INTERPRETERS OF TIME, ARCHITECTS OF (EDUCATIONAL) DESTINY: YOUTH SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY AT A NONTRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the ways that students negotiate rhetorical constructions of subjectivity and agency, and how the logics of time work on subjectivity and agency within the context of a nontraditional high school. This work is necessary to elucidate a tension at the heart of not only mainstream high school education in the early 21st century, but also to lay bare a paradox of rhetorical theory: that the field has historically been premised upon the speaking subject, but that the subjects who may speak are not only bounded by race, gender, and class, as many other scholars have illustrated – but also by the material effects of time as a rhetorical phenomenon upon the speaker. Rhetoricians can address this gap in theory by examining subjectivity and agency through three rhetorical registers of time: language as time, learning as work/work as time, and developmental time.

Using participatory critical rhetoric to examine live, *in situ* discourses, and critical rhetoric to investigate textual sources, this dissertation examines disparate discourses that construct studenthood, such as "official" discourses of education propagated by those in positions of power such as state school boards or school districts as well as students' own discourses.

For Sean.

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CHAPTER I

IT'S ALL SUBJECTIVE: SITUATING STUDENTS IN NETWORKS OF RHETORIAL SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

…there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches. I respect that pain.

- bell hooks[1]

I am sitting next to a tall bookshelf, at a table in a high school classroom that is nearly empty but for a student, a parent, a tutor, and a teacher. Outside the windows it is a gray December day, with hesitant snowflakes drifting from the sky; the kind of day that makes you want to go home and curl up under a blanket with a good book. The student and the parent are discussing the particulars of an upcoming field trip to Washington, D.C. with the teacher, and suddenly, as is wont to happen, they find themselves on a tangent.

Student (to parent): Did I tell you I got a 9% on that test, the mandatory math test?
Parent: NINE??
Student: Yeah on like 3rd grade math?
Parent (exasperated): WHY would you do that?
Student (proudly): I failed on purpose to protest the system.
Parent: You can't do that, the system doesn't care and it won't give you things. You're just wasting your time.
*Student: But it's **my** time to waste!*

Unsure, in the moment, of why I am writing this down in such specificity, I wrap up my field notes for the day and leave the school. Much later, as I am flipping through my field notes, searching for a story to open my dissertation with, I stop on the page. This story, brief though it is, gives us a glimpse of the tensions between competing discursive structures of what it means to be a student. The student is proud of their deliberate failure, speaking about it in terms of protest, choice, and freedom. The parent, knowing the often-crushing ways that systems such as education can function, is exasperated by the student's rebelliousness, perhaps worrying about the child's future career or chances

[1] From *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), p. 43.

of getting into college while deliberately failing standardized tests. Having myself successfully cooperated with formal education systems for the better part of 25 years, I understand where the parent is coming from, but I am also unduly proud and heartened by the student's display of defiance, by their agentic assertions and conviction that taking a stand in small ways does matter, that it is their right to use their time on this planet as they see fit.

If the experience of adolescence is a civil war of sorts, then school is one of the battlegrounds on which the fight is staged. The struggle to articulate subject positions and to negotiate one's agency are fundamentally human experiences, yet rhetoricians have not paid much attention to the critical years of youth and the struggle for subjectivity and agency through the mesh of educational institutions, time, and materiality that form the boundaries of the teen years. Furthermore, the layers of rhetoric in which students are enmeshed frequently conceptualize youth subjectivity and agency in very particular ways that often clash with adolescents' self-concepts. Federal, state, and local educational standards, popular media discourse, and even parents' and teachers' discourses all have the potential to misrecognize or refuse to acknowledge students' subjectivities and agencies in various ways. As Young (2008) observes, "The challenge…is not to simply define rhetorical agency but rather to recognize it in context" (p. 228). Because of this gap in rhetorical theorizing, we have no way of knowing how our theories and research are skewed or inadequate.

It seems that so often, the public imaginary of youth and teenagers is profoundly negative, categorized in terms of lack – lack of respect, of ambition, of intelligence, of social graces – the list could go on and on. And yet, brilliant and flawed young humans are rejecting easy categorization every day and demanding that those who interact with them question this negative public imaginary of youth. I argue that this negative perception has a great deal to do

with the way we see students as lacking subjectivity and agency. One of the fundamental actions that attends agency is decision-making, which is a critical component in successfully navigating everyday life. Although our society generally espouses critical thinking as a core value, mainstream public education in the U.S. rarely affords students opportunities to engage in substantive, meaningful decision-making in capacities that are relevant to them. Even in high school, students are only allowed to choose a few electives, and most mainstream schools do not give students a say in the curriculum, the codes of behavior and discipline, or in the governance of the school. I aim to illuminate and critique the reasons for this exclusion, but for now suffice it to say that we owe it to our students and to the future of our societies and cultures to give rigorous theoretical and practical attention to the ways that students perform, practice, and develop rhetorical subjectivities and exercise agency.

Working and advocating with/for teenagers, I have been perturbed by a serious disconnect between the ways that adults (my own peers) talked about high school students, public education, and the ways that I observed high school students speaking and acting. I started to ask questions such as: Do students see themselves as active participants wielding some measure of power in their own educational experiences? How do high school students negotiate their subjectivity and exercise their agency in nontraditional educational settings? How are the concepts of time and relationships with time reflected in adolescents' discourses as they begin to structure their own lives? How do students negotiate, comply with, and resist various institutional and official/state discourses about what it means to be a student? It seemed to me

that there was a lot going on in the differences between teenagers' communication about themselves, their lives, and their educations, and the "official" adult versions of what it means to be a student. Through a happy coincidence, I learned about and began to investigate a nontraditional high school in Western City with a less restrictive institutional philosophy of education. I wondered, how do students who are in an environment structured in part by the philosophies of critical pedagogy rhetorically position themselves and respond vis-à-vis values of educational independence, responsibility, and critical consciousness? This dissertation is an attempt to bridge some of the gaps and answer some of these questions by drawing together relevant strands of literature from rhetorical studies, critical communication pedagogy, and critical pedagogy in order to lend insight into youth rhetorical practices. Specifically, I study the ways that students negotiate rhetorical constructions of subjectivity and agency, and how the logics of time work on subjectivity and agency within the context of a nontraditional high school. This study is oriented by the following research questions:

1. How do official discourses within education systems construct student subjectivity and agency?
2. How do high school students negotiate their subjectivity and exercise their agency, particularly in terms of values of educational independence and responsibility, in nontraditional education settings that are structured in part by the philosophies of critical pedagogy?
3. How are concepts of time and relationships with time reflected in high school students' discourse as they begin to structure their own lives, and

how does time intersect with agency?

I approach this research topic as a scholar clearly sympathetic to the systemic legal, cultural, and education disenfranchisement that many youth face. I have worked with high school students for the past 7 years of my professional career, volunteered with organizations that make a point of treating adolescents as capable and intelligent human beings of their own right, and advocated for youth in many contexts. I also approach this research with memories of my own frustration as an adolescent when I was not permitted to exercise agency, or when I was rhetorically pigeonholed by the label "student" and stripped of my voice by an education system that did not always treat me and my peers as intelligent, fully-human subjects. This is, of course, a partial and interpretive work, aimed toward illuminating lived experiences and drawing from those experiences to inform contemporary educational practices rather than arriving at a truth per se.

In this chapter, I lay out the central theoretical terms and the contexts surrounding them in an effort to delineate the stakes of the argument and the issue. This work is necessary to elucidate a tension at the heart of not only mainstream high school education in the early 21st century, but also to lay bare a paradox of rhetorical theory: that although in recent years, our discipline has dramatically expanded its conception of rhetoric, the field has historically been premised upon the speaking subject. However, the remaining bridge to cross is that the subjects who may speak are not only bounded by race, gender, and class, as many other scholars have illustrated – but also by the material effects of time as a rhetorical phenomenon upon the speaker.

Literature Review

This dissertation rests on theoretical frameworks of critical rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. In this section, I offer a theoretical justification for undertaking the research, first with a discussion of subjectivity, then moving on to critical rhetoric and critical pedagogy.

Subjectivity

Rhetorical conceptions of subjectivity and agency are often tied to the assumption of a sovereign subject, but rarely is the concept of the subject extended to youth. Furthermore, the concept of the sovereign subject has historically been linked to a male, socioeconomically advantaged, White body, which marginalizes the subjective experiences of youth, women, people of color, differently abled people, etc. This subjective homogeneity has recently begun to be complicated by feminist scholars (Butler, 2005; Moi, 2008), postcolonial scholars (Shome, 2012), critical queer scholars (Rand, 2013; West, 2010), rhetoricians of prison discourses (Earle, 2016), and others. Interestingly, the element of temporality has all but escaped our notice – the sovereign subject is almost universally assumed to be an adult (a term which is densely packed as well). An analysis of how children and youth negotiate subjectivity and agency in explicitly time-sensitive educational institutions will illuminate an element that has been hitherto missing from much rhetorical theorizing about the subject.

McKerrow's (1993) description of the subject as "decentered…viewed as a form rather than a substance…" (p. 64) troubles the concept of the sovereign subject, but still does not include a consideration of time. Building upon

McKerrow's legacy, I theorize subjectivity as fragmentary, shaped by the contours and forms of discourse rather than relying on a static, prediscursive essence. Similarly, Butler's (2005) formulation of subjectivity is one where the subject is forged through a discursive connection. I follow in this vein, theorizing a subject that develops and exists in discourse, and is thus fluid, multidimensional, and deeply intertwined with structural, contextual, and interpersonal environments. Such a fluid, rhetorically constructed subject is necessarily beholden to some degree to cultural conceptions of time and the attendant expectations of time-sensitive institutions.

Butler's (2005) theory of subjectivity as a state in which one is able to give an account of oneself is an interesting one. And she rightly points out, there is no subject able to ever give a perfect and complete account of oneself, for we are all entangled too thoroughly in the conditions of our emergence to be able to clarify the boundaries between ourselves and our origins. As she writes, "…the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms" (Butler, 2005, p. 8). This leads me to ask, "Who or what is demanding that we account for ourselves?" In many ways, this is a question which is overlooked by much theorizing on subjectivity, and yet one that we must contend with in the lived practices of our everyday existences.

Another condition of our lives is the state of vulnerability and precarity in which we frequently find ourselves. In much of Butler's recent work, she explores the crucially important concept that vulnerability and power go hand-in-hand, but not necessarily as opposites. Vulnerability and power are not a binary opposition, but rather two entangled circumstances of being. In *Giving an*

Account of Oneself, Butler (2005) makes two key points at the end of her first chapter: first, that human beings have a fundamental dependency on each other, and second, that we are not the same as the other (p. 33). As far as youth subjectivity is concerned, this is an important insight. During adolescence, we are so thoroughly dependent upon our peers for our sense of identity and community, and yet almost completely at the mercy of one another, constantly on the brink of losing our fragile identity and place in the community. This simultaneous power and vulnerability is central to the articulation of adolescent subjectivities. Fear of the Other and fear of the Other within ourselves, which can cause so much pain and damage throughout one's teenage years, may be slightly ameliorated by these dual recognitions that Butler so succinctly gives us. hooks (1994) emphasizes the role that teachers must also play, and what is at stake in the struggle for subjectivity:

> We must return ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in the classroom, denying subjectivity to some groups and according it to others. By recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity, we disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination. That is why the efforts to acknowledge our subjectivity and that of our students has generated both a fierce critique and backlash. (p. 139)

By acknowledging that my subjectivity is shaped by many of the same cultural forces that shaped the subjectivities of others, perhaps the realization of our mutual vulnerability can bring us closer together both in the classroom and outside of it.

And yet, fear and rejection can also be a part of adolescent subjectivity. In Erikson's eight stages of psychological development, the adolescent phase of life is marked by a conflict of "identity vs. identity confusion," where the developing

human struggles to negotiate and articulate themselves as an individual. Gilligan's (1993) groundbreaking work on women's voices and female adolescence notes how complicated gender expectations often require a submerging of subjectivity, a sort of going underground: "…the secrets of the female adolescent pertain to the silencing of her own voice, a silencing enforced by the wish not to hurt others but also by the fear that, in speaking, her voice will not be heard" (p. 51). Nonetheless, the desire to locate oneself within one's social network is also a strong motivating force for adolescents; "The desire to locate oneself in a social context becomes paramount…therefore, a sense of belonging becomes equally necessary. Since an individual's likes and dislikes are constantly changing, social influences that do not match the emerging sense of the self are either dismissed or perceived as threats" (Batra, 2013, p. 266). Indeed, the search for belonging and the potential for subsequent rejection can be generative and creative: "When their voices are not heard, or when they are not provided legitimate spaces for self-expression, they tend to seek or create subcultures for the development of their identity" (Batra, 2013, p. 267). And for students experiencing the rigidity and formalism of mainstream public education, "…the struggle to belong, to find acceptance for the self and to locate the space to sort out role-confusion is severely challenged and threatened" (Batra, 2013, p. 268). This struggle is important, with lasting implications for an adolescent's subjectivity. As Andy Furlong (2013) points out in *Youth Studies*, "For young people, dealing successfully with the identity achievement/role confusion conflict provides a foundation for healthy young adulthood and conditions the ability to form relationships with others and negotiate choice in areas such as

education and work" (p. 122).

Giroux also tackles the issue of precarity and subjectivity, although (like the psychological literature) not in those precise terms. In *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?*, he argues that 'youth' ought to be regarded as a political and moral category; in short, that rhetorical subjectivity is inherently a social construction, inflected with the values and politics of our times and with the power to galvanize change (2009, p. 23). For adolescents in particular, articulating one's subjectivity must occur in conversation with peers first and foremost. Perhaps part of this conflict and vulnerability stems from identitarian politics, a desire to easily identify and thus gain an epistemological foothold on the Other. So often, we ask to be recognized as complex, multi-dimensional, multi-subjective individuals, but we fail to afford everyone the same recognition. Smith (1988) provokes the "tension between the ideological demand that we be one 'cerned' subject and the actual experience of a subjective history which consists in a mobility, an unfixed repertoire of many subject-positions" (p. 107). The ideological demand to which Smith refers is both common and unfair. To give an example, teenagers in high school now are drowning under a sea of expectations from older generations; they must earn straight A's, take part in student leadership and volunteer programs, be involved in extracurricular activities, play sports, and fulfill a myriad of other requirements without having the gall to doze off in class because they were awake for all hours of the night scrambling to complete their homework. As McLeod and Yates (2006) observe, "It [studying subjectivity] involves questions about what is required of the person in this era—what fashioning of…identity

does the new work and cultural order require, and how do young people shape themselves, over time, in the context of their family and school life?" (p. 3). The requirements for the "good" student are often unreasonable, particularly in light of current research on the simple sleep needs a teenager's brain requires for optimum development (NIH, 2011, p. 19)! The subject position of the "good" student, however, can be investigated and dissected, along with the discursive structures that make that subject position possible.

Along those same lines, recent theoretical work by Chris Earle (2016) suggests that there is a productive theoretical move to be made when we "root agency in dispossession rather than possession, in relation rather than in the subject" (p. 49). Earle's analysis pivots upon a graceful reading of political prisoners' writing; depending upon how jaded one is, this may or may not be an apt analog for high school students' rhetorical performances. Regardless of one's cynicism, both Earle's work and this dissertation deal with the constraints and potentials for bodies within institutions. He uses this to probe the possibilities of resistance that occur at the "rupture rather than recuperation of the subject" (Earle, 2016, p. 64). I agree with him, that the rupture points ought to be the focus, and would argue that the discursive interactions in a high school setting are full of productive ruptures that can teach us a great deal about subjectivity and agency.

An example for potential sites of rupture is the separation of students by grade levels. Students are expected to "account for themselves" as a member of a particular grade, firmly linking subjectivity to chronological age. But what are the meaningful differences that necessitate students being separated by grades?

Certainly this is not the case for all educational environments in all countries, nor even a transhistorical norm in the U.S. Notable exceptions include programs for gifted and talented students, Montessori schools, and "curriculum and assessment labs" – essentially research and development schools for innovative curriculum. There are still some K-12 schools in the U.S. that, by dint of very small enrollment population, are not divided by grade levels. Moreover, the "free schools" movement, such as the Summerhill and Sudbury schools, often eschew age segregation in favor of creating a more holistic, unifying, and democratic education environment (Wilson, 2016). Along these same lines, Ackoff and Greenberg (2008), in discussing educational testing standards, note:

> The use of such standards in schools is based on the assumption that children undergo the same developmental process, at the same basic rate, from birth until maturity. The truth is that every child has his or her own highly specific and original way of growing up. To deny this diversity is to deny the very existence of individuality. Perhaps the most devastating effect of standardized testing is degradation of many children who deviate from the testers' idea of the norm. (p. 6)

In other words, the perceived relationship between temporality and subjectivity that leads to educational institutions structured by student age – namely, that time is the most logical determining factor of a student's capacity to learn, and for determining what it is appropriate for that child to learn – is not an unchallenged productive relationship. In addition, the temporal divide between grade levels has a peculiar leveling effect – it assumes that once again, chronological age of the student determines not only the student's capacity to learn, but also that the student's capacity to learn is the same across all subject areas. If you're a 10th grader in mathematics, you're also a 10th grader in history, English language & literature, foreign language studies, etc. Alongside many

other scholars from Dewey to Freire and beyond, I contend that this is not the best way to facilitate the work of learning, but rather a side effect of the industrialization of education dating back to the mid- to late-1800s.

And yet, such routine categorization of student ability is open to be troubled. Ann Murphy's (2012) *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary* asks us as scholars to question the origins of our own imaginaries, or the foundational assumptions upon which we rest our work. This fundamental questioning is by no means limited to academic endeavors, but can and should be extended to the foundational categories by which we order our worlds. For me, this is an essential component of an ethical praxis of education, and a necessary piece of my pedagogical desires. Not only do I find it necessary to question and deconstruct the categories of "good student," "bad student," and to limn the third path, but I align myself with theorists such as hooks (1994, 2010), Freire (1986, 2005), and Giroux (1988, 2013) in saying that it is utterly imperative to engage in knowledge-construction with students so that they too can learn how these deconstructive and generative processes work. For example, the Youth Council, a youth activist group in the City metropolis area, is constantly engaged in this troubling of categories. They are a group of students, many of whom suffer from and live with mental health issues, devoted to creating environments where people "Respect, Accept, and Defend" one another. Although many of these youth have lived and gone to school in environments where they have been demeaned, abused, neglected, or dismissed, they nonetheless defy the impulses to categorize themselves and one another. Watching them navigate the difficulties of running their own organization, seeing their triumphs as they

bring programs to fruition and share their education and experience with peers, and witnessing their struggles is a privilege and, for me, a prime example of how to go about troubling these categories and rupturing the idea that youth subjectivity is primarily defined by lack.

Critical Rhetoric

Critical rhetoric as we know it today was inaugurated in 1989 by Raymie McKerrow in his seminal article "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis." In this article, he laid out the framework upon which critical rhetoric has since been built: a critique of domination and a critique of freedom. He also outlined eight principles of a critical rhetoric that have been launching points for various elements of critique and theory-building since then.

From McKerrow's initial proposal of critical rhetoric and the first wave of challenges and critiques (Biesecker, 1992; Charland, 1991; Hariman, 1991) arose a few points of consensus that served as building blocks as critical rhetoric gained momentum and that inform my work in that tradition. First, critical rhetoric is an orientation, not a set methodology. Critical rhetoric orients the scholar toward a text and its contextual setting, but does not prescribe step-by-step instructions for "doing" critical rhetoric. Second, critical rhetoric is conscious of power. Varying theories of power have been integrated into critical rhetoric over the years, but the fact remains that critical rhetoric is always seeking to uncover the ways that power flows through/works through/is undermined and resisted in discourse and discursive formations. Third, the critic is visible and implicated in critical rhetoric. This is necessitated by the ideological work of critical rhetoric, the fact

that the scholar must take a stance somewhere and provide a reasonable interpretation from that stance, and the reflexive critique of freedom that critical rhetoric demands. These foundational principles have carried critical rhetoric forward to the present day.

The initial challenges leveled by Hariman (1991), Charland (1991), Biesecker (1992), and others to McKerrow's critical rhetoric provoked many communication scholars into an invigorated conversation rather than stultifying discussion. In the intervening years, critical rhetoric has been an immensely productive field of study within the discipline of rhetoric more broadly.

Critical rhetoricians have addressed a wide array of topics: the Holocaust (Hasian, 2004), postcolonial diasporas (Shome, 1996, 2012), nuclear waste disposal issues (Endres, 2009), the newspaper of a WWII Japanese-American internment camp (Ono & Sloop, 1995), LGBTQI* bathroom safety (West, 2010), architectural spaces and national monuments (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010), to name a few. Although Hariman's and Charland's early critiques of critical rhetoric expressed a concern that it would spiral endlessly into unproductive criticism, the field has consistently produced wide-ranging, vigorous, and important scholarship. Yet despite the impressive variety of intellectual problems engaged by critical rhetoricians over the years, very few have dealt explicitly with issues of education or articulations of subjectivity during adolescence. As a scholar of critical rhetoric, it is my responsibility to contribute to rhetorical criticism by producing creative and impactful work that makes a difference not only for our theoretical understandings of rhetoric but also for marginalized and silenced communities such as youth. As Giroux points out in *Youth in a Suspect*

Society, "There are few too few commentaries about how the media, schools, and other educational sites in the culture provide the ideas, values, and ideologies that legitimate the conditions that enable young people to become commodified, criminalized, or made disposable" (2009, p. 2). Moreover, Valerie Renegar (2013) puts it succinctly: "The goal of critical rhetoric, like other forms of rhetorical criticism, should be to generate theoretical tools that will enable other scholars to better understand the way rhetoric works" (p. 510). My dissertation will speak to this work, joining the intellectual heritages of critical rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and education ethnography to produce tools that I hope will allow us to better understand the ways that youth articulate their subjectivity in the context of educational institutions.

The object of analysis for critical rhetoric may vary widely; it need not be a "complete" preexisting, or even a written, text. Indeed, this is one of the elements that draws me so strongly to critical rhetoric. It is an orientation with vast applicability, because what element of communication in society is unaffected by power and discourse in some way? Virtually everything can be productively analyzed through a critical rhetorical orientation. Critical rhetoric can address written or spoken single- or multiple-rhetor texts, protest music, visual images, films, and even spaces and monuments. Indeed, McKerrow (2015) points this out by highlighting the debate between "BIG rhetoric" (e.g., "rhetoric is everything") and "little rhetoric" (rhetoric is bounded). I personally fall somewhere in the middle; while I can appreciate that nearly everything having to do with the social world has a rhetorical element to it, I do not necessarily believe that rhetoric IS everything. McKerrow's (2015) article "Research in Rhetoric Revisited" rightly

contends that rhetoric addresses that which is given meaning in some kind of use or interaction with human discourse or language, and that an object is not a priori rhetorical in and of itself (p. 155).

As a critical rhetorician, I have of course developed my own set of assumptions and foundational principles guiding me in my critical rhetorical practice; I place a high value on scholarly reflexivity and social justice. The rhetorician must be, first and foremost, reflexive in her approach to the object of analysis. This was first laid out in McKerrow's critique of freedom and has since been refined through conversation with many other scholars in the 25+ years that critical rhetoric has been in use. The reflexive scholar identifies and acknowledges her own biases and ideological standpoints and takes account of them in her analysis of the text(s) at hand and in her writing. Critical rhetoric, by examining the myriad ways that power functions through discourse and discursive formations, shows us clearly that there is no such thing as pure objectivity. Thus, it behooves critical rhetoricians to be conscious and mindful of our own privileges and positionality within discursive formations, as this has an impact on the way we see the world, select and create our texts, interpret contexts, and write analyses.

We owe this reflexivity to our own scholarly integrity as well. One of the most common missteps a rhetorical scholar can take (and probably scholars in many other disciplines as well) is to overstate her findings or implications. A reflexive stance is also a humble stance. As a rhetorical scholar I have an obligation to contribute to rhetorical theory, but I also have an obligation to critically examine my contributions and to make those contributions in a way

that furthers the field and does not falsely inflate the field's practical value.

In addition to maintaining a reflexive stance, critical rhetoric is an orientation which serves disenfranchised and marginalized communities in struggles against disproportionately powerful interests in the social and discursive worlds. Critical rhetoric is intimately tied to social justice in my own scholarly practice. Indeed, in McKerrow's (1989) essay on critical rhetoric, it is evident in the title itself that critical rhetoric is not a detached armchair philosophy; it is a theory and praxis. Praxis, Charland (1991) tells us in "Finding a Horizon and a Telos: The Challenge to Critical Rhetoric" is "a form of action…guided by an intelligent understanding of contingency" (p. 72). One of the key ways that critical rhetoric does this is by analyzing silences and aporias as well as that which is present. Critical rhetoricians put their training into practice by spotting communities and voices that have been systematically silenced and excluded from discursive formations, and by calling attention to these exclusions. While we cannot by any means speak for silenced communities, we can help to clear a space in which those voices are heard and valued. As a human being privileged with the opportunity of writing a dissertation, it is imperative that I use my status to improve the world for my fellow human beings. Critical rhetoric is the orientation to the world that best helps me to accomplish this goal.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy explicitly addresses power inequities in education, seeking to reveal and dismantle the systemic forms of oppression that underlie a

seemingly banal institution of everyday life. It is a form of teaching which values the inherent knowledge of students and approaches students not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge from a wise teacher, but rather as equal collaborators – a co-intentional approach to education with a goal of revealing power structures in education and putting that power in the hands of the oppressed in order to dismantle traditional hierarchies (Freire, 2005). It approaches teaching as a joint endeavor between teachers and students. This is an explicitly constructivist pedagogy, taking the stance that liberatory knowledge emerges from the interaction between student and teacher. As such, scholars such as Cammarota and Fine (2008) and Noguera, et al., (2006) have demonstrated that critical pedagogy can create spaces for students to articulate their subjectivity and agency differently than they would in a school that uses a more traditional, compliance-centric pedagogy.

Paulo Freire's development of what has come to be called critical pedagogy originated while he was working with peasants in the early 1960s in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, where literacy was a requirement in order to vote (Kirkendall, 2004), in a drastically different sociopolitical and economic climate than exists in the United States today. During the intervening years, many scholars have engaged in conversation about critical pedagogy, producing a great deal of research on the topic that has pushed the discipline forward in productive ways. The specific philosophies and praxes of critical pedagogy vary widely with location, intellectual heritage, and student population, but the common elements among all of them are these: first, students engage in emancipatory work by taking an active role in their own education; second,

knowledge is created through critical interactions between teachers, learners, and material; and third, any successful educational program must respect and build on the world view of the learners.

Freire's early work centered on bringing oppressed groups (primarily rural laborers) to critical consciousness through a dialectical process of discussion and of valuing the learners' own lives and experiences in the education process. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire lays out a theoretical rationale and practical framework for helping learners make progress toward critical consciousness, or conscientização. Eschewing the "banking" model of learning, where a wise teacher deposits knowledge into the empty vessel of the student's mind, Freire instead theorized that knowledge is based in experience and developed through dialogue – "Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning" (1986, p. 63). By analyzing the world in conjunction with the word while teaching literacy to rural peasants, Freire sought to bring about a radical change in consciousness that would spark the people's desire for freedom. One of the primary tenets of Freire's philosophy is that "One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people [the oppressed]" (1986, p. 84). I argue that within the confines of formal education, youth as a category are frequently oppressed by a system which structures their daily lives and in which they are too often voiceless, much like the Brazilian sugarcane farmers (citation) who inspired Freire's critical pedagogy in the 1960s. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the body of work already addressing this issue by tackling the specific issues of rhetorical subjectivity and agency in a

nontraditional high school.

Summary of Chapters

This dissertation is written in six parts. This section previews each chapter and its intended subject.

Chapter I: *It's All Subjective: Situating Students in Networks of Rhetorical Subjectivity and Agency*. This chapter will delineate the contours of youth subjectivity within rhizomes of discourses about youth, adolescence, students, teens, and what it means to be a subject within sometimes conflicting rhetorics of "student" and "self."

Chapter II: *Recognizing Youth: Rethinking Frameworks of Subjectivity and Agency*. This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks in which the dissertation is situated: namely, critical rhetoric, critical pedagogy, and youth/childhood studies. It also offers a rhetorical analysis of how youth/adolescence came to exist as a category.

Chapter III: *Respecting Student Subjectivity and Agency: Participatory Critical Rhetoric for Students' Communication.* This chapter details the methodological rationale and procedures for data collection and analysis in the dissertation.

Chapter IV: *You Are a Student: "Official" Perspectives on Student Subjectivity and Acceptable Agency.* This chapter is a critical rhetorical analysis of official, state-sanctioned, and/or adult discourses through which we can gain a picture of "The Student's Subjectivity".

Chapter V: *I Am _____: Youth Discourse on Subjectivity and Agency in the Context of an Educational Institution.* This chapter is a critical rhetorical analysis

of youth discourse regarding their own subjectivity in the context(s) of educational institutions, and addressing the concept of time as a material rhetorical phenomenon.

Chapter VI: *What's in a Name? Lingering Thoughts on Subjectivity and Agency.* This chapter summarizes the conclusions and overall contributions of the dissertation.

CHAPTER II

RECOGNIZING YOUTH: RETHINKING FRAMEWORKS OF SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

I want to emphasize that how we view, represent, and treat young people should be part of a larger public dialogue about how to imagine a democratic future.

\- *Henry Giroux*[2]

If there are two things that the literature seems to agree upon, it's that the rhetorical concepts of subjectivity and agency are notoriously difficult to pin down, and that the assertion of agency is a critical marker of the passage into adolescence (Shorter, 1977; Young, 2008). These stakes nicely outline the discussions and tensions that I discuss in this chapter: namely, the contradictions and paradoxes that youth, and particularly high school students, navigate in the realms of rhetorical subjectivity and agency. In her article on the 1995 controversy surrounding the placement of the Children's Peace Statue in Los Alamos, New Mexico (home place of the atomic bomb), Risa Applegarth points out insightfully,

> Even as our field has embraced theories of agency that include objects, environments, and nonhuman animals, *we still have difficulty perceiving children as rhetorical agents*. As posthumanist conceptions of agency as dispersed, partial, and contingent have gained ground, children have

[2] From *Youth in a Suspect Society* (2009), p. 141.

> persisted as figures that elude even our capacious theories. When I speak about this case with other scholars in rhetoric, I am often met with skepticism about the extent to which the children who supported the statue – children as young as eight and as old as eighteen – acted "on their own," or without adult or teacher guidance (*emphasis mine*). (Applegarth, 2017, pp. 52-53)

The casual inquiries Applegarth encounters from fellow scholars beg the question: Would an adult rhetor be automatically questioned about the extent to which she acted "on her own"? Such a question seems to take a foundational assumption that there are rhetors that exercise agency within a vacuum, devoid of outside influence or social contamination, as though adulthood affords one a rhetorical shield of subjectivity which young people have not yet developed. I take up Applegarth's critique and extend it, arguing that it is not only rhetorical theories of agency that needs to be expanded, but also theories of subjectivity. After all,

> any viable notion of resistance to the current authoritarian order must also address the issue of what it means pedagogically to imagine a more democratically oriented notion of knowledge, subjectivity, and agency and what it might mean to bring such notions into the public sphere. (Giroux, 2013, p. 87)

The youth-as-rhetor and youth-as-critic subject positions must be explicated, and reckoning with these subject positions and the agentic moves available from there force us to critically encounter time as a subject-constructing rhetorical force that is accepted and resisted in myriad ways. Youth deserve to be recognized as capable rather than defined by lack, and their rhetoric deserves due consideration and analysis rather than automatic dismissal.

This chapter sets up the theoretical frameworks available for rethinking subjectivity, agency, and adolescence. First, I offer a literature review of theory on subjectivity and agency that draws from critical rhetoric as well as critical

pedagogy and youth/childhood studies. Second, I briefly trace the histories by which childhood and adolescence came to be rhetorically separated from adulthood. Finally, I discuss ways in which youth might rhetorically open up the concepts of subjectivity and agency for reinterpretation or negotiation in the contexts of their own educational settings.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, or "what it means to be a discrete person or human subject, is a central issue in much current social and critical theory with important implications for rhetorical studies" precisely because it has been so hotly contested over the years (Jasinski, 2001, p. 560). Much modernist rhetorical theory is predicated upon an understanding of the subject that originated in Renaissance humanism: an autonomous, sovereign individual – a self-contained, thinking, independently acting man – as a modern subject (Conley, 1990). Perhaps the ultimate expression of this particular epoch in theorizing subjectivity is Descartes' famous logic, "*Cogito, ergo sum*." For modernist theorists, this autonomous subject is located at rhetoric's center.[3] The theoretical model underpinning numerous studies of "great men speaking well" is evidence of this, wherein an independent rhetor chooses from many rhetorical devices to persuade (more or less successfully) an audience to his point of view (e.g., Leff, 1992; Leff & Sachs, 1990; Lucas, 1988). At the heart of this type of rhetorical criticism is an assumption that there is a sovereign subject to be held up as an exemplar, from whom students of rhetoric may learn and model themselves

[3] Most of rhetorical theorizing on subjectivity has dealt with human subjects, and although scholars such as Haraway (1999) and others have challenged that anthropocentrism, the human focus of rhetorical theorizing persists.

after.

As many critical scholars have noted, this model fails to account for research on social realities and the contexts of communication in action. It also lacks a framework for understanding the constraints experienced by different rhetors navigating a world fraught with systemic inequality where rhetorical devices are not equally available to all speakers (e.g., Enck-Wanzer, 2012; Gaonkar 1990; Wander, 1984; Warnick, 1992). Subjectivity is, after all, intrinsically linked to rhetorical agency, as McKerrow (1993) observes:

> In the modern world, dominated by Cartesian rationality, the subject, both in its empirical, physical presence to the world and in its transcendental "I," occupies center stage. A subject, conscious of its own presence in the world and actively engaged in thought about the world, operates as the originator of action. (p. 54)

McKerrow and other scholars (Biesecker, 1992; Charland, 1987) then go on to thoroughly problematize the concept of the sovereign subject acting as a conscientious agent of rhetorical action. This de-centering of the subject in rhetorical theory developed in response to these deficits within theories of the autonomous subject. However, this shift also precipitated some turmoil; if the rhetor is not an autonomous subject, freely choosing one rhetorical device over any other, then *who is the rhetor*? And who is the rhetorician or rhetorical critic? One very productive line of reasoning can be found in the work of Althusser (1984), who posited that subjectivity is linked to discourse and through discourse, to ideology. In Althusser's formulation, the subject is interpellated by discourse through a process of hailing. Subjectivity is constituted when a pre-subjected individual is recruited by hailing and transformed into a subject. Althusser's (1984) classic example is that of a police officer shouting, "Hey, you!"

on the street. When the officer shouts this address, an individual is hailed/recruited by the discourse, turns around to face the officer, and thus is interpellated/transformed into the subject within a discursive formation. The interpellated subject may or may not have been the same individual that the police officer thought s/he was hailing but, in responding to the hailing, becomes that subject. This does assume that an individual-cum-subject possesses some kind of a prediscursive essence, a concept with which later scholars take issue.

Althusser (1984) theorized subjectivity as something that occurs when an individual becomes subject *to* discourse, and others have built upon this line of reasoning to highlight structural inequalities. Scholars engaging in this conversation contend that structural formations put individual subjects into particular positions. A purely structural theory of subjectivity is ill-suited to address the limited opportunities that may exist for a subject to manipulate positional disadvantage to her own ends. Though it is undoubtedly necessary to recognize and confront structural inequalities at play in theories of subjectivity, such recognition leaves little room for independent choice or agency on the part of the subject, and rhetorical agency is a key theoretical pillar. For instance, Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994) argued that academic writing conventions cause women in the academy to be hailed/interpellated into certain subject positions, forcing upon them a uniform subjectivity that is difficult to displace. Citing "a disempowering form of subjectivity 'offered' to women all too frequently in this culture," the authors express their disappointment with and anger at the structural expectations attendant upon being born (or living as) a woman (p.

396).

Blair, Brown, and Baxter also raise a point oft-mentioned in feminist scholarship – that subjectivity is two-sided (Christoph, 2002; Harde, 2004; Titchkosky, 2005). Although they agree that a subject position is necessary for discursive interaction, a subject position also makes an individual vulnerable to be acted *upon*, discursively or otherwise. Phillips (2006) addressed this dilemma, explicating a "rhetorical maneuver" by which a subject may capitalize on the existing tension between her subject position and the constraints of that position in order to "redirect the agency of its position against the very relations of power/knowledge that seek to position it" (p. 329). This common thread running through the theoretical underpinnings of Althusser (1984), Blair, Brown and Baxter (1994), and Phillips (2006) affirms that subjects are formed through encounters with discursive formations, but does not satisfactorily account for the role that agency might play in rhetorical situations.

Other scholars have conceived of discourse and subjects as mutually constitutive. This more complex and nuanced approach to subjectivity recognizes the simultaneous effects of the subject on discourse, and of discourse on the subject. McKerrow's (1993) discussion of the subject in relation to critical rhetoric is based upon a decentered critic-subject making contributions to the fragmentary world of discourse. He contended, "If the subject is decentered and viewed as a form rather than a substance, as the intersection of truth rather than the being that finds truth, [there can be] a role for the speaker as an agent of social change" (p. 64). Thus, he challenges the idea of a subject's prediscursive essence apparent in Althusser's (1984) theory of interpellation. Likewise, Butler's

(2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself* deals at length with subjectivity by raising the question of how to live an ethical life. Butler concluded that in order for ethics to be ethical, each person must make them her own; and in order to know what is ethical to "me," I must be able to know what "I" am. In this scenario, ethics hinge upon subjectivity, which is implicated both in networks of "social conditions of its emergence" and in a narrative of self in relation to Other (p. 7). Butler's "I" necessitates the existence of a "you" with whom to communicate before subjectivity is possible. The subject is forged *within* the discursive connections.

Situated within these discursive networks, Phillips (2006) offers a shifting, postmodern conception of subjectivity, as "a tension between the positioning carried out by the formations of discourse within which we act and the fluid multiplicity of subjectivity against which such positions are employed" (p. 313). Working in the realm of subjectivity means constantly contending with the shifting nature of discourse, deeply intertwined with structural, contextual, and interpersonal environments.

Scholars must contend, too, with questions about the origin of the subject. If the subject does not, as Althusser proposed, possess a prediscursive essence (a form of sovereignty), then from whence comes the subject? Judith Butler's (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself* theorizes the subject as always-partial, never-completed, and impossible to fully account for *because* the material practices and discourses that form the circumstances of the subject's formation are conditions for which she cannot account. Furthermore, Butler reminds us that "The means by which subject constitution occurs is not the same as the narrative form of the reconstruction that constitution attempts to provide" (Butler, 2005, p. 69). In

other words, the subject is not only in a state of perpetual flux and vulnerable to the discourses in and through which she lives, but is also opaque to herself. Never fully knowing the conditions of her emergence as a subject, she cannot capture the ephemeral subject-constitution, but can only attempt to partially recapture it through narrativizing her story.

The formulation of the subject-in-flux relies in part on an assertion of the materiality of rhetoric. Greene (2009) observes of Althusser's infamous work on ideology and state apparatuses: "…ideology is not the interest lurking behind the back of the speaker or critic, but a terrain and practice of turning individuals into subjects of a particular kind" (p. 45). Indeed, Nancy Lesko's (2001) definition of subjectivity takes a provocative, openly materialist stance, declaring the subject to be

> …the effect of material practices, of discourses, rather than a prior unity. Subjectivity is theorized as being constructed along with objective knowledges. Subjectivity assumes that systems of reasoning do not just produce object knowledges, but they also affect how young people or teachers experience and understand themselves. (p. 17)

The concept of materiality is significant to this dissertation because it implies that rhetoric is at work here not generally, or in a vacuum, but rather within specific sites; as I will argue, with the specific lives of students at the intersections of their interactions with official discourses of education. Thus, I contend that rhetoric is material both in terms of its constitutive dimensions, and in terms of its concrete effects on subjects. As I will discuss at length in Chapter IV and Chapter V, the discursive formations in which students' subjectivities are forged have significant impact on their lived experiences with education. In some cases, students are refused recognition as fully-human subjects, even within the

context of their own educations.

However, there is a deep tension carving a rift into the terrain of subjectivity which must be addressed; on one side, the conception of subjectivity as always-partial, never-completed, and in flux, and on the other side, an inability to see youth as anything *except* subjects-in-process. Vivian (2000) articulated one side of this tension, asserting that

> …the self may be conceived as a form - a rhetorical form- that exists only in its continual aesthetic creation, in its indefinite *becoming*. Such a formulation makes the self open to difference, to continual movement and transformation, instead of identical to itself. (p. 304)

Having determined that the subject is brought into being through discourse, it makes a great deal of sense that the subject is in a state of "indefinite becoming," where each new discursive encounter is ripe with potential for change to occur. I argue that this is a good thing; the capacity for learning and change is, after all, one of humankind's most valuable characteristics. This subjective flexibility offers us opportunities to literally engage anew with our discursive communities, reshaping them as we invite them to reshape us. However, it seems that the implications of this continual state of change have potentially profound material consequences for youth.

When youth are represented as *only* becoming, they are misrecognized and interpellated into society as incomplete, not fully formed, or lacking. As Lesko (2001) notes, the rhetoric of *becoming* has taken such a prominent role in cultural understandings of adolescence that it is difficult to see youth as anything but. She calls us to recognize how

> the evolutionary roots of adolescence impose a strong interest in *the future* over the present or the past; one eye is always on the ending, which spurs the documentation of movement or lack of it toward the desired

> characteristics. The temporal movement into the future is understood as linear, uni-directional, and able to be separated from the present and the past. (p. 191)

In other words, by fully submerging youth as a rhetorical category into the discourses of *becoming*, the people who occupy that category find themselves in a sort of strange limbo, living their lives towards a mythological point in the future which they are assured will 'happen' eventually, but deprived of the opportunity to *be* in the present. For example, take the common tendency to use the phrases 'the real world' or 'real life' to describe life after a student's formal education has drawn to a close. These phrases rely heavily upon the logics of *becoming* that Lesko critiques, and upon which critical rhetoric has built much of its theory about subjectivity. Claiming that 'real life' happens in 'the real world' is to discursively re-inscribe a distinction between the lived experiences of high school students (or college students), and the lived experiences of adults. It places adulthood in a privileged position, asserting the primary reality of that world, and denigrating the (equally real) world of students as they experience life that is structured largely by the institutions of schooling. This hierarchy provides the grounds on which the struggles and triumphs of youth are dismissed rather than taken seriously, and more often than not, is used as a rhetorical weapon to keep youth 'in their place.'

This tension represents an opportunity for critical rhetoric to be reflexive; to acknowledge that while subjectivity is constantly in flux, it must be recognized that the state of *becoming* does not cease upon entering one's 20s, but extends throughout one's entire life. Lesko calls for

> …a politics that supports youths and their futures without the biologically based guarantee of "adolescence." Can we work to enhance youths' life

> conditions without the confident characterization that youths are at a different psychological stage from adults? Can we work to improve youths' life conditions without the hierarchy of adult over youth? Can we consider youth as more than *becoming*? (pp. 12 – 13)

However, I argue that rather than discarding the concept of the subject-in-flux, we must also make the case for *becoming* to be a liberatory state, rather than one that is defined by lack and inadequacy, by recognizing that there is no telos for who and what we are becoming. Rather, our full humanity lies in the process of that becoming, and crucially, *at every point in the process*, more than at some imaginary end point. Through this critical celebration of subjectivity, we can also recognize that youth have much to teach adults in the 'real world' that we all share.

Agency

Part of the critical urgency in reconceptualizing subjectivity is that the stakes of who is recognized as a legitimate, fully-human subject has very real implications for the contours of life, from the mundane to the global. If one is not recognized as a subject, then whatever rhetorical agency one attempts to exercise is essentially doomed from the start. This is certainly not to say that one's rhetorical agency cannot be undermined by other means even when one *is* afforded subjective recognition, but to be deprived of subjectivity puts one at an even greater disadvantage when it comes to taking action.

Agency, like subjectivity, can be a slippery term, taking on many nuances within the field of rhetoric. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (2005) wryly writes,

> The term 'agency' is polysemic and ambiguous, a term that can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions among others. I imagine

> myself in my speech writer persona rafting down a river filled with rapids named Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault, at the end of which I must navigate a vortex of feminist controversy with Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Michelle Baliff, which lures me toward hidden reefs as I consider whether the phoenix of female agency can emerge out of the ashes of the dead male author. (p. 1)

This is, perhaps, the most amusing rhetorical description of agency, but it does set the stage for some of the challenges of its current theoretical locations. And though the basic definition may seem to be fairly straightforward – taking action through one's rhetorical performances – Applegarth rightly notes, "…posing the question of agency…to what extent were these children *really* agents? – highlights the recalcitrance of our collective ideas about what constitutes agency" (2017, pp. 53-54). She goes on to observe that "rhetorical agency is a measure of power" and calls upon rhetoricians to actively deconstruct these dynamics to more fully understand "children's rhetorical activity as a mechanism for engaging with and intervening in unequal systems of power" (Applegarth, 2017, p. 57). In some ways, the definition is less important than the implementation, which is what I address in the remainder of this section.

Freire's conception of agency, described in detail as the process of coming to critical consciousness, may be helpful here. For Freire, agency is *only* possible when a person is Subject rather than object: "On the contrary, he knows that as a Subject he can and ought, together with other Subjects, to participate creatively in that process [carrying out a liberatory revolution] by discerning transformations in order to aid and accelerate them" (Freire, 2010, p. 10). This fundamental entanglement of subjectivity and agency makes sense as a hallmark of critical pedagogy, where one's full humanity emerges in tandem with one's capacity for responsible and critically conscious decision-making. Rather than

considering agency as a phenomenon, Freire describes it as developing in stages: from intransitivity, to semi-intransitivity, to naïve transitivity, to critical transitivity. At each stage, a subject can be stalled and remain stuck in that phase; Freire also notes that between naïve transitivity and critical transitivity lies the potential for a person to "fall into *fanaticized consciousness*" (p. 15), wherein "he will become even more disengaged from reality than in the semi-intransitive state" (p. 15). While Freire's model is fairly linear in its design, his description of critical consciousness offers rhetoricians an interesting way of thinking about agency.

> The critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's "findings" and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation…(Freire, 2010, p. 14)

Moreover, Freire (2010) does not understand agency or conscientização as a natural human attribute, but rather something that must be developed intentionally. "…the further, crucial step from naïve transitivity to critical transitivity would *not* occur automatically. Achieving this step would thus require an active, dialogical educational program concerned with social and political responsibility" (p. 15). In short, agency is not a thing that one possesses, but rather a characteristic that one might develop given the right set of circumstances. Though I would contest Freire's assertion that only certain people have rhetorical agency, I think his point that agency is created is useful.

Adolescence and agency have a complicated relationship with one another, as well. In fact, "adolescence" may be far too broad a category for

meaningful critical rhetorical intervention here, since the "appropriate" amounts of agency for any given young person to exhibit are also created and constrained by that young person's social location in a complicated fabric of gender, race, social class, and more. For example, similar agentic assertions from male and female adolescents may be received very differently by the same parents, depending on how those parents think about the appropriate levels of independence for their male or female children, or the perceived differential dangers to a female child and a male child making the same play for agency. Likewise, youth of different racial backgrounds engaging in the same agentic rhetorics may encounter drastically different forms of resistance or acceptance from their audiences. In other words, agency is not exempt from issues of intersectionality, and we must attend to it as such. As Phillips (2006) reminds us, "Agency, therefore, must be conceived not only in terms of power and the resistance to power, but also in terms of the risks entailed by invoking it" (p. 326). Youth, because of their social status as dependents, often risk more than adults when they engage in overt displays of rhetorical agency, particularly if they fall outside the sanctioned realms of 'appropriateness.'

As rhetorical scholars, we are called to deconstruct the norms of discourse that set the boundaries of 'appropriate agency.' It behooves us to question the ways that rhetorical strategies may be used to varying effect based upon the rhetor employing them. As Applegarth (2017) reminds us,

> …scholars [must] resist the tendency to discount or overlook children as rhetorical agents, but we must also identify how the scripts by which children are divested of agency intersect with other circulating narratives – narratives animated by gendered, geographic, racialized, and myriad other axes of difference. (p. 71)

In identifying how cultural scripts are used to divest children of agency and in attending to the intersectionality of agency, I argue that within most discursive formations, youth *itself* is an identity which audiences often use to discount the rhetorical actions of children. As Giroux (2013) puts it,

> What is particularly new is the way in which young people are increasingly denied any place in an already weakened social contract and the degree to which they are no longer seen as central to how the United States defines its future. Youth is no longer the place where society reveals its dreams but where it increasingly hides its nightmares. Within neoliberal narratives, youth are either defined as a consumer market or stand for trouble" (pp. 106-107).

In other words, the fact that someone is young is taken as an excuse to dismiss or belittle their right to speak and act publically, and "youth" comes to act as a rhetorical container for society's anxieties and fears. This is not an inconsequential dismissal. Within the context of a high school, it can result in students being disbelieved by teachers and staff about their accounts of traumatic experiences such as bullying, sexual assault, or intimate partner violence. As I will go on to argue in later chapters, it can also result in students' disenfranchisement and the systematic separation of formal education from students' engagement with their own lived experiences of learning. I contend that in addition to recognizing youth as fully-human subjects, we (adults) must find better ways of listening to them as they assert their rhetorical agency.

A Brief Rhetorical History of Adolescence

The period of life which we now regard as "adolescence" was not always regarded as such. Contemporary understandings of the commonplaces of human development tell us that life unfolds in a strict and nearly universal pattern:

birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, old age, and death. And yet, adolescence as a rhetorical category is socially constructed, containing the traces of the ideologies and discursive formations that shaped it. By unpacking the processes by which "adolescence" came to be a category of its own, we can better learn what it means to be an adolescent today. And since adolescence in the U.S. is almost always closely tied with certain kinds of schooling, a more thorough review of adolescence will also give us purchase on how such schooling impacts the lives of students. This section will very briefly outline the development of several rhetorical distinctions between units of society: the family unit as distinct from more nebulous kinship networks, the separation of childhood from adulthood, and the further distinctions between childhood and adolescence.

Making Families: Defining Family from Kinship Networks

The notion of "family" has become much more flexible in recent years, with larger swaths of society demonstrating a willingness to accept different variations of people as a family. Though this adaptation is sometimes bemoaned as the decay of the family, that idea is frankly nonsense. Familial arrangements have constantly evolved to meet the needs of people through different social, economic, and governmental periods of time, and will likely continue to evolve in the future. As Nicholson (1999) so aptly says, there is no need to be ashamed of the various living arrangements that family can take on: "This shame is needless for the language of the categories is duplicitous" (p. 77). In other words, the idea that some types of families are inherently more natural or better than

others is both inaccurate and misleading.

Kinship networks are common to all societies, although they differ in their particularities. They may be very wide-ranging, and include any relative as well as other relationships of consequence, such as very close and trusted friends, or they can be tighter circles measured by shared blood. Nicholson, however, notes that often "family" is used interchangeably with "kinship," thus blurring the distinctions between the two concepts. "In other words, there is a slippage in the use of language so that the universality of one type of institution [kinship] becomes claimed about another [the modern nuclear family] only because the two institutions share the same name – 'family'" (Nicholson, 1999, p. 79). This slippage is significant because the concept of nuclear families – parents living with their biological offspring – has colored so much of current understandings of acceptable subjectivity for the family members in question. For instance, the structure of the public school system is based upon the expectation that a parent is available to provide care for the children when school is not in session. As Nicholson observes, this assumption places heavy burdens on all members of the family network: "For children, it means that if one or both parents are emotionally or physically abusive, there is little recourse to other adults to mitigate the abuse. For adult members, heavy expectations are placed on the other partner to satisfy needs for companionship and love" (1999, p. 93). Nuclear family structures also have strong dependency ties between children and parents, rendering the children economically and legally vulnerable to their parents. With such networks as the basis of society, perhaps it is unsurprising that children are largely voiceless in their educational processes and experiences,

as all social institutions defer to parents as the spokesperson for their children.

Edward Shorter's classic 1977 sociological work, *The Making of the Modern Family* is even more clear in his diagnosis of what is driving contemporary changes in family structures. He argues that "…the reshaping of the family currently underway has two main components: an inherent instability of the couple itself, and a loss of control by parents over adolescent children" (Shorter, 1977, p. 7). However, though Shorter wavers between inevitability and chagrin over these changes, I argue that teenagers' increasing independence is a positive thing when it comes to their likelihood to act as rhetorical agents within their educational experiences. Shorter essentially contends that a psychic shift in the way people learn "who they are" has driven this change in adolescent behavior.

> …in the Bad Old Days people learned who they were, and what their place in the eternal order of things was to be, by looking at the progression of generations that stretched behind them – a progression that would extend from them into a future of which one could say only that it would probably be like the present…Adolescents now soon realize that they are not links in a familial chain stretching across the ages. Who they are and what they become is independent...of who their parents are. (Shorter, 1977, p. 8)

In other words, it is a crisis of subjectivity, of understanding why and how one comes to be as a discrete person, that Shorter identifies as the heart of changing kinship networks, particularly for youth. These changes are accompanied by a subtle but significant shift in rhetorical implications: If youth are 'rebelling' against their parents by asserting themselves as agentic subjects, the connotations of 'youth,' 'teen,' 'adolescent,' and even 'student' changes to include an element that needs to be controlled and contained – if not by powerful parents in a nuclear family, then by other social institutions in which youth find themselves entangled – such as schools.

The Innocence of Youth: Rhetorical Construction and Consecration of Childhood

In order to understand the rhetorical construction of adolescence, we first must explore the rhetorical constructions of childhood. Although historians agree that most cultures have had varying notions of childhood over time, "childhood" as we know it today only came to be studied as a distinct phenomenon in the 1950s, and even then primarily focused on ideas of children's deficiencies and the best methods through which to apply corrective interventions (Heywood, 2001). However, it is important to note that contemporary understandings of childhood are always naturalized through discourse, wherever they appear in history:

> The temptation was for members of any society to consider their own particular arrangements for childhood as 'natural,' having been steeped in them all their lives. At the same time, it was easy to assume that the biological immaturity of children would be the overriding influence on this stage of life. (Heywood, 2001, p. 3).

Thus, while the early 21st-century perspective on childhood includes tensions such as finding a balance between the social responsibility to shelter children, and the necessity of teaching them to cope with a world that can be very harsh or cruel at times; debates about what is and is not appropriate for children to learn, witness, or do at given times in their lives; and many other serious issues, these have not, nor will they always be, the 'natural' topics of discussion circulating around childhood. For example, the passage of child labor laws during the late Industrial Revolution is just one illustration of the changing stakes of how childhood is defined, socially patrolled, and experienced. Or, to give a more recent example, examining the changes to typical public school curricula over the

decades reveals a similarly shifting understanding of the purposes and appropriate uses of one's childhood years.

However, it is not just that the meaning of childhood has shifted over time, but also that it has been consecrated in often-problematic ways. As the "cult of the Infant Jesus which symbolizes childish innocence" gained social traction in the 17th century, so too began the association of 'child' with 'innocent' (Hoyles, 1989, p. 12). This trend continued through the Enlightenment period and into the Victorian era, when the cult of the child was in full swing:

> The work of the Romantic poets and Victorian novelists…placed a central emphasis on the innate purity and natural goodness of children. For writers as diverse as Dickens and Wordsworth, the figure of the child became a powerful symbol in their critique of industrialism and social inequality. (Buckingham, 2000, p. 8)

Here, it is crucial to note that the child was a *symbol,* not a rhetorical subject capable of exercising agency, but rather a figure to be rhetorically deployed by adults in support of their arguments. In the early 1900s, Western European and U.S. "child-saving" movements sought to shelter children (mostly boys) from the evils of the adult world, since "early independence of all sorts came to be seen as dangerous, so efforts to keep boys dependent accompanied those to keep them pure" (Lesko, 2001, p. 63). These rhetorical linkages between childhood, innocence, and purity still hold a prominent position in discourse about children today, and still often tokenize children; Applegarth (2017) observes, "Young children in particular are deployed as symbols of straightforward innocence," (p. 56). In other words, childhood is still typically rhetorically constructed by drawing upon the presumed goodness and innocence of the child, without a great deal of regard to the discourses of children themselves, or the gendered,

raced, and classed ways that childhood is experienced.

Separating Adolescence from Childhood

However, innocence can be fraught with complications, depending as it does upon the expectation of silence that is demanded of a symbol, rather than the dialogue that is expected of a human: "As figures, children must bear uncomplicated meanings to motivate adult action; children who act with complex intentions lose their claim on adult protection and relinquish their hold on the status of *child*" (Applegarth, 2017, pp. 55-56). It seems to be through the assertion of rhetorical agency that children shatter the illusion of innocence that is projected upon them, forcing adults to reckon with their full complexity and humanity. As Applegarth points out, this is a double-edged sword; by demanding recognition as fully-human subjects, children lose the automatic assumption of innocence granted them by the adult world. It is worth noting, however, that not all children enjoy equal claims to adult protection. To give an example, one need only examine the demographic statistics of children killed by police officers in recent years to realize that African American children are not afforded the same assumptions of innocence as their Caucasian peers. In their incisive essay, "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children," Goff, et al., launch an inquiry into "whether Black boys are given the protections of childhood equally to their peers" and find unequivocally that they are not. The authors conclude that systematic, racially-motivated dehumanization of certain groups of children regularly occurs within policing contexts, and that "dehumanization is a uniquely dangerous intergroup attitude"

(Goff, et al., 2014, p. 526). Indeed, in popular public discourse, "children are also increasingly perceived as a threat to the rest of us – as violent, anti-social and sexually precocious" (Buckingham, 2000, p. 3). Often, this shift in perception coincides with the onset of adolescence, and this paradoxical clash between innocence and threat seems, in some ways, to drive many of the negative public perceptions of teenagers. For example, accusations of laziness (usually leveled along generational lines) can be read as a rhetorical conflict between the idyllic, playful world of childhood innocence and the 'real-world' struggle and competition of adults trying to survive in a contemporary capitalist society; a double-bind in which youth are damned either way for either being too childish, or lamented for growing up "too quickly." Teenagers, rhetorically marked by in-betweenness, inhabit this clash and are (unfairly) held both to mythical childlike standards of innocence and the hard-eyed realism of adulthood simultaneously.

Interestingly, as the rhetorical category of adolescence is solidified, it is also increasingly commodified.

> Once proclaimed as innocent and in need of protection, they are now viewed as one of the central pillars of the consumer economy and increasingly are exposed to market concepts and relations in public spheres and areas of life that were once typically heralded as a safe haven from market values. (Giroux, 2009, p. 35)

This shift which, accompanies the rhetorical separation of teenagers from the innocence of childhood, reveals discursive formations in which youth are no longer deployed as symbols of innocence, but rather are figured as symbols of potential profit. As bell hooks (2010) observes, "democratic education is being undermined as the interests of big business and corporate capitalism encourage students to see education solely as a means to achieve material success" (p. 16).

In other words, as youth come to be constructed as participants in the adult world, they are encouraged to dissociate from the joys of learning and the satisfying challenges of critical thinking and asked to participate in their own self-commodification as 'future workers' competing in labor markets. Thus, adolescence as a rhetorical category is further separated from both adulthood and from childhood, placing it firmly into complex, contradictory, and sometimes competing discursive structures that construct youth as chaotic and lacking. It is into this discursive positioning that my dissertation intervenes, asking rhetorical scholars to consider rethinking frameworks of subjectivity and agency in the service of emancipatory aims.

Enacting Agency, Adjusting Subjectivity

So, given the rhetorical construction of adolescence as its own category, the potential pitfalls of subjectivity, and the risks of agency, how might a high school student today navigate these obstacles? This dissertation dives into the heart of precisely that paradox; into the contradictory and complicated discourses that structure the boundaries of high school students' subjectivities and patrol the lines along which they should or should not assert their rhetorical agency, and wades alongside students as they navigate the tides and undertows of their educational environments.

One way in which students might attempt to engage subjectivity and agency is found in Phillips (2006) concept of a "rhetorical maneuver" which "involves trading one's established - or positioned - ethos for one that is not already accepted in a particular space" (p. 327). Within the spaces of mainstream

schools, students who attempt to exercise agency over their education are seen as deviating the norms and values of the subject position of "the good student." In a nontraditional high school such as City High School, "good students" are *expected* to exercise agency over their education because that subject position is formulated on a more flexible, inclusive conceptualization and valuation of time. In other words, students as "good students"/subjects are understood as already legitimately fully-human and capable of acts of rhetorical agency, rather than excluded from those positions vis-à-vis their youth. They do not have to prove it to anyone within that discursive structure. However, if a student in a mainstream high school attempted to, for example, set their own schedule for completing coursework, that rhetorical maneuver of repositioning their subjectivity would probably fail, and fail spectacularly, with disciplinary, social, and educational consequences for the student in question. In fact, Lesko (2001) argues that "the assumption by schools of a normative and proper slow development of youth is effective in keeping many youths 'socially young'" (p. 145). This discursively enforced 'social youth' undermines students agentic work, providing a cultural script by which young people's rhetorical action can readily be dismissed as a phase, exaggeration, or nonsense.

But there is also hope in the potential for students to use a rhetorical maneuver in ways that challenge and open to dialogue the ways that their subjectivities are constructed and their agencies are dismissed. Since the subject is forged through discursive connections, it is these discursive connections that offer us the greatest chance to reforge the subject and enact agency differently. It is within communities of rhetors that these changes can happen. bell hooks

(2010) reminds us that

> To achieve a greater sense of mutuality in the classroom, teachers must dare to teach students the importance of mutual respect and regard. We must be willing to acknowledge the hierarchy that is a real fact of our different status, while at the same time showing that difference in status need not lead to domination or any abuse of our power. (p. 114)

Within the theoretical frameworks and practices of critical pedagogy, students are constructed as partners in education, recognized as fully human, and have firm foundations from which to act, rhetorically. In a time when 'school choice' is a hotly contested topic, some students are exploiting the conservative politics that attempt to dismantle public education in order to seek out and co-create radical places such as City High School, in which they are constructed as active agents and valued participants in their own educational experiences.

CHAPTER III

RESPECTING STUDENT SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY: PARTICIPATORY CRITICAL RHETORIC AND STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this dissertation is to study the ways that students negotiate rhetorical constructions of subjectivity and agency, and better understand how the logics of time work on subjectivity and agency within the context of a nontraditional high school. Despite critical rhetoric's reluctance about labelling our processes "methods," in order to answer my question I needed to find a means of accessing live rhetorics coming from the very population that I contend is wrongly overlooked by rhetorical theory – youth. Since my topical interests are critical communication pedagogy and K-12 education, it made perfect sense to take a participatory critical rhetoric approach to studying rhetoric as it unfolded in the context of a nontraditional high school. In the chapter that follows, I lay out the tenets of participatory critical rhetoric, the methodological approach or critical orientation to research that I chose for this dissertation, offer a rationale for choosing the research site that for carrying out fieldwork, and give a description of the research site.

Methodology: A Summary of Participatory Critical Rhetorics

The object of study for my dissertation is a text of partial connections and fragments, gathered from participant observation of students' discourses on their own educational experiences in both normal school settings, semistructured interviews, and borrowed voice recorders, curriculum documents, professional development agendas, official education policies, and educator discourses. A recent development in the trajectory of critical rhetoric, the process of participatory critical rhetoric, gave me unique tools to assemble a rich text for analysis.

Participatory critical rhetoric (PCR) is an ideal way of investigating the ways that subjectivity and agency are negotiated in lived experience rather than solely through written or spoken texts. As Middleton, et al., (2011) observe, "more recent work by rhetoricians utilizes participant observation, and other in situ methods, to critique embodied, often mundane, forms of rhetoric" (p. 387). PCR allows rhetoricians to "focus attention on rhetorical places and performances expanding both the range of what counts as rhetoric and the critical vocabularies informing rhetorical analysis" (Middleton, et al., 2011, p. 387). The rhetorical inventions of youth are all but invisible in the rhetorical canon, contributing yet another reason to bring PCR to bear on the rhetorical performances of high school students: rhetors do not spring forth as fully-formed adults, but rather grow up in environments that shape their rhetorical skills. Attending to rhetorical phenomena during the high school years grants us a better understanding of how rhetoricians are formed. As participatory critical rhetorics are a relatively new methodological innovation, this technique has not

yet been applied to study the unfolding of discourse, subjectivity, and agency in high schools. This offers a unique opportunity to both expand the scenes in which participatory critical rhetoric can be practiced, and also a chance to test the boundaries of this recent development. This dissertation aims to utilize the productive tension between the theoretical underpinnings of critical rhetorical approaches and field-based approaches, utilizing both methods to contribute to the growing body of work on participatory critical rhetoric.

While participatory critical rhetoric may be relatively new, it has roots in both critical ethnography and space/place studies. To name a few, participatory critical rhetoric builds upon work done by ethnographer and rhetorician Ralph Cintron's work (1993, 1997) who brought anthropological methodologies into the realm of writing studies and rhetoric; Carole Blair (2001), whose eloquence in writing of the rhetorical significance of bodies in public places helped rhetoricians to acknowledge the contextual specificity of one's embodiment in scholarly projects; and Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010), whose work on museums and monuments has helped to expand the field's definition of what rhetoric may be. Critical education ethnography also lends context to the development and importance of tackling rhetorical studies with fieldwork. Leigh Van Horn's (2001) chapter in *Critical Ethnography and Education*, "Negotiating Meaning and Power: Middle School Students Interpret Literature and Selves Through Discussion and Recall" discusses the way that fieldwork allows educational sociologists to study not just power, but the processes through which that power is negotiated. It is the unfolding of these negotiations that are significant; rather than studying written texts, she examines empowerment at a granular level. She

concluded, "The voices of these children and of other children like them reveal much to us about the impact and the influence of our pedagogy. They may also open the door to further understanding of the meaning of empowerment and what can happen when social modes of power are equalized" (p. 260).

More recent work has seen an uptick in the number of rhetorical scholars utilizing field methods. From Phaedra Pezzullo's insights on "toxic tours" (2003) to Greg Dickinson's analysis of authenticity and material rhetorics at Starbucks (2009), field methods offer rhetoricians an opportunity to interact with different kinds of texts, engage rhetorics as they happen in real time, and develop other nuances to strengthen rhetorical analysis. Aaron Hess (2011) offered a methodology of critical-rhetorical ethnography to "give rhetoricians an insider perspective on the lived advocacy of individuals and organizations that struggle to persuade in public for changes in policy, social life, or other issues that affect them" (p. 128). Hess also makes several important points about the necessity of rhetoricians to work in the field rather than solely in the armchair. First, fieldwork enables us to address the complexities of studying "everyday" or vernacular speech. As a participatory critical rhetorician, I gained access to a rhetorical artifact that has been rarely considered by scholars – the school day discourse of high school students. Second, by embracing the rhetorician as a finely tuned research instrument rather than a detached analyst, the method is "immersive and embodied" (Hess, 2011, p. 129). Importantly, rhetorical work in the field also connects the researcher with everyday practices and advocacy. "Embodied advocacy, as performed and witnessed under ethnographic conditions, provides critical rhetoricians with an opportunity to not only

maintain a critical attitude toward discourse but also connect research practices with activism" (Hess, 2011, p. 129). Where I depart from Hess' critical-rhetorical ethnography is that I did not act as an advocate directly within the research site, but rather analyzed the compiled texts from participant-observation and semi-structured interviews with a critical rhetorical lens in order to stake out my position. My research informs my current and continuing advocacy and work in the realm of K-12 education.

My methods more closely reflect the position staked out by Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook (2015) which holds that there are three essential components of participatory critical rhetoric, namely, a rhetorical aspect that is "concerned with how symbolic practices articulate disparate identities, ideas, values, beliefs, images, meanings, bodies, and communities with some effect on immanent (and future) symbolic practice" (p. xvii), a critical dimension which "aim[s] to expose how power is sustained through the mystifying force of discourse" (p. xviii), and a participatory element that "requires the critic be present as the rhetorical practices under examination unfold" (p. xix). This definition gives a degree of flexibility to the role and actions of the critic in the scene and allows me to make knowledge claims about the mundane rhetorics circulating within a high school as they develop.

In their comprehensive book on live rhetorics, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric in Situ* (2015), Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook identify three key assumptions that participatory critical rhetoric is grounded in. First, texts are not floating in a vacuum, but rather are entangled with their social and performative contexts

(Middleton, et al., 2015, p. 15). The more deeply a critical rhetorician immerses herself in the social and performative contexts as well as the texts, the more deeply she can understand how rhetoric is working, and to what effects, in the scene.

The second assumption is that "participatory epistemology enhances rhetorical theory and criticism" (Middleton, et al., 2015, p. 18). As a researcher seeking to learn the insider's perspective in the school, I embraced a participatory role and tried to be involved in as many normal school activities as I reasonably could. I attended school assemblies, loitered in the office and hallway, offered suggestions on curriculum for a special communication short course, helped students with assignments if they asked about them, engaged in conversations and debates about novels, politics, and chemistry, helped stuff envelopes for fundraisers, connected teachers to helpful local resources, laughed at wry memes and snaps, catalogued and organized library books in classrooms, and learned inside jokes between students. Of course, as an adult at least 12 years older than the oldest students at the school, my presence was noticed and remarked upon, and it forced me to reckon with my own purpose and as a researcher, and to observe more complexities and contradictions at the school than I would have been aware of by studying only written texts. As a participant, I was confronted by my own Otherness and felt very keenly the rhetorical moves that I made to gain acceptance into the school community,

The third and final key assumption about participatory critical rhetoric is that examining rhetorical situations with an embodied and emplaced perspective reveals nuances and intersections, deepening both our experiences and

understandings of rhetoric (Middleton, et al., 2015, p. 19).

> *It is January 20th, and I am standing in the back of a packed classroom. The lights are dimmed, the perforated blinds lowered, and the projection screen is down. Inauguration Day. Every single seat in the classroom is filled, and some students are sitting on each other's laps, on the floor, or on tables. There are at least a dozen of us standing along the sides and back of the classroom. Normally one of the noisiest classrooms in the school, it is unusually still, and I sense an intense focus from the watching crowd. Almost everyone's eyes are drawn to the larger-than-life faces on the screen. A few students are sitting with their heads lowered to books or computers, trying to get regular work done. The national anthem booms over the loudspeakers, audible all the way through the school – three classrooms are livestreaming the inauguration proceedings. The mood is somber and tense. Three of the students, all white males, standing in the back with me are wearing "Trump" t-shirts, and are conversing in triumphant, almost boastful tones. Their happiness clashes palpably with the disappointment and worry that permeates the rest of the classroom. After Trump's inauguration speech, one of them lets out a loud whoop, and cries, "President Trump!" and dashes down the hall shouting the same. The other two walk out after their friend, and I overhear one staying to the other, "Dude, this is the greatest troll ever!"*

Most of these students were not eligible to vote in the 2016 elections. Many students elected to attend City High School because they were bullied, ostracized, or otherwise made to feel less-than at other schools they attended. For most of the students I spoke with, there was a clearly conveyed understanding that City High School is a safe haven, a place where you are allowed to be yourself, unmolested by cliques, unfettered by stereotypes or the strange and subtle laws that govern high school popularity and friendship. There are many students in the room who identify as genderqueer or LGBTQ, students who are immigrants or whose parents are immigrants, students who are working full-time to help support their families, or are living on their own and supporting themselves: people to whom the results of the 2016 election are a devastating personal blow that will have untold, unforeseen impacts. This is the crux and the consequence of the way that discourses intersect with subjectivity and agency; by virtue of their age, most of the students were denied full subjectivity – denied a

voice in the governance of the country in which they live – and told to "just deal with" the outcomes of a process from which they were excluded. This day in the field has come back to me repeatedly through the analysis process, because it stands out so singularly and so clearly. The bitter poignancy of the situation, the urgency, the sense of betrayal that so many of the students felt, juxtaposed with the clear and energetic jubilation of the students whose presidential candidate had won the election. The minute I set foot in the school on January 20th, I could sense a different energy, a different charge than there usually was in the school. Being a participant in the scene of research allowed me not only to learn the cultural norms of the school to the point where I could identify a difference in atmosphere, but also allowed me a more visceral, affective, embodied understanding of the ways that subjectivity and agency play out for youth in this arena.

Practical Considerations for Methodology

This section describes the practical considerations of my role as a researcher in the field, gaining access to my research site, the process of data collection, and an outline for analyzing the text collected.

As previously mentioned, I have been aware of City High School for several years, and had opportunities to work with school counselors over 3 years to organize financial aid outreach events for the students and families in my professional capacity. During these events, I became intrigued by the way the school was operated. I had several lengthy, informal conversations with the school counselor who was one of the instrumental parties in launching City High

School as a part of City School District.

After obtaining permission from City High School' principal and City School District to conduct research at the school, I submitted an IRB application, which was approved. I was invited to talk about my impending research project, potential risks, and benefits at an all-school assembly, and put a sign-up sheet in the office. Everyone who signed up on the sheet was sent the appropriate consent and assent information via email. A total of 57 people expressed interest, though not all during the initial recruiting period; some students became interested after the project began, and wanted to participate when they saw their friends being interviewed or participating. In fact, two of the original students, Bear and Kitty,[4] were tremendously helpful in getting other students interested in the project. Six students returned the informed assent, but were unable to obtain informed consent from their parents or guardians. Twenty-one students did not return either the consent or assent documents. The remaining 30 people who returned all necessary documents were the final participants in the project. After a 2-week period intended to give prospective participants enough time to make an informed decision, I began my research with the students who had brought back their completed assent and consent forms.

As a researcher in a school, I took on the role of participant-observer, acknowledging that my presence in the scene changed the performances that occurred. I compiled a text using participatory critical rhetoric (Middleton, et al., 2015). Prior to my research project being approved by City School District and

[4] Bear and Kitty are pseudonyms chosen by two students as part of the research process. They were my first two participant allies at City High School. Outgoing and talkative, they befriended me while I was volunteering at City High and cataloguing books in their classroom library. When they learned that I had applied to do a research study, they were enthusiastic and signed up to be the first official participants once the school district and IRB had approved my proposal.

the University of Utah IRB, I volunteered in the school between June and September 2016 to get a better sense for the discourses enacted there and to make connections with critical faculty members. Once my research project was approved, I carried out participant observation sessions between September 2016 and January 2017, and attended regular meetings and events for the Student Senate group over the same time period. As participatory critical rhetoricians may spend anywhere between a few hours at a protest, or months on end in a scene, the 105 hours that I spent at City High School is a reasonable window of time for participatory critical rhetoric research (Middleton, et al., 2015).

I collected 50 pages of single-spaced field notes based on my participant/observer experience in the research site, involving not only students' rhetoric, but also that of educators, school leaders, other adults within the school setting, and textual artifacts such as curriculum plans, school policies, etc. I also conducted 25 semistructured interviews with students, teachers, tutors, and staff at City High School (see Table 1).

Interviews ranged from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 14 minutes long. Sample questions included:

1. Tell me about the schools you went to, and how you ended up coming to City High School. Which ones did you like and not like? What were they like? What has your experience here been like?
2. Tell me about your friends at City High School. Are there names that other people at the school would use to identify your group of friends?
3. How does your group of friends set themselves apart or identify yourselves?

4. If I wanted my niece to go to City High School, what do you think I should tell her about it?
5. How do the students in this school get along?
6. How do the teachers treat students?
7. How do you bring up problems or things you're worried about with your teachers? Your peers? Can you give me an example?
8. Have you been able to participate in decision-making? Can you give me an example?
9. What sort of relationships do you have with the teachers and administrators at City High School?
10. What else should I know about City High School?

After completing the interviews, each was transcribed and included in the body of texts that forms the basis of this dissertation's analysis. All research participants were asked to choose a pseudonym by which I could refer to them while protecting their confidentiality for this dissertation. However, in the spirit of honoring students' rhetorical agency, I have not altered any of the pseudonyms chosen for the project, nor those chosen by teachers, tutors, and administrators.

Reflections on Being in a Rhetorician in the Field

I must admit that, when I made the "real" transition between in-school volunteer and researcher, I was worried that the students and teachers I had been getting to know would feel betrayed, or think that I had feigned interest in their experiences because of my ulterior motive – the research project. And

indeed, some students were clearly skeptical when I asked if they were interested in participating in a research project. But for the most part, my fears turned out to be relatively unfounded.

> *I was sitting in the corner of Miss Llama's classroom, observing one of the Student Senate meetings. At the end of the meeting, everyone stood up, and gathered in a huge ring around the entire room, arms thrown over one another's shoulders, standing awkwardly but easily over and through the tables with computers. Not wanting to interrupt the social ritual, I stayed seated in the corner with my notepad and pen, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. One of the Student Senate officers noticed that I hadn't joined in, and hollered across the room, "Hey, Dissertation Girl! Want to join our group?" I joined the circle, threw my arms over the shoulders of the students who had extended arms to me, and sang along to the tune of the Farmers' Insurance jingle: "We are Sen-ate! Bump-um-dum-pum-um-pum-pum!"*

The Student Senate had conferred upon me a nickname: Dissertation Girl. After that, students would often approach me while I was sitting in various places in the school and ask some version of, "Hey, are you the person who's writing the 200-page paper?" and then ask if they could talk to me about their experiences. In fact, toward the end of my fieldwork when I was at City High School to arrange one last interview with a teacher, a 9th-grade student with a lollipop-blue mouth bounced out of his classroom, explained cheerfully to me that he was now done with the Chemistry class that had been occupying his time, and announced that he was ready to participate in the study. Not one to quash an eager participant, I took down his email address to send him the informed consent documents, and promised to come back next week for an interview. This continued enthusiasm was gratifying to me as a researcher, though it did make it difficult to wrap up the fieldwork in a timely manner.

That isn't to say that my presence in the research site was unremarked. Unsurprisingly, the obvious age difference between myself and the students was

a clear signal that I was out of place; I am much closer to the age of their teachers than they are, and in some cases, even older than the teachers. In an attempt to mitigate this difference, I tried to dress in a way that might help me blend in a little bit more – wearing jeans, beat up old Converse sneakers or snow boots, and "cool" or funny t-shirts and hoodies. I refrained from my usual business-day attire: no pencil skirts, blazers, blouses, or dress shoes. I even carefully considered how much makeup to wear, not wanting to come across as "too" anything – too low-key, too high-maintenance. Truth be told, I have not put that much effort into using makeup to blend in since my own high school days. I abandoned my usual bright red lipstick, feeling that it would stand out too much. I went bare-faced instead, hoping that it might make me look a little bit younger or more approachable.

How well my efforts were received, I do not know, but it presented me with opportunities to critically reflect on how "researchers' bodies are, depending on the rhetorical scene, critical, affective, and risky" and to "reexamine participatory roles such as witness, opponent, observer, advocate, participant, and companion" (Middleton, et al., 2015, p. 81). A couple of vignettes demonstrate moments when my "observer" status was brought into sharp relief.

> *Sitting in Professor McGonagall's*[5] *classroom at a table by the bookshelves, I was talking with four students. Somehow the topic of fashion came up, and the students were discussing certain combinations of clothing items that they enjoyed wearing. I piped up, "Yeah, I really like the jeans/blazer combination!" and Benjamin cut in, "What is this, an episode of* Miami Vice*? Are you a vice cop?"*

[5] Professor McGonagall is the pseudonym chosen by the teacher whose classroom I often frequented to conduct research. An avid fan of the *Harry Potter* book series, she collects "Pop" bobblehead figurines of all the characters from the books. She was another strong participant ally within City High School, and was very excited about and supportive of my research study. It is significant that she chose "Professor McGonagall" for her pseudonym, because in the *Harry Potter* series, McGonagall is an outstanding and dedicated teacher whose unflinching ethical commitments in the face of evil and concern for the students' holistic well-being help her students learn more than just the subject material.

> *Attempting to play it off, I grinned painfully and said, "My whole life is like an episode of* Miami Vice*!" (I have never even watched* Miami Vice*, which leads me to believe that this may have been a fairly reckless remark. I have no idea what I just signed up for.) After that, I refrained from joining conversations about fashion, noting that I am officially "old" as far as the students go, and that such contributions only served to emphasize my otherness.*

On numerous occasions since then, I have reflected on that interaction and cringed; it was clear to me that I sought the approval of the students, and was shot down. This failed attempt at bonding over fashion, and then an attempt at humor to cover the awkwardness of the situation, represent a rhetorical exchange where the power was with the students. According to my stated research and advocacy goals, this is a situation that I should relish – I *want* to see the students empowered. It forces me to ask, "Am I re-inscribing the same relationship of domination in desiring the students be empowered, but only in ways that are comfortable and easy for me to accept?" I think that there is some truth to that, and as I grapple with that truth, I acknowledge a blind spot and a bias in my research and my writing, and can perhaps take steps to ameliorate it.

A second example of being forced to reckon with my own embodiment in the field and what it meant for me to be there happened in another casual conversation in a classroom.

> *I was conducting an interview with one of the students who had volunteered to participate in the research project, when the student's friend, who was sitting at the same table, suddenly interrupted. Pointing at my wrist, he asked, "What's this?" Caught off guard, I looked down to see what he was asking about. He was pointing to the decorative bracelet cover that I had purchased to house my FitBit tracker, a chunky, modern-arty, brushed silver bangle. I replied, "A FitBit." He said, "I feel like you keep something illegal in there, I don't know what it is." His friend, who was being interviewed, joined in, saying, "An ankle monitor on your wrist or something. Like, oh, she's on probation." Laughing, I explained, "Are you kidding? They wouldn't let me into the school! You have to have background checks before you're allowed in." Both students looked relieved, and the one who was interviewing said, "Yeah, that's true." His friend, not quite ready to let it go yet, said, "Okay, but what if you got probation while you were doing this*

[fieldwork] and then you hid it from everybody?"

I had initially purchased the bracelet as an attempt to "professionalize" my FitBit, hoping that a chunky silver bangle would be less obvious than the standard black silicon band that the device comes with. However, this interaction made me realize just how far removed my everyday life is from the lives of high school students. Having worked in an office setting for the last 10 years, I have become enculturated to the myriad devices, motivational tools, or environmental adjustments that office-working adults make in an effort to battle the sedentary nature of their jobs. Contrasted with the active setting that students are accustomed to working in – where they can move around freely during the day, actually have physical movement built into the structure of "success" in high school (Physical Education classes), etc., I realized that what I thought would "blend" was really only relevant in my daily professional context, and not the context of the school. When this student thought of a "tracker" it was in the context of a recently-released convict under surveillance. It was a humorous but sobering moment that made me appreciate just how deeply rooted my assumptions were in my adult life and daily practices. Not wanting to alarm other students who might think that I was a recent parolee, I stopped wearing the bracelet to research sessions.

During my time in the research site, I found myself often torn between interacting and spending time being fully present at the site, and trying to take careful field notes. This tension is certainly not unique – Middleton, et al. (2015) identify this as a necessary struggle for the reflexive scholar working in participatory critical rhetoric. In moments of indecision, I typically chose to

engage with others at the site rather than take careful notes.

> *I was sitting in Ms. Belle's classroom with a group of students gathered at her desk. They were discussing the upcoming journalism class field trip to a student conference in Seattle and working on a fundraising campaign to support the trip. Rather than take notes on their conversation, I joined in and helped to stuff, address, and stamp envelopes with letters requesting support that were destined for local businesses. Though my field notes from that hour were not as thorough as some others, the goodwill and shared sense of community was equally valuable as careful notes. This informal work also gave me a chance to advocate for student-constructed knowledge and for the kinds of experiences the students are likely to encounter at a national conference. I also got to hear about why the students were so excited about the conference, which may not have come up in other conversations.*

After most participant observation sessions, I would adjourn to the coffee shop across the street from the school to scribble down as many thoughts and reflections while they were still fresh in my mind.

Another tension that merits discussion is the balance between textual analysis and nontextocentric components in the research site. Middleton, et al., warn that practitioners of participatory critical rhetoric must be wary of our disciplinary comfort with textualizing everything we can find:

> …textocentrism cuts both ways: it both blinds the critic to the panoply of intersectional rhetorical activites in the communities they examine, *and* it discourages critics from considering other ways [of] knowing, other forms of media, which might better illuminate the rhetorical practices they critique for their academic audiences. (Middleton, et al., 2015, p. 37)

Field notes clearly have a textocentric bent, but I also interspersed them with diagrams or sketches of the way classrooms were laid out. I took a fair number of photographs of City High School as well, though I felt it was inappropriate to photograph the students themselves. In addition, I recorded "soundscapes" from various classrooms throughout the days I spent there, trying to capture a non-textual glimpse of the atmosphere and energy of different areas of the school. The photographs and soundscapes play a significant role in my analysis; as

multimedia texts, they command a different mode of critical attention and also serve to remind me of things that I had not noticed or written down while taking field notes. And indeed, much of what I learned through my fieldwork seems to be resisting textualization – I cannot adequately describe the feeling of genuine happiness that pervades the school, or the particular way that light filters into the classrooms depending on their position in the school and the time of day. However, those elements are not insignificant for their resistance to the sway of words. The feeling of happiness in the school is co-constituted with the way of learning and the way of treating students as fully subjects, capable of exercising agency in valid and intelligent ways.

Textual Analysis: Critical Rhetoric

I take a critical rhetorical approach to analyzing the texts, drawing on both my embodied experiences as a participant-observer at the research site and my training as a critical rhetorician. This dissertation puts two complementary texts into conversation with one another: a text that elucidates the voices of students and their experiences in the research site, and a text that illuminates official discourses of education at play in and around the research site. While I concur with the majority of critical rhetoricians that critical rhetoric is an orientation, not a methodology, as a scholar I do have a rigorous, inductive process by which I approach my work. My training in critical rhetoric has led me to notice certain things in popular and political discourse in particular, and that is usually where my process begins. My attention is caught by something strange, concerning, or out of place within a particular discourse or set of discourses. This may also be

something missing; for example, within the policy advocacy discourse on K-12 education reform, the voices of students are near-completely absent. I then begin to assemble my object of analysis from the various fragments of discourse. The construction of a text from fragments in this manner is one of the hallmarks of critical rhetoric. As McGee (1990) theorized of early critical rhetoricians' orientation toward texts,

> Critical rhetoric does not *begin* with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we can call "fragments." (McGee, 1990, p. 279)

With this understanding, I construct my text out of the fragments of written field notes from participant-observation, transcribed interviews with students, teachers, tutors, and administrators, photographs, recorded soundscapes, and various ephemera collected from the site.[6]

As I wrapped up my on-site research, I simultaneously compiled a text that would allow me insights into the way that school districts and those who control the "official discourse" conceptualize and operationalize the limits of "acceptable" student subjectivity and agency. To do this I approached both the State Board of Education website and the City School District website holistically and combed through the different sections of both sites, seeking documents aimed at students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Both sites represented a rich archive, and it was difficult to discern what would be most productive to

[6] For instance, I collected an example of a "Study Pass" that students from the high school can use when they want to spend time studying in Western State Community College; several sample templates that mentor teachers use to help their mentees learn to structure their time; a Credit Completion Form that is used to mark their successful completion of a course and have it recorded on their transcript; mentor meeting sign-up sheets; the application to be a part of Student Senate; and several other such ephemera.

focus on. I eventually opted to focus on official documents that fell into the policies and procedures category: the *City School District High School Handbook,* the *City School District Shared Governance Guide*, the *City School District Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021*, and several "model policies" that the State Board of Education encourages districts and schools to use. I also included the "About Our School" page of City High School' website, as it provides a relevant overview of the way that policies and procedures are deployed vis-à-vis student subjectivity and agency in this particular educational setting. I chose this body of texts rather than the Common Core curriculum standards for several reasons: first, the core standards collectively represent over 2,100 pages of guidelines applied to the entire K-12 public education system in the subjects of Health, Fine Arts, Language Arts, Library Media, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, and, at the high school level, Driver Education. The focus of this dissertation is on rhetorical subjectivity and agency of high school students specifically, and the broad age range of students to whom the Common Core standards apply is outside the scope of my study. Second, a text as unwieldy as the Common Core standards does not lend itself to the depth of close textual reading that a rigorous critical rhetoric project demands. Third, and most significantly, the policies and procedures better address the official perspectives on subjectivity and agency that is my object of focus.

With my text assembled (a messier process than this narrative is making it appear), I sorted through all of my primary source materials, making multiple passes through the assemblage and taking note of patterns, oddities, silences, gaps, or striking features of the texts. As a critical rhetorician, I am keenly

attuned to clues that show me how power and resistance are functioning within the rhetorical framework. Having identified several primary issues that will be discussed at length in Chapter IV, I turned to the existing literature on critical rhetoric to see where I can enter into conversation with other scholars.

From there I develop my analysis and make my modest contributions to theory. The final, and perhaps most personally important, part of my process is to follow through to logical implications. How can my analysis make a difference in someone's life? Am I attending to power through discourse and identifying points of resistance or generative gaps where change might be wrought?

Through this process, I hope that this dissertation makes a positive impact on the lived experiences of students and the rhetorical practices of educators by providing pathways to educational environments which are more aligned with students' articulations of subjectivity and agency. I also hope to produce research that will benefit rhetorical scholars by illuminating the ways that time/temporality plays into constructions of rhetorical subjectivity and agency, thereby contributing to work around one of the theoretical tensions in the field. It will additionally serve to expand the boundaries of current work within participatory critical rhetoric, thereby benefiting other researchers who practice participatory critical rhetoric or similar methodological orientations. Finally, I hope this dissertation work will inform my post-graduate endeavor to open a nontraditional K-12 school, and thus benefit myself in furthering my life's work and the students and families that the school will serve.

Emplaced Rhetoric: Acknowledging the Place and Space of City High School

Site Rationale

This section describes the research site as well as offers a justification for carrying out research suitable to the goals of this dissertation. I first learned of City High School in 2013 through my professional network, organizing college access and financial aid outreach events at high schools throughout the state. I received an email from the counselor of a new school in the City School District, asking for a presentation to their students. Though I did not realize it at the time, this school would become formative to my research program and ultimately, the site of my dissertation project. During my first visit to the school, my attention was caught by the truly student-centric mission, nontraditional structure of the school, and the affection and obvious care in the way that administrators there spoke about their young charges.

As it transpired, it became important for this dissertation research to take place in a nontraditional school in order to study subjectivity and agency within environments that are less about enforcing compliance and more engaged in allowing students to develop under more flexible rules. As Giroux points out in *America's Education Deficit and the War on Youth*, "[Public] schools now adopt the logic of "tough love" by implementing zero tolerance policies that effectively model urban public schools after prisons, just as students' rights increasingly diminish under the onslaught of a military-style discipline" (2013, p. 64). The harsh, disciplinarian environment found in many traditional public high schools constrains students' opportunities to freely test and develop their subjectivities,

and limits the avenues through which agency may be exercised.

City High School as a research site is explicitly different from traditional high schools in the way they allow students to engage with their environments, their educational processes, their teachers, their peers, and their sphere of influence within society. Other scholars, particularly those engaged in youth participatory action research (YPAR), have argued that alternative education forums serve as better settings for students to engage in meaningful ways with the struggle for identity and independence (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Flores-Gonzales, et al., 2006; Noguera, et al., 2006). I seek to graft a critical rhetorical perspective into this line of inquiry to examine whether a nontraditional school grants access into new ways that students can engage in the struggle for subjectivity and agency, and further, how these ways may have implications for students in traditional high school education settings. Because identity formation is such a critical part of the human experience, as educators we owe it to our students, and as a society we owe it to ourselves to attempt to build organizations and systems that support healthy and productive subjectivities and allow realistic and useful assertions of agency. This approach, studying the fragments of text and the context to learn about the systems as a whole, allows me to access an under-researched area of education: the way that rhetorical subjectivity and agency are intertwined into a student's educational journey.

Site Description

City High School is a public school in the City School District. It is a relatively small school, with 381 students in grades 9 – 12 (see Table 2) as of the

October 1, 2016 census (State Board of Education, 2016).

City High School is staffed by: a principal and assistant principal, a school counselor, a registrar, 8 full time teachers, 12 part time/CTE subject teachers, over a dozen classroom tutors,[7] and administrative support staff. As a public school, it is widely accessible to students from a range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (see Table 3).

It is located in Western City, near neighborhoods with large refugee and immigrant populations. It is housed on the urban campus of Western Community College, which serves approximately 28,000 students throughout the metropolis area (State System of Higher Education, 2015).

The mission of City High School is to increase educational equity through personalized learning for every student. The school's principal states that it is his goal to ensure every student has control over learning in their own "time, path, pace, and place" (P. Dragon, personal communication, February 20, 2015). City High School' website makes it even plainer:

> Our goal is to provide a framework for students within our district to meet their educational needs and unique learning styles and to reengage students from the traditional high schools, home schools, and full-time online students. Additionally, we evolve with changing technologies and are responsive to educational reform efforts. (http://www.City High Schoolhigh.org/our-school/FAQ.php#.VvgfNWQrIy4)

The school uses a blended-learning flex model, which employs a digital curriculum and an interactive, mentor/facilitator role for teachers. In this model, the basic curriculum is available through online interactive modules, which are all available at the start of each school year. This allows students to choose their

[7] The number of tutors is difficult to pin down, because City High School regularly hires new tutors. City High School funds their tutoring program by reallocating the money that would typically be expended on extracurricular athletics. There is typically at least one tutor working in each of the 10 classrooms, and usually more than one.

own pace for completing modules, working as quickly or as slowly as they feel is necessary. Each teacher serves as a mentor to between 30 and 50 students, working closely with them to set and work toward academic and personal goals. The teachers and tutors spend most of their time in small-group discussions, individual instruction, and coaching sessions for their "mentees," rather than presenting lectures to large classes. Teachers also collaborate on interdisciplinary special units, such as a social studies/language arts intensive unit on civil rights. As City High School is an early college high school, students are encouraged to take advantage of the state's concurrent enrollment program, which allows students to take college-level coursework for both high school and college credit. These classes are essentially free, with a $15 registration charge. It is possible for students to graduate with both their high school diploma and an associate's degree or their general education requirements completed.

The research site is ideal for a number of reasons. First, City High School explicitly encourages students to take ownership for their learning and a very active role in shaping their educational experiences rather than using a rigid, prescribed curriculum based on student age. Their motto is: "Choose your time; choose your path; choose your pace; choose your place," illustrating their commitment to individualized, student-centered learning (see Figure 1).

Second, in any qualitative or rhetorical analysis, it is critical to be aware of contextual factors; as a longtime resident of the City and a professional working with schools in this area, I already have some insights of the cultural, economic, and social contexts within which the research site is embedded. Third, the relatively small size of the school allowed me to observe a larger portion of life at

the school than I would with a larger, traditional high school that may serve populations 2,000 or more students.

Participatory critical rhetoric asks the scholar to attend to the particularities of physical space as it plays a role in live rhetorics (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011). City High School itself is housed in the same building as City School District's Career & Technical Education (CTE) Center, and is built on as an addition to the southern end of Western State Community College's urban campus. The CTE center occupies the bottom floor of the addition, and buses from the regular public schools transport students back and forth to specialty classes such as forensics, cosmetology, and computer science. Throughout the school day, bells ring to signal the beginning and end of CTE classes, and although students upstairs at City High School do not have class times signaled by the bell, it is clearly audible through the loudspeaker systems.

Walking in through the main south doors of the City High School/CTE Center, visitors find themselves in an entryway to a long and wide hall with a high ceiling. Turn left immediately, and you find yourself in the hallway that houses the CTE Center, the large City High School conference room, and the staff break room. Walk in 25 more steps, and a set of stairs to the left leads up to City High School. At the top of the stairs, there is a wall of glass windows looking out onto a patio with weather-worn wooden furniture. On pleasant days, students work and congregate outdoors, but in the winter it is usually deserted. Once at the top of the stairs, turning to the right finds you looking directly into the hustle and bustle of City High School.

The main space of City High School itself is essentially made up of one long hallway on the second floor of the addition with an administrative office suite, two student bathrooms, and 10 classrooms branching off it (see Figure 2).

Downstairs, there is also a large multipurpose room that can be converted into three smaller rooms, a large, glass-walled conference room, and a spacious atrium with natural light from west-facing windows. Students are always to be found in the hallway in small groups, sometimes talking or walking somewhere, sometimes seated on the floor with laptops out, or occasionally sitting solo, hunched over a laptop with headphones in ears. Since City High School is an early college high school, there's also quite a bit of movement between the high school and the college part of the building. There's usually a buzz of activity and engagement here. The main hallway is adorned with several stock photos of landscapes – stunning red rock deserts, alpine vistas, and the urban skyline of Western City at night – interspersed with quotes from students about their educational experiences at City High School (see Figure 3).

The office suite is the first hub of activity. Outside the door to the administrative suite is the checkpoint where students clock in and out of the building to mark their attendance either by scanning their student ID card, or typing in a PIN code (see Figure 4). The office occupies a corner with windows to the south and east, and the suite itself is full of natural light. A tall counter surrounds the reception desk. Two administrative assistants share the long L-shaped desk throughout the day, interacting with nearly every single person who enters the school. Across from them, six moderately comfortable, no-frills waiting-room chairs and a small side table occupy the corner. The offices for the

physical education teacher, the school counselor, the assistant principal, and the principal are all housed in the suite, along with a corner conference room with south-facing windows. There is also a copy and supply room, stocked with various rolls of colorful paper, reams of plain printer paper, office machinery, and ample counter space. There are usually a couple of footballs or soccer balls and a skateboard or two stashed back there by students who don't want to carry them into classrooms.

Some of the classrooms in the upper hall look out over the parking lot and the street, and some look out over the atrium inside the school. The classrooms are not lined with rows of individual desks, but rather feature tables in various arrangements, some with large Mac desktops on them, and some pushed together to give meeting spaces. Projection screens come down at an angle in the corners of the room rather than square with a front wall. There are no lockers lining the halls of the school; students leave footballs and skateboards in the copy room of the main office, and carry their backpacks with them – since the curriculum is online, there aren't traditional heavy textbooks. Each classroom has laptops for students to check out as well as larger desktop computers. Instead of one centralized library, each classroom has books related to the subject, linked by a central electronic borrowing system.

Each teacher's classroom has a different atmosphere – Snape's classroom tends to be fairly quiet and reserved, and is the venue for Friday afternoon sessions of the video game club. Professor McGonagall's and Churchill's classrooms tend to be very animated and boisterous, with many students engaging in political or literary debates. Miss Llama's classroom is a comforting

space for many students, where students seem comfortable regularly expressing vulnerability and all shades of emotional turbulence, from celebratory joy to depression. Ms. Belle's classroom is general calm and focused, with outbursts of laughter provoked by her teaching style during the brief lectures. (She very memorably demonstrated prepositions to her 9th-grade writing class using a chair to enact each one they shouted out.) As one of the students, Bear, said in his interview:

> *Every classroom has a certain set of kids that, like, always hang out in that classroom. And that doesn't mean that that classroom is their mentor's classroom, it doesn't mean anything like that, and it doesn't mean that there are even cliques, it just means there is a certain room that you work better in. Now Professor McGonagall's room is a more social room, so I feel like if you work better in a social environment that's kind of the better room for you, I mean, you can talk while you work, as long as you're working. Um, and then, I would say Miss Steele's room is a more quiet room, so if you work better in a quiet environment you would go to that room. So it kind of just depends. And who you end up, you know, working, those people that work the same as you are the people who end up being your friends.* (Bear, personal communication, December 9, 2016)

The space is highly significant to the social organization of the school, not because of the architecture of the space necessarily, but because of the social uses and conventions which engender the rhetorical emplacement. Students are free to move around the space largely unconstrained by a class schedule or convention. For example, if a student prefers to work on all subjects in one particular classroom, they are free to do so. If a student prefers not to be in close proximity with someone they had a falling out with, they are free to leave that classroom and work elsewhere. This emplacement is inextricable from the rhetorics that circulate within City High School.

Conclusion

Having laid out the foundations of my methodological orientation, I do want to include a few caveats. Per IRB requirements, consent and assent processes were followed prior to doing any research activities with a student. This was, in some ways, a limitation, because several students who were interested in being involved in the project had parents who refused to sign any permission forms for anything school-related, and I did lose some potential participants because of those requirements. As I spent time at City High School, it transpired that most of the students who elected to participate in the study spent the majority of their time in four specific classrooms – Professor McGonagall's, Ms. Belle's, Miss Llama's, and The Bionic Woman's. Therefore, I spent the majority of my time in the field in those classrooms, participating and observing those students. As with any qualitative and rhetorical study, this dissertation is partial, incomplete, and not intended to be generalizable. What it is, however, is a meaningful co-construction of rhetorical knowledge that honors students' intelligence, complexity, and the ways they enact their subjectivity and agency in the contexts in which they live.

Table 1. Interviewees by subject position within the school.

Interviewee Group	**Number of Interviews**
Students	17
Teachers	5
Tutors	2
Administrators	1

Table 2. Student enrollment by grade, from SOE report "School by Grade, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity"[8]

Grade Level	**Number of Students**
Grade 9	80
Grade 10	118
Grade 11	95
Grade 12	88

Table 3. Student demographics at City High School, from SOE report "School by Grade, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity"

Demographic Category	**Number of Students**
Female	202
Male	179
American Indian	1
African American/Black	6
Asian	5
Hispanic	140
Multiple Race	9
Pacific Islander	5
White	215
Low Income	155
Special Ed	15
English Learner	7

[8] October 1, 2016, http://schools.******.gov/data/Reports/Enrollment-Demographics.aspx.

Figure 1: Wall hangings in the main hallway of City High School, illustrating the main principles of the school.

Figure 2. Main hallway of City High School. Office is on the left, classrooms branching off the main hallways.

Figure 3. Photos and quotes from students hanging in the main hallway of City High School.

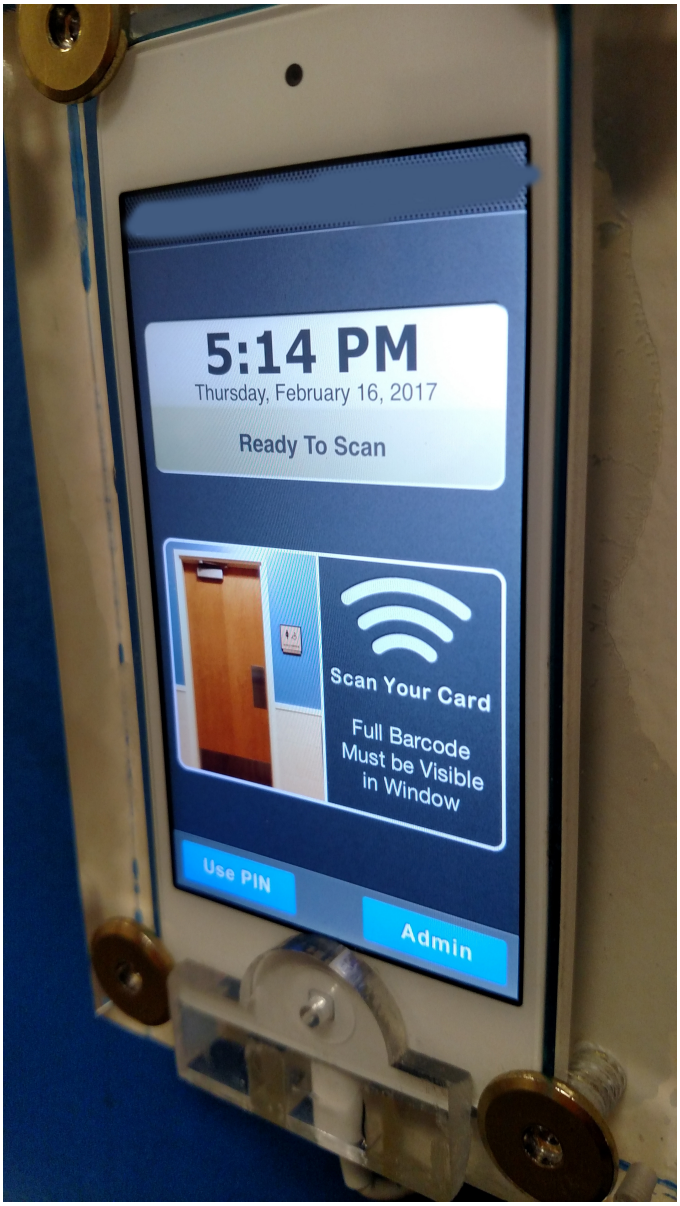

Figure 4. Checkpoint for students at City High School to sign in and out of school electronically.

CHAPTER IV

YOU ARE A STUDENT: "OFFICIAL" PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT SUBJECTIVITY AND ACCEPTABLE AGENCY

"L. "Student" means a child in public school grades kindergarten through twelve counted on the audited October 1 Fall Enrollment Report."[9]

Introduction

As with any other rhetorical category, "student" is bounded both by clear definition and by aporia. In the aforementioned definition, studenthood is the combination of a certain time of one's life, spent in a particular location (a school). However, an abundance of official discourse also defines studenthood through the spaces where students are excluded, and by things left unsaid in the definitions.

In order to understand and deconstruct the way that subjectivity is operationalized within official discourses of education, we must first examine the parameters and possibilities of subjectivity itself. In her book, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler recuperates responsibility and ethics through the realm of subjectivity, rejecting the postulate that postmodern subjectivity is tantamount

[9] From State Office of Education Administrative Rules, R277-491. (City Schools Shared Governance, p. 29).

to moral relativism, or even nihilism (Butler, 2005). She lays out the boundaries within which what we might call postmodern subjectivity exists:

> There is (1) a non-narrativizable *exposure* that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) *primary relations*, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my *partial opacity* to myself. Lastly, there are (4) *norms* that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the *structure of address* in which it takes place. (Butler, 2005, p. 39)

Within this theoretical framework of subjectivity, official discourse, for which I will shortly lay out a definition, lays the foundation for student subjectivity by demanding that students "account" for themselves in particular ways. And from that delineation of subjectivity, we can extrapolate the range of acceptable expressions of rhetorical agency available to students. In other words, official discourse sets the structure of address through/within/against which all communicative exchanges must occur.

> No account takes place outside the structure of address, even if the addressee remains implicit and unnamed, anonymous and unspecified. The address establishes the account as an account, and so the account is completed only on the occasion when it is effectively exported and expropriated from the domain of what is my own. It is only in dispossession that I can and do give any account of myself. (Butler, 2005, pp. 36-37)

In this case, the addressee of students' account-giving is an institutional interlocutor, an official discourse of education, carrying the weight of the State Board of Education, the City School District, and City High School. And conceding to the demand of the official discourse, by giving accounts of themselves, students experience a dispossession wherein they must express themselves as subjects within certain limits that are not of their own choosing.

Students must become legible and readable to a discourse that may coincide with, but does not originate, with them. It is the *structure of address* that "establishes the account as an account, and so the account is completed only on the occasion when it is effectively exported and expropriated from the domain of what is my own" (Butler, 2005, p. 36). Thus, official discourse establishes the structure of address, and in order for students to be "readable" as "students" they must address themselves to the official discourse within that structure by adhering to certain governing norms. However, we should be alert to the fact that this may not function in the same sort of way as the human-to-human interactions through which Butler understands subjectivities are forged: since students are accounting for themselves to an official discourse which does not respond as an embodied interlocutor, the scene of address is different. Butler likens this to speaking into a sort of void:

> In fact, the one who is positioned as the receiver may not be receiving at all, may be engaged in something that cannot under any circumstances be called "receiving," doing nothing more for me than establishing a certain site, a position, a structural place where the relation to a possible reception is articulated. (Butler, 2005, p. 67)

Do the official discourses of power within educational settings "receive" students' disclosures, their accounts, in any way that would be recognizable as a rhetorical exchange? I think not. And yet, they are providing a structure against which to reckon with oneself and do, indeed, have material effects on the students whose accounts are demanded. This chapter is concerned primarily with the governing norms of official discourses, and the ways in which students would be demanded to account for themselves in relation to those norms in light of the fact that their interlocutor is invulnerable in ways that they are not.

I do want to explicitly acknowledge that the U.S. public school system comprises well-intentioned educators who often genuinely care about the well-being of their students and seek to create opportunities for youth to thrive. Over my own career as a student, I have been fortunate to benefit from a great many dedicated and talented educators' efforts. Nonetheless, the well-intentioned educators' best efforts are often subsumed into a vast system that is asked to do a great deal with few resources. As other scholars have argued, the current public education system is still rife with holdovers from the industrial revolution model of schooling (Giroux, 1988). The realities that many students face are no longer aligned with an educational system which places high value on conformity, blind obedience, and the standardization of knowledge. Because of this, official discourses on youth and youth education have come under fire by critical theorists in particular (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 2013). Schools have been criticized for participating in the school-to-prison pipeline (Giroux, 2000), engaging in surveillance and police states (Giroux, 2009), and systemically disadvantaging young people by running the school day on a schedule not suited for optimal sleep cycles and health of youth (National Institutes of Health, 2011). The cumulative effect of these policies is to create educational institutions where, by and large, youth are deprived of full subjectivity and merely seen as bodies to be controlled, shaped, managed, and corrected.

It is into precisely such a restrictive environment that critical rhetoric calls on scholars to intervene. We must engage the ideological dimensions of rhetoric, abandon the pretense of scientific neutrality, and put our skills to work in a

constant critique of power relations that are enabled and constrained through rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). To speak more specifically to the rhetorical choices made in this dissertation project, participatory critical rhetoric in particular charges us with, at minimum, *being* in the scene as rhetorics unfold: "In other words, participatory critical rhetoric eschews the notion that the critic can or should occupy a third position outside of rhetor or audience" (Middleton, et al., 2015, xix). As a critical rhetorician, I have a stake and a position in this discourse, and my perspective is colored by the lenses through which I examine the discourse: as a child attending public K-12 schools, a university student who was able to attend college thanks to scholarship and federal financial aid programs, a graduate student who has simultaneously worked in the public higher education sector her entire professional career, and one who intends to make the empowerment of youth in education her life's work. It is this methodological grounding in critical rhetoric which leads me to my text and my object of critique in this chapter, which is the official discourse that structures and co-constitutes the environments, pedagogies, expectations, and norms within which high school education takes place.

For the purposes of this dissertation, official discourse is distinguished from popular/cultural discourse, and from student or individual discourse, by several factors. First, official discourse originates in an institution that society has imbued with decision-making authority over educational practices and personnel, such as a state board of education, or a school district administration office. This is in line with contemporary interdisciplinary theorists working on "official" discourses; whether or not a discourse is "official" is gauged by its

provenance. In their analysis of ethnic diversity and the 2011 riots in England over the killing of a Black man by a police officer, Fasel, et al. (2016) conclude that "Discourses by members of government…are especially likely to be influential, because they are widely distributed and accepted as the official account on a pressing matter" (p. 660). This attribution of "official" status to any document or speech originating from people in "official" positions, or institutions of power such as government, is a common thread among many working on these discourses (Baldacchino & Ferreira, 2013; Boland, 2010; Down, et al., 1999; Esch, 2010). However, I would complicate the definition of official discourse simply as *rhetoric that stems from a person or institution of authority*, and include the next two characteristics as well. Second, official discourse regularly uses both "evidence-based practice" and rhetorical strategies of normalization as the grounds for, and confirmation of, its authority. Third, official discourse, particularly in the field of education, disavows its political origins in a cloak of technicalities, masking itself as impartial and unbiased and constructing other parties, therefore, as partial and biased in contrast. This is not unlike the Ideological State Apparatuses that Althusser (1984) theorized:

> The mechanisms that produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology…where teachers respectful of the 'conscience' and 'freedom' of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their 'parents' (who are free, too, i.e., the owners of their children) open up for them the path to freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their 'liberating' virtues. (Althusser, 1984, p. 119)

Together, these rhetorical characteristics comprise what I refer to as "official discourse" on students, which I argue must be examined in order to better

understand the way that power circulates in and through official discourses. Finally, I want to be clear that in this dissertation, I am not making claims about "The Official Discourse of Education" writ large, but rather the way that an official discourse functions within the context of my research site.

Critical rhetoricians cobble together texts from various sources in order to understand the underlying common ground. As McGee points out, "Critical rhetoric does not *begin* with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent" (1990, p. 279). This chapter is a critical rhetorical analysis of a complex, fragmented text comprising samples of official discourse on education from several primary sources: personal interviews with educators at City High School, the *City School District High School Handbook* (*Handbook*), the *City School District Shared Governance Guide* (*Shared Governance Guide*), the *City School District Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021* (*Student Achievement Plan*), the "About Our School" page from City High School official website,[10] and several "model policies" that the State Board of Education encourages districts and schools to use. In order to complicate these relatively stale official documents with more dynamic and aspirational forms of official discourse, I surveyed the City School District's blog, seeking moments when the activities or accomplishments of high school students were headlined. I looked at every blog post focusing specifically on high school students in a 4-month time period, which generated nine blog posts in total. Since all of these texts are written and published by City High School, the City School District and the State Board of

[10] City High School does not have a mission statement; rather, the "About Our School" page provides both information about how the school operates and its aims in operating in that manner.

Education, they collectively represent an authoritative "official" matrix of rules, guidelines, benchmarks, assessments, and indicators that ultimately reveal how a student should be and act. As with all texts, this is a necessarily incomplete and fragmented object of analysis; yet, through a critical rhetorical analysis of this text, we can better understand official perspectives on the rhetorical subjectivity and agency of youth.

Of the texts that form the object of critique for this chapter, most are attributed to an institutional author, with five exceptions: the SOE's "Student Suspension/Expulsion Model Policy," which is attributed to Carol Lear, and three of the blog posts, attributed to various teachers and a principal. The SOE model policy very carefully notes at the bottom, "Prepared by: Carol Lear, Director, School Law and Legislation, upon request from CMAC" (Lear, 2003, p. 3). This distinction in authorship is important, because I argue that the ethos of an institutional rhetor is very different from the ethos of an individual rhetor; when an institutional rhetor is engaged in lived realities, the terrain of the rhetorical situation changes. While two individual, embodied rhetors would be vulnerable to one another through their mutual humanity (Butler, 2005), an institutional interlocutor does not share the same vulnerabilities, and hence, is not susceptible to the rhetorical force of the individual in the same ways. An institutional author is, quite literally, *inhumane*, and is not open to negotiation. This is critical because authorship can be read as a form of power from which subjectivities are derived. Exchanges through which subjectivity is sustained are essentially ethical exchanges between humans. What happens when one of the parties is not a human, but an institution? Butler argues:

> The ethical valence of the situation is thus not restricted to the question of whether or not my account of myself is adequate, but rather concerns whether, in giving the account, I establish a relationship to the one to whom my account is addressed and whether both parties to the interlocution are sustained and altered by the scene of address. (Butler, 2005, p. 50)

However, with an institutional interlocutor, the opportunity to be mutually sustained and altered; the only one who can be altered, who is vulnerable to the interlocution, is the student-subject. In Butler's terms, an official discourse/institutional interlocutor demanding that students account for themselves is not part of an ethical address.

Reading "A Good Student" Through the Texts

The *City School District High School Handbook* (2012) is a 33-page guide setting the standard for the model high school student, covering 62 separate topics such as dress code and grooming, permissible use of electronics such as cell phones and digital music players, even who should have access to elevators – and enumerating the potential penalties for the less-than-model student. This PDF document is linked to the "Current Students" portion of the City High School website as well as made available through the City School District website. The *Handbook* was last revised in August 2012 for the 2012-13 academic year, and has remained in effect since then. The cheerful City School District apple-shaped logo and tagline ("Your Best Choice") adorn the front page of the *Handbook,* along with the title "High School Handbook." Each of the 62 sections begins with an all-caps heading (such as ACADEMIC INTEGRITY), and some of the sections refer to state educational policies, district policies, or state laws. The overall reading level of the *Handbook* is an 11.7 on the Flesch-Kinkaid Grade

Level scale.[11] Like the rest of the official documents, there is no listed author, but only a small-print disclaimer on the bottom of the last page stating the district's antidiscrimination stance, and listing a person to be contacted in the case of "inquiries and complaints regarding prohibited discrimination, harassment, and retaliation" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 32).

Of particular interest, the *Handbook* is fraught with inconsistencies of audience and point-of-view; sections are written variously in 1st-person addressing a general audience, 1st-person addressing students directly, in 2nd-person addressing the student directly, sometimes in 2nd-person speaking to parents, or even in 3nd-person addressing educators at a school, and 3rd-person addressing a general audience. For example:

- 1st-person plural to general audience: "We expect staff and students to demonstrate high standards of academic integrity" (p. 3).
- 1st-person plural to student directly: "We encourage you to contact any of the Community Council members for input or questions" (p. 15).
- 2nd-person to student: "There are many scholarships for non-seniors. Please check with your counselor" (p. 15).
- 2nd-person to parent: "If you have questions about your child's attendance, including excused and unexcused absences, please contact the school where your child is enrolled. Your support and cooperation are appreciated" (p. 5).
- 3nd-person to educator: "The purpose of this policy is to ensure that

[11] The grade level was determined by converting the PDF *Handbook* document into a Microsoft Word document and using the readability statistics available through the Spelling and Grammar tools.

accurate and up to date information is available to teachers for classroom instruction" (p. 12).

- 3rd-person to general audience: "A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility" (p. 28).

Taken over a 33-page romp through the terrain of official discourse, this frequent perspective-shifting has a rather disorienting effect, and as a result, the various audiences who may find themselves readers of the *Handbook* may find themselves uncertain which provisions and rules apply to them, and how. This rhetorical strategy, whether intentional or the product of negligence essentially resists concretely identifying and speaking to students as a primary audience, which has the disempowering effect of willfully eliding the audience's presence. Regardless of confusion caused by the *Handbook* (for those who actually read it in its entirety), students are technically held to the standards set forth therein. It seems ironic that an education agency would have such a confusing muddle by which to lay out rules for students. I contend that this disregard for student understanding is indicative of the low esteem in which official discourse holds students.

The "City School District Shared Governance Guide" (2015) is a 41-page document outlining philosophies, principles, and procedures to create the "ideal conditions for student learning" in the district (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 2). Shared governance is intended to be used as a decision-making method that invites stakeholders into the processes of running a school. The principles or values that the school district designates as most important for a successful

shared governance process are: "delegation; openness, trust, and equity; decision-making; review and adjudication; accountability; and dialogue and communication" (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 2). It includes policies and procedures for assembling and operating two shared governance councils that should be active in each school in the district: the School Community Council (SCC) and School Improvement Council (SIC). According to the guide, "A School Community Council is established in each school to provide a cooperative means of improving the educational programs and conditions within that school" (*Shared Governance Guide,* 2015, p. 4), and is made up of educators and parents or guardians of students attending the school. The SIC has a slightly different purpose: "…to provide an orderly and professional means of improving educational programs and conditions within a school through the shared governance process" (*Shared Governance Guide,* 2015, p. 17), and comprises teachers, staff, and administration of a school. While the goal of shared governance is laudable, it seems a telling oversight that students are not included as part of either the School *Community* Council, nor as a part of the School *Improvement* Council. In the official discourse, students' roles are relegated to nonagentic, passive beneficiaries of a community and recipients of improvements which they have been allowed no part in creating or governing.

The City School District Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021 is a 30-page plan "containing missions and objectives the district, schools, and departments intend to pursue over time. The current plan is organized around "eight essentials of a learning community." (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 26). It is essentially a long table listing goals, objectives, action steps, timelines, and

measures/outcomes for each essential mission, which include (in the order listed in the document): assessment and evaluation (pages 1-6), curriculum and instruction (pages 7-12), communication and community engagement (pages 13-16), early childhood (pages 17-21), educational equity and advocacy (pages 22-24), family and school collaboration (pages 26-28), and student success (pages 29-30) (*Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021*, 2016). Given that the district's stated tagline is "City School District is Your Best Choice [*sic*] in education because we focus on one goal, one purpose – student learning," it does seem interesting that student success is the last goal listed, and that only two pages in the entire document are devoted to that mission (City School District homepage, http://*********schools.org/).

The "About Our School" section of City High School' website is a relatively short document in six sections: a short introduction about the history and current status of the City School District, a bullet-point list of what City High School does as a "personalized learning school," a paragraph about what a typical school-day includes for City High School students, a section detailing the advantages of personalized learning, a bullet-point list answering the question "What role does technology play?", and a final paragraph about advanced educational opportunities such as concurrent enrollment, college courses, and career and technical education courses ("About Our School," n.d.). This document uses active voice frequently, though not quite consistently, and seems to be written for a general public audience that includes, but is not necessarily limited to, current and prospective students and parents. Three key words or phrases crop up repeatedly: personalized learning, self-paced, and customized.

Overall, the effect of this document is to rhetorically center students' choices and actions in their educational environment.

The State Board of Education (recently renamed from State Office of Education, and referred to variably throughout all the documents) is the governing entity over all public and charter schools in Western State. Charged with implementing legislative mandates, its responsibilities range from teacher licensing, to developing curriculum standards for Common Core, to providing comprehensive counseling for students, to providing aggregate data on educational systems to the public. It is a fairly large bureaucracy by Western State standards, permeating into all corners of the state through 41 public school districts and charter schools, and impacting the lives of nearly everyone in the state at one time or another. Although the State Board of Education does not always directly tell schools and districts (referred to as Local Education Agencies, or LEAs) what to do, it sets forth standards on many topics. One such example is the set of "model policies" found on their website for LEAs to use as a baseline in developing school and district-specific policies (http://schools.*******.gov/law/Policies-Procedures.aspx). The model policies are: "Searching Students in Public Schools," "Student Discipline Model Policy," "Student Suspension/Expulsion Model Policy," "School District or Charter School Search and Seizure Model Policy," "School Clubs Model Policy," "Electronic Device Model Policy" (which, interestingly, contains both a permissive and a restrictive version), and "Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, Hazing, and Retaliation Model Policy."

The nine blog posts, drawn from the blog featured on the main page of

City School District's website, are variously concerned with the achievements of, and events for, high school students and their families. The blog posts include an announcement for a documentary film "Screenagers," a summary of a "College Knowledge" district-wide event, seven posts congratulating the winners of several academic and one athletic competitions. Upon closer examination, there is a bit of a trend in the titles: "Science and Engineering Winners," "Working Hard Even When School is Closed," "Four Sterling Scholars at [Local] High School," "Early Graduation at City High School," "[Nearby] High Robotics Team Headed to World's Competition," "2017 District MathCounts Competition," and "[Affluent] High Student Wins Western State's HSAA Spirit of Sport Award." In short, most of the blog posts feature praise for specific students who rose to the top of competitive academic proving grounds. The blog posts that are attributed to an institutional author tend to be fairly short and unremarkable publicity-type documents. However, the blog posts that are written by a specific teacher or principal are much more personal, descriptive, and notably lengthier than their institutionally-authored counterparts.

Taken collectively, the *Handbook,* the *Shared Governance Guide,* the *Student Achievement Plan,* the "About Our School" webpage, the seven model policies, and the nine blog posts represent the text for this chapter. Through a critical rhetorical analysis of the text, several prominent themes emerge: control and regulation of the physical space of the school, "ideal" subjectivities expected of model students and acceptable displays of student agency, and rhetorical normalization of external, top-down application of authority in school settings. In what follows, I trace out each theme and discuss its implications for official

understandings of students' subjectivities and agencies.

Possession Is 9/10^{ths} of the Law: Regulation of Behavior and Movement

By the numbers, youth make up the vast majority of the people found inside a school on any given day. Indeed, the typical ratio of students to teachers is currently 22:1 in Western State, and even factoring in administration and support staff, there are still easily several students for each adult in most schools (Dickson, 2015). However, it is apparent that schools are not *students' spaces* in the sense that the ownership of and responsibility for the space belongs to the students. The importance of space and place have been theorized by many rhetoric scholars (Blair, 2001; Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010; Donofrio, 2010; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Ewalt, 2011) as well as by critical pedagogy scholars (Flores-Gonzales, Rodriguez, & Rodriguez-Muniz, 2006; Haymes, 2003). Even simply looking at the layout of the traditional classroom, it is obvious that the space was designed for the convenience of the adult, whose desk is more spacious and comfortable, and whose status is underscored by the implicit invitation to move around freely at the front of the room. In contrast, students' designated spaces tend to be smaller, more crowded, and confining. This traditional layout of mainstream classrooms is a hint at the ways in which students' bodies are controlled and their movements regulated throughout the physical space of the school. This desire for control saturates many aspects of official discourses.

Control of the physical space is assured, in part, by Western State's

compulsory attendance regulations.[12] Students are required to be in school, and may only be absent for a certain number of days before various levels of intervention occur. These interventions range from being required to bring in a doctor's note to truancy citations and conferences with school officials. Perhaps the most obvious example of this can be found in the Attendance section of the *Handbook*. Citing Western State's compulsory attendance laws, the handbook lays out the difference between excused and unexcused absences, and sets forth limits for truancy consequences, etc. Most strangely, though, is that in this handbook ostensibly directed towards high school students, the last paragraph in the section is: "If you have questions about your child's attendance, including excused and unexcused absences, please contact the school where your child is enrolled. Your support and cooperation are appreciated" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 5). Even though the handbook is for students, the rhetorical choice to address the final paragraph directly to parents is a slippage, revealing an official understanding that students' attendance is not for they themselves to take responsibility for, but rather a form of control to be monitored by the institution of the school, and students' parents. This exemplifies the disconnects of subjectivity that bell hooks (1994) discusses in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, namely, that full recognition of subjectivity is not afforded to everyone equally. In this case, the adults in the situation are automatically granted subjectivity, and the students are relegated to the role of objects, or at

[12] It is worth noting that during the 2016 session of the Western State legislature, Senate Bill 45 (S.B. 45) was introduced and appeared in both the House and the Senate to dismantle truancy laws entirely, which would have allowed parents to remove students from school for an unlimited number of days without consequences to the parents. The bill did not ultimately pass the Senate. Even without truancy laws, the focus of this bill was to give "control" over children from the state via its legislative authority back to parents via a plea to natural authority, resulting in a mere transfer of power from state to familial adults (Jackson & Anderegg, 2016).

best, defective subjects, incapable of exercising agency for themselves.

In contrast to the rigidly controlled space of the school intimated by the *Handbook*, the "About Our School" page from the City High School website paints a different picture.

> A student attends school each day between 7 am and 5 pm. When on campus they will be involved in teacher led student skill groups, study groups, a group project session, and working alone on the determined courses. Student assemblies are held every two weeks where we nourish our culture of success, and we also recognize individual student achievement with immediate feedback. ("About Our School, n.d.)

Though this paragraph begins with a confusing construction – students are at school for 6.5 hours each day between the hours of 7 am and 5 pm, not from 7 am to 5 pm cumulatively – it also starts out by representing an active student who is attending school. This is a very different tone than is found in the *Handbook,* where much of the attendance portion of the policy is aimed at a parental readership.

Students' presence in schools is not the only way that official discourses rhetorically construct control of the physical space; students' movement within the school is regulated by the permission of the adults. For example:

> Student in the halls during class time will be expected to have a hall pass in their possession. Students who do not have a hall pass or are not using the hall pass as approved by their teacher may be escorted to in-school detention, school administration, or referred to the school resource [police] officer. (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 11)

As classrooms do not usually have en-suite bathrooms, and students typically must request permission (which may be granted or denied) to take a hall pass and go to the bathroom to accommodate their bodies' basic physical functions, this control functions as a mechanism for delineating appropriate subjectivity vis-à-vis embodied realities, and also bounds the field of appropriate displays of

agency. A student who needs to go to the bathroom to relieve themselves is deemed out of order if they take matters into their own hands and leave the space of the classroom to go down the hall without official permission. Rhetorically, this enforces a Cartesian split, where the space of learning (the classroom) becomes a place where the physical body is denied and controlled.

Even more strangely, random "hall sweeps" may be conducted throughout the school year to prevent loitering: "When a hall sweep is conducted all students who have not arrived to class by the time the tardy bell rings may be directed by school personnel to a "detention" area. These students may be issued a citation and then released to class" (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 11). The rhetorical choices of "detention," "citation," and "released" closely mirror the language routinely used in the criminal justice system to describe the cycles of captivity, inscribing a wrong, and being permitted movement. Furthermore, the passive impartial voice designates students as objects of actions rather than participating subjects exercising agency.

Nor are students assured of any privacy, as evidenced by the *Handbook's* discussion of lockers: "Lockers are school property and are loaned to students for their convenience. The school reserves the right to inspect lockers" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 14). In an even more general statement, the *Handbook* contains a policy simply entitled "Searches (Policy P-7):"

> Do not bring inappropriate items to school or to any school activities. Lockers are the property of the school and can be searched at any time by school administration or their designee. School personnel can also search personal property and vehicles on school campus or during school activities based on reasonable suspicion. (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 15)

Not only are students required by law to be present in the school building during

the day, but they are also required to forfeit any supposition of privacy or personal property while they are in the building. Students in this situation are indeed caught in a double bind: unable to choose to leave for risk of truancy and the penalties that entails, and unable to control their personal belongings for risk of being disciplined for lack of cooperation.

There is another interesting dynamic to the regulation of behavior and movement occurring in the texts. The official discourse refers many times across multiple documents both to the necessity of 'reasonable suspicion'[13] and 'probable cause'[14] for conducting searches of specific individuals and their belongings, but simultaneously includes provisions for more sweeping and wide-ranging forms of control and invasiveness (such as the "hall sweeps" previously discussed). Another such provision is found in the "Search and Seizure Model Policy," where we learn that "…students may lock them [lockers] against access by other students, but students shall not expect that their privacy prevents examination by a school official. The local school board may direct the

[13] "Reasonable suspicion" is defined in the "Search and Seizure Model Policy" as follows: "a particularized and objective basis, supported by specific articulatable facts, for suspecting a person of criminal activity; reasonableness extends to both the reason for the search (reasonable at the inception) and the appropriateness of the scope of the search (reasonable in scope). In addition, as used in this section, "reasonable suspicion for a search" means grounds sufficient to cause an adult of normal intellect to believe that the search of a particular person, place, or thing will lead to the discovery of evidence that the student:

A. Has violated or is violating a rule or behavioral norm provided in school policy;
B. Has violated or is violating a particular law;
C. Possesses an item or substance which presents an immediate danger of physical harm or illness to students, staff or school/district property"

("Search and Seizure Model Policy, 2012, p. 4).

[14] "Probable cause" is defined in the "Searching Students in Public School" model policy as follows: "the standard that law enforcement must meet to search a person suspected of committing a crime; Under the 4th Amendment, probable cause is more than a bare suspicion, but less than evidence that would justify a conviction" (p. 1) and goes on to say "the distinction [between school official and police officer, law enforcement official, school resource officer or school security officer] is important, because, most often, trained law enforcement personnel/police officers, even when working in a school, are usually held to the probable cause standard when initiating a search of a student"
("Searching Students in Public Schools," 2012, p. 1).

appropriate school official to conduct a *routine inspection of storage places* [emphasis mine]" ("Search and Seizure Model Policy," 2012, p. 1). The model policy even includes a stipulation about not using locks that are not provided by the school, ostensibly so the school will have the combination or key to the lock ("Search and Seizure Model Policy," 2012, p. 1).

Students attending the school are not the only ones whose presence is monitored and controlled: "Students from other schools may not be at the high school during regular school hours. This includes waiting for students to be dismissed as well as being in the building or on the grounds while school is in session. This behavior may be reported to the police as trespassing" (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 17). This insider/outsider division is exacerbated by the "School Clubs Model Policy," which explains that applications for clubs must include "assurance that club membership will be limited to students who attend the school" (2012, p. 2). Furthermore, it has the effect of preventing free association of students across the boundaries of schools, essentially limiting the people to whom they have contact with. This type of restriction is not only indicative of the level of control which official discourse attempts to exert over students, but also constructs all perceived outsiders as Others to be feared and shunned, as evidenced by the criminalization of students being reported as trespassers to the police. Since different schools, even within the same district, may have vastly different populations, resources, and available student experiences, a model policy that implicitly Others those from outside the walls of the school, and explicitly encourages students not to associate with those outside of those physical boundaries necessarily limits the scope of the world to which students

are able to see. There are clear benefits to associating with people whose background is dissimilar to one's own: children from wealthy backgrounds learning that not every child is as fortunate as they are, children from different ethnic heritages learning firsthand about each others' traditions and cultural practices, and children sharing their beliefs and experiences are only a few of the benefits. To sacrifice opportunities like these in the name of control of a physical space is not only a loss of potential growth to students, it is to willfully deny them the chances to form random connections to other human beings.

Taken together, the picture that emerges of the physical control of the space of the school is grim: The school is a place constructed and designed for the convenience and use of adults, while students are inconvenient, excessive, and unmanageable bodies to be controlled, surveilled, stripped of the right to privacy and exposed to the harsh glare of official discourse, usually in the name of student safety. It is a rhetorical play that equates control with safety and misplaces trust in complex systems of rules and sanctions rather than in people, relationships, and the bond of seeking a common cause. However upsetting, the fact that these regulations of behavior and movement are considered normal in most high schools is theoretically significant. Official discourse exercises power in both obvious and less-obvious ways; while searching lockers and regulating movement throughout a school are overt displays of power, a more subtle form of power is also at work here, through the very normalization of these types of policies themselves. The exceptions are, interestingly, all from City High School rather than the state or the district. In one text, the environment described in the "About Our School" webpage, where students are characterized as active agents,

making decisions about where to attend different classes and exerting their own agency in their educational decisions. In another, a blog post about students earning high school credit over the 3-week winter break, students are characterized as actively using nontraditional spaces (their homes or other out-of-school locations) as learning places.

One of the ways that official discourses of student subjectivity function is by being the "ground" against which subjectivity and agency are measured. As Butler explains it, "By asking what accounts for this "ground," Foucault implicitly argues that this ground is no ground, but comes to appear as a ground only after a certain historical process has taken place" (Butler, 2005, p. 115). This succinct explanation of the ways that acceptable behaviors become normalized as 'proper' student subjectivity illuminates the function of documents such as the *Handbook*. School districts, through the historical precedent of being permitted by society to set forth standards for good students that reflect, by and large, the governing cultural norms of the times, come to be the taken-for-granted, invisible grounds on which student subjectivity is accounted for and against. All of this takes place, of course, without reference to or inclusion of the primary group of people who must exist in this realm: the students themselves. However, this is not to say that the situation is hopeless. As the "About Our School" webpage alludes, intentional rhetorical choices – such as refusing to engage in a system where adults strictly regulate and control the movement of students, and deliberately empowering students in exercising agency – have the potential to be a rhetorically normalizing force, drawing our attention to the fact that the historic precedent need not be our future as well.

Being a Student: "Ideal" Subjectivities and Appropriate Agency

Official discourse paints a very clear picture of the "ideal" student subject, closely entwined with delineations of how, when, where, and to what extent students ought to express their rhetorical agency. The text explicitly calls for students to "be" certain ways: conformist, participatory in sanctioned school activities, polite, respectful, kind, cooperative with the requests of school officials, easily correctible, manageable, timely or prompt, compliant with rules, present during particular hours, focused, and attentive during instructional time. Of course, the text further limits student subjectivity in the negative with extensive rules and policies on how students ought *not* to behave: bullying, late, truant, in possession of contraband or certain electronic items, distracted, plagiarizing, un-identified, loud, putting feet on seats, messy, disorderly in line for lunch, vulgar, profane, problematic, in the wrong place at the wrong time, running indoors, eating outside designated eating zones, riding a skateboard on school property, loitering, and willfully disobedient. In fact, the list of how students ought not to be is much more extensive than the list of how students should be.

Taken together, these designations of "the good student" seem to indicate that student/subjects are required to be totally coherent within the limitations of the official discourse. Butler notes, "complete coherence…demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same. For subjects who invariably live within a temporal horizon, this is a difficult, if not impossible, norm to satisfy" (Butler, 2005, p. 42). In other words, the account demanded by official discourses of students – that between the hours

of 7:30 am and 2:30 pm, they comply fully and docilely with the subject position carved out for them, cohering not to the sense of self in which they may inhabit the majority of their times and lives, but to the list of behavioral do's and don't's laid out by the discourse – is an impossible and unethical request. To compound this tenuous request is the dilemma that, were it fulfilled to satisfaction, one student would become substitutable for another, annihilating the diversity of experiences and expressions that should be prized. Once again, Butler observes,

> If something substitutes for me or takes my place, that means neither that it comes to exist where I once was, nor that I no longer am, nor that I have been resolved into nothingness by virtue of being replaced in some way. Rather, substitution implies that an irreducible transitivity, substitution, which is no single act, is happening all the time. (Butler, 2005, pp. 89-90)

The subjective substitution which students experience as they strive to meet, resist, ignore, or dispute the terms of studenthood laid out for them by official discourse is, therefore always happening. Any student inhabiting the "good" subject position could stand in for any other, and is always in the process of happening. Conversely, any student who finds themselves labeled into the "bad" subject position can also be substituted for any other, resulting in a sort of Saussurean slippage of subjectivity.

Student subjectivity and agency also intersect with the regulation of behavior and movement – for example, the *Handbook* contains a list of 15 behaviors for which a student may be removed from school, and four things for which a student will certainly be removed from school (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 22).[15]

[15] Students "MAY be removed from school for: willful disobedience or violating a school or district rule; defying authority; disruptive behavior; assault/battery; foul, profane, vulgar, or abusive language; defaming or false statements about students or staff; destroying, defacing, or vandalizing school property; criminal mischief; burglary, theft or stealing; posing a significant threat (including harm to self or others) to the welfare or safety of a student, school personnel, or the operation of the school; possessing, using controlling, or being under the influence of alcohol, a drug, an imitation drug or drug paraphernalia or misusing (including inhaling) any substance;

The goal of this section is not necessarily to pass judgment on whether the "ideal" student and acceptable forms of agency are good or bad, but rather to delve into the ideological commitments and power structures underlying the established criteria to examine how these inform, enable, and constrain the expressions of subjectivity and agency deemed acceptable.

Attitudes, Behaviors, and (dis)Embodiment

In her insightful discussion of what it takes to build a strong teaching community, bell hooks delves into the complicated relationship between privilege, embodiment, and subjectivity by challenging official discourse's reliance upon the primacy of the mind in the Cartesian split:

> I think that one of the unspoken discomforts surrounding the way a discourse of race and gender, class and sexual practice has disrupted the academy is precisely the challenge to that mind/body split. Once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we're automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalized space. The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body. (hooks, 1994, pp. 136-7)

In the context of a high school, the privilege of denying one's embodiment is afforded to the upper classes of official discourse – adults. The official discourse sets the expectations for appropriate ways of enacting subjectivity, and in doing so, reinforces the notion that passionate, nonappropriate embodiment could only ever be a mere distraction to learning, rather than a primary fact of life and an

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possessing or using tobacco; hazing, demeaning, intimidating or assaulting someone or forcing someone to ingest a substance; sexual or other harassment…; inappropriate exposure of body parts; bullying – aggression, verbal or physically threatening or intimidating behavior including cyber bullying; gang related attire or activity that is dangerous and disruptive" (*Handbook,* 2012, p.22). Students "WILL be removed from school for: possession, control of a real weapon, explosive or noxious/flammable material, or the actual or threatened use of a lookalike or pretend weapon; possession, control, sale, or use of an alcoholic beverage, drugs, or controlled substance; using or threatening to use serious force; or any serious violation affecting a student or staff member" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 22).

impactful factor upon learning.

Certain student attitudes and behaviors are specifically noted in the texts. For example, the *Handbook* requires that during assemblies, students must "be respectful of others by listening, showing courtesy, and being positive at all times" (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 4). Frankly, "being positive at all times" seems like a tall order for adults as well as students, but nonetheless it made it into the *Handbook* and now helps to define student subjectivity by attitude towards speakers at mandatory-attendance in school events.

Although high school is a deeply embodied experience, both in terms of the changes to biochemical processes occurring during adolescence and in terms of the embodied experience of literally sitting through/enduring the school day in anticipation of its end, the ideal student subject distances themselves from their body. For example, there is a short section in the *Handbook* entitled discussing appropriate physical affection between students, which I quote in its entirety to emphasize the short shrift it is given:

> PUBLIC DISPLAY OF AFFECTION
> Displays of affection, other than handholding are considered inappropriate. A high school campus is not a place for overt displays of physical affection between students. Students are expected to demonstrate restraint at a public place. Students who fail to do so will be required to have a parent conference with the administration. (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 14)

Interestingly, it seems that the public displays of affection that the official discourse is eager to prohibit are solely romantic, unsurprising, since many adults are uncomfortable with the idea that teenagers are sexual beings. This fails to account for the embodiedness of friendship– according to a strict interpretation of this policy, friends embracing each other or walking with arms around each other down the hallway could be in violation. Thus, the official

discourse, while seeking to regulate students' physical expressions of romantic affection, also shows vast ignorance of the emotional and affective dimensions of friendship that is often so vital to thriving in youth. The vagueness of this policy is rhetorically interesting, as it lumps together "overt displays of physical affection," rather than specifically naming concrete actions, such as kissing, that are discouraged in school.

Participation, Conformity, and Compliance

Official discourse certainly encourages students to take active roles as participants, but only in school-sanctioned and convenient ways. The ideal student subject is involved in extracurricular activities, because "Becoming involved in at least one club greatly enhances your school experience. Every club has its own requirements as well as a social program which affords an opportunity to get acquainted with students who have interests similar to yours." (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 6). In this formulation, school-sanctioned clubs serve as a social time to gather with like-minded students to participate in an activity that has been deemed adequate by the institution (since student clubs must apply to and be approved by school administration). This is a compliant, non-threatening show of agency, and thus is encouraged by official discourses. Furthermore, only students who meet the eligibility requirements of two governing entities – the State Board of Education, and the Western State High School Activities Association – are permitted to participate in student clubs, etc. (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 9). Encouraging students to ascribe to activities governed by statewide boards rhetorically encourages conformity and uniformity across

schools and districts.

In striking contrast to the conformity and sanction-following ideal student delineated by the *Handbook* is the student represented in the "About Our School" webpage, who takes full advantage of personalized learning and customizes their educational experience. The student at City High School is encouraged to:

> …access learning at any time and in any place, facilitating flexibility to take advantage of their peak learning time; …customize their schedule to better meet their academic goals;…[use] personalized learning where students can spend as much time as needed to master the material. ("About Our School," n.d.)

This encouragement for students to develop self-awareness by recognizing their own learning patterns and assert their preferences via customizing their schedules and taking advantage of the flexibility offered at City High School to make and meet their own goals is reflective of an official discourse that both respects and seeks to develop students' subjectivity as autonomous, capable beings.

Further complicating this aspect of official discourse and subjectivity are the nine blog posts, many of which praise students for their achievement in competitive fields. These aspirational documents set up an implicit expectation that students are stratified, and that the "highest" echelons are deserving of recognition and praise, while everyone else is given an example to strive to match. For example, one of the blog posts includes a note that students in City School District earned 94 awards in a Science and Engineering Fair, but specifically notes that "We would especially like to recognize those students who will be competing in the International Science and Engineering Fair to be held in May. Our ISEF Grand Champion Winners are…" ("Science and Engineering

Winners" 2017)." This subtle focus on hierarchy and competition reveals an understanding that, even among aspirational and ostensibly positive official discourse, the preference is for students to take part in organized and non-collaborative events to prove that they are "good students."

This tension within the various official discourses indicates that while they may at first seem to be homogenous and unified, there are nonetheless frissons of internal resistance. Indeed, the stances taken by the *Handbook* and the "About Our School" webpage are dramatically different when it comes to constructing the rhetorical limits of student subjectivity. Where the *Handbook* takes a cautionary, almost admonitory tone, the "About Our School" webpage takes a student-centered, egalitarian tone. These differences may seem insignificant at first, but I argue they are a hopeful indicator of potential areas of change for official discourses to be more cognizant of students' full capacities as subjects and agents for their own educational experiences.

Ways of Learning

The "ideal" student constructed by official discourse uses additional resources to compete with other students intellectually and for financial gain based on intellectual achievements. Per the *Handbook* section on Library/Media Center: "Students are encouraged to use the library often to browse, read, research, and study" (2012, p. 13). However, a stricter set of rules governing behavior in the library is in place, including admonitions such as "Users are expected to conduct themselves in such a manner as to make quiet study possible for all" (*Handbook,* 2012, p. 13). This seems to indicate that learning takes place

during quiet, solitudinous hours of study time rather than in raucous discussion and thoughtful debate or conversation. This is indicative of a deeper split, one which divides both times and spaces into "learning" and "nonlearning" spaces. This false divide is worrisome to me, for it fails to acknowledge that humans are constantly learning, and that the environments cannot be easily divided into educational and noneducational. Certainly some environments can be constructed and controlled with a certain educational intent (such as an aircraft simulator), but to imply that classrooms and libraries (and not hallways, bathrooms, school grounds, or administrative offices) are the places of learning is to uphold intentional curricular learning as the primary purpose of education. This rhetorical tendency in official discourse is symptomatic of the tendency more broadly to separate "school" from "the real world" without recognizing that they are part and parcel of each other. However, this construction of learning spaces is particularly challenged by one of the blog posts (written by a City High School teacher) that celebrates students' earning high school credit over the winter school break. City High School organized a challenge for their students to earn as many credits as they could while school was officially out of session. As the blog post states, "Earning a total of 50.25 credits, each of the 127 students completed at least one term (.25 credit) in classes during the two week break" (Ms. Belle, 2017). In essence, students are praised for taking their learning outside of the walls of the traditional classroom, and reclaiming their own various spaces for learning.

Official discourse also seems to have a vested interest in competitive forms of learning and evaluation. As evidenced by the placement of "Assessment

and Evaluation" first in the *Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021*, assessment and testing is of primary concern to official discourse, for it allows the means by which students can be dissected into numbers, compiled and then disaggregated into meaningless units of subjectivity to be displayed in reports and data dashboards. In the *Handbook*, students are informed,

> Tests are required of [Western State] students. CRT tests are given near the end of the academic year and include testing in various Language Arts, Math, and Science classes. CRT tests measure student progress and are used to comply with Federal requirements, primarily the No Child Left Behind legislation. Students in 10th grade are required to take The Plan and 11th graders are required to take the ACT. Other various tests are also offered during the school year. (2012, pp. 16-17)

This paragraph contains a contradiction that I find a little amusing – the first three sentences bluntly assert that tests are *required*; the last sentence claims that tests are *offered*. The result of testing, be it required or voluntary, is of course to rank students according to percentile and supposedly to compare their progress at mastering certain subject material. Other scholars, more experienced in this subject (Addison & McGee, 2015; Delpit, 2012) have dealt at length with the validity and effects of standardized testing, but for my part, I am concerned with what this tells us about official discourse and the way it constructs students' subjectivity and agency. The *Handbook* does not indicate any opportunities for students to abstain from taking tests, nor does it indicate that testing might not be as desirable or less objective than is assumed.

Scholarships are another oblique way of enforcing certain subjectivities. College preparedness is *de rigueur* in high schools these days, and students and their families are usually expected to shoulder the cost. As such, being a competitive applicant for scholarships is near the front of many students' minds,

and of course, the official discourses have something to say about that, too. Students ought to be interested in competing for scholarships, and according to the *Handbook*, funds are not limited only to the top students in the school: "While donors of these scholarships are interested in students who have achieved scholastic excellence, they also look closely at those who exhibit good citizenship, qualities of leadership, and development of individual talents" (2012, p. 15). Of course, the *Handbook* elsewhere defines what constitutes good citizenship and qualities of leadership, along the lines of compliance and cooperation. Interestingly, the blog post titled "College Knowledge" contains this somewhat equivocal statement:

> Middle and high school students and their parents were introduced to the costs and benefits of higher education and various career pathways and learned about the importance and preparation necessary to be successful with high school completion and postsecondary pursuits. ("College Knowledge," 2017, n.p.)

While the quote above could be interpreted as supportive of both collegiate and noncollegiate postsecondary pathways, I think it more likely that this reveals the expectation that high school students aim for college attendance and completion rather than trade or apprentice-based education. This interpretation is further cemented by the "highlight of the evening, [which] came at the conclusion when ten $500 scholarships were awarded to…participants" ("College Knowledge," 2017). In other words, the subjectivity that is endorsed by official discourse is that of a college-bound student.

Similarly, the "About Our School" webpage rhetorically constructs an ideal student who capitalizes upon the available advanced educational opportunities, namely, the college courses available to high school students

through Western State Community College, and the certifications available through the Career and Technical Education Center onsite. A student who takes advantage of these opportunities is one who is "empowered" to "[have] control over time, place, path, and pace" of learning ("About Our School," n.d., n.p.). This implies that students who are unable or choose not to avail themselves of these advanced learning environments are not empowered. Essentially, this official discourse exacerbates the good student/bad student model in setting up an ideal that is not possible or realistic for everyone, and then selectively praising students who are able to reach the bar.

Voice and Meaningful Contributions

Of particular interest are the silences and spaces where students are excluded. The most glaring of these omissions, to my mind, is the fact that within the realm of official discourses, students are rarely asked to provide input about anything relating to the conditions of their own education. Student input comes up explicitly in precisely TWO places in over 100 pages of original documents. Once in the *Student Achievement Plan 2016-2021* as part of the actions towards improving assessment and evaluation "Survey students and teachers regarding school climate, student interests, and extra-curricular activities" (*SAP*, 2016, p. 6)

Shared Governance Guide; and once in the *Handbook* with an ambiguous pronoun, "We encourage you to contact any of the Community Council members for input or questions" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 15). If the lack of invitation were not a clear enough signal that official discourse is not remotely interested in students' meaningful participation in the construction of their educational

experiences, a review of spaces from which students are specifically *excluded* ought to be convincing.

According to the *Shared Governance Guide*, "Shared governance requires each of us to work together with respect, trust, good faith effort, and purpose in pursuit of our mission: Student Learning" (Governance, 2015, p. 2). This sentence, delivered in the first section of the guide, removes students from the equation, making it the stakeholders' mission to accomplish the goal of student learning. Although, as I have mentioned earlier, students are the primary occupants of schools and, at least in name, those for whom schools exist, they are specifically excluded as stakeholders throughout the entire *Shared Governance Guide*: "A School Community Council (SCC) is established in each school to provide a cooperative means of improving the educational programs and conditions within that school. Its membership should represent school employees and parents or guardians of students" (2015, p. 4). While presumably, parents who are interested and engaged enough to want to volunteer for a School Community Council are also parents who would be attentive to issues of education with their children, the politics of representation are at play nonetheless. The rhetorical choice is significant: calling it a school-community council, and then naming only school employees and parents and guardians to its membership, is a move that literally excludes students from the community.

The second type of shared governance body described is "A School Improvement Council (SIC) [which] is established in each school, with membership representing faculty, staff, and administrators at that school" (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 17). Again, students are left to play no part in

meaningful decision-making or consensus-building processes described at length in the guide. "School improvement councils operate within a parity relationship between two parties: (1) the administration…and (2) faculty and staff together" (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 17). Rhetorically excluding students from this opportunity for governance is particularly poignant: Students, many of whom have the ideas, passion, and enthusiasm to contribute to social progress causes, would be an excellent partner in the venture to improve schools. Arguably, students should be regarded as the primary stakeholder in the education system, and yet, they are not named anywhere as such. Again, this is significant: "Stakeholder" implies a partner, one whose buy-in and active participation is necessary for a successful venture. Students are clearly not regarded as partners in official discourses on education.

To continue in this vein, students are not only excluded from being equal partners and stakeholders in the systems that determine their own educational experiences, but they are relegated to the role of passive object-observers. Perhaps more telling is the values with which shared governance is executed:

> In group decision-making, full participation, mutual understanding, inclusive solutions, and shared responsibilities are core values. Participants are problem solvers. A participatory process encourages group discussions about issues. It replaces positions and demands with clarification and understanding of individual interests, and it makes creative solutions possible. (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 15)

Thus, students are defined by lack through this passage. Students are implicitly posed as problems, not problem-solvers; irresponsible, rather than sharing responsibilities; and incapable of generating creative solutions. There is recourse, naturally, for adults who do not feel that their partnership potential is being taken seriously: "A group of parents who feel that they are not adequately

represented on the SCC may petition the council for an additional representative position" (Governance, 2015, p. 9). No such recourse exists for students, other than contacting a Council member to provide input. The critical significance of this, to my mind, is not just that students are left out of the process overall, but that in the confabulations of official discourse, *students are not even included as the group of people who might feel they are not adequately represented*. Not only are they left out, but students collectively are regarded so poorly that official discourses literally do not have the imaginary capability to recognize that students could possibly be disenfranchised. What we have here, then, is not only a system that systematically leaves students out of situations where they might have a voice, but a discourse that is incapable of even recognizing students' voices as generative, powerful, or significant to the enterprise of developing educational systems.

Rhetorical Normalization of Top-Down Authority

It is perhaps unsurprising that the last major theme is the rhetorical normalization of top-down authority within a school, and also perhaps a bit too clear-cut a distinction. After all, control of the physical space is premised upon an external authority whose beliefs govern the way the space must function, and "ideal" subjectivities must be measured against some other, lacking subject position. Critical rhetoric leads me to examine texts not only for the trends and commonalities, but also for the outliers and gaps. In that spirit, this section focuses on school rules that have been so thoroughly normalized that, although they often seem to me capricious and arbitrary, they are accepted as part and

parcel of everyday life in schools.

The first example is that of dress codes. It's a widely acknowledged human tradition that manner of dress is one of the easiest way to distinguish one's identity and group affiliations (Crane, 2000), but over the past 50-60 years, the strict rules of dress in society have relaxed quite a bit. No longer are jeans the sole purview of male blue-collar laborers, and colors are no longer restricted to certain social classes (such as the medieval tradition of purple for royalty). However, official discourse in education still exerts a great deal of effort in asserting and policing dress code norms.

Students are expected to conform to dress code requirements, such as avoiding the following violations: "Short shorts, running shorts, or miniskirts (as a rule of measurement, shorts hem should reach the finger tips when arms are held loosely at the side)" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 7), while at the same time the School Community Council (from which students are excluded) is charged to "Determine and facilitate discussion of site-based uniform or dress codes pursuant to board policy and state law" (*Shared Governance Guide*, 2015, p. 6). And of course, as students do not come in standardized dimensions, the "rule of measurement" listed above is quite arbitrary. Moreover, the intense focus on dress code and penalties for dress code violations in the *Handbook* reveals a certain obsession with enforcing gendered and sometimes racialized norms, and a particular type of appearance among students, which has little to do with students' ability to learn, and more to do with normalizing the policing of youth and youth's bodies. As Anne Shirley,[16] a tutor at City High School, said of the

[16] Anne Shirley was chosen by the tutor as a pseudonym, after the eponymous Anne Shirley of the "Anne of Green Gables" fictional novels.

dress code in an interview:

> It [intentionally not focusing on the dress code] moves it from "your appearance is offensive to me" to – 'no, LEARN.' And it immediately removes one source of contention that is HUGE in most other schools. It's a huge source of contention and shame…it's a power struggle that literally doesn't belong in the learning atmosphere. (Anne Shirley, personal communication, December 16, 2016)

As Anne aptly points out, enforcement of dress code norms is one of the most pervasive ways that top-down authority is normalized in the official discourses. Students' views and experiences are excluded from the "community council" that makes the rules, and students must comply with the rules or risk being sent home, having parents called in to bring them a change of clothes, forced to wear oversized or ill-fitting "school" clothing, and/or shamed into changing. Rather than engaging in a dialogue with students about the complex social, economic, aesthetic, or political reasons for which a person might choose to dress themselves, it is simply assumed that the adults who made the rules know best, and that compliance is in the students' best interests.

Another such contentious topic is a ban on personal electronics, such as cell phones and smartphones. According to the "Electronic Device Model Policy" that the State Board of Education offers as a guide to LEAs, there are both permissive and restrictive ways to deal with student electronics. Disappointingly, both models include condescending policies that treat students as incapable of being anything but distracted by electronics. From the permissive policy, "The devices must remain out of sight **during instructional time** AND be turned off OR in silent mode. If students intentionally use or respond to electronic devices during instructional time or during time identified by teachers, electronic devices may be confiscated [emphasis in original]" ("Electronic Device

Model Policy, n.d., p. 2). Permissive consequences for violating the policy include a warning, confiscation of the device, requiring a student to come to the office after classes end for the day to retrieve the device, and other penalties as the school sees fit ("Electronic Device Model Policy," n.d., p. 3).

However, in the School District High School Handbook, the more restrictive policy is in place. "The use of CD players, iPods, headsets, pagers, cell phones, cameras, or other personal electronic equipment is not permitted during class time in the classroom. These items must be turned off and placed out of sight in the classroom" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 8). This top-down control of students' personal belongings, which students might even regard as extensions of themselves and guard with concern to their privacy, might be ostensibly about facilitating student concentration in the classroom, but it also takes away valuable tools. Photographing a drawing or diagram on the board, looking up background context for a topic being discussed, or even listening to music while studying are all potential avenues closed off by the implementation of restrictive policies when it comes to control of students' electronic devices. More importantly, such a restrictive policy rhetorically emphasizes students' inability to exercise agency and to be active, responsible partners in their own educational journeys.

Furthermore, the consequences for violating the policy are even more stringent: "Students who violate this policy will have their [electronic] item confiscated by a school official and given to an administrator. The parent or guardian will need to personally retrieve the item from the administrator" (*Handbook*, 2012, p. 8). This restrictive policy is troubling because it reinforces the

idea that students are less-than by disallowing them even to retrieve their own belongings at the appointed time or place (probably in the main office after school). By requiring parents to come and collect the electronics, it ensures an adult-to-adult chain of custody over an item which (for example, in the case of a smartphone) students often consider very necessary for everyday life. Once more, the restrictive policy focuses on punitive measures that rhetorically underscores to students that, as far as official discourses go, they are not capable and their experiences and concerns are unimportant.

Conclusion

Student subjectivity within the realm of official discourses is a complicated rhetorical phenomenon, not least because it is never as clear-cut as it might seem. The account that is demanded by official discourses is not always the same type of account that is given to fulfill the demand. For example, an official discourse can demand that students account for their whereabouts in a certain way, such as with their physical presence in the school; yet the students might account for themselves with an argument that their intellectual presence and engagement is superior or more accurate an account than physical presence. The implications of rethinking subjectivity for high school students ask us to recognize the regimes of truth to which they are literally subjected, and to imagine ways it might be otherwise. For, as with anything, making oneself legible within a certain regime of truth necessitates certain sacrifices. Before we ask students to comply, to account for themselves within these structures, it behooves us to examine more closely what is lost or given up when the accounts

are given. To turn once more to Butler:

> …the forms of rationality by which we make ourselves intelligible, by which we know ourselves and offer ourselves to others, are established historically, and at a price. If they become naturalized, taken for granted, considered as foundational and required, if they become the terms by which we do and must live, then our very living depends upon a denial of their historicity, a disavowal of the price we pay. (Butler, 2005, p. 121)

This is precisely the issue with contemporary regimes of official discourse in education – the forms of rationality that form the boundaries of intelligibility as a "student" have become ahistoricized. Rather than recognizing and accepting that these rationalities were developed in a particular historical moment to meet the labor needs of, for the most part, early industrial capitalism, these boundaries have become unmoored from their beginnings. The "sit still and listen" model, which excellently prepared students for lifetimes in factories, is no longer a useful model to prepare students to deal with the present and future realities of their own lives and environments. In such an environment, "… telling the truth about oneself comes at a price, and the price of that telling is the suspension of a critical relation to the truth regime in which one lives" (Butler, 2005, p. 122). For a student to unreflexively give the account which is asked of her is to sacrifice her critical agency at the moment in which it is most necessary.

And yet, to problematize the rhetorical situation: To what extent do these restrictive realms of discourse produce the subjects that seek to evade them? More to the point, how and what can we imagine otherwise, that would potentially be more emancipatory, more empowering, and more egalitarian in treating students and adults as equally valid and recognizable rhetorical subjects capable of exercising critical agency? It appears an inescapable bind, because

> …the "I" who seeks to chart its course has not made the map it reads, does

> not have all the language it needs to read the map, and sometimes cannot find the map itself. The "I" emerges as a deliberating subject only once the world has appeared as a countervailing picture, an externality to be known and negotiated at an epistemological distance. (Butler, 2005, pp. 110-111)

The subject, as it is not a prior unity but rather the accumulated effects of rhetorical force, cannot avoid the conditions of its origins, and is perpetually entangled with those conditions, a rhizomatic relationship. It is critical to note that this is not necessarily a negative thing, for it is in the murky conditions of our origins that we as subjects find our vulnerability, our opacity, and our capacity to recognize the Other in ourselves and ourselves in the Other. As Butler rather poetically puts it, "I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others" (Butler, 2005, p. 84). However, this does intersect with the risks and costs of truth-telling within an uncertain regime of truth. Official discourses on education, even the aspirational and "positive" ones, are not adequately prepared for the full complexities and lived experiences of students in their messy human subjectivities, and so lay forth a structure of address that seeks to isolate, to separate the self from the Other, to demand accounts based on prohibitions rather than curiosity, on condescension rather than inclusion, and on norms that have been ahistoricized to the point that they have become the standard. Within this regime, students lose when they tell their partial, in-process, contradictory, and fully subjective truths about themselves.

Official discourses on education structure everything from the day-to-day experiences of students in schools to the philosophies and processes of school governance and operations. This being the case, a close examination of official

discourses is necessary to better understand the ways that students are expected to be and behave, and the parameters within which students are expected to exercise agency. However, such an examination leads to a dismaying conclusion: that schools are not *for* students so much as they are *containing* students. More than 50 years after Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, official discourses still seem not to regard students as thinking, feeling, living, acting beings, so much as lacking, passive objects in need of instruction. It's as though the official discourses on education contain a psychic schism: both that the abstract idea of the student is something to be cherished and valued, and that the realities of students must be closely monitored, controlled, and corrected. Perhaps this schism is rooted in the primary opacity of the subject's origination. "And so one might say, reflectively, and with a certain sense of humility, that in the beginning I am my relation to you, ambiguously addressed and addressing, given over to a "you" without whom I cannot be and upon whom I depend to survive" (Butler, 2005, p. 81). However, as the official discourses represent an institutional interlocutor, the vulnerability and humility are largely one-sided. Though the "About Our School" webpage is more rhetorically empowering for students, in most of the official discourses it is only the student who can say that they are "ambiguously addressed and addressing;" official discourses have no subjectivity, and thus are not open to mutual rhetorical interactions. The paradoxes of this schism are evident throughout the official discourse: so many tight regulations and rules laid out in the name of student safety, while overtly excluding students from the decision-making tables and conference rooms. The false neutrality of official discourse stifles students' agency, sets close limits on

who is recognizable as a 'good' subject, and generally quashes passion for learning out of educational environments by wholly neglecting a key constituent group – the students themselves. Juxtaposed against this background, Chapter V explores students' discourses and experiences, their own negotiations of subjectivity, and assertions of agency in their educational lives.

CHAPTER V

I AM _____: YOUTH DISCOURSE ON SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

We have students who are seeking freedom. We have students who are seeking compassion, someone who cares about them. Students who are seeking to find their own personality, who they are.[17]

The boundaries of students' subjectivity and agency are heavily surveilled and regulated in the official discourses surrounding this case study. This chapter delves into another perspective: the students' own. In other words, what does *being a student* mean to students in a nontraditional educational environment? In exploring students' perceptions of their roles in their educational experiences, I argue that we can better understand not only rhetorical subjectivity and agency as they apply to youth, but glimpse aspects of subjectivity and agency that have been unaccounted for in rhetorical theorizing to this point: namely, that while we as a discipline have gone variously through modernist, antihumanist, discursive, and critical turns, in order to fully theorize the subject and more deeply understand how agency functions for marginalized groups of people, rhetoric

[17] Snape (personal communication, February 17, 2017). "Snape" is a pseudonym for one of the teachers at City High School.

now needs to take a *temporal turn*. This chapter provides a critical rhetorical analysis of youth discourse regarding their own subjectivity in the context(s) of an educational institution. First, I discuss how students negotiate subjectivity and agency in the context of City High School. Second, I offer a theoretical explanation of time as it pertains to the concept of studenthood. Third, I analyze various configurations of the ways that students at City High School articulate their subjectivity in relation to three different registers of time, and what sorts of agentic purchase that allows them in the structure of the school. Finally, I trace out implications and conclusions of complicating subjectivity and agency with time.

Students Rhetoric on Subjectivity and Agency

My second research question was initially posed as "How do high school students negotiate their subjectivity and exercise their agency, particularly in terms of values of educational independence and responsibility, in nontraditional education settings that are structured in part by the philosophies of critical pedagogy?" Over the course of my time at City High School, I observed students negotiating their subjectivity on a daily basis, as they made assertions about what it meant to be a student, and what it meant for them to be humans living meaningful lives. I witnessed them asserting rhetorical agency in conflicts with teachers and in the ways that they sought, accepted, and sometimes resisted responsibility for their own educational path and processes.

In a very literal sense, of course, students are *subjected*; they are interpellated into educational and official discourses in which they did not

necessarily choose to participate, and are required to deal with the consequences. As a result, students resort to different means to negotiate their subjectivity within these discourses, from the self-expression of clothing choices to their actual speech and writing, each student articulates themselves uniquely. However, several major common themes in terms of student subjectivity emerged from the research: a desire for independence and freedom, the desire to be recognized and treated as capable and equal by the adults in the school, and a desire to maintain a high degree of responsibility for their own educational outcomes.

Independence and Freedom

It is something of a commonplace that teenagers are in a hurry to grow up, and that part of that process is the attainment of increasing levels of independence and freedom to make one's own choices. Students at City High School clearly value the same thing, since these themes came up in several different manifestations: the enjoyment of the independence found in a fairly permissive environment, freedom to move about the school, and ability to drive one's own educational pathway, to name a few examples. Students often refer to their independence with pride, as it is a desirable characteristic at City High School. Indeed, several students cited their tendencies to work well independently as a reason they have been successful, including Chet:

> **Chet:** I just have found that with – for me because I'm kind of a more independent personality, it's worked really, really well because I've been able to get through. I mean, I'm a freshman, and I'm taking sophomore classes. Like I'm almost on a sophomore year math. (personal communication, January 31, 2017)

When asked if he thought the sort of educational environment that exists at City High School would work for every student, Chet hedged a little bit.

> **Chet:** Yeah. It's more like – it's just – it's kinda – I think it would work for everybody if everybody had been in an independent – more independent system like City High School from the very beginning. I think some people struggle because it's not what they're used to. They're not used to all of the freedom that comes with the school. (personal communication, January 31, 2017)

Thus, independence is defined both in terms of a personal trait of students as well as a structural characteristic of the educational environment. This rhetorical alignment creates a parallel between the student and the school, demonstrating Chet's belonging at City High School vis-à-vis his (and the school's) independence. In this scenario, independence is a wholly positive thing, one which students should cultivate in themselves but which can be difficult to adapt to if you aren't immersed in an independence-encouraging environment "from the very beginning." Some students are even more specific about the ways that independence and freedom can be difficult to manage.

> **Curly:** It's been... I'd say City High School is like one of the coolest schools. Like if I could've came here for my freshman year, I would've done that instead of Highland. And I think traditional school is just not really for me, but in the same sense it is. Like they both have their pros and cons. Like in a traditional high school you just show up to class and then the teacher would like teach you. And then you'd just do like the homework. But here it's more like you gotta show up to class on your own time. So like you kind of have the freedom to either show up or not. But, and then you also have to like read it all online. So sometimes you don't really have the teacher's help. But that just depends if you show up to like your class meetings or what not. So when you show up to class meetings, like I think it's easier and I learn more than I would than in a 45 to an hour and a half class. I would just learn that in the same period in like a class meeting. And I need to ask a lot of questions in order to learn, so it's nice in a class meeting because there's a smaller group of people. So I can ask more questions and then like the professor, the teacher isn't too worried about like answering too many questions because they only have like a certain amount of time that they have to get through the whole like curriculum. So, I think... just showing up to class, and kind of doing your homework is

> a little bit easier than you having the willpower and like the self-motivation to just do it all yourself. And I think that's why it's kind of a little bit harder, but at the same time it's like -- it is an early college high school so they are like developing you for college. And in college it's like -- and I realized that when I took like a math class, like they just did not care if I even showed up to class or anything. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

Implicit in Curly's remarks is an opposition between students' experiences at City High School versus mainstream high schools. By aligning themselves with the way that City High School does things, students are purposely distancing themselves from mainstream high schools' everyday practices and values, essentially declaring themselves to be different and embracing the opportunities that this difference affords them.

A notable part of the unusual way that City High School is run is the freedom of movement that students enjoy, since the encouragement to work in 'your own space' is part of the school's tagline. Having grown up in mainstream schools myself, and used to the formal approval processes necessary to obtain permission for movement around the school, this struck me as very unusual.

> *I am seated in Ms. Belle's classroom on a Tuesday morning, next to the door. There's a certain ebb and flow to the swirls and trickles of students coming in and out and around the classroom here. Sometimes people enter in a flood but more often it's a small group of students streaming in. Each room does seem to have its own tidal flow; sometimes filling up to capacity before emptying out again, but there is always a low-level movement of bodies entering and exiting rooms, making their way down hallways and stairways, a sort of constant reminder of the permeability of architectural boundaries. (field notes, January 20, 2017)*

Students also commented upon this freedom of movement, relishing it in perhaps comfortingly predictable ways:

> **Dennis:** And I'd say the biggest thing, also, is, like, going to lunch wherever want, that the -- but yeah, the lunch times are flexible, too, 'cause it's like a 30 minute lunch break, but you come back after 45 and you're not reprimanded. And so, like--
> **Interviewer:** So what is your favorite lunch place around here?

> **Dennis:** Probably the one we went to the most is Café Rio, for sure. Definitely, a lot of Café Rio.
> **Interviewer:** Good old Café Rio, a Western State classic.
> **Dennis:** Thousands of dollars spent there. (chuckles) (personal communication, January 13, 2017)

The pleasure of feeling oneself unrestricted by institutional boundaries, able to enjoy simple luxuries such as choosing the place you want to eat lunch; this is a privilege that is not always afforded high school students, limited within mainstream high schools by 30-minute lunch periods, rules about leaving campus during the day, or even local businesses' discriminatory rules against serving groups of students. Dennis (who talked at length about his and his friends' favorite places to get lunch) claims his freedom and in so doing, constructs his subjectivity in terms of that freedom. However, it is not an uncomplicated freedom. While there are quite a few dining options within walking distance of City High School, access to a vehicle and enough disposable income for restaurant lunches are certainly not common to every student at City High School. In fact, 33% of students at City High School qualify for free school lunches, with an additional 8% qualifying for reduced-price lunches.[18] Nonetheless, the freedom of movement within the school is certainly shared by many students. As Bear noted,

> Like, there's never been fights here that I really know of, like, I just -- there's just -- if you don't like somebody you can leave the room. If you don't like somebody you can go do whatever else, you don't have to stay sitting next to them, you don't have to be forced to be in a classroom with somebody you don't like. And I think that's really important. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

This cognizance of autonomy permeated my conversations with students at City

[18] For comparison, the free and reduced-price lunch rates at other high schools in City School District are: Other High School, 58%; Affluent High School, 38%; Alternative School, 83%; Crowded High School, 57% (State Board of Education, 2016).

High School. In fact, students brought this subject up in almost all of the interviews that I conducted there, and I witnessed it happening in practice several times. Though there is certainly a case to be made for encouraging students to work out their differences by speaking with one another, there is also value in students feeling as though their preferences and experiences are relevant and prioritized. However, not every student felt that their expectations were met by City High School's practices. Ducky expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with what he perceived as a failure on the part of City High School administration to follow through on their promise to allow students to move at their own pace, as illustrated by this conversation.

> **Ducky**: Just like, I don't know what it is, but like I seem to always have problems with like [administrator], she just needs to like, stay in her lane. Like she just needs to like stay in her lane and calm down and let people do what they are doing. And [other administrator] actually really nice, I like [other administrator].
> **Kitty**: I like [other administrator]. He stays in his lane.
> **Ducky**: And I'm pretty sure he hates me but he's super funny. (Chuckles)
> **Kitty**: Well, also [other administrator] stays in his lane. (Chuckles)
> **Interviewer**: So what does that mean? Like tell me.
> **Bear**: Mind your own business.
> **Ducky**: Like mind your own business. Like... it's not...
> **Kitty**: If kids are at a lunchtime they're not supposed to be, [inaudible]
> **Ducky**: Yeah, and even if it's not, it's their fault. Like this school is supposed to be a self-like-motivated school. So if they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, and they've been getting like warnings, then you should then start doing crap like that, and then start cracking down, or just make them go to another school if they're not taking it seriously.
> **Interviewer**: Yeah.
> **Bear**: He's right?
> **Ducky**: So there's like no point into just being always being a hard-core and a bitch all the time when you don't know what's going on. Maybe they're caught up or maybe they just need a tiny break for ten minutes. Like they don't ask questions of why you're there. They're just all like, "Go back to class," or yell at you.

In other words, not all the students are completely satisfied that the freedom promised by City High School is carried out in actual practice. Though Ducky is

attempting to capitalize on the flexibility and movement that City High includes in its mission statement, he feels that he is essentially penalized for doing so.

An additional sort of freedom at City High School is one of – shall we say –unfettered linguistic self-expression? Students, both inside classrooms and in other spaces within City High School, were not particularly cautious about swearing or language that would, in most official documents, be described as "foul" or at the very least, "inappropriate."

> *I am sitting in Professor McGonagall's classroom, at the back corner table, observing and writing field notes. Several students are discussing Christmas and Hanukkah gifts with one another, and one brings up a photo on Instagram of highly realistic penis-shaped lipsticks. A fair amount of raucous laughter and exclamations of "OH MY GOD LOOK AT THOSE LIPDICKS!" ensues, followed by an internet search for the cosmetics in question, and much more colorful discussion of said lipstick. There are two tutors and one teacher in the room, but none of the adults issue a warning, "Hey, language!" or even direct a glare towards the corner. During this whole episode, I try to keep a straight face. I probably fail miserably.*

That was my first, rather surprising, encounter with the freedom of language that students at City High School experience and seem to expect. Nor did the teachers or tutors often attempt to police or repress such language.

> **Bear:** And the freedom of you can say basically anything, for the most part -- I mean, there's some tutors that let the kids swear, that's how it is. But there's a few tutors that piss me off, because, like, my girlfriend said fuck once. And it's just, like, whatever. Hey, no. And I was like, are you being serious? I'm just like, oh, my gosh. Like, she's not calling anybody anything, she's just saying it, and she wasn't even saying it loud, she wasn't, you know, hurting anyone, we were good. And he's -- I really just feel like sometimes -- and he was a new tutor, so I don't think he really understands what's -- how things roll here sometimes, you know. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

Choice of language, particularly taboo language, is one way that students can leverage freedom in constructing their subjectivity, perhaps in an effort to legitimize their maturity or publically mark a rebellious streak. As Bear's

comments above reveal, using swear words as a vent for frustration or even just in casual conversation, so long as they are not being leveled against a particular person, is considered part of everyday life at City High School. When those expectations are violated, as with the new tutor who censored Bear's girlfriend, it is taken by students not just as an attempt at teaching manners, but as a power play, in essence refusing to recognize the student's maturity and right to choose their language.

Expectations of Egalitarian Relationships

Students' rhetorical construction of themselves is also shaped by their input, both solicited and unsolicited, on all sorts of meaningful and consequential matters within City High School. Student Senate, for example, plans and runs all school spirit events, assemblies, volunteer service activities, dances, and the school "InnoStore" where students may exchange tickets for candy, snacks, or prizes.[19] Students are consulted on the content and delivery of curriculum, the design and naming of the e-learning platform iGo, selecting reading materials for Professor McGonagall's book club, and more.

This recognition and relatively egalitarian treatment of students by the adults at City High School is accepted so matter-of-factly that sometimes students are dismayed to find their subjectivity is constructed very differently in other contexts. As one student noted in regard to planning a Student Senate event and reserving space at Western State Community College: "The college doesn't like to talk to the [high school] students, they prefer to have the teacher

[19] Tickets are earned by completing courses, doing an exceptionally good job on something, occasionally raffled off at assemblies, etc. They function as a systemic bribe to reinforce "good" behavior among students.

just email" (field notes, November 10, 2017). In short, though students are recognized and treated as equals within the social structure of City High School, this construction of student subjectivity is renegotiated outside the discursive structure of the school, and on terms less favorable to students.

This egalitarianism lends itself also to student-teacher relationships that are not as concerned with the appearances of maintaining power in the classroom. Teachers demonstrate their vulnerability to students, and many students choose to reciprocate.

> *I am sitting next to the teacher's desk in Ms. Belle's classroom, observing a small group lesson on adverbs. She asks for students to give her some examples of adverbs and writes them on the board. During the course of the discussion, Ms. Belle loses her train of thought, and simply tells her students, "I'm getting confused because you guys are throwing in prepositions." She shifts her example to be more specific, asking for adverbs that could be used to modify the word "throw." Then, delving into prepositions, Ms. Belle pulls up a chair and is demonstrating the idea that you can use "_____ the chair" to quickly suss out prepositions from other types of modifiers or parts of speech. She leaps over the chair, stands on the chair, crawls under the chair, goes around the chair, slides across the chair, as her students call out adverbs for her to demonstrate.*
>
> *I am fairly captivated by this lesson; although I loved grammar and parts of speech when I was in high school, I don't recall ever having it taught to me in such an active way, nor do I remember my teachers openly acknowledging moments of confusion. The vulnerability that Ms. Belle demonstrates seems to spark a reciprocal sense within her students, and they are less shy about offering answers for the remainder of the lesson.*

In this context, student subjectivity is constructed in a way that is similar to teacher subjectivity on many levels that are significant to the students. While the teachers definitely hold formal power at City High School, students' subjectivity is such that their input is sought and valued in very real ways. Nonetheless, students remain responsible to their teachers in significant and traditional ways. Though City High is ostensibly premised on students' freedom and flexibility with their own time and their learning space, when a teacher tells a student to

get back to work or asks for an account of what the student has been working on, the student has little choice but to respond in kind.

Participating in Pedagogy

Students at City High School, by and large, understand themselves as powerful/empowered subjects capable of asserting agency within their own educations. While I cannot make claims as to the precise reasons for this high degree of responsibility that students take on in this environment, the responsibility manifests itself in students' discourse.

> **Chet:** But you can redo stuff. You're not like I had a C. I'm screwed…You know, you can get whatever you want. And I would say there are very few excuses for getting like, low – super-low grades 'cause it's so much easier at this school. And it's not like – when you get it... like I would say 99 percent of the time, you deserve it. But you can go back, and if you want it, like you can absolutely learn stuff and do better with it. (personal communication, January 31, 2017)

Chet's assessment, that it is incumbent upon the student to do the work to earn a high grade, was echoed by many other students during my field work at City High School. While mainstream high schools traditionally use assessments in a much more final way, City High School is structured so that the student can always go back, learn more, and retake exams or improve their performance in a course. As such, some students also feel that City High School is more challenging than other schools they have attended.

> **Bunny:** Yes. It's [academic success] not something that was just handed to me. Which a lot of people think is what's going to happen at this school, is teachers are just going to tell you what to do, you know? "Here is how you do it, here is what you're going to do." They sit there, and they help you learn like what you're going to do. They teach it to you, instead of just giving up, and getting frustrated. And then once you start to figure that out, you start to, you know, work on it yourself. And it's rewarding doing the work. It's just like, when you get your first job, and you get

> your first big paycheck, and then you got to buy new clothes or something, go to the movies, it's so rewarding because you worked for that money. I worked for this grade. (personal communication, January 31, 2017)

This willingness to take over and begin learning for yourself is a common theme at City High School, but some students simultaneously express gratitude for the flexibility of the teachers. For example, Crystal and Ginger Estep both spoke at length about how the teachers and tutors are willing to employ various methods of assessment instead of only written exams. Ginger takes delight in presenting her learning in PowerPoint form, while Crystal prefers talking through her arguments with teachers.

> *I am once again sitting in Professor McGonagall's classroom, listening to the swirl of conversations going on around me. Crystal enters the room with her characteristic flair for the dramatic, humorously bemoaning an assignment that involves writing an essay on the short story,* The Necklace. *Clearly familiar with this particular scenario, Batmah Coehlo sits down with Crystal and asks her to tell him her analysis of the story. Crystal promptly launches into the first part of the assignment, a feminist analysis of the story. She critiques the story's reliance upon the trope of women's value being defined primarily by their appearance, expressing her dissatisfaction with the idea that "women's purpose is to exist for the viewing pleasure of men." They move into the second part of the assignment, providing a psychoanalytic response to the same short story. Through a conversation with Batman Coehlo, Crystal has fulfilled the requirements of the assignment: to demonstrate the ability to perform feminist and psychoanalytic responses to the literature. (field notes, December 9, 2016)*

Crystal is hardly alone in this assumption of ownership and active participation in shaping the pedagogies of City High School. Chet discusses a similar experience:

> **Chet:** I've done the assessments, and I'll – instead of just letting the teacher grade it, I'll go watch them and grade it with them so I can explain myself. And then, I've actually fixed a lot of wrong answers because I've explained myself. It's a valid answer if I do the explanation. Because I've noticed here and everywhere else, there are a lot of repeating questions. And you can...
> **Interviewer:** And they could be answered more than one way.
> **Chet:** They can be answered more than one way. So if you look like,

> there's not a set way of thinking of things…Well, maybe you know the term a different way. (personal communication, January 31, 2017)

Rather than ceding power to the teacher, Chet's participation in the grading process for his own work demonstrates a high level of engagement and a desire to have in-depth discussions with teachers about his reasoning and choices. Even when the reasoning itself is not correct, Chet's sense of responsibility for his academic success leads him to learn from his mistakes by discussing them with his teachers.

Throughout these patterns through which students negotiate their subjectivity and assert agency, there is a common thread: the students' experiences of time. The freedom to manage one's own day, the immediacy of sitting face to face with a teacher, being recognized as competent rather than incapable during one's teenage years – these are all experiences of time. Though this is an infrequently studied aspect of discourse, Lesko

> suggest[s] that a dominant aspect of the discourse on adolescence is its location within panoptical time, within a time framework that compels us – scholars, educators, parents, and teenagers – to attend to progress, precocity, arrest, or decline. Adolescence both makes and marks time." (Lesko, 2001, p. 113)

The remainder of this chapter delves into the concept of time as a material phenomenon, not because of a desire to attend to arbitrary timelines of how students "should" experience time, but precisely because it surfaced so frequently in the students' own rhetoric.

Registers of Time

I have been struggling constantly with how time fits into this dissertation. From the beginning, from my first inklings of this project, I suspected that it was

really about the way that students' relationships with time are reflected in their discourse as they begin to structure their own lives, in other words, how their relationships with time changes as they increasingly exercise agency. Through many conversations with my advisor and committee members, through book after book and article after article, I sought to understand how this fits in. I began to despair. If I could not articulate the fluid and complex ways that time is important to my project, what could my theoretical contribution to my chosen field be?

My initial hunch that time played a critical role in students' rhetorical subjectivity and agency was borne out by my fieldwork. Over a total of 6 months spent at the research site, observing, participating, and talking with the members of the school community, time, along with personally connecting with teachers, was the concept that came up most frequently. As I analyzed the ways that students negotiate subjectivity and agency at City High School, it became evident to me that time was critical to students' rhetoric somehow. It became even more frustrating that I still struggled to articulate *why* this mattered, and understand why it was coming up so often in conversations with students, teachers, and tutors.

In a late-night writing session, after going back to my field notes and recordings for what felt like the hundredth time seeking some new insight, it occurred to me that *perhaps it is not time in and of itself that is significant, but rather the way that time is rhetorically marked and indexed to subjectivity and agency in different discourses – in other words, the rhetorical force of different registers of time.* So I reframed my question: How is time rhetorically marked in the discourses of

students at City High School, and why does that matter? Time is marked intersectionally: time and subjectivity, time and agency, time and movement of bodies through places, time and educational achievement, time as a resource, time as a double-edged sword, time as an economic metaphor, and time as a measurement. More than anything else, what I learned in my fieldwork came down to the way that time is articulated: to beliefs and values, to actions, and to understandings of subjectivity and agency. This section offers a framework for understanding rhetorics of time on different scales or registers, from the small and seemingly mundane patterns of time implicit in speech, to the broad, sweeping strokes of time as is articulated to the human lifespan.

I also realized that this study would have been completely impossible to do in a mainstream high school where time is valued and structured differently. Having the opportunity to complete fieldwork in a school with intentionally minimal formal structure forced me to seriously reckon with what it meant to be in a high school at all. The conversations, the inside jokes, the flashes of inspiration and the daily work of education – the inflexible way that time is structured inside a traditional high school would likely have prohibited me from seeing the type and volume of interaction that I was privileged to observe at City High School.[20] In mainstream educational institutions, time is usually articulated as a constant value: credit hours, seat time, the number of hours, weeks, months, and years spent receiving knowledge that added up to a predictable and accreditable sum of accomplishments. At City High School, time is articulated as

[20] As you will read in this chapter, I was able to observe many interactions between students, and between students and the adults in the school, that would not have occurred in a mainstream high school where students are held to a predetermined bell schedule and teachers do not have the time to interact in depth with students at times that are convenient for the students.

a variable value, and it is always articulated jointly with subjectivity. It is not the number of hours you spend sitting in a given course that marks your qualification, but rather the quality and depth of your engagement with the subject matter that occurs when you are ready for it, and with a duration of your choosing. Time and subjectivity are linked even more closely than I had initially realized. In this environment, time and subjectivity are not in a fully parsable relationship to each other so much as they are integrally entangled, almost at a subatomic level, with one another. Much like Butler calls upon us to recognize the primary opacity of our own subjectivity, I contend that we must also acknowledge the impossibility of seeing the foundational origins of our own time. It is impossible to fully understand how subjectivity and agency function at City High School without also accounting for the unusual axiologies of time that are at play.

Subjectivity, Agency, and the Temporal Turn

Though the concept of time as it relates to education and child development is a topic of considerable scholarly discussion (Applegarth, 2017; Erikson, 1968; Lesko, 2001; Piaget, 1970), it has not been fully considered in theorizing rhetorical subjectivity and agency. Yet, time has long been the basis of several underlying assumptions about subjectivity and agency. As Applegarth (2017) notes, "…posing the question of agency in relation to this case [the Children's Peace Statue hearings in Los Alamos] – to what extent were these children *really* agents? – highlights the recalcitrance of our collective ideas about what constitutes agency" (pp. 53-54). Time intersects with subjectivity in several

interesting ways that both challenge the idea of "becoming" and extend theorizing to consider other ways of being that open the door to additional possibilities for exercising agency.

Time begins, of course, as an abstract concept, usually referred to as highly immaterial and ephemeral. However, as our various subjectifications are profoundly shaped by different cultural acceptances of and enforcements of time, time is transformed from an immaterial concept into a material force. For the purposes of this dissertation, when I talk about "time," I am referring to time as a material, rhetorical force that structures the movement of our daily lives by the way that it is widely accepted and normalized through discourse. Although Einstein famously proved in 1915 that time is not a universal constant, time has nonetheless been treated as a *social* constant in the way it structures our assumptions about speaking and acting rhetors (Einstein, 2015). From the idea that there are kairotic moments for rhetorical action in sequential time, to the understanding that with age comes rationality and therefore, the acknowledgement as an agentic, speaking subject, time is heavily influential in the discipline of rhetoric.

If subjectivity is "…the effect of material practices, of discourses, rather than a prior unity….constructed along with objective knowledges," then time is one of the material conditions that structures the production of this subjectivity (Lesko, 2001, p. 17). Time needs to be accounted for in rhetorical theorization just as much as the embodiment and constitution of selfhood through relationships to others (Butler, 2005). Failing to account for time leaves out an entire dimension of subjectivity, and forecloses an entire discursive realm from which agency might

be exercised, reconfigured, or reclaimed. The stakes are high: as Lesko says,

> in order to examine childhood and youth critically, we need to extricate them from the discourses of growing up, to *represent* children and youth; that is, to consider empirically and theoretically the temporal dimension of childhood. We need to be able to consider children and youth separate from the narratives of growing up and biologically based developmental schemas. In order to make youth differently visible, we need to disrupt the normative narrative of youth with its dominant time/event relation" (Lesko, 2001, p. 139).

This chapter is an attempt to partially answer Lesko's call to represent children and youth as primarily human, rather than as primarily almost-human. One of the advantages to theorizing a temporal turn in rhetorical subjectivity and agency is an additional perspective in attending to power relationships, the material conditions of existence, context, and text.

Nancy Lesko's provocative book, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (2001), examines time's relationship with youth at length. She

> …explore[s] the rise of uniform world clock time at the turn of the twentieth century as the dominant definer of human lives and the measure of success and failure. A certain temporal order simultaneously grounded new sciences as well as new institutions such as schools. People began to think about the past and the future, about learning, and about criminals, to name only three areas, through a one-directional, linear, cumulative lens of "development in time." I introduce the term *panoptical time* to indicate how adolescence was understood as a chunk of time that could be displayed and manipulated in various contexts. Panoptical time emphasizes the endings toward which youth are to progress and places individual adolescents into a temporal narrative that demands a moratorium of responsibility yet expects them at the same time to act as if each moment of the present is consequential. (Lesko, 2001, p. 107)

This change in cultural understandings of time is significant, because it has altered the way that time is marked rhetorically, and how it acts as a material force in the process of subject formation. One such notable issue is that:

> Youth were defined as always "becoming," a situation that provoked endless watching, monitoring, and evaluating. As time was made and marked in public, standardized ways, the modern, scientific adolescent

> became a multifaceted social site for talk about the productive use of time, the glorious future, and sometimes the inglorious past. Slow, careful, development-in-time was identified as the safest path. (Lesko, 2001, p. 111)

This standardization of childhood has had widespread ramifications for youth with various degrees of severity – from standardized testing movements (and organized resistance to standardized testing) to the widespread criminalization of children of color, these assumptions tend to be fairly troubling. Even the phrase "let kids be kids" neglects and obscures the fact that for many children, childhood is not an idyllic, pastoral time – many children suffer abuse at the hands of their adult caretakers, and are often not believed by adults when they tell the truth of their abuse. I trace this disbelief in students' rhetorical agency back to a fundamental refusal to acknowledge children's subjectivity as fully human.

I contend that critical rhetoricians can do something in order to disrupt the pernicious influences of such reasoning on the material existence of youth, and that at least part of what we need is a temporal turn. By examining the underlying temporal assumptions of subjectivity and agency, we can better understand the power dynamics at play, and deliberately intervene. Let us not

> …accept clock time and its demand for homogenous, public, irreversible, and fragmented time. Such a view of time supported the belief that youth in public and private schools should be learning and behaving on identical timetables; this view of time helped establish slow children as hopelessly other. (Lesko, 2001, p. 122)

Instead, let us perform close readings of time as it circulates through and constructs discourses, turning critical rhetoric, as always towards emancipatory ends for those who have been historically marginalized.

I propose a scalable rhetoric of time: a theoretical framework which

critical rhetoricians can use to engage with the material force of time in rhetorical ways. I outline three rhetorical registers of time to help focus our lens: the time we take to speak, the time we need to learn, and the time we have to grow. *The time we take to speak* is a microregister, engaging with language itself as pacing, as a form of time that is so mundane as almost to escape our notice. *The time we need to learn* questions the urge to compress all activities into as short a temporal duration as possible, and asks what is gained and lost through different ways of understanding learning as work, and work as time. *The time we have to grow* delves into understandings of the human lifespan and the 'proper' speed at which various life stages ought to be completed or begun.

The Time We Take to Speak: Language as Time

The time we take to speak is the smallest register of time that I discuss in this dissertation. This section analyzes the operation of time as articulated through the lens of language as time. This analysis is made possible by the use of participatory critical rhetoric as my methodology – being *in situ* and immersed in live rhetorics allowed me to soak in the paces of language in the research site.

Students talking to each other speak quite quickly, and usually speed up when they are expressing intensity of emotions: happiness, excitement, frustration, anger. During the course of my research, I interviewed 17 students, and those interviews were subsequently transcribed. This gives me a unique opportunity to both listen to an interview, and simultaneously notice repetitions and verbal idiosyncrasies visually through the transcribed text. For example, the filler word "like" is far more visible in the text than I noticed it during

conversation with students. For example, in one interview lasting 1 hour and 7 minutes, the filler word "like" was used 545 times. In this excerpt from that interview, I have bolded the times that "like" was used as a filler word.

> **Ducky:** Just **like**, I don't know what it is, but **like** I seem to always have problems with **like** ********, she just needs to **like**, stay in her lane. **Like** she just needs to **like** stay in her lane and calm down and let people do what they are doing. (personal communication, December 14, 2016)

In this excerpt, which is fairly representative of many other conversations I had with students at City High School, Ducky is using "like" to allow him to speak at a rapid pace but also buy him a little bit of time to think. The concentration of filler words intensifies when Ducky is expressing socially risky opinions, such as openly criticizing one of the adults in the school.

Conversely, in situations where students are sure of what they are saying, that the content of their expression will be positively accepted, they tend to speak with fewer fillers and more certainty. When asked why he had decided to leave the mainstream high school he attended for a few months and return to City High School, Shmoobers did not even hesitate in launching into his rationale.

> Oh, my gosh, they [adults at mainstream high schools] treat you like kids. That was the main thing that really bugged me. They literally treat you like you're way below them, you don't matter to them. And the teachers don't care, they just want you in and out. They don't like you. **Like**, half the teachers -- **like**, I probably had one teacher that I actually enjoyed, that actually, **like**, was fun and cared and made it fun to learn. And that was my science teacher. But I think those were the biggest thing. But it's hard to transition -- I was noticing it's gonna be hard to transition for those kids that were in high school because they had to have such a structured life. And it's all just set out for them period by period. Whether -- then in college they're thrown into an environment where they have to be on time to class, doing their homework, and they don't have their -- not as much parent's enforcement to do their work and stuff like that. And it's just very, very challenging. Whereas there's this school, you get your credits, you have to actually work for it, and, too, the teachers actually care. **Like**, they're there for you, but they're not gonna do your work. They're there for the support that you need while in high school. And it's a good

> transition between it, because you can go take college classes and try them out, but you don't have to take, like, four a semester and it just throws you in like that. But with this you can kind of introduce yourself into it, which is nice. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

He spoke firmly and confidently – after all, the entire population of City High School, from students to administration, chooses to be there because they prefer it to mainstream high schools. Shmoobers' confidence in his perspective is reflected through the rhetorical register of language as time. In fact, the sentence containing the most filler words is the one where he is trying to describe the single positive experience he had with a teacher in mainstream high school: "**Like**, half the teachers -- **like**, I probably had one teacher that I actually enjoyed, that actually, **like**, was fun and cared and made it fun to learn" (personal communication, January 27, 2017). He starts this sentence off by almost making a negative generalization about half the teachers at the mainstream high school, then backtracks slightly, focusing instead on the one teacher about whom he has positive things to say.

Another rhetoric of time that is apparent in the granularity of language itself is highlighted in the next quote, where Kitty is talking about confronting her struggle with dyslexia at City High School.

> **Kitty:** So finally I was like mom, I don't want this anymore. Like, they tried to put me in a reading class here and I was like no, *I'm not doing that because I've done it, like, my whole life, forever*. Like, I've always been in a reading class. And I was like it doesn't help.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah.
> **Kitty:** Because, like, you can't really fix dyslexia. Like, yeah, you can, like, try to, like, cope with it. (*emphasis mine,* personal communication, December 14, 2017)

When I first read that "forever" in the transcript, I was tempted to roll my eyes at the "forever"; at first blush, it sounds overly dramatic and exaggerated.

Although the "forever" is not really forever in the context of my life, it *is*, in a very material way, forever for Kitty. Assuming that she does not have a great deal of memories from her very early childhood, it is completely reasonable for her to say "forever" and to not be exaggerating. From her perspective, most of her remembered life has been spent in formal institutions of learning, where she has been labeled deficient, shunted aside, and felt stigmatized by the institution's reaction to her neurodiversity. When Kitty says, "I've done it, like, my whole life, forever," it reveals another important insight about the way time acts as a material force on subjectivity. Kitty's frame of reference, her subject position as a student, is based on the fact that her time on the planet is only about 16 years. Her "forever" is very different from the "forever" of an octogenarian, but that does not make it any less valid. A critical rhetorical analysis of time and subjectivity here acts as a reminder and a call to ethical action: we do not have the right to dismiss another person's subjectivity because it has lasted a shorter duration than ours, or some other arbitrary standard.

Moreover, an analysis through this rhetorical register of time serves to highlight the point that student time and adult time are often experientially and materially different from one another. Not only do students experience time through a different frame of reference, but the language that they use to talk about time, as with Kitty's example above, varies accordingly. Curly, who is a senior and about to graduate, illustrates this tension as he navigates the line between student-time and adult-time as someone who is still in high school, yet is also on the cusp of adulthood.

> **Curly:** And time too. Like I don't know, like kids like my age kind of have this mentality that they have a lot of time. But…what I wanted to be

> doing by the time I'm at this age, it's still something that I want to be doing. Now it's gonna be 21 or like the time's just kind of like running out before you know it.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah.
> **Curly:** And just like kind of take advantage of it. Like getting through college quicker would be another way to do it. But it also depends on who you are. Like I don't really see like the point in trying to like race through time if you just don't really have like a set goal for two to five years, ten years down the line.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah. For sure. So what's your plan? What do you want to do when you're 21?
> **Curly:** By the time I'm 21 hopefully I'm making enough residual income in my business that I can focus majority on school and…making a lot of music. And smoking. (Smiles) I honestly just want my business just to like run me enough money. Also there's like two ways that I kind of want to go through. Just kind of like, retire from my business at a young age, and I can just kind of live off the money that I'm having, and snowboard and skateboard throughout the whole year. And that's my life till my body can't handle it anymore.
> **Interviewer:** (Laughs) That would be pretty cool.
> **Curly:** Or, if I have the knowledge to like create my business into a way where I can retire at a young age, then I'd want to do that with other businesses. But I also want to buy a house like sometime in the near future and just get into real estate too. So that's like -- so I kind of have like this five year -- like a five-year goal, but real estate's more of like a 10- to 20-year goal. So like when I have like kids and a family, like I don't have to worry about that too much. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

Curly draws a distinction between himself and his peers by his choice of language, using the phrase "most kids my age" to describe people who feel like they have a lot of time to accomplish their goals. Curly, on the other hand, describes a sense of urgency for himself in accomplishing his goals. He expresses some regret about certain benchmarks he hoped he'd have achieved by the time he was 18, and had already had to push those benchmarks back until he's 21, saying "time's just kind of like running out before you know it." While adults tend to tell students that they are young and therefore have 'plenty of time for all that,' Curly clearly articulates this sense of urgency and a strongly developed sense of his goals for the next few years and is not interested in putting off those

goals just because of his youth.

Though Curly characterizes himself as unusual in his desire to accomplish his goals immediately, he is certainly not the only one who expresses this sort of urgency. In an interview with Bunny, she talks about a particular assignment and an argument with a teacher about when the assignment is to be handed in.

> **Bunny:** Yeah, he [the teacher] has his sassy pants on all the time. That's what I like to call him.
> **Interviewer:** That's funny. So when you were talking about like the deadline the other day that you were annoyed about, like how did you end up getting that resolved?
> **Bunny:** Well, I went and talked to him. I was like, listen here, buddy. But I was like, "Churchill, I'm already stressed out enough, why do I have to wait?" And he's like, "Because it will give you time to think about it again, and make it better." He was like, "Now, where you had a week to do it, now you have two months to finish it." You know? And when he was giving me crap about not going to this financial class I just went to him and I was like, remember I talked to you. I have a college class in between that. So I can't come. And he was like, "Oh, I remember now, I'm sorry. Just make sure you get your schoolwork done," you know?
> **Interviewer:** Yeah.
> **Bunny:** And he was opening, and welcome about it. He was being nice. He was like, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I forgot. I understand." I was like, I don't need to be coming in and you giving me sass, Mister. And he was like, okay.
> **Interviewer:** Oh, that's funny. So what was the thing, so you wanted to turn something in like in a week, but he wanted you to wait longer?
> **Bunny:** So I turned in my essay for government. And he was like, our last essay that I forgot to put in MLA format. So I got a bad grade. So then I was like why do I have to wait to do it when you start the class up again. "Because, you have to wait." "Like why do I have to wait? It's just putting something in MLA format, that's going to take two seconds." But then he was like, "Well you can go back and reread your paper, and you can work on it. You have time to do it. Instead of feeling rushed." And I was like, okay, that makes more sense.
> **Interviewer:** So once he explained himself, like his reasoning, then you were like, all right.
> **Bunny:** Yeah, I was definitely mad. I was like, I don't want to wait. Why can't I just do it now?! And now it makes more sense.

This recollected interaction between Bunny and her teacher succinctly encapsulates some of the differences between typical adult time and typical

youth time. While Bunny expresses a desire to turn the essay in immediately (after taking "two seconds" to put it in MLA format), her teacher asks her to take additional time on the revisions and pay attention to more substantive ways that the paper could be improved before turning it in. Bunny's temporal frame of reference reflects the immediacy and urgency of someone who wants to get something finished so she can get on to the next thing. The conversation with her teacher can be read almost as a rhetorical education, encouraging Bunny to reflect on the real goals of revision, and coaching her to spend adequate time improving the substance of her claims rather than just quickly editing for MLA format. Rather than dismissing her desire to be finished with the assignment, Churchill takes the time to explain his reasoning to her, and they come to an agreement based upon their common goal of Bunny completing and receiving a good grade for her essay.

Examining the rhetorical register of language as time helps to clarify and illuminate the ways that students' and adults' conceptions and experiences of time are materially different, and allows us a window into the tensions between those two perspectives. Though it may be tempting to bemoan the frequency and prevalence of filler words such as "like" in the everyday speech of youth, attending to this as a rhetorical phenomenon gives us an alternate view. And while adults often dismiss students' language choices such as "forever" or "two seconds" as simple hyperbole, the register of language as time asks us to consider their subjectivity and their rhetorical agency in a different, more meaningful light.

The Time We Need to Think: Learning as Work/Work as Time

Having been a student/participant in formal education myself for 24 years, the last 11 of which have been voluntary, I am familiar with a paradox of time that occurs sometime in the last few weeks of a semester or quarter (or for that matter, the last few weeks of writing a dissertation). It is a strange situation in which time is rushing by and also moving draggingly slow, wherein you cannot wait for the semester to end, but also are not ready for it to end because that means you have a LOT of papers to write and finals to study for. Of course, I cannot speak for everyone, but I suspect that this phenomenon occurs for a good many students. This paradox, for me, serves to emphasize learning-as-work. In other words, there is a great deal of labor expended on the business of learning, by a good many people. This section discusses the rhetorical register of time that deals with learning as work/work as time.

What does it mean to say that learning is rhetorically articulated as work in terms of time, and what do we gain by attending to this rhetorical register of time? Students at City High School are encouraged, in many different ways, to take their work seriously – that is, to treat their education as they would treat the responsibilities of a job. Admittedly, if school at City High School is a job, it is a very flexible and highly individualized one. This is evidenced by the way that students lay claim to their right to own their time. Standard school days, marked by bells sounded through loudspeakers or in hallways, with strict tardy policies, and start times that are not ideal for high school students' sleep needs make it clear that time does not belong to the students in the sense that they choose it or have any voice in the way it is divided or used. Students, such as Cory,

expressed a sadness for the way that this model of learning made them feel:

> Yeah. And somewhere along the line, students lose their love for learning. Students stop wanting to try new things, and I think it's because they get discouraged by... just the education process. It wears you down. The mountains of homework, the teachers who are so strict and so unmoving in the way they teach, it wears you down. And unless you find a teacher who's perfect for your learning type, then you're not gonna learn anything, and you're not gonna enjoy it. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

In contrast, City High School organizational structure centralizes the student in a way that gives them ownership of their time. It is integral to the very values and beliefs of the school, and encoded in their mission of helping students to "Choose your time, choose your path, choose your pace, choose your place." Cory went on to say:

> And this school, it makes learning accessible in a way that's like, kindergarten again. It's like it allows the students to appreciate what they're doing, and it allows the students to find something they're passionate about and maybe spend a little bit more time on that and really absorb that knowledge. And then, if there's something that they need for graduation, and they need that knowledge, but maybe they don't wanna use it in the future, they can zip through that and move on with their life. And I think that's really, really great is it gives students an opportunity to learn what they need to learn to make their lives fuller, rather than what the textbook says that they're supposed to need. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

If learning is work and work is time, then City High School rhetorical register is an entrepreneurial one. Cory identifies her satisfaction with the way that she can take more time to learn the things that she is passionate about, and then "zip through" the sections of the curriculum that do not interest her.

> *I am leaning back in a chair in the corner of Professor McGonagall's classroom, and Cory is holding court, gesturing emphatically and half-shouting her frustrations with the textbook monopoly currently enjoyed by the Texas School Board. She speaks eloquently of the AIDS crisis, Stonewall, and how a Human Rights class should be required curriculum in high schools. She connects the systematic oppression of the LGBT community to a patriarchal white supremacist narrative of U.S. history, and ties the whole thing back to Western State's*

> *current, appallingly high rate of teen suicides. I jot down in my field notes, "INTERVIEW CORY!!!" I am impressed, not just by the clarity of her argument, but by the fact that she obviously cares about this topic – enough to do research far above and beyond the basic requirements of Language Arts 12 essay assignment.*

This orientation to time is much more like that of a salaried employee in the knowledge economy than is generally found in mainstream high schools. Of course the freedom to schedule one's own time can also be a drawback: One runs the risk of becoming too acclimated to a lax pace, and failing to accomplish the necessary goals on time.

> *I am sitting in The Bionic Woman's classroom towards the end of the school day. Most students have already left, but there are several students still working around the room. I am talking to James, an energetic 9th grade student who doesn't walk so much as bounces through City High School. He speaks with conviction and excitement, particularly when he is talking about his extracurricular research projects (sociology, the sciences, and film noir).*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *So what made you think like, when you came to the open house, what made you think like, "Oh, this is where I wanna be?"*
> ***James:*** *Well, it seemed – you would go to a – an open house for like when I first went to the one for Greenacres High School. It seemed more... how – I don't know how to say… bureaucratic?*
> ***Interviewer:*** *(Chuckles)*
> ***James:*** *How as this school, it just – it seems all over the place, kind of unorganized. But that's what I'm like. I'm exactly that type of person. You don't – it's not really that organized, but I think – and I think that's why I like it.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *Yeah, so kind of the ability to make your own structure, rather than having a structure that you just have to deal with.*
> ***James:*** *It's like being – yeah, that sounds about right. Being able to be the architect of your own destiny... or your own education. Yeah.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *Nice. (Chuckles) So what makes you feel like you're able to do that here? Like, what are those specific things that let you be your own architect?*
> ***James:*** *Well, for one, I do not notice – I notice that so... people can become their own – how – sorry. I'm trying to word my question. So there are so many different ways people learn here. Like I hit pedal to the metal, work, work, work. Then take a really good – like and then take some pretty good breaks. But I don't know. I like to work, work, work. But then there are people who like to go – they like to go traveling at the pace they normally would be, but they have a lot more free time on their hands. And they're still learning the same thing.* (personal communication, February 16, 2017)

As James observes, the freedom to be the "architect of your own education" is

indeed a thrilling prospect. However, he identifies several ways that the freedom to schedule one's work can be a drawback. Even within his own work patterns, he remarks upon cycles of intense work followed by periods of "pretty good breaks," which has allowed him to get "ahead," in the parlance of City High School. He does note that not all of his classmates share his enthusiasm for the working periods, choosing instead to schedule their days with a more leisurely pace, "And they're still learning the same thing." It is this assumption that I would like to trouble a bit.

The impulse to cram as much work (read: learning) as possible into as short a duration of time as possible is rooted in a very utilitarian perspective of learning and the nature of knowledge, and exploits deeply internalized cultural norms of productivity and virtue. This model assumes that knowledge is already available, that the student's job is to consume it as quickly as possible, then be able to pass quizzes and tests on that knowledge, reconfigure it, draw conclusions about its relation to other bits of knowledge that exist in the world, and articulate those ideas. However, as Batman Coehlo, one of the tutors at City High School, notes:

> **Batman Coehlo**: Last year, we had three students who did two years of Language Arts in two weeks.
> **Interviewer**: Yikes.
> **Batman Coehlo**: So no one can tell me that they *learned* two years of English literature in two weeks. They have calculated, "What do I need to do to pass?" And our administration does concern enough with numbers that they allowed it to happen. And there are teachers who care so much for the students that they want them to succeed, so they're willing to let them cut corners on their education so they can be successful. And our school's not allowed to give F's. Like, no grade is allowed to be submitted if it's a failing grade. But then the students never learn what it's like to fail in high school where it's safe. (January 31, 2017, personal communication)

Batman Coehlo touches upon exactly the question: How much time does it take

to learn? The answer, of course, depends on what your understanding of what "learning" is, and a rather fascinating slippage between learning and completion. The rhetoric of time in this register reveals that the time it takes to learn is a contested issue at City High School, a seemingly liberating practice (students scheduling their own time) that assumes the work of learning can and should be done on a variety of scales. In this register, time is articulated to the completion of work, and success is predicated upon completing that work in as short a time as possible. I am, quite frankly, very torn about this. Recalling my own high school days, I would have loved to be able to "get it over with" when it came to classes like calculus; however, I would have also loved to spend longer in all of my Language Arts and AP History classes. I honestly believe that the way City High School gives students ownership of their own time is a better way of educating, a better way of acknowledging students as fully human subjects, capable of exercising their own agency. However, I also agree with Batman Coehlo's assessment (which was echoed in various forms by several other teachers), that you cannot adequately learn 2 years' worth of Language Arts in 2 weeks. However, it is certainly possible to exploit the underlying principles of the system and complete 2 years' worth of assignments in 2 (probably very unpleasant) weeks.

That said, I must reflect upon my own biases. Were I given a chance to plow through 2 years' worth of math classes in 2 weeks and free up my time to take every Language Arts class that was offered, my high school self would have jumped at the chance. Perhaps my inclination to say that deep learning demands time is simply rooted in my adoration of the written word and the shock of

realizing that some students dislike the subject. My goal in this chapter is not to settle upon a 'right' answer, but rather to provoke a dialogue between adult conceptions of time and youth conceptions of time by examining points of tension. One such point of tension, as brought up by Batman Coehlo, is the idea of appropriate time needed to learn, and within what boundaries energy must be expended to count towards that total. The time we need to learn is certainly not bounded by the confines of formal curriculum and specific assignments. Often, the work of learning is the work of planting oneself and engaging, struggling, questioning, being frustrated by and inspired by the material one is attempting to know – and that can be performed in many different ways.

> *Elbows propped on a table, I am leaning forward intently and watching an animated debate occur between two students. A small audience has gathered; Ginger Estep is acting as a moderator, and Anne Shirley is the tutor advising the debaters, Cory and Lily. The topic? Was Severus Snape, villain-turned-hero of the Harry Potter series, a good guy or a bad guy? Each side is allotted the same amount of time to muster arguments – each side has access to the complete Harry Potter series from the bookcase in Professor McGonagall's classroom. The debate begins with both sides placing their right hands on Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince and pledging to keep the debate civil and volume to a reasonable level, "…so help me Dumbledore."*
>
> *The debate takes at least an hour and cover the merits of nature vs. nurture, whether good deeds can make up for bad deeds, whether you can tell what a person IS based on their actions, the effects of childhood trauma, where the line is between an excuse and an explanation, Severus Snape's level of attractiveness, the cultural practices of British boarding schools, what it means to truly love another person, and whether or not the Dark Mark was "cool."*
>
> *Though it may seem trivial, both the debaters and the audience members were demonstrating a great depth of thought and knowledge about the subject at hand. All parties involved had clearly read the Harry Potter series closely a number of times – and as both a rhetorician and a Harry Potter fan myself, I cannot help but appreciate a well-considered close reading. The debaters were performing literary analysis by connecting their close readings to literary theories as well as political and ethical topics. Moreover, they were engaging in a rather spectacular and moving display of public speaking – demonstrating ethos, pathos, and logos that would have made Aristotle proud (except for the fact that both debaters were female). They were also practicing civic engagement, negotiation, and conflict*

> *resolution principles. Although the debate was heated, both parties and the moderator all used tactics such as saying, "I think what you are saying is X. Is that correct?", showing respect for their opponent by observing conversational turn-taking conventions, and affirming one another's right to their interpretation even as they vehemently disagreed with that interpretation. I found myself wishing that Congress could watch this debate and take a few lessons.*

Although this example would probably be categorized as "getting behind" because the students were not actually working on assignments, and yet they were undoubtedly learning, as was the audience (who occasionally jumped in with support for one side or the other) and the moderator, who was more fair-minded and unbiased than I could pretend to be about the debate. So what can an analysis based in this rhetorical register of time tell us about students' subjectivity? Two things, I think: one, that it is just as foolish to designate "iGo time"[21] as learning time as it is to designate "seat time" as learning time; and two, that when students are permitted flexibility with their own time, they will rise to a high bar, sometimes without even realizing that they are doing it. In other words, respecting students' subjectivity sometimes means recognizing that learning takes place constantly, that we are never *not* learning. As adults with relative privilege and power over youth in educational settings, we must also recognize and respect their capacities for deep learning, even when it might look like wasting time.

Although at City High School the timeframes are more flexible and are under students' own control, they are still saturated in the foundational assumptions that undergird mainstream public education: that learning can be measured in units of completeness, and that knowledge can be meted out and accomplished in discrete amounts of time. While mainstream schools set the

[21] iGo is the software system that City High School uses as the platform for its digital curriculum.

same pacing guide for every student, and City High School uses individualized pacing guides for each student, the assumption remains the same: It is a rhetorical scale of time that conflates particular activities with knowledge gained. In other words, the time it takes to learn is rhetorically marked in relation to a "pace" standard, which is the rate at which students should ideally move through completing assignments in order to graduate within the typical 4-year period of high school. Students and teachers both frequently refer to being "ahead" or "behind" on different subjects. Along with this, time can also be measured by what you choose to do with it, such as earning "extra" credits, or earning credits at a pace faster than the standard. This vocabulary is built into the everyday practices of the school's inhabitants and can be seen even in the various documents collected as ephemera through field work (see Figures 5 – 8).

For example, there are several "pacing guides" that mentor teachers often use with their mentees, particularly the ones who are new to City High School and may be tempted to use their freedom to enjoy a complete lack of work. Interestingly, these pacing guides work along the same essential metaphor as a computer program: Work can be broken down into simple chunks of action, which are then completed according to a specified timeframe and in a certain order. The diversity of pacing guides used at City High School belies the fact that they all essentially function in the same way. For example, Figure 1 shows a pacing guide that is based upon Sloth's weekly goals. In their meeting, Sloth and her mentor set four goals to be completed within that week: complete and post "Fit For Life, Term 2," and complete six assignments per day in each of her current classes for math, language arts, and earth science. In contrast, Figure 2

shows a much more detailed, daily pacing guide to give additional structure for students who prefer to work that way. It has space for a daily area of focus, a detailed daily schedule, six homework assignments, six blank lines to list "today's accomplishments," and seven blank lines to list what you will study tomorrow. It also has an inspirational quote from Einstein, and a square for "Notes" at the bottom. Figure 3 is another weekly pacing guide, laid out spreadsheet-style, with only hour-long time intervals preprinted in the grid. Interestingly, especially because there is supposedly no fixed start or end time at City High School, it runs on an 8 am to 2:30 pm school day, with 6 hour-long blocks and a half hour break time in the middle. Finally, Figure 4, which is yet another weekly pacing guide simply has two tables with six columns each. The top table has a column for each weekday, plus one for the weekend. The bottom table is a spot to write down weekly goals for English, Math, Science, History, Other, and Other.

This measure of progress is essentially what students must do to graduate in the typical 4-year timeframe allotted for high school; that has become encoded as "on track," and has become a commonly understood shorthand among students and teachers alike. For example, in an interview with The Bionic Woman, she discussed a couple of her students who were "behind" on earning credits towards graduation, but were able to catch up or surpass the expectation: "…by the end of the year, one of them had 10.5 credits which to be on track to graduate you need six. What you would normally see in high schools, and we call the green is 8. So they both were above and beyond" (personal communication, December 9, 2016). On track is the accepted term, and carries

with it a slight moral connotation of goodness. This is not to say that being behind is coded with badness, but when students and teachers both spoke of being behind, it was with the assumption that an intervention of some sort was pending or needed due to a struggle of some sort – often with family life, mental health, or social issues.

Of course, if there is an "on track" which measures the standard, there is also "ahead" and "behind." Though City High School ostensibly is a school where students can work at their own pace, there are tensions around what that really means in practice. Some students feel that the implicit encouragement from teachers and administrators is to go *faster* than the standard pace, rather than slower. For example, this conversation with Ducky and Kitty demonstrates a perceived disconnect between the advertised flexibility with time, and the actual flexibility with time that students have to complete work.

> **Ducky**: Well, like the thing about me is I put things off until the last minute.
> **Interviewer**: A procrastinator.
> **Ducky**: So like I will get it done. Like, I **will** graduate you guys.
> **Interviewer**: But I will do it at the last minute (*chuckles*)
> **Ducky**: But I will do it at the last minute and you guys -- calm down about it. Like I get it. I'm a little behind in science or whatever. I will get it done if I need to. It just may not be in the same time that you want me to. Which is what you advertised. If I've got some stuff, well like --
> **Kitty**: At this school they were like, "If you do that one class, you can just work on that one class." But then your mentor is like, "No, you have to do all of these classes."
> **Ducky**: Like in 8th grade, when they came to my school to like ask stuff, they were always like, they would advertise, "Yeah, you can work on one class a lot, and even get a little bit behind on the other one as long as you're getting ahead of that one, and you can get back with that by the end of the term." No, they don't do that. They're all like, "You have to be at 29 percent at this point, and if you're not, it's bad. And you need to only work on that class." And it's like you advertise stuff and then you don't follow through.
> **Interviewer**: So do you think -- was it like setting up the wrong expectations?

> **Ducky**: Yeah, I think they set up the wrong expectations and they didn't -- then again, it was like the school was like two years old when I first started. And so -- because this is the fifth year?
> **Interviewer**: Fifth year, yeah, I think so. Is it six?
> **Kitty**: Six.
> **Interviewer**: Six.
> **Ducky**: And so of course they still have issues, but with how innovative and progressive they say they are, they should get these issues done faster. (personal communication, December 14, 2016)

Of course, this conversation is only one part of the tension that is at play, and is not necessarily representative of all students' perceptions. Nonetheless, it does underline the understanding that if learning is work, and work is time, the real goal is to do as much learning (work) in as little time as possible, and move at a more rapid pace.

While I absolutely see the pragmatic value of using pacing guides,[22] and of setting them up as individualized modules for students, they too are steeped in the foundational assumptions of mainstream public education. In fact, City High School is so much a reaction against mainstream high schools that sometimes it is difficult to see the ways that the same sorts of thinking infuse/seep into the structure of the school. It is easy to get caught up in the novelty of students being treated as fully human subjects capable of managing their own time; it can easily obfuscate the underlying rhetorics of learning as work/work as time that subtly structure students' lived experiences at City High School.

Perhaps the most visible realm of this understanding of learning as work/work as time is in the activities completed by students as they go through their curriculum in the blended flex learning classrooms.

I am sitting cross-legged in the hallway, listening to Bear describe the way that he

[22] Such as proving there are some common standards to boards of education in order to obtain funding as a public school, gaining accreditation, and helping students to graduate within the culturally accepted reasonable timeframe of 4 years.

works through assignments in the online curriculum, which is called iGo. The software is designed in such a way that the learner does not have to follow a strict progressive sequence, but rather can interface with the program more flexibly. He starts on a dashboard with a very high-level overview of all the classes he is currently enrolled in. He is demonstrating the way the software works for me, using the example of a biology class he is currently enrolled in. He clicks along on one of the many school-provided Mac laptops, pointing and narrating as he goes.

Bear: *So with the iGo … the left side of your screen is your grades with a letter grade next to it…So you have your letter grades and then you can click on a class. And I don't know why there's two sections for this, I honestly think they could mash it into one. But then the section bellow has all of the classes. It looks a little bit more refined, and below that there's a bar and it's split up into certain amounts. And, you know, depending on how many lessons, quizzes, and tests there are -- I mean, not lessons. It would be quizzes, and tests, and labs, depending on what class it is. So usually, let's say Language Arts never really has labs, so there's quizzes and tests. Quizzes, you usually can see on the bar and you can pick which one it is. If you honestly don't know this part of the quiz in this section, you can do the rest of the other quizzes if you know those. Then go back and work on this later, but you can knock them all out--*
Interviewer: *So it doesn't have to be sequential.*
Bear: *No, you don't have to do it sequential. But you can also see what -- which one, by just the home screen, by what the lesson's on. And then you can just click it and do it. And before that there's a lesson on the quiz. And if -- but you have to either -- you can either click on the little guy on the left, on whatever class. Or there's, like, these little boxes that have each of the classes, but those are kind of useless. I mean, there's basically ten links to go to the same thing. But I mean, however you want to do it. Honestly, I'm either clicking the bars, or I'm going and looking at the lesson and then doing the thing.*
Interviewer: *And doing the quiz.*
Bear: *And the nicest thing is you can take a lesson -- so it's never like there's one big lesson then a bunch of quizzes. It's like lesson, quiz, lesson, quiz. So that lesson's going to be on that quiz specifically. So if you go on there and you're just taking notes and writing down specifics on that lesson, like things that you think will be on the quiz, you can use those notes right after. So honestly, there's not any reason to not know anything on the subject. I mean, unless you -- just you look at math and your brain just explodes, which is what happens to me.*
Interviewer: *That's how I feel about math, too. (Laughs)*
Bear: *Yeah, so that's what ends up happening for me there. But Language Arts, it's like -- the nicest thing is, if there's a short story you have to read, they provide you with the story. It's not like you have to go and find it. So if you don't have, you know, internet you can download it easily.*
Interviewer: *Yeah, so, like, everything's there.*
Bear: *Yeah, every -- yeah, everything's right there. We have, like, a periodic table there for the Chemistry and things like that. So it's--*
Interviewer: *Ah, chemistry. (Laughs)*
Bear: *Yeah. It's really nice, though. And then from there you can message your mentor about stuff that you have questions on. There's -- you can just always see*

> *progress. And the bar fills up green while you move along. So one the bar's completely filled with green -- sometimes the post pre-assessment aren't on the bar and you need those sometimes, so you have to go and check, and, you know -- so that's important to look for, it's -- I mean, sometimes you have to do a little bit of digging. But you get used to it, for sure. At first I was like, what is this? I didn't really have anybody explain it to me, except for my girlfriend, how to use it. It made me mad. You could probably add that to the flaws. One of the flaws would definitely be that nobody's explained to me how to use iGo. But I learned. (personal communication, December, 9, 2016)*

Bear's description of his process working with the software contains several different ways of understanding learning as work/work as time. He describes each course (such as biology) represented by a bar divided into segments on the screen. The bar starts out blank, and then as the student completes various lessons, labs, quizzes, and assignments that comprise the course, the bar is filled in with green to indicate that the component has been finished. He even says, "you can just always see progress." The work of the course is divided in such a way that it is emphasized as the sum of discrete units of measurement: "…there's a bar and it's split up into certain amounts." Likewise, this format (lesson, quiz, lesson, quiz) leaves Bear with the opinion that:

> So if you go on there [iGo] and you're just taking notes and writing down specifics on that lesson, like things that you think will be on the quiz, you can use those notes right after. So honestly, there's not any reason to not know anything on the subject. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

In this estimation, knowing things on the subject is conflated with the notes taken during the lesson that immediately preceded the quiz, and then used during the quiz. In other words, learning is the work of taking notes, then taking the quiz, and the learning takes only as long as is required for those activities to take place.

Time and space prohibit me from following this line of thinking as far as

perhaps I would like, but this rhetorical register of time could be productively leveraged to answer questions such as: What sort of workers are being produced by individualized educational systems such as the one at City High School? What does student success mean in a nontraditional educational context? And who benefits when student subjectivity is articulated through a rhetorical register of learning as work/work as time?

The Time We Have to Grow: Developmental Time

The final rhetorical register of time that I discuss in this chapter is that of the time we have to grow, or developmental time. Developmental time is the macroregister, and imbues our material existence from prebirth until death. Developmental time is rhetorically marked by tracking physical characteristics and percentages on growth charts, psychosocial behavioral standards, and educational benchmarks. As Lesko (2001) noted, adolescence is…"mapped…by tables and charts of physical regularities, rates of pubertal change, and psychosocial steps. These all function to *rank* individuals according to their placement in time, a process that will facilitate their placement and processing by institutions" (pp. 113-114). Developmental time asks the question, "Are you 'done' enough?" However, developmental time is also riven with contradictions when it comes to high school students' subjectivities, and the students are keenly aware of this fact.

> *I am sitting on the floor at the end of the hallway at City High School, in a little nook between Professor McGonagall's classroom and the west staircase, listening to Crystal's experiences in her education. Weak, watery winter sunlight is streaming through the wall of windows behind us, illuminating but not warming. It's a Friday afternoon, and she just got back from a trip to visit family out of the country, yet she was excited to be back at City High School and to be doing an*

> *interview. (Quite frankly, it was more flattering than I care to admit that a student would get back from an international trip and want to talk to me right away.) She speaks with an endearing, slight lisp, and a lightness in her voice that belies the intensity of her expression and the sincerity in her convictions.*
>
> *Crystal says, "Yeah because when you're a teenager, it gets really annoying because you're like treated like a child but expected to act like an adult, and you're like, well, what do you want me to do here? Because I cannot do both. And here, they're like if you're going to act like a child, you're going somewhere else. You need to be an adult, and I'm like, okay, cool. And I still act like an immature little kid sometimes because that's just my weird personality for some reason, but that's fine because they still trust -- they still trust me enough to get my work done and to know that I'm a trustworthy person, and, you know, and it's just really big for me because I've never had that much dropped on me, per se. Like, you know, like I've never had that much responsibility being thrown at me and being like, "We trust you to do this." And aside from the fact that they trust me to do it, they trust me to graduate on my own - with the help of them - but mainly on my own. It's also a fact that I don't want to let any of these teachers down, you know. Like I joke about dropping out, but if I ever dropped out, I would never forgive myself…" (personal communication, February 22, 2017).*
>
> *As she talks about her responsibility, I can hear the pride in her voice at having her teachers' trust. It is not just a throwaway comment or an empty phrase; knowing that these people, whom she loves, respect and trust her with meaningful responsibilities, is clearly very important to her.*

Crystal's comments reflect an awareness that the way teachers at City High School treat her and the other students is not typical of the way that youth are treated by most adults in other settings. She eloquently names the often-painful in-betweenness that youth feel, being "treated like a child but expected to act like an adult…I cannot do both." This paradoxical nature of developmental time is fractious: students are simultaneously treated as incapable, as not-fully-subject, and yet are expected to exercise agency at the level of an adult whose fully-human subjectivity *is* recognized. Contrary to this typical paradox, Crystal expresses that at City High School, "You need to be an adult…they trust me enough to get my work done…and it's just really big for me because I've never had that much responsibility being thrown at me." The parallels line up:

Regardless of chronological age and the amount of time the student has experienced, students are treated *as fully-human subjects* and are supported and encouraged in exercising agency accordingly, even if that agency is to refuse their acknowledgement as fully-subject.

Interestingly, students at City High School make distinctions between themselves and other students based upon developmental time. This presents itself as age discrimination between different grades of students. Most of this discrimination comes from seniors, and is directed specifically towards freshmen coming into City High School from junior high school. These judgments tend to be based in the implicit assumption that youth = incompetence, and typically revolve around rhetorical distinctions between the "child" world and the "adult" world, drawing a spectrum of maturity between the two. As Ducky (who attended City High School as a 9th-grader himself) puts it,

> Like, a lot of them are immature…I was raised always with adults and I only like -- so I know how the adult world works and I don't like the child world. It's annoying. It takes twice as long to get…like, people like talk behind your back instead of just being all like straightforward like, "You're a bitch." Like thank you! I need to know that; I don't need you to go tell other people to tell me, I want *you* to tell me. (personal communication, December 14, 2016)

These distinctions, while not as obvious to me as an observer, are clearly felt keenly by some groups. This conversation between four students sitting clustered around a table started on the topic of having the flexibility to go to a different classroom to avoid people they dislike, and quickly spiraled into a half-mocking, half-serious discussion of banning freshmen.

> **Ducky:** There are a few that I just won't sit by them. If they sit by me, I will leave. Like if --
> **Interviewer:** You have the flexibility to do it.
> **Ducky:** Like if the freshmen like or those annoying freshmen groups, if

> they go into a room, like not even sit near me, I leave that room. Because I don't wanna handle them. They're just so much work.
> **Sloth:** Yeah, I'm the freaking worst one. (Wryly)
> **Kitty:** What if freshmen couldn't go to this school?
> **Ducky:** We're talking about it should be a 10th to 12th grade school.
> **Kitty:** Yeah, because --
> **Sloth:** I can't stand freshmen.
> **Kitty:** Freshmen don't deserve to go here. (Chuckles)
> **Bear:** You're right, they don't!
> **Ducky:** They might deserve to go to this school. I was so annoying as a freshman.
> **Kitty:** What has changed, Ducky? (Laughter) (personal communication, December 14, 2016)

It is noteworthy that Ducky is the only senior, while Kitty is a junior, Bear is a sophomore, and Sloth is a freshman who spends much of her time with Ducky, Kitty, and Bear. Clearly the age discrimination does not extend to all freshmen, all the time. While some students, like Ducky, cite lack of emotional and interpersonal maturity as the reason for thinking that 9th-graders don't belong at City High School, other students make more nebulous claims. For example, Bear discusses the value of having experiences in multiple types of high schools to contrast with each other in order to make an informed decision:

> I think you just need to know yourself. And I really feel like that nobody should come here their freshman year, I really think freshman don't do well here for the most part…Freshman don't do well here. I don't know what it is. But -- and I'm glad I didn't come here as a freshman. I -- you know, I had a great time at Highland my freshman year. And I think everybody should experience both and then go back if they want. (personal communication, December 9, 2016)

This age discrimination serves to rhetorically mark developmental time by certain standards: in these cases, maturity, the ability to make informed decisions, and interpersonal or social skills.

However, that is not to say that developmental time is always so clear-cut. Although there is a fair bit of age discrimination that occurs, many City High

School students often don't realize what grade others are in, as exemplified by comments from Bunny: "You're a sophomore! I thought you were a junior" (field notes, December 9, 2016). Though Bunny was surprised by her classmate's age/class standing, she also expressed a satisfaction with the way that fluid valuations of developmental time enable social connections throughout the school: "You can be friends with freshman and it's not weird" (personal communication, January 31, 2017).

Sometimes, in fact, students have to consider what their own grade standing is within the unusual rhetorical markers for developmental time at City High School:

> *I am perched on a classroom chair in Miss Llama's room, interviewing Max. She is one of the Student Senate leaders – the same one who nicknamed me Dissertation Girl – and she often has a look in her eyes that resonates with me, reminds me of my own experiences in high school, overcommitting myself so I could avoid spending time at home. Her eyes look as though they have seen more years than the rest of her face. Students swirl around the room, chattering and working and asking questions as Max and I converse.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *Okay. So, you've been here since ninth grade. What grade are you in now?*
> ***Max:*** *11th…(hesitates, an expression of mild concentration on her face)… I believe.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *It's kind of hard to keep track, right?*
> ***Max:*** *Mm-hmm.*
> ***Interviewer:*** *it's very fluid. (chuckles)*
> ***Max:*** *Yes. Right now, I have 39 credits…the summer after freshman year, I started college classes. I was the reason that they now allow sophomores [in college classes].*[23] *(personal communication, December 23, 2016)*

This brief exchange illuminates the intersection of two rhetorical registers of time: developmental time, and learning as work/work as time. By

[23] Utah high school graduation standards only require 24 credits to graduate. By the time Max graduates, she will have enough credits for more than two high school diplomas, and will likely have completed an associate's degree. Typically, high school students must have finished their sophomore year and be starting their junior year to enroll in concurrent enrollment and take college courses.

developmental time standards, Max is an 11th-grade student. But by learning as work/work as time standards, Max is a super-senior, with far more coursework than is required to graduate high school, and enough to be a college freshman. But she chooses to identify herself both by developmental time as a junior AND by her accomplishments in the framework of learning as work/work as time. This is rhetorically significant, because it points to an implicit understanding that a student's subjectivity is shaped and informed by multiple registers of time. Though official discourses may be slow to acknowledge it, students like Max are coming up with unique ways of articulating their subjectivity vis-à-vis time, and are subtly showcasing their agentic involvement in their own educational experiences.

Developmental time is also rhetorically marked by relationships with adults at City High School. In most mainstream educational institutions, developmental time is used to draw boundaries between groups of people and delineate the relationships that are permitted based on the way that developmental time informs subjectivity. In other words, a student whose subjectivity is marked as not-fully-human because of where they stand in developmental time would be treated on a different social plane than adults in the school. However, this use of developmental time is challenged at City High School, where students and teachers form relationships on relatively equal footing. Teachers at City High School are obviously affectionate towards their students, which, having spent so much time in mainstream public education myself, was quite jarring to witness at first.

> *I am in the middle of one of the back rows in an auditorium, feet braced against the row of chairs in front of me, and notebook propped on my knees, scribbling*

> *frantically. Frequent school assemblies, rather than sports, are the primary venue for celebrating and developing school spirt at City High School. All of the teachers have lined up on the stage, printed certificates in hand, and they are taking turns at the microphone. Each teacher invites students up to the stage and recognizes them for a particular achievement or character trait: finishing a class they were struggling with, strong work ethic, professionalism, eagerness to learn, being "ahead" of pace.*
>
> *Miss Llama takes the microphone and recognizes Bunny for having heart. One arm around Bunny's shoulders, Miss Llama talks in general terms about the family struggles that Bunny has worked through over the past couple of years, and says, "I just am so proud of you, and I love you so much." Both have tears in their eyes and they share a hug before Bunny returns to her seat and Miss Llama recognizes another student's accomplishments. I am thrown off; did she really just express affection that openly for a student? In most mainstream schools, teachers are often discouraged for openly loving their students, and certainly from physical contact with their students. But nobody in the audience bats an eye, and the rest of the teachers are smiling – with approval? The program for the assembly keeps on going as though nothing unusual has happened.*

This fundamental and visible affection between teachers and students seems to pave the way for a great deal of the work that happens at City High School. In fact, themes of feeling supported, love, and care were hugely prevalent in both my field notes and interviews with students. Lesko's (2001) analysis of the privileged position of adults interacting with adolescents is particularly telling:

> Although youth themselves are expected to take each moment seriously, we, the adult audience, know that these things are relatively trivial. Since we know the panoptical sequencing, we may watch and comment on adolescence with detachment and humor. Thus the characters in the narrative of adolescence may easily lose their humanity and become stereotypes. (Lesko, 2001, p. 132)

Students, many of whom are used to this type of attitude and this sort of treatment from previous educational environments, are usually pleasantly surprised, proud, or happy to find that their teachers and tutors do not condescend to them, but rather take their concerns, struggles, and triumphs seriously. As Professor McGonagall said in an interview,

> I am more than a teacher, and I love it…I love talking to them, I love

> letting them know that they are important and people care about them, and they have a safe place to…they're going through so much, and their worlds are this big, so everything that happens is enormous. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

This orientation towards students changes the tone of interactions, too; enforcing the rules becomes less about power struggles, and more about teachers helping students to accomplish their goals. For example, the rules governing the use of personal electronics and cell phones are rarely enforced at City High School. However, in this conversation with Benjamin, we glimpse an example of a time when the rules are enforced, and his feelings about having his personal belongings taken away.

> **Interviewer:** So how does that work? Like if you -- if you fall behind, how does that work?
> **Benjamin:** Mentors are on top of their shit. Like they know -- I --
> **Interviewer:** Yeah? Who is your mentor?
> **Benjamin:** McGonagall.
> **Interviewer:** McGonagall?
> **Benjamin:** McGonagall, from what I know, is on top of it. She's calling my mom when I'm not doing things. She takes my phone. She does whatever she needs to do to get me to (inaudible).
> **Interviewer:** That's funny. That's interesting because like I have a hard -- I haven't seen like hardly anyone have their phone taken away and stuff like that.
> **Benjamin:** If it's becoming a distraction --
> **Interviewer:** Then...
> **Benjamin:** Like if you're not -- like if you're so far behind and you're on your phone…she's like, "I'm going to hold onto this for right now, you can have it back at the end of the day." And they only do it because they care about you.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, that's kind of cool. So it doesn't actually bother you though your phone gets taken away.
> **Benjamin:** No. Because I know I'll get it back. I don't really mind it. It's not a big deal. It really doesn't bug me. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

Because of Benjamin's relationship with Professor McGonagall, he acknowledges that her occasional confiscation of his cell phone is done out of an ethic of care. The teachers themselves also commented on how caring relationships form the

foundation of the teaching they are able to do at City High School. One teacher talked about her satisfaction with the way City High School is run, but also acknowledged the systemic issues that usually try to disrupt caring relationships between students and teachers, particularly in terms of professional certification.

> **Professor McGonagall:** Well, and it's really funny. 'Cause like I said, I was doing my admin stuff right now. And I was talking to my mentor about doing the Praxis exam.[24] Because I have to do a Praxis exam at the end of this course. And I was asking, you know, like, "What information do I actually need? And all these chapters that I'm reading. And everything that I'm doing."
>
> And he's like, "Well, you know, it's mostly just common sense stuff. But also, don't think about it too much. *(Laughter)* Answer it like a robot."
>
> And I said, "So, if a question comes up about a kid, I can't think like, 'Oh, what's that kid's situation?'"
>
> He's like, "Exactly. You can't think about it. " and I just thought, "Well, isn't that horrible?" That the administration exam is -- doesn't humanize students? Yeah, I just thought it was really interesting. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

This teacher simultaneously identified that the professional certification standards are dehumanizing to students, and also resisted that subjectification, labelling it "horrible." She expressed her belief in the importance of placing relationships first, saying,

> …maybe there are times when I know more than I should about a student, but you know what, then I'll have a better relationship with them, so I can say, you need to be doing this. They know I'm doing it because I care about them. (personal communication, January 27, 2017)

The mentoring and tutoring systems at City High School give students regular, close interaction with many adults who are outside of their families. The Bionic Woman expressed the relationships between students and teachers almost as a familial one: "I go, 'You just got yourself an extra mom,' and I tell them that right

[24] The Praxis exam is the licensing exam that educators must take for certain subjects.

off the bat. And I tend to be very motherly anyway, so it's like I'm gonna love you to death, and let's get your stuff done" (personal communication, December 9, 2016). In addition to developing closer caring relationships, students' interactions with their mentors are also colored by their ability to make choices. As Snape, one of the teachers, described in an interview,

> So, with their mentor teacher they [students] have a lot of impact over their weekly goals decision making that applies to them directly. Okay, and I'll negotiate with my students, I'm like, this (holds hand up to indicate a bar) is where I want to set it, is that something you can do? Or I'll say, how much do you think you can get done by this date? Or when do you think you can finish this by? And they start to take ownership of those weekly goals. As far as larger decisions our students run all our clubs. Like, I have a Gamers' Guild Club, we call it. And we have five elected officers and they meet every week and they tell me what the plan is. (personal communication, February 17, 2017)

Snape's description of goal-setting with mentor teachers is indicative of how these relatively egalitarian relationships set the stage for students to be acknowledged in their fully human subjectivity, and how students are encouraged and supported as they assert rhetorical agency for their educational experiences. Through these relationships, developmental time articulates to subjectivity in a way that shows a more complex picture than is often ascribed to youth.

This rhetorical register of developmental time can also reveal the flows of power within cultural settings. As I was engaged in my fieldwork at City High School, I had many opportunities to talk with teachers, including scheduling formal interviews for the end of the school day or between classes on breaks. These interviews were held in the teachers' classrooms for convenience's sake, which meant that occasionally a student would come in and want to talk to the teacher. In every single instance, the teacher I was interviewing would pause our

interview in order to speak to the student. This may not sound altogether remarkable at first, but consider: How many times, from early childhood onwards, are we told to be quiet and wait because "adults are talking"? That cultural commonplace, repeated ad nauseum, becomes internalized along with the lesson that adults' time is inherently more valuable and important than children's time. This is yet another way that a critical rhetorical reading of developmental time can be of use. Attending to the way that assumptions about developmental time structures discourse can produce insights not just for studies on childhood, but potentially in areas of healthcare, aging studies, feminist studies, studies of racially minoritized populations, organizational communication, and more. By turning that discourse on its head, the teachers at City High School are implicitly telling their students: *Your time is equally valuable as mine and any other adult's. Your subjectivity, and the rhetorical agency that you are going to exert by choosing to speak, are important, valid, and valued in this space and time.*

The Temporal Turn for Subjectivity: Implications and Conclusions

In this chapter, I have proposed a scalable rhetoric of time which I hope will prove useful to critical rhetoricians as they interrogate the material force of time on subjectivity and agency. This theory comprises three rhetorical registers of time: language as time, learning as work/work as time, and developmental time. In examining subjectivity through the lens of this temporal turn, it becomes evident that time has been a previously unexamined material force that has serious implications in the ways that students' subjectivity and agency are

shaped. Through the language as time register, subjectivity is articulated through the granularities of discourse, allowing us to begin a dialogue between youth and adult conceptions of time and explore the implications of complicating those distinctions in ways that validate, rather than dismiss, the subjectivities of the youth involved. The rhetorical register of learning as work/work as time allows us to examine students' ownership of time, and time's articulation to modes of productivity. Finally, the register of developmental time asks us to consider how the human lifespan is divided, charted, mapped, and graphed in ways that attempt to standardize 'appropriate' subjectivity and agency based on criteria that are not necessarily relevant, and to trouble those divisions and rethink the possibilities for developmental time as a liberatory and affirmative framework rather than a divisive one.

To return to my argument from the beginning of this chapter: I contend that critical rhetoricians must take a temporal turn in rhetorical theory, because there are serious material implications to be understood and demystified based on the ways that time is articulated to and through subjectivity. Time is used as a measuring stick in many ways, and that measuring stick is both created and held by those in power, and used to dismiss or deny the full subjectivity of youth. Rather than questioning the rhetorical dimensions of time itself, the trend up to this point has been to beat students over the head with the measuring stick and berate them for failing to measure up. However, this scalable rhetoric of time asks us to rethink the measuring stick, to complicate our understanding of time, and to acknowledge that time is a material force, given weight by our combined social acceptance of its current rhetorical deployment.

Rather than labeling students as advanced, average, or slow, perhaps a more thorough analysis of learning as work/work as time can clarify how relative speed becomes laden with moral value and challenge the idea that one pace is better than another. Instead of dividing students from one another based on age groups, perhaps a rhetorical examination of developmental time can help us recognize the full complexities of human beings at all stages of life and form the basis for emancipation from age segregation and discrimination. And perhaps attending to the particulars of language as time will permit us to affirm and validate the students' experiences of their own lives as we find ways to acknowledge them in their full subjectivity and humanity rather than dismissing their claims on the basis of adult frames of reference.

The broader implication, of course, is that the axiology of time in our society is such that human life is valued differentially at different points in what we might call the "natural arc" of a full life. During infancy, childhood, and youth, subjects are viewed as ramping up to full potential (and thus full subjectivity), which is achieved during the middle years of life, and then accepted as taking a decline in the later years of one's life. I argue that we, as a society, should resist buying into this temporal differentiation of value of human life, and we owe it to ourselves to closely examine the ethics of such rhetorics. Critical rhetoricians can contribute to this examination by taking seriously the way that time acts as a material force in shaping subjectivity and agency and examining these intersections through the various rhetorical registers of time proposed in this chapter.

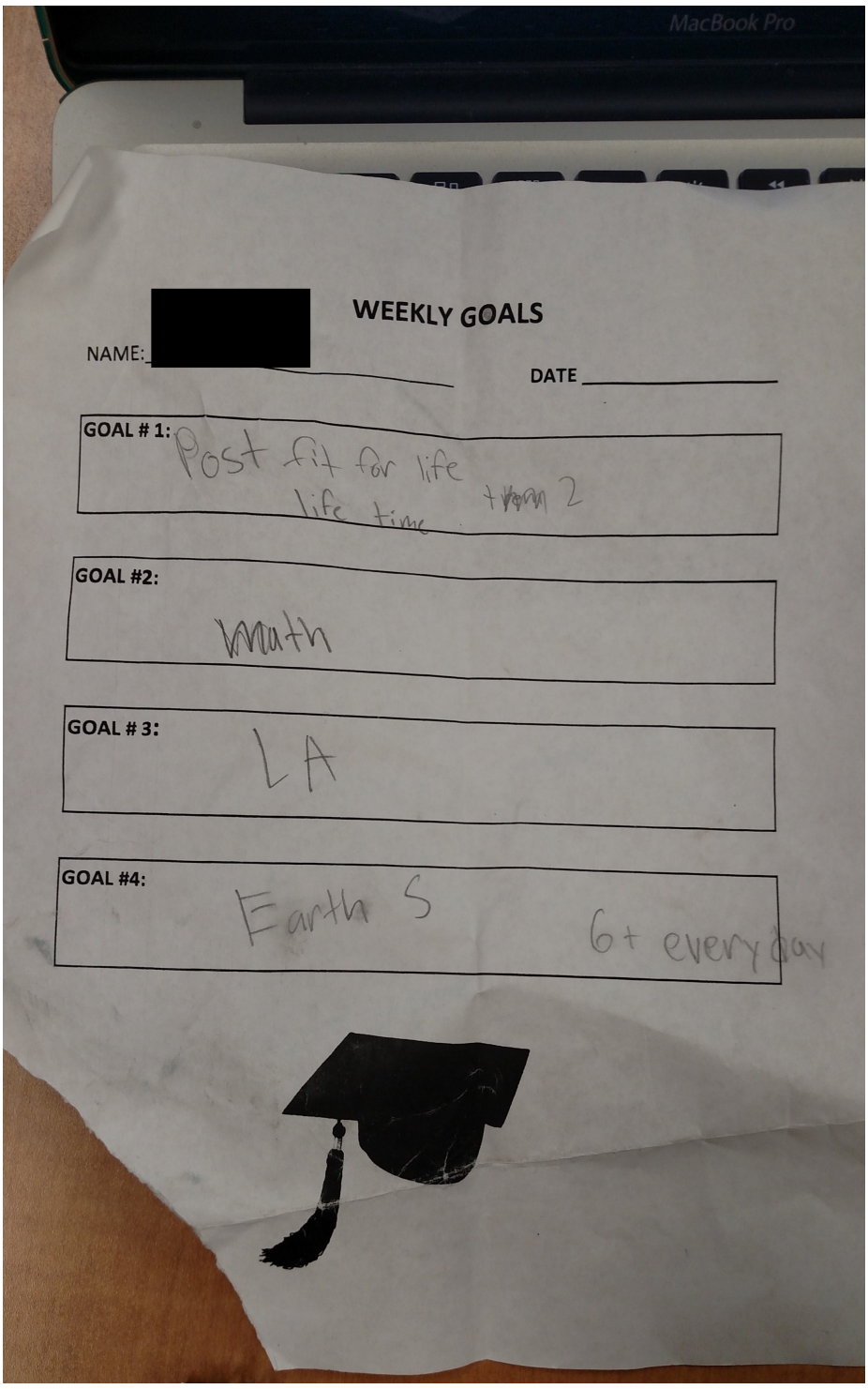


Figure 5: A weekly pacing guide based on goals, with student notes.

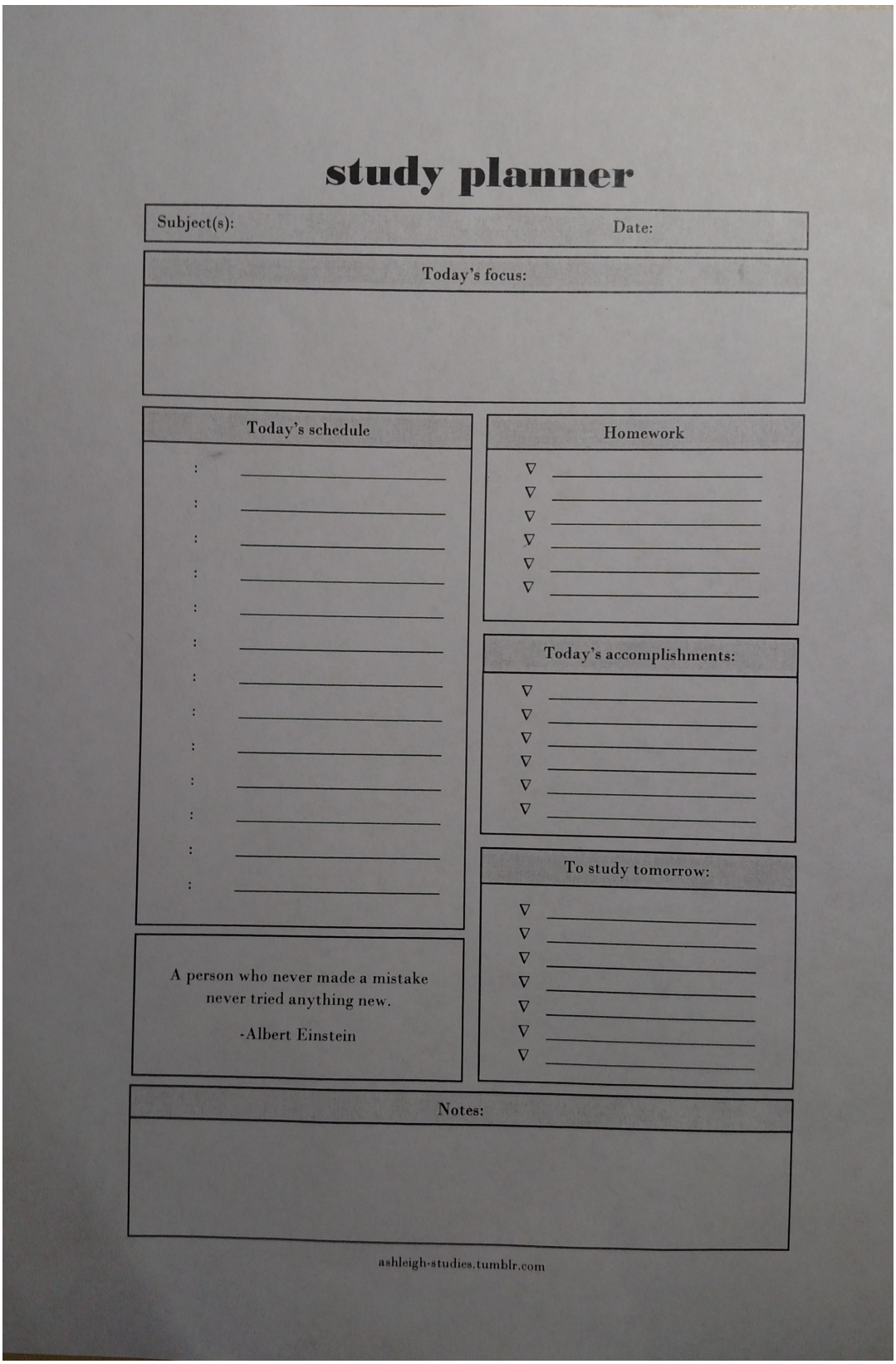
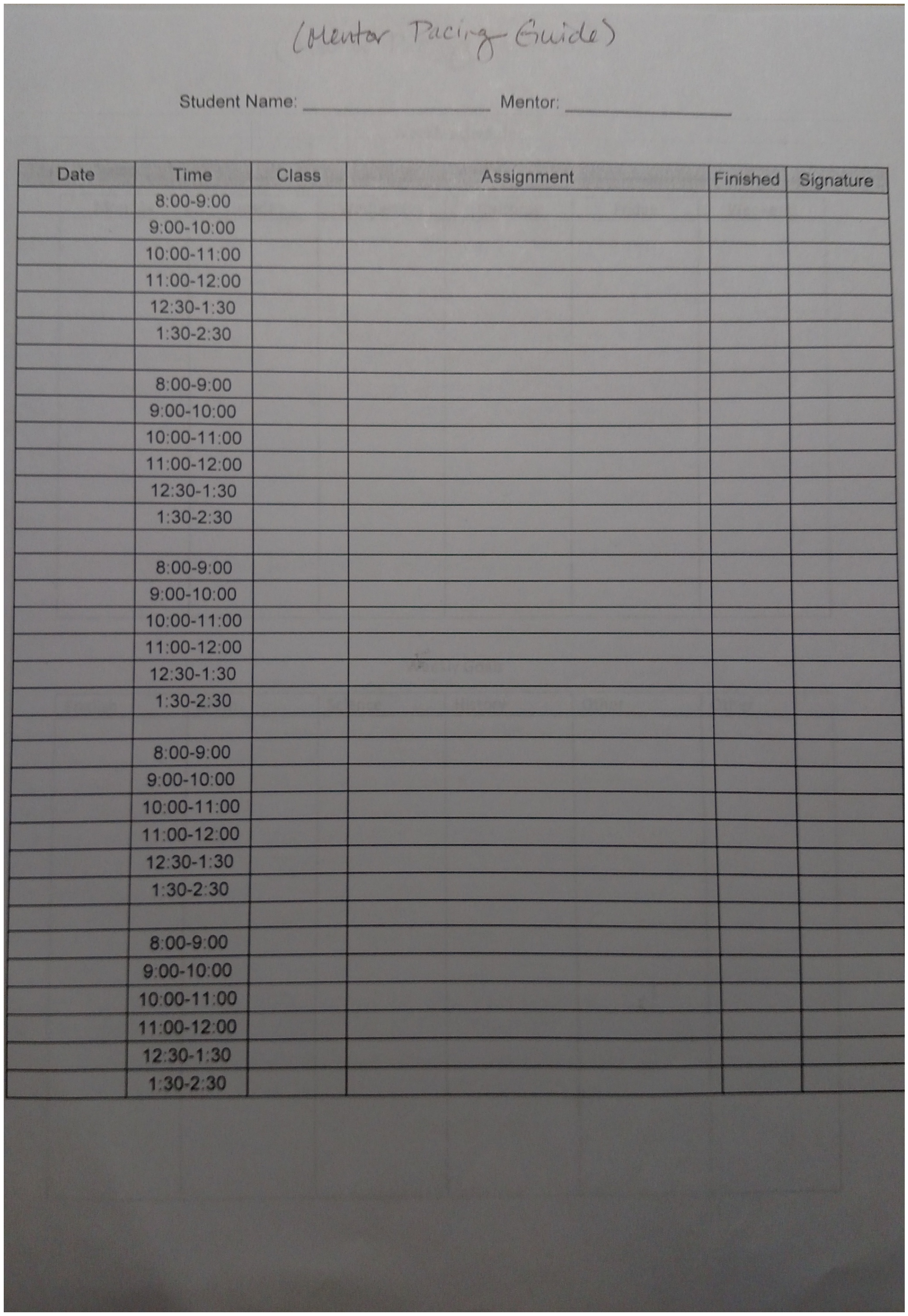


Figure 6: A daily pacing guide.

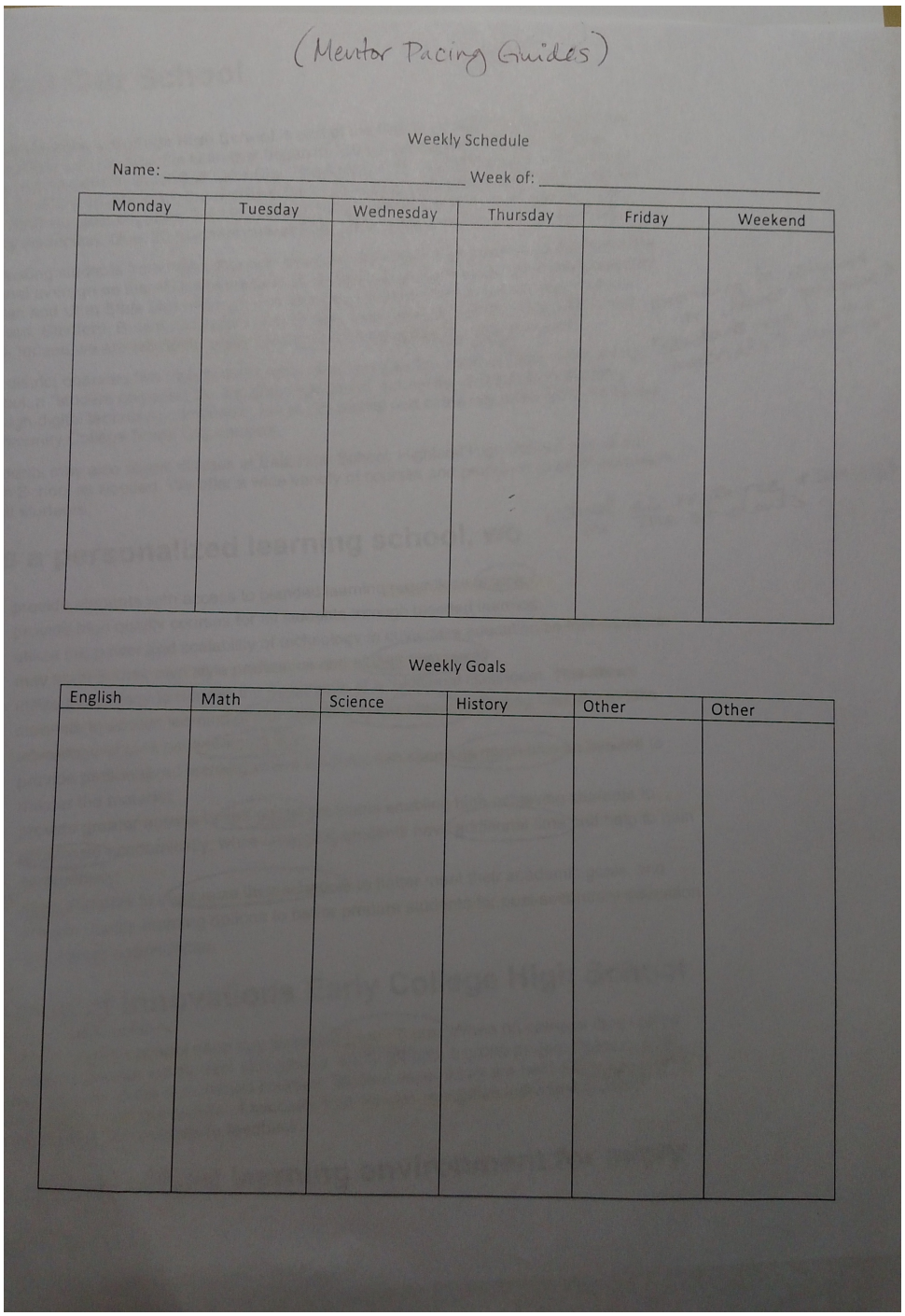


(Mentor Pacing Guide)

Student Name: ________________ Mentor: ________________

Date	Time	Class	Assignment	Finished	Signature
	8:00-9:00				
	9:00-10:00				
	10:00-11:00				
	11:00-12:00				
	12:30-1:30				
	1:30-2:30				
	8:00-9:00				
	9:00-10:00				
	10:00-11:00				
	11:00-12:00				
	12:30-1:30				
	1:30-2:30				
	8:00-9:00				
	9:00-10:00				
	10:00-11:00				
	11:00-12:00				
	12:30-1:30				
	1:30-2:30				
	8:00-9:00				
	9:00-10:00				
	10:00-11:00				
	11:00-12:00				
	12:30-1:30				
	1:30-2:30				
	8:00-9:00				
	9:00-10:00				
	10:00-11:00				
	11:00-12:00				
	12:30-1:30				
	1:30-2:30				

Figure 7: A weekly pacing guide, divided by hours.



(Mentor Pacing Guides)

Weekly Schedule

Name: _____ Week of: _____

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend

Weekly Goals

English	Math	Science	History	Other	Other

Figure 8: A weekly pacing guide along with goals.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT'S IN A NAME? LINGERING THOUGHTS ON SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

I want to return, for a moment, to the story with which I opened this dissertation: the story of a student who deliberately fails a standardized test, proudly tells their parent about it, and receives a less-than-enthused response. In light of all that has been written here, what possible meanings could this story hold? It could certainly be read as a tale of 'typical' teenage rebelliousness and written off as simply a kid who doesn't know what they are doing. It could be read as a foolhardy attempt to make a stand, a David-and-Goliath story where David is not triumphant, but rather is crushed by the weight of Goliath's superior resources. It could also be read as a conscientious assertion of rhetorical agency by a student who knows that one deliberately failing grade will not necessarily change the entire system of standardized education, but who recognizes the power and importance of symbolic action nonetheless. I hope it is clear by now which interpretation of the story I would choose to believe.

Over the course of this dissertation project, I have learned a tremendous amount, and hopefully have had some success in sharing some of the ideas which emerged. My focus, of course, was to provoke rhetorical scholars to think

about subjectivity and agency for high school students in different ways. In this chapter, I summarize my study, interpret my findings, and make note of the limitations of this study. Finally, I discuss implications and directions for potential future research.

Summary of Study

This section provides a brief overview of my study, including the research questions which I initially posed and to what extent they were each answered; how the method drove the study in unexpected ways; how the data were selected; and major findings.

Revisiting the Research Questions

As with many studies, I found that the research questions that I posed led me onto a path that did not always answer them in ways that I had anticipated. As a critical rhetorician, working inductively, this is fairly unproblematic since I followed the project as it unfolded in collaboration with the students, teachers, staff, and administrators at my research site, rather than imposing preconceived theoretical notions on the study and molding the evidence to suit the headlines. In what follows, I address each one in turn and offer a brief discussion of how the study played out in terms of that question.

Research Question 1

My first research question was "How do official discourses within education systems attempt to construct student subjectivity and agency?" As

Chapter IV discussed, official discourses often construct student subjectivity through complicated channels, demanding that students account for themselves in certain ways while simultaneously excluding the students from participating in determining what are 'appropriate' ways for students to give those accounts. Through an analysis of school board, school district, and high school documents, I argued that students are rhetorically dehumanized and constructed by state board of education and school district official discourses as excessive, chaotic bodies in need of tight control in terms of their interaction with each other, adults in the educational space, and the educational space itself. However, City High School itself is an institution and as such a participant in official discourses. By and large, City High School's official discourse runs counter to other official accounts, constructing student subjectivity as active, engaged, self-aware, autonomous, and responsible. Perhaps these tensions that exist within the realm of official discourses are a hopeful sign that more forward-thinking schools are looking at students more as partners in educational endeavors. I also argued that critical rhetoric can play a role in rethinking subjectivity for high school students and imagining different ways of being in education systems with more emancipatory means and ends.

Research Question 2

My second research question was "How do high school students negotiate their subjectivity and exercise their agency, particularly in terms of values of educational independence and responsibility, in nontraditional education settings that are structured in part by the philosophies of critical pedagogy?" As

was discussed in Chapter V, students at City High School employed various means to negotiate rhetorical subjectivities that were agreeable to them, and to assert agency in various ways. Nonetheless, a few common practices included desires for independence, freedom, recognition by adults as fully-human subjects capable of agentic action, and enjoyment of academic responsibility.

Students at City High School, by and large, embraced independence and responsibility, placing a high value on having latitude to make choices for themselves and to be actively engaged in the process and progress of their own education. In short, in the nontraditional setting of City High School, students negotiate (successfully, I would argue) for recognition as fully-human, as complex and important as any adult subject, and are generally comfortable with making agentic assertions from that subjective terrain. Indeed, having self-selected to attend City High School, this is not particularly surprising. Nor is this to say that students uniformly embraced these values – some students expressed a desire for more structure and less independence, and some students even expressed contradictory feelings about responsibility and the various types of co-involvement at different times within the school year.

Interestingly, the element of critical consciousness – so central to critical pedagogy – is much more difficult to discern in students' rhetoric at City High School, as it was not an explicit topic of discussion or part of the curriculum. Many students, though not necessarily articulating it in the terms of critical consciousness, spoke passionately about deconstructing inequality in many of its forms, and indeed some students even exemplified it to some extent in the way that they refused to engage in the labeling and shunning that often occur in

mainstream high schools. In their academic work and in their casual conversations, many students engaged in critiques of capitalism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, and racism. However, there were also pockets of backlash to attitudes of critical consciousness; occasionally, I would hear a student snidely terming those who were attempting to come to greater critical consciousness "SJWs," or ,"social justice warriors," which was clearly meant to be a derogatory term. Several students, all of whom had enjoyed privileged positions[25] in other schools, explicitly expressed their dissatisfaction with high level of acceptance that the "weirdos" and "freaks" at City High School had gained, and how that changed the social dynamics of the school to be drastically different from those at a mainstream high school.

Research Question 3

My third research question was, "How are concepts of time and relationships with time reflected in high school students' discourse as they begin to structure their own lives, and how does time intersect with agency?" This question, answered at length in Chapter V, was quite frankly one of the most fascinating and difficult questions I have come across. The very concept of time itself is fraught with contradictions and complexities, but through my participatory critical rhetorical inquiry at City High School, time actually emerged as a dominant theme for students.

Students at City High School are acutely aware of time, and they

[25] Privileged positions such as being raised in a family with wealthy and highly educated parents, socioeconomic stability, having politically powerful parents, or having been athletes who had been socially successful in terms of the hierarchy of previously attended mainstream high schools.

characterize it through many different metaphors: economic metaphors of spending time, scarcity of time, and valuable time; moral metaphors of good uses of time and bad uses of time; time as potentiality, as dangerous, and so many more. The various threads in all of these themes came together to form three rhetorical registers of time that are reflected, enabled, and constrained in City High School students' discourse as they journey through high school towards adulthood. There is the register of language as time, the register of learning as work/work as time, and the register of developmental time. Through each of these rhetorical registers of time, students' subjectivity and agency are thrown into different lights, illuminating just some of the complexities of their educational experiences.

Participatory Critical Rhetoric

The method employed for this dissertation is participatory critical rhetoric, which comprises three primary elements: traditional critical rhetorical research, fieldwork, and analysis, and is described at length in Chapter III. The traditional critical rhetorical research formed the basis of Chapter IV (You Are a Student: "Official" Perspectives on Student Subjectivity and Acceptable Agency). It led me to seek out textual sources that reflected the views of student subjectivity and agency held by those in positions of power: a state board of education, a school district, and a high school. My fieldwork at City High School took place during 105 hours over the course of approximately 6 months, and included participant observation as well as interviews. The interviews, which were then transcribed and then coded, along with soundscapes, ephemera

collected from the site, and field notes, formed the basis of Chapter V (I Am _____: Youth Discourse on Subjectivity and Agency in the Context of an Educational Institution).

Major Findings

Student subjectivity and agency are understood in different ways through different discursive lenses, underscoring the rhetorical construction of both concepts. Within the realm of 'official' discourses, student subjectivities are structured through a framework wherein an account of the students is demanded by an institutional interlocutor, and is often framed in terms of passivity, lack, and exclusion. Students' own rhetoric at City High School, while sometimes reflecting these long-internalized discourses from 'official' perspectives, more frequently framed their subjectivities in terms of possibility, choice, freedom, and responsibility, and expressed agency in the way they engaged with their educations. Relationships and rhetorical exchanges between students and teachers or students and tutors were also a major theme within student discourse, with many students openly expressing affection, care, and even love for their teachers. The structure of subjectivity developed through these more egalitarian and personal discursive connections is patently different from the subjectivity constructed through the State Board of Education and the City School District 'official' discourses. The latter positions students as passive, empty vessels to be molded and filled into certain shapes reflecting a fairly narrow standard of a "good" student. The former constructs students as active, capable, and intelligent, and yet in many ways still draws upon some of the

fundamental assumptions revealed by an analysis of the official discourse. Further complicating the situation is City High School' own official discourse, which, by virtue of being an institution in a public school district, is imbricated in many of the less emancipatory official discourses, but simultaneously protests those discourses through its everyday rhetorics with students in the space of the high school.

Interpretation of Findings

This section will provide an interpretation of the findings in terms of what they might mean practically and theoretically. As a praxis-oriented researcher, I strive to produce knowledge that has theoretical value and practical applications. I hope that what I have written in this dissertation contains both. When I began this project, it was borne out of frustration with practices I observed in the education world, many times from people who purported to be educators and to have a vested interest in helping students. I was tired of hearing baseless claims about youth rooted in shallow and stereotypical generational thinking – the ubiquitous "kids today are so lazy and entitled," and really anything else following the formula "kids today are so [insert derogatory adjectives]. I was upset by the hypocrisy of adults condemning youth for being politically ignorant, and simultaneously complaining about youth taking political action. I was angry about the countless federal, state, and local education policies passed without consulting either youth or passionate, dedicate educators who deeply care about the well-being of youth and are able to see their students as fully-human beings. Even more deeply than that, I was hurt and upset by a realization

that the educational experiences that I have loved and been privileged to experience were not afforded to every student, that it was probably my embodiment as a White girl student, viewed by mainstream official discourses as "good" and "compliant," that set me up for such an education. Although I am ashamed to acknowledge that it took me so long to fully come to this realization, it was only a few years ago in conversation with my husband about our respective experiences in schooling that this project came about. The ways in which our subjectivities were constructed by mainstream official discourses along such disparate lines infuriates and devastates me. Knowing the ways in which education has so thoroughly shaped every aspect of my life, and understanding that not every student is given such a chance, I felt compelled to intervene in the best way I know how: by more closely examining the rhetorical structures that make such treatment possible.

After spending time at City High School in a professional capacity prior to beginning this research study, I was struck by the difference in its official discourse, especially in contrast with many other high schools I had spent time in: most generalizations about students at City High School were along the lines of "kids today are facing so many challenges, and doing an impressive job of meeting those challenges head-on." I jumped at the chance to focus my dissertation research in an area that was purposefully complicating official discourses on students, one in which discursive structures were colliding, and in which (forgive the pun) innovative and productive rhetorics of education were enacted daily. This also complicates the idea of 'official discourse'; just as with 'student discourse,' it is not a singular and clearly defined rhetoric. Facing this

complexity, my ultimate aim as a scholar is to produce theoretical knowledge with the potential to change the oppressive material circumstances of students' lives in emancipatory ways. While this is only the first step along this pathway, I plan to continue in this line of inquiry, theorizing and practicing into a more just model of education where each student is recognized as a fully-human subject and whose rhetorical agency is not diminished or dismissed.

From a theoretical standpoint, I argue that this dissertation has made a case for reading subjectivity and agency across, between, and through different discourses, setting them in conversation with one another and examining the points of tension to glean rhetorical knowledge. My aim in juxtaposing official discourses with student discourses is not to create a false dichotomy of evil and good, but rather to highlight the mutual dependencies and intersections of both, while suggesting that there are opportunities for significant improvement and change to the benefit of students. Through this juxtaposition, I have sought to provoke us into thinking otherwise about what it means to be a student and to imagine rhetorics in which students are understood on more egalitarian terms with adults. I have also sought to challenge rhetoric's default conception of the subject as an adult subject, demonstrating the ways in which it is deeply ingrained into our theories, our case studies, and our implications.

Simultaneously, I proposed a way of understanding time as a material and rhetorical phenomenon that might assist us in rethinking subjectivity and agency in more liberatory ways. Although I have focused solely on students in the context of a nontraditional educational setting, a temporal turn and rhetorical registers of time has the potential for use in numerous other types of studies.

Subjectivity and agency have powerful implications in many realms: for example, the rhetorical workings of cases where adolescents are tried as adults in criminal courts, understanding the discursive structures that support child and elder abuse, or complicating the ways that personhood is constructed in religious discourse about abortion.

On a practical level, I have tried to make a case for educators to take seriously the processes by which educational institutions systemically disenfranchise students, both by showing what is lost when such exclusions occur, and by examining the significant impacts to students in an institution like City High School where such exclusions are minimized. I think that many educators genuinely want to help, but are caught inside systems that patronize students by assuming that they are not rhetorically capable agents. Instead, educators should revise the rules for the composition of governing committees to include students and closely attend to documents such as handbooks and policies that govern student behavior; inviting students to participate in those processes as fully-subject human beings is a step in the right direction. Reconsidering the way that students' subjectivities are constructed through different rhetorical registers of time is one way for educators to begin these considerations, as is critically analyzing those who are systematically excluded from processes by which power is maintained, condensed, or replicated. This has the potential to lay the foundation for social contracts between people engaged in education rather than punitive rules for students that are set out by those in power. Students often have finely honed "bullshit detectors" and, for the most part, can clearly sense when they are being condescended to or being tokenized

by educational systems paying lip service to student-centered schools. As is evident by the discursive environment at City High School, including students in meaningful educational partnerships through mentoring or student-driven learning has significant impact on rhetorical empowerment. To take a more radical approach, my arguments in this dissertation could inform educational institutions that wanted to thoroughly challenge common practices such as age segregation, developmental narratives of youth that are rooted in rhetorics of lack and deficiency, and welcome students who are active and equal participants in their own educational experiences.

Potential Improvements

As with all research studies, this study was carried out in the real world and therefore was not perfect. In this section, I answer the question, "What would have made this a better study within the paradigm in which it was designed?" As a rhetorical dissertation, it was not designed to make generalizable claims over large populations; rather, it was intended to offer highly contextualized, specific insights about certain rhetorical phenomena within a very local area and over the course of a short time. The foremost improvement that I, as a scholar, would have loved to indulge in was spending more time at the research site, even over several years. The richness of rhetorical activity, I am convinced, could have carried me on for a much longer time than the few months that I conducted field work. With additional time at the site, I may have been able to tease out more nuances or observe discursive changes over an entire school year, or even follow a particular graduating class

throughout their entire high school career. This would also have allowed me to become more a member of the community, which would have shifted my relationships to the participants and potentially granted me different insights to their world.

The second potential improvement to the study would have been additional critical rhetoricians in the field. Although, of course, that would have been unsuitable for a dissertation in which a single scholar's work must stand alone for critique, multiple rhetoricians' insights would have made the study stronger and more insightful as each would bring their own perspective to the field. In a more qualitative parlance, it was a limited scope study, with only one investigator doing field work at a single, rather unconventional, high school. This necessarily resulted in certain geographical, cultural, and social commonplaces that were largely taken for granted. Given this scope, I cannot make claims as to the likelihood that other high schools, even other nontraditional high schools, would see similar results. However, it would be fascinating to engage in this type of study at many different schools within the same area and/or time period to see what sorts of rhetorical phenomena emerge in each place.

The third potential improvement would be to engage more participants in the research study. There was a relatively small participant group for the study. Out of a school of nearly 400 students, 57 people expressed interest in the study. Thirty people completed the informed consent process and became final participants in the research study. Interestingly, the final participants spent the majority of their time in four classrooms – Professor McGonagall's, Ms. Belle's,

The Bionic Woman's, and Miss Llama's – and accordingly, that is where I spent the majority of my time at City High School. Most importantly, since participation in the study was voluntary, the participants tended to be largely positive about City High School's mission and approach to education, and enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. In other words, a larger group of participants may have included other, less rosy but equally interesting, perspectives about the school. It is, of course, probable that further time spent at the research site in different classrooms, with an expanded participant group, would reveal different rhetorical phenomena than emerged during this study.

The fourth potential improvement is one of demographics. Since participation in the study was voluntary, the demographic makeup of the study participants is not a representative group of City High School' population at large, nor of City School District. Although I did not collect data on students' racial identifications, I noticed that many who completed the informed consent process were Caucasian-presenting. I made it a point to follow up with students of other ethnicities who had expressed interest, and particularly tried to recruit more Latina/o/x students since they make up a major ethnic group presence at City High School, but with little success. Though I can only speculate on the reasons for that outcome, it may be because my embodiment as a White woman did not engender trust with a wide range of ethnically diverse students, due to a discomfort or mistrust of the research process, students being too busy to participate in the research process, or simple lack of interest. Participants also skewed female; of the 30 participants, 19 were female and 11 were male. Recruiting a more diverse group of participants would have, again, added

nuance and complexity to the rhetorical phenomena occurring in students' discourses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Rhetorical subjectivity and agency as they are negotiated in nontraditional high schools is a rich area for additional research. Future research could include longitudinal studies on City High School students' college and later life experiences. How do official discourses and student discourses variably define "success" for students – in terms of standard metrics such as GPA, timely degree completion, and participation in college communities? In terms of less tangible metrics such as life satisfaction, postcollege community involvement, or volunteerism? A great deal of effort is invested at all levels in the idea of "student success," but are we all speaking the same language when we use that term? What sorts of student subjects are considered "successful," and in what contexts?

Other potential research could investigate the rhetoric of political economies and question the material production of "student success" in terms of labor markets and what kind of "worker" this nontraditional kind of education produces. Are there particular academic or career disciplines in which City High School students tend to gather or to be more successful or satisfied? One might imagine that a student whose subjectivity is shaped by the hyperindividualized education system offered at schools like City High School would be less content to work in certain industries or fields, such as call centers, where they are heavily surveilled, tracked, and quantified in terms of per-minute productivity. Then

again, perhaps the hyperindividualization could be read rhetorically as the production of the super competitive worker who derives pleasure from that type of "success."

Future research could also include participatory critical rhetoric studies with more stakeholders in the K-12 education communities – students in elementary and middle/junior high schools, parents, district administrators, school governance councils, etc., likely all have different things to teach us about the way that subjectivity and agency is constructed, accepted, confirmed, sidestepped, or resisted. It would be a fascinating study to engage in participatory critical rhetoric in multiple areas of an education system over the same time period, perhaps sitting in on school board meetings, observing the daily routine of district administrators and teachers in different schools, attending parent involvement events, and including a broader age group of participants. Subjectivity in an elementary school might look very different from subjectivity in a high school, and may illuminate different rhetorical registers of time, or contradict or complicate the theory offered in this dissertation.

Whatever paths future researchers may tread, I hope that they take seriously students' subjectivities and agencies, recognizing youth as fully-human subjects who are capable of independent rhetorical agency. Through continued critical rhetorical interventions into educational discourses, we can work towards – though never truly finishing our work – environments in which more emancipatory lived experiences of education become commonplace, and in which we are all recognized as subjects-in-flux rather than judged against arbitrary standards or against one another.

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