper doll sundresses, an illustration of Victorian boys and girls
dressed in little suits with skirts or knickers, and text from Higonnet’s (1998) work on
representations of childhood innocence in Western depictions of children. Thus the page
juxtaposes a variety of alternate views about little girls and how they should dress.
Higonnet’s text, in a sense, accuses the dress code of sexualizing young girls, while the
code itself claims a focus on “safety and health” and preventing “disruption to the
educational process.” Spaghetti straps are singled out as “inappropriate” in the code, yet
the paper doll sundresses on the same page appear as subdued and innocuous. Too, the
girl scout text speaks of being “clean on the outside” as involving soap and water, and
laments that “It’s harder to be clean on the inside.” One perception, therefore, of viewing
this collage might be that the difficulty for a little girl in being thought of as “clean on the
inside” (and therefore acceptable in school) is created by the code rather than prevented
by it. Thus the text of the code is contained within the collage, yet it is unsettled, and so
remains in question. Additional meanings might be simultaneously noted, perhaps by a
viewer who was a girl scout. Then, memory might play some role in the perceptions of
the collage.

Arts-based research also serves as a way to access my memories (Chute, 2011).
As I re-created the teen girl fashion can, my pleasure echoed the pleasure the girls and the
teachers described in their own self-initiated art making practices. It also allowed me to
connect specifically with the pleasure of dress I experienced as a high school girl, and so
connect to each girls’ description of their own pleasure in dressing; and one that is far
removed from what the dress code assumes to be girls’ degenerate intentions in their clothing choices. Locating and embracing this pleasure in clothes is important in articulating the complexities of fashion and dressing. It is also a reminder of the value of pleasure: of enjoyment in learning and in artistic production. While playfulness is (one hopes, at least in theory) considered important in the education of younger children, pleasure and playfulness disappear as valuable considerations in secondary schooling. Yet the girls’ pleasure and playfulness in drawing is conjoined with constructive acts: sketching entire books full of drawings, and filling boxes with prolific drawings and ideas; continually communicating ideas through doodles; concentrating on lessons through doodling, and responding to loneliness, tedium, or delight in the observation of school life through continual drawing practice. Thus, the girls’ drawing choices are not an avoidance of work (as the teacher who threw McKenzie’s drawing in the trash may have thought) but productive works in their own right.

**Loose Ends, Tied and Untied**

The overarching presence of dividing practices can loom, and indeed often acts, as an ominous force that can damage individuals and groups. I’ve seen enough students sit out their school days in the ISS room (In School Suspension) to know that is an ever-present threat, and for some students, a reality. And I’ve witnessed the uneven distribution of discipline among different groups of students, as Alissa noticed with her friends. Studying these phenomena can be disheartening. But it is worthwhile to study them. Foucault points out:
It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p.6).

And as Foucault also points out, power is not owned but is always in play. I believe that teaching is a socially oriented practice that can give one a good feeling, complicated as that notion may be, and that’s how this research felt. The social aspects of teaching encourage us to continue checking for the ethical use of our power; the use of our authority as teachers.

I’ve left some stories unfinished. In the annotated dress code, I included a story about several girls that were disciplined by an administrator for their spaghetti-strap shirts during the final exam I proctored. I did not know the girls, as we were assigned to random classes for final exams. To my regret, I said nothing, to the administrator or to the girls. I had no idea what to say, or even how to think about what happened at that time. But it made me uncomfortable and angry, and that incident is one of many that wore away at my acceptance of the rules of the code as a naturalized, sensible practice.

By the time Kasey was reprimanded for her black dress, I had been thinking a lot about the code and discussing it with co-workers. Before she left homeroom that day, I spoke to her. It was important to me that she know that an adult in the school (in addition to the nurse) disapproved of how she had been treated; how she had been shamed as a girl for her dress. I apologized for what she went through. I also encouraged her to never let
anyone make her feel ashamed of her body. Perhaps I could have been more eloquent, but that is what I could think of in the moment. By that time I had trained myself to no longer look at girls, or any student, through the rules of the code. I stopped scanning their bodies for infractions and looked at them the way I wanted to be looked at—as a valuable member of the school community.

As for Roxanne, the girl who drew the alphabet blocks that spelled “SORRY,” I think I graded her drawing as an A-minus. Roxanne was another of those students that helped me along a path of questioning, and eventually thinking differently, about educational practices; in her case the practices of rating and dividing students through aesthetic judgments of their production. While I struggled over Roxanne’s grade, later I realized that she had little use for my evaluation, whatever it was. Whereas another student might have argued over an A versus a B, or an A versus an A-minus, Roxanne did not seem interested in her grade at all, except perhaps as a task to check off her list. She considered each assignment, and then created emotionally charged artworks in an intense but efficient manner. I admired her independence, and her disinterest in my assessments was a valuable lesson for me in that it showed me the possibility of a different relationship between student and teacher.

In the community space that is a public school, the building itself is a site of constraint. The rules for what must happen inside stand in contrast to what may happen outside: Inside, skirts must be worn long, while outside, skirts may be shorter. Inside, students must make what is assigned, while outside, students may make what they choose. But the walls of school are permeable: Students and teachers bring in outside knowledge, beliefs, and desires, and so the school is also a site of possibilities. A former
idea becomes layered with a new idea: one that is learned within school or one that seeps in from outside of school. Control and constraint are present, but the collage of school—the juxtaposition of various requirements, policies, beliefs, knowledge, motivations, and desires—disrupts them continually. Kasey and Roxanne disrupted my beliefs, and the experience was liberating. Expertise may act as a sort of control, in that one’s experience provides useful knowledge that may be shared, or that guides one’s own or others’ actions in a helpful way. What was remarkable for me as a teacher is that it was Kasey and Roxanne’s experience; their expertise, in a sense, that guided me, rather than the other way around. Relinquishing my role as an authoritarian expert allowed me to access realities and knowledge that were beyond my expectations. What I gained, and what I believe my students gained, was far greater than what the codes and rubrics allowed me to foresee.
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